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The impact of ethnic tourism on gender equality: A case study of Iran's Baluchistan women

Abstract

Ethnic tourism makes women more visible in the public sphere in traditional ethnic communities. In many ethnic traditional communities such as Iran's Baluchistan, women see ethnic tourism as a window into other cultures. In these kinds of communities, women are often isolated from contact with outsiders because of their responsibilities, which are typically focused on managing the household, while men are responsible for trade and travel. This paper examines how ethnic tourism affects gender equality and helps women in Iran's Baluchistan for their voices to be heard in the community. This research illustrates the potential of ethnic tourism as a vehicle for gender equality through increasing social interactions and cultural exchanges, leading women to hold greater awareness of their human rights. Thus, the idea of ethnic tourism for gender equality in ethnic communities can be seen as a new way of understanding the potential of ethnic tourism for women equality. The results of the research were gathered through fieldwork as the major methodological frame and during the fieldwork, different specific methods were used to collect empirical data: interviews and participant observation. The theoretical structure for analyzing interview data was grounded in theory. Moreover, visual data in the form of photography was collected throughout all the stages of the fieldwork.

Key words: *tourism; gender equality; women; ethnic community; Iran's Baluchistan.*

Introduction

This research was conducted on the Baluch ethnic group in Sistan and Baluchistan province in Iran. Iran is one of the largest nations in the Middle East with diverse ethnic minorities groups a land area of around 1.65 million square kilometers and a population in excess of 76 million (Figure 1). The country was known as Persia until 1935, and has a history dating back over 7000 years. A rich heritage is revealed by the inclusion of 16 cultural sites in UNESCO's World Heritage list (UNESCO, 2015). Compared with other parts of Iran, Baluchistan's economic and social development appears to face particularly daunting challenges and is one of the most underdeveloped regions in Iran. Among the indicators studied for development of each region of Iran, Baluchistan has one of the lowest indicators in each variable especially in active presence of women in the community (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2015).

Baluchistan starts from a relatively low level in terms of social achievements such as economic development, education and especially gender equity indicators. Socially, the Baluch community is still very

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traditional and tribal in nature. Everything is under the domination of tribes and major groups of this region (Afrakhteh, 2006). The cultural economic and social structure of the region in connection with beliefs of Baluch people has brought many negative results such as emphasis on internal tribal and class ties, resisting marriage with non-Baluch people, maintaining some negative forms of livelihood, not welcoming education and physicians for treatment, emphasis on tribal prejudices, belief in destiny, belief in ghosts, and the lack of ability to predict the future which justifies and prolongs the closeness of Baluch community (Taheri, 2013).

Figure 1
Geographical location of ethnic minorities in Iran



Source: The map is created by the author.

The key objective of this research is to identify ethnic tourism as a window for women in traditional ethnic communities in order to have equal life opportunities and appearance in the public sphere and introduce it as a vehicle for gender equality by increasing social interactions and cultural exchanges, leading women to hold greater awareness of their human rights. The paper opens with a literature

review on gender and tourism. This is followed by an introduction to the study area of Baluchistan after which the methodology of the research is described. Study findings are then given and summarized in a table, which is followed by the conclusion.

Gender and tourism

Research on women and tourism has emphasized that women's roles in economic production cannot be understood without reference to the cultural context of women's structural position in community (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996). Three issues are central to the conceptual framework for understanding gender in tourism. First, tourism processes are constructed from gendered communities ordered by gender relations. Secondly, gender relations over time inform and are informed by the interconnected economic, political, social, cultural and environmental dimensions of all communities engaged in tourism development. Thirdly, power, control, and equality issues are articulated through race, class, and gender relations in tourism practices (Swain, 1995). Ethnic tourism activity as a sphere of social practice can be considered in Iran's Baluchistan to be breaking the traditional boundary of the community to help women to have a voice inside of their community. How this might change is a focus of research on sociocultural impacts of tourism development. Tourism development influences changing value systems as hosts and guests identify with each other and their profoundly gendered interactions shape each other's perceptions and behavior. Ethnic tourism development has been linked with family system change. Links between gender, changing environmental perceptions and practices by the providers of tourism services in ethnic community are addressed in Iran's Baluchistan.

Taleb Rifai (2011), pointed out that "tourism plays a crucial role in the empowerment of women politically, socially and economically. But it makes it very clear that more must be done to close the gender gap and raising quality and ending all discrimination". According to the UNWTO (2012), women make up the majority of the tourism workforce, in order to promote gender equality, support opportunities for women and end violence against them. The tourism sector provides various entry points for women's opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium sized income generating activities, thus creating paths towards the elimination of poverty of women and local communities in developing countries. Therefore, as one of the fastest growing and most dynamic spheres of the global economy, tourism is not only ideally poised to ensure prosperity, but also to promote gender equality and women's rights.

Ethnic tourism, if properly planned, organized, and managed, can bring understanding, appreciation, prosperity, and a better life to all who are involved. If understanding and having an increased appreciation for other people's way of life, culture, traditions, religions, and so on, make one more a part of world community, this understanding can help the women ethnic groups to be connected as a part of world community and not suffering because of being separated (Sheikhi, 2015). Ethnic tourism is an essential precursor for promoting gender equality in ethnic communities, in addition to being central to fairness and inclusive social development. There are numerous significant linkages between gender equality and traditional ethnic communities. There has been limited research conducted on ethnic tourism and gender and this has made it difficult to identify key emerging issues surrounding this phenomenon for gender equality in ethnic communities (Peeters & Ateljevic, 2009). The rapid growth of the tourism industry in many parts of the world has led to an increase in opportunities

and the number of jobs deemed to be appropriate for women (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2008). In fact, ethnic tourism development affects gender equality and increasing opportunities for women to have a voice in traditional ethnic communities to being familiar with women's rights. Moreover, women are exceptionally well-placed to plan and establish ethnic tourism products based on the wealth of cultural heritage, across boundaries of ethnicity; whether in the form of handicrafts, folklore, dances, or gastronomy, towards inclusion in lucrative tourism value chains (UNWTO, 2012).

In addition, women from ethnic communities in Iran were not empowered to change their communities through their ethnic arts production and they instead conformed to the idea of women and men's perceived roles within the community. Moreover, their ethnic arts production was seen as a way to resist cultural assimilation. However, there were some women entrepreneurs in the same study that did use their empowerment to resist and change gender ideology in their community (Swain, 1993). Ethnic tourism does have the potential to bring opportunities and benefits to gender equality in ethnic communities. Many women are responding to tourism in innovative ways that benefit themselves and their communities and also enhance the sector.

Increased women's economic independence, decision-making power and social freedoms have a positive effect on gender relations in the domestic and community setting. Unfortunately, women are usually more affected by poverty than men. In Iran's Baluchistan, girls have less opportunity for schooling than boys. As a consequence, rates of illiteracy are higher for women than for men and below-standard school education is more common among women (Taheri, 2013). Involving women in handmade handicrafts will provide employment, direct income and educational opportunities that will allow them to play a necessary role in shaping overall development (Corinne Flacke, 2007). There is a need to further understand ethnic tourism development empowerment for create gender equality in ethnic communities such as Iran's Baluchistan. Indeed, ethnic tourism could be used to explore the differences and similarities between women. Therefore, the study aims to explore the potential for ethnic tourism to empowering ethnic communities' women in context of traditional ethnic groups.

Ethnic tourism and Iran's Baluchistan

The ethnic poor are often culturally rich, which is a tourism asset (Theerapappisit, 2009). These cultural resources offer the potential for the development of the region, as an attractive tourism destination (Sheikhi, 2015). In fact, ethnic tourism can provide an important opportunity for Iran's Baluchistan. There is some evidence of this trend in Iran, where the government is paying increasing attention to benefits from the potential of the diverse ethnic groups within an ethnic community context and has launched several initiatives such as the annually organized national ethnic festivals in Golestan province (ICHTO, 2015). In recent years, Iran's Baluchistan was the first region in Southeast Iran in which ethnic tourism made its appearance, but in general, little research has been conducted there. The purpose of this research is to examine how ethnic tourism could affect gender equality by increasing the social interaction in ethnic communities. Generally Baluchis women do not have a role in the public sphere. But things have been changing recently, as increasing the social interaction through ethnic tourists and Baluchis women are taking up active and leading roles in the community. Iran's Baluchistan is a uniquely interesting case in terms of the development of ethnic tourism and in how it may present a

platform for helping to increasing gender equality. The reasons that made the researcher study Baluch ethnic group as the case study and not the other Iranian ethnic groups is that a) women are very seldom seen in the community and there is very low visibility for them b) there are many socio-cultural limitations for women c) old traditions are still ruling in the community d) there is a traditional vision toward women e) there are many potentials for development of ethnic tourism in the region f) the only way one can see a footprint of Baluchis women is through producing art and handicrafts for tourists.

Baluchistan, which is economically and socially poor, but culturally rich, presents enormous opportunities to showcase their rich cultures, exotic lifestyle and heritage. Iran's Baluchistan may have been inhabited first during the Pleistocene as proposed by Hume (1976), based on Paleolithic sites found in the Ladiz valley. Tourism has proven to be one of the most ingeniously crafted, deliberately propagated and expedient opportunities for social change and exchange. Ethnic tourism has been promoted as a development strategy for poverty alleviation creating livelihoods in poor ethnic regions (Yang & Wall, 2009; Yang & Li, 2012).

This paper asserts that ethnic tourism is a unique form of providing an opportunity to achieve gender equality in traditional ethnic communities. It is significant that interaction between hosts and guests can inspire women to work and gain more rights and break boundaries that have been created by the traditional community (Yang & Li, 2012). This is because tourism can have a positive impact in terms of increasing the quality of life and will give women the chance to connect with more egalitarian social aspects (Jafari, 1990). In fact, gender equality in each community is different and most of the existing work regarding tourism impacts on women has failed to take into account non-economic factors influencing change in gender roles and the complexity of gender relations in traditional communities (Swain, 1995). Indeed, gender relations of host communities are a key factor in ethnic tourism, as they influence how power, identity, and change are produced. As ethnic tourism seeks to equally involve and empower women, it needs to be based on a good understanding of local gender roles (Guelke, 2014).

Iran's Baluchistan, officially known as a major part of the province of Sistan & Baluchistan which is one of the thirty-one provinces of Iran. It is in the southeast of the country, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan and its capital is Zahedan (Figure 2). The province is the largest in Iran, with an area of 181,785 km (Afrakhteh, 2006; Spooner, 1967). The province is comprised of two sections, Sistan in the north and Baluchistan in the south. The name of Baluchistan in Persian language means "Land of the Baluch" (Afrakhteh, 2006; Ebrahimzadeh & Sahraei, 2012).

Iranian Baluchistan attracted the attention of Western colonizers, because of its strategic location bordering between Pakistan and India (Taheri, 2013, p. 13). In 2013, the Baluch population in Iran was about two and a half million. The politics, community, and culture of the Baluch in Iran have peculiar characteristics and unique features (Spooner, 1967), and although most people speak in Baluchi, many communities regarded as Baluch are actually from a variety of ethnic origins and are believed to have been assimilated over the course of centuries. Some are considered to have adopted the Baluch identity relatively recently; for while they are categorized as Baluch according to the outside world, they identify as particular tribal groups: Nusherwani, Gitchki, and Barakzai, as well as sub-ethnic groups for example, as Brahui, Dewar, Golam, Jadgal and Med (Spooner, 1967). The major cities of Iran's Baluchistan are Zahedan, Iranshahr, Chabahar, Saravan, Nik Shahr, Khash, and Konarak and the region is mainly home to Iran's Baluch Sunni (Taheri, 2013).

Figure 2
Geographical location of the study area



Source: The map is created by the author.

The Baluchis continue to hold their own traditional norms and to practice their own unique traditions, and the region has the potential to become one of the top sight-seeing areas of Iran (Ebrahimi, 2012; Taheri, 2013). Indeed, Baluchistan is lacking educational quality, gender equality, political, and social institutions such as schools with the administrative infrastructure they might bring (Taheri, 2013). This is due to the Baluch tribal chiefs that have dominated the community, where people know little else than to carry out the instructions and wishes of tribal leaders (Salzman, 2011). Whatever their origins, Baluchis today have their own separate cultural identity and one of their most important attractions - from a tourism point of view - is their handicrafts, custom and music which have made this ethnic group famous in Iran and elsewhere. In addition, the wedding customs, clothes, language and lifestyles are very interesting attractions. The Baluch are known for their hospitality. They gladly receive guests with open arms and enjoy entertaining tourists, which is an important asset in trying to develop ethnic tourism in the region (Ebrahimi, 2012). The region is located on the route of the historic commercial Silk Road (Afrakhteh, 2006).

These cultural resources offer the potential for the development of the region as a very attractive ethnic tourism destination. According to stages of tourist product life cycle, Baluchistan is in the exploration stage, therefore the numbers of tourists are small and tourist infrastructure is limited, impacts are minimal (Butler, 1980), and index of (local) irritation euphoria: local enthusiasm for tourism, curiosity, strangers welcomed, mutual feeling of satisfaction for both hosts and guests (Doxey, 1975). Baluchis can provide many local services such as guest house accommodation, traditional hospitality, local tour

guidance, native/authentic foods, locally-made souvenirs, traditional clothes, and traditional music, among others. Basically, goods and services can be sourced locally and this in itself is a very strong foundation for developing ethnic tourism. These features are more evident in Iran's Baluchistan than in other ethnic groups in Iran (Ebrahimi, 2012, p. 3).

Methodology

The data of the study was collected through fieldwork, as the major methodological frame, and during the fieldwork in Iran's Baluchistan, different specific methods such as semi-structured face to face interviews with Baluchis women was chosen as the most appropriate method of gathering primary information. In addition, participant observation was used to collect empirical data. Interviews which were in the local dialect, lasting from 60 to 90 minutes, were completed over one month in July and August of 2013. Since the researcher is able to speak in Baluchi and made the interviewees sure that the interviews will be used anonymously, several successful interviews were conducted.

The theoretical structure for analyzing interview data was grounded in theory. The grounded theory approach was deemed suitable for this study. Moreover, visual data in the form of photography was collected through all the stages of the fieldwork. The results of this research show suitable direction to understand gender equality in the context of traditional culture, through ethnic tourism.

The aim of this research is to examine how and to what degree ethnic tourism can positively impact the lives of women and raise awareness of the opportunities that ethnic tourism offers them and determine the ways of overcoming obstacles to the equality of women in the context of ethnic communities for capacity building and community development. By examining the current status of women in Iran's Baluchistan, this study is designed to help provide a framework for improved policy-making concerning gender equality through ethnic tourism development.

This research included twelve interviews with Baluchis women who are active in ethnic tourism activities in Iran's Baluchistan. The method of choosing these women was to take one woman from each Baluch tribe that has been active in working as Baluchis handicraft producers and hospitality. Eight of these women were married and four others were single, this helped to obtain diversity within the sample. Moreover, among the eight married women, six had young children, and two had no children, and this also helped to provide different perspectives and experiences. The women's ages ranged from mid-18s to late 45s. Most of the women held a high school diploma. All of the women had experiences in ethnic tourism production, ranging from 1 to 6 years. The women had experiences in solely producing handicrafts and hospitality. They were interviewed for their views on the impacts of tourism on their community in terms of its effectiveness in increasing a sense of gender equality and in terms of its effect on economic activity within the community.

The focus of the investigations was on identifying the view of Baluchis women in order to gain an understanding in terms of finding ways to promote a sense of gender equality through tourism development. The researcher undertook on-site observations of craft makers, performers, tourists' behavior, and the interaction between tourists and Baluchis women's in Iran's Baluchistan. The researcher also spent significant time in Baluchistan acquiring insights into Baluch culture and life through active engagement in Baluchis life.

The interviews were all recorded and later transcribed. Hard copies of the transcripts and Microsoft Word program were used to organize and manage the transcribed data, as well as to record codes and coding decisions as the analysis progressed. The analysis process was broken down into three stages of grounded theory coding (i.e., initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding) as advocated by Charmaz (2006). The initial coding stage involved naming the data by using line-by-line coding. These initial codes provided a good understanding of the data as well as to avoid the exclusion of any valuable information. Focused coding involved identifying the codes that best captured the Baluchis women's expressed meanings and that were deemed to be the most helpful in terms of the formation of possible categories.

Study findings

The presentation of findings is organized around the two main themes. The main themes were: 1) that the women have opportunities to work and have income to help family as a result of their development in ethnic tourism; 2) that the women were determined to seek ethnic tourism development for social change.

Theme 1: Opportunities for Baluchis women

Baluchis women do not have a voice inside of their communities. There are traditional boundaries of Baluchis culture and the conflicts that exist between Baluch ethnic group and government. Therefore, the government is not able to have influences inside of Baluchis community to empower Baluchis women. "Women in Iran's Baluchistan do not have any voice, because, this ethnic group is in conflict with Iranian government" said a Baluchis women handicraft artist from *Ghanbarzebi* tribe. Therefore, through tourism, it would be possible to highlight the voices of those who still remained socially, economically and geographically marginalized. In fact, progress for women in Baluchis culture may be more difficult than in other ethnic groups' cultures in Iran. Indeed, the Baluchis community is particularly problematic for its women because of traditional attitudes about women and women's roles. But, with growing tourism in ethnic communities, such as Iran's Baluchistan, it works as an important opportunity for women in terms of increasing gender equality and social communication.

The Baluch women appear to have started seeing ethnic tourism as an "opportunity" and as a form of "progress". Ethnic tourism provides opportunities for Baluch women to have independent incomes and to provide needed income to support their families. In addition, "ethnic tourism work can reduce women's financial reliance on men in Baluch ethnic group" said a Baluchis women handicraft artist from *Barakzai* tribe. The Baluch women interviewed were very keen to promote tourism as an appropriate form of employment for women in order to provide them with needed income to support their families, and this was seen as important because of the poor economy.

Theme 2: Implications for social change

The social and cultural impacts of ethnic tourism are the ways in which ethnic tourism is contributing to change in value systems, individual behavior, family structure and relationships, collective lifestyles, safety levels, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organizations

(Jafari 1990; Wall & Mathieson 2006). Therefore, socio-cultural impacts are the outcome of particular kinds of social relationships that occur between tourists and the Baluch ethnic group as a result of their coming into contact. The nature of these relationships is a major factor influencing the extent to which understanding or misunderstanding is fostered by the ethnic tourism development process (Wall & Mathieson 2006). Indeed, ethnic tourism as a social and cultural activity has potential for social change and breaking boundaries of traditional Baluchis culture, but the direction of this change is uncertain. “With the presence of tourists, women from different cultures are coming to visit and this could help to change traditional cultural norms” - said a Baluchis women handicraft artist from *Jadgal* tribe.

With the increased popularity of Iran’s Baluchistan as a tourist destination, the potential for opportunities for Baluchis women and for the social change has increased. “This form of work is attractive to Baluchis women, because, job opportunities are scarce and limited in Iran’s Baluchistan especially for women” - said a Baluchis women handicraft artist from *Shabbakhash* tribe.

Baluchi women withdraw early from the labor force due to the pressure of marriage and childbearing. Ethnic tourism is seen as more “fun” compared to other types of work in Iran’s Baluchistan. In this study, the Baluch women’s enjoyment of ethnic tourism work came largely from the opportunities it offered in terms of new experiences, learning about different cultures and meeting different people. This includes the opportunity to meet and interact with ethnic tourists, clients and other people.

Figure 3
Baluchis women while making handicrafts



Photo: Ebrahimi, M.

Being comfortable with these social interactions seems to lead to greater satisfaction and commitment to their ethnic tourism work and supports. Indeed, the nature of ethnic tourism development in the context of ethnic communities, which includes meeting people, may act as an incentive to women and counteract some of the negative aspects of tourism work. A Baluchis woman handicraft artist from *Rigi* tribe said: “Meeting different people and being exposed to new situations also provided an opportunity for the Baluch women to be familiar with women’s right, and can help the women to develop a growing sense of independence as well.” They also learned to be comfortable in new situations, which they had not experienced before.

Ethnic tourism has the potential to gain status for Baluchis women to feel that they play an important role in their community because of their work in this industry, and Baluch women felt that their work in ethnic tourism as handicrafts producers is playing a major role in Iranian Baluchistan development. In addition, through their ethnic tourism work, they felt they were promoting their Baluchis culture (Figure 3) and representing the Baluchis handicrafts and hospitality. It helps them to be capable, stand for their own rights, and to gain freedom from all sorts of domination.

In this study, the Baluch women's deliberate advocacy for change, in terms of their personal lives, other women's lives, and changes in cultural attitudes towards women - can be seen as forms of intentional resistance through ethnic tourism development. Ethnic tourism can provide one of the few avenues available for women to challenge the strong cultural and religious norms of the Baluchis community. The idea of ethnic tourism development in Iran's Baluchistan as a site for women's resistance can be seen as a new way of understanding women in ethnic communities and it plays a role in assisting women to overcome traditional stereotypes. Ethnic tourism development can potentially have a major effect on the community in general as well as on individual women. The numbers of women employed in the Iran's Baluchistan are low in comparison to other provinces of Iran.

The findings of this research are encouraging, as far as increased employment opportunities for Baluch ethnic group may develop and may facilitate greater gender equality and social development. The study also helps to enhance understandings of the roles of women in ethnic groups and ethnic tourism. In this way, ethnic tourism has potentially contributed to social change and creates a "new community".

This paper gives a critical overview of ethnic tourism development in the Baluch ethnic group area, arguing that ethnic tourism is a very complex instrument for community development (Figure 4). This is especially true when it comes to the role of women in ethnic communities.

Figure 4
Baluchis women while working in group



Photo: Ebrahimi, M.

There is a need to explore the claim that Baluchis women do not have a voice due to tradition, and that the only way that is possible for Baluchis women to communicate with different cultures and have a voice is through ethnic tourism activities. Tourism has sometimes led to increasing support for minority groups, as it has helped to raise their social and political profile internationally. However, it is also accepted that ethnic tourism can offer something of a boon to developing world economies, as well as making a positive contribution to social and cultural development.

Relying on the observations of the researcher, there are many people coming from out of this province working in governmental jobs such as teachers and other governmental organizations, therefore the presence of non-Baluch residents has impacted the image of Baluchis women about equality in their community and their vision on tourism. According to the results of the study, in Table 1 the perception of Baluchis women regarding the impact of ethnic tourism development in Iran's Baluchistan is presented.

Table 1
Baluchis women's perceptions of ethnic tourism in Iran's Baluchistan

	Positive impacts	Negative impacts
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's awareness about other cultures will increase • Women will have interaction with other cultures • Men's behavior will change and they will respect women's rights more • Our hospitable culture will be introduced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguments among Baluchis family members will increase • Foreign culture will enter to our community
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's presence in community will increase • Reducing obligatory marriages for women • Young people will find job opportunities and social problems of unemployment will be reduced • Quality of life will increase • Variety of social activities will entertain tourists. • Having job will reduce the drug consumption of young people • Women will have a choice in the community • Monogamy will increase and polygamy will decrease • Obligatory marriages of young girls with old men will decrease • Decrease of male violence against women • Women's social knowledge will increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce and family problems will rise • Local people may fall in love with tourists and it will break the family structure • Religious beliefs will be blurred • Women should devote more time to prepare traditional foods for tourists
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in job opportunities for women • Increase in family income • Selling directly our art crafts to tourists • Business boost for men and reduce smuggling activities • Men's long travel for working in Persian gulf countries will decrease and they will join tourism activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism activities are seasonal and host should wait for tourists presence in the destination • Prices will increase

The results explored the ways in which ethnic tourism development can improve conditions for Baluchis women throughout the region, and could benefit the ethnic tourism trade at large, towards enhancing ethnic tourism's positive effects on the economic and social development of Iran's Baluchistan (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Baluchis women while making needlework handicraft



Photo: Ebrahimi, M.

Conclusion

There have been few studies that have looked at the impact of ethnic tourism on gender equality in ethnic communities. This work describes a new period of particularly dramatic changes in gender equality of Baluchi, which result from ethnic tourism empowering women to participate in economic development and social well-being, including sustainable work systems and the need to strike a balance between men and women.

In fact, religion and culture have had an influence on the role of women in ethnic communities (Mazro'el & Shaw, 2014), such as Baluchis in Iran's Baluchistan. Indeed, Baluchis does not allow women to work for pay, all economic provision is thought to be the responsibility of men; women are expected to marry and reproduce and take care of children in order to gain status. In the Baluch ethnic group community, women must receive consent from their husbands, fathers, or brothers in order to work. The conduct of Baluchis women is totally controlled by men, in part because of the focus on maintaining family honor and a good reputation, and to avoid the negative consequences of shame. Therefore, cultural and religious influences vary for different women in different communities.

The approach of ethnic tourism development as an option of social change emerged as a possibility in the Baluch ethnic group in order to open the way for Baluchis women to be aware of their rights by empowering them to break away from traditional culture and enhance their quality of life. Indeed, the women who were interviewed in the study clearly explained that they would like to know different cultures and get familiar with the rights of women. Moreover, they mentioned that through interaction with tourists, women will be able to learn about the lifestyles of women in different cultures and then fight to overcome the traditional culture such as rejecting the Baluchis men's polygamy. This positive viewpoint of Baluchis women, who are active in the production of ethnic tourism products in Iran's Baluchistan and show the potential for these activities to become a vehicle for social change, was related to a number of different points raised in the interviews.

The first point was that the economic significance of ethnic tourism for Baluchis community as an option for economic development is fairly limited, yet full of potential. The second aspect raised was that Baluchis women are willing to promote Baluchis handicrafts, since their works of art are unique in Iran and always name of Baluchis women are mentioned in the market as great handicraft makers and this is the opportunity to provide Baluchis women with needed jobs. The third discussion was about making Baluchis men aware of respecting the right of Baluchis women.

This research clearly demonstrates that through ethnic tourism development, when Baluchis get into contact with tourists from other cultures and this exchange improves the quality of their lives as the host community, this will then result in gender equality. As interaction between Baluchis women and tourists grows, so does the positive impact on gender equality. Ethnic tourism can help Baluchis women break the poverty cycle through formal and informal employment, entrepreneurship, training, and community betterment. Therefore, ethnic tourism has a positive impact in promoting women's empowerment and protecting women's rights. In summary, ethnic tourism has played a significant role in empowering women politically, socially and economically. However, ethnic tourism development remains a vital solution in order to close the gender gap in traditional ethnic groups, such as Baluchis, and end all forms of discrimination.

In terms of future research, a larger and more diverse sample of Baluchis women in ethnic tourism and gender equality could serve to expand the results of this study. Specifically, research is needed to understand the different ways in which ethnic tourism development may affect women from different areas in Iran's Baluchistan. In addition, studying the perspectives of Baluchis men may also be helpful in terms of identifying gender differences and commonalities with regards to attitudes towards other ethnic groups in Iran. Lastly, further studies need to be conducted with other ethnic groups, in order to further explore the idea of ethnic tourism development as opportunities for women's awareness and empowerment.

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