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Persian Diasporic Bloggers and Virtual Performances of Cultural Identities

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concept of consciousness and liminality in the Iranian Diaspora and the way Iranians create digital diasporas where they can practise cultural identities outside the homeland. The discussion elaborates on the concept of traditional *dowreh* (family/social circle) in the fibre of Persian culture and then illustrates the creation of a virtual *dowreh* among Persian bloggers in the diaspora and the reasons that might contribute to the formation of such a digital *dowreh* in the diaspora. By exploring a section of a weblog called “Friday for Living” it demonstrates that weblogs provide a unique opportunity for the Persian diasporic bloggers to revive a *dowreh* in a virtual way where they can get together and practise cultural identities in the diaspora while living between two cultures. The examination of “Friday for Living” also reveals that the virtual *dowreh* for this group of Iranian diasporic bloggers acts as a community of practice that assigns the members a domain, membership, and commitment, and members took part in joint activities by sharing their stories and experiences.

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1. Introduction

The question of identity for many Iranians in the diaspora seems to be a complex one. Mobasher (2006) states that currently “the Iranian community in exile suffers from a major identity crisis and lacks a unified sense of national identity that binds Iranians together” (p. 100). This type of attitude toward identity has caused Iranians in the United States to struggle for identity recognition. Depending on the situation or the type of audience, they may introduce themselves as Iranian, Persian, Iranian-American, Persian-American, or American-Iranian. Part of the identity crisis for Iranians is that they are proud of their Persian culture and history with which they want to be identified and yet feel shame and embarrassment for being identified with the present Iranian image as perceived by the West. This dual view of identity has caused a cultural trauma for some Iranian migrants and is a source of identity negotiation in the diaspora (Mobasher, 2006).

Although Iranians have been struggling for identification in the diaspora, they have developed something of a diaspora identity based on their common background as an ethnic group in the diaspora. The creation of such an identity, as Brinkerhoff (2009) points out, is because members generally “identify with each other as members of a dispersed identity group with continuing common ties to the homeland” (p. 30). This type of identification in the diaspora has caused Iranian migrants to establish communication exchange networks that have linked them together in the diaspora. Diaspora identity is the result of the combination of national/cultural identity, the host culture, and lived experience of diaspora members (Brinkerhoff, 2009). This creates a blended identity, which originates from not entirely accepting the host society culture and not fully adhering to one’s traditional ethnic and cultural values. Hence, individuals may feel they are living in a third space between their culture and that of the host society.

The feeling of cultural in-betweenness has also caused a feeling of “liminality” for Iranians in the diaspora where they feel they are “neither here nor there...betwixt and between” (Turner, 1969, p. 95) the homeland and the host country. Naficy’s (1993) study on Iranian migrants in

Los Angeles highlights liminality among exiled Iranians where they felt they were separated from their homeland and pushed into a state of in-betweenness. They had longings for home and were unable to fully assimilate into the new environment. Naficy (1993) pointed out that the production of TV programs by Iranian migrants in the diaspora gradually emulated the host culture television structures and strategies and helped Iranians move from liminality toward joining the host culture, allowing them to change their status from exilic to ethnic.

The liminal feeling makes migrants build the concept of home simultaneously in the host society and in the past of the homeland. It is a state of “co-presence of here and there” (Clifford, 1999, p. 264) where “linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning”. The feeling of liminality for Iranians seem to have been accompanied by a feeling of missing the social and cultural practices common to *dowreh* (social/family circle) which may be absent from their daily life in the diaspora. This absence has motivated them to seek ways of reviving such traditional values in the diaspora. By using Internet technologies such as weblogs and creating a digital diaspora which is not space and time bound, some Iranians have been successful in reviving their cultural identity and practices in the diaspora. This new digital diaspora has provided an opportunity for Iranians to get together and practise national/cultural identities without the feeling of being between and betwixt space and time. In fact, the creation of the virtual diaspora among Iranians, as will be illustrated, seems to have created a Persian home- and homeland-like space that has reduced the feeling of liminality among them to a great extent. They have been able to establish virtual *dowrehs* where they feel at home and bring their stories and experiences of living in the diaspora and share them with each other. In other words, Internet technologies have redefined the concept of diaspora identity and liminality for some Iranian migrants and have given new meanings to their life in the diaspora as they can be in the circle of family and friends at any given time.

2. Theoretical Framework

The weblog discussion presented in this paper is part of a longitudinal study on a weblog network of Persian immigrants residing in Australia. The study explores how the new generation of Iranian immigrants use weblogs to form digital diasporas and why they publish their migration experiences online, thereby adding to the understanding of a relatively under-researched community. The study draws upon a sociocultural approach (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) in order to shed light on the role of weblogs in the context of the most recent Iranian migration and the way Iranian migrants use weblog networks to replace *dowrehs* (family/social circles) disrupted by the migration experience where they could perform cultural identities. The study uses a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and discourse analysis to collect and analyse the textual production of the bloggers in the diaspora. The discussion in this paper is based on the analysis of the content of a weblog and the blogger's role in shaping a cultural section for other Persian bloggers to get together regularly as part of the network where they could revive some of the Persian cultural rituals.

The widespread popularity of weblogs (or blogs) in cyberspace has inspired Iranians as well and weblogs are very popular among Iranians (Baldino & Goold, 2013; Zareie, 2013). There has been a rapid increase in the number of weblogs published by Iranians both inside and outside the country. The rapid growth of weblogs among Iranians is because they provide "a safe space in which [Iranian] people may write freely on a wide variety of topics, from the most serious and urgent to the most frivolous" (Alavi, 2005, p. 2). The popularity of weblogs among Iranians has caused the creation of a Persian blogosphere, which is generally referred to as "Weblogistan". Hendelman-Baavur (2007) highlights the growth of Weblogistan as the fastest growing cyber-sphere in the entire Middle East that has become "a prominent feature in defining the new global phenomenon of online communities" (p. 1). While weblogs play an important role for Iranians in Iran due to the presence of heavy censorship and control of the main stream media by the government (Simmons, 2005), they have also gained popularity among the new generation of Iranians in the diaspora. Part

of this popularity is related to the background of the new Iranian migrants, as the majority are highly educated and technology savvy. Like the blog users in Iran, Iranians in the diaspora use weblogs for different purposes, which may include discussing taboo subjects, spreading news, and circulating campaigns and petitions for different causes in support of countrymen in Iran. Furthermore, weblogs are used in the diaspora as a communication bridge between the host society and Iran and within and across the Iranian diaspora around the globe. This has provided an opportunity for Iranians to develop social ties in cyberspace where they can practise cultural identity and be in touch with each other regardless of time and space. The network of weblogs among Iranians in the diaspora has created a virtual social space where they can communicate their thoughts and experience of life in the diaspora and seek help and support when needed.

The formation of the digital diaspora among the new generation of Iranians has been highly significant in the history of the Iranian diaspora. Cyberspace has given Iranians a chance to create a Persian space beyond the borders of Iran where they can connect with each other across the diaspora and into Iran and feel at home virtually. The success of the digital diaspora among Iranians is in line with Brinkerhoff's (2009) interpretation of digital diasporas. Brinkerhoff (2009) states that the success of digital diasporas are due to their voluntary nature as they provide an environment which is "non-hierarchical and non-coercive" (p. 47) and allows individuals to join or leave as they wish. Using the interactive features of the Internet, Iranians have been able to revive some Persian cultural traditions in the diaspora by practising them virtually without the limitations of time and space or the intrusion of people outside their Persian circle (*dowreh*). This is an important step as in talking about Persian culture we are highlighting "a culture that employs closed, impenetrable walls and numerous hallways in its architecture to maximize privacy in the home environment [and] encourages the use of metaphors and symbols in speech to protect one's message from intruders" (Rohani, 2009, p. 6). The digital diaspora has provided an opportunity for Iranians to create a virtual Persian home with Persian walls and hallways. These walls around weblogs are the Persian culture, language, and

norms and values that are penetrable ethnically and open to any Iranian who lives in the diaspora and feels the same as other Iranians who live outside the country. It is the space that allows them to live between cultures and identities and yet practise Persian cultural identities in the diaspora.

It is this online social space, as will be illustrated, which constitutes a cyber equivalent of the *dowreh* (family/social circles) in Persian culture and brings Persian bloggers together on a regular basis.

3. Methodology

3.1. Procedures for Data Collection

The data collection was based on a snowball sampling procedure in which one weblog introduced more weblogs to the study via their hyperlinks. When a new weblog was found, its blogroll was used to navigate to other weblogs by clicking on the hyperlinks of weblogs that were available on the blogroll. The hyperlinks in the comment sections of the weblogs were also used to identify Persian bloggers in the diaspora. Through reading the weblogs' archives and their "About Me" sections the weblogs that were identified as Iranians residing in Australia were chosen for the purpose of this study. In total, a list of forty four weblogs was created, which were all written in the Persian language.

3.2. Instrument

Since the study took a qualitative approach and it was longitudinal in nature, it was essential to keep a precise record of the data, and manage and store the data in the collection process. Dörnyei (2007) states that a formal logging of data will help the researcher to avoid forgetting or mixing up the details during data collection and analysis. For this reason, two instruments were used to collect the data: research log (reflective journal) and a webpage downloader.

3.2.1. The Research Log

At the inception of the study, the main tool for collecting data was a research log. As the starting point, the researcher began to go through the weblogs and their archives and read the content of the posts and comments. In the

process of exploring and reading the contents of the weblogs, the posts that revealed the bloggers' identity, Iranian cultural identity, and cultural performances were recorded electronically in a Microsoft word document. Specific pages were allocated to each blog post and the readers' comments regarding that post, and each post was dated the day that it was recorded. Under each weblog post, questions that were raised when reading the posts were written down along with notes that could be used in the data analysis section. All the weblog posts and comments were recorded in the original Persian format, but the researcher's questions and comments were in English.

3.2.2. WinHTTrack

Due to the large volume of data and the danger of losing online data, WinHTTrack was used to download all the weblogs and their content for offline use. This offline browser utility is capable of downloading the whole content of the weblog and updating the downloaded web page every day if something new is added to the page. WinHTTrack was used regularly in the course of the study to download the latest contents of the weblogs.

3.3. Data Preparation

As all the original data were in the Persian language, they needed to be translated. The entire translation was based on the researcher's knowledge of English and Persian as a bilingual speaker. The translation went through rigorous revisions through consultation with both Persian and English speakers. Attempts were made to transfer the exact meaning and language of the original posts and comments without manipulating or changing any part. In cases where posts contained any culture specific term that was not easily translatable into English, the Persian term was transliterated accompanied by an approximate English translation and a cultural explanation. Once the transliterated word/expression was introduced with its English translation, then the transliterated word/expression was consistently used throughout the writing.

4. Findings

The data in this paper illustrates the digital revival of *dowreh* (family/social circle) among

a group of Persian bloggers in the diaspora. *Dowreh* is interwoven into the archaeology of Persian culture and is a symbol of collective identity in different layers of the society. *Dowrehs* traditionally consist of people who get together based on *samimiat* (intimacy) and some form of commonality. In a very general sense, family members, relatives, and friends constitute a natural *dowreh* when they get together on different occasions and for different reasons. The origin of *dowreh* is Sufism where Sufis got together for spiritual practice, but in present Iran *dowreh* exists in different levels of society. It normally consists of a group of intimate and equal-status individuals who have things in common. Beeman (1986) states that members of a *dowreh* “may all have attended educational institutions together; they may all have similar cultural interests; they may all have common backgrounds of foreign residence ... [or] they may share the same political or religious beliefs” (p. 45). *Dowrehs* generally take place on a regular basis with the aim of socialising and sharing ideas. In a sense *dowrehs* are communities of practice that “characterize membership as being created and maintained through social practices” (Davies, 2005, p. 557). A *dowreh* is the concept of getting together and performing something and has certain characteristics that distinguish it from other gatherings of people. Like communities of practice, a *dowreh* has a domain with an identity where membership brings commitment, a community in which people are engaged in group activities and build relationships and learn from each other, and develop a shared practice (cf. Wenger- Trayner & Wenger- Trayner, 2015). It is through repeated performances of the same activities that people know they belong to a particular *dowreh*. On a family level the common activities may include getting together for an elaborate dinner, watching movies, and listening to music on a Thursday night, which is the end of the week in Iran. On a social level it may include a group of people with common interests who get together once a week or once a month to discuss their interests. The interest can be, for example, Persian literature where people who are interested in Persian poetry get together on a night called *shab-e she'er* (poetry night) and recite and discuss poetry. On any of these occasions *dowreh* may bring obligations on the members, and each individual should try to fulfil the obligations of *dowreh* by taking

active roles to “further the interests of the individual members” (Beeman, 1986, p. 45).

A common practice of *dowreh* which is highly valued in contemporary Iran is the religious gathering of people, either all men or women or a combination of both in separate groups, to celebrate or mourn religious occasions. Currently, this kind of social gathering of *dowreh* is quite customary in Iran and is a unifying factor and a means of expressing different individual and group identities.

Dowreh is also a symbol of power and influence in Iran. In essence, the more *dowrehs* individuals belong to the more powerful and influential they will be. For this reason people try to have greater diversity in their *dowreh* membership. A case in point is the way an Iranian family operates. It is generally an advantage for an Iranian family to develop its membership “in terms of occupations, interests, political connections, life styles, and so forth” (Beeman, 1986, p. 47). Therefore, entering other family *dowrehs* through marriages is a very common practice. In other words, since marriage counts as obtaining membership to more *dowrehs* “people in Iran do not marry people; families marry families” (Beeman, 1986, p. 47).

At a very basic level, *dowrehs* start in family gatherings where children develop their Persian cultural identity. Family plays an important role in the shaping of the “self” and the development of cultural identity. It is in the family that *mehmān-navāzi* (hospitality) is learned and practised as a significant feature of Persian culture. The consequence of growing up in such a cultural production unit is that individuals become heavily dependent on family *dowrehs* and this develops a strong sense of emotional dependency among the members.

However, as soon as Iranians leave the country and start living in a new environment, they will be cut off from their families and all the ideologies, values, practices, and their *dowrehs*, and they instead encounter a culturally non-intimate world in the host society. This may make some Iranians look for a Persian *dowreh* in the diaspora where they can feel the intimacy of communicating with people inside their ethnic group. Virtual *dowrehs* are very good opportunities for Iranians to meet other Iranians

in the diaspora and get together and bring their stories of life in the diaspora online and share them with others. The presentation of stories online, as Brinkerhoff (2009) observes, may evoke a sense of sustaining or reinterpreting individuals' homeland identities and thus supporting the collective identity of the group.

A very good example of a *dowreh* is the case of a group of Iranian bloggers in the Australian diaspora. The bloggers seemed to be facing a culturally non-intimate and alienating world in Australia where they found it difficult to identify with the new environment. This motivated them to seek an intimate virtual *dowreh* where they could share their moments with other Iranians in the diaspora in a Persian way. Thus, they used their weblogs to create a virtual *dowreh* where any Iranian who has migration experience or is interested in migration stories can join and spend some time in an ethnic environment in the diaspora and practise cultural identities.

A simple blogging genre that can be used as a practice in these new *dowrehs* is the "meme". The concept of the meme was first introduced by Dawkins (1976) as "the fundamental unit of cultural transmission" (Aunger, 2006, p. 176) where ideas or values are passed from one person to another through imitation rather than genes. The same concept has become a catchphrase on the Internet where ideas circulate on web pages from one person to another. In weblogs, memes start by the initiation of an idea or a theme by a blogger who then invites other bloggers to take part and write something based on that idea or theme. The blogger who initiates the meme mentions the name of those who have been invited and hyperlinks their names to their weblog URLs, a process known as tagging. By doing this, visitors to the blog can go to the pages of other bloggers who have been invited and read what they have written on the subject. The same technique was used by some of the Persian bloggers in Australia where each blogger tried to post a common theme such as memories from Iran, reasons for migration, and so forth initiating a circle of friendly discussions by inviting other bloggers to participate. Sometimes the meme went on for several weeks in a domino-effect fashion with interesting discussions by both the bloggers and their audience. The presence of a particular theme

helped to materialise the network among the bloggers and in a way a virtual *dowreh* where the bloggers got together based on a certain theme. The memes acted not only as a network but also a virtual *dowreh* that included practices and ways of behaving and socialising.

A very creative way of constructing the Persian tradition of *dowreh* in cyberspace and bringing Iranians together was the creation of '*Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi*' (Friday for Living), a special weekly section of one Persian blog from Australia. The idea of *Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi* plays with the concept of '*Jome'eh*' (Friday) in Persian culture, which is the weekend. *Jome'eh* is originally an Arabic word with a religious connotation. In all Islamic countries, it is at noon on this day that congregational devotion takes place. Apart from the religious observance of *Jome'eh*, in Iran it is typical to have a familial *dowreh* and get together with other family members, relatives, and friends whom you do not have the chance to see or get together with during the week and spend some time together. It is usually accompanied by a meal, casual talk, watching movies, and relaxing away from the things that people normally do during the weekdays. In a traditional family, on Fridays, women usually take care of the food preparation, and they all help with some chores to prepare lunch or dinner. This preparation, which may take up to several hours, allows women to mingle and eat fruits, nuts, drink tea, etc. While women are preparing the food, men and children gather in the living room and watch TV and chat about different things including political issues that are current in the society. When the meal is ready, everybody gives a hand in laying the table. People, especially children, travel between the table and the kitchen to bring the cutlery, plates, and the food. Some traditional families do not use dining room furniture and a Persian carpet is the major floor covering in the whole house. In such a case, food is served on a large piece of cloth or plastic called *sofreh* (similar to tablecloth), which normally has beautiful patterns on it and is spread on the Persian carpet. All the guests and the host family sit on the carpet around *sofreh* and eat. The following photo shows a typical Iranian *sofreh* on a Persian carpet, which is quite common in traditional families:



Figure 1
A Typical Persian Sofreh on a Persian Carpet

During the meal, older people serve younger ones and tell jokes and stories to entertain people. The whole period is a dynamic one with

a lot of compliments on the food from the guests and a lot of insistence from the host in persuading the guests to eat:



Figure 2
A Persian Dinner Mehmāni (Reception)

The idea of Iranian Friday *dowreh* in the physical world was revived among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora in a digital way. During the week, the blogger who created the virtual

dowreh normally wrote about different things including scientific talk, current issues in Iran and around the world, life experiences in the diaspora, and other things; however, the blog

theme changed dramatically on Fridays. Every Friday the blogger uploaded some *musighi-ye shād* (literally happy music) from different ethnic groups whether in Persian or other languages such as Turkish, Azeri, or Arabic and invited the audience to relax and enjoy their time. Sometimes the blogger wrote about the foods and confectionaries that he had made and put some photos of his cooking on this section inviting the audience to take part in cooking.

After a while, based on the reception and comments of the readers of the blog, the blogger decided to ask others to join in and write something for this section of his weblog:

Well, from now on you see and read “Friday for Living” with some changes. In fact, I want to tell friends and others who sometimes write or suggest things for this section to do some teamwork for Fridays. The teamwork can be writing about your favourite subjects or taking photographs and then finding different types of music for them and putting them on the ‘Friday for Living’ section. I will not touch or change anything other people write. Therefore, you will read what the writer of that text has written. My assumption is that this concept of Friday will change into something valuable....

With this post he invited other Iranians who were visiting the weblog to join him in creating a public space (*dowreh*) in which everybody could take part and read or discuss different issues. Gradually this section grew into three major parts:

1. Music in the form of a video clip
2. A one-theme newspaper called ‘Iranian Journalists’ published weekly with the cooperation of readers, usually other bloggers, who were ready to contribute. The theme for this paper was introduced in advance and everybody was asked to write something short considering the theme of the week.
3. A narrative episode called “Unheard Memories”. This episode was narrated by the son of a doctor who died in 1999 and was involved in the Iran-Iraq war. The whole narrative was the memories of the doctor from his diary written during the war. This

episode was in the form of an mp3 file and could be listened to online.

This section of the weblog created a sense of solidarity among some Iranian bloggers in the diaspora and acted as a *dowreh* in which they could communicate with each other and other people through their writings, photos, video clips, and so forth. The source of solidarity was the commitment that some bloggers showed in taking active roles and preparing something every week for *Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi*. This weblog gathering also revealed that membership in this virtual *dowreh* had a wide geographic spread from the homeland and the diaspora. Participants came from the United States, Canada, European countries, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. There were some bloggers who wrote almost every Friday for this section and were committed to bringing interesting things to *Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi*. The interesting point about some of these bloggers was that each of them usually focused on a certain topic. It was like a newspaper, which had different reporters for different sections. In fact, this was the same as Beeman's (1986) idea of furthering the interests of the *dowreh* members. For instance, one blogger's contribution to *Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi* was normally sports news and analysis. He usually wrote about Iranian football leagues and analysed the issues surrounding them. A female blogger from Iran usually wrote under the title of ‘Scattered Diary of the Days that Lapsed’. Her writings were memories of days of her life in the past, which were narrated episodically. Another blogger from Sweden normally wrote about social issues based on her own life experience. An Australian member had a taste for movies. His writings were normally about the movies he had seen recently and his critiques of those movies, which he reviewed for his *dowreh* intimates. Music was also reviewed by a young blogger from Iran. He introduced different styles of music especially Iranian underground music and the history behind them, which might not have been available in the diaspora. His writing each week was usually accompanied by a video clip, which was an example of what he was discussing on that Friday.

Mehmān-navāzi was also practised virtually among the members. Although it may sound unusual, as *mehmān-navāzi* needs a physical

context in order to entertain guests, some bloggers practised it on Fridays in order to bring the flavour of *mehmān-navāzi* to the online community. *Mehmān-navāzi* was mainly practised via pictures where some bloggers brought their cooking photos online and shared them with other members with complementary remarks. For instance, the creator of “Friday for

Living” put a photo of the confectionary that he had made for an occasion on his weblog and asked the audience to enjoy them:

Well. Now look at the photos of these delicious things on the table. I made some tarts and pastries for 12 people yesterday. *befarmā* (Help yourself).



Figure 3

The Blogger's Pastry Making as Published in his Weblog

By showing the photo of the confectionary in his weblog and using the imperative *befarmā* (help yourself) which is a very common expression of invitation in Persian, the blogger created a typical Iranian *mehmāni* (reception) where guests are entertained with different types of confectionary. The audience also showed interest and enthusiasm by using appreciative remarks and taking part in the blogger's *mehmāni*:

Wow! You have got good taste. I really enjoyed seeing all these delicious things on one table. If I could not be in your *mehmāni*, at least I enjoyed the photo. You know that they say *vasfol eish nesfol eish* (describing an enjoyable moment is half of the enjoyment, i.e., unattainable joy). I wish you had posted the recipes here so that we could make them.

The comment from another diasporic blogger shows her enjoyment by using the Persian expression *vasfol eish nesfol eish*, which is used in contexts where people are not generally able to enjoy something physically and they can

only be the observer. In fact, the comment is not merely a compliment on the post and the photo but a way of performing and re-creating an Iranian identity in order to keep alive “the social dynamics of remembrance” (Gilroy, 1999, as cited in Duarte, 2005, p. 322) in the diaspora. This is because, as Duarte (2005) maintains, migrants always feel that they are “*out of place* in the host country, and therefore endeavour to foster a sense of *being at home in the new place*” (p. 323 emphasis in italics is author's). Thus, for the commenter the use of such an expression to show her virtual enjoyment of an unattainable moment is a strategic representation of a “foundational identity” (Hiller & Franz, 2004, p. 733) which is deeply rooted in Persian culture and functions as a binding factor with other members in the community. In other words, the commenter's performance, which reveals how she is missing a Persian *mehmāni*, is a way of creating a special Persian moment that reminds her and other members of the homeland and of making them feel at home in the host society. Furthermore, the comment illustrates that she

not only took part in the virtual *mehmāni* but also performed her role as a critic appraising the display of performance knowledge and skill (cf. Langellier, 1998).

5. Concluding Remarks

An examination of '*Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi*' demonstrated the possibility of a virtual *dowreh* for Iranians both in and outside Australia. It provided a virtual ethnic space for Iranians where they could get together and discuss different issues especially the ones that they were missing due to migration. It was a social circle to which people were invited by the host blogger to spend their Fridays in a relaxing way. Different ideas and issues were put forward by each participant, and they communicated with each other through their comments, photos, music, recipes, and narration of their memories. *Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi* was a typical Iranian *Jome'eh dowreh* but held in virtual space. In other words, *Jome'eh Barāy-e Zendegi* was a community of practice that had a domain where members had a commitment to the *dowreh*, participated in joint activities, and shared practices such as their stories and their experiences.

This paper was a first attempt to illustrate the way Iranian migrants make use of weblogs to create virtual *dowrehs*. The discussion brought to the fore the use of weblog technology in the diaspora among the new wave of Iranian migrants where they could practise cultural identities. This is a radical and innovative step forward in studying Persian culture and language as opposed to Persian cultural studies of several decades ago (cf. Beeman, 1986; Good & Good, 1988). The study illustrates how useful weblog technology is for the new generation of Iranian migrants, and how weblogs empower Iranians in the diaspora to create virtual communities where they can practise their sociocultural rituals and identities while they are away from the homeland.

Although this paper analysed the concept of Persian *dowreh* in a new way, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the main source of data collection in this study included a group of Persian diasporic weblogs and their audience in Australia, which may imply a small sample size. Although these weblogs were an ocean of data by themselves

in the context of migration, they may not necessarily represent a good and comprehensive sample of Iranian weblogs in the diaspora. For that matter, the findings and the result of this study cannot be generalised to the overall view of Iranian migrants in general and Iranian migrants in Australia in particular. Future research could concentrate on a larger number of weblogs as the source of data in order to be able to generalise the findings.

The second point is related to the demography of the bloggers in this study that might affect the ethnic generalisation of the findings. Based on the biodata available in the weblogs, the majority of the bloggers were people with an IT background or computer savvy who immigrated to Australia under the skilled migrant category. This may also affect the worldview of the bloggers and their expectations of life back home and in the diaspora and their online performances. Therefore, the opinions and ideas explored in this paper may not be generalisable to all Iranian bloggers in the diaspora even though the general Persian culture and language manifested in the blogs stay the same. Other studies may take into account the diversity of bloggers, their educational background, class, lifestyle, etc in order to be able to generalise the findings.

Last but certainly not least is the exploration of weblog technology and its effect on the isolation of a migrant population from the host society. As illustrated in this paper, weblogs provided an opportunity for Iranian immigrants in Australia to create virtual *dowrehs* where they could get together and practise cultural identities in the diaspora. This may imply that Iranian migrants spent more time being in their virtual ethnic *dowrehs* instead of integrating into the host society. This raises the question of whether the creation of virtual spaces by migrants and being with their ethnic group online impedes integration into the host society. In the same way, it will be interesting to explore how far removed migrants actually are from their homeland when they have access to the virtual world. Future studies may address these issues and explore how weblog communities affect migrants' integration into the host society and distance from their homeland.

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