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**HOME AND AWAY: BLOGGING EMOTIONS IN A
PERSIAN VIRTUAL *DOWREH***

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics and Second Language Teaching
at Massey University**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the creation of a virtual *dowreh* (family/social circle) via Persian language weblogs among a group of Iranian migrants in Australia. The motivation and inspiration for this study arose from my own experience as a migrant. I became interested in looking at how the new generation of Iranian migrants use weblogs to form digital diasporas and why they publish their emotional experiences online, thereby adding to the understanding of a relatively under-researched community.

The study draws upon a sociocultural approach in order to bring to light the role of weblogs in the context of the most recent Iranian migration and the way Iranian migrants use them to replace *dowrehs* disrupted by the migration experience where they could perform cultural identities and express and share their emotions. Using a grounded theory approach and discourse analysis to blog posts, the study investigates the expression of emotional challenges, expectations, and cultural performances of a group of Persian diasporic bloggers.

The exploration of a diasporic virtual *dowreh* produced several interesting results. The findings suggest the possibility of online community formation via weblogs where Iranians could meet and perform cultural identities which are not available to them in the host society. Two characteristics that marked the virtual *dowreh* were the type of Persian language used and the interaction between the bloggers and their audience. The analysis demonstrated that interactions between the bloggers and their audience via commenting functions were noticeably governed by Iranian notions of politeness and other Persian rules of decorum and cultural practices. The analysis also illustrated that the language used in the virtual *dowreh* was a combination of written and spoken Persian, Internet jargon, weblog terms, and concepts from the host society. Furthermore, the exploration of the emotional challenges of the bloggers revealed that certain emotions such as homesickness and self-conscious emotions were among the major sources of emotion in the diaspora and indexed the bloggers' Iranian diasporic identities online. The study concludes with the importance of weblogs for Iranian migrants in creating virtual *dowrehs* where they could practise/perform cultural identities and express and thereby share their emotional experience.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

In order to transliterate and transcribe the Persian language used in the body of this thesis I simply considered the computer keyboard as it was the fastest and the most convenient way of transliterating or transcribing Persian into Latin characters. Furthermore, I felt that using English keyboard and English alphabet were the most comprehensible way of presenting the Persian language to readers of English. In using the keyboard, I have tried very hard to create a simple and user-friendly way of representing the Persian sounds to the reader. However, there were two cases that I preferred to use two different symbols to represent the sounds. I have represented /i:/ with “i” and “ee”. This is because it is common in Persian to write “ee” for names that include /i:/. Therefore, all the Persian names that needed /i:/ have been transliterated with “ee”; other Persian words have been transliterated with “i”. The second case was the transliteration of /u:/. This was once again because some Persian names use “oo” to represent /u:/. Furthermore, I have used “oo” in the initial syllables of the Persian words so that the English reader does not confuse /u:/ with /ʌ/; elsewhere “u” has been used to represent /u:/.

The Persian language has six vowel phonemes and twenty three consonant phonemes. The following tables show the Persian vowel and consonant phonemes and their Romanised equivalents that have been used in this thesis:

Phoneme	Sound in IPA	Persian Letter	Romanisation in this thesis	Example
/i:/	[i:]	ی	i, ee	ist /i:st/ (stop); Saeed /sai:d/ (a Persian name)
/e/	[e]	اَ, اِ	e	ketaab /keta:b/ (book)
/æ/	[æ]	اَ	a	dard /dærd/ (pain)
/u:/	[u:]	و	oo, u	moo /mu:/ (hair); nofuz /nofu:z/ (influence);
/o/	[o]	و, اُ, اَو	o	gol /gol/ (flower)
/a:/	[a:]	اَ, اِ	aa	maar /ma:r/ (snake)

Phoneme	Sound in IPA	Persian Letter	Romanisation in this thesis	Example
/p/	[p]	پ	p	par /pær/ (feather)
/b/	[b]	ب	b	baaraan/ba:ra:n/ (rain)
/t/	[t]	ت, ط	t	taa /ta:/ (till)
/d/	[d]	د	d	dast /dæst/ (hand)
/k/	[k]	ک	k	kshaavarz /keʃa:værz/ (farmer)
/g/	[g]	گ	g	goruh /goru:h/ (group)
/ʔ/	[ʔ]	ع, ع	'	ma'ani /mæʔni:/ (meaning)
/tʃ/	[tʃ]	چ	ch	chaaneh /tʃa:ne/ (chin)
/dʒ/	[dʒ]	ج	j	jeld /dʒeld/ (cover)
/f/	[f]	ف	f	faraar /færa:r/ (escape)
/v/	[v]	و	v	vazn /væzn/ (weight)
/s/	[s]	س, ص, ث	s	saraab /særa:b/ (mirage)
/z/	[z]	ز, ذ, ض, ظ	z	zabaan /zæba:n/ (tongue)
/ʃ/	[ʃ]	ش	sh	shaad /ʃa:d/ (happy)
/ʒ/	[ʒ]	ژ	zh	zhaaleh /ʒa:le/ (dew)
/x/	[x]	خ	kh	khaahar /xa:hær/ (sister)
/ɣ/ /G/	[ɣ] [G]	غ, ق	gh	gholaam /ɣola:m/ (servant)
/h/	[h]	ه, ح	h	haft /hæft/ (seven)
/m/	[m]	م	m	maadar /ma:dær/ (mother)
/n/	[n]	ن	n	narm /nærm/ (soft)
/l/	[l]	ل	l	lab /læb/ (lip)
/r/	[r]	ر	r	iraan /i:ra:n/ (Iran)
/j/	[j]	ی	y	yaa /ja:/ (or)

Persian also has long consonants which are a borrowing from Arabic. The long consonants are called *tashdid* (literally ‘emphasis’) which is represented as ˆ over a consonant. In most English texts Persian consonants with *tashdid* have been transcribed with double consonants. In the same way, I have used double consonants in the transliteration of some Persian words to show the long consonants. For example, the word meaning ‘sensitivity’ in Persian has been transliterated as *hassasiat*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Searching for another *dowreh*: a personal experience that turned into the object of study

The late 1970s and 1980s in Iran were characterised as a period of important and dramatic changes in the history of the nation. The Iranian revolution in 1979 and the subsequent Iran-Iraq war, which lasted eight years, brought the country economic depression and decline. The civil conflicts caused a lot of damage to the infrastructure of the country, and the war forced many people who were living in the border cities between Iran and Iraq to move elsewhere to find shelter and safety. This period was also marked by international migration as many Iranians left the country because their personal beliefs conflicted with the ideology of the new regime or because they were fearful of the war.

I grew up in this context. Born in the 1970s, my childhood and adolescence was a period of internal confusion and commotion inside the country and the long war that ate into my teenage life. The story of migration is not new to my family, as we experienced it domestically due to the war or heard the stories of aunts, uncles and cousins who left the country for Europe at different intervals. On a family level, we sometimes had to leave my hometown due to airstrikes or rocket strikes and go to other safer places. My life, like that of many other Iranians at that time, was just like a living death waking up every day and thanking God that we were still alive. During this period some of my cousins who were my age left the country either legally or illegally in the hope of a better life beyond Iran's borders. As I grew up in a traditional family – my father is an orthodox religious patriot – I did not have the chance to go with my cousins. My father believed that we were the young generation of the country and if we did not stay, then there would be no one to fight for the country.

My acquaintance with the outside world was only via the return of friends and relatives who visited the country every now and then after the United Nations Security Council Resolution¹ and the truce between Iran and Iraq. Their visits always brought joy and happiness to our *dowreh* (family circle). I remember that my emigrant cousins, aunts, and uncles were special people for me and other family members as they narrated exciting stories about life outside Iran and how people in other countries were spending their lives without the worries and problems that we were facing inside the country. For me, their return and their experience of places and activities that I could only imagine were the best part and their leaving was the saddest experience of my teenage life. Apart from their enchantment and excitement, their stories of migration were emotionally loaded with feelings of the absence of *dowrehs* and missing grandparents, relatives, friends, and familiar places such as their birth place, vineyards and gardens, and holy shrines.

As a teenager I could not understand why they were talking so emotionally about those things, and I always thought that they were trying to tell us such sad and emotional things in order to make us stay and not leave the country. Based on these sweet and bitter narratives of migration, I promised myself to go abroad one day and experience life elsewhere. This promise motivated me to start learning English although it was not my first choice as my cousins were in European countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands. I chose English simply because it was the only language offered at that time in my hometown. I did not know if it would be at all helpful to me or if it might become my career in the future.

My dream of getting outside Iran did not come true until I was 36 years old. In fact, my PhD journey was the start of movement and migration for me. I came to New Zealand in April 2007 for my PhD studies. Coming to New Zealand was a journey into the unknown. It was my first experience of leaving Iran and I knew nothing about New Zealand and its culture. With bachelor and master degrees in English and Applied Linguistics, I was sure that I would not experience any language barrier in an English

¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 called for a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war. Although the resolution was rejected by both countries, it formed the basis for the truce that came into effect in 1990. Text of this resolution is available at UNHCR.org: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3b00f20e64.html>

speaking country. In fact, I was so sure of my language abilities that my first shock was at Auckland Airport when I conversed with the first Kiwi in my life. I still vividly remember that day as I failed in communication and I had to ask that person to be more articulate as I was a foreigner.

My first months in New Zealand were spent wandering about and trying to manage my life, finding and replacing different *dowrehs* such as the social network of colleagues, friends, and family members that I had lost. This was a very lonely period as communicating with different cultures was very difficult for me. The situation got worse and worse and I reached a kind of psychological state where I had problems sleeping at night. This made me go to the university medical centre where I got to know about the Manawatu Ethnic Centre, which was recommended to me by the receptionist at the medical centre. My visit to the Ethnic Centre did not produce any major results as I only met one Iranian couple who were in New Zealand on sabbatical and they returned shortly after we met. Their departure had a very sad effect on me and I remember I was thinking of going back with them as I was losing my only Iranian *dowreh* in New Zealand. As I was not successful in finding any friends, I tried to stay in touch with family and friends via telephone and the Internet. In retrospect, the long hours of chatting over the phone or via the Internet were the best part of my life at that time as their support and encouraging words made my stay easier and kept me going.

As an applied linguist with a background in EFL teaching, my initial research was in English language and learning but since I did not have any source for data collection in New Zealand, my supervisors recommended that I find some Persian resources online. I was also advised to start my own weblog. At that time, the term “weblog” was new to me. The start of my weblog was a window to the online world of Iranian migrants and the establishment of my Iranian virtual *dowreh* where I entered the online community as a migrant and, later, as a member and a researcher with a focus on migration. It took me a while to learn the basics of blogging and when I posted my first writing, I did not know what would happen.

The start of my weblog exploration was accompanied by a reflective journal in Persian in order to document my experience of blogging. The journal represented a chance to record my emotional experience when I was interacting with the community. I think my

journal is a genuine document that depicts my experiences as both the researcher and object of the research. In fact, my journal is in a way the conductor of my later thinking with respect to migration and emotion that became the main objective of the study. In order to illustrate the power of my reflective journal, I bring some of my writings from the journal to show the reader my feelings at the onset of the project and the challenges I faced when visiting the bloggers in the diaspora. The following writing is an example of how I was emotionally affected by my study when I was exploring the Persian weblogs in the diaspora²:

Sunday 8 July 2007

It's almost evening and I'm browsing through some of the blogs. What a boring day! Hope next week wouldn't be like this. Oh God! Some of these people have great talent in writing. This blog "*Kooch*" is unbelievable! I can't imagine a person can write like this. When I read his post about "home" I started crying! What a depressing evening! I really feel homesick. I wish my research proposal was something else. Working on these blogs is damn difficult because it brings back memories. I don't know what to do. I might go to my supervisors and ask to change my topic. I haven't got over my homesickness yet and these blogs are intensifying it.

My emotion was so high at the time that even reading other diasporic blogs did not soothe my experience of living outside the country. If anything, it worsened my situation. Clearly, the first couple of months were a challenge for me to decide whether to stay and continue this project or let it go. Day by day my emotional and psychological states were fluctuating with the type of weblog and content that I visited. Sometimes my mood changed from sad to happy or vice versa in a single day as I went from one blog to another:

Monday 23 July 2007

What a good day! Finally somebody read my post. I can't believe it. There are some comments for me. I didn't expect it. This is one of those moments that needs celebration. I'm damn happy about starting my connection with other Iranians. It's really great that others come and read my ideas.

² In the body of this thesis all the Persian texts that have been transliterated or translated into English have been right-aligned in order to give the reader a flavour of the original texts in the Persian language, which is a right-to-left language.

Saturday 4 August 2007

What's wrong with these people today? Any weblog that I visit today has a sad post about being homesick or nostalgic. I think I should stop reading them as I'm being emotionally affected by their writing. What a boring Saturday. I wish there were other things to do than reading these sad posts.

Trying to handle my feelings, I continued blogging and little by little blogging became an indispensable part of my life in the diaspora. I was always waiting for visitors to my weblog or I wanted to visit and read other weblogs. The weblogs were the only place and, in a way, the only Iranian *dowreh* in the diaspora where I could identify with other people who had the same identity and language. I felt comfortable to write anything I wanted without any fear of cultural misunderstanding. Yet, the main reason for my identification with the bloggers was our common background and life perspective as a generation that had witnessed both the revolution and the war in Iran. Labelled as members of "the Burnt Generation", we were born in one Iran with a particular regime and grew up in a new one with all the problems and suffering of the revolution and the war. This common background was a strong unifying factor for me as it attached meaning to what the bloggers were publishing. The weblogs were a life mirror in which I could see myself. When bloggers wrote about their life in Iran, their families back home, or questioned the philosophy of existence and what happened to our generation, I could situate myself in the same context with the same questions and empathise and sympathise with them. I could see me and my friends and family being described in their writing. This common background, I believe, was a powerful device that allowed me to connect with the bloggers and understand their life perspectives in their writing. This kind of life perspective, I imagine, might be otherwise overlooked or misunderstood by other generations of Iranians, whether the old or the new, as imagining or visualising the living conditions of my generation during the revolution and the war still does not reflect the real essence of what my generation has been through. That is why I consider that being part of that generation was a great privilege for me to conduct this study and reflect on the bloggers' writings due to our shared background.

1.2 Research questions and framework for the study

Reading through the bloggers' experiences and challenges in the diaspora, questions started to swirl around in my head about the way they presented themselves in their weblogs. I became interested in knowing who the bloggers were and why they were writing and publishing online where anyone with a knowledge of Persian could access them. Based on the high frequency of emotional posts and discussions in the weblogs, I started wondering why they were writing about their emotional experience in cyberspace, especially in cases where some of their posts were quite personal. These sorts of questions became the foundation for my research and helped me to explore how the process of migration affects Iranians emotionally and why individuals bring their emotional experience online in a public domain where other Iranians can read and comment on them. There were a number of questions that I pondered over and later finalised as two broad research questions for this study:

1. How do Iranians in the diaspora use weblogs to revive their *dowrehs* lost in migration?
2. Which emotions, and their linguistic expression, index Iranian diasporic identities online?

Having established the questions, the main challenge for me was how to explore the written document of emotional experience of a group of Iranian migrants online as a linguist. This was due to the large body of emotion research in different fields such as psychology and the overwhelming number of theories which were already established in offline settings. While a tension for me, I ultimately decided to draw upon some of the current discussions of emotion and the available theories to the extent that was needed in linguistics generally and in this study specifically, and utilised them to analyse the emotional experience of Persian bloggers in Australia. Therefore, my aim in this study is not to explore how biologically or psychologically emotion is constructed but to use some aspects of theories of emotion to represent and describe how emotion is affected by culture and society, and how and why it is expressed online. My assumption is that virtual settings such as weblogs offer unique and creative opportunities for Iranians in the diaspora to create a virtual Iranian social circle (*dowreh*) and express their emotional

experiences and share them with others. For this reason, I take an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the written communication of emotion among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora. My hope is to seek understandings and shed light onto the social and cultural factors that cause emotional experiences for Iranians and explore the functions of blogging for Iranians in expressing and managing their emotional experience in the diaspora.

I explore the issue of Iranian bloggers and their emotional experience in the diaspora by means of a combination of sociocultural and sociolinguistic approaches to illustrate how cultural processes shape and organise emotional experiences of Iranians and how they are expressed through the Persian language online. As represented in figure 1.1 below, there are several aspects that are focused on:

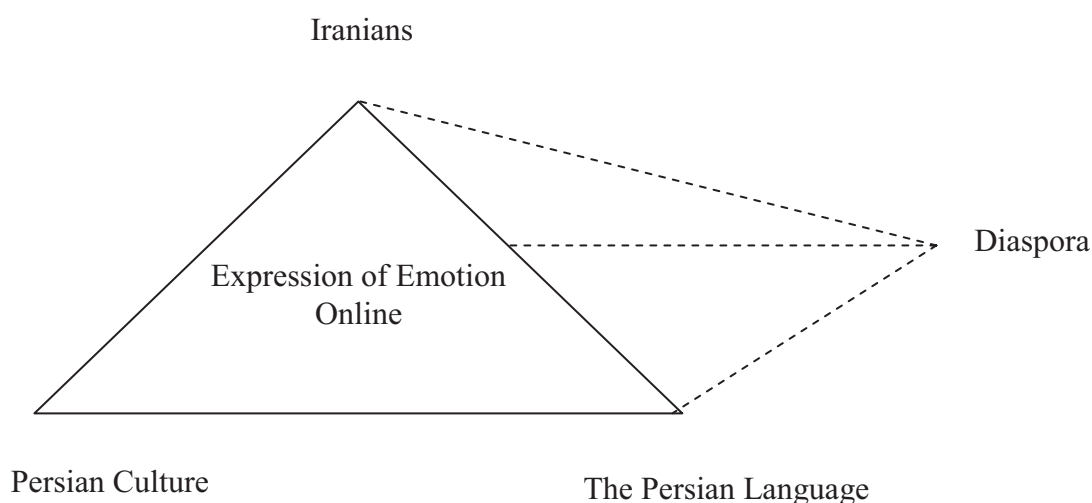


Figure 1.1 Ethno-linguistic presentation of the study

As the figure shows, each face of the pyramid covers a certain aspect of the study. On the one hand, there is a national and geographic identity that marks a nation as “Iranian”. This Iranianness is based on a set of cultural and social values and norms that define both the individual and the collective identity of individuals. These cultural values designate how individual and collective ways of feeling are shaped within the Persian

sociocultural context. Furthermore, this specific cultural group has come into contact with a different culture and language as a result of migration. As I will discuss later in detail in chapter six, migration is traditionally an emotional experience for Iranians and this may cause an array of emotions at an individual and collective level. My ultimate goal is to put all these angles together in order to come up with an analysis of the emotional experiences of Persian bloggers in the diaspora and illustrate how and why they write and reflect on emotion in weblogs.

1.3 Research problem: studying the emotional experience of migrants in cyberspace

Studies of emotion are not new and can be traced back to Darwin's classic theory and his exploration of the kinship between animal and human expressions. For decades, scholars in psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and other related fields have been developing an interest in the study of emotion (Lutz & White, 1986) and currently the literature on emotion is inundated with numerous definitions and theories of emotion (Scherer, 2000). While much of the work on emotion has been carried out in psychology, anthropology, and sociology, researchers in other fields such as migration studies and linguistics (cf. Fussell, 2002; Dewaele, 2004; Tannenbaum, 2007; Rivera Maulucci, 2008) have begun to show interest in the study of emotion. The focus of such studies has been on issues such as the emotional wellbeing of migrants, the effect of culture on emotional communication, literal and figurative expressions of emotions in different cultures and how these emotional expressions may vary across cultures. In spite of the new interest, the research in the area of emotion seems to be limited to offline settings. There are few studies with a focus on the use of Internet technologies such as weblogs as a source of emotion documentation especially in the case of migration.

Recently, the Internet has changed the ways in which migrants and transnational groups interact within and across diasporas. The Internet and computer mediated communication (CMC) have provided new opportunities for transnationals to create virtual communities where they can interact with the homeland and others in the

diaspora. One Internet technology that has been used in the context of migration to create online communities and social networks is the “weblog” which has empowered migrants to create digital diasporas and inhabit a migrant/transnational virtual space. Furthermore, since virtual communities have the potential of creating emotional ties among their members (Rheingold, 1993; Wellman & Gulia, 1999) they are suitable spaces for members of such communities to bring their emotions online and seek support from other members. For this reason, it seems that some migrants feel comfortable in writing about their emotional experience of living in the diaspora and sharing it with the virtual community.

The same thing is true of Iranians living in the diaspora. Iranian transnationals have made use of weblogs as a way of creating a virtual space connecting them with their homeland and each other within and across the diaspora. Weblogs seem to be a very useful Internet tool for Iranians in the diaspora for creating online social networks or what I may call an Iranian virtual *dowreh* (family/social circle) where they can share their experience of living in the diaspora and receive support from other members.

Despite the continuing popularity of weblogs among people worldwide, especially among diasporic communities such as Iranians, the research in this area is still in its infancy. For this reason, it is my hope to shed light on the use of weblogs among Iranians who live in the diaspora and find out how and why they use weblogs to reflect on their emotional experience of living in the diaspora.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study aims to explore the role of weblogs in the expression of the emotional experiences of Iranians who have recently migrated to Australia. By focusing on a group of Persian bloggers publishing from Australia I am hoping to extend the academic research on migrants and their use of weblogs in expressing the emotional challenges that they may experience in the process of migration. I specifically wish to find out what role weblogs play in the life of diasporic Iranians and how they make use of

weblogs in creating virtual spaces where they can expose their emotional experiences and negotiate their cultural and emotional identities with other Iranians in the diaspora. Examining the available literature on emotion shows a paucity of research on Persian culture and emotion. In fact, there are few studies that have specifically focused on emotion in Persian culture (cf. Beeman, 1986; Good & Good, 1988) and they are decades old and may not reflect the psychological states of the younger generation of Iranians after the Iranian revolution and Iran-Iraq war. Further, research on the emotional experiences of the new generation of Iranian migrants is quite limited, especially in Australia (cf. Aidani, 2007). The scarcity of research is even more evident in the area of Iranian migrants' use of Internet communication technologies such as weblogs for creating virtual Persian spaces in the diaspora where they share their emotional experience of life with other Iranians. Therefore, I am hoping to open up a new line of research on Iranian migrants and their use of weblog technology in documenting their experience of migration by analysing the psychological and emotional challenges of living far from the homeland as revealed in their weblogs.

As for studies of emotion in general, this research project also may bring a new approach to researching emotion as it contributes to studies of emotion on several levels. In terms of modality and context of research, there are few studies with a linguistic focus on migrants and/or transnational people and their written documents of emotion posted on personal weblogs. The majority of the studies conducted so far have used face-to-face interviews, diary writing, observation, etc as sources of data collection. Also, the available research is mostly on the verbal communication of emotion ranging from studying the emotional lexicon, metaphor, or other figures of speech to conversational analyses and sociocultural attributes of emotion. Furthermore, the bulk of research on emotion has been carried out on English and some European and Asian languages and cultures (cf. Wierzbicka, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1996; Goddard, 1996).

In addition, studies of emotion have mostly focused on emotions that occurred in the past to individuals. In such cases the originality and intensity of emotion may differ at the time of the study from the moment that it actually happened. In contrast, the data from Persian weblogs in the diaspora show that a lot of posts that express emotional experience of the bloggers have been written in present tense. This may confirm that the bloggers write about their emotional experiences as they are engaged with them. In

order to illustrate this, I will bring a post by Homaa, one of the bloggers in this study. However before I begin the analysis of the post, I will provide some information about the weblogs and the names used in this study.

The weblogs used as the source of data in this study were all published in the Persian language by Iranian immigrants residing in Australia. In order to protect the identity of the bloggers, I did not disclose any type of online identifiers such as IP addresses, URLs, and weblog names. In cases that the bloggers wrote about their offline locations such as their workplace address or their children's schools I either did not use the names in my translations or I only referred to the job/school rather than the addresses. However, if the bloggers used the names of Australian cities or other names that were common in the wider society, I used them in the translations. In the same way, I used the bloggers and the readers' screen names (first names) as the characters in this study and as identifiers of the posts and comments. With this background in mind, let us look at the post by Homaa and the way she uses present tense to express her emotion:

Homaa³ 29/08/2007 post#7

It's not possible to write everything in English. After all, your mother tongue should show some difference from your father tongue⁴! If someone who has recently gone to a foreign country was talking about the type of feeling that I have now, I would probably say that he was sick of being overjoyed. But I'm not sure now that this kind of feeling is called 'being overjoyed'! There are things such as language, culture, history, literature, theatre, art, and even land that make you more dependent as you get older. Here everything is beautiful. Everything is wonderful. Its [Australia's] easy and disciplined life can change you into an all-out moron! But I still don't know if this country can own me. I miss Iranian music! Cinemas are awesome here, but I wish they were in Iran and I could see movies there in the Persian language! I still prefer Iranian food to Thai and Chinese food. Why? I don't know. Maybe this is one aspect of migration that can't be felt unless it's experienced. But I'm not sad and only feel homesick for all those things that I had, have, and will have forever.

³ The spelling of this name may not sound appropriate to Persian speakers as Persian names with /a:/ are normally spelled with only one "a". For example, the above name is usually spelled as "Homa". However, Since I have represented /a:/ with "aa" in the body of this thesis, the same has been applied to all Persian names in the data that include /a:/ in their spelling.

⁴ Here the use of father tongue does not have any special meaning and the blogger is jokingly using this structure as a rhyming phrase that matches with mother tongue.

The way Homaa describes her feelings regarding living in the diaspora gives the reader the impression that she is in emotional pain from all the things she has lost in the process of migration. This post is infused with the idea that she is suffering from the social and cultural traits that construct her cultural identity and now she is missing them in the new environment. Her writing is an indication of the depth and continued presence of emotional discomfort that is present in her daily life in the diaspora, and thus she uses the present tense in reporting this.

Putting it all together, this study is a first attempt in exploring how Iranians in the diaspora use weblogs to create virtual *dowrehs* to share the emotional challenges of migration with other Iranians. This is done by bringing to the fore how Iranians view migration and how certain Persian cultural schemata affect particular emotions and give meaning to them. This is an important step in the study of emotion and brings new dimensions to the cross-cultural analysis of emotion and how the language of emotion can have different manifestations in different cultures.

1.5 Overview of chapters

This study comprises eight chapters. Chapter one began with how my journey as a migrant turned into the object of study. Then, it presented the research questions and the framework for the study, a brief overview of the research problem, and the significance of the study.

Chapter two focuses on the formation of a virtual *dowreh* among a group of Iranian migrants in Australia. The chapter opens with an introduction to the Iranian diaspora and discusses the formation of the Iranian diaspora from the perspective of history. The discussion highlights different periods of Iranian migration and the reasons that contributed to the migration of Iranians during each period. The discussion then moves specifically to the formation of a virtual *dowreh* among a group of Persian diasporic bloggers and explores the weblog's potential in creating such a virtual space in the diaspora. The chapter then brings to light the functions of weblogs in the Iranian diaspora and the way Iranians make use of this technology. The final part of the chapter

is the examination of the use of Persian language in the bloggers' writings and their communication with each other in their online gatherings.

Chapter three follows the discussion on weblogs and presents online/virtual communities and the way they operate. As part of this discussion, the weblogs' potential to create online communities is discussed by introducing their communication features and examining the existence of a sense of community (SOC) among Persian weblogs in the diaspora. The second part of the chapter examines a specific group of Persian weblogs in the diaspora and their audience as part of virtual *dowreh* formation. The discussion brings to light the type of audience that the Persian weblogs in the diaspora host. The final part of the chapter discusses the social sharing of emotion among the bloggers and their audience in their virtual *dowrehs*.

Chapter four presents the research methodology and design utilised in the study. The chapter starts with an overview of the qualitative research paradigm and then moves to a discussion of online research and the issues surrounding them. This is followed by an account of my research approach, ethical issues in online research and weblogs, and data collection procedures. The second part of the chapter is a detailed discussion of grounded theory and its stages and the way the themes emerged in this study through the application of grounded theory. This is accompanied by an introduction to the socio-linguistic and sociocultural processes that were used in the analysis of the emotional contents of the weblogs.

Chapter five presents a sociocultural discussion of emotion and how cultural and social norms affect emotion in different cultures. The chapter introduces the cultural shaping of emotion and then runs a brief discussion of the dependant and interdependent view of the "self" in different cultures. The rest of the chapter introduces and discusses some elements of Persian culture that can cause emotional discomfort for Iranians in encountering other cultures. The discussion is supported by bringing to light the performances of the Persian cultural elements by the bloggers in their weblogs and their virtual *dowrehs*.

Chapter six is the analysis and discussion of the written document of the emotional experience of the Persian bloggers in the diaspora. The chapter starts by introducing the

terminology of migration in Persian and the way migration is viewed by Iranians, and then moves to a discussion of new reasons for some Iranians (the bloggers in this study) to migrate. Following that, the chapter delves into a detailed analysis and discussion of emotional experience of the bloggers based on the themes that emerged in the process of the grounded theory.

Chapter seven focuses on the language of emotion in Persian and the way certain Persian emotions are culturally constructed. The chapter specifically concentrates on the language of homesickness and self-conscious emotions as expressed by the bloggers. It runs a socio-linguistic analysis of these emotions in Persian and highlights the existing differences between Persian and English manifestations of these emotions.

Chapter eight is the final chapter where a summary of the study is presented along with the conclusion, contribution of the study, and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

“FRIDAY FOR LIVING”: THE EMERGENCE OF A VIRTUAL *DOWREH* IN THE IRANIAN DIASPORA

2.1 Introduction

The discussion in this chapter contemplates the formation of a virtual *dowreh* among a group of Iranian migrants in Australia. The chapter opens with a discussion of the Iranian diaspora from the historical perspective of Iranian migration and the issues that contributed to the formation of the Iranian diaspora. Different periods of Iranian migration are highlighted along with the reasons that propelled Iranians to migrate during each period. As part of this discussion major studies on the Iranian diaspora are introduced and their results and findings are brought to the fore. This is followed by a brief discussion of diaspora consciousness and liminality in the Iranian diaspora and the reasons that may push Iranians in the diaspora to seek ways of reviving cultural practices such as *dowreh* that are missing from their life in their new countries.

Next in the chapter is a detailed discussion of the creation of a virtual *dowreh*, “Friday for Living”, a site visited by many Iranian bloggers in the diaspora. The discussion explores the weblog’s potential for Iranians in the diaspora in creating a virtual space where they can practise their cultural identity in an online ethnic environment.

Discussion then moves to weblogs in the Iranian diaspora and the way Iranians make use of this technology. As part of this discussion, previous work on weblogs around the world and the Persian blogosphere are brought to light.

Last in the chapter is an exploration and detailed discussion of the type of language used in the Persian weblogs in the diaspora.

2.2 The Iranian diaspora: from past to present

The literature on diaspora links the first application of the term “diaspora” to the dispersion of the Jews. However, the modern definition now applies to “any ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands” (Sheffer, 1986, p. 3). The modern definition of diaspora and diasporic communities is increasingly being used as an umbrella term in different disciplines for displaced communities, immigrants and refugees, exiled people, expatriates, and ethnic/racial minorities. Likewise, diaspora has been used to refer to the migration of Iranians and the formation of Iranian communities around the globe (cf. Sullivan, 2001; Naficy, 2003; Shoamanesh; 2009).

The history of Iranian migration to other countries dates back to the late nineteenth century (Adibi, 1998) but the formation of the Iranian diaspora around the world is believed to be relatively young (Graham & Khosravi, 2002; Spellman, 2004; Behrouzan, 2005). Some scholars (see e.g. Graham & Khosravi, 2002; Spellman, 2004) maintain that the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war that shortly followed were the major events in forming the Iranian diaspora. Iranians mainly emigrated to the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia. This trend of migration depended, and still depends, on several factors including specific immigration policies of the host countries and different historical, political, and socio-economic relations between Iran and other countries. These factors are highly important in determining which countries to emigrate to as some are liberating while others are constraining the movement for Iranians. For example, currently it is very difficult for Iranians to enter the United States due to the current political climate while the Australian/New Zealand policy of welcoming skilled migrants makes it easier for Iranians to apply for immigration.

The Iranian diaspora, like many others, is extremely heterogeneous with regard to ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, social and educational status, gender, language, and motivation for migration. In terms of ethnicity, although the majority of Iranian

transnationals are originally Persian⁵, there are communities of Turks (Azeri), Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Turkmens, and Assyrians. The variety of ethnicities also brings linguistic diversity to the Iranian diaspora. At the same time, there is a religious divide between the Shi'ia Muslim majority and minorities such as Sunni Muslims, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is.

The contemporary history of emigration from Iran can be divided into three major periods based on the reasons and motivation of individuals. The first wave of Iranian migration to Western countries is mainly marked by the Shah's modernisation of Iran (Aidani, 2007) where a lot of the wealthy elite went to Europe, especially England and France, and the United States for education. This Iranian elite class comprised many young Iranians who were sent abroad to pursue a Western education due to the close relationship that the Pahlavi regime had with the Western world. They were mostly government-sponsored individuals who returned back with a Western education and lifestyle. The by-product of this period was a general negative attitude toward the West and saw the coinage of the word *gharbzadegi* (Westoxication), which is still in widespread use today in Iran.

The second phase of migration starts with the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the resultant Iran-Iraq war. This period is the climax of Iranian migration history where many Iranians who were either supporters of the Pahlavi regime or who had different political views from the new regime left the country. This is the time when the concept of voluntary migration almost lost its meaning for many Iranians and was replaced by the notion of forced migration and movement. Thousands of Iranians left the country as asylum seekers and political refugees (*panaahandeh*) during this period.

The third and most recent period of Iranian migration which has been called the "new wave" includes mostly the voluntary departure of educated individuals. Aidani (2007) describes the migration of this group as "the departure of thousands of young professionals, academics, and highly skilled people who have sought to find better salaries and more comfortable and stable lives abroad" (p. 69). This period is the height

⁵ The use of Persian here refers to people in Iran who speak only Persian and do not have a second language as an ethnic group.

of the Iranian brain drain as many highly-skilled individuals have left, and are still leaving, the country at a constant and unprecedented rate. This is the group who are the focus of study in this thesis.

2.2.1 Studies on the Iranian diaspora

Since the Iranian diaspora is relatively new, there are few studies on Iranians who have left the country to live in other parts of the world (Spellman, 2004). The bulk of the research on Iranian communities is based on those in the United States, especially Los Angeles which has accommodated almost half of the Iranian diasporic population. In fact, Los Angeles has become such a cultural and political centre for the Iranian diaspora (Naficy, 1993) that Iranians in the diaspora and in Iran call it “Tehrangeles”, a portmanteau which is a combination of Tehran the capital of Iran and Los Angeles⁶. Following the studies in the United States, there has been a growing research trend on different aspects of the Iranian diaspora in Canada, Europe, and Australia. The following studies provide a background to the variety of orientations and patterns of diasporic life of Iranians that have been found by different scholars.

A few Iranian scholars have researched their fellow Iranians in America through the lenses of demography and sociology. Chaichian (1997) studied the cultural identity of first generation Iranians in the United States based on the typology of four elements of cultural identity proposed by Banuazizi (1992):

1. Iran’s pre-Islamic legacy [especially Zoroastrianism and all its traditions and festivals] from the Achaemenian dynasty until the time that the country was invaded by Arabs in the 7th century and Islam was introduced to Iran;
2. Shi’ism as the dominant religion for over 90% of Iranians;
3. bonds between various ethnic groups living in the same country with the same history;
4. and the Persian language.

⁶ Based on the increasing number of Iranian migrants around the world other portmanteaus have been coined by Iranians. For example, Iranians in Canada call Toronto “Tehranto” due to the large number of Iranians living there.

Chaichian (1997) explored the question of cultural identity for Iranian immigrants in the United States within this theoretical context which is believed to construct Iranian national identity. By focusing on a group of Iranians living in Iowa, he made some conclusions about the way Iranians view their cultural identity. The results showed that Iranians who left Iran for the United States after the 1979 revolution and Iran-Iraq war were not particularly willing to become naturalised citizens of the United States while those who went to the United States earlier had a stronger tendency to become citizens. The respondents mentioned adjustment to American society, and social isolation as two serious social problems that Iranians face in the United States. The researcher points out that one of the challenges for Iranians in America is their belief in Iranian cultural values and the desire to bring up their children according to these values. As a result, Iranians cannot blend fully into American society and this social isolation may cause some form of discrimination against them in the United States.

Bozorgmehr (1997) focused on the issue of Iranian ethnicity within the Iranian immigrant community in the United States. His study is based on the argument that the majority of research on immigrant communities has focused on the immigrant groups as homogeneous resulting in a neglect of the ethnic ties that exist within a special immigrant group. Based on the idea that diverse immigrant groups may contain ethnic subgroups, he focused on the Iranian religious ethnicities in the United States. By comparing the Iranian Muslim majority with that of Armenian, Baha'i, and Jewish ethno-religious minorities he concludes that Iranian minorities who had a well-defined pre-migration ethnicity before going to America keep their ethnicity in the United States more than the majority (Muslim) group.

A more recent study about the challenges that Iranians face in the diaspora was conducted by Behrouzan (2005). She analysed Iranian identity from the perspective of history discussing the major elements that establish the Iranian cultural identity using Banuazizi's (1992) typology of Iranian identity (see above). She argues that Iranian identity is not an easy concept to explore as it depends on factors such as history, social and political environment, and ethnicity. In terms of immigration, she reviews Iranian history and the reasons why Iranians have moved out of the country throughout different centuries. She, like other Iranian scholars, believes that the Iranian 1979 revolution and Iran-Iraq war were the major factors for the immigration of Iranians in

the past, whereas economic, political, religious and social struggles are among the factors of recent immigration.

Although there is a large number of Iranians living in Europe, there are few studies on this corner of the Iranian diaspora. Graham and Khosravi (1997, 2002) studied Iranians in Sweden from a sociological perspective. In their first study (1997) they focused on the challenges that Iranian refugees and immigrants face in Sweden especially regarding home and the homeland. Their findings indicate that the question of home is a complex concept for Iranians in the diaspora. They state that there is no country that can fulfil the different social and cultural needs of Iranians in the sense of home and this has therefore created the concept of multiple homes for Iranians. In a second study (2002) they examined the role of cyberspace in the public and private life of Iranians in Iran and in the diaspora, and the way the border between the private and public life of Iranians is redefined in cyberspace. They analysed Iranian cyberspace from different angles such as cyber-politics, cyber-etiquette, and cyber-capital and concluded that the diversity and proliferation of ideas and opinions in Iranian cyberspace may cause the undermining of the belief that there is only one Iranian diaspora in cyberspace.

In a study of linguistic diversity and language choice in diasporic websites Androutsopoulos (2006a) analysed a group of German based ethnic websites including Indian, Persian, Greek, Asian, Moroccan, Turkish, and Russian. His findings demonstrated that code-switching and mixing of language in online diasporic pages had different functions some of which could be the result of establishing identities in web pages.

To my knowledge to date, with respect to research on Iranians in Australia and New Zealand, which are new hubs that have already accommodated a large number of the new wave of Iranians, there are few studies which address the Iranian diaspora in Australia. Adibi (1998) tried to illustrate the history of Iranian immigration by focusing on Iranians in Australia. This study provides some demographic information about Iranians and their lifestyles in Australia. In a later study, Adibi (2003) examined the situation, expectations and concerns of Iranian youth and young adults in the process of forming and retaining their Iranian identity in Australia. The findings of this study show that while Iranian youth have many similarities with their Australian peers, they have

many differences too. Not surprisingly, he argues that this is most likely due to family background, emigration as a prominent feature of the family, and having a different language to use in the family. In other words, Adibi (2003) underscores the importance of family *dowreh* in shaping the cultural identity of Iranian youth in Australia and the consequent differences in their value and meaning systems.

In a recent study Aidani (2007) explored Iranian migrants and refugees in Melbourne, Australia in order to illustrate how they negotiate and manifest their identity in the diaspora. His study highlights some of the problems that Iranian migrants and refugees are facing because of their displacement and the attitudes of the host culture.

Regardless of the fact that the literature on Iranians in the diaspora is quite limited in scope, the issues addressed in the available studies regarding Iranian migrants are of great value and help in understanding the challenges of the diaspora. These studies also provide a good background for this study in understanding the structure of Iranian identities and the factors that cause the creation and negotiation of identity in the diaspora. They could be a good base to cross-compare the Iranian identity and find out how the concept of identity is negotiated and manifested by the new wave of Iranian immigrants in Australia.

2.2.2 Consciousness and liminality in the Iranian diaspora

The question of identity for many Iranians in the diaspora is 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.

Although Iranians have been struggling for identification in the diaspora, they have developed something of a diaspora identity/consciousness 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 led to the establishment of communication exchange networks among Iranian transnationals 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 immigrants in Los Angeles is a very good example of 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. His study found 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* 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, they

have been successful in reviving their cultural identity in the diaspora. This new diaspora has provided an opportunity for Iranians to get together and practise national/cultural identity without the feeling of being between and betwixt space and time. In fact, the creation of the digital diaspora among Iranians, as illustrated in the body of this thesis, 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 Iranian migrants and have given new meanings to their life in the diaspora as they can be in the *dowrehs* of family and friends at any given time.

2.3 “Friday for living”: the warmth of a virtual *dowreh*

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.

A case in point is the digital revival of *dowreh* (family/social circle) in the diaspora. The *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 the *dowreh* is Sufism where Sufis got together for spiritual practice, but in present Iran the *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, 2007). 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 read 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.

The *dowreh* is also a symbol of power and influence in Iran. In other words, 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 arranged 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 *khaanevaadeh* (family) gatherings where children learn the intimacy of *baaten* (the internal world) in the family circle as opposed to *zaaheer* (the external world) outside the circle of intimates (*zaaheer* and *baaten* will be fully explored in chapter five along with other Persian cultural terms). *Khaanevaadeh* is the space that provides the most intimate *dowrehs* and teaches children the dichotomy of *baaten* and *zaaheer* and how to act in both domains in private and public.

Khaanevaadeh plays an important role in the shaping of the “self” and the development of cultural identity. It is in *khaanevaadeh* that *mehmaan-navaazi* (hospitality) is learned and practised as a significant feature of Persian culture along with *adab* (courtesy) and *ehteraam* (respect) for others. 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 *khaanevaadeh* and all the ideologies, values, practices, and their *dowrehs* and they instead deal with a non-intimate world of *zaaher* 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 a very good opportunity 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 the bloggers in this study. The bloggers seemed to be facing a non-intimate and alienating world of *zaaher* 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 the *baaten* of an ethnic *dowreh* in the diaspora and practise cultural identities.

A simple example of a 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 bloggers in this study where each blogger tried to post a common theme such as memories from Iran, reasons for migration, and so on 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 the 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 Baraay-e Zendegi*” (Friday for Living), a special weekly section of one Persian blog from Australia. The idea of *Jome’eh Baraay-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 *Jome’eh-haa* (plural form of Friday in Persian), women 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 the women to eat fruits and nuts, smoke hookah⁷, drink tea and so on. While women are preparing the food, men and children gather in the hall of the house, which is the main part of the house and also the space to receive guests, and watch TV, movies, eat fruits and nuts, smoke hookah, 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*, which normally has beautiful patterns on it and is spread on the Persian carpet. All the guests and the host family sit

⁷ Hookah is a symbolic smoking device in Iran and men and women may use it as a kind of entertainment in social gatherings.

on the carpet around the *sofreh* and eat. The following photo shows a typical Iranian *sofreh* on a Persian carpet, which is quite common in traditional families:



Figure 2.1 A typical Persian *sofreh* on a Persian carpet (from the author's collection)

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



Figure 2.2 A Persian dinner *mehmaani* (reception) (from the author's collection)

The idea of Iranian *Jome'eh 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, etc; but on Fridays the blog theme changed dramatically. Every Friday he uploaded some *musighi-ye shaad* (literally happy music) from different ethnic groups whether in Persian or other languages such as Turkish, Azeri, or Arabic⁸ and invited the audience to relax and enjoy their time. Sometimes the blogger wrote about the foods and confectionaries that he had cooked 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, this blogger decided to ask others to join in and write something for this section of his weblog:

⁸ This choice of music from different ethnic groups is due to the fact that the music in the region has basically the same theme and rhythm, and Iranians are quite familiar with the regional music.

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. Little by little this section grew into three⁹ 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 any reader, usually other bloggers, who was 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 page 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 Baraay-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, 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*

⁹ This is when I finished the data collection. This section continues to expand and now there are more than three sections.

Baraay-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 Baraay-e Zendegi* was normally sports news and analysis. He usually wrote about Iranian football leagues and analysed 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.

An examination of "*Jome'eh Baraay-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 *Jome'eh-haa* 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 Baraay-e Zendegi* was a typical Iranian *Jome'eh dowreh* but held in virtual space. In other words, *Jome'eh Baraay-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.

2.4 Weblogs in the Iranian diaspora

The virtual *dowreh* explored above reveals the presence of Iranians online and how they make use of online tools and resources to create Iranian identities online. In what follows I focus on the tools of online sociality that they deploy to create their identities and networks in cyberspace. The widespread popularity of weblogs (or blogs¹⁰) in cyberspace has inspired Iranians as well and 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 “Weblogestan”. Hendelman-Baavur (2007) highlights the growth of Weblogestan 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 against the government 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. It is this social space, I will argue, that constitutes a

¹⁰ Today the term “blog”, which is a backformation form of “weblog”, is more common and is used more widely. In this study both “weblog” and “blog” are used with the same meaning.

cyber equivalent of the *dowreh* and is a space in which Iranian identity can be performed.

2.5 Previous work on weblogs

With the growth of weblogs in cyberspace, scholars in different fields have begun to study weblogs with different questions in mind. Currently, the literature is filled with an increasing number of studies on blogs (see e.g. Papacharissi, 2002; Simmons, 2005; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Huffaker, 2006; Karlsson, 2006). Among the early studies of weblog, perhaps the works of Blood (2002) and Herring and her colleagues (see e.g. Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004; Herring, Kouper, Scheidt & Wright, 2004; Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, Wright & Yu, 2005) are most worthy of attention. Blood (2002) established the first typology of blogs that included filters, personal journals, and notebooks. Later, Herring, Scheidt, et al. (2004) expanded and modified the typology and included filter blogs, personal journals, k-logs or knowledge logs, mixed purpose blogs, and other types of blogs, eliminating Blood's notebook category. Their typology was based on the coding of the contents of the blogs in their study. According to them, the content of filter blogs is about the outside world while the content of the personal blog is about the owner of the blog. K-logs are used in professional contexts where the aim is the exchange or creation of new knowledge. Mixed blogs were used in cases in which the content of the blog was a combination of all or some of the other categories. Among the typology of the blogs that they coded, personal journals were the most frequent with seventy percent of the blogs that were surveyed, and mixed blogs were the least frequent comprising only nine percent of the total. However, in terms of readership and media coverage filter blogs occupied the first place. Herring, Scheidt, et al. (2004) also worked on the genre of the blogs. Based on the examination of the content and features of the blogs and making use of traditional models of genre within the studies of rhetoric they conclude that "blogs are neither unique nor reproduced entirely from offline genres, but rather constitute a hybrid genre that draws from multiple sources, including other Internet genres" (p. 2).

Research on weblogs (see e.g. Papacharissi, 2002; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, & Sapp 2006) has also focused on the identity performance of bloggers, and through the examination of different weblogs some weblog identities have been recognised. LeMoine (2006), for example, identifies three types of blog identity: personal identity, blog identity, and group identity. Personal identity is the blogger's perception of self and understanding of who they are and can be manifested through self-expression and narratisation. Blog identity is shaped through the readers' perceptions of the blogger that emerge over time by reading blog posts. Group identity is formed through the connections that bloggers create with other bloggers and readers based on gender, age, location, interest, and so forth. This type of identity is in fact the result of the creation of a virtual community based on similarities with other people on the Internet.

Despite the popularity and growth of weblogs among Iranians, there are few studies that have focused on the issues of blogging and bloggers inside and outside Iran. Among the available studies, the majority have taken a political stance in analysing different aspects of weblogs (see e.g. Jensen, 2004; Simmons, 2005; Alavi, 2005; Alexanian, 2006; Sreberny & Khiabany, 2007; Mina, 2007; Hendelman-Baavur, 2007). The only available study that has specifically focused on the social and linguistic aspect of Persian weblogs is Doostdar (2004). Initiated by a post published by an Iranian blogger in Canada, he explores vulgarity in the Persian blogosphere. He argues that blogging can be considered as an emergent genre that provides the opportunity for the layperson as opposed to the intellectual to be "linguistic and cultural rebels by being careless in their writing or by otherwise using language in unorthodox ways" (p. 653). Although a small-scale study, this study brings up some linguistic and sociological issues about blogging in general and Persian blogging in particular.

With respect to the role of weblogs for Iranians in the diaspora, Petrossian (2006) examined how Iranians in the diaspora make use of weblogs. By interviewing several Iranian bloggers in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, she concludes that weblogs have given voice to Iranian society which was traditionally silenced by providing a transnational space in which Iranians can self-express their political, social, and cultural views. She maintains that "Iranian bloggers serve as merchants of culture

and information, trading cultural knowledge and news from both Iran to the outside world and from the West to the Iranian people living in Iran” (p. 54).

In sum, the limited literature shows that the use of weblogs among Iranians in the diaspora needs more attention. As will be discussed below, weblogs are multi-functional for Iranians in the diaspora and the assimilation of the weblog in Iranian diasporic sociocultural experience and production are well-established. Focusing on the diasporic aspect of blogging and running comprehensive analyses of the archaeology of weblogs in the diaspora may produce interesting results and open up new areas for research.

2.6 The functions of weblogs for Iranians in the diaspora

The bulk of the research on Iranian weblogs has focused on political aspects of the medium. The main reason for such studies might be the current conflict between Iran and the West and the way Iran is viewed by the West. Besides, the proliferation of weblog technology among Iranians as a site for discussions of political and social issues inside Iran may have contributed to such studies. Whatever the reason, these studies have been conducted at the expense of other aspects of blogging for Iranians.

With this in mind and with the existence of different Iranian weblogs in Weblogestan publishing and discussing myriads of topics, one may ask what other functions weblogs have for Iranians who live outside the country in the diaspora. What other roles do weblogs play in the daily life of people who live in the diaspora apart from the political debates, which have been a target of research? In answering such questions, it might be a good idea to have a closer look at the Iranian blogosphere and the way it is used by Iranians.

The Iranian blogosphere can be defined and categorised along several dimensions (cf. Mina, 2007; Hendelman-Baavur, 2007). The first obvious category is professional blogging such as journalism where journalists and people who are interested in news on different aspects of Iran publish their blogs. Blogs for Iranian journalists and the like act as a space where political and social issues that might otherwise be banned in the

society can be discussed. These blogs may be published by individuals or groups and include writers from both inside and outside of Iran. The second category comprises people who use weblogs as a form of diary and may have some common interest, and hence share a sense of community with others. This category includes personal weblogs written in Persian or other languages by Iranians who reside inside or outside the country. Although the content of their weblogs may include a non-professional analysis of some of the political and social issues regarding Iran, the bulk of their writing revolves around their hobbies, interests, and things that happen in their daily life. The third category includes weblogs by scholars and academics who may write in more than one language on certain academic subjects. This category normally includes people with certain skills and expertise whose weblogs are dedicated to particular subjects and fields of study.

While the above classification may not provide a comprehensive list of the groups in the Iranian blogosphere, it at least serves as an indication of the diversity of these groups that exist in cyberspace. Also, it is a good base for the comparison of the functions of the weblogs in this study. The group of bloggers in this study published their blogs from the diaspora with several purposes. One major function of the blogs was a communication bridge between the diaspora and families and friends in Iran. There were posts in some weblogs that showed the bloggers' complaints about the distance between the host country and Iran and the difficulty they had in making long-distance calls. This made them use weblogs to create a family *dowreh* in order to communicate with their social networks in Iran and share different aspects of their life in the diaspora with their circles of intimates. For this reason, the weblogs had frequent posts about daily life in the diaspora including birthday photos, news about children starting school, spending the weekend with other Iranians in different places such as the zoo, the beach, or other recreational centres in order to keep family and friends in Iran posted about life in the diaspora. Another function of weblogs in the diaspora, which was more important for readers in Iran, was the provision of information about the host country for people who were considering or in the process of immigration. This aspect of blogging in the diaspora was in line with Petrossian's (2006) discussion of the functions of blogging for Iranians in the diaspora that provides an opportunity for Iranians to transfer knowledge and information from the West to people in Iran. The blogs contained plenty of information on different aspects of immigration such as visas, work, accommodation,

insurance, driver's licence, bank accounts, etc that was mainly published for the consumption of immigrants-to be. Emerging as an integral part of the bloggers' writing, illustrating their emotional experience of life in the diaspora was also a central theme. The bloggers used their weblogs as a medium of expressing their emotion in the diaspora and sharing it online with other Iranians. Hence, weblogs were a source of connectivity among the bloggers and their readers which enabled them to communicate their emotional status and seek help in some cases.

On the whole, what emerges from the blogs in this study is that political sensitivity of the West toward Iran and the associated use of the Internet among Iranians has eclipsed interest in other functions of blogging for Iranians, especially those who publish from the diaspora. This has caused the neglect of the role of blogging for those Iranian migrants who are not interested in politics or any issues related to it, and who use weblogs to be in the social circle of family and friends and share their experience of living in a different country. The existence of such weblog communities among Iranians introduces a new line of research examining the social experience of Iranians living in the diaspora.

2.7 Language in the Persian diasporic weblogs

One intriguing question that was sparked by the exploration of the Persian bloggers and their virtual *dowreh* in the diaspora was the use of the language in the bloggers' writings and their communication with each other online. The type of writing available in the weblogs was quite unique as it did not fall exactly into the traditional categories of written or spoken Persian. This motivated me to explore the use of language in the Persian diasporic weblogs and find out the nature of language that was used by the bloggers in their virtual gatherings and discussions.

Previous findings on the use of language in computer-mediated communication (CMC) suggest that the language of CMC has many properties of both written and spoken language. Crystal (2001) claims that the type of language used in CMC is neither spoken nor written. Defining Netspeak as "a type of language displaying features that

are unique to the Internet...arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (p. 18) he argues that online language is complex and multifaceted and has features of both writing and speech. Drawing upon Crystal’s (2001) list of the differences between speech and writing, Nilsson (2003) argues that the language of blogs has much in common with features of both speech and writing. Blog language does not fall completely under one category but somewhere between speech and writing. Furthermore, Nilsson (2003) indicates that the majority of the posts in her data were usually written in “short, paratactic sentences” employing “informal, non-standard constructions and slang” (p. 28), features found to be associated with speech.

There are some other studies that have specifically looked at the use of language in weblogs. Cohen, Mehl and Pennebaker (2004), for example, used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) tool to investigate psychological changes in language use in online personal journals in response to September 11, 2001. Their findings revealed that the bloggers expressed more negative emotions in the short term, wrote with greater psychological distance, and were more cognitively and socially engaged. However, all these features returned to the normal level over time.

Taking into account gender and the use of language, Huffaker (2006) studied a group of teenage bloggers. While he did not find any significant difference on the surface structure of their weblogs in terms of features such as word length and word count, there were some gender-based differences in language use. He found that male bloggers tended to use more active language than females.

In spite of the fact that the above studies focused on the use of language in weblogs, the major focus was more on word frequency and semantic themes rather than the analysis of the type of language used in weblogs. What is more, the focus of these studies has been on English language weblogs whose authors do not have a migrant background. This leaves the issue of the Persian language in weblogs from the diaspora as a new area for exploration.

With this background in mind, this section will illustrate the use of Persian language by the bloggers in this study. But before that, I will provide a short background to Persian language and some of its features. Persian (also called Farsi) is the official language of

Iran. The Iranian¹¹ Persian language is an Indo-European language which uses an extended version of the classic Arabic script. In addition to the Arabic alphabet, it includes the four letters پ /p/, گ /g/, ژ /ʒ/, and چ /tʃ/. Although the original Arabic alphabet is used in Persian, the pronunciation of some of the sounds has been adapted to Persian. This includes the lack of certain phonemes such as interdental and emphatic alveolars. For example, Arabic sounds such as ز /z/, ذ /ð/, ض /dʕ/, ظ /ðˤ~zˤ/, are all pronounced /z/, and س /s/, ص /sˤ/, ث /θ/ are all pronounced /s/. On the other hand, capitalisation and diacritics are absent in most Persian written texts. The Iranian linguistic community is diglossic and there is a remarkable difference between the formal written and colloquial spoken registers of the language.

With the growth of the Persian blogosphere, the Persian language has become one of the top ten languages of the weblog community (Sifry, 2007). Focusing on blogs and virtual culture in Iran, Mina (2007) states that the style of the Persian language in blogs originates from the “sociolect” of young Iranians and does not follow the standard pattern of formal written Persian and “floats between written and spoken registers” (p. 31). According to Mina (2007), Persian syntax in Persian weblogs is generally simple, and bloggers use intentional misspellings and stylistic mistakes as a specific feature to weblogs.

In order to understand the type of language used in the Persian diasporic weblogs, I examined the use of the Persian language by the Persian bloggers in Australia. What follows is an exploration of the language used by the bloggers and in some cases their readers. Crystal (2001) notes that the use of the English language on the Internet is strongly influenced by the content of the site (e.g. personal diary, political, informational), and this leads to language variation on the Internet. Given that the bloggers in this study published their weblogs in order to record and share their life experience in the diaspora, the type of Persian language that they used in their writing was mostly colloquial. Their posts and comments were abundant with shortened verbal stems, attached pronoun forms, loanwords, free word order, and spelling that

¹¹ I used Iranian Persian to distinguish between other varieties of Persian which are used in other regions such as Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

corresponds to colloquial pronunciation. Blogs also contained ellipses, emoticons, spelling mistakes, and new spellings which were the result of the Persian alphabets on keyboards which lack certain symbols and diacritics.

The use of conversational language in Persian writing sometimes introduces some affixes that are not part of formal Persian writing. The use of such affixes was quite common among the bloggers. An example can be the use of /e/ and sometimes /eh/ at the end of some words as the definite suffix which is shown with **ه** /h/ at the end of the word:

*Vaghti ke raanandeh**ه** (راننده) mano dobaareh did az khejaalat aab shodam.*

When the (taxi) driver saw me again I felt embarrassed.

A major use of conversational Persian in the blogs which was quite noticeable was in the verbal domain. The bloggers not only used modified inflectional endings but also shortened many of the verbal stems. Furthermore, they used a lot of informal words and expressions which are not normally used in formal written Persian. The following excerpt from a blogger's post illustrates the use of conversational language in Persian weblogs:

Homaa 24/07/2006 post#5

*Be ham**un** andaazeh ke verraaji va porch**un**egi va zadan-e harfaayeh bikhod **tu** edaareh mardud va naapasand**eh** be ham**un** andaazeh shaayad ham bishtar **tu** jamaayeh dustaaneh va mohitaayeh khaarej az ravaabet-e kaari va **hattaa** jame'e hamkaaraa dar baarhaa va kaafehaa va saayere amaaken-e omoomi va khosoosi matloob va pasandid**as**. Injoor jaahaa **ageh** kam harf bezanin va faghat baa baleh yaa kheir javaab bed**in** bi adab talaghi mish**in**.*

Translation:

Although yakking, talkativeness and talking nonsense is not accepted in the workplace, the opposite is true outside the workplace in different places such as friendly gatherings, gatherings of colleagues in bars, cafes and other public and private places. On such occasions if you talk less and answer with just yes or no, you're considered impolite.

The excerpt is a direct reflection of the way people use Persian colloquial language and the majority of the words are written the way people pronounce them in conversation. The conversational pattern can be summarised as:

1. the use of informal *tu* (in/inside) instead of formal *dar* (in/inside);
2. the alternation of /aan/ to /un/ in many words especially verbals. Examples include: *porchunegi* (talkativeness) instead of *porchaanegi*;
3. the replacement of verb copula *ast* (to be) with /eh/. For example, *naapasandeh* (is not accepted) instead of *naapasand ast*;
4. shortening or reduction of suffixes and contracting them with preceding words especially when present perfect tense or past participle is used in adjectival forms: e.g. *pasandideh-ast* (is accepted) is reduced and contracted as *pasandidas*.
5. using shortened verbal stems and inflectional endings: *mishin* (you become) versus *mishavid*; *bedin* (give) versus *bedahid*.
6. using new spellings (or misspelling) that do not exist in Persian written language: *hattaa* (even) instead of *hatta*; *اصلن aslan* (indeed) instead of *اصلا aslan*;
7. the elimination of /r/ at the end of some adverbs and replacing it with /eh/ and changing the pronunciation of the last sound before adding /eh/: *ageh* (if) instead of *agar*.

The blogs in this study also contained a large number of loanwords from the English language which were written in Persian and naturalised according to the morphological and phonological rules of Persian. Two categories were quite remarkable: the first category was the use of scientific and technological terms especially with respect to Internet technologies such as blogs and blogging. Some of the words which were widely used by the bloggers are illustrated in table 2.1¹²:

¹² This table is not comprehensive and includes some examples from the blogs used in this study. There are definitely more words and expressions which are used in the Persian blogosphere. The aim here was to bring some examples of language use in the Persian diasporic blogs.

Table 2.1*Some English words used by the bloggers in Persian writing*

Persian word	Transliteration	English source
پابلیش	<i>paablish</i>	publish
پست	<i>post</i>	post
کامنت	<i>kaament</i>	comment
آنلاین	<i>aanlaayn</i>	online
آفلاین	<i>aaflaayn</i>	offline
ایمیل	<i>imeil</i>	email
چت	<i>chat</i>	chat
کیبورد	<i>kibord</i>	keyboard
مونیتور	<i>monitor</i>	monitor
لپتاپ	<i>laptaap</i>	laptop
لینک	<i>link</i>	link
ویندوز ویستا	<i>vindoze-vistaa</i>	Windows Vista
آفیس	<i>aafis</i>	office
کلیپ	<i>kilip</i>	(video) clip
بلاگ اسپات	<i>blaag espaat</i>	BlogSpot
سرور	<i>server</i>	server
پینگ	<i>ping</i>	ping
بلاگرول	<i>blaagrol</i>	blogroll
پادکست	<i>paadkast</i>	podcast
دانلود	<i>daanlod</i>	download

One interesting point that caught my attention in examining the language of the weblogs was the bloggers' coinage of neologisms which were a combination of English and Persian words using word formation rules from Persian. None of these words exist in Persian whether formal or informal and I assume that they are meaningless to people without knowledge of computers and the Internet. In making the new words, the bloggers used the English loanwords as the base and added inflectional suffixes to make new verbs or nouns. The following table shows some of these words and their word

formation patterns that were used as common terms in the weblogs as if they were originally Persian:

Table 2.2

Neologisms coined by the bloggers

English word as the base	Persian inflection and its meaning	Neologism	Meaning in English
blog	+ <i>idan</i> (to do)	<i>blogidan</i>	to blog
log	+ <i>idan</i> (to do)	<i>logidan</i>	to blog
click	+ <i>idan</i> (to do)	<i>cilikidan</i>	to click
download	+ <i>idan</i> (to do)	<i>daanlodidan</i>	to download
chat	+ <i>idan</i> (to do)	<i>chatidan</i>	to chat
chat	+ <i>kardan</i> ¹³ (to do)	<i>chatkardan</i>	to chat
hack	+ <i>kardan</i> (to do)	<i>hack kardan</i>	to hack
hack	+ <i>shodan</i> (to become)	<i>hack shodan</i>	to be hacked
hang	+ <i>kardan</i> (to do)	<i>hang kardan</i>	to hang
email	+ <i>zadan</i> ¹⁴ (send)	<i>imeil zadan</i>	to email
email	+ <i>fersetaadan</i> (send)	<i>imeil fersetaadan</i>	to email
link	+ <i>dooni</i> (storage)	<i>linkduni</i>	blogroll

The second category of English words used by the bloggers included words written in Persian with almost the exact English pronunciation. There could be several reasons behind this. One reason might be the Persian sociocultural background of the bloggers and the way Persian culture views certain things. For example, some bloggers used the

¹³ *Kardan* in Persian is an infinitive which basically means “to do” or “to make”. However, it is mostly used with other words to make compound verbs. For example, *telefon* (telephone) + *kardan* make *telefon kardan* which is “to phone” in English.

¹⁴ *Zadan* in Persian is an infinitive that can be used on its own to mean “to hit” or “to beat” and as an infinitival morpheme with different words to make compound verbs with different meanings. For example, it can be used with items of clothing, perfume, glasses, etc with the meaning of “to wear” in English.

word پارتنر /paartner/ (partner) when talking about different types of relationships among people in Australia or لزبین /lezbian/ (lesbian) in talking about homosexuality in their weblogs. This is because in Persian culture the concept of ‘partner’ does not have any place and meaning regarding relationships since people cannot live together outside marriage. For such a reason, the bloggers avoided translating the word “partner” as the translation in Persian bilingual dictionaries is *sharik* (business partner), *hamdast* (accomplice), *yaar* (a sport team mate), and none of them reflect the view of partner in relationships in English. Homosexuality is also a taboo concept in Iran due to the country’s Islamic sociocultural structure and people normally do not talk about it. Furthermore, there is no gender differentiation in the Persian word همجنس باز /hamjens baaz/, which literally means ‘fancying the same sex’ in Persian. Therefore, the bloggers used the exact English word in order to transfer the exact meaning in English. Another reason could be the effect of the new environment on their language. After living in the diaspora for several years, they might have found it difficult to have an exact translation as they wrote their posts. For example, some bloggers wrote in Persian some words such as انتشن /atenshen/ (attention), رپورت /riport/ (report), میدل ایستی /midel isti/ (Middle Eastern), and so forth as if they were Persian words. Yet another reason for the use of original English words could be lack of a single word/simple equivalent in Persian to replace the English one. For instance, some bloggers used words such as تاپ لس /taaples/ (topless), ترمزاند کاندیشنز /termz and caandishenz/ (terms and conditions), اف-ورد /ef vord/ (F-word) in their posts since the equivalents of such words and phrases in Persian are definitely not single words and need a longer phrase or explanation.

Another trend in the use of language in the blogs that was widespread was using English words or phrases in Persian when discussing issues such as sexuality. Such concepts are taboo in Persian or too private to talk about and may bring shame and embarrassment to the speaker. Stepping out of the Persian language, so to speak, is just one strategy to avoid shaming Persian identities. In addition, it may not be easy to find a Persian equivalent that transfers the exact meaning of the word or expression to Persian speakers as it is used in English language and culture. In such cases, some bloggers especially women used deliberate misspellings or telegraphic writing of the English word in Persian. Regarding this type of language in Persian, a female blogger published a post:

The title that you see doesn't mean "to love". It means to have a sexual relationship or to have an affair. If they want to use the interrogative form, then they ask, "Did you make love with her/him?" Or if they want to talk about their relationship with someone, they say, "We made love". Very probably you have heard that a lot in movies or songs. Of course, they also use the famous word 'sex' [the original Persian word was written in telegraphic form س/ک/س, that is, without vowels s/k/s in English] which doesn't have any emotion in it and it's more like a need for sexual relationship than an emotional relationship between two people. Fuck [written فاک pronounced *faak* in the Persian post] is more an insulting word than what we infer from the word....Now if an Iranian man wants to talk about his sexual relationship with a woman, how does he say it? Except for that disgusting word that interprets a woman as an object for satisfying a man, what really is the best word?...

In this post the blogger uses English words and phrases in her Persian writing because she feels that the Persian language does not have proper equivalents that can be used to replace them. Part of the reason for this kind of writing may originate from the translation of words such as 'fuck' in Persian bilingual dictionaries. The Persian translation of such words is usually a very negative and insulting word or phrase that cannot be used in a polite conversation in a normal situation, and mentioning them is more of an insult and may bring shame and embarrassment. On the other hand, there are a few formal words or phrases in Persian language, some from Arabic, that are too formal and are not used in an informal conversation. This seems to have made the use of such words in original English more comfortable for the bloggers in their Persian writing.

And finally, a somewhat novel way of writing in the blogs that might be considered specific to this group of diasporic Persian blogs was the use of certain English words in Persian writing which were environment bound and were encountered by the bloggers in the host society. Generally, when the bloggers wrote about certain organisations, social events, or any other concepts which were related to the host society, they wrote the exact pronunciation of the word, name, or phrase and in some cases they hyperlinked it to their websites or Wikipedia where people could get some information about them. Examples include مدیکر /mediker/ (Australian Medicare), سیک /sik/ (SEEK job website), ماسمن دیلی /maasman deili/ (the Mosman Daily newspaper), سمبوکا

/sambukaa/ (Sambuca the Italian liqueur), and so forth. The main reason for such a kind of writing could be the assumption by the bloggers that such concepts were quite new to their readers in other countries especially Iran and writing a Persian equivalent (if available) would still be confusing.

In closing this section, the data revealed that the use of language in this group of Persian diasporic bloggers does not simply come from Persian written and spoken language. The language of the blogs suggests “the possibility of a new variety of language found within the weblog communities” (Nilsson, 2003, p. 3). The type of language used in the blogs is a hybrid of Persian written and spoken language combined with the jargon of the Internet and weblog technology and terms from the host society. In fact, the language of the blogs in this study may be presented in a conceptual model that covers the range of language used:

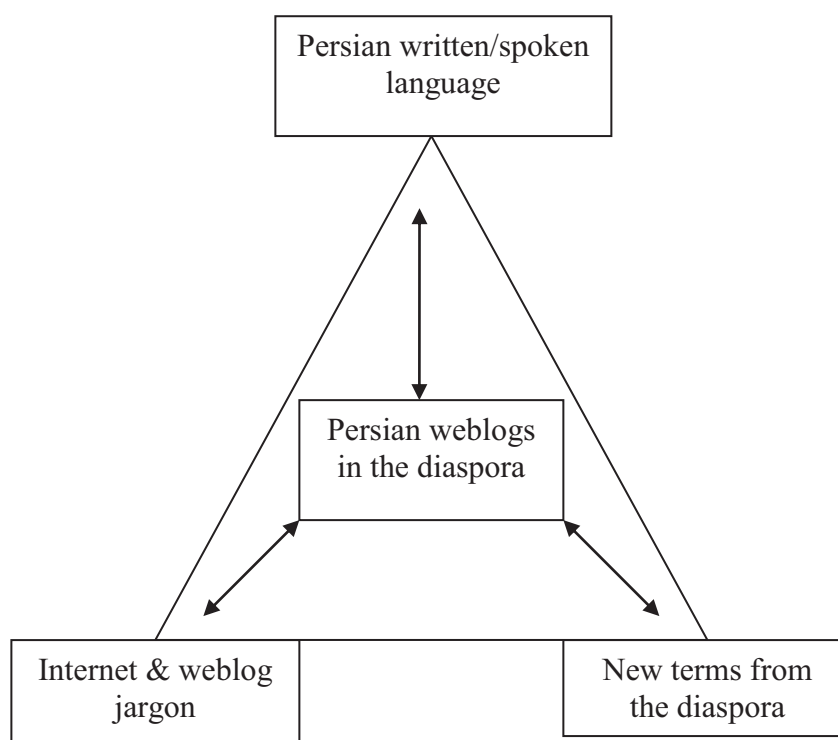


Figure 2.3 Persian diasporic language in weblogs

The linguistic feature of this specific Persian weblog community seems to be a bit different from other Persian blogs in that the language has been affected by the diasporic experience of the bloggers and the use of technology in the diaspora. Since almost all the weblogs were a written medium, the bloggers used Persian written form in a conversational style to write in their weblogs. As the weblogs were a means of reflecting on their life in the diaspora, they needed to use or introduce some English terms from the diaspora. This was accompanied by technological jargon that has affected the Persian language to a great extent and the bloggers as the majority were technology-savvy. And finally, as the bloggers were writing about their life experience in a diary-like fashion their sentences and posts were generally lengthy with minimum use of paratactic sentences, which are common in other weblogs in the blogosphere (see e.g. Nilsson, 2003; Mina, 2007).

2.8 Summary

This chapter explored the way Iranian migrants make use of Internet technologies such as weblogs in creating a digital ethnic space for practising cultural identities in the diaspora. The chapter started by introducing the creation of the Iranian diaspora and highlighting different periods of migration for Iranians and the reasons that made them leave the country. The discussion then focused on 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 was demonstrated that weblogs provided a unique opportunity for the Persian diasporic bloggers to revive a *dowreh* in a virtual way where they could get together and practise cultural identities in the diaspora while living between two cultures. The examination of “Friday for Living” revealed that the virtual *dowreh* for this group of Iranian migrants acted as a community of practice that assigned the members a domain, membership, and commitment, and members took part in joint activities by sharing their stories and experiences.

The second part of the chapter dealt specifically with weblogs in the Iranian diaspora and their functions in the life of Iranian migrants. The discussion revealed that weblogs

were multifunctional and acted as a communication bridge between the diaspora and Iran, a source of information about the host country for people back home, and a space for expressing and sharing the emotional experience of life in the diaspora.

In exploring the use of language in the weblogs, the data showed that the language used in the Persian weblogs in the diaspora was a hybrid of written and spoken Persian combined with the jargon of the Internet and weblogs and terms that were bound to the new environment encountered by the bloggers in the physical diaspora.

The next chapter, chapter three, focuses on virtual communities and brings to light the possibility of community creation via weblogs. In order to show the possibility of the existence of online weblog communities, different features of weblogs that allow communication, along with the availability of different dimensions of sense of community are discussed. Furthermore, the idea of weblog audience is examined by looking into the type of audience that the Persian bloggers in the diaspora attract, and the way they accommodate to their audience.

CHAPTER THREE

PERSIAN DIASPORIC WEBLOGS AS ONLINE COMMUNITIES

3.1 Introduction

The focus in this chapter is on the formation of virtual communities among Persian bloggers in the diaspora. The chapter opens with an overview of virtual communities and the conditions that need to be met for any online group to be considered a community. This is followed by the communicative characteristics of weblogs that allow for community formation. The discussion then moves specifically to the examination of the existence of a sense of community (SOC) among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora by highlighting different communication features of these weblogs and analysing their social networks. In doing so, the discussion concentrates on the performances of the bloggers and their audience and the way they perform cultural identity in their virtual *dowrehs*.

The second part of the chapter examines a specific set of Persian weblogs and their audience as part of the investigation of virtual *dowreh* formation in the diaspora. The discussion opens with an overview of the possible functions of audience for weblogs in general and then moves to examine the Persian diasporic bloggers and their audience in particular. After the analysis and categorisation of the audience in Persian diasporic weblogs, the discussion turns into the social sharing of emotion among the bloggers and their audience and the way the virtual *dowreh* is used in the diaspora by the bloggers to express their emotion.

3.2 Developing social networks in online communities

The enormous advancement of the Internet and cyberspace has overwhelmingly affected almost every aspect of our life. Cyberspace has made it possible to communicate with and meet new people, work or shop online, and live a virtual life without having to leave the house or office. Such online interactions have brought together people with the same interests or hobbies and have caused the formation of communities on the Internet. Online communities, also known as “virtual communities”, have become a very popular phenomenon and very much part of everyday life. Social networking sites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, discussion groups, forums, and other possibilities of the Internet allow people to communicate with each other and form their virtual communities. Äkkinen (2005) assumes that the popularity of virtual communities is that they “bring some collectivity to this world where people are isolated, far away from each other and always in a hurry” (p. 4). Hence, virtual communities provide comfortable spaces where people can meet and get together at their leisure regardless of how far they are from each other.

The development and popularity of online communities has also attracted different researchers from almost all academic fields because cyberspace raises interesting questions to researchers and, at the same time, puts old and routine questions into new perspectives (Stolterman, Agren, & Croon, 1999). Among these questions is one of definitions as the old definitions of community before the advent of the Internet concentrated on “close-knit groups in a single location” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005, p. 1) with distinctive physical or geographical borders where people interacted face-to-face. Nonetheless, the application of such a definition to the Internet and cyberspace has become problematic as communication among people has taken on new dimensions.

In order to account for online communities, a number of researchers have come up with working definitions. A pioneer among them is Rheingold (1994) who defines virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 5). This early definition of virtual

community has been influential and fundamental in understanding the concept of community in cyberspace. Later other researchers in CMC studies introduced other definitions that ranged from inclusive versions to assigning a series of conditions to be met for a group of people on the Internet to be considered a community (Androutsopoulos, 2006b). Some researchers have operationalised the term in the hope that they can design, analyse, and evaluate particular communities. Among the current definitions, Herring's (2004) framework is one such case that delineates a good picture of virtual communities and has much in common with the community of practice model of Wenger (2007). In her framework she considers six dimensions for an online community including:

- a) active, self-sustaining participation around a core of regular participants;
 - b) the emergence of roles, rituals, and hierarchies;
 - c) evidence of shared history, culture, norms and values;
 - d) self-awareness of the group as an identity that is distinct from other groups;
 - e) solidarity and support;
 - f) and criticism, conflict, and the emergence of means of conflict resolution
- (Herring, 2004, as cited in Androutsopoulos, 2006b, p. 422).

Herring (2004) states that these conditions are the main characteristics of virtual communities and their presence or absence will ensure that researchers understand that not all online groups establish virtual communities.

In line with Herring's (2004) conditions for identifying virtual communities, other researchers have drawn a distinction between virtual communities and virtual settlements arguing that not all virtual settlements do form virtual communities. Jones (1997) states that there needs to be a distinction between cyberspace or a virtual settlement on which virtual communities exist, and the existence of actual virtual communities. He argues that a virtual settlement is composed of a minimal level of interactivity, by a variety of people who communicate online in a common public space, and have sustained their membership. These conditions need to be met and reach a minimal threshold in any online group in order to be called a virtual settlement. Jones (1997) argues that a virtual settlement is distinct from a virtual community although there is a possibility that a virtual community emerges once a virtual settlement is

identified. The fundamental and distinctive feature of a virtual community is the development of affective ties among the members of an online group. In other words, a virtual community is a virtual settlement in which a sense of community (SOC) co-exists with a set of community-like behaviours and processes. A SOC is defined as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith the members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), SOC has four dimensions:

1. membership: feelings of belonging to, and the identification with the community;
2. influence: feeling that one has an influence on, and gets influenced by the community;
3. integration and fulfilment of needs: feelings of having support for others, and being supported by others in the community;
4. shared emotional connection: feelings of identification with a shared history, and having a relationship with others due to shared history and connection.

SOC has not been studied widely in virtual communities; however, Blanchard (2004) reviews some research findings that have identified evidence of the existence of SOC such as McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) membership, influence, fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Considering that the above SOC elements can be seen to exist in virtual communities and that these elements are in fact essential dimensions of virtual communities, then the question arises as to whether or not weblogs can be used to establish virtual communities.

3.2.1 Weblogs as virtual communities

In order to find out if weblogs can establish virtual communities, the characteristics of weblogs and how they operate online must be determined. In other words, the first thing to do is to look for signs of virtual settlements and then determine if there exists any sense of community in weblogs. Basically, weblogs are interactive web pages that provide a virtual space for bloggers to write and publish posts as many times as they

want. In addition to the main page where the primary posts are published and updated, there are places for their readers to leave comments regarding each blog entry. The comment space provides an opportunity for the reader to interact with the blogger and with other readers.

Hyperlinks are another feature of weblog technology that enables bloggers to link to other Internet sites. Hyperlinks are very useful as they work as shortcuts and redirect readers to other websites that bloggers have referred to in their entries. Hyperlinks are also part of another feature of weblogs called a “blogroll”. The blogroll is the space usually in the sidebar of the weblog where bloggers list other weblogs or web pages that they frequently read or visit. Each weblog name is hyperlinked in the blogroll and by clicking on the link readers are redirected to that page.

Some weblogs may also use certain widgets¹⁵ such as C-box (short term for chat box) which adds chat technology to the weblog, allowing bloggers and their readers to interact with each other. The distinctive feature of C-box is the permanent message history that allows readers to follow a thread of discussion on a weblog at any time they go to that weblog.

The presence of such features shows that weblogs can provide a virtual space for interaction and thus have the characteristics of virtual settlements. Nonetheless, some researchers have argued that weblogs are different from other forms of CMC in that communication tends to be one-to-many as opposed to many-to-many (cf. Blanchard, 2004). In other words, public interaction among a minimal number of people is an element of the composition of virtual settlements. While this argument may be true of some weblogs, it cannot be applied to all weblogs. Bloggers, especially those who have links to others and are linked back in return, know that there is a potential audience in cyberspace who will definitely come to their weblogs and read what they publish. In addition, weblogs that have features such as comment spaces and/or C-boxes are

¹⁵“In computers, a widget is an element of a graphical user interface that displays information or provides a specific way for a user to interact with the operating system and application”. **Source:** http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0,,sid9_gci213364,00.html

specifically providing space for the interaction of their readers with each other and the blogger. Furthermore, bloggers use hyperlinks in their posts that can take their readers to other pages that have been authored by other bloggers. In the same way, the use of blogrolls provides readers with the chance to see which blogs the blogger visits and click on the links in the blogroll to go to other blogs. Hence, weblogs create a social network between themselves and their readers and indicate signs of virtual settlements.

Having established that weblogs can act as virtual settlements, some researchers have tried to find out if weblogs can emerge as virtual communities. Blanchard (2004) explored the SOC in a case study of a very famous blog called the Julie/Julia Project. In her study, participants expressed a SOC within the blog and she concluded that weblogs “have the potential to evolve into socially beneficial, self-sustaining virtual communities” (p. 10). Efimova and Hendrick (2005) also explored the existence of weblog communities by examining artefacts of virtual settlements. In their study they suggested six artefacts that can be used to indicate if a weblog community exists:

1. Meme paths: where ideas are initiated by a blogger and then go from one weblog to another. The circulation of ideas around weblogs is not random and is influenced by social norms and structures.
2. Weblog reading patterns: where the regular reading of weblog posts and comments can establish a relation or maintain an already established one.
3. Linking patterns: that show connections between a weblog with other weblogs.
4. Weblog conversations: that can trigger when a weblog post attracts feedback whether in the comment space or a post as a reply in another weblog that is linked to that weblog.
5. Indicators of events: where bloggers talk about their face-to-face events or their online event participation, which can indicate the existence of relation between bloggers.
6. “Tribe” marks, group spaces and blogger directories: which indicate that a weblog belongs to a particular community.

Based on these artefacts they argue that blogging is the same as “life between buildings in a real city” (p. 7) with shared social spaces that account for different social activities of its residents. This implies that weblogs are capable of providing a virtual space for

interaction where people with some interests or common background can get together and form a SOC. In the case of migrants and transnationals an obvious sense of common interest in forming SOC is shared cultural background, history, and emotional attachment to their past and homeland that lead to the formation of communities in the diaspora.

3.2.2 Diasporic weblogs as virtual communities

The use of the Internet among migrants and transnational communities and the existence of SOC have been explored in the past by several migration researchers (see e.g. Rao, 1998; Mitra, 2000; Smith, 2002; Adams, 2004; Navarrete & Huerta, 2006). However, this research has focused on the use of Internet technologies such as electronic mailing lists, bulletin boards, forums, chat rooms, and so forth. There are few specific studies of weblogs among transnational/diasporic communities of immigrants exploring the question of a virtual community. Navarrete and Huerta (2006) state that an emotional attachment to the place of origin is a crucial factor for transnational communities of immigrants to construct and maintain a SOC, and since they are far from their homeland the urge for the formation of a community increases. Emotional attachment for migrants can originate from several sources including country of origin, shared histories, and shared experiences (Sonn, 2002). Emotional attachment among migrants has led to the use of Internet technology as a bridge between the country of origin and the host society. The use of the Internet has brought together dispersed groups of individuals from the same nationality inside the host country and the homeland. Cyberspace plays the role of a community in which migrants can establish their SOC based on their shared histories and experiences.

3.3 Persian diasporic weblogs as virtual communities

The above discussion offers an avenue for the exploration of sense of community (SOC) among Persian bloggers in the diaspora. I examined different dimensions of SOC among the bloggers to find out if they had developed a SOC and had established a virtual community as the result. As discussed before, according to McMillan and Chavis

(1986) the first dimension of SOC is a feeling of membership which sets boundaries for the community to identify who belongs to the community. Iranians in this network of diasporic weblogs got together based on several characteristics. As Iranians, the bloggers shared a common background, history, cultural values, and language to identify them as a distinct ethnic group in the diaspora. Their weblogs were a space where they could express their concerns about their common struggle with life in the diaspora and share them with others. Furthermore, their diasporic background provided an opportunity for the gathering of Iranian immigrants and Iranians who were planning or in the process of immigration at the exclusion of other Iranians who did not belong to this category. Therefore, members in this virtual community consisted of a group of unified people with some common goal and understanding and a sense of belonging to an online migrant community. In other words, the Persian immigrant virtual community addressed certain issues which were only of interest to certain people, and membership for them was a self-selection process to be part of the community.

The second dimension of SOC is a feeling of influence (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Here individuals feel they have an influence on and make a difference to the group as well as being influenced by it. Navarrete and Huerta (2006) state that the amount of individual influence on a virtual community of immigrants corresponds with the amount of influence individuals have on the physical community. Individuals who have a lot of influence in the physical world are more susceptible to creating or sponsoring a transnational virtual community. The group influence on its members includes compelling and supporting desirable behaviour and punishing deviant behaviour. This dimension also existed in the weblog community in that members tried to influence the community in different ways, and the rules of community and their sense of belonging to the community coerced or motivated them to do certain activities. A very good case in point is the following post that affected the members to a great extent:

Three weeks to lose weight

Why I chose this title for this post is related to something that we're going to do together. There are no excuses like I don't want to or I can't for what we're going to do. It crossed my mind that as of today we get together and promise each other to do some kind of work-out for three weeks. I mean it. I think it is possible to make a team via this weblog for working out together and becoming our own trainer. They also don't cheat and they honestly write down their results every day. Three weeks of work-out, every day 45 minutes. I will remind you every day during these three weeks. Right now, I will write on the top left part of the blog that we have a work-out plan for three weeks, and I will change all the photos on the sidebar into sports photos that give you athletic feelings....Don't eat chocolate for three weeks. Don't drink tea with sugar and stop smoking for three weeks and spend your money on fruit instead....

The post influenced almost all members of the community that this particular blogger belonged to, and members responded eagerly to the idea. The noticeable point about the writer of this post is that he normally plays the role of a leader in the community, and his age as a mature Iranian and his hobby as a freelance journalist have attracted the attention of almost every member. His leadership has had a deep influence in bringing Iranian immigrants together in cyberspace. Being able to do this is an important step in building trust among Iranians, as Iranians normally avoid each other in the physical world due to a long-existing "conspiracy theory" (Zeiden, 1996; Bar, 2004) among them. Iranians may avoid each other for different reasons including the current socio-political situation in Iran, and the variety of ethnic groups with different political views and religious beliefs and backgrounds. These reasons have created a social phobia among Iranians that acts as a repelling force and drives them away from each other in the physical world, and it takes time for them to build trust and form a group or community. However, cyberspace and in this case blogging has become an invaluable resource for Iranians in the diaspora to build trust and get along with each other regardless of differences in social status and ethno-religious and political beliefs. In fact, weblogs seem to have influenced individuals to establish an Iranian *dowreh* based on their common background, history, and language as a distinct group in the diaspora where individuals influence the group online and are influenced in return.

The third SOC dimension is integration and the fulfilment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) which is a feeling of support that members have for others and also the feeling of being supported by other members of the community. Navarrete and Huerta (2006) state that this dimension is characterised by two feelings: (a) reinforcement which is the attraction of members to people who have special skills or competence that they can benefit from; (b) shared values which guide decisions and priorities regarding emotional and intellectual needs. The third dimension of SOC was definitely present in the Persian blog community and it was by far the most important one for the members. The community represented an indispensable source of information and support for all members especially those who were new in the diaspora or were in the process of migration. They received all types of support and information about the host society from the veteran members. On the other hand, each member was a contributor to the community in that they used their skills and knowledge to support other members and the community. For example, Hamid answered some of the questions of migrants-to be in a long post based on his own experience of living in Australia and asked other members to share their experience regarding what he had published:

Hamid 28/05/2006 post#12

What should we bring to Australia from Iran?

Well this is a very general and somehow hard question and you can't prescribe something for everybody. Depending on the flight you're taking, being single or married, and your finances people may propose different options. As always I'll try to put my information and experience in my weblog. Therefore, they are not guaranteed and may not help everybody.

1. Where should we buy a laptop?

Laptops are cheaper in Iran but the warranties that they offer in Australia are better. Also, you can get a refund for a proportion of what you have paid at the end of the fiscal year. Therefore, it's better to buy your laptop in Australia.

2. Shall we bring our electronic gadgets?

Sockets in Australia are different and you need an adaptor, which are available in most supermarkets at a price of about 12 dollars. But remember that some of your gadgets may not work here as the voltage is different. You should also know that the prices of some household items such as irons, CD players, and cell phones are almost the same as Iran, and it's better not to make your luggage heavy with these things....

If other friends have other experiences or think that I have forgotten anything, put them in the comment space so that others can use them.

The individual member support included, but was not limited to, accommodation, medical care, job searches, banking, Internet and mobile services, finding Iranian businesses in the host society, news about both the homeland and the host society, etc that helped and supported the members in the community. The community was in itself a virtual bridge between the homeland and the host society where migrants could stay in touch with families in the homeland and vice versa.

The last dimension of SOC is shared emotional connection which is “the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together and similar experiences” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Shared emotional connection is seemingly a distinctive feature of migrants living in another country as their shared histories and values draw a border between them and the host society or any other community or ethnic group. The same was true of the Persian bloggers as their virtual community provided them with a space in which members had a shared history, the same cultural background, and in some cases were from the same city, province, or local area. The virtual community was therefore a channel for interacting with other members and participating in shared events that were historically or culturally significant and that were missed as a result of migration. The virtual community was a space that filled the gap for the migrants and connected them emotionally to each other across the host society and within the homeland. A very good example that was frequent in the bloggers’ posts at a certain time each year was the Iranian New Year (Nowruz) festival. Going through the weblogs, each year around 21 March, the bloggers had a lot of posts with spring season greetings celebrating the Nowruz festival and wishing each other a happy new year. Posts were usually accompanied by the traditional photos of *Haft Sin* (a table cloth that is decorated with seven symbolic items each starting with the sound /s/ in Persian and hence the name *Haft Sin* which literally means seven Ss):



Figure 3.1 A typical *Haft Sin* in the diaspora (courtesy of the photographer)

The weblog community was also a venue for the migrants to keep their families posted on their life in the diaspora including their children’s birthday events and photos, their first year of school, family holidays, and any other events that they felt necessary for their families to know. For example, the following post shows how a blogger felt about keeping a weblog and being part of the community:

An advantage of blogging for me, or perhaps a lot of other Iranian immigrants, is that blogs fill the empty place of friends and relatives who have been left in Iran. If a person spends a lot of time reading blogs, writing and revising posts, and answering comments, it is not because of their love toward Iranians nor their national responsibility to enlighten ignorant people. In fact, it's neither one. A lot of us who keep blogs are not social or political activists or even journalists. The majority of us are average people who have started blogging in order to escape the fact that we cannot speak or read in Farsi anymore, and we also feel that we are being cut from our ancestral roots....

A big advantage of blogging for me is that I have found friends. Although weblogs have sometimes been a source of unresolvable misunderstanding, they give you a good feeling that there is someone on the other side of the world or maybe near you who you can talk to and enjoy the talk even without having seen him/her. You can be full of joy of the good feelings that you receive, and you can even be courageous enough to go further and show him/her the real you and meet each other. The fact that virtual people become real is a strange and yet very interesting experience.

The blogger openly expresses how the blog community has replaced the empty place of those who have been left behind due to migration. The weblog and other members of the community have given the blogger the chance to share the experience of living in the diaspora and interact with other members which in some cases culminated in offline friendship. Therefore, a personal weblog was not merely a virtual space to keep and record a diary of life in the diaspora. It was a conduit to a virtual community and a place to receive emotional support from other members and the community and also a space to provide support to other members.

The emotional attachment to the community also imposed obligations on the members of the community. The obligations were greater on the bloggers than the commenters. Bloggers normally tried to publish new posts as often as they could. In cases when they got busy with their life in the diaspora and were not able to update their weblogs, then their new posts usually started with some apologetic sentences or explanation for their silence. This kind of opening was an indication of the bloggers' obligation to the community and the fact that they knew there were people waiting for their new posts. In some cases, the visitors left some comments in the form of a friendly complaint or showed their anxiety about why the blogger did not publish anything new by questioning if things were okay with the blogger.

With a focus on the success of virtual communities, Blanchard (2008) argues that there are other elements that are vital in sustaining a successful virtual community. These elements include the development of trust between the members of the community, and the development and imposition of norms and rules of conduct to be obeyed and respected by the members. While the development and maintenance of trust is vital in virtual communities due to increased deception and fraud online, it did not seem to be a problem in the virtual community of the Persian bloggers. I did not witness a single case in which the bloggers or their audience questioned each other's identity. Both the bloggers and their readers were quite open in discussing different aspects of their life such as their workplace, their living conditions, their location in the homeland and the host society, and any other issues that were raised in the community. My assumption for trust being taken for granted among the Persian bloggers' community is that these people started their weblogs and their virtual community with the purpose of helping each other in the diaspora and in the homeland. Their aim was to develop a network of socio-emotional support where new migrants could receive information about the host society and have an easier transition from the homeland by using the experience and advice of others who were already living in the host society. For instance, a blogger introduces her weblog as:

Elhaam 23/03/2006 post#1

This weblog is a communication page between me and my beloved husband who is far from me as the result of my migration to Australia. I want to store my hours and days of living in Australia on this page so that he can be with me in all moments of my life. I also want to write about the stages of migration that I went through and my life experience in Australia for those who need this information. My aim is to write here so that I feel less lonely and feel that you and my husband are with me.

This weblog introduction shows that for this woman the weblog was multifunctional. It acted as a communication bridge between her and her husband and a space to be part of the virtual community where she could both provide support for those who needed information about Australia and receive emotional support from the community.

The virtual community of the bloggers seemed to be the only space for people who were in the process of migration to trust each other regardless of all the feelings of insecurity and mistrust which are common in the present society. The virtual community was the space where people listened to each other, followed the advice of other members, and supported each other without expecting anything. Therefore, the element of trust was not an issue in this particular virtual community as it belonged to a certain group of Iranian immigrants with a certain audience whose aim was to provide/seek socio-emotional support with respect to the diaspora.

Nonetheless, the development and enforcement of norms and rules of behaviour within the Persian diasporic virtual community was a controversial issue. The controversy was not about what or how to discuss different topics but rather if weblogs needed a series of norms such as self-censorship, or censoring certain posts or comments to be developed and followed by the members. The following is an example of such a discussion between a blogger and other members of the community regarding the development of norms for the weblog community:

In all social relations around the world there are several terms and conditions in contracts that both sides are required to obey. In Australia, these terms and conditions are written in very small font at the end of the contract, and not reading them causes a lot of trouble. After our first accommodation contract and the problems that we went through to cancel it, we have understood that before signing anything you have to read all those fine print sentences....

In my opinion, maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to introduce terms and conditions for our weblogs. I'm writing this because one of my comments was censored in an unseen friend's weblog which didn't come with any terms and conditions. She had written this for me, "harsh comments won't be published". Of course, she had written an explanation that my comment was harsh! I think what makes something a harsh comment should be defined since an opposing comment can be accused of being harsh. Last night I found out that certain other comments were not published either, and it was very probably because of being harsh or antagonistic or whatever you might call it. In a sense, if you have to approve of everything I say as a blogger then I shouldn't publish you, but instead censor you and accuse you of being harsh.

I myself censor comments that are insults or nonsense. I also censor those comments that are not relevant to the post or are anonymous and partial. Because of this, I have been thinking of searching for what the tenets of blogging are. What are the tenets of commenting? Do you also censor comments? What are your reasons? If you have expressed your opinion wrongly in a post and someone opposes you, then what? Do you change the content of the post or do you add a post script? What do you do with misspellings after you have been reminded of them? What kind of writing do you consider harsh and how much is your tolerance for being insulted? How many unpublished posts stay published only in your brain?

In your opinion, is it right to introduce terms and conditions for weblogs?

The blogger tries to compare the weblog with the physical world where every contract has terms and conditions that need to be read and followed carefully, otherwise trouble may arise. She thinks that weblogs should have some kind of terms and conditions that define the norms of behaviour for visitors and readers who want to be part of the community and leave comments. For this reason she poses several controversial questions and asks other members of the community to get involved and share their opinions. The comments from other members are as controversial as the questions since each member has a different opinion of blogging. However, a final comment by a member which puts an end to the discussion of introducing terms and conditions to

weblogs is worth analysing as it highlights several important aspects which are explicitly linked to blogging in the diaspora:

Hamid 17/10/2007 comment#14

While I respect other people's opinions, I believe that weblogs are not private diaries that you hide away somewhere. We write online because we want others to read our thoughts and share their experiences with us. We also should consider the fact that lots of us are bloggers that write about our experiences of living abroad. Therefore, it's not just a private page and it belongs to others as well. We write here because we're far from the people we love, and we want to soothe the sorrow of being far from them by sharing our *roozmargihaa* (days that you spend like a living death). We also want to be a source of information for those who are in Iran in order to have a better view of life in *ghorbat* (foreign land) if they want to migrate.

I suggest that we get off our high horses, improve our tolerance of listening to each other, and forget about terms and conditions for our weblogs.

The comment from this member uncovers several aspects of blogging and the existence of a virtual community for the people in the diaspora. The commenter thinks that weblogs are not the traditional private diaries that people used to keep as a personal possession and the only person who had access to it was the writer of the diary. He believes that for people in the diaspora weblogs act as a public space and what is written is for the consumption of the public. He reminds others of the fact that they write about their life experience in the diaspora, an indication of writing for a purpose and with a potential audience in mind. For this reason, he thinks that the diasporic weblogs are not personal and belong to other Iranians as well. Furthermore, he indicates that weblogs are a social network for people in the diaspora to soothe the sorrow of distance and detachment from their loved ones. By highlighting different aspects of blogging in the diaspora he is indicating that bloggers have a responsibility regarding others and for this reason they should improve their tolerance of criticism and let people express themselves freely without any conditions.

Apart from not making overt norms of behaviour in the weblog community, the bloggers made use of "sanctioning" (cf. Blanchard, 2008) as a way of filtering the flow of comments. Sanctioning worked on different levels. Some bloggers activated

comment moderation after being annoyed by some comments. The comment moderator allows bloggers to check the comments before they appear on the comment area. This way they were able to filter comments which were rude, insulting, or partial. Sometimes some bloggers deactivated the comment link for certain posts indicating they did not want to receive any comment or they thought their opinion in that post might cause controversial discussions. In other cases, some bloggers wrote a warning note for the commenter under their comments. This was especially common in cases where the commenters caused some discomfort for the bloggers. For example, if a commenter used Roman alphabet to transliterate Persian words (what was generally called *Pinglish* (Persian English) or *Finglish* (Farsi English) by the bloggers), then the bloggers warned him/her of not publishing their future comments.

On the whole, the discussion revealed that all four dimensions of SOC as proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) were present among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora. The bloggers developed SOC online based on their shared common background, cultural values, and experience as an ethnic group living in the diaspora. The next step was to identify and map their online social network and ties in the diaspora.

3.4 Social network analysis (SNA)

Another way of identifying online communities is to utilise network analysis in order to examine the interlinking between web pages and determine the potential relationships among them. Social network analysis (SNA) has been used as a method “for mapping and analyzing relations among people, organizations, and objects” (Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, et al., 2005, p. 2) in the physical and social worlds. Over the past decades, a number of researchers have used SNA as a method for identifying online communities on the web. SNA has been used to explore the relationships and structures of networks in newsgroups, emails, forums, and other services on the web. SNA “exploits the link structure and examines the roles and behaviour of nodes on other nodes in the network, and on the network as a whole” (Chin & Chignell, 2007, p. 349). One common way to show the interlinking of web pages is to visualise the network by using tools such as Pajeck, UCINET for Windows,

or other software that are able to produce a graphical representation of the links between the web pages in a supposed community.

With the popularity of weblogs, SNA has also been used as a method for mapping and identifying weblog communities (cf. Merelo-Guervós, Prieto, Rateb, & Tricas, 2003; Efimova & Hendrick, 2005; Herring et al., 2005). Among the available studies, Nilsson's (2003) work on weblogs is interesting as she specifically focuses on weblogs and the social networks among them from a linguistic point of view. The study is multi-faceted and includes the history of weblogs and their value on the Internet, an analysis of language found in weblog posts, how virtual communities are shaped, and the social networks that might exist in weblog communities. One highlight in the study is the mapping and visualisation of the social networks among a group of weblogs using UCINET. On mapping the community, the researcher identifies two types of links that exist: solidarity, and informational. She defines solidarity links as the links that refer to "first names and references within the group and informational links as the links to articles, information, or people found outside of the network" (p. 22). The experiment with the blogs in her study shows that blogs with high rates of solidarity tend to be in the centre of the network, while those with informational links are peripheral.

On the whole, the general findings with respect to weblogs and their social networks indicate that weblogs are a form of social hypertext that can form a social entity. They include a network of people who relate to each other by using a network of web pages which can represent a social network from which communities can merge.

Similarly, I explored and examined the type of social network that might have existed between the Persian bloggers in the diaspora. I analysed each individual weblog in order to trace and map their links to neighbouring blogs or other web pages. In doing so, I used a service from Google called "TouchGraph"¹⁶. This service allows one to map and visualise the interlinking that exists between web pages. The power of this service is that it reveals all the links between a web page with others that are connected in any form including blogrolls, hyperlinks, comment links, or any other links that have been added to the web page. At the same time, it allows the user to click on any webpage to

¹⁶ <http://www.touchgraph.com/TGGoogleBrowser.html>

further develop the links to other web pages or click to close the links. The following is the mapping and visualisation of a Persian diasporic weblog and its links to other weblogs and online resources:

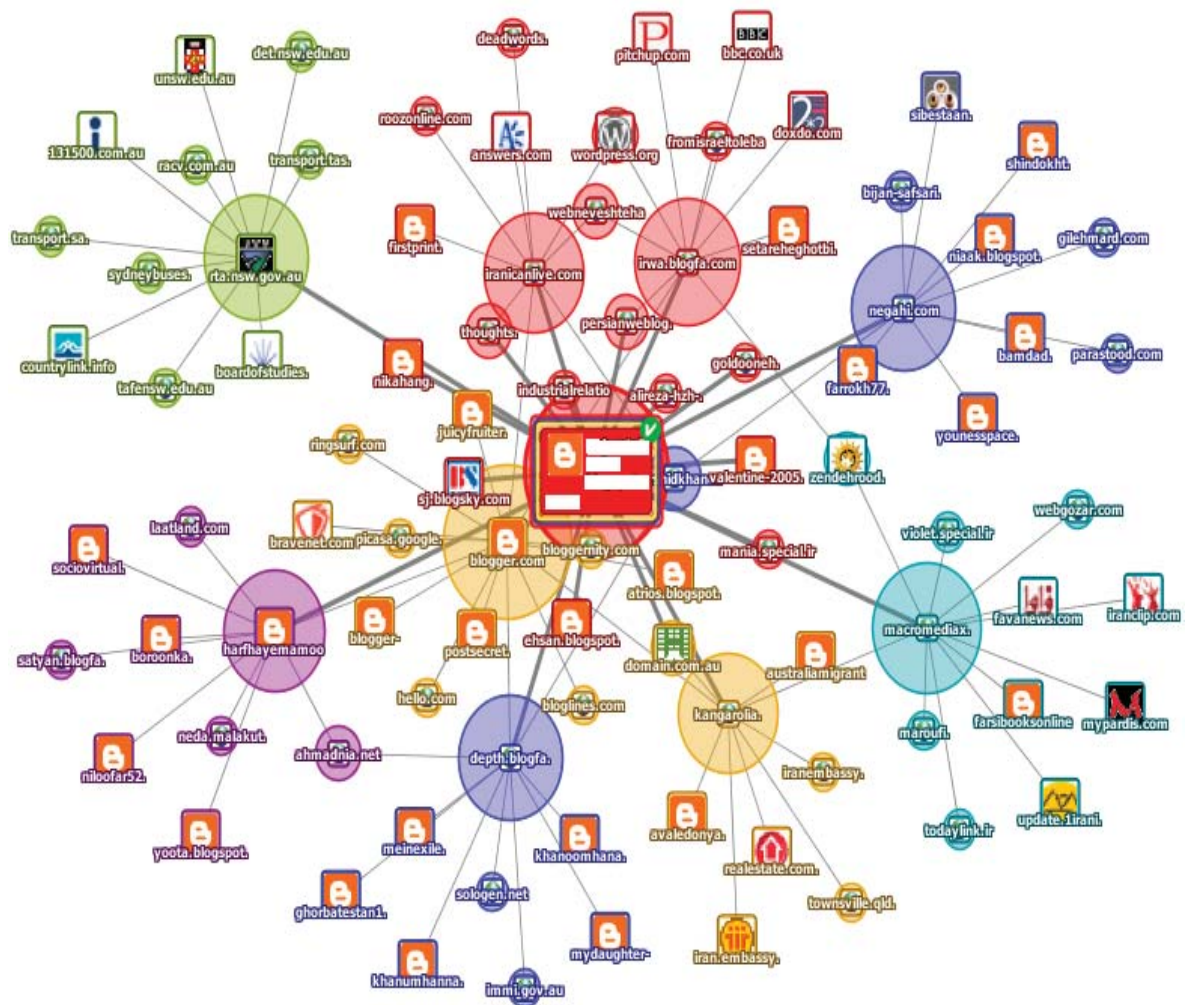


Figure 3.2 Mapping and visualisation of Persian weblogs¹⁷ in the diaspora

¹⁷ The URL of the weblog in the centre was erased in order to insure the anonymity of the weblog as it was part of the sample.

As can be seen, the big pink circle in the centre shows the original blog and the big circles with different colours are the neighbouring blogs that are connected to this blog. The smaller icons are web pages, weblogs or Internet services which are linked to the main weblogs. By clicking on each circle TouchGraph generates all the links related to them, and by moving the mouse on each circle the major links to each weblog are highlighted with bold lines. In order to have a better visualisation of the connections between these blogs, I deleted almost all the peripheral icons that were linked to the neighbouring weblogs. Figure 3.3 shows the main weblogs and their main connections:

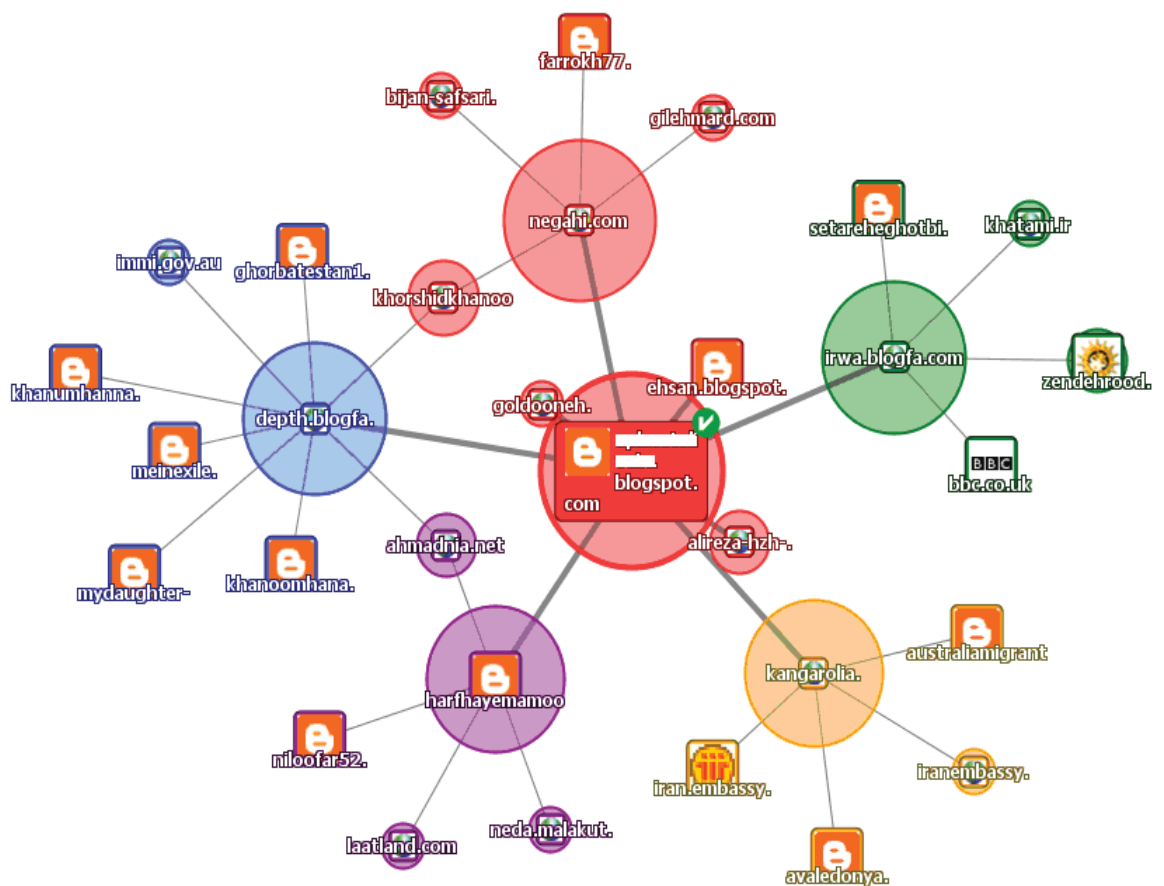


Figure 3.3 Visualisation of blog connections after deleting the peripheral icons

The visualisation revealed some interesting facts about the blogs and their online social network. The blog in the centre is connected to two blogs in Australia on the left <http://www.depth.blogfa.com> and bottom right www.kangarolia.blogspot.com. On the right it is connected to a blog <http://www.irwa.blogfa.com> which belongs to a group of Iranians who publish jointly from Australia, Europe, Asia, and America. The other two blogs <http://negahi.com/yoldash/index.php> and <http://harfhayemamooli.blogspot.com> are each from a different country. The first one is from the United States and the second one from Iran.

The existing connections between these weblogs show that the weblogs in the diaspora are not only personal pages that stand alone in cyberspace. They are part of a wider online social network which extends beyond Australia and are linked to other Iranian communities around the world as well as the homeland. This implies that cyberspace has provided a space that allows the bloggers to go beyond a local geography and participate in other surrounding communities, thereby building and reinforcing a virtual social network that extends across the globe with a unique diasporic identity, and whose aim is to exchange information and support within and across the community.

3.5 Persian diasporic weblogs and their audience

The existence of SOC and a social network among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora triggered the idea of exploring the audience in the weblog community. The motivation was to see who the audiences were in the community, how the bloggers viewed their audience, and how accommodating the bloggers were to their audience. But before exploring the type of audience in the community, it is worth analysing the communicative features of weblogs and how they operate in terms of communication between bloggers and their audience.

The idea of a weblog audience may seem strange at first glance based on the assumption that weblogs are personal and private pages or diaries which are kept online for the personal consumption of their writers. However, as discussed earlier, many weblogs are created for the purpose of attracting a potential audience by providing a communication

channel on the Internet. Communication in weblogs usually takes place between bloggers and their audience via the weblog comment space. Marlow (2004) states that weblog comment spaces serve “as a simple and effective way for webloggers to interact with their readership” (p. 3). They offer a social interaction space where weblog visitors can contribute or reply to a specific post and/or converse with the blogger and other readers. Despite this, weblog audiences and their comments have been largely overlooked in the current studies of weblogs. Part of the neglect may come from the unseen nature of the audience in weblogs as they do not appear on the main page or the fact that “extracting and processing their content is somewhat more complex than extracting the content of the posts themselves” (Mishne & Glance, 2006, p. 1). Yet another challenge for understanding the weblog audience is the contradiction that weblogs pose as they are addressed to everyone and no one at the same time (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Nonetheless, I was able to map the weblog network among the bloggers in this study and extract and process the communication between them and their audience in the comment space. In fact, the comment space was the heart of communication in the blogs and the audience and bloggers wrote specifically for a group of Iranians who were living in and out of the diaspora. In other words, weblogs were purposeful and addressed a certain audience, and anything published or discussed in the blogs was for the consumption of that audience.

Barrett (2002) states that bloggers create their weblogs for a group or segment of the mass audience in cyberspace and that segment will ultimately find their favourite weblog based on a common interest and become regular visitors even if they do not participate actively and stay in the shadow as lurkers. According to Marlow (2004), weblogs are places for “decentralized conversation” (p. 3) where millions of bloggers publish posts for the consumption of their audience. Conversation normally takes place in weblogs when bloggers visit each other’s weblogs and read each other’s posts. When bloggers constantly read, write, and reference other weblogs, the ties among the bloggers are likely to strengthen.

The challenges of researching weblog audiences seem to have affected the line of research in this area as there are hardly any studies that specifically focused on weblogs and their audience. Scheidt’s (2006) study of weblog audience might be considered the only study in this area. She examined a group of adolescent weblogs and their audience

applying Langellier's (1998) typology of audience. His typology consists of five types of audience for personal narrative performance: audience "as a witness testifying to the experience; as a therapist unconditionally supporting emotions; as a cultural theorist assessing the contestation of meanings, values, and identities in the performance; as a narrative analyst examining genre, truth or strategy; and as a critic appraising the display of performance knowledge and skill" (p. 210). In applying the typology to the weblogs, the findings of Scheidt's (2006) study show that the category that outweighed the others was "audience as witness to the experience". In the case of gender differentiation, this category of audience was also produced more by male bloggers.

In this light, I examined the audience in the Persian diasporic weblogs. In order to explore the audience I initially started by looking into the communication channels that were used between the bloggers and their audience. The interactions in the blogs were by way of reciprocal asynchronous discussions in comments and the use of "permalinks" and "ping blogrolling". Permalinks allow bloggers "to have a sort of distributed conversation, where one post can respond to another on an entirely different weblog" (Marlow, 2004, p. 3), and ping blogrolling signals to other bloggers that a weblog has been updated. Some bloggers also used a C-box in order to interact with the audience on the main page. Furthermore, some bloggers used other communication channels outside the weblog space such as email. Any communication outside the weblog space was private and the only way to understand the existence of such a communication channel was the signal by the audience in the comment space asking the bloggers if they had received their emails. The conversation in the comments or C-boxes was more of a public nature discussing things related to a specific post or raised by the audience in the discussion.

Exploring the content of the comments in the weblog community revealed that Langellier's (1998) typology of audience fit quite well into the Persian weblog community in the diaspora. In applying the typology, I was able to identify the five types of audience in the comments. The first type, audience as a witness testifying to the experience, was quite common as the bloggers posted a lot of personal experience narratives regarding their life in the diaspora and shared them with their audience. In terms of emotional support, it is needless to say that one of the major functions of blogging in the diaspora was to receive emotional support from the audience. For this

reason, blogs were full of emotional posts that were consciously or unconsciously created to share with the audience and seek support. In fact, the frequency of such posts was so high that they became the major focus of this study. The third type of audience was also abundant as the bloggers created a lot of posts talking about or comparing different cultures in the diaspora considering the audience as a cultural theorist. The fourth type of audience was also present as the bloggers brought up different issues in their blogs. For example, a blogger wrote about her son having problems with Persian language placing the audience as a narrative analyst examining genre, truth or strategy:

Anis 27/09/2007 post#4

My son speaks bad Farsi these days. In fact, there are two problems with his language. Firstly, he pronounces /r/¹⁸ and /v/ with an English accent and secondly, in a Farsi sentence he uses Farsi verbs and replaces other words with English equivalents. For instance, he says:

Mom *misheh ba'ad az school brim shopping fun konim?*
Literally: Mom can after school we go shopping fun to have?

I'm in a dilemma. Sometimes I tell myself, "well let him speak English as he needs this to be successful, but then I ask what about his mother tongue?" I don't want him to be like other Iranian children here who in ten years when others talk in Persian to them, say, "sorry, I don't know Persian".

Asal 29/09/2007 comment#1

Hi dear. Don't let him forget the Farsi language at any cost. Let him talk in Farsi all the time when you are at home. Of course if he uses English words when he speaks Farsi, it is quite natural. My cousin who is 33 went to New Zealand for two years and when she came back she used a lot of English words when she spoke Farsi.

¹⁸ The difference that the blogger is expressing is in the manner of articulation. In Persian /r/ is a trill while in English it is an approximant. The problem with /v/ is not so clear because no examples are given. Perhaps it concerns /v/ pronounced as /w/, a segment that does not occur in Persian.

And finally, the bloggers posted different entries with respect to art, cooking or creating new dishes, obtaining good/high-status job positions or social status as a foreigner in the diaspora, etc raising the audience's appraisal of the bloggers' performance.

On top of Langellier's (1998) typology of audience there were other categories that emerged from the data that originated essentially from the nature of blogging in the diaspora. The main reasons for the existence of such audience types might be that blogging in the diaspora was not only about narrating a personal adventure but rather creating a space to be part of a native community in a foreign land, be a vicarious observer and narrator of life in the diaspora, and be in touch with the homeland simultaneously. What follows is the presentation of other types of audience that were identified in the community.

3.5.1 Explaining and sharing the new

In this category there are four types of audience which emerged with respect to the bloggers' new location. Here the audience was seen as:

1. information seeker
2. receiver of the host culture
3. receiver of news about the homeland
4. family members, relatives, and friends in Iran and in the diaspora

One major function of publishing a weblog from the diaspora was to provide information for people who were new in the diaspora or in the process of migration. In this case, some bloggers published information regarding different aspects of migration such as visas, accommodation, job-hunting, and so forth and tried to provide as much information as they could in the hope that information seekers could benefit from their blogs. The audience was particularly interested in the information that might help them in the process of migration or settling in the diaspora. This type of audience was quite easy to identify as they left comments especially in the form of questions in the comment space which were not related to the post being discussed by others. Furthermore, the majority of the bloggers published posts about the host culture

explaining, highlighting, or bringing to light their lifestyle in the diaspora. Therefore, the audience was a voracious seeker and eager receiver of the host culture, taking active roles in the host culture discussions by commenting on the culture or comparing it with the homeland culture. This was in line with Laurel's (1993) argument that audiences "become actors" when they join "the actors on the stage" (p. 17) instead of remaining a passive audience. Apart from the fact that blogs generally created a space for the interaction between blogger and audience, this active role could have been the result of the fact that the bulk of the audience were people who had their own blogs, and thus felt like an authority to discuss cultural issues.

Some bloggers were also able to attract a certain audience based on their ability to provide up-to-date news about the homeland. The audience in this category consisted mostly of people in the diaspora who did not know that much about Persian news sources or were too busy to go and explore different web pages so that they could find the latest news. There were certain bloggers who had a good knowledge of Iranian society and access to news and were quite capable of analysing or critiquing different news about the homeland and publishing main stories or a commentary about current events back home on their weblogs. Thus, these weblogs were visited by other members almost daily in order to keep abreast of current affairs in the homeland and take part in occasional discussions with the bloggers and other readers.

Blogs were also used as a channel of communication across the diaspora and the homeland. This was achieved by writing posts about activities that were going on in the diaspora such as an Iranian singer from Los Angeles visiting Australia or an Iranian festival held in the host country. In such cases the comment space was used as a way of discussing points such as the concert location, buying tickets for the concert, transportation, where to stay if the members were not in the concert location, and any other issues about that event. Blogs were also used to communicate with family members, relatives, and friends in Iran. Activities included writing about events in the diaspora or posting photos of birthdays or children's school activities for the people back home who did not have the chance to be present at those events. These posts were sometimes so private that the comment space was dedicated to family discussions. In other words, the comment space turned into a family *dowreh* and the people who were taking part as audience were among the blogger's circle of intimates.

3.5.2 Explaining and sharing the old

Blogs were also used as a channel for sharing the past in the diaspora. The bloggers published posts which were mostly flashbacks and relieving memories. I presume that sharing the past was due to the distance with the homeland and the people with whom the bloggers identified, and this was a way of soothing the nostalgia of being away. In this category audience was seen as:

1. receiver of the nostalgic past
2. collaborator in nostalgia
3. supporter of an idea or ideology

Almost all weblogs published occasional posts regarding the past inviting the audience to share in the bitter and sweet nostalgic feelings about the homeland. Sometimes the posts were so emotionally loaded that they caused a chain of emotional discussions among the audience making them talk nostalgically about their past. The following post is an example of how a blogger invited the audience from the diaspora to be an observer of the past:

Saeed 05/06/2009 post#1

Sometimes I have to hide the truth behind my unstoppable crying.

I don't know how I was thrown into the past. Time was moving forward as usual and I was going with it getting away from my past every second. But it was as if my mind had held a grudge against me and time. The more I was going ahead, the more my mind was going deeper in my memories. That caused me to be thrown into the past. It was interesting that I was thrown into my childhood and the dividing lines for my childhood were the houses in which I lived. The first thing that I remember from our house was riding my bike.

Honestly, I don't know why I have to think hard to remember the phone number of the house where I was living recently but I still remember the address of the house in which I lived till I was nine years old. When I went back to Iran in November 2006, one of the things that I really wanted to do was go to my childhood address and I finally did. When I arrived at the address, I got a sudden shock. They had demolished almost all of the houses and had built new ones. Our house was half way down the alley. I went toward it disappointedly, but as soon as I saw the pink door and its faded golden-colour knobs I felt as if I was two steps away from all my childhood memories.

I subconsciously got misty-eyed and started to cry....

The way the blogger shares his memory of his childhood house with other members is like walking the audience with him down the neighbourhood street to become part of that memory. Such nostalgic narrations of the past were common with the majority of the bloggers, and their feelings seemed to originate from the migration that had caused detachment from the homeland. In such posts the audience was not merely an observer of the past but a companion with whom the past was shared. The audience was expected to understand the nostalgia of being a migrant far from the homeland and help soothe the pain of the past in the diaspora. For example, the following is a response to the post above:

Ali 06/06/2009 comment#2

Your post threw me into the past as well. I remembered my childhood and the summer nights when we went to the roof of the house and slept on a wooden bed with a mosquito net. I still haven't forgotten the cool smell of the sheets and the pillows. Daddy always told us stories, but he never finished one because he would fall asleep in the middle. Sometimes I feel that something has been left somewhere else and nothing ever can replace it. After reading your post, I have a strange feeling that I can't describe.

Considering and involving the audience as collaborator in nostalgia was also common especially via the use of a "meme". Sometimes the bloggers started a meme by first posting something that they did in the past in the homeland and then inviting the audience to join in by following the theme of the meme. This could involve embarrassing experiences, funny incidents, or blunders. Then, the invitation to share went from one weblog to another and circulated in the community sometimes for several weeks. The following post is a result of being tagged with a meme:

Dear Elhaam has politely put me into an unwanted game! Believe it or not it has been one week now that I have been flashing back in my life to remember some of my goofs and publish them here instead of thinking of my daily problems in Australia. I don't mean that I don't have any goofs. On the contrary I have got a lot but I can't write about all of them! You know what I mean! Well let me tell you some of my goofs in the past:

I was newly engaged and one of my fiancée's uncles invited us to their house for dinner. It was a Thursday and like other Thursdays I was really busy at work. I remember that Thursday I had to stay at work longer and when I went back home, we went to the reception hastily. As soon as we arrived, tiredness started to creep all over me and the uncle's house was cosily warm. Besides, women were preparing the dinner in the kitchen and the uncle, his son, and I were sitting together and talking. As the uncle's interest was mountain climbing, the talk got into mountain climbing. For me mounting climbing is at the bottom of the list and I don't have any interest in it whatsoever. So, the tiredness, the cosy environment, and the boring talk worked together and I fell asleep! Of course, I remember that I occasionally blinked and said yes or no every now and then but then I would fall unconscious again. When they woke me up for dinner, I understood how embarrassing it was to fall asleep in my first visit to my fiancée's relatives. On the other hand, I was thinking that they thought that their first son in law of the family was an addict because I was lethargic like that!...

That's for me. Now I invite my dear friends Asal, Homaayun, Mahin, Kaaveh, Amir, and Sepantaa to confess their goofs!

The aim in circulating such memes about the past was multifaceted. On the surface, the idea was to share the memories of the homeland with the only people in the diaspora who could understand and follow the culture behind the stories. On the other hand, memes were a way of filling the gap of friends, family members, or anyone else with the same interest and experience in the diaspora who were otherwise difficult to meet in the host culture.

Yet another type of audience was present in discussions that were about approving or disapproving an idea or ideology with respect to the past in the homeland. Audience in this category included people who were interested in or had knowledge of certain issues such as religion, politics, government, etc and were willing to run long discussions of these issues in the comment space and sometimes in their weblogs as follow-ups. This type of audience was quite active and sometimes the discussion became heated and lasted for weeks.

3.5.3 The blogger as the audience

The final type of audience was the bloggers as their own audience. This type of audience may sound strange but it is like the paper diary. The reason is that any type of self-disclosure on the part of the blogger involves a process of self-clarification and self-validation (Calvert, 2000) and such a process positions the blogger as his/her own audience. In other words, a blogger at any given time is “involved in two types of conversations: (1) conversations with self and (2) conversations with others” (de Moor and Efimova, 2004, p. 9). In some cases, the conversations that the bloggers had with themselves were quite easy to notice as they signalled the other audience not to get involved. The following example may help to understand this type of audience:

Homaa 11/05/2007 post#6

Let me tell you that right now I have gone nuts. My heartbeat is near 1000 and my blood pressure is 100. I want to say some words that are all about me. I'm not looking for a family counsellor nor an ethics teacher to tell me what to do.... For this reason, I have deactivated the comment link so that you keep your opinions to yourself and don't try to leave anything after you read this post as it is all my opinion....

In this post the blogger is venting and reflecting on her experience of life in the diaspora. Here the blogger uses the blog as a space to get rid of her anger and calm herself. Therefore, she was not communicating with any audience other than herself, and since she felt the venting was about herself and her experience, she deactivated the comment link so that no one could get involved with what she had posted. This kind of post shows that bloggers sometimes have conversations with their ‘self’, which might be an online version of self-dialogue – a conversation between “I” and “me” (Shaw, 2001) that some people have in the physical world.

After determining the type of audience in the virtual *dowreh*, the next task was to see how accommodating the bloggers were toward their audience. What follows is a brief discussion of the bloggers’ views toward the audience and how they accommodated to their needs.

3.6 Accommodating to the weblog audience in the diaspora

Accommodating to the audience and their needs depended heavily on the type and nature of the posts and sometimes the purpose of the weblog. In the community there were some weblogs whose main aim was to provide as much information as possible about the migration process for the consumption of their audience. Therefore, the bloggers in this category were quite accommodating and tried to satisfy their audience as much as they could. They answered every single question in detail and provided hyperlinks and cross-referencing to other weblogs or online resources for their audience so that they could benefit from all the available resources. The same trend was true of the bloggers who had occasional posts and discussions about the process of migration. On the other hand, when it came to personal opinion posts or posts about the bloggers' lifestyle in the diaspora, accommodating to the audience was low or sometimes near zero as no criticism or scathing remarks were tolerated. There were instances when the bloggers overtly attacked their audience for showing a lack of tolerance. For example, the following comment is by Homaa who was angered by a reader's comment:

Homaa 05/03/2008 comment#7

I have written this a hundred times and I repeat it here. This is my weblog and what you are reading here is my personal opinion and the way I see things. If you don't like it, you don't have to come here and waste your time.

By leaving such a comment the blogger signalled that she was not accommodating to the audience at all as she felt her weblog was a private space that reflected her thoughts and ideas and the audience had the right to choose whether to visit her weblog or not. This kind of attitude was seen more in the comment space when the posts were personal and the bloggers were having self-dialogue in their posts. Therefore, there was little room for the audience to be judgmental about the bloggers' personal opinions.

3.7 Social sharing of emotion among the bloggers and their audience

A noticeable feature of online interaction between the bloggers and their audience was the overwhelming number of emotional posts that were shared online. The bloggers posted their emotional states regarding life in the diaspora frequently in their weblogs, and these posts received a lot of attention and emotional feedback from the audience. The weblogs provided a suitable social context for the bloggers to express and disclose their emotional experiences and share them with others in the community. At the same time, the audience was a good receiver of such emotional loads as they took part in different discussions of emotional experience and sympathised or empathised with the bloggers and offered support and advice in some cases. For this reason, the rest of this thesis will specifically focus on the emotional experience of the bloggers as manifested in their writing and bring to light the role of weblogs in expressing their emotion in the diaspora.

In search of an explanation for such online behaviour I came across “social sharing of emotion” which is a term used to describe the process of recounting an experienced emotion by individuals to their social environment (Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001). Social sharing of emotion is based on the idea that emotional experiences are almost inseparable from a social response since when individuals experience an emotion, they may want to be with other people, talk to them about what happened, and share with them their feelings and thoughts of the emotional experience (Rimé, 2009). According to Rimé (2009), the process of social sharing of emotion “entails a description of the emotional event in a socially-shared language by the person who experienced it to another” (p. 65). The research findings generally suggest that sharing emotion with others is a basic component of emotion, and there is plenty of evidence that shows negative episodes of emotional experience such as natural disasters or war evoke social sharing (e.g. Pennebaker & Harber, 1993). Furthermore, recent studies reveal that social sharing of emotion happens in both positive and negative cases and with roughly equal importance in a number of different cultures (Rimé & Zech, 2001).

The basic notion of social sharing of emotion fits well with the Persian community of bloggers as the weblogs provided a social space for the bloggers to share their

emotional experience with other members. However, the application of earlier research findings to the weblogs poses new questions and challenges that need to be addressed. In what follows, some of the similarities and differences of social sharing of emotion in the weblogs will be highlighted and briefly discussed.

In spite of the generality of social sharing of emotional experience, Rimé (2009) argues that individuals avoid the sharing of emotion under three circumstances. The first includes emotional episodes of self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt that stop individuals from sharing their experience with others as such feelings are wished to be concealed or disappeared. The second situation is when individuals experience emotions which are extremely intense or traumatic; such feelings trigger avoidance and motivate individuals to leave such experiences untold. The third condition that may cause elusion of emotion sharing is the degree of reception from the social environment. This happens when individuals in a social environment constrain or deny the sharing of emotion with others in order to protect themselves from harmful emotions that come from others. Based on several studies Rimé (2009) concludes that the social sharing of emotion is independent of age and gender, and people generally share their emotions with intimates, and non-intimates hardly have any role in the process.

In examining the emotional writing of the bloggers some intriguing results were obtained. Fundamentally, the weblogs were used as a space to share the emotional experience of living in the diaspora with others in the community. In this process, language was the main medium for the bloggers to unfold their emotional experience and address it to others. However, the data proposed a lot of contradictions with respect to the previous findings. The first noticeable difference in my research was the social sharing of self-conscious emotions. In essence, expressing shame and guilt in the blogs was so frequent that a very big chunk of the data analysis and discussion in this study were dedicated to self-conscious emotions. As will be demonstrated in chapter seven, the bloggers wrote consciously or unconsciously about their emotional experience of self-conscious emotions and shared this with their audience, and the audience was quite receptive of such emotional episodes as they involved themselves in the discussions surrounding such emotions. The second source of contradiction was the social sharing of intense or traumatic emotions. The bloggers brought their most intense/traumatic emotions to the community and shared them with other members. For instance, during

the data collection period two bloggers lost their fathers in Iran. In both cases, the bloggers published several long posts about their fathers' passing away which overtly demonstrated their trauma of loss. These posts were also well-received by the audience with a lot of sympathetic feedback and support. In case of the third circumstance, the online social environment did not prohibit the bloggers from sharing their emotional experience even in cases where they received criticism or harsh remarks from the audience. They generally wrote about any aspect of their emotional experience even if they were embarrassing or face-threatening. On the other hand, the frequency of social sharing of emotion by the female bloggers was impressionistically far higher than that of the male bloggers. The female bloggers were more expressive in their emotional experience. The final contradiction originates from the intimate and non-intimate division for social sharing of emotion. The bloggers published their emotional experience online for the consumption of the public. Their posts could be seen and read by anyone with knowledge of Persian as none of the weblogs were password-protected or needed membership to access. For this reason, it is practically impossible to claim that the bloggers shared their emotions only with their intimates. In order to demonstrate the aforementioned contradictions the following post from a female blogger is a good example of how she tries to share her emotion of her father's passing away with other members of the community:

Homaa 10/01/2007 post#1

We are all from him (God) and return back to him¹⁹

My dear and compassionate father passed away, and now after eleven days from the time that we heard the horrible news, I have dedicated a moment to express my heart ache and sadness to my weblog friends and offer my apology for delays in my answering their comments. The New Year has just started while my family and I are mourning for the loss of a compassionate and sympathetic father. The first day of the New Year was the worst and the gloomiest moment of our life in Australia; we held a small mourning session for him....Now that we are not able to express our condolences and make peace with the tragic event and suffering by being among family members, as foreigners in this part of the world we raise our hands to the sky and with our broken heart ask God to give our dear mother patience and bless the soul of our father.

¹⁹ The title is the translation of an Arabic phrase (انا الله و انا عليه راجعون *ennaa lellaah va ennaa alayh-e raajeoon*) that is commonly used as the title of obituaries in Iran.

Although the English translation may not carry the same emotional load and depth of sadness in the Persian post, the blogger is sharing the tragic emotion of losing a member of the family. At the beginning of the post she mentions that she is writing to share the news with her weblog friends which implicates any individual who visits her weblog. This post was visited by a number of readers and they all tried to be supportive by leaving condolences. Furthermore, the post shows her guilt for not being with family members during such a tragic time in order to support them. Considering the whole structure of the post, it is obvious that the blogger is sharing her most traumatic emotional experience with others, feeling guilty of being far from the family, and the online community social environment is receptive and supportive of the blogger's emotion. Regarding the above post, members of the community left Homaa comments such as:

Asal 11/01/2007 comment# 1

Dear Homaa, I really felt sad when I came to your weblog and read the sad news.
Khodaavand biyaamorzadeshaan (May God bless him).

Asal and other members made use of sympathetic expressions such as *khodaavand biyaamorzadeshaan* (May God bless him) or *rooheshaan shaad*²⁰ (May he rest in peace) which are common expressions of condolences in Persian in order to show their sadness and sympathise with Homaa. Since they were addressing Homaa's father, all the members used *khodaavand* (God) which is the formal form of *khodaa* and the plural forms of verbs and nouns such as *biyaamorzadeshaan* instead of *biyaamorzadesh* (bless him/her singular) and *rooheshaan* instead of *roohesh* (his/her soul singular) in order to show respect to a *bozorgtar* (older) member of Homaa's family, which is common in Persian when an older person dies. The use of sympathetic expressions by the members clearly demonstrates how the online community created a *samimi* (intimate) environment which was receptive and supportive of emotions that were shared online and that these emotions were encoded and shared in a way appropriate to Iranian performances of grief.

²⁰ There are a number of fixed expressions in Persian which are used to show sympathy when someone dies.

In conclusion, it seemed that this group of diasporic weblogs were a virtual settlement in which a sense of virtual community co-existed as members revealed a set of community-like behaviours. The data showed that the sense of virtual community in the Persian diasporic weblogs was similar to McMillan and Chavis' (1986) SOC in the physical world. However, the SOC between the members of this virtual community may have been a bit different from other pure virtual communities in that their shared cultural values and history and the fact that they were living in a foreign country may have brought more commitment to the online community. On the other hand, because of the unique Persian diasporic nature of the community, the issue of trust online was not a problem as the members trusted each other based on their Iranianness and the fact that the community was a space for the exchange of information and emotional experience and support. Furthermore, the Persian diasporic weblogs and their online community have opened up new horizons in the social sharing of emotion that may challenge the traditional view of face-to-face expression of emotion (cf. Rimé, 2009). This might be the result of factors such as the sociocultural background of the bloggers and the context of the diaspora that have redefined the social sharing of emotion.

3.8 Summary

The introduction of Internet technology has redefined the concept of diaspora around the world. The interactive features of the Internet have provided new opportunities for migrants and transnational communities to communicate with each other in unprecedented ways. This has caused the creation of online communities among diasporic groups using Internet technologies such as weblogs for different purposes. The discussion in this chapter revealed the possibility of the existence of a virtual community among migrants by examining a group of Persian diasporic weblogs. The examination took on board the previous research findings and demonstrated that weblogs established an online network for this group of Iranians in the diaspora based on the presence of an audience and a set of community-like behaviours between the bloggers and their audience.

As for the weblogs and their audience, it was illustrated that the type of audience for this group of Persian bloggers in the diaspora went beyond Langellier's (1998) typology of audience. This was mainly due to different functions of weblogs in and from the diaspora that attracted specific types of audience. The discussion also revealed that contrary to previous research findings, the bloggers were quite open in bringing their emotional experiences to the online community and shared them with their audience no matter how private or intense their experience was.

Having now established the object of study, this being the Persian diasporic weblogs as a virtual community, the next chapter will outline and discuss the research methodology. The chapter provides information on research design and setting, materials for the study, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCHING A VIRTUAL *DOWREH*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed description of the methodological approaches that were utilised in the study. The chapter opens with an overview of the qualitative research paradigm and the justification for the use of such an approach in the design of this investigation. Then, it moves to Internet research and the related issues surrounding it which need to be addressed in any online study. This is followed by a discussion of ethical issues in online research and weblogs, online data, criteria for the selection of the weblogs, and an introduction of the bloggers and their weblogs in the diaspora. The discussion then leads to the procedures for data collection, the instruments used, and data preparation.

The chapter then delves into grounded theory and its stages that are used in any application of the theory. Grounded theory and its stages are introduced and discussed along with the procedures that I went through in the course of the study in order to categorise the themes that emerged during different stages of the theory. This section also includes a brief discussion of the linguistic and sociocultural analysis of the emotional experience of the bloggers in the write-up process.

4.2 Rationale for the choice of a qualitative approach

Perhaps the biggest challenge for any researcher during the course of a study is the choice of a methodology that best fits the data and is capable of analysing the data. Depending on the nature of the research questions and type of data, researchers may choose their methodology from the quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research traditions which best capture the aims of the research. I chose to move into a qualitative research framework as the present research project required examining and comparing data in order to interpret themes in them. Qualitative modes of analysing data provide the researcher with different means such as ethnography, and discourse and textual analysis (Berkowitz, 1996; Bernard, 2000) that help to examine, compare and interpret themes and patterns. Many researchers emphasise the strength and benefits of qualitative methods and discuss the distinguishing characteristics of qualitative analyses of data. Miles and Huberman (1994), for example, discuss the loop-like trait of qualitative analysis in which the data is revisited as many times as new questions arise. The revisiting of the data provides the researcher with the opportunity to have a better understanding and deeper analysis of the data. This characteristic was an important factor in my decision to use a qualitative research paradigm since I was uncertain at the launch of the project as to what I might find in the process of data collection. Thus, the initial phase of the research was exploratory, and I immersed myself in the data with an interest in finding out how the bloggers make sense of their lives as immigrants in the diaspora. For this reason, I made use of a grounded theory approach and discourse analysis as I was facing a large volume of text produced by the bloggers in the diaspora. In what follows, I will discuss the methodology and the procedures that were used in the course of this study.

4.3 Internet research

Since scholarly studies on different aspects of Internet communication are relatively new, there are few fixed theories, approaches, and methodologies that are specifically attributed to Internet research. This has made researchers draw on and adapt methodologies from other (offline) disciplines and apply them to online research. Over

recent years, there have been a growing number of studies on Internet technology and communication with the prospect of understanding the new media and its effect on everyday life (Hine, 2004). Most of the studies of Internet technologies have drawn upon traditional methodologies of quantitative and qualitative research with an attempt to adapt them to the new field of inquiry. Qualitative studies, for example have been conducted in order to study online social environments such as chat rooms, forums, online support groups and so on, applying techniques such as analysis of chats and texts, online interviewing, and recording of the activities in different Internet communication groups. For the purpose of this study I drew upon a grounded theory approach as I found it the most appropriate to the type of data I was dealing with. However, before discussing the procedures that I went through in the course of this study, I will focus on some of the issues and challenges that researchers may face in online research in general and weblog studies in particular and how they were conceptualised in the study. These challenges may include defining the research setting online, ethical issues that arise in online research, and types of online data.

4.4 The online research setting

Since the nature of the Internet does not allow individuals to interact face-to-face²¹, then the first question that arises is where the researcher should locate himself/herself in the context of the research, and how the research setting should be defined. Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, and Cui (2009) discuss three types of setting that are available to online researchers, and that should be defined in any online study. In the first setting, there is no offline contact among the members of the online community and the interaction among them is solely online. Therefore, researchers can only examine the online behaviour of the members. In the second setting, members appear to have some offline interaction with each other but their main contact and experience of that setting is online. In such cases, researchers again rely on the interpretation of the online behaviour because the major interaction among the members is online. The third type of setting is

²¹ Here “face-to-face” is used to mean the traditional physical view of the term as opposed to online interaction as the Internet allows individuals to see each other virtually via webcams or the like.

multimodal where there is a need for the researcher to conduct the study both online and offline. Therefore, both offline and online settings need to be defined.

Based on this classification of online settings, the data used in this study were solely online as the source of the data was the text production of the bloggers in their weblogs. However, there was some evidence that some members started offline contacts after they got to know each other via their weblogs. The offline contact happened during the course of data collection, and I assume that this was mainly because of the aim and nature of blogging in the diaspora. When new migrants arrive in a new environment, they might lose their social network of family and friends. By starting a weblog, they try to create a virtual network where they share their experiences of migration and this will ultimately become a channel that leads to meeting other migrants and brings the bloggers into offline contacts especially if they live in close vicinity in the offline (physical) world.

4.5 Ethical dilemmas in online research

There are a number of concerns and dilemmas with respect to online research. Many of these concerns are the same as those that researchers face in real world research: concepts such as anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, and participant consent (Jankowski & Van Selm, 2001). Researchers who work in online environments have differing opinions of ethical guidelines that should be followed in studies of cyberspace. Sveningsson (2004) argues that the divergent opinions of Internet researchers may be owing to several reasons. First, the attitude of researchers toward research ethics depends heavily on the discipline and research background they come from. The second reason is the type of Internet environment which is used in a study. Each Internet research environment has special characteristics that demand different ethical norms and this means that researchers need to seek different advice from off-line ethics when studying a particular environment. Nonetheless, in doing so, other questions may arise. By comparing the virtual environment with that of the off-line world, it is still not possible to promote a set of conclusive ethical guidelines for all Internet environments as there might be different requirements within a specific environment. For example, if

a researcher is doing research on weblogs, then the type of weblog may demand specific ethical considerations. A third reason for differing ethical norms may originate from the focus of the research questions. Depending on the nature of the research questions in the same research environment, researchers may need a different set of ethical guidelines. This may happen, for instance, in weblog studies where one's focus is on the language of weblogs while another researcher is working on how identity is manifested in a weblog.

Based on the differing views of online researchers, Sveningsson (2004) offers four variations of Internet environment that need to be considered while doing online research:

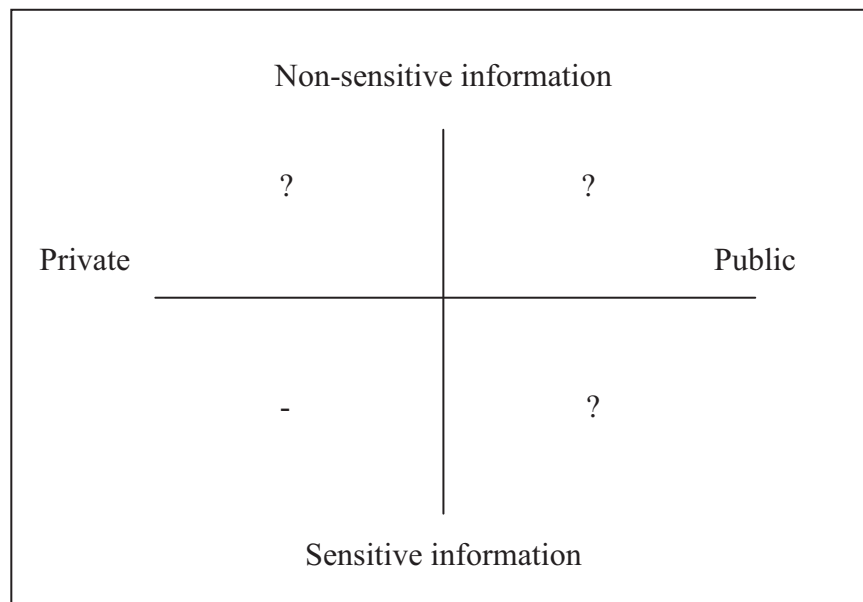


Figure 4.1 Variations of online environment (Sveningsson, 2004, p. 56)

As the figure shows, if the online environment is public and the information available is not sensitive, then it might be assumed that it is acceptable to waive ethical requirements. On the other hand, if the online medium is public but the information is private, then it will be wise to be careful about ethical norms. In cases where the online medium is private, researchers should have respect for people's right of privacy and

refrain from collecting data even if the available information is not sensitive. Furthermore, if the medium is private and the information is sensitive (left lower part of the figure), then it may become “forbidden fruit” (p. 55) to online researchers.

Sveningsson (2004) maintains that while the above classification of non-sensitive/sensitive and private/public may help researchers in their decisions in some cases, they are still problematic and may raise some questions. These questions can be regarding the definition of (non-) sensitive information and public/private aspect of the Internet. Who is the authority, for instance, to decide which information is sensitive or not? This might be obvious, as some researchers may say, in some cases such as rape victims online support groups especially if the identity of individuals is recognisable but not in cases where the sensitivity of information may be an individual interpretation. Another difficulty is the definition of the public and private spaces online. In order to distinguish the border between public and private space on the Internet various attempts have been made by online researchers. Lessig (1995), for instance, introduced a typology based on the forms of association in virtual space; the typology includes association in public (e.g. public forums), association in private (e.g. private chat rooms), and association in construction (e.g. multi-user dungeons²²). However, there is no general consensus among Internet researchers over what establishes these two spaces in cyberspace. Waskul and Douglass (1996) posit that these two spaces are defined by the degree of accessibility that the online space provides, and use “publicly private” and “privately public” (p. 131) maintaining that the private and public concepts are assumed labels for physical spaces which are applied metaphorically to online settings. Furthermore, they advise researchers to avoid defining public and private spaces in the hope that they can fit the research needs into the definition; instead, they should take into account the nature of the online setting and the degree of intrusiveness that the study aims at.

²² “A MUD or Multi-User Dungeon is an inventively structured social experience on the Internet, managed by a computer program and often involving a loosely organized context or theme, such as a rambling old castle with many rooms or a period in national history. Some MUDs are ongoing adventure games; others are educational in purpose; and others are simply social.” **Source:** http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0.,sid9_gci212609.00.html

Herring (1996, as cited in Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2000) holds that different types of research imply different relationships between the researcher and participants, and hence different ethical requirements. She classifies the connection between research objectives and research ethics into:

1. naturalistic where the researcher makes every attempt to minimise the disturbance of the natural setting of the research as much as possible;
2. participatory when the researcher consciously wants the participants to reflect on and contribute to the research;
3. consensual in cases where the researcher wants the participants to reconstruct their own view of the world;
4. and critical when the aim of the researcher is to expose the participants' performance to certain criteria.

Each of the research classifications demands certain ethical norms that need to be taken into account. In naturalistic research, for example, the informed consent from the participants may affect the performance and thus the result of the study as they may perform differently; in contrast, in a participatory study the researcher needs the conscious participation and reflection of the participants.

Based on the lack of general consensus among Internet researchers regarding the definition of private and public online spaces, researchers' views regarding the definition of these two spaces may fall into three categories. First, there are researchers who believe that online archived materials which are publicly available can be used without the informed consent of the participants. This view relies on an analogy between online public spaces such as public forum, where the researcher can observe and record publicly accessible Internet content, with research on offline public spaces such as television or other public media. Second, there are researchers who maintain the idea that a lot of online materials are written publicly with a potential audience in mind, and hence can be treated as public. The third group are the researchers who believe that people need to be informed that they are part of a research project no matter how public their space is. This implies that in any type of online research, participants have to be informed and asked for consent if their online contents are going to be used.

The above discussion of ethical concerns in online research shows clear contradictions among researchers in different disciplines, and researchers are confronted with a range of potential ethical conflicts in doing Internet research. This makes it impossible to have a straightforward and unambiguous answer to the question of how to advance in online ethical considerations. What can be inferred, however, is that researchers should be aware of their role and the consequences of their study on their participants. This can be done by constant negotiation of the role of the researchers and reflection on the choices that they make in order to achieve research of high quality.

4.5.1 Ethics of weblog research

Hookway (2008, p. 105) states that weblog researchers should “adopt the ‘fair game-public domain’ position” reasoning that they are “firmly located in public domain”. He argues that weblogs are in public domain not only because they are available to the public but also due to the way they are defined by bloggers. He justifies his argument by asserting that bloggers write publicly for a potential audience although there might be exceptions where some bloggers make their weblogs private by activating features such as ‘friends only’. Based on this reasoning, he concludes that weblogs which are publicly accessible may be called personal but not private.

Given that the ethical challenges of Internet research are open to debate, I specifically considered Bruckman’s (2002) suggestions in the process of data collection. She proposes four conditions for any online information which is supposed to be used as the target of any research:

- 1) the data is publicly archived;
- 2) the webpage archive is not password protected or does not require individuals to register in order to gain access;
- 3) the website policy does not prohibit it;
- 4) and the website does not include any highly sensitive topic.

Among the conditions, she maintains that if the first condition is not met, then the researcher needs participants’ consent.

The weblogs in this study met all the four conditions; their archives were public, none of the weblogs was password protected or needed registration to access, they did not have any prohibition policy against the use of their materials, and the majority of their posts were about their life experience in the diaspora exclusive of any sensitive topic. In fact, all the bloggers were publishing their posts to share their experience with other Iranians and to ask for help on some aspects of their experience. Since these conditions were met, participant consent forms were not used in this study.

Regardless of the public nature of weblogs, in order to minimise possible harm attempts were made to protect the identity of the bloggers. In so doing, two measures were taken. First, as the original data were in Persian and were translated into English for the purpose of the study, no original Persian transcript was brought into the study. In cases where data needed to be in Persian, then the English transliteration was included. Second, all the bloggers' online identities such as IP addresses, URLs, and weblog names were excluded from the study in order to ensure the anonymity and traceability of the bloggers.

4.6 Online data

Persian weblogs were the source of data collection in this study. The specific weblog genre was personal diary-like weblogs from Australia which were published in the Persian language. There were several reasons to use the weblogs as a source of data. Firstly, the researcher himself was living in the diaspora and was going through the same types of experience with regard to blogging and diaspora. Secondly, it was convenient to obtain data online about Iranian immigrants as some Iranians may shy away from the research if they understand they are being researched. This is, as will be discussed later in detail in chapter five, due to the feeling of insecurity and suspicion that some Iranians feel toward each other and outsiders. The third reason was the volume of data required in qualitative research where the researcher needs a great deal of authentic and reliable data in order to be able to form and interpret concepts and categories. And finally as the focus of research was on emotion and migration, these weblogs were a rich source of natural emotional writing about the bloggers' lives in the

diaspora. This type of data was an invaluable source as the bloggers were writing about their emotional experience and sharing them in their virtual *dowrehs* and discussions that took place without the interference of the researcher, which usually happens in other forms of data collection such as questionnaires and interviews.

4.6.1 Criteria for the selection of the weblogs

Initially forty four Persian diasporic weblogs were found in the process of my weblog exploration out of which ten were used as the main source of data collection. There were some basic criteria that determined the choice of these weblogs. The first and most important criterion was that the nature of the weblog needed to be mostly diary-like, in which the bloggers wrote mainly about their life experience in the diaspora. For this reason, weblogs that were purely political, technical, or vocational were excluded. The second criterion was to follow the weblogs that did not freeze in time or were removed from the Internet during the data collection period, and the bloggers continued writing. This aspect was important due to the longitudinal nature of the study (see 4.7 for further discussion). The final criterion was that the weblogs were published by Iranian migrants who were living in Australia and the language of the weblogs was Persian. The reason for that was that the main aim of the project was the sociolinguistic analysis of the emotional language expressed in Persian by the bloggers (migrants) in this part of the world, investigating factors that contributed to becoming emotional in the diaspora, and a sociocultural analysis of Persian and English emotion.

4.6.2 Introducing the bloggers

Computer-mediated interaction has posed new challenges to the study of self-presentation as it significantly differs from face-to-face communication. Perhaps the most influential work in the area of face-to-face self presentation is Goffman (1956) where self-presentation is described as a kind of performance with a difference between the types of signal that individuals present. For Goffman, in any act of self-presentation there is a distinction between the signals that individuals intentionally “give” and those that they unintentionally “give off”. This type of face-to-face self-presentation has been examined in the context of CMC. Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006), for example, argue

that in CMC “more expression of self is given rather than given off” (p. 197) based on their study of self-presentation in online dating sites. Donath (1999), on the other hand, states that in any online performance of ‘self’ individuals “give” a series of deliberate signals to convey an intended meaning while simultaneously “giving off” unintentional information. Fiore (2008) argues that in online interactions individuals are able to have more control over their self-presentation as they have more time to monitor and manage their performance. For this reason, they are capable of choosing the amount of information that they want to “give off”.

My observation of the Persian diasporic weblogs shows that both types of self-presentation were available as the bloggers used the standard “About Me” or “My Profile” section of their weblogs to “give” deliberate information about themselves. This section was definitely controlled by the bloggers and the amount of information varied from weblog to weblog. On the other hand, they occasionally “gave off” information in their posts in cases when they were writing about their jobs, visa status, residential address, family life, and so on with less control over the content of their posts as their aim was to narrate different life events to other members rather than control unintentional cues in their writing.

Another relevant issue in online communication is deception or disguise in the kind of information that individuals give out. Rowe (2005a) presents three types of online deception which include deceiving others by online appearance, motivation, and mechanism. He argues that the possibility of such online deception is merely because it is difficult to confirm information about online participants. In another study, Rowe (2005b) argues that online deception depends on the distance between people who interact online. In other words, the more distant and less familiar people are to the deceivers, the more reluctant they feel to deceive them. Ellison et al. (2006) also argue that the visual anonymity of CMC may enable individuals “to express themselves more openly and honestly than face-to-face context” (p. 197). Their argument is somehow in line with Whitty and Gavin (2001) who state that traditional values such as trust and honesty are equally important in online interaction.

Given that the discussion of deception and disguise depends heavily on the type of online medium, I base my argument on the features of this specific diasporic weblog

community. The issue of trust did not pose any problems for the members of the community due to the nature of blogging in the diaspora. The blogs were merely a means of narrating stories of life in the diaspora and providing occasional information about migration and living in the diaspora. The bloggers were quite remote from the majority of their readers (excluding family members and friends) and any acquaintance and familiarity was via the weblogs and their virtual *dowrehs*. Furthermore, living in the diaspora had somehow created a family-like situation based on their Iranianness where people generally trusted each other. Part of this trust could also be attributed to the fact that there were no materialistic expectations on the part of both the bloggers and their readers, which might have naturally created some kind of mistrust in the community among the members.

Based on the information “given” or “given off”, the ten bloggers whose posts I analysed in this thesis were all immigrants who arrived in Australia under the skilled migrant category. The type of available information in their weblogs revealed that the majority were IT analysts or other related professionals. What follows is an introduction of the bloggers based on their profile page (information given) and their posts (information given off). However, before that one caveat needs to be taken into account regarding this introduction. The aim of this introduction is to familiarise the reader with the type of character that produced the texts that were used in this thesis. I assume this is important to consider as I did not have any direct contact with the bloggers and I was only a reader and community experiencer through the production of texts; the whole data analysis is based on the available texts in their weblogs and my interpretation as a native speaker of Persian.

On her profile page Homaa introduces herself as a thirty-four²³ year old woman who lives in Sydney with her family and works as an IT analyst in a company. She started blogging in February 2005. On the sidebar of her weblog she introduces herself as:

²³ The information presented is based on the time that data collection finished, namely, October 2008.

I want to be myself without any pre-conditions!
My name is Homaa, which is the name of a legendary bird of fame and fortune in ancient Persia. I love my Iranian name. I write here for myself and you don't have to come here and read my thoughts if you don't like them.

In such a short introduction, she describes herself as an Iranian who is tired of being entangled in conditions of Iranian life and wants to be what she thinks she should be. Furthermore, it seems that she has chosen blogging in order to reflect on her thoughts and experiences of living in a new environment without being judged by the reader. She also emphasises that she is publishing her personal thoughts about life in Australia and readers need to take that into account when reading her posts.

Another blogger, Zohreh, introduces herself on her profile page as a thirty-eight year old woman who lives in Sydney and works as a website designer. She started her weblog in November 2004. On the sidebar of her weblog she introduces herself as:

My happiness, challenges, and all my angers and frustrations as a woman emigrated from a Third World country are all about my daily battle in this crazy and amazing journey which we call "life". I believe in freedom of thought, and freedom of speech; the things I always struggled with in my homeland. I always spoke my thoughts even if I knew I was going to get into trouble; but the thing is be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind, don't matter and those who matter, don't mind. That's my policy.

She describes herself as a woman who has migrated from a developing country to challenge herself in the journey of life. She thinks that her migration has been a positive move for her to get away from the barriers of daily life in Iran. Her policy at the end of her writing shows that she is frank and says what she thinks. This type of frankness is quite obvious in her posts and discussions with her readers.

Paaeez is another blogger who does not have any profile page. She has not revealed any information about herself overtly on her weblog, but her posts show that she has migrated with her husband and they live in Brisbane. She started her weblog in December 2004. On the sidebar of her weblog she introduces her weblog as:

There is nothing here but my writings as an Islander who is spending her life in the most remote waters of the world. This is Brisbane the east coast of the green and remote land of Australia; and I'm Paaeez, the islander, who is spending life here with my husband. Staying forever or temporary, I don't know and I sometimes write here maybe due to homesickness.

She seems to have a taste for Persian literature and poetry as she writes with a poetic passion and some of her posts are about the books that she has read whether in Iran or the diaspora. The style of her posts is like trying to create a stanza by pressing "enter" on the keyboard after she finishes each sentence. This makes her posts look like pieces of poetry rather than prose. This style is in all her posts without any exception.

Anis is another woman who does not have any profile page and has not revealed any information on her weblog except for a photo on the sidebar which is likely to be her, but her writing reveals that she works for a company in Australia. She started blogging in May 2007. The same is true of Hamid, who is a male blogger and started his weblog in June 2006. He does not have any personal profile on his weblog, but some of his posts about IT in Australia reveal him to be a computer programmer.

One blogger who has been very active in the area of blogging is Homaayun who has run his weblog for a long time starting from July 2003. He publishes almost every day and his weblog has attracted many Persian readers from within Australasia or other centres of the Iranian diaspora. He seems to be a professional writer with previous background in journalism and acting as a leader in the Persian online community.

A blogger who runs four weblogs from Australia is Saeed who started blogging in November 2006. He does not have any profile page, but the information on his sidebar reads as:

I was born in March 1978. I am interested in opposing the taboos that build human beings and wrong beliefs. My writing here is not for anyone's satisfaction; on the contrary I like to know the opposing opinions about me more.

As his blog and his posts show, he seems to be a well-educated man with a very good taste in writing. His four weblogs are:

1. a weblog about life experience in the diaspora
2. a weblog about Iranian football leagues and the Iranian national team
3. a pictorial Atlas weblog that introduces different countries of the world
4. a Persian poems weblog

For the purpose of this study, the first weblog, which is about life experience in the diaspora, was chosen.

Mahyaar is another male blogger whose weblog is the itinerary of his journey and settlement in Australia. He started his weblog in July 2007 with the aim of sharing his diasporic experience with other Iranians. He does not have a profile page but introduces himself on the sidebar as 28 years old and a graduate of electrical engineering.

Another blogger who has not included any personal information on his weblog is Haamed who started blogging in June 2006. Just the same as some other bloggers, some of his posts are indicative of his job as an IT analyst.

The last and perhaps youngest blogger is Khashaayaar who started blogging in December 2006. He does not have any profile page but introduces his weblog and himself in his first post as:

This page will be revised eternally.

I exactly knew that when I got out of Iran, I would definitely start a weblog like my many other weblog friends. This was what my personality told me! Therefore, I decided to start a weblog before the environment forced me to do so. My only preoccupation is where to choose to live in the future. I still don't know whether or not I will go back to Iran, but my main aim of migration, or I had better say travel, is to increase and complete my ideology. I know that may sound funny!

I was born in December 1984, and I left Iran in 2006 during summer when I was twenty one or two, in order to know "the unknown". I currently live in Australia. The effort to know the unknown caused a lot of previous known things to become unknown again. It made me learn them again! The more I get to know, the more unknown things get revealed; and being astonished from this endless cycle, I go toward them to know them.

Khashaayaar is a young Iranian who started his journey in order to understand the world of the unknown. As will be illustrated later, his posts are all full of life experiences that he gained as a result of migration.

4.7 Procedures for data collection

Data was collected from June 2007 to October 2008, a period of sixteen months. The data collection was like a snowball sampling procedure in which one weblog introduced more weblogs to the study. In order to find the weblogs, I mainly relied on the available hyperlinks in the blogroll of each individual weblog. When I found a new weblog, I checked its blogroll and by clicking on each hyperlink I was navigated to another blog. I also used the hyperlinks in the comment sections of the weblogs where the readers, some of whom were also bloggers, left comments. Through reading their archives and “About Me” sections of the weblogs I identified the bloggers in Australia. In some cases it was not difficult to find the weblogs in the region as their weblog’s identity overtly expressed where they were located. A lucky break was the discovery of a weblog that keeps a comprehensive list of Iranian bloggers who live abroad. The weblog has classified Iranian diasporic weblogs according to the region from which they publish. The weblog is updated regularly and new weblogs are added on a regular basis. This was a good source to check the availability of weblogs in Australia. In total, a list of forty four weblogs was created, which were mainly written in Persian. There were cases where some bloggers kept two weblogs, one in Persian and one in English; however, since the focus of the study was on Persian language weblogs, the English ones were not included. I started exploring all these weblogs by visiting them almost every day and leaving comments for their new and updated posts. As the rate of attrition is quite common in online research, I lost some of the weblogs. The main reason was that some bloggers removed their weblogs from cyberspace. In some cases, the bloggers did not update their pages for a long time and their pages became dormant. Therefore, I scaled the number down to ten weblogs which were active and published almost every day or week.

4.8 Instruments

In any qualitative research, it is essential that the researcher keep a precise record of the data, and manage and store them in the process of data collection. A formal logging of the data will help the researcher to avoid forgetting or mixing up the details during data collection and analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). In this study two instruments were used to collect the data: research log (reflective journal), and a webpage downloader.

4.8.1 The research log

At the inception of the study, the main tool for collecting data was a research log. As the starting point, I 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 content I selected the posts that revealed the bloggers' identity, Iranian cultural identity, and expressions of emotion and recorded them in a notebook. I allocated specific pages 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, I wrote questions that were raised when reading the posts and wrote notes that could be used in the data analysis section. All the weblog posts were recorded in the original Persian format, but my questions and comments were in English. After a while I was overwhelmed by the volume of the data, and it made the traditional way of using a notebook practically impossible. Therefore, I decided to start a Microsoft word page on my computer and stored everything on the computer.

During the first few months of data collection, I noticed that I sometimes got emotional when I came across certain posts and comments in some weblogs. This made me think of reflecting on my own emotional experience throughout the process of data collection. Hence, my research log became a reflective journal as well, and it gave me the chance to reflect on my emotional experience as a new person in the diaspora and being part of the online community. This was a good way of understanding the bloggers' emotional experience in the diaspora and why they wrote about them on their weblogs. For example, the following is an excerpt from my reflective journal that I wrote on visiting a weblog. On 23 July 2007, I visited a weblog which had posted a YouTube video about

the Gulf war. The video clip showed the miserable life of people especially children who were wounded, and the airplanes that were bombarding the cities. The combination of the scenes and the music was so strong that it made me cry. My reflection on watching the video clip was:

Saturday 29/12/2007

Today I came across another Persian weblog from Australia. His post was a video clip with a post about war and its consequences. What a sad and bitter music and video. It really got into me, and I started crying. I never thought the story of a war in which I grew up could make me cry in this part of the world after almost two decades. The combination of the music and the video were really strong. It brought back a lot of memories; all my friends and people that I knew and that died in the [Iran-Iraq] war. I don't know what caused this intense feeling in me. Maybe it is because of the distance from my family and friends. I don't know, but I cried for a while.

My research log and reflection on the data helped me to record the data, my thoughts and feelings about the data, and the emotional challenges that I went through during the course of the study. It was a diary in which I recorded my success and failure, ups and downs of the study, and how to approach and manage the data for further analysis.

4.8.2 WinHTTrack²⁴

After several months of data collection, I noticed that a thorough examination of some weblogs was practically impossible as their archive was quite large and required more time to browse all their entries. At the same time, there was a potential danger of losing the weblogs due to the unstable nature of the Internet and cyberspace. Thus, I decided to use a program called "WinHTTrack" which is of great value since it downloads the whole webpage with all its content and it is capable of updating the downloaded web page every day if something new is added to the page. It can be used as a safeguard against the loss of online data. Using this program I was able to download the ten chosen weblogs with all their contents.

²⁴ Available for free download at: <http://www.httrack.com/>

4.9 Data preparation

As all the original data were in the Persian language, they needed to be translated. The entire translation was based on my knowledge of English as a bilingual speaker of English and Persian. When I started the translation, I prepared the first draft of the posts in English leaving blank the words or expressions for which I could not find the exact English equivalent, and I wrote the Persian words/expressions instead. When the first draft was ready, I got on the Internet and checked online resources for those Persian words and expressions. The first thing to do regarding the Persian equivalents of the words/expressions was to check them in a Persian-to-English dictionary. As sometimes bilingual dictionaries may be misleading, I checked the words/expressions that I found in Persian-to-English dictionaries in an English-to-English dictionary to make sure that the words/expressions had the exact meaning and fit well into the context of translation. In the analysis of the emotional language used by the bloggers I sometimes had to check certain words in a Persian-to-Persian dictionary as well in order to be satisfied with my analysis of emotion in Persian culture.

The final translation that appears in the body of the dissertation is based on several revisions and consultations with native speakers of English including my supervisors. I tried very hard to transfer the exact meaning and language of the original posts without manipulating or changing any part. In cases where posts contained any culture specific term that was not easily translatable into English, the word was transliterated accompanied by an approximate English translation and a cultural explanation. Once the transliterated word was introduced with its English translation, then the transliterated word was consistently used in the body of the thesis. Furthermore, if the bloggers used certain Persian names or brands, they were either parenthetically explained or footnoted.

One point that should be taken into account regarding the posts and their translation is that some posts or comments started or ended with general discussions or issues that were not relevant to the study. In such cases, I only translated the parts of the posts or comments that were needed for this study.

4.10 Grounded theory

In order to develop an understanding of the migration experience of the bloggers in this study I decided to use a grounded theory approach in the analysis of the content of the bloggers' posts and readers' comments in their weblog. The reason to make use of such an approach was the large amount of data that I was dealing with at the start of the project and the emergence of different themes as the data were observed and recorded during the data collection period. In what follows, I first highlight the features of grounded theory and some of the debates surrounding it and then discuss the details of the stages of grounded theory that I went through during my investigation.

Grounded theory is currently a popular qualitative research method which is being used across different disciplines. The original outlining of grounded theory was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967). They believed that grounded theory allows the researcher to build theories which are grounded in data that have been systematically gathered and analysed. It is in contrast to the deductive scientific method where the researcher first develops a hypothesis and then tries to collect data to support or reject it. In this approach categories and concepts emerge during the data collection period, and theories are built based on the emerging categories. It is an approach that uses a "systematic set of procedures to develop and inductively derive grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). The construction of the theory allows the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Since the original work by Glaser and Strauss (1967) there have been other publications and views on grounded theory which have reflected on the original work. Charmaz (2000, 2002), for example, has advanced the theory by what she terms "constructivist" grounded theory, which is a variation of the theory relying on the original writings of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Her main argument in constructivist grounded theory is that "data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts" (Charmaz, 2002, as cited in Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, p. 6).

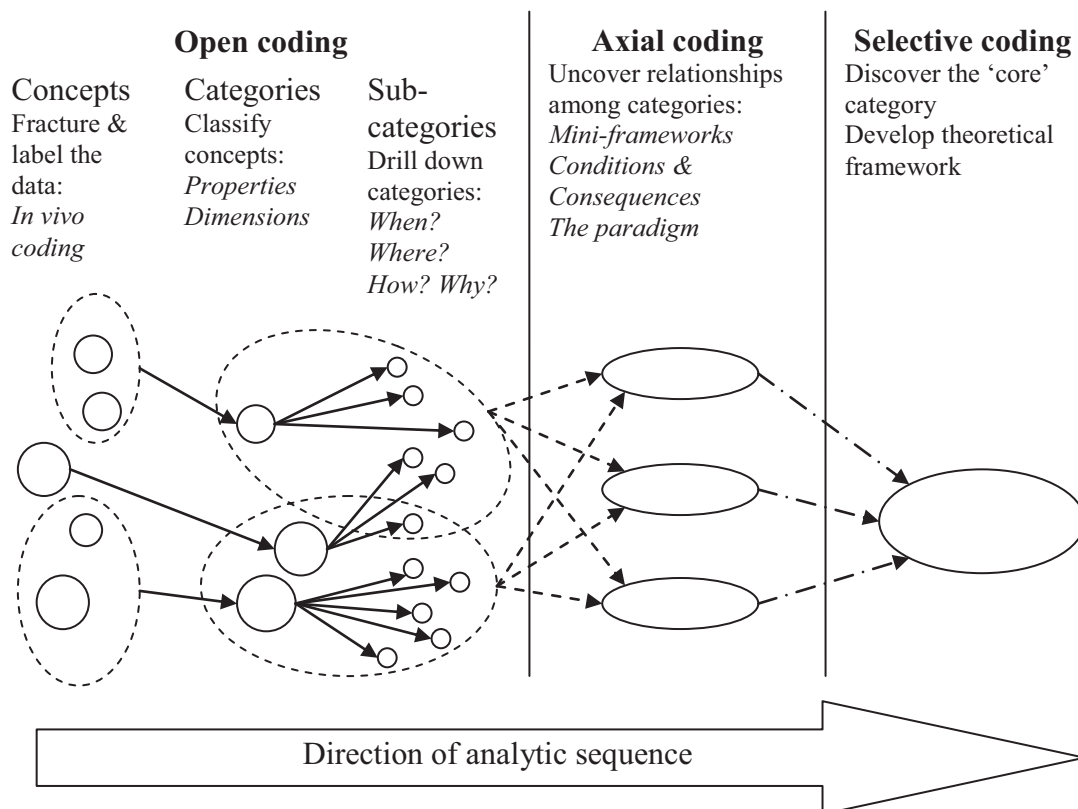


Figure 4.2 The grounded theory analytic process (adapted from Harwood, 2002, p.76)

The coding stages mix and overlap in a linear fashion to produce the theory. As figure 4.2 shows, open coding comprises three tasks of naming concepts, defining categories by classifying the concepts, and developing subcategories regarding their properties and dimensions. At this stage of coding several questions such as the following need to be continually addressed as the data are being broken down and coded:

- What is happening in the data?
- What is the basic socio-psychological problem?
- What accounts for it?
- What patterns are occurring here? (O'Callaghan, 1996, as cited in Goulding, 1999)

Another phase in the coding stage is axial coding which is the process of relating categories to their subcategories and identifying the relationships among them. In axial

coding, the data which is broken into pieces in open coding are put back together in order to answer questions such as “when, where, why, how and with what consequences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 125). The final phase in the coding process is selective coding which consists of procedures taken by the researcher to select and refine the categories that have been developed in the previous coding phases. Selective coding allows the researcher to narrow down the number of categories in order to arrive at a core category which ultimately becomes the basis for the grounded theory. Selective coding as the final stage of the coding process should be able to present the theory by “bringing together the concepts and integrating them into categories which have explanatory power within the context of the research” (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 11). In the rest of the chapter, I will discuss in more detail the stages that I went through in order to analyse the data using a grounded theory approach.

4.11 Application of the grounded theory in this study

I decided to use a grounded theory approach in this study as I found it the most suitable for the type of data that I collected. This method of analysis allowed me to develop an understanding of the emotional experience of the bloggers in the process of migration and discover patterns as they emerged. The application of the theory was based on my understanding of the core description of the grounded theory described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) taking into account the three main procedures of open coding, axial (theoretical) coding, and selective coding.

4.11.1 Open coding

Grounded theory is assumed to be a type of “content analysis” (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 11) that allows the researcher “to find and conceptualise the core issues from within the large pile of data”. Grounded theory demands that data be simultaneously collected and analysed, constantly compared at each stage and allow the theory to emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Consistent with different stages of coding practice in grounded theory, the posts and comments of the bloggers were subjected to open coding in order to identify the initial categories and concepts. The open coding, which is also

known as microanalysis, helps the researcher to break down the data into meaningful codes that represent the phenomena without assuming any predefined categories or jumping to theoretical conclusion (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2000, p. 515) maintains that open coding “helps us to remain attuned to our subjects’ view of their realities, rather than assume that we share the same views and worlds”.

The coding of the data at this stage of analysis was to read the posts and comments and try to identify and name the phenomena in the content of their writings. By using open coding, different codes were generated. These codes were then compared and contrasted with other posts and comments in a given weblog and also other weblogs in subsequent data collection in order to find out any similarities and differences. At this stage, the main purpose of coding was to identify the concepts and categories and their properties that existed in the bloggers’ posts. I tried to look at the data by reading between the lines and checking posts and comments line by line as “line-by-line coding frees you from becoming so immersed in your respondents’ worldview that you accept them without question” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 51).

4.11.2 Axial (theoretical) coding

While identifying the initial concepts, I started the axial coding of the data concurrently. In doing so, I put back together the broken concepts and categories which were identified in open coding in order to find links and relations among them and ultimately be integrated into a theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that at the early stage of coding, the initial hypotheses may not seem to be related but as each category emerges and develops, then their interrelations will lead in forming “an integrated central theoretical framework” (p. 40).

In order to determine the relationship between the categories, Glaser (1978) proposes a set of eighteen theoretical coding families. These include, for instance, the “Six Cs” (p. 74) in which the qualitative researcher considers the causes, consequences, contexts, contingencies, covariances, and conditions for each category that emerged in open coding. The “Six Cs” can be helpful in asking questions that help the researcher to identify the relationship between the categories of data. Questions can be, for example:

- What caused the behaviour?
- What is the context in which the category emerged?
- Is the category contingent on another category?

By asking such questions, I was able to conceptualise the categories and the relationships between them. The use of the theoretical coding enabled me to be sensitive to the subtleties of the relationships between the categories.

Through coding and further analysing the categories, a major category emerged that represented the fundamental source of the bloggers' writing, namely, "emotion related to migration". The core category was able to provide explanation for the links between different categories of emotion which emerged and accounted for the emotional experience of the majority of the bloggers.

4.11.3 Selective coding and theoretical saturation

Once the core category was identified as the fundamental problem of "emotion related to migration", the analysis shifted to identifying the relationship between this category and other categories. In selective coding, researchers "selectively code for a core variable and cease open coding" (Glaser, 1978). This stage may help to identify additional categories or properties that are related to the core category. The core category of "emotion related to migration" emerged from the data and the available data determined its relationship with other categories.

In order to validate the process, my supervisors and I reviewed the data continually in order to explore the concepts and categories further. The reviewing process was helpful as it provided the opportunity to sort the concepts and categories. In sorting the categories, the emotional experience of the bloggers were sorted under four categories: migration and emotion, sociality and emotion, acculturation and emotion, and return and emotion, which emerged around the core category.

Data collection was complete as soon as the researcher felt there were no additional data that could help to "develop properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61).

In fact the data were theoretically saturated and were adequate enough to form the basis for the theoretical findings in the study. Data saturation was achieved in October 2008 when the bloggers' posts regarding their emotional experience in the diaspora reached a plateau or had more or less the same themes. In some cases the bloggers did not publish any new emotional posts and their writing was more or less about other aspects of their life in the diaspora. Yet some other bloggers were publishing posts with repetitive themes such as homesickness, and feeling guilty of being far from their families and friends, which were published in their previous posts.

4.12 The process of write-up after the grounded theory

In writing up the findings, I particularly took two steps. First, I made use of a large proportion of the bloggers' posts and the comments from their audience in the process of writing. This has two advantages for the study. On the one hand, it gives a very thick description of the bloggers' emotional experience in the process of migration and allows the reader to delve into the heart of their original experience without any researcher's interference or manipulation of the data. On the other hand, the original posts and comments add to the trustworthiness of the study as they "accurately represent the experiences of the study participants" (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 333) and the credibility of the study as they are believable experiences of the participants that occurred as the result of migration. For this purpose, I did my best not to change or modify the content of the posts and comments (whether linguistic or sociocultural), and translated exactly what was written on the weblogs even though some of the posts or comments might be regarded as impolite or offensive by some readers. This was mainly because I hoped to transfer the real tone and feeling that existed in their writing so that the reader can connect to and identify with their emotional experience. The second step in writing was the comparison of the findings with the relevant existing literature. Grounded theorists have different views on how familiar the researcher should be with the existing literature when working on the data. One view criticises the fact that more familiarity of the researcher with the literature might raise his/her awareness of the preconceptions of previous research in the area, thus affecting the study. However, the critics of this view argue that researchers need to build their knowledge of the topic on

what already exists and get an in-depth insight of the relevant knowledge. For this reason and in order to minimise the risk of being influenced by preconceived ideas, I compromised my position by first immersing myself into the data in order to sketch the key themes, and then going back to the existing related literature in the further analysis of the data.

4.13 Avoiding researcher bias

In qualitative research it is sometimes argued that the researcher's background, gender, beliefs, etc may affect the research process and research outcomes. Sword (1999, p. 270), for example, points out that qualitative investigators "do not acknowledge how, among other things, their own background, gender, social class, ethnicity, values, and beliefs affect the emergent construction of reality".

While it is not possible for any qualitative researcher to be entirely objective (Ahern, 1999), attempts were made during the course of this study to minimise the researcher bias that might have affected the research outcomes. For this reason, I especially paid attention to most of Ahern's (1999) tips on enhancing the researcher's reflexivity and putting aside personal judgments and preconceptions. The study provided me with the ability to refine the whole process of research by: (1) considering my personal interests in the completion of the study; (2) clarifying my value and judgment system to avoid subjectivity; (3) avoiding areas of conflict that might have impaired my vision to complete the study; (4) taking into account the personal feelings that may have compromised my neutrality as a researcher; (5) enhancing the ability to see if there was anything new and surprising in my data collection and analysis, and if that was a problem or indicated saturation; (6) reframing the problems that blocked the research; (7) reflecting on my write-up process when my data analysis was complete; (8) strengthening the ability to consider if the available literature supported the result or expressed the same cultural background as the researcher; and (9) reanalysing the posts if I felt any bias in any section of the analysis. For instance, any time that I read something new during the course of the study, I revisited my data to find out if the new

idea from that reading could be applied to the data. This way I was able to apply different theories and approaches to my data to see which one(s) fitted the best.

These points helped me to form “theoretical sensitivity” which refers to “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to the data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). Theoretical sensitivity relies on the knowledge and experience of the researcher with the phenomena being studied (Glaser, 1978). The advantage of theoretical sensitivity is that the researcher is able to “uncover data that otherwise might be overlooked” (Glaser, 1978, p. 39). Here I may argue that contrary to the assumption that the background of the researcher may affect the research, it is sometimes important to have a good background in cases such as culture, ethnicity, and language since such a background allows the researcher to have appropriate interpretations of the data. For example, my background as an Iranian was of crucial importance in this study as I was able to see the subtleties of Persian culture and language that could have been otherwise overlooked by any non-native of Persian. In this study my theoretical sensitivity consisted of my background as a native Persian speaker, living in the diaspora like the bloggers, publishing a personal weblog from the diaspora, being a member of the online community of Iranians in Australasia, comprehensive study of the Iranian diaspora and their communities around the world, and going through more or less the same process of migration and emotion. At the same time, my knowledge of migration and emotion was near nothing at the inception of the study and I had not previously done any type of online research or sociolinguistic analysis of emotion. The combination of expertise but lack of experience in the area of the study provided me with a familiarity as well as an adequate distance from the study to be able to have a better insight in analysing the bloggers’ experience of living in the diaspora.

Based on the emergence of emotion concepts and categories in the process of grounded theory, I ran a linguistic and sociocultural analysis of emotion in Persian in order to shed light on certain emotions in Persian. I specifically focused on the language of homesickness, and self-conscious emotions in Persian culture and tried to bring to light the linguistic, social, and cultural aspects of these emotions. In so doing, I drew upon a sociocultural approach based on Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) “sociocultural linguistics”. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) use sociocultural linguistics to refer to “the broad interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection of language, culture, and society”

(p. 586). In the same way, I used the term “sociocultural” in the analysis of Persian emotion in order to show how Persian emotion is socially and culturally constructed and expressed through the Persian language.

4.14 Summary

The methodological procedures chosen for this study were influenced by the overall qualitative research paradigm which was further shaped by the evolution of online research in the study of the Internet and cyberspace. The chapter discussed the methodology, design, and strategies that were used throughout the research project with the rationale behind them. The discussion addressed issues surrounding online research and dealt with a number of important ethical considerations in the study of the Internet. In addition, grounded theory and its application in the study were described and discussed in detail along with the issues of trustworthiness and credibility. Finally, the method of analysis that was used to analyse the emotional experience of the bloggers were introduced and described.

The following chapter, chapter five, is a discussion of the effect of culture on the shaping of emotion. It specifically deals with the issue of the role of culture in the shaping of emotion and introduces several important elements of Persian culture that may cause emotional discomfort in facing a new culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CULTURAL SHAPING OF EMOTION AND PERSIAN CULTURAL SCHEMATA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of culture in shaping emotion and highlights sociocultural elements of emotion. The chapter opens with a brief introduction of how emotion is culturally shaped and the cultural views of ‘self’ that affect individuals in developing their emotional identity and emotional experience. The discussion then follows by revisiting some elements of Persian culture that shape Persian identity and may cause emotional discomfort in facing a new culture. These elements are explained and exemplified by the bloggers’ posts and comments where deemed necessary.

5.2 The cultural shaping of emotion

One approach to understanding emotion is the ethno-psychological approach (cf. Geertz, 1974; Rosaldo, 1980; Abu-lugod, 1986; Shweder, 1994) with the fundamental assumption that emotion is a sociocultural construct. In this view, emotion is in the centre of social norms, meaning systems, and moral values of a specific culture. The reason for such an approach to studying emotion, as Markus and Kitayama (1994a) state, is that on the one hand “emotions connect individuals to their social world and thus are the key to social integration” (p. 94) and on the other, there are certain underlying cultural norms that make emotional events for a certain cultural group comprehensible while other cultures may not understand them. On the basis of such an assumption Markus and Kitayama (1994b) offer a conceptual framework to describe the processes and mechanisms that are involved in the cultural shaping of emotion. Their conceptual

framework is based on a set of questions including the difference between individual and collective realities and sociocultural practices that shape emotions in a given culture.

This kind of recognition of emotion has led to studies of 'self' from a perspective of internal/external attributes and how these attributes cause the 'self' to behave (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Along this line, sociocultural studies have identified and labelled two cultural views in which the 'self' and consequently emotion operates: the independent/individualist and the interdependent/collectivist views. The first view relies on internal attributes where individuals are not influenced by others, and the centrality of meaning resides in individuals. Independence of self is dominant in many Western cultures, particularly North American, where individuals have a strong tendency toward separateness of the self as an autonomous entity. The latter view by contrast postulates that the self is connected to others and social context. This view of self is dominant in many non-Western cultures especially Asian cultures where the self is mainly conceived of as an ongoing connection and relationship with other people. These two views also suggest the subjectivity and inter-subjectivity of emotion. In the independent view because individuals place great importance on internal attributes, they organise and reflect on their subjective emotional experience according to their personal attributes. In the interdependent view, great importance is given to external attributes and individuals try to attune their emotional experience with that of others and as a result undergo inter-subjective experiences.

Growing up in any of these contexts individuals develop a set of cultural identities as part of their identity that defines the boundary of the self for them. A cultural identity comprises several components such as language, religion, rites of passage, leisure activities and food habits (Bhugra, 2004) which are essential parts of an individual's identity even if people do not follow or practise them strictly. Jansz and Timmers (2002) state that individuals' identities are always dynamic but cultural values restrict this dynamicity in any given culture. Therefore, any change to the cultural aspects of one's identity may become a source of uneasiness, stress, and other mental health problems (Bhugra & Ayonrinde, 2004).

A case in point is migration where an individual's cultural identity comes into contact with a new culture and value system. In such a case individuals may practise their own

cultural values or avoid/follow the host culture to some extent and in some cases develop a hybrid identity. This may lead to the rejection or acceptance of the dominant culture and cause discomfort as a result. Bhugra and Becker (2005) state that “cultural changes in identity can be stressful and result in problems with self-esteem and mental health. Contact between the immigrant, or minority, community with the dominant or host community may lead to assimilation, rejection, integration or deculturation” (p. 21). Therefore, contact between cultures may create emotional discomfort for the migrants based on the degree of acculturation. Bhugra (2004) points out that the degree of acculturation happens at both individual (psychological) and cultural levels and states that during this process some aspects of identity such as the concept of self may change.

Given that some aspects of an individual’s identity are subject to change as a result of acculturation and hybridisation and the way that they may influence how they express their emotional behaviour, then it is reasonable to consider weblogs for this group of Iranians in the diaspora as virtual *dowrehs* and social networks where they get together and share their ideas regarding the challenges of cultural identity in the new environment, and seek help when their cultural values have been threatened by the new culture. Weblogs can also be a space for the bloggers to display their emotion with respect to the challenges of living in the new environment and ask for help in their quest for cultural identity.

5.3 Persian culture and *dowreh* revisited

In this section I will introduce and discuss some elements of Persian culture as part of family/social *dowrehs* as the background to the study of Persian emotion. This introduction is necessary as I believe understanding the emotional experience of any cultural group without considering particular cultural values will be difficult, if not impossible. In so doing, I will highlight some of the major features from the Iranian cultural, social, and linguistic heritage that construct the individual and collective identity of Iranians and govern their daily life. The building blocks of my discussion will be some major social constructions, beliefs, and communication conventions that govern Iranian interaction, and traits and values that define Iranianhood and give an

individual such an identity. I will support the discussion by bringing examples from the weblogs. Most of the examples in this chapter are, in principle, the ethnic and sociocultural performances of Persian identities by the bloggers in their virtual *dowrehs*. I will illustrate how the bloggers create their Persian cultural identities online through “textual performativity” (Sundén, 2003, p. 53) and audio-visual signals such as photographs and music that infuse a virtual intimate space in the host society and allow the bloggers and their audience to perform sociocultural identities online.

The idea of performing the self in the virtual world derives from Butler’s (1990) conception of gender performativity. Butler believes that “gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler, 1990, as cited in Salih, 2002, p. 56). Built on Butler’s concept of performativity, Sundén (2003) introduced the term “textual performativity” into cyberspace studies based on her ethnographic study of a MUD called WaterMOO (Ladd, 2009). For Sundén “textual performativity” is a process of performing the self in the virtual world by textualising the self. In spite of the fact that there has been debate and confusion over the concepts of “performance” and “performativity” in the literature (cf. Ladd, 2009), Internet researchers have been using these terms interchangeably to refer to the textual performance of subjects in cyberspace. The difference between these two concepts, as Ladd (2009) argues, is that “performance invokes a dramaturgical understanding of performance, whereas Butler’s theory of performativity is a discursive, temporal account” (p. 40). With all the debate surrounding “performativity” and “performance”, I simply use the term “performance” in this chapter and throughout the thesis in order to demonstrate how the Persian diasporic bloggers manifest their traditional and cultural identities in their weblogs as an intimate ethnic space in the diaspora. I will delineate that the communication and performance of the Persian sociocultural identities in the virtual *dowrehs* of the Persian bloggers are not only textual but also dependent on other features of blogging. Furthermore, I will draw upon these performances to illustrate that weblogs for this group of Iranian migrants is a space for performing collective identities parallel to their individual identity performance.

For a performance to be interpretable for a specific cultural audience, it must make reference to, be modelled on or at the very least make reference to the expectations of that audience with respect to norms of understanding particular ways of being, feeling, and interacting. We might use the idea of scripts and schemata to explore this notion. Wierzbicka (2003) defines cultural scripts as “representations of cultural norms that are widely held in a given society and that are reflected in language” (p. 401). Nashida (1999) defines cultural schemata as:

When a person enters a familiar situation in his or her own culture, a stock of knowledge of appropriate behaviour and appropriate role he or she should play in the situation is retrieved. In other words, every interactant’s social world is usually constituted within a framework of familiar and pre-acquainted knowledge about various situations. This familiar and pre-acquainted knowledge is called cultural schemas (or schemata). (p. 402)

The Persian specific scripts and schemata which underpin the performances cluster around the key words and concepts outlined in the rest of this chapter.

5.3.1 Family

The term *khaanevaadeh* (family) in Persian culture has a very special place and like elsewhere is considered to be a microcosm of the whole society. Koutlaki (2002) states that “the nuclear family is an all-important unit of organisation in Iranian society, not only as the minute component of the social edifice, but also as a frame of all kind of support for its members” (p. 1740). *Khaanevaadeh* is the place where an individual’s personality and identity are shaped and preserved. It is the social unit in which cultural traditions and values are instilled and practised and it is where children learn and practise Iranian social roles and hierarchies. Nassehi-Behnam (1985), an Iranian anthropologist, defines the Iranian traditional family as:

an autonomous unit of production and consumption, patrilineal and patriarchal in nature and based on male supremacy. The traditional family culture rigorously preserves its beliefs in the hierarchy, unity, and cohesiveness of the domestic group. The eldest male of the family (grandfather, father, eldest son, uncle) is considered the master and expects to be obeyed. Apart from sex, the hierarchy is built upon the respect due to age and experience. Marriage concerns not only two individuals but two lineages. It plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of the social system, based on the kinship network. (p. 557)

She underscores several important aspects of family in Iran that determine an individual's identity. Autonomy in the Iranian family is based on the fact that family members work together to run the family and protect it from the outside world; therefore, it acts as an independent unit in the bigger society. Children understand the supremacy of the father and other elders of the family and learn how to use verbal and non-verbal rules of communication to show respect to this supremacy. It is the family unit that teaches children the world of *baaten* (internal) and the world of *zaaher* (external) and how to act in both. Family is where the border between *khodi* (familiar) and *gheir-e-khodi* (stranger) is shaped as children grow up. In fact, the traditional family has a pivotal role and "covers all aspects of its members' lives" (Nassehi-Behnam, 1985, p. 558).

Such a social unit with a high degree of proximity and unity creates a strong emotional link among family members that cannot be easily broken. This kind of connectedness is typically labelled as *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) in Persian culture, and it is a culture-specific attribute with a positive meaning that, like any other culture-specific term, is difficult to render in exact meaning in other languages. *Raabete-ye aatefi* is a strong emotional connectedness between family members, and to a lesser degree, close relatives and intimate friends. It is a type of *vaabastegi* (dependency) that maintains love and affection between family members and circles of friends and relatives and is part of an individual's identity. For example, Anis explains her *raabete-ye aatefi* with her family members and how she felt when she was leaving Iran:

Anis 14/03/2006 post#9

On my farewell at the airport my mum started crying while saying, "You're the light of my house. You're all the passion and excitement of my house, but now you're leaving."

I hugged her and told her, "You know that if I had thought for a second that I was going away and losing you and my sisters forever or I couldn't bring this family together again, I wouldn't leave at all."...

Although I have been away from them all these days, my family haven't stopped their love and emotional support for a second and their voice, efforts, and co-presence have been a big gift from God....

Anis' posts is a typical example of long distance farewells that can be seen every now and then in Iranian airports. Family members especially females may cry at the airport on the departure of other family members as if something bad was going to happen to them. It is a sight that can only be understood by Iranians and might be a shock for anyone who is distant from Persian culture. In the case of Anis, the words from her mother are so emotional that one might think that a disaster is happening and life is coming to an end for the rest of the family.

Raabete-ye aatefi brings a very strong emotional connection among family members and if this connectedness is cut off for any reason, for example distance and migration, or when a family member dies, it causes considerable emotional reaction in other members. In some cases, the emotional dependency is so intense that family members may suffer for a long time, and nothing can soothe the emotional discomfort. For this reason, family issues have been a major topic of discussion in the Persian weblogs in the diaspora. There are numerous posts and comments which illustrate the emotional dependency of the bloggers to their families and their concerns for their family members who still live in Iran. In the case of Zohreh, for example, this emotional dependency manifests itself in the form of guilt when her father dies and she is not in Iran:

...Dad, please forgive me if you kept wanting me to be there and I couldn't make it- selfish enough to believe that I am strong enough to live by myself and handle all the shit in my life. Please forgive me if I thought you or mum would live for thousands of years and death would have no idea where you guys live....

please forgive me if you kept wishing to be with me and I didn't want to trouble you and the rest of the family or perhaps I wanted more in life trying to take responsibility for my own actions and life.

Please forgive me if when you kept telling me that life was short and you were sick and wanted me to be there I couldn't make it. Please forgive me if this trip is just all about seeing you in the hospital in a coma and while I'm scared of losing you.

Please forgive me if I'm still in denial. I can't believe this. It's like a long nightmare and I keep thinking that one day I will wake up and this will finish.... Even if you forgive me, I will never forgive myself, and I know I will live with this damn regret of losing you the rest of my life.... Yeah! This is my reality and I have to live with it....

The intensity of emotional dependency for Zohreh is so high that she has turned her post into a guilty confession. She reveals that she loved her father so much that she did not want to bother him or other family members to have a long journey to Australia to visit her. The idea of losing her father seems so painful and shocking to her that she tries to deny it by writing that she feels it is a nightmare and cannot be true.

The virtual *dowreh* provided an opportunity for the practice of the concept of *khaanevaadeh* in the diaspora. The virtual *dowreh* was a space where many practices of *khaanevaadeh* and familial gatherings took place. Some bloggers brought their family life events in the diaspora online and shared them with others. These "others" consisted of family members back home, other readers from Iran, and virtual friends from the diaspora. The sharing of life events with others created a warm *khaanevaadeh* environment where the bloggers received emotional support which may have not otherwise been available in the host society. For example, Anis' post about her child's first day at school is one of those *khaanevaadeh* occasions online where a number of people took part in her joy virtually:

Anis 30/01/2008 post# 1

Today was Bardiaa's (her son) first day at school. Rezaa (her husband) and I went together to drop him off at school. The school principal was standing at the door welcoming people. He found Bardiaa's name on his list and after a lot of funny remarks and jokes, he told us that he would be happy to show us to his class since he knew we were new to the school. When we reached his class, Bardiaa's desk was already labelled with his name and there was a lanyard with his name in the desk. By wearing the lanyard Bardiaa was reassured that he wouldn't get lost in school....

This post created a typical virtual *khaanevaadeh* where other family members and friends shared their joy with Anis and congratulated her on the first day of Bardiaa's school:

Mosaafer 02/02/2008 comment# 18

Hi dear Anis. Congratulations. It is the start of a new period of life for Bardiaa. I hope he will be successful at school and make you proud. I hope we will celebrate his graduation one day.

Minoo 03/02/2008 comment# 19

Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations. You don't know how happy I am that Bardiaa has started school. A lot of kisses from a distance and I wish him success.

While Mosaafer congratulates Anis and shares his wishes of success with her, Minoo shows familial intimate emotions by sending kisses from a distance, which comes from the Persian phrase *az raah-e door boosidan* (to kiss from a distance) and is used in situations where people are physically distant from each other. The expression of affection shows how the virtual *dowreh* provided the space for *khaanevaadeh* gatherings and practices which were missed in the diaspora and back home. In fact, it seems that the virtual *dowreh* was a medium in reviving *khaanevaadeh* practices in a *samimi* (intimate) environment and receiving emotional support for all the life events that needed celebration, sympathy, attention, and so forth.

Seemingly contradictory to *raabete-ye aatefi* is the personality trait of individualism (*esteghlaal-e fardi*) which is also advocated in the family. Individualism is the product

of the fact that Iranian families throughout the history have endeavoured hard to maintain the family constitution and protect it from foreign forces on a national and international level. The practice of individualism among Iranians can be attributed to several factors including the geography of Iran and the way it has affected people's way of life, foreign invasion and anarchy during different centuries, and change of political governments (Behnam, 1986). These factors and some other Iranian characteristics such as the feeling of insecurity, which is discussed later in the chapter, have caused individuals to fight for and look after themselves and their families and not to trust anyone outside their *samimi* (intimate) *dowrehs*. It is quite common for Iranian parents to use the expression *rooy-e paay-e khod istaadan* (to stand on one's own feet) when they advise children for independency. This Iranian trait has given Iranians the power to survive under difficult conditions, and is an advantage for acclimatising themselves to different situations and living independently without any community support. This kind of attitude among Iranians is both a source of individual fulfilment in the diaspora as they can adapt to their new life and, at the same time, a source of community rupture. The practice of individualism and the lack of unity among Iranians have been discussed on some weblogs in the diaspora. For example, Khashaayaar discusses this fact in one post:

Khashaayaar 28/02/2007 post#6

Today I was reading the BBC website. There was a video clip about the fact that there are 35000 Iranians living in London but there are only three Iranian shops running in London which sell everything from fruit to books to musical instruments. The reporter was also complaining that Iranians don't have any cultural site where they can get together and celebrate ceremonies and festivals...while other nationalities have their own neighbourhood, cultural institutions and a lot of other things. Indeed, when I compared that to Sydney I was really hopeful about the Iranians living in Sydney. Of course we Iranians are not, on the whole, a united nation outside the country compared with other nations such as Chinese, Indians, Arabs,....

As far as I know, there are more than four million Iranians living abroad but the only place they have been able to get together and establish a neighbourhood is Los Angeles. I really want to discuss the reasons for this and the possible solutions...I will offer the first solution. For example, the new Iranian immigrants who come to Australia can come to Parramatta region because the Iranian population here is greater than anywhere else in Sydney and can benefit from the help and guidance of older Iranians.

While Khashaayaar is complaining about the lack of unity among Iranians who live abroad, his post implicitly points out the existence of individualism in the fibre of Persian culture. In fact, it is his individualism that allows him to make such a bold statement about Iranians and their lack of community. By offering new Iranian immigrants certain regions of Sydney with higher numbers of Iranians, he hopes to bring Iranians together in the form of a community. However, the cultural characteristic of individualism along with the feeling of insecurity may not allow this to happen as many Iranians prefer to keep their distance from each other.

Individualism was also evident in the structure of the virtual community and the bloggers practised it under certain circumstances. Individualism was voiced by the bloggers in cases when other members criticised personal opinions in a post or criticised the blogger's lifestyle in the diaspora. For instance, in a discussion of reasons for migration some commenters criticised Haamed, and this caused Haamed to voice his individualism:

Haamed 18/03/2008 comment # 7

It's quite clear that people have different reasons for their migration from Iran. While these reasons may sound childish or trivial to others, they're still meaningful for the blogger who has written about them....I just want to say that a weblog is a personal space and people can write anything that they want. Therefore, my dear friend if you don't like other people's opinions, then you don't have to go to their weblogs and waste your time. It is the same with me. I write my opinions here and you don't have to come here and read them.

The comment by Haamed clearly illustrates his practice of individualism. By warning the reader, he tries to inculcate the idea that his weblog is his personal space where he can publish anything he wants. This position is in sharp contrast with being part of a community as being a member of a community implies sticking to collective practices. However, Haamed seems to practise individualism in order to tell the reader that being part of the virtual community does not necessarily mean that the bloggers cannot voice their individual opinions.

5.3.2 *Baaten* (internal); *zaaher* (external)

In almost all studies of Iranian culture, the themes of *baaten* (inner) versus *zaaher* (outer) have been discussed as the major characteristics of Iranians which affects different aspects of their life. Beeman (1986) highlights the internal and external continuum of Iranian cultural contrast along with the opposition between hierarchy and equality as two major dimensions of Iranian interaction. The themes of *baaten* and *zaaher* have a longstanding tradition in Persian culture and have their roots in the Persian philosophy of ‘dualism’. Dualism in Persian history and culture originates from two sources: religion and traditional Iranian social architecture. In Zoroastrianism, as the main official religion of Iranians before Islam, dualism is represented by good and evil. In Islamic ideology there is a differentiation between the purity of *baaten* and the impurity or corruption of *zaaher*. Islam also associates *baaten* with all good and positive human attributes such as compassion, humbleness, and trustworthiness, and is thought to be the seat of true feelings of human beings and thus, is highly valued. *Zaaher* is by contrast the source of all negative and materialistic traits of humans, and although it is considered necessary for social life and protection of the internal world of *baaten*, it is not highly appreciated. In Sufism, another practice of Islam which has highly affected Persian culture and literature, there is a distinction between the external desires and the internal or mystical dimension of humans. This belief is based on the ideology that one should get away from the external or animalistic aspects of human nature in order to reach a pure *baaten*.

In traditional Iranian architecture the concepts of *zaaher* and *baaten* are physically manifested in *birun/biruni* (outside/ exterior) and *andarun/andaruni* (inside/interior). In a traditional house *birun* is the public space, for instance the main hall of the house, where non-intimate guests are received and entertained without disrupting the private life of the family members (Beeman, 1986). This is the space where family members should *zaaher raa hefz konand* (save their external appearances) in front of guests. *Birun* is the space where men remain in their formal clothes and women wear their *hejaab* (clothing/covering body and hair). On the other hand, *andarun* is the private space of the family where members are safe and far from the outside world. It is the intimate space where family members and sometimes close relatives such as aunts,

uncles, and cousins spend most of their time without the formalities of *birun*. Behzadi (1996) elaborates on these two Persian concepts:

These two spaces are associated with modes of being, dressing and acting. *Birun* is associated with appropriate sitting and body movement, proper dressing, formality, etiquette, and self-control; while *andaruni* is associated with uncensored behaviour and body movement, spontaneity, casual dressing, informality, and self expression. It is in *andaruni* that traditionally men wear pajamas and women are “veil-less”. (p. 73)

It is of course possible, as Beeman (1986) points out, to define and redefine the boundaries of these two spaces. An Iranian can take his/her *andaruni*, for example, to different locations such as another relative or a close friend’s house or a hotel room while travelling where they can wear pajamas and curl up in front of the TV.

Understanding these two concepts in Persian culture is very important as they explain almost all of the linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours of Iranians in different social contexts. It is also essential that they be considered in how they affect Iranians emotionally in the diaspora where Persian culture meets other cultures. Practically any Iranian lives a dual life at any moment and *zaaheer* and *baaten* are absolutely essential parts of their life. As examples, consider the following posts by Homaa and how she views *zaaheer* and *baaten* in her daily life:

Homaa 14/04/2006 post#9

The multicultural community of Australia is very interesting. We are three friends who are close to each other. One is a Catholic, one is a Jew, and me [Muslim]. If we consider religion as a reference, then none of us should tolerate each other. But Australia places special importance on people’s freedom and respect for personal interests and doesn’t tolerate annoying questions or behaviour. On the other hand, there are racist people who keep their *zaaheer* if they can not reveal their true *baaten* of being racist....

Homaa 15/11/2007 post#3

My boss sent me a bouquet of flowers on behalf of my co-workers and himself, and made me happy. I called him and thanked him for such a kind act. He looks frightening in *zaaheer* (on the outside)... but you know that you can’t understand people from their *zaaheer* (outsides)...

These two posts imply how some Iranians overtly live a dual life in any single moment and how they always make a distinction between what is on the surface and what might be hidden under that surface. In the first post Homaa explicitly reveals that the dichotomy of *zaaher* and *baaten* exists for her and people may hide their true intentions behind the face of *zaaher*. In the second post she highlights the fact that it is not always possible to understand people from their *zaaher* as *zaaher* is like a mask that hides the inner world of people and does not allow the full understanding of what lies beneath that *zaaher*. In this case, it was her boss's kindness that was revealed under a frightening exterior.

The concept of *zaaher* and *baaten* is not limited to human beings in Persian culture and encompasses different aspects of life. For example, in the following post Homaa attributes the dichotomy of *zaaher* and *baaten* to the ceremony in which she took part. This means that in any encounter with the environment, Iranians always consider two sides for everything that need to be taken into account. This adds to the complexity of life for Iranians as they find it difficult to take things at face value and the way they are:

Homaa 09/09/2007 post#8

It was my first time being inside a church. I went there for Jasmine's christening who is a friend of Kooshaa (Homaa's son)... The *zaaher* of the ceremony is way different from the religious ceremonies that I have in mind but in *baaten* it's very similar to those beliefs that sometimes are mixed with superstition....

On the community level, as discussed in chapter two, the virtual *dowrehs* provided a world of *baaten* for the bloggers in the diaspora. The members of the community felt comfortable in bringing their *samimi* moments online and sharing them with other members. This was mostly due to the ethnic *baaten* of the virtual community in the diaspora which allowed the bloggers to get away from the Australian world of *zaaher* and bask in the ambience of an ethnic environment in the host society. For this reason, the bloggers brought their most private or intimate moments online and shared them with the audience:

Homaa 08/12/2007 post# 1

Yesterday was the Christmas party in our company. You should have been there. We ogled a lot of people and threw a lot of wisecracks at each other.... Me and my Indian co-worker who hadn't even tried wine before got to the point of drinking vodka and Sambuca. The person in charge of coordinating the company's projects is a blonde girl who flirts with all the top dogs of the company. She is a nice girl and also intelligent even though she is blonde! Late at night when all of us were wasted I saw the hand of one of the top guys, who is going to get married in two months, sliding on our Miss blondie's butt. Then, from the butt to the arm and forearm and back to the butt again.

As my Indian co-worker and I were enjoying the scenery, we also bet on her underwear! He was saying that she was wearing nothing and I was saying she was wearing a G-string!...

Hamid 09/12/2007 comment# 4

How interesting. Our company's Christmas party was Thursday night. I was *mast-o-kharaab* (so drunk and wasted) that I can't remember anything about the details of what happened.... I really like your company. What interesting stories happened in your company. By the way, doesn't your company need a skilled and committed programmer?

The post by Homaa illustrates how the virtual community has provided the *samimi* and *baaten* environment for the bloggers to bring private moments and share them online. Normally, this would only happen inside intimate *dowrehs* in the physical world. Homaa, as an Iranian woman, has touched on some sensitive and taboo issues such as drinking alcohol, talking about a co-worker's buttocks and her flirting with others, and women's underwear, which can only be talked about if you feel you are in a circle of intimate people. The revelation of her *baaten* online suggests that she feels that she is inside a *samimi dowreh* where other members act as close family members and friends and provide an intimate space where she can express herself without the limitations of the world of *zaaheer*. In fact, Homaa's revelation of her private moments inside the virtual *dowreh* can be considered a new experience in the life of Iranian women and blogging. This is because her post is in complete contradiction to the duality of *zaaheer* and *baaten* where women have to present an appearance that functions as a *hejaab* (veil) to cover and protect their inner self (*baaten*). This means that the virtual *dowreh* has provided such an intimate space where Homaa can drop her public mask of *zaaheer* and perform an aspect of her personal life which is not permissible for an Iranian woman to discuss in public. The same is true of Hamid and other commenters as they were all

discussing their private issues without wearing the mask of *zaaheer* inside the virtual *dowreh*. Hamid has used the rhyming phrase *mast-o-kharaab* (so drunk and wasted) to illustrate the amount of his alcohol consumption, which is usually used in a circle of intimate people to describe one's almost unconscious condition after consuming a lot of alcohol. This reveals how *samimi* (intimate) Hamid feels toward the community members that he openly discloses a private moment which can be a negative and embarrassing characteristic for an Iranian man outside his circle of intimates.

5.3.3 *Ta'aarof* (ritual courtesy)

A related issue to be addressed with respect to *birun/zaaheer*/external and *andarun/baaten*/inside concepts is rules of decorum that are part of this dichotomy and that are learned mostly in the family as children grow up. One important aspect of Persian culture is the practice of proper etiquette as part of the Persian system of politeness. This kind of practice results in the status ranking of individuals in a given situation. The most common practice of manners and etiquette is *ta'aarof* (roughly translated as "ritual courtesy"). *Ta'aarof* has been studied and elaborated on by several scholars (cf. Beeman, 1976, 1986; Assadi, 1980; Rafiee, 1992; Sahragard, 2000). In fact, any study of Persian culture and language without understanding *ta'aarof* would be vague, if not possible. All Iranians learn and use *ta'aarof* in their daily life and their interpersonal communication but the degree and intensity differ depending on the relationship and proximity of individuals engaged in talk. Aidani (1994) states that *ta'aarof*:

has a direct application to individuals' social, linguistic and emotional behaviour. It is the medium through which people illustrate their loyalties and at the same time it gives an impression of deep respect for the individuals involved in social and linguistic interactions. It is a form of false politeness which is used to mask the true feelings people have towards each other. Friends and acquaintances all use it but the degree of falseness differs with respect to the relationship of those talking. (pp. 8-9)

His metaphor of 'false politeness' is an important point that needs further discussion. From my experience, *ta'aarof* is a major source of emotional experience for almost all Iranians in the diaspora, especially when they are new and do not know anything about

the cultural values of the host country. Thus, I will delve into the concept of *ta'arof* and bring examples from the bloggers to illustrate how they have been emotionally affected by practising *ta'arof*.

The Iranian system of politeness works on two levels in interpersonal communication in a fashion that fits Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. These are positive and negative politeness – systems of addressing the two faces of speakers in interaction. Our positive face is our desire to be found likeable, while our negative face is our desire to remain unimpeded. Incidentally, this dichotomy reproduces the tensions between emotional dependency and individualism already discussed in Iranian culture. In an interaction where people involved in the talk are perceived to be intimate, equal, or similar in some ways, positive politeness will be used to enhance or reinforce the feelings of solidarity and intimacy between the interactants who will address each other's positive face. The type of language which is used is usually unmarked in terms of social status because individuals feel *samimi* (intimate) towards each other. This conceptual situation is where both individuals may use second person singular *to* (you) instead of second person plural *shomaa* (you) or use less flattering and face-saving language to address the other side of interaction. This lack of hierarchical language reinforces the feelings of solidarity between the interlocutors. The opposite form of politeness is used when people perceive themselves to be unequal in rank or distant in terms of social proximity. In such a situation the interlocutors take on their roles based on their hypothetical status. If the first person is thought to be *baalaatar* (higher) in rank or *bozorgtar* (older), then the second person automatically accepts a lower role using more formal and flattering language in an attempt to show *ehteraam* (respect) while lowering himself/herself in the communication exchange by using expressions of servitude. In such a context the expressions of servitude such as *ghorbaan-e shomaa*; *mokhles-e shomaa*²⁵ (I will be your sacrifice) are used in place of the pronoun *man* (I). Negative politeness, then, stresses social distance as more relevant or appropriate to the context.

Sahragard (2000) approached *ta'arof* in a novel way using Wierzbicka's (1996) Natural Semantic Meta-language (NSM). In his study, he considers five components

²⁵ There are a number of similar expressions which are used by Persian speakers.

that constitute *ta'arof* in Persian culture. These five components are fundamental to Persian ways of thinking and behaving, and can be strong sources of emotional experience such as embarrassment, shame, and anger when practised in a new culture. I will discuss three of these components as relevant to my data²⁶.

5.3.3.1 *Mehmaan-navaazi* (hospitality)

Persian history marks *mehmaan-navaazi* (hospitality) as one of the most conspicuous features of Iranians. This cultural trait is manifested in the famous Persian proverb *mehmaan habib-e khodaast* (guests are friends of God) and has its root in religious philosophy. Therefore, for all Iranians, from any ethnic group, it is important to retain and manifest this cultural trait and be labelled as *mehmaan-navaaz* (hospitable). The typical characteristics of *mehmaan-navaazi* are exchanges of verbal expressions and non-verbal behaviours that hosts show to guests and include the use of “flowery language, expressing strong and repetitive insistence that the guest eat something, degrading the host’s belongings and capabilities, etc” (Sahragard, 2003, p. 417). *Mehmaan-navaazi* sometimes becomes a source of pain and embarrassment for Iranians in the guest role. Situations may arise where the guest is full but has to continue eating because the host is using *ta'arof* expressions while refilling the guest’s dish. There are a number of posts in which the bloggers have documented their experience of *ta'arof* and *mehmaan-navaazi* in the diaspora. Saeed writes in detail about one of his experiences with an Australian guest:

²⁶ Interested readers may refer to “Sahragard, R. (2000). Politeness in Persian: A cultural pragmatic analysis.” for a detailed analysis of *ta'arof*.

...some time ago my Iranian *mehmaan-navaazi* got into me and asked me to invite Seth [the blogger's co-worker] to our house for lunch....I did this because of his special interest in cooking and the fact that any time that the smell of Persian food got everywhere in my workplace, he started to smell the trace of the food like a cat and used appreciating words. This got to the extent that Mr. Seth printed off Persian recipes from the Internet and cooked them for himself....Thus, his extreme interest in Persian cuisine made us invite him to our house. We prepared three types of Persian dishes just in case he didn't like one or two of them, he could still fill himself with one....I don't remember which one he started with, but with our insistent *ta'aarof* he ate and ate and ate from all of them. We had also prepared egg-plant and garlic pickles and he tried them as well.... To put it in a nutshell, our Iranian hospitality and food caused his stomach to start groaning. The situation got to such a point that he miserably asked, "Why has my stomach become like this today?" I was so embarrassed and didn't know what to say....After that day Seth stopped even thinking about Persian foods.

This post demonstrates how the cultural script of *mehmaan-navaazi* caused both the guest and the host physical and emotional discomfort. This is a typical situation which may be experienced by any Iranian almost every day, and they know how to handle the situation tactfully based on their Persian cultural schemata. However, this cultural script cannot be interpreted by a Westerner whose cultural training does not comprehend the fact that the emphasis or overemphasis of a Persian speaker comes from the culture of *ta'aarof* and does not necessarily mean what they say. This can be a source of confusion and misunderstanding for non-natives of Persian as deciphering such a Persian cultural script is very demanding and needs cultural understanding.

Mehmaan-navaazi was also practised virtually among the members. Although it may sound strange as *mehmaan-navaazi* needs a physical context in order to entertain guests, some bloggers practised it every now and then in order to bring the flavour of *mehmaan-navaazi* to the online community. *Mehmaan-navaazi* was mainly practised via pictures where some bloggers brought their cooking photos online and shared them with other members with complementary remarks. For instance, Homaayun put a photo of the confectionary that he had made for an occasion in his weblog and asked the audience to enjoy them:

Homaayun 12/11/2007 post# 1

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



Figure 5.1 Homaayun's pastry cooking as published in his weblog

By showing the photo of the confectionary in his weblog and using the imperative *befarmaa* (help yourself) which is a very common expression of invitation in Persian, Homaayun created a typical Iranian *mehmaani* (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 Homaayun's *mehmaani*:

Naahid 13/11/2007 comment# 3

Wow! You have got good taste. I really enjoyed seeing all these delicious things on one table. If I couldn't be in your *mehmaani*, 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 wish you had posted the recipes here so that we could make them.

Naahid shows her enjoyment by using the Persian expression *vasfol eish nesfol eish*²⁷ which is used in contexts where people are not generally able to enjoy something physically and they can only be the observer. In fact, Naahid's comment is not merely a compliment on Homaayun's post 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 mine). Thus, for Naahid 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, Naahid's performance, which reveals how she is missing a Persian *mehmaani*, 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, Naahid's comment illustrates that she not only took part in Homaayun's virtual *mehmaani* but also performed her role as a critic appraising the display of performance knowledge and skill (see Langellier's (1998) typology of audience discussed in chapter three).

5.3.3.2 *Adab* (politeness; courtesy)

As part of family upbringing, Iranians get to understand and practise *adab* (politeness; courtesy) at an early age. *Adab* is a moral and personal fibre and is "an important concept in Islamic culture" (Sahragard, 2003, p. 405). As children grow up, they learn how to show *adab* in both verbal and non-verbal behaviour. *Adab* is a personal feature and includes family teaching as well as social learning (Sahragard, 2003). As part of *ta'aarof*, individuals learn strategies on how and when to reject when they are offered something and when to accept when they face repetitive insistence. *Adab* is also practised in non-verbal behaviour such as bowing and offering something with both hands to a high rank person (*baalaatar*) or older person (*bozorgtar*); or for a male,

²⁷ This expression is originally an Arabic phrase, and it is even written in Arabic in the Persian language: (وصف العيش نصف العيش) *vasfal eish nesfal eish*. However, it is a very common expression which is used to describe unattainable joy.

putting the right hand on the chest where the heart is located when greeting a high status person. The practice of *adab* can create emotional experiences for Iranians when practised outside the Persian cultural norms of the society. As an Iranian living in New Zealand I have experienced embarrassment and even anger on several occasions. One experience, about which I wrote a post in my weblog, was when a lecturer (read as a high status rank individual) gave me a ride to my flat. When we reached the flat I asked her, out of *adab*, if she would like to join me for a cup of coffee and she accepted my offer while I did not have coffee in the flat. My intention in that situation was to show *adab* as part of *ta'aarof* rather than invite her for a coffee, but my words were taken literally. It was an embarrassing experience and I was angry with myself for why it happened.

A good example regarding *adab* is what Khashaayaar wrote about in one of his posts and how emotional he got in practising *adab*:

Khashaayaar 19/05/2008 post#5

I don't know how long it takes for we Iranians to be able to get rid of *ta'aarof* in Australia as I feel that it's suffocating us little by little here. I have a nice Aussie neighbour. They're a retired couple and live on their own as their children are all grown-up and live in other cities or overseas. They have two cats and one ugly dog that always barks at me madly whenever I go to visit them. Sometime ago they had a plan to go overseas to visit their son and they were looking for someone to look after their animals while they were away. One evening when I was there, they mentioned this to me and just out of *adab* I said that I could take care of them. For me it was just an Iranian way of *ta'aarof*, but it seemed that they took it literally and said yes. You can imagine my face. It was like I was electrified by high voltage. I couldn't imagine myself with two cats and a dog for three weeks....

Khashaayaar is complaining about how the Persian culture of *ta'aarof* has caused problems for Iranians living abroad. The situation is so painful for him that he compares *ta'aarof* to something that is suffocating Iranians. Because of this and showing *adab* he seems to have been caught in an unwanted situation. While the major source of discomfort for Khashaayaar seems to come from his practice of *adab*, he also signals the reader how bad he feels to imagine himself with animals. Implicit in his post is another aspect of Persian culture that may cause discomfort and annoyance for some Iranians. Generally, keeping an animal as a pet is not a common practice in the

traditional society in Iran although some modernised and westernised families may keep cats or dogs at home. This is mainly because some animals such as dogs are considered *najes* (religiously unclean) and are not therefore accepted indoors. This means that many Iranians are distant from the idea of keeping a pet, and animals do not have any presence in their daily life. Thus, because of the practice of *adab*, Khashaayaar puts himself in a very undesirable situation that he thinks is the result of *ta'aarof* that may happen to any Iranian outside their cultural zone. Sadly, his post does not reveal whether he ultimately took care of the animals or not in order to find out how *ta'aarof* affected his daily life in the diaspora. However, it is clear that the practice of *ta'aarof* out of *adab* already made him feel uncomfortable.

5.3.3.3 *Ehteraam* (respect)

Ehteraam (respect) has a special place in Persian culture and is basically a type of moral obligation on the part of individuals. As Sahragard (2003) states, *ehteraam* is “the most pivotal aspect in human relations among Iranians” and it covers a broad range of situations which require the practice of *ehteraam* in Persian interaction. *Ehteraam* starts in the family and is learned as part of family hierarchy knowing when, how, and where to engage in talk with other family members. Essentially, it is the tribute to elder people such as parents, grandparents, older brothers or high-status people such as teachers. On a social level *ehteraam* covers any polite behaviour ranging from a simple hello, to practising humbleness through verbal and non-verbal communication. This aspect of *ta'aarof* has also been a source of emotional experience as Mahyaar writes in one of his posts:

Every morning when I went to the company I used to exchange greetings with people who worked next to me. But one day in my first weeks of working there our manager, who was a respectable and honourable man came to me and asked me, “Isn’t there anyone in your flat to say good morning to so that when you come to the workplace you don’t need to say hello to other co-workers???” I was stumped and didn’t know what to answer.... In a nutshell, I should say that the culture here is a long way from what we have in Iran and I have learned not to pay too much attention to the same sex because having a *samimi* (intimate) relation with the same sex may cause misunderstanding....

Mahyaar’s post is a common example of *ehteraam* in Persian culture. It is quite customary to say hello to other people in the neighbourhood or workplace especially the older ones as a sign of respect, and individuals may show it in a more affectionate way to the same sex out of *samimiyat* (intimacy) by, for example, hugging or kissing each other on the face. This is part of the social structure of Iranian society and for Mahyaar the transfer of this Iranian cultural norm to his work place seemed natural but ultimately caused him inconvenience and embarrassment.

To sum up the components of *ta’aarof* and to show how *ta’aarof* and its components may cause inconvenience for Iranians, I bring another post from Homaa in which she discusses and somehow criticises the components of *ta’aarof*:

Homaa 27/04/2008 post#1

The definition of *adab* and *ehteraam* is sometimes garbled for we Iranians who live abroad. Iranians who live abroad including me are still so much more formal and have *ta’aarof* with themselves that you feel they are not really what they must be.... *Adab* is always good. Even these Australians that come to you and go nice and easy and don’t answer your greetings with all those flowery *ta’aarofaat* [plural form of *ta’aarof*] that you know or don’t stand up to show respect to you when you go to them still have *adab*.... With a closer look at their behaviour you understand that they also have good and bad in their ideology.... In my opinion, a lot of things that they have fed us in the name of *adab* and *ehteraam* are nothing but a source of weakening our confidence abroad....

²⁸ Mahyaar’s weblog is in the form of a long itinerary and does not have post identifiers as the whole writing is on one page. For this reason, all the excerpts taken from his weblog are shown with the same date, as shown at the beginning of his writing, in the body of the thesis.

Homaa's post is a criticism of the Persian cultural upbringing where children are closely supervised for their manners especially in their interactions with others. This makes children grow up in an environment where they learn the flowery language of *ta'arof* and its applications especially in the world of *zaaher*. Consequently, children learn to be vigilant in their behaviour and practise *adab* and *ehteraam* in their daily interactions by using a lot of circuitous language of *ta'arof*. By highlighting some rules of *adab* and *ehteraam* in Persian culture such as standing up in front of people when they come to your office or having a long flowery greeting conversation, Homaa argues that these rules of conduct are sources of decreasing people's self-confidence. She seems to be advising other members of the community to do something about the culture of *ta'arof* in the diaspora as it may cause inconvenience for them.

As well as being lamented, *adab* and *ehteraam* were also practised as part of *ta'arof* in the structure of the virtual community in different ways. The members of the community who were regular visitors of each other's weblogs always showed respect towards each other by starting their comments with greetings and terms of endearment such as *aziz* (dear), *aziz-e delam* (literally dear of my heart), *Jaan* (dear), and so on. In cases where some non-intimate or anonymous visitors left impolite or rude comments regarding a post in a weblog, then other members wrote comments advising that specific person to be polite. For example, in one weblog where an anonymous commenter had left a rude comment for the blogger, another blogger advised the commenter to show *adab* and *ehteraam* to the blogger being criticised:

Saeed 15/06/2008 comment# 3

Dear (*aziz*) anonymous friend, I know that the owner of this blog has a big heart and is very modest and won't answer your rude remark as it will be beneath his dignity to use vulgarity. However, I want to tell you that it is a good thing to show *adab* and *ehteraam* to other people and their opinions even if they don't appeal to us....

Regardless of the fact that Saeed's comment underscores the importance of *adab* and *ehteraam* in the community, it also illustrates how polite Saeed tries to be in addressing an anonymous reader. He uses the term *aziz* for an unknown reader in order to illustrate the *samimi* environment of the community where the members show respect toward

each other even if they have different opinions regarding issues which are brought up in the community. In fact, what Saeed is performing in his comment is the presentation of *shakhsiat* (literally personality/character) in Persian. Koutlaki (2002) considers *shakhsiat* and *ehteraam* as two main components of face in Persian and claims that they correspond to Goffman's (1967) concepts of "pride" and "honour" in the conceptualisation of "face". Goffman states that individuals are not only concerned with their own face but are also expected simultaneously to show consideration for other people's feelings and to endeavour to sustain their face owing to "emotional identification with the others and their feelings" (p. 10). This means that when individuals refrain from certain behaviours due to self-respect, it is a case of "pride" while accepting limitations in behaviour due to responsibility to the wider society is a case of "honour". Koutlaki (2002) points out that *shakhsiat* in Persian is a complex notion and depends on individuals' behaviours and educational backgrounds and is "often perceived as related to the socialisation and upbringing" (p. 1742) that they have shared. She argues that *shakhsiat* is similar to the concept of positive face of Brown and Levinson (1987) although there are some significant differences. The main difference, as she observes, is that Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive face depends on individual values while *shakhsiat* in Persian is based on both individual and collective/group values. Hence, Saeed's performance of *ehteraam* via the use of the term *aziz* and the description of the blogger's personality is a strategic way of elevating an anonymous commenter's face *shakhsiat daadan* (literally to give someone *shakhsiat*) in the community, protecting the blogger's face as a *bozorgtar* (older) and respectable member (Homaayun the creator of *Jome'eh dowreh* and a leader in the community)²⁹, and simultaneously also manifesting his own *shakhsiat* and enhancing the collective *ehteraam* in the community.

5.3.4 *Shak; tardid* (insecurity; uncertainty)

In dealing with Iranians, western scholars have highlighted feelings of insecurity and uncertainty (Zonis, 1971; Zeidan, 1995) as national characteristics of Iranians. This type of analysis is the result of a Western way of thinking in which the observer is trained to think in straightforward and unambiguous way (Beeman, 1986). But for a Persian

²⁹ See the discussion in chapters two and three on Homaayun and his role in the community.

speaker, communication does not rely merely on a single set of criteria and any message is subject to different interpretations based on the norms and values of Persian culture. Beeman (1976) ascribes two principles to the Persian communication system: “1. messages cannot be interpreted according to any single set of criteria; and 2. an adroit operator never settles on a final interpretation of any message” (p. 32). I propose that Beeman’s interpretation of the Persian communication system can be approached from two angles. The first is the practice and effect of dualism and the way Persian speakers apply the concepts of *baaten* and *zaaher* in interpersonal communication at any moment of the talk evaluating the speaker and the situation in which the communication is taking place. The second is the Persian language itself. Persian is full of metaphors, allusions, and traditional sayings. In order to understand the intent of the speaker, one must be able to decode the circuitous language being used. This linguistic and social complexity of Persian may impose feelings of *shak* (uncertainty/insecurity) or *tardid* (uncertainty) on any side of the interaction especially when the interlocutors are not *samimi* (intimate) or equal in rank or status. There is always a degree of *badbini* (mistrust) which is another element of Persian culture. *Badbini* is usually present in situations where the interlocutors do not have any acquaintance with each other and they are in an offer/request interaction situation. In such a situation each side may think that the other side is concealing his true intentions in interaction and thus is labelled ‘*toodaar*’ (sly). It is customary to hear sentences such as *taraf kheili toodaar-e* (He/She³⁰ is really sly) when intimate friends describe someone outside their circles. This is because each individual or group considers other people so unpredictable that they can never predict what will happen to them if they trust them.

In interactions with the outside world of *dowreh*, the members may use the expression *movaazeb baashid shaayad daareh tazaahor mikoneh* (Be careful, maybe he is pretending) or *aadam-e motezaaheriyeh* (He is a pretentious person) to warn each other how to handle the person being talked about. Therefore, the element of *shak/tardid* should be considered as a kind of communication strategy in Persian language which needs to be interpreted by sets of cultural norms and values. The following example by

³⁰ In Persian there is no gender reference for the third person singular pronoun. Therefore, when speakers use *ou* (formal) or *taraf* (informal), it is a reference for both he and she.

Haamed shows how *shak/tardid* and *badbini* are present in daily life of Iranians and affect different aspects of their life even in the diaspora:

Haamed 15/07/2008 post# 3

Thank God that sometimes events come together so nicely that you learn from them. About two months ago I went to the common room where all the co-workers usually have their lunch, but I couldn't find any seats except for one next to a Chinese woman. When I asked her if the seat was taken she replied coldly, "yes". As Chinese people have strange manners and behaviours and look *toodaar* I started to get judgemental and wondered why she was keeping the seat for her friend while I was standing there. For a few seconds I started a lot of suspicious analysis in my brain questioning everything. Suddenly the Chinese woman stood up and gave her seat to me while she was still eating her food. At the same time, the occupant of the next seat arrived and I noticed that they didn't have any familiarity with each other. Right then and there I felt embarrassed and told myself – why can't you be patient for one minute!! But after all it's all about being an Iranian and feeling *badbini* and *shak* about everything. I really don't know if I can ever get rid of such traits in Australia.

Haamed shows how the mentality of an Iranian is inculcated with negative elements such as *badbini*. This is simply because it is extremely difficult for an Iranian to rely on a single interpretation of a message especially in the world of *zaaher* and in encounters with people outside their *dowrehs*. After receiving a negative answer from the Chinese woman, Haamed's brain starts to analyse the situation immediately, and perhaps automatically, based on his cultural schemata of *shak* and *badbini*. This does not mean that Haamed is a negative person or wanted to be negative in that situation. It is his pre-acquainted Persian cultural schemata that dictate to Haamed that there might be other things concealed in the *baaten* of people and hence the message. In order to justify his way of thinking Haamed comes to the conclusion at the end of the post that this mentality is typical of Iranians and therefore difficult to get rid of.

Reciprocal to *badbini* (mistrust) is the practice of *zerangi* (wilyness; cleverness). *Zerangi*, in essence, is the ability to manipulate relations and communication with others and as Beeman (1986) states, it is "an operation on the part of an adroit operator which involves thwarting direct interpretation of one's own actions or deliberately leading others to an erroneous interpretation of those actions while being able to successfully interpret the actions of others" (p. 34). A person who is *zerang* (wily) or in

other words skilled at discourse manipulation is highly admired in the society and this is when the feeling of (mistrust) emerges as each individual or party expects the other one to be *zerang*. The practice of *zerangi* does not always need to be an individual or group effort for personal gain but may also be for a good cause. For instance, there are plenty of stories in Persian literature and cinema which illustrate witty handling of different situations in different layers of the society. A good example of *zerangi* is Scheherazade in the oral tradition that became *The Thousand and One Nights Stories* and the way she practised *zerangi* to prevent her execution by the king. These attributes make Persian culture a very complex system to understand. Homaa complains about the complex relationship that exists among Iranians and the way it has affected her life in the diaspora:

Homaa 27/06/2006 post# 2

I think the relationship between people in Iran is almost like chess. You can't predict what will happen next? I always think here [Australia] if that person did something or said something, then what was his intention? What is his next move? Does he want to cheat me into sending my queen ahead and then attack me with his pawn? If he moves his queen ahead, then what will be my next move?...

As Homaa points out, *zerangi* can be another source of emotional experience for Iranians living abroad. It might be the fear of practising it in a sense that it will be misinterpreted by non-Iranians and cause them problems; or they feel that non-Iranians are practising it against them to gain favour. This kind of feeling may bring about feelings of insecurity and the dilemma as to what to do or how to behave in the new location. Although a simple post, Homaa reveals many of the concerns of Iranians and the way concepts such as *baaten*, *zaaher*, insecurity, and uncertainty have created a complex culture for Iranians.

The elements of *shak/tardid* (insecurity; uncertainty), *badbini* (mistrust), and *zerangi* (wiliness; cleverness) were not practised inside the virtual community as there was no room or occasion for such practices. As discussed in chapter three, the members of the virtual community trusted each other, and this trust was mainly due to the nature of the virtual community. On the one hand, people were not after materialistic needs and

expectations and this resolved the issue of *shak* and the consequent practice of *zerangi* to gain favours. On the other hand, the virtual community was a *samimi* (intimate) ethnic environment where the members got together to practise cultural identities and give/receive emotional support in the diaspora. Therefore, there was no room for such practices which normally happen outside *samimi dowrehs*.

5.3.5 Religiosity

Iranian society is highly religious and individuals are infused with different religious beliefs. For Iranians without religious training, these beliefs are not necessarily of a pure orthodox Islamic nature and may be just an individual's understanding of what is good and what is evil in their interpretation of human behaviour and intentions. These beliefs normally start in traditional family *dowrehs* where parents try to teach the basic beliefs to their children and then the beliefs are reinforced in schools and society. This religiosity is accompanied by special rites of passage that affect individuals in varying degrees and is a unifying factor for Iranians that defines their collective identity.

The religious ideology and dualistic view of life has long brought about a cultural resistance against foreignness among Iranians (Bar, 2004). Persian history and literature are inundated with heroic movements against foreign forces reinforcing internal unity. This has created an exclusive Iranian nationalism and xenophobia among a large number of Iranians, and as a result, a religious and political border between Iran and the West. People may use terms such as *kaafar* (heathen), *sarzamin-e koffaar* (land of heathens) in their daily interaction to refer to the West. Take, for example, the following post by Homaa:

Yesterday at the beach there was a woman who was getting a suntan like many others, and she was about to burn to a crisp. She was wearing only a thong and lying with closed eyes under the scorching sun. It's not unusual or strange to see women here at the beach topless. However, what is strange is why these topless women in *sarzamin-e koffaar* don't make anyone's gorge rise? Why doesn't anyone get stimulated from seeing these women?... Don't Australian men have the *gheirat*³¹ (manhood) like Iranian men to go and torture these *kaafars* so that they have a taste of the torment of the hereafter....

Homaa starts her post with *sarzamin-e koffaar* in order to bring irony into her writing as a comparison between the Australian and Iranian way of thinking. When you read the post as an Iranian you notice the type of irony and anger that Homaa illustrates. She is criticising the structure of the Iranian society where women are obliged to cover their whole bodies in public and hence are limited in social activities such as sunbathing at a beach. She uses *sarzamin-e koffaar* and *kaafar* as an opposition to the dominant Islamic ideology in Iran. The irony in Homaa's post is that religious people in Iran believe that Islam has brought the best conditions of life for people and has given individuals freedom to choose. However, she thinks that Islam has brought limitations to the society. Hidden in her writing is her revulsion of the way women are limited in Iran as opposed to the freedom that Australia (and the West) provides for women while they are *kaafar* in the eye of Iranians, which ironically means people without religion. Homaa uses such terms in her writing as these terms have been interwoven into the Persian culture especially after the Iranian revolution, and people use them in referring to foreigners or foreign countries without even considering their religious aspect. For some people, it is just another way of referring to foreigners and it does not mean anything more than a funny or ironic way of addressing the West in interaction. As it will be discussed in the coming chapter, the religiosity aspect of Persian culture may cause discomfort for some Iranians in socialising with others in the diaspora even if they are not of a pure orthodox nature in their Islamic ideology.

³¹ The concept of *gheirat* in Persian culture will be explored and discussed in detail in chapter six.

Religiosity was not a common practice in the virtual community as the members were not keen on discussing religious issues. This could be due to the fact that religion was taken for granted in the community as the nature of the community was more on the narration of stories of living in the diaspora. However, there were occasional practices of religiosity in the community when something sad happened inside the virtual community. This could be the passing away of a person close to the bloggers or an Iranian national figure's death such as a musician or an artist. In such cases, there were expressions of condolences and sympathy such as *khodaavand biyamorzadeshaan* (May God bless him/her/them) or *ennaa lellaah va ennaa alayh-e raajeoon* (We are all from him (God) and return back to him), which are deeply rooted in Islam, circulating among the members. In some occasions, some bloggers changed the colour of the weblog template into black, which is the colour for religious occasions in Iran, in order to express their sympathy and sorrow.

5.4 Summary

This chapter addressed the issue of culture in the expression of emotion. The discussion revealed that culture plays an important role in developing an individual's concept of the 'self' in comprehending emotional events. Furthermore, by introducing some elements of Persian culture it was illustrated that they shape Persian identity, and may affect Iranians emotionally in the diaspora. The discussion also illustrated how the members of the virtual community brought some of these practices online and made them explicit as part of their linguistic interactions with each other. The chapter revealed that any of these cultural values may add to the complexity of Persian culture and create a potential source of emotion when they are practised in a Western society such as Australia.

The next chapter is the analysis and discussion of the emotional experience of the Persian bloggers in the diaspora with respect to migration. The chapter is based on the results that were obtained through grounded theory.

CHAPTER SIX

MIGRATION AS AN EMOTIONAL JOURNEY

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the emotional experience of the Persian diasporic bloggers regarding migration and their life in the diaspora. The discussion starts by introducing the terminology of migration and how migration is viewed by Iranians and then introduces new reasons for the migration of some of the bloggers in this study. Following that is the analysis and discussion of the bloggers' posts and the readers' comments regarding their emotional experience in the process of migration. The analysis is presented under four main themes that emerged as the result of the grounded theory application and discusses the emotional challenges of the bloggers with respect to migration as revealed in their writings.

6.2 Terminology of migration and emotion in Persian

There are a number of words and expressions in the Persian language that attach value and meaning to the concept of migration. The most common word which is generally accepted and used by all Iranians is *mohaajerat* (migration) denoting movement from one place to another. The target location implied in *mohaajerat* can be domestic due to the cultural diversity and existence of ethnic groups in Iran or international; nonetheless, the current and modern use of the word is primarily international migration. In any case, the connotation of *mohaajerat* implies a kind of sadness for the majority of Iranians due to its historic and cultural meaning. The word *mohaajerat* originates from the Arabic word *hejira* (meaning breaking off relations, abandoning one's tribe, or migrating) which specifically references the migration of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to

Medina and which marks the beginning of the Muslim era and the Islamic calendar³². Migration for the Prophet Mohammed was forced. He had to leave Mecca for Medina as the environment was unsupportive and hostile. The exile of the Prophet Mohammed contributes the sad tone to the meaning of migration, and currently the word *mohaajjer* (migrant) is used by Muslims from different backgrounds as a “significant point of reference... because it aptly defines a departure from one place to another” (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1990, as cited in Aidani, 2007, p. 86).

The other word that relates to movement in Persian is *kooch* (migration). *Kooch* denotes moving from one place to another and is generally associated with birds, animals, and nomadic tribes in Iran that move from one place to another seasonally. While *mohaajjerat* has an emotional overtone, the word *kooch* does not imply any emotion. The distinction between *mohaajjerat* and *kooch* is the duration and temporality of the two words. *Kooch* references seasonality and implies return, and is not associated with being uprooted from one’s land. But *mohaajjerat* is used in conjunction with words such as *ghorbat* (foreign land), *gharibeh* (stranger), *bigaaneh* (alien), or expressions such as *az jaa kandan* (to be uprooted) and *raahi-ye diyaar-e ghorbat shodan* (going to a foreign land), all of which denote a feeling of alienation from one’s familiar land and having left it forever.

The association of *mohaajjerat* with concepts such as *az jaa kandan*, and *ghorbat*, which was used by Sufi mystics “as signifying a form of primordial alienation and fragmentation” (Aidani, 2007, p. 98), in Persian culture defines migration for the majority of Iranians as a process that cuts them from their native land and all the belongings that they are associated with. Thus, *mohaajjerat* for Iranians implies alienation from their native land even if some Iranians disregard the religious connotation of the word. As will be discussed later in the chapter, almost all stories of *mohaajjerat* written by the bloggers in this study give the reader the feeling of alienation. Almost all the bloggers feel detached from their homeland and belongings although their migration has been voluntary and they have more or less good social status in the host society.

³² The free dictionary online: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Hejira>

6.3 A new move in the latest wave of Iranian migration

In chapter two I presented three major periods for the migration of Iranians and the reasons behind each period. However, based on my own experience as a migrant and the available data in the bloggers' writing I will argue that there has been a new and recent move in the latest wave of Iranian migration that may add new dimensions to the history of Iranian migration. In chapter two I proposed that the reason for the new form of migration for Iranians is the fulfilment of materialistic needs. While this line of reasoning may match with the majority of the new Iranian migrants, I may add some other reasons that may ignite migration for some Iranians based on the data from the bloggers and my experience of being a migrant. My assumption is that there is a new migration movement among the new Iranian migrants that goes beyond seeking better salaries and lifestyle. In order to clarify this point, I will conceptualise the understanding of and positioning toward migration for some of the bloggers in this study. My data show that none of these bloggers are refugees and their choice to leave Iran is initially voluntary. Based on their writing, they can go back to Iran or travel between the two countries anytime and as often as they wish. Thus, the analysis of their texts does not put them in the category of refugee studies. Furthermore, it seems that the majority of the bloggers come from financially secure backgrounds and their choice of leaving the country is not necessarily motivated by the desire to earn more money for a better life or sending money back as remittance to support their families in Iran. There are even cases where some bloggers have transferred their furniture or other household items to Australia spending a lot of money on the shipment. In essence, this group of Iranian bloggers, with which I identify myself, are people who left Iran for other reasons including more freedom and independence, self-actualisation, and the opportunity to meet and explore other foreign cultures so that they can evaluate their Iranian identity and find their 'self'. This kind of migration is in line with Madison's (2006) term "existential migration". In introducing this term Madison argues that some individuals move across cultures in order to explore and understand their self and find the answer to fundamental questions such as "who am I?" or "where can I feel at home?" rather than materialistic needs.

I presume that existential migration fits well with the majority of the bloggers as there are a great number of posts which explicitly uncover their feelings of restlessness in search of self-actualisation and belonging. A very good example of blogger as existential migrant is Homaa. Her weblog is full of posts which delineate her existential journey and how she finally reaches internal peace and satisfaction by finding answers to her questions in the diaspora and in virtual space. In fact, most of her weblog is a written narrative of this journey, and she stops publishing on her weblog after she feels she has found her 'self'. She thinks she has found what she has been looking for in her life. In what follows, I bring some of her posts with the dates they were published in order to show the psychological challenges she went through during the process of migration and finding her identity in the diaspora:

Homaa 02/03/2006 post# 19

Who is *vatan* (homeland)? What is *vatan* (homeland)?³³

Australia has everything, even radio with sweet Persian language, FM wave 107.3 frequency. It's broadcast on Sundays from seven to nine. Radio Fardaa³⁴ is also on the Internet. But I don't know why the more I listen to Persian language the more depressed I become. This got worse especially yesterday when radio Fardaa was broadcasting a song by Farhaad³⁵ about Nowruz (Iranian New Year festival)... I felt sad. I felt sorry for myself. Indeed, we Iranians never lived a happy life. I don't know anything about what happened before my birth, but in my 32 years of life there has been revolution, war, rocket strikes, famine, earthquakes, and fear of another war. I'm done. I wasn't patient anymore to challenge myself with routines of daily life. That's why I forgot the homeland. But what should I say about this place? Well it's not bad!!!
It's difficult here....

The idea of belonging is a confusing and painful question for the blogger. In the post she shows reluctance towards her homeland due to the sad incidents she has

³³ The title of the post is the translation of a rhyming expression (...*kiyeh* (who)? ...*chiyeh* (what)?) in Persian that is used to show disapproval, anger, indifference, etc.

³⁴ Radio Fardaa which literally means "tomorrow radio" is a common Persian language radio which is broadcast from outside Iran for Iranians around the world. It is also available online at: <http://www.radiofarda.com/howtolisten.aspx>

³⁵ An Iranian singer

experienced during her years of life. The experience of homeland is a period of misery and unhappiness due to all the internal problems that almost all Iranians of her age have been through. While she shows reluctance regarding the homeland, she does not feel satisfied with life in Australia. She notes that because of the Internet Australia has some Iranian culture, but this is not enough for her and does not make her happy. This has turned into a state of uneasiness which has made her question staying or leaving when the situation is not favourable:

Homaa 30/03/2006 Post# 4

Question of the week

In an unpleasant situation should you stay and tolerate and try to change the situation or should you leave everything behind and go?
Is your life more important or the society in which you're living?

The questions in the above post sound like they come from a guilty conscience and one that is struggling with self and identity. These questions although they may sound simple to other people outside the Persian culture, are representative of the new generation of Iranians. The struggle is due to *fadaakaari* or *isaar* (sacrifice) that is advocated in the Persian culture and has been inculcated and reinforced after the Iranian revolution. As the country experienced a revolution and a war that damaged almost everything from the infrastructure to the economy, the motto of *fadaakaari* has proliferated in the country. This means that people should feel responsible toward the country and use their knowledge and expertise to help build what has been damaged. This is where the struggle with self and identity starts for Homaa and the like as individuals face a dilemma as to whether to sacrifice their life and tolerate the current situation or mind their own lives and leave the country. This type of Iranian mentality has created a guilty conscience for Homaa as reflected in her post for she has left the country and now she feels guilty. In search of self and identity, she challenges herself, and maybe the audience, with another post questioning happiness:

Happiness means?

Is going more important than reaching?
Travelling more important than the destination?
The dream that you're trying to reach more important than the things that you
have in the wardrobe?
Is the answer clear? Is it not?
Why do we sometimes destroy everything to define an unreachable goal for
ourselves? What do we want from life? Peace? Endeavour? Struggle? Running
like a dog? Some people go back to their predefined happiness regardless of
anything bad that happens to them. Some others, which may include me, are
those who start to panic when they reach peace and tranquillity...Life means
what? What is life for? For yourself? For your parents? For your life partner?
For your child? For your neighbours? For saving face? For the boss? For
money? For the future?...

This feeling can be a reflection of self which, as Madison (2006) states, is shaped in the interaction of the individual with the environment. Since Homaa has lost contact with the familiar environment of home in the process of migration, she is emotionally challenging her 'self'. The post is an implicit document of her feeling of loneliness which has created in her an unsettled and restless self, one that is seeking relief. She continues her state of restlessness in search of self by trying to justify her confused feelings about life as part of the human life cycle. What might be understood from this post is that migration for her is an unavoidable part of that cycle and it is essential in the completion of self and identity. Not surprisingly, a lot of her questions and unhappiness are directed to or caused by family relationships:

Why should I have stayed?

In the neighbouring blogs everybody is reviewing their personal reasons for why they got out of Iran.... Instead of this question, these days I'm thinking of the question "why I should have stayed in Iran?" Well, it's around eleven months that I'm here but, honestly speaking, I still don't miss anything about Iran except for my family. When I was making the decision at that time, I knew what I was doing. Now I don't sit here in *ghorbat* (foreign land) and cry that I'm dying. You can label me a woman without feelings, without emotion and even a traitor, but I think the world is bigger than the fact that you feel dependent on a small piece of land in a continent which is not even one third of the world's land. Love of *vatan* (homeland) is something that should be talked about with more caution. I have my own opinion. All human beings have a life cycle in which they should be completed. They should find their weaknesses and try to correct them.... We don't come to this world to fool around or maybe being fooled around in that piece of land and don't understand why we were born especially in the Iranian type of *vatan* (homeland). I was losing myself in Iran. Instead of improving, I was getting worse. I was regressing backward day by day.... Then, why should I feel homesick? I should be homesick of what? Why should I have stayed in Iran?...

Homaa's posts appear to show a deep *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) on her familial *dowreh* and this seems to be the major source of homesickness and loneliness for her in the diaspora. In addition to *raabete-ye aatefi*, her post shows that she was not satisfied with her life in Iran as she felt she was lost in the cycle of life. Hence, she displays the search of 'self' in foreignness. Implicit in her post is the assumption that living outside Iran and exploring other cultures will culminate in a better understanding of who she really is and what she expects in her life. Migration for her is like a spiritual journey that brings her more awareness of her surroundings and prevents her from living in vain and routines of life without recognising the philosophy of life.

“Nel” or maybe “Haach” the honey bee

Sometimes I can go through the eye of a needle, but sometimes when I want to go through the front door I have a thousand excuses for why I can't pass through.... Is there any book written about a 33-year old woman?... I wish I could think like the average person. Those who see everything in going to university, working and bringing home the bacon, marriage and starting a family, and passing their time till they get old; those who see being healthy as the ultimate sign of pleasure. I'm not ungrateful. Everything is good and I have everything. But something has been lost among the waves of *mohaajerat* (migration) to this Island and I don't know what it is. Sometimes I think that maybe because I have reached this level of peace from that level of stress, I have reached an emotional vacuum. Maybe I haven't got used to the peace and quiet here. Maybe I feel *deltang* (homesick) for myself....

Starting in 2006, her challenge of self and identity continues in 2007 by questioning different aspects of life and how she is far from what she sees as the average layperson who runs a routine life and is happy with it. She uses “Nel” and “Haach zanbur-e asal” (literally Haach the honey bee) as the title of her post to show the reader her search of self. Nel (a girl) and Haach (a bee) were characters in two famous cartoon series on Iranian national TV a long time ago and well-known to any Iranian of Homaa's age. In these two cartoons the characters are looking for their mothers and their place of origin by going from one place to another. During their long journey, they face and discover many things. Homaa is using a piece of popular Iranian culture to explain her search for self and identity like the characters in these two stories. However, the contrast in her writing is that she is not looking for her mother or place of origin but rather leaving everything behind to find her 'self' somewhere else. She thinks that there is something hidden in the migration that needs to be discovered in order to bring meaning to her life. That is why migration is a confusing experience for her as she uses 'Island' instead of Australia in order to describe the host society as a confining and prison-like environment. Ultimately, she reaches a point of self-direction and self-awareness as a result of migration when she publishes her last post in 2008 showing how content she is with her life:

Reaching final destination

Living in the weblog (*zendegi too-ye veblaag*) has had several big advantages for me. Firstly, I have seen my personality change from the first day of migration till now. I think it's interesting that you can keep the days of your past alive for a better feeling. You can see your strengths and weaknesses better and you can judge yourself better and be better than before....

Now I feel that there is no reason for me to continue writing.... Instead of opening this white page and filling it with words that are heavy on my heart, I can do other things. I can live and enjoy myself in the new place [Australia]. Anyway, I have come home; the place I have chosen to live. You also try to be happy and enjoy your life whether real or virtual. I'm really happy to have had your company, and I hope to see you in the real world.
Good bye.

The post is like a summary of her existential journey and shows how blogging and her experience of living in the diaspora has turned her into a person who knows what she is after and how to reach it. The interesting point about her post is her use of *zendegi too-ye veblaag* which implies living in the virtual space. Her weblog in the diaspora has been a space for her to live virtually and record the details of her physical experience of migration in order to build a better personality. Her use of *zendegi* (living) shows that the weblog has been a major component of her diasporic life which ultimately allowed her to understand herself better.

The above discussion is just one example, among others, of the current trend of migration for some Iranians who leave the country in search of self and identity. The weblog community which I have been researching for more than two years is a place where some bloggers question or discuss their reasons for migration and what they are looking for in the process of migration. I close this discussion since I feel it is not in the capacity of this study to analyse all the bloggers and their posts regarding "existential migration" but suffice it to say that it is important to consider this aspect of migration as it brings meaning to the emotional challenges of the bloggers in the diaspora. Instead I turn to some of the emotional themes in all the bloggers' posts about migration, and reveal ideas foreshadowed by Homaa's journey reported above.

6.4 Migration and emotion

The first theme that emerged in the grounded theory was the attitude of the bloggers toward migration. The majority of the bloggers were emotional in their writing when they were writing about their migration experience. The bulk of the posts on migration showed uncertainty and sadness in leaving the homeland and starting the journey. As an example, I will analyse a series of posts by Paaeez which delineate other aspects of migration for Iranians in general and Paaeez's feelings surrounding leaving Iran and living in Australia in particular. I will go through a number of posts in a chronological order to illustrate how she starts the journey and how she ultimately views migration:

Paaeez 07/01/2005 post# 3

I can't believe I'm packing my stuff!
Here is the day I was waiting for; we have the tickets and the visa, but I'm
carrying a lot of confusing and contradictory emotions on my shoulders!
I've always been a traveller (*mosaafer*) but now I'm a migrator (*mohaajer*)!
I don't know whether to be happy or sad.
My husband doesn't feel any better than I do; on top of that he's tolerating my
bad mood!
But I don't want him to know how scared I am.....

Paaeez 09/01/2005 post# 4

[Looking out the airplane window] Here is an endless sky and plateau of
clouds!
It has been hours that we have been suspended between the Earth and the blue
ocean of the night!
I'm tired and sometimes crying.
I left all the bits and pieces of my reminiscence in small and big boxes in my
childhood room and started the journey.
All the lovely people of my life and anything I had of compassion and
acquaintances I left in my homeland when I started the journey!
To a land that after long hours there is still no trace of!?
They say it's the land of beauty.
The land of blue sea, green jungles, and unseen animals....

Paaeez starts her writing by stating that she has always been a *mosaafer* (traveller) meaning that for any trip, in the end she went back to her original place, but this time

she feels that she is a *mohaajer* (migrator) starting a journey that may not have any return. *Mosaafer* in Persian derives from *safar* which is used to refer to any short or long trip which ultimately finishes when people go back to their normal life. On the contrary, *mohaajer*, as discussed before, derives from *hejrat* (Persian form of Arabic *hejira*) and is associated with concepts such as *az jaa kandan* (to be uprooted), and *be diyaar-e ghorbat raftan* (to go to an alien land), all of which imply a sad and alienating experience. Thus, the idea of being a *mohaajer* has given Paaeez a confused and dejected feeling and she does not know whether to be happy or sad. The whole journey has turned into a frightening experience as she writes at the end of the first post. During the flight she is reviewing what she has left behind and this brings her tiredness and tears. The flight is a flashback journey into her memory thinking of the materialistic and emotional belongings that she is going to lose. She tries to soothe her feeling by thinking positively about the destination based on the judgment of others. However, the positive description of the unknown land does not make her happy as her feeling of insecurity and sadness continues when she arrives at the airport and sees the city for the first time:

Paaeez 10/01/2005 post# 5

Tired from long hours of flight and dejected from the scrutiny of customs
officials because of our suspicious food items!
We went through the customs exit and faced a large area of pink and smiling
roses!
The incredible greenery of the city didn't fade my sadness of being in a foreign
land. I try to tell myself what a beautiful land it is and do not think of being
thousands of kilometres away from my homeland and trapped in an alien and
strange island surrounded by the ocean.
My only assurance is the secure presence of the one with whom I would go to
any unknown land!
I kind of feel like Alice in Wonderland!??

Her encounter with the new place does not make her happy as she feels that she has arrived at a foreign and unfamiliar land. Like Homaa, Paaeez has made use of 'Island' (see comment on page 154) to refer to Australia which may also imply the confining thoughts that she has regarding the new environment. Her unhappiness could be the result of her feelings of loss for the social networks and the familial *dowrehs* from the

homeland and as well as entering a new environment where everything is new and no one is waiting for her. Having this kind of feeling as a migrant seems to be common among many Iranians who leave Iran. This is because many Iranians do not have the chance to go abroad and experience life outside the country, owing to financial reasons or the law that limits people's movement. For example, men cannot get a passport if they do not do their military service and married women cannot leave the country without the permission of their husband. Therefore, migration for many Iranians is a big step as they are detached from the only place that they know and the only people they have lived with. This means an emotional separation from family, friends, relatives, and the environment in which individuals have grown up. The separation from the homeland and all the familiar belongings makes migration for many Iranians a mysterious journey into the unknown. In the case of Paaeez, the intensity of her feeling is such that she describes herself as Alice in Wonderland entering a new environment where everything is a wonder. Paaeez's use of Alice in Wonderland is because the story of Alice is commonly known among Iranians, especially children. This familiarity mostly originates from the famous Walt Disney animation although there are several translations of the book in Iran. Comparing herself to Alice may come from the original story where Alice enters a marvellous imaginary place with things which are different and unfamiliar to her; or it may be the implication of a real world place, which she mentioned earlier in the 09/01/2005 post, where everything has dreamlike attributes. In any case, it seems that migration for her is like an adventure into a world of the unknown. This feeling stays with her as days pass and she is not able to adjust to the new environment. She continues her journey with hatred:

Paaeez 12/01/2005 post# 9

I'm tired and I hate this scorching sun!
I hate the pestering temperature and the strong and bitter scent of the trees
that can be felt in your brain!
I hate the stifling humidity!!!
I hate these Aussies who sit under this scorching sun and read books and their
love is "sunny day"!
I'm tired. Pity my husband who has to tolerate my bad and ungraceful temper!

The tone of her post shows that she feels lonely. She is nagging about almost anything in the new environment. The change of weather also seems to be quite annoying for her. She is a girl from the capital, Tehran, where the weather is cold in winter and hot and dry in summer. In Australia she has faced a humid weather, which is typical of Iranian cities that are surrounded by the sea and may not be experienced if people do not travel to these cities in their life. On the other hand, she cannot understand why Australians like sunny days and prefer to be outside when it is sunny. Her lack of understanding may come from her background of four seasons in Iran. Normally, most regions of Iran have a clear seasonal divide throughout the year with hot summers and cold winters, and people normally avoid the harsh sun during summer as it is scorching. Paaeez's background as an Iranian and her lack of communication with the locals as she is new in the host society have heightened her awareness of other stimuli. Her displeasure indicates that she is missing her home environment.

A number of migration studies divide migration into several stages including pre-movement stage, transition, initial resettlement, and adjustment and integration (cf. Cox, 1987; Cox, 1989). Among these stages arrival and initial contact with the new environment are believed to be critical as migrants start to go through social and cultural changes. For Paaeez, and some other bloggers, the initial experience of migration and contact with the new society is negative and she finds settlement in the new place painful. This kind of emotional experience continues to be the same for her as she writes about them. Almost all her posts at this stage of her life are about *deltangi*³⁶ (nostalgia; homesickness; missing; craving) for her past:

³⁶ This concept will be fully analysed in chapter seven.

I'm craving our usual coffee shop with that special cappuccino with extra
chocolate!
I'm craving my old coffee shop friends who have been scattered all around the
world!
I'm craving to go to our coffee shop and read *Ignorance* by Milan Kundera and
debate and get angry and reach nihilism and start over again.
I'm craving those long and thin cigarettes in places where it is indecent for
women to smoke!
I'm craving the time that my head scarf slides down and my head band and
earrings are visible and I say to myself: oh when will I finally get rid of this
head scarf!!!
I'm craving the time when I feel hungry at any time during night and day, I
can go out and eat sandwiches!...

After almost seven months of living in the diaspora Paaeez is experiencing intense emotions regarding her past belonging and the desire she feels for all those things that she has left behind. Of interest in this post is her mention of Kundera's (2000/2002) novel *Ignorance*, a story of two Czech emigrants who leave in exile and decide to return home after 20 years with the collapse of communism. The story homes in on nostalgia and the alienation of homecoming. Very probably Paaeez is comparing her life with the characters of the story, and she is visualising herself in their place in the real context of migration. This has intensified her nostalgic memories of friends and the familiar environment in such a way that she is even craving undesirable conditions such as smoking where smoking is not an accepted social norm for women or covering her head in public. Her post is an ironic reference to the situation back home where a woman who is smoking or a woman whose scarf is loose attracts other people's attention. She may feel she has lost the attention that she used to receive from the environment of the familiar *dowrehs* as a result of migration where women smoking or bareheaded are taken for granted and are not attention-raising in the host society. At the same time, by visualising the distant future of self as one of the characters of the story, she may foresee her return as an alienated person in the homeland.

This type of confused feeling is typical of the majority of the bloggers at some stage of their life in the diaspora, and in some cases living in the diaspora for two or three years has not changed their intense emotion. Some bloggers have reached a stage where they feel they are lost, and this has turned into a strong motivation to write about their

emotional experience online in an attempt to establish a *dowreh* and seek help. Homaa, for instance, has turned to the audience for their opinions and experiences of living in the diaspora:

Homaa 28/06/2008 post# 9

Someone like me

I have sat down. I'm doing nothing. I mean, I'm working but subconsciously; subconsciously and not with the *shogh va zogh* (passion and zeal) that I always had. Life is going on and I'm going with life. I walk but I don't get tired. I watch TV but it's like I haven't seen anything. I eat but the food's taste doesn't have any excitement for me. I eat anything which is available. We have sat to talk and I'm making myself busy with different thoughts which are turning around in my head among the words that hit me on the face and the head. They talk and I hunt two or three words in the air. This is a habit that has penetrated into Persian conversation from the gaudy and purposeless English conversation. I also answer so that the talk goes on. So what? I don't know. But the answers don't match the questions. And I myself, like others, understand that I haven't paid any attention to any part of the talk so far. I have sat down.

I laugh and make others laugh but my soul is flying in the gray and sooty alleys of memories. They decide for me that it will be better if I go back to Iran. But I'm not doing anything. Even thinking of sitting and thinking about this decision makes me tired. I must make a phone call but I don't. I must talk but I don't. I have become tired and this tiredness is more horrifying than pestering.

It's not a disease. This tiredness smells like death. I haven't written these things to frighten anyone. I'm lost. I want to find myself again. Please don't judge me. Also don't advise me as it will be like other people's talk that I don't hear. But if you still remember what kind of thought was turning around in your head after the second year of your migration, I definitely want those experiences.

Thanks for listening to me and leaving me comments.

I need to *poost bendaazam* (moult); several times. It's painful but there is no escaping it.

She has titled the post "someone like me" trying to find and communicate with someone with the same emotional experience of migration among the audience, someone who feels the same as her. The title is like a cry for help. She states that she has lost the *shogh va zogh* (passion and zeal) which is a rhyming phrase in Persian to show enthusiasm about things in life. The start of the post introduces her as a person whose life has turned into a robotic state doing routines without any feeling. The migration process seems to have turned into a type of schizophrenic experience freezing her

normal life. She explains that she is with others as part of the discussion but her soul is far away reviewing the old memories of home. Her use of indefinite pronouns and language reveals that she is not alone in the diaspora, but this does not change her internal loneliness as she feels she is lost in migration. At the end of the post she uses the verb *poost andaakhtan* (to moult) as a metaphor for growth which is used in Persian culture to connote working hard and gaining experience so that one's personality will develop. The overall tone of the post gives the reader the impression that she has reached an emotional vacuum after living in the diaspora for about two years.

This post was the start of a *dowreh* for Homaa and created a chain reaction among the readers of the blog who viewed the content and commented from their own perspective. The comments can be grouped into two types: one group is people back home who are thinking of or in the process of migration and the other group is people who already live in the diaspora. Each individual tries to justify the blogger's feeling by expressing the source of the feeling and offering a solution. The content of the comments has two major themes. Some commenters state that Homaa's feeling is not related to migration. They see Homaa's confused feeling as a period of stagnation due to the routines of life using the word *roozmargi* (literally death days), a period that can happen in anybody's life. *Roozmargi*, which is a common word among the bloggers, comes from the word *roozmarrehgi* meaning "routines" in Persian; However, with the drop of the middle syllable *eh* the word changes into *roozmargi* which becomes a combination of two words *rooz* (day) and *margi* (death) in Persian. The new word connotes living in routines without any change so that you feel you are dead. The following shows how the word is formed in Persian:

Persian word	pronunciation	English meaning
روزمره (adj.)	<i>roozmarreh</i>	routine
روزمره گی (n.)	<i>roozmarrehgi</i>	routine
روزمرگی (n.)	<i>roozmargi</i>	death day

Homaa is in a stage of migration where life has become a circle of completely repetitive and meaningless routines. This feeling might be the result of different factors including losing the social network and support of people back home, and also the effect of different stages of acculturation. Hurh and Kim (1990) call the first two years of

migration “exigency” where migrants have to cope with a lot of problems in the new environment. It is logical then to suggest that Homaa was still in the exigency stage of migration at the time of writing the post. As such, she is beseeching others online to help her understand these demands.

The second theme of the comments is the solution they offer to the blogger in order to get back to normal. They feel that Homaa is suffering from *deltangi* (homesickness) and almost all of them advise her to go back to Iran and visit family and friends as they think visiting the homeland will help her get out of *roozmargi*. The following are some of the comments that I have chosen among a pool of comments to share some interactions of the audience with the blogger:

Shivaa 29/06/2008 comment# 3

Dear (*aziz*) Homaa, this type of feeling happens when your everything becomes stagnant like a pond and there is nothing that can take you out of this *roozmargi* (living like a dead person). And definitely it doesn't have any relationship with migration. But a change can help you. You're a brave girl and you can make this change. Give yourself some time. A trip to Iran can help you more than you might think....

Aatrisaa 01/07/2008 comment# 5

Not only after two years but also after ten years there will be days when you have the same feeling as what you have now.
Dear Homaa, I think a trip to Iran has two benefits for you. The first is that you visit your family after a long time and reach peace and tranquillity regarding emotional dependency (*az lahaaz-e aatefi*) especially because of the sorrow of your father's passing-away.
Second, after living in better conditions for two years, you go and see that Iran has become worse than before, and then you thank God that you made this decision and you became successful somewhere else.
I hope that the spirit of life flows in your soul fast.

Dear Homaa, you and I got out of Iran almost at the same time. Both of us went to Sydney. After that, I went to different locations like a gypsy. I haven't regretted it for a second in these two and half years. I got homesick a lot. I cried once or twice. I felt like a stranger. I had the feeling of futility and marginality but I never regretted this. Now I miss Tehran, Sydney, and Milan. I don't have that attachment to any of them. In my opinion, all these things that go through your head are quite natural but temporary. The sunny days will come again. I think it's a good idea to have a trip to Iran. Definitely go. Then, you can see where you are more of a stranger. I'm more of a stranger in Tehran. In Tehran no answer will match any question.

The comments touch upon different aspects of life in the diaspora and the experience that each of the commenters has had when they migrated. The central issue in these comments is the traditional view of *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) among Iranians. They think that distance has cut off the emotional bonds between Homaa and her family and friends, and this has caused her to suffer as a result. What is implicit in the comments is the loss of family and friends' *dowrehs*. The commenters think that Homaa's detachment from her *dowrehs* and social networks in the homeland and lack of *raabete-ye aatefi* and emotional support in the host society have made her feel like this. By putting forward their ideas, the commenters performed different roles as the audience. The commenters performed their role simultaneously as witnesses that testified to Homaa's experience in the diaspora and as therapists that supported her emotionally and offered solutions for her emotional challenge. Performing these roles might be the result of being a migrant with the same emotional experience of living in the diaspora and being detached from familial *dowrehs* and social networks.

Aatrisaa thinks that the kind of feeling that Homaa has expressed in the post is part of migration and will strike people every now and then. Zharfaa expresses her different negative feelings that she has experienced as part of migration. She describes her migration as that of a gypsy who moved to different locations in her attempt to settle. During the process she suffered from feelings of homesickness, futility, and marginality yet she feels more distance from her society of origin by mentioning that after two and a half years of living in the diaspora she feels more of a stranger in Iran.

The type of language used by the commenters reveals that they feel *samimi* (intimate) with Homaa and are concerned about her health. All the commenters address Homaa with *aziz* (dear) which is a very common term of endearment in Persian in intimate relationships. People usually use *aziz* inside their *dowrehs* and *andarunis* (intimate spaces) to show verbal expression of love and affection toward each other in their daily interactions. By using such a term the commenters are showing concern toward Homaa and her problems as insiders and members of *dowreh*. This indicates that the commenters are quite close to Homaa, which might be the result of years of virtual gatherings in the diaspora or possibly also knowing each other offline. Furthermore, the language of the comments shows that some commenters are quite direct and instruct Homaa about what to do while some others such as Zharfaa are less direct and try to sympathise with her in the form of advice. The combination of direct and commiserating indirect language also suggests that the commenters think of Homaa as a *samimi* person such as a family member and feel responsible toward her. Thus, they feel it is their duty to advise Homaa as a family member and soothe her psychological challenges.

All in all, the type of language that the commenters have used explicitly states that migration has not been a cheering experience for them, and the emotional support from the homeland is still the strongest factor in fighting the emotional challenges of life in the diaspora.

6.5 Sociality and emotion

The second stage of migration for Iranian migrants, like any other migrants, is living in a new location and socialising with other people. In this section the focus will be on the social life of the bloggers and the way their social life in the diaspora has been demonstrated on their weblog. My analysis will be centred around emotions that may have arisen as a result of the contrast between Iranian national characteristics and cultural scripts and the dominant culture. In principle, the bloggers' social life can be divided into several categories including sociality in the workplace, in society, family life, children, and Iranians with each other. In other words, the type of information

revealed in the bloggers' posts and discussions with the audience concern their interactions and behaviours in different *dowrehs* that are tentatively being established in Australia. I presume that this aspect of Iranian life in the diaspora is an interesting issue to ponder over since it may shed light on some of the Persian cultural scripts that explain the bloggers' behaviour and emotions in the diaspora.

Traditionally, Persian culture places great importance on proper conduct (*raftaar-e nik*) on a personal and social level. This tradition is rooted in Zoroastrianism with the three basic principles of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Iranians generally characterise themselves as *mehrabaan* (kind), *forutan* (modest), *khoon-garm* (warm-blooded), *dast-o-del-baaz* (open-handed; generous), *hassaas* (sensitive), and *del-suz* (empathetic). These traditional and national qualities along with other characteristics such as the concepts of *zaaher* and *baaten*, *ta'aarof*, religiosity, and status-differentiated and hierarchical structure of the society (cf. Bateson, Clinton, Kassarian, Safavi, & Soraya, 1977; Beeman, 1986; Bar, 2004) may make Iranians meticulous and delicate in their socialisation. This scrupulousness in sociality may make Iranians over-vigilant of their behaviours and the behaviour of others in society.

There are certain speech behaviours and non-verbal behaviours that are expected of any Iranian when socialising. For instance, an individual is expected to watch his/her manners and language in public and avoid vulgarity; a younger person should always give priority to elder people to talk while they are listening patiently without interrupting them; or you are not allowed to talk while you are eating and thousands of others which are very much part of the fabric of the Iranian culture. Coming to a new country with such a cultural background, Iranians may face discrepancies in their expectations and social dilemma in their social life. In what follows, I try to highlight some of the above cultural scripts and how the bloggers have expressed them in their posts.

The first thing that comes as a shock to the bloggers is their encounter with Australian attitudes to alcohol, especially regarding night life and the commotion caused by drunk people. The Islamic foundation of Iranian society does not allow alcohol. It is an illegal commodity. For this reason, Iranians are not used to late night noise and commotion in

public. There are several posts in which some bloggers have expressed their criticism about such activities in the society. For example, Homaa writes:

Homaa 24/11/2007 post#12

Aavaaz-e dohol shenidan az door khosh ast (blue are the hills that are far away)

The cry of young drunkards in the streets is still strange to me even after a long period of living here. How is it possible that a person does this to himself with his own hands? Such indecent (*zesht*) and repulsive (*zanandeh*) behaviours!!! A boy has taken off his clothes in such a cold winter day and has buried his head under the dirty leaves and is yelling. A girl is screaming. A beer bottle spins in the air and breaks near a tree.

There is nothing special to narrate or to see but because our apartment is on the third floor and opposite the Unibar, we see a lot of this.... I haven't got used to these noises yet. You can hear the noise from all sorts of civilised animals till 2 AM. Thank God that we came here and saw civilisation in this part of the world!

Homaa starts the post with a Persian proverb, whose English equivalent is 'blue are the hills that are far away'. This proverb is used when you talk about the beauty of something in the distance, but which disappears when you get close to it. This title for the post is a rather tactful way of introducing an aspect of Australia, which is considered negative in Persian culture, to some Iranians, especially those who think of the West as a utopia. In other words, she is telling the reader that from the distance of Iran Australia seems to be beautiful, but the culture of alcohol abuse makes Australia quite ugly close-up. The general concern for Homaa in this post is the conflict between her Persian cultural schemata and that of Australians. In principle, Iranians are quite concerned about manners and etiquette in public. They mind their *zaaher* (outer) both in speech and non-verbal behaviour. In daily interactions people are advised to think before they speak in the expression *avval harfet ro bejo* (literally first chew your words), not to raise their voice, and show respect toward the interlocutor. If a person raises their voice, then it is most likely interpreted as a sign of hostility or aggression. Therefore, in any occasion that people hear commotion, they assume that there is a physical or verbal conflict. Normally, any person involved in any commotion is labelled as *laat* (hoodlum) or *velgard* (hooligan) both of which are very negative words and attributes in Persian. If a person in the neighbourhood carries these words as a title, then other people try to

avoid him. Thus, Homaa's cultural background does not accept such behaviour in public and she refers to *harekaat-e zesht va zanandeh* (indecent and repulsive behaviours) to describe the yelling and screaming of young Australians on a weekend night.

In social contexts Iranians generally consider themselves as sociable and hospitable. As part of their sociability and hospitality, people show a lot of love and affection toward each other whether in words or behaviour on social occasions. The open expression of affection in social contexts is so obvious that it is easy to distinguish Iranians among other nationalities when they are together. Bloggers in this study have written several posts about this dimension of Persian culture and the way it is viewed by other nations. For example, there are posts and discussions on why Iranians are not that successful in finding Australian girlfriends due to the excessive affection that they show to girls, which girls consider fake or seductive. The following post by Khashaayaar is a good example of how Persian cultural norms cause social embarrassment for some Iranians:

Khashaayaar 26/03/2008 post# 6

An experience from cultural differences

I have an Australian-Indian-British friend here. You may ask what kind of creature this is. Well, his father is British and his mother Indian but he was born in Australia. Anyway, we have a very close friendship with each other.

Several days ago, I met him in the cafeteria after our class. Since I'm very intimate with him, I put my arm around his shoulder out of the Iranian habit to show him sincerity. I suddenly noticed that his colour changed, and his face became pale. While some girls were looking at us in a puzzling way, he whispered in my ear, "What are you doing? Right now our classmates think that we're gay." Oh I was like a person who received an electric shock. I removed my arm from his shoulder and apologised to him. Then, I explained to him that in my culture this means we are *kheili nowkarim* (literally very servant of you I am) or we are *kheili chaakerim* (literally very servant of you I am)....

The non-verbal expression of emotion is typical in Iran. On meeting each other, men hug and kiss each other on the cheeks, and women kiss each other on the cheek; kissing the opposite sex in public is forbidden, though. Khashaayaar practises this cultural script in the diaspora unconsciously to show his sincerity toward his friend, but it brings

him embarrassment. Then, he tries to justify his behaviour by saying that it is a sign of sincerity in Persian. In his post he uses *nowkar* (servant) and *chaaker* (servant) which are common expressions of servitude in Persian. There are several other honorific terms in Persian such as *nowkar* (servant), *chaaker* (servant), *bandeh* (subject), *qholaam* (slave) which are used in communication to lower one's status in front of the interlocutor as a sign of respect and sincerity. In this post he uses expressions such as *kheili chaakerim* and *kheili nowkarim* to express his relationship with his Australian friend. Persian readers definitely understand the depth of his friendship but his behaviour may not be interpreted in the same way in the eyes of a non-Persian. One of the readers has left a comment regarding this post which admits the presence of excessive signs of social emotion:

Daarugheh 28/03/2008 comment# 2

What an interesting point! Migrants should be careful that their cultural differences do not cause them trouble especially Iranians who are too much into kissing and hugging in their greetings.

This is in line with Beeman's (1976) observation of the difference between the way Iranians express emotion and the way they feel emotion. He maintains that "a non-Iranian observer may indeed conclude that Iranians are extremely emotional, but this conclusion is probably based on the fact that the expression of emotion is appropriate in different contexts in Iran than in the West" (p. 39). What Khashaayaar has expressed in his post is in accordance with Beeman's observation as he showed his friendliness toward his friend in a typical Iranian way. Daarugheh takes Khashaayaar's experience as a warning to take care of the taken-for-granted Iranian behaviour in dealing with foreigners as it may cause trouble outside the Iranian cultural framework.

Relevant to Khashaayaar's post is what Hamid has expressed in one of his posts on cultural differences that may make some Iranians uncomfortable in their sociality:

Cultural differences

There are lots of cultural differences that Iranians need to get used to. For example, your wife should get used to seeing you kissing another woman in a reception when greeting her out of respect. If you enjoy this as a man, then be ready not to *rag-e gheiratet baalaa bezaneh* (get bigoted) if other men at the reception kiss your wife. Of course this is not an irritating issue, but both partners should increase their threshold of tolerance according to the environment here. Similarly, if your daughter comes home with her boyfriend, you not only *aragh-e sharm nemirizi* (don't feel ashamed) or *rag-e gheiratet baalaa nemizaneh* (don't get bigoted) but also you entertain the boyfriend with a lot of respect. It is also the same story for your son.... Anyway, in summary, leave the culture of *hojb va hayaa* (modesty and virtue) or anything like that in Iran and come to Australia.

Hamid has touched upon a very fundamental concept in Iranian traditional society. *Gheirat* (roughly honour; manhood) is an important foundation of Persian culture, and it imposes numerous rules of conduct on people on how to behave under different circumstances. In fact, it can be said that Persian culture is a *gheirat* culture. Hamid is talking about two fundamental issues that govern and frame the structure of the traditional society. Men are responsible for the protection of *naamus* (one's wife and daughter(s) or one's sister(s) on the family level and any female on the social level), and anything that damages this image will cause *sarshekastegi* (literally breaking of the head, which means dishonour/shame) or *sarafkandegi* (dishonour/shame). *Gheirat* is an unwritten rule that is required of any Iranian man, lack of which may bring shame and embarrassment to the individual and being labelled as *bigheirat* (without honour/lack of manhood). This might be the Persian lexicalisation of Connell's (1987) concept of "hegemonic masculinity" which is defined as "an ideal or set of prescriptive social norms, symbolically represented, but a crucial part of the texture of many routine mundane social and disciplinary activities" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 336). Machismo in the fibre of Iranian society may originate from two sources. The first may be the culture of heroism in the structure of the society which has been traditionally depicted in Persian history and literature through characters such as *Rostam*, the most famous Persian hero in the history of Iran, in *Shaahnaameh* (The Book of Kings) which has been the symbolic representation of a strong man in Iran through the centuries. The second can be related to the Islamic structure of the society in which men are

responsible for the protection of women and children. These characteristics have made the Persian culture into a *gheirat* culture in which men have to show masculinity at a symbolic level even in cases where they are unable to or they do not want to. Another issue that affects the structure of the society is the relationship and proximity between men and women in the society which is a safeguard for the protection of *naamus*. In principle, any physical contact across the gender boundary is forbidden by religion and policed by male family members. This is a general rule of conduct that needs to be obeyed no matter if an individual is religious or secular.

In the first part of the post, Hamid is satirically visualising an Iranian family with the culture of *gheirat* in a Western country. He states that men should get used to a situation that is *gheirat* raising for them. In a way, he is revealing an Australian cultural script that needs to be taken into account by the reader, who could be any Iranian, before migrating as it can affect their life enormously. On the other hand, one may also infer that Hamid is ridiculing Iranian women's jealousy in his writing in contexts where their men kiss other women. In the second part of the post, he again visualises a situation where Iranian boys or girls come home with their boy/girl friends and the type of reaction (very probably angry) that traditional families may show in such a situation. Hamid's post is a vivid picture of some of the religious and cultural norms that may limit Iranians' sociality in a Western country especially when they are new.

Hamid has made use of some Persian expressions in showing Iranian bigotry that are worthy of analysis. *Rag-e gheirat baalaa zadan* is literally translated as "to raise the *gheirat* vein" which is a metaphor for great anger in Persian. The assumption behind this expression comes from the biological fact that when a person gets angry, the blood circulation in the body becomes more intense and the main vessel that carries blood to the brain becomes easily noticeable. This is an important concept in Persian culture and men are always reminded of *rag-e gheirat* in protecting their honour. If an individual shows disinterest toward such issues, then people may say that the *rag-e gheirat* does not exist in him which practically means he does not have the "Persian" signs of manhood. Therefore, when *rag-e gheirat* raises, it means that the individual has got angry as a result of something that has jeopardised his *gheirat*, and he needs to do something about it; otherwise, it will be like a stain on his manhood (this is specifically a Persian culture (or perhaps Middle Eastern) trait and does not mean that Iranians

necessarily view Australian men as unmanly). He also uses the expression “*aragh-e sharm rikhtan*” which is roughly translated as “to sweat with shame”. This is also a metaphor that originates from the fact that people’s faces are said to sweat when they feel their *aaberu* (face) has been threatened. Hamid has used this expression to show how the Australian/Western cultural scripts can bring dishonour to a traditional family that wants to preserve their original culture in a new environment.

At the end of the post, he ironically advises people who want to move to Australia to leave behind the culture of *hojb va hayaa* (modesty and virtue) before coming to Australia. Both these words are originally Arabic and have moral/religious connotations. *Hojb* derives from *hejaab* which means “covering” and it is required of any Muslim especially women. They need to cover their head and body from the eyes of *naamahram* (non-intimate), which can be anyone outside the familial *dowreh*. Therefore, the concept of *hojb* means that people cover themselves against anything that may threaten their *gheirat*. *Hayaa* connotes modesty and self-restraint in a moral way. For this reason, individuals are expected to abandon or avoid doing any social and moral wrongdoing. One reason for the emphasis of *hayaa* in Persian culture, as Sahragard (2003) observes, is that “in the Islamic context the audience for *hayaa* is not only the immediate persons or public who might reproach an individual; rather, regardless of any public sense, the audience is Allah (The All-seeing Judge who takes everything into account)” (p. 412). Hence, the expression of *hojb va hayaa* in Persian is used to emphasise the importance of preserving moral values which may include the things that Hamid has highlighted in his post. The irony in his post is that people with a traditional ideology will face difficulty in their interaction if they want to stick to them. He even underscores this in another post which is a response to a reader’s question:

Hamid 05/10/2006 post#3

One of the readers has asked me a question that I thought would be a good idea to write about here. Honestly speaking, cultural problems are not easy issues to ignore. It's because of these problems that you see some families suddenly decide to go back to Iran as soon as their children reach puberty. Of course I should add that everyone has his/her own view and my post is a reflection of my view. Anyone depending on his/her degree of flexibility and his/her mentality should prescribe something for themselves, and you shouldn't expect anyone to propose a comprehensive prescription. Anyway, people who come to a foreign land have definitely thought of these things. Religious people who want to insist on their ideology don't last long as children will grow up in schools here with the dominant culture, and cultural differences will cause children to get more and more distant from their parents. Here there is no difference between the sexes from kindergarten. Children grow up with their Western peers and it's natural to think like them, to want to find a job as soon as they are twelve and to have their own flat for more independence and freedom; and as we know, none of these things are compatible with our culture.

This post is also an underlying emphasis on the traditional values of *hojb va hayaa* that the majority of Iranians have as part of their cultural schemata and may affect their social life. Hamid believes that Iranians should do something about these traditional and moral values before starting their journey to a different culture or they will not survive for a long time and have to go back to Iran. A good example of how the culture of *hojb va hayaa* may affect the sociality of some Iranians is the following comment by one of the readers:

Mohaajer 05/10/2006 comment#1

Oh dear you're taking the words right out of my mouth. I'm married but don't have any children at the moment. Therefore, I can't say anything about what will happen if my children grow up like this, but I can tell you that my Iranian prejudice has limited my wife and me to work, shopping, and going walking. We only go to parties of our Iranian friends, and other nationalities such as Indians or Pakistanis who know our culture and you don't have to worry about these things. I normally reject my Aussie friends' invitations politely with different excuses so that *khoonam be joosh nayaad* (my blood doesn't come to boil) later on.

For Mohaajer, the cultural values have caused a kind of cultural resistance and he directly mentions that his Iranian mentality has constrained him and his wife from

mixing with Australians. He uses the Persian metaphor *khoon be joosh aamadan* (literally blood comes to boil) which means to get angry to show his Iranian prejudice about family values and how any violation of those values may cause him extreme anger.

Something that needs to be added to the above discussion in order to clarify some of the misunderstandings that may arise out of the discussion of Iranian identity is that these moral values that the bloggers and their readers are highlighting are not necessarily of religious origin. The majority of Iranians who live in the diaspora are modern and West-oriented people “with secular, non-traditional life experiences and behavioural patterns” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 207). The bloggers in this study have written about their going out for a drink or going to the casino for fun and other activities which are against Islamic ideology. Therefore, the expressive element of this kind of social emotion that limits some Iranians from socialising is either rooted in the traditional structure of Iranian society or it is an individual matter. The way that they manage their emotion is whether to withdraw from some social activities which may result in marginality and exclusion from the society, or to accept the dominant culture to the extent they feel is tolerable and live a bicultural life.

Another point which merits consideration regarding sociality for Iranians in the diaspora is the use of polite forms of address terms in daily communication as part of *ta'aarof* in Persian system of politeness. The polite system of the Persian language makes use of two types of terms: self-lowering and other-raising (Beeman, 1986). Under normal circumstances, individuals are expected to show some kind of humbleness when referring to themselves by using self-lowering honorific terms such as *bandeh* (slave), as discussed earlier in this chapter, and using other-raising terms to show respect to others by using terms such as *aaghaa* (Mr/sir), *khaanum* (Mrs), and sometimes occupational terms such as *doktor* (doctor), *mohandes* (engineer), *ostaad* (master) accompanied by first and surname or surname. For example people are addressed as:

Aaghaa-ye doktor (Mr doctor)

Khaanum-e mohandes (Mrs engineer)

Aaghaa-ye mohandes (Ali) Amini (Mr engineer (Ali) Amini)

To any Persian speaker, the use of self-lowering and other raising terms is a sign of good virtue and they try to make use of them in daily interaction as a sign of respect, but this seems to be an uncomfortable experience for the Iranian bloggers in the diaspora where people generally use first names to address each other. Khashaayaar even finds the use of first names in formal occasions a bit embarrassing:

Khashaayaar 09/04/2008 post#3

Something that is very interesting for me here is that no one calls each other *aaghaa-ye mohandes* (Mr. engineer), Mrs or Mr or other titles which are common among Iranians. For example, a two-year-old boy is called Alex while the same is used for an eighty-year-old man without using a title such as Mr before that. Sometimes I feel that this kind of attitude may bring *samimiyat* (friendliness). I remember when I was new here, I felt embarrassed to call a bank teller by his/her first name, but little by little I understood that if I call someone with a title such as Mr or Ms, then I have done something illogical. I think that we Iranians have built a metal wall around ourselves with these titles, and if anyone passes over this wall, then it will be as though he has committed a serious crime. This way of addressing people in Australia is not the only thing to be unusual for we Iranians. There are other things as well. For instance, titles such as “mate” or “guy” that children use to call each other are used among adults, and indeed you can feel how much these things can increase intimacy among people.

Khashaayaar thinks that the hierarchical structure of Iranian society that makes people use self-lowering and other-raising terms in their daily interaction has caused distance among people. He feels upset by how status-differentiation in Persian communication has turned into a wall that makes social life uncomfortable for Iranians especially when the Persian culture encounters another one. His use of the word ‘wall’ is a criticism of the structure of the Persian politeness system where formality is a means of protecting *zaaher* (outer) in non-intimate interactions. He believes that getting rid of this cultural and linguistic barrier may bring more *samimiyat* among people, but obviously this aspect of Persian culture also causes social discomfort in the society, and it takes a while to get used to the dominant culture. This is mainly because Iranians carry the culture of Persian hierarchy with them everywhere and this may make them set up an Iranian ‘island’ with Persian hierarchical walls in Australia. Consequently, any social behaviour that breaks these walls may bring discomfort.

Another cultural trait that may affect Iranians in the diaspora is the sad nature of Iranian society. Sadness and grief (*gham-o-ghosseh*) has a long tradition in Iranian society and is part of an individual's self and the collective identity of Iranians. The depth of sadness and grief in Persian culture mostly originates from religious rituals and mourning festivals such as "Muharram"³⁷ that have been practised for generations. These religious rituals have received special attention since the Iranian revolution, and at present some of them are performed nationwide where thousands of men, women, and children participate. In essence, the majority of these ceremonies are sad and revolve around the martyrdom of religious characters where people cry openly in public in order to keep the history alive. This has given "sadness" a special place and meaning in present Iran, and as Good and Good (1988, p. 52) observe, it "is associated with personal depth". Therefore, individuals are expected to be sad and grieving especially at certain times of the year where special mourning festivals are held. The depth of sadness has affected the society and can be seen on its surface. For instance, the usual colour for clothes is black or any material with a dark background although there has been some movement especially among women to use more vivid clothes. Anis has written about how sad the majority of Iranians are. Her writing implicitly shows that she views Australia as a happy place:

³⁷ Muharram is originally Arabic and is the name of the first month of the Islamic calendar. In Iran there is a nationwide mourning rite which is held every year during the first ten days of Muharram for Hossein, the third Imam of the Shi'a and the grandson of the Prophet. The whole nation mourns for the martyrdom of the Imam for ten days by wearing black colour, crying, beating their chest/heads, and performing *ta'zieh* (passion plays) in public places. The first ten days of Muharram is the peak of sadness in Iran.

Enjoy the moment

Do you know what the common attribute of Iranians is? *Ghosseh khordan!* (to be sad). Many of us most of the time are, whether feeling sad about past events or being anxious about what will happen in the future...We have got used to carrying a preoccupied mind with us throughout the day! I was like that, but I'm not anymore; or I had better say I'm trying not to be like that anymore! Several days ago I was talking to my husband about our sad and grieving past and present experiences, and he said something simple that I really liked. He said, "Let's forget this and let's live". I thought about this sentence for several days and tried to look at other people's lives as well. A lot of people from different parts of the world are living an easy life...Our days of life are full of unexpected things such as illness, bad luck, or even losing someone. If we want to feel sad and grieving about those events or be anxious about similar bitter events, then when can we live our life?...

What Anis has pointed out in her post corresponds with my experiences. My observation as an Iranian is that many people have got used to feeling anxious and sad about almost any aspect of life. This gets worse especially when people think of the future as the future is always blurred. The present structure of the society has turned many people, especially the younger generation, into a state of sadness and uncertainty which may cause them a life devoid of happiness. Therefore, the centrality of *gham-o-ghosseh* in the social organisation of Iran may bring discomfort to some Iranians in facing the new society as they may not be able to understand the level of happiness that other nations have. For the same reason, Hamid also expresses his ambivalence about differences in the structure of sociality in Australia and Iran in one of his posts:

The need to change our mood

Since Australians are happy people and used to making each other laugh a lot, you have to press yourself to be like them. For example, I went to the cinema some time ago. People were giggling with any word or phrase while in my opinion there was nothing funny to giggle about.... Or some time ago I was invited to a job interview in the most famous bank of Australia. There were two interviewers there and one of them did a lot of *dalghak baazi* (buffoonery and clownish behaviour) for which I wanted to slap him on the face and ask him to shut up and let me finish my talk. Later on, I understood that here they basically look for a person who is a *dalghak* (clown) or *lowdeh* (clown) like themselves. In almost all their job ads you see this sentence: "We need someone to bring fun, would like to work in an exciting team, has a fun and outgoing personality, and is energetic and committed to his/her work." In summary, besides your English language skills, you need to change your mood and temper here; otherwise, no one will employ a serious and grim-faced person.

Apart from the fact that Hamid may not have understood the punch line of the talk in the movie or the work environment in Australia, this much fun and happiness is quite surprising for him and perhaps other Iranians. This kind of attitude is very probably because of his background as an Iranian and the way fun and entertaining behaviour in public is viewed in Iran. Generally, people in Iran are supposed to avoid certain behaviours in public that might be viewed as *dalghak baazi* (clownish behaviour). This is because *dalghak baazi* in Persian is used to label any behaviour that may bring public embarrassment and shame to the doer, and it makes people have a negative view of the person labelled as *dalghak*. For this reason, older people usually advise younger people to keep their *sangini va vaghaar* (roughly gravity and dignity) in public. Thus, any behaviour that threatens *sangini va vaghaar* of an individual may be considered as clownish. This kind of attitude toward public performance of individuals has made the surface of the society into a rather formal and sad atmosphere, and individuals try to avoid any behaviour that might be considered as *dalghak baazi*. In the same way, Hamid uses words such as *dalghak* and *lowdeh* (clown) which have negative connotations in Persian when they are used metaphorically to describe socially unaccepted behaviour. His background does not allow being happy or funny for no obvious reason, and this may come from the fact that he, and perhaps many Iranians of the present generation, have got used to sadness and grief rather than being happy.

Tavagho is another Persian cultural construct that has been touched upon in the blogs. *Tavaqho* (literally “expectation” but may be translated as “heightened sensitivity”) has a special value among people in interpersonal relationships and social *dowrehs*. *Tavagho* involves mutual caring and dependence on one another and requires individuals doing things for each other while subordinating one’s immediate needs without expecting anything in return. *Tavagho* is similar to the English expression “you scratch my back, and I will scratch yours” with the difference that the second part is not mandatory in Persian culture as the assumption is that it will be reciprocated by others. This reciprocity in interpersonal relationships and social *dowrehs* is highly valued and brings intense emotional connectedness and interdependence among family members, close friends, co-workers and even neighbours. This kind of culture causes closeness among individuals and is accompanied by a lot of asking and giving in a warm and affectionate ways. For example, if the father of a family is away and the family faces a problem, then the general concept is that other people in one’s social *dowrehs* and networks such as neighbours, friends, or co-workers will help the family and try to resolve the problem without even letting the father know what has happened while he is away. In such a context, people who help do not expect anything in return as they know other people will do the same if something happens to them. This may appear as high expectation to foreigners but works on many levels for Iranians, and if one’s expectation (*tavagho*) is not fulfilled especially in intimate interpersonal relationships, people may feel bad, disappointed, and even angry. Haamed thinks that this aspect of Persian culture is not recognised among Australian friends:

Haamed 25/12/2007 post# 3

...if you are one of the people who has heard that people are nice here, then I should say that it is true, but there are some cultural points that these people don’t know anything about. There are things that we do for our friends, city fellows, or even country fellows in our culture that these people have no idea of or at least don’t do for us. For example, which Australian takes my child to the doctor if he is sick and I’m away in another city? Some time ago when my boss heard that my son was sick, he told me to go and stay with him and come back anytime that I wanted. But I’m sure if he were an Iranian, he would first ask what he could do for me. I don’t want to start a philosophical discussion here and say which attitude is good or bad. My point is that cultural viewpoints are different; otherwise, even in Iran I *tavagho nadaashtam* (didn’t expect) anyone to take leave from his job to do something for me....

What Haamed is expressing in his post is how a heightened degree of *tavagho* (interpersonal sensitivity) is expected of anyone in Iran. *Tavagho* for Iranians is a kind of *del-suz* (empathetic) awareness of other people's needs and feelings, which develops as part of the 'self' as children grow up. The capacity for empathy, warmth, and dependency is advocated in Persian culture and individuals develop sensitivity toward what they do for/to others. People learn how to do things for others so that they make them feel better, and avoid anything that may violate other's *tavagho*. The same is expected of anyone on a daily basis in any situation and it is considered as an obligation to fulfil something. Haamed's performance on this occasion is the result of his inside view of Persian culture about *tavagho* as opposed to other cultures. For this reason, his Persian cultural schemata may not allow him to fully understand the concession of his Australian boss in the context of the Australian system of politeness where such a concession is considered a big one. Therefore, by introducing cultural differences he tries to signal the reader not to forget ethnic solidarity in a foreign context even though his post reveals that he is grateful for what his boss has offered him. Haamed's performance in this post is the result of the common complaint among many Iranians who think their compatriots have lost their cultural integrity and may not help other Iranians especially in another country, and hence they should be avoided. Haamed's post received several comments each analysing the situation from a different perspective:

Mozhgaan 27/12/2007 comment# 2

Bravo. It was excellent. I enjoyed it. I have been here in Australia for six years and I should confess that I won't exchange an Iranian for a hundred non-Iranians. However, I really want to throw up when I see some new and so-called modernised Iranians who have just arrived and walk with their nose in the air and they think they are God on earth.

Faraaz 29/12/2007 comment# 6

...I agree with all your complaints. Unfortunately, some of us haven't learned to be moderate and we feel we come from another planet. The reality is that not all Australians are good nor all Iranians are bad. The point is that everything is relative and people view things the way they want to....

Although Mozhgaan shows chauvinism in her comments, she also shows strong disgust against some Iranians and their attitudes in the context of diaspora. In fact, her disgust reveals the reality of life for some Iranians who try to avoid other Iranians as soon as they move to the new environment. In the same way, Faraaz criticises the attitude of some Iranians and the way they view Iranian identity. By using relativity, he tries to tell Haamed and other readers that it is not a matter of which nationality a person comes from but rather how they view the world around them. In other words, he is illustrating that Iranians should be moderate in their *tavagho* especially in the online community where the bloggers try to help other Iranians, and avoid things which are illogical and impossible for the bloggers to fulfil.

As mentioned before, Iranians consider themselves a highly *mehmaan-navaaz* (hospitable) nation and they go to great lengths to prove that. In a typical lunch or dinner banquet the host prepares several types of food and decorates the table with different soft drinks, salads, desserts, and sometimes flowers before guests arrive. An elaborate feast is very important when inviting people to your house and the same is expected of other people when one is invited to their houses. This may make some Iranians sensitive to Western informal invitations where, for instance, a person is invited to an afternoon barbecue which may consist of just meat/sausage and drinks. Mahyaar has written about his experience of being invited to a barbecue and how he felt offended:

Mahyaar 22/08/2008

One Friday one of my co-workers told me that he was having a barbecue party on Saturday evening at his house. He invited everyone including me. I was about to work on Saturday, but I overslept and missed the train. Therefore, I decided to rent a car and go to the barbecue in the afternoon. When I got there, some of my co-workers including my supervisor were already there. My concept of barbecue was the different types of kebab that we make in Iran with all the side dishes that we serve to guests, but here there were only some burned sausages, which I'm sure were not *halaal* (religiously/ceremonially clean). On the other hand, people were emptying bottles of alcohol one after the other and after a while there was a pile of empty bottles on the table. I was quite angry and embarrassed and excused myself and got out. I promised myself not to go to any of their parties anymore.

What can be understood from Mahyaar's post is that his cultural script of *mehmaan-navaazi* has been compromised in encountering an Australian barbecue. Since Iranians consider themselves as *dast-o-del-baaz* (open-handed) and offer things generously, his expectation was to see an elaborate *mehmaani* (reception) with different types of food that provides the opportunity for the guest to choose. Instead, he faces a table with a pile of empty bottles which contradicts with his idea of an Iranian *mehmaani*. The post also reveals that he comes from a religious background and he is concerned about the type of food that he consumes. This makes it even more difficult to be with the team and enjoy the party. This kind of *hassaasiyati* (sensitivity) over *halaal* food is typical among many Iranians and it may originate from two sources. The first one is the Islamic belief in which products from pigs are considered *haram* (religiously unclean) and therefore not to be consumed in any form. The second one might be the scarcity³⁸ of such products in Iran which makes it a bizarre thing for even non-orthodox people to want to try. For whatever reason, this aspect of Persian culture also limits some Iranians in their socialisation. In the case of Mahyaar, he says he has decided not to go to any Australian parties anymore. He has made no effort to alter his interpretation of the Australian philosophy of having a barbecue, which is simply spending a casual and informal evening with friends. His performance shows that he is still entangled in Persian cultural norms such as *ta'arof*, which make people prepare elaborate meals for parties, and does not understand that an elaborate meal in Australia belongs to formal occasions, and this formality may bring distance among people.

Mahyaar had deactivated the comment links to all his posts and did not want to receive any comments from his readers. Thus, he was not an inside member of the virtual *dowreh* as there was no communication between him and other bloggers and readers. For this reason, some of his posts were discussed by other bloggers and readers in other blogs in the community. The above post received different reactions from the readers and raised a heated discussion that went on for several days. While some were supportive of what he had written, others were quite critical and attacked his attitude. The major theme of the discussion was that Iranians like Mahyaar who come from a religious background and cannot be receptive to Western culture should not leave Iran

³⁸ Pig's products are illegal in Iran but there are some places in the Iranian Armenian and Christian communities that prepare pig's products and sell them under the counter in the country.

as they cause emotional problems for themselves unless they show flexibility in the new environment. Mahyaar was considered an outlier blog in the community as most of his posts were about negative aspects of life in Australia and this caused a general outrage among the members. One major criticism was ignoring the audience by deactivating the comment links and not allowing others to express their views or question what he had posted. This made the members of the community discuss his posts and ideas in other weblogs.

Contrary to Mahyaar's attitude, many Iranians express themselves cogently as belonging to a warm-blooded (*khoon-garm*) nation and they expect the same characteristic from others. As part of warm-bloodedness, Iranians try to develop their social *dowrehs* by communicating with others and making more connections. Leaving Iran and coming to live in another country, they try to make friends with other people and start a new social *dowreh*. However, it seems that for the bloggers communicating with Australians is the most difficult task, and they have found it very difficult to be accepted by Australians whether at work or elsewhere. This has brought them a sense of marginality and alienation from Australians and has made them turn to other migrant ethnic groups who live in Australia. Bhugra and Becker (2005) state that it is common for migrants to develop a sense of alienation if they feel their social and cultural values are different from the surrounding environment. On the other hand, they may feel a sense of belonging if the environment suggests similar social and cultural traits. Haamed writes about his experience of socialising with others in Australia:

Although we try to mix with Australians and don't let our non-Australianness interfere with our daily life, I should confess that it is not possible. Any way that you put it, you come to this conclusion that if we were in Iran, and had some colleagues and friends, definitely the foreign ones would not be among our first choice, or the intimate ones. Some time ago I was talking to an Iranian friend whose children were born here and now are going to high school. I asked him if his children didn't have any problem in communicating and being with other children. He said, "no" and continued that when children reach high school age, they find their own peers. But the interesting point is that our children from any family background go and find friends from other nationalities such as Iraqis, Turks, and other Middle Easterners even if they have never seen Iran before. Of course I should add that there certainly are exceptions and I don't have any experience about that, but as this friend said, it will be the third generation that becomes a hundred percent Australian.

My experience so far is that I have a very good relationship with my Israeli friend regardless of all the tension between the two countries and also my friend from Palestine!!!

Haamed thinks that Australians around him are not receptive of him and his culture even if he tries to ignore the fact that he is a foreigner. Part of this concept is that he thinks any Iranian may show stronger solidarity toward his/her own nation rather than mixing with other nationalities. Whether right or wrong, the lack of success in mingling with Australians has driven him to other migrant ethnic groups, and he believes that communicating with other migrants and being accepted by them is easier than the dominant culture. In order to prove this, he even ironically mentions his best friends to be from Israel and Palestine showing how the concept of migration will redefine life for people of different ethnicities in the diaspora. An Iranian, an Israeli, and a Palestinian, all from countries that allegedly make a triangle of problems and conflict in the Middle East, are close friends regardless of what is going on between their governments.

The reason for Haamed's unhappiness with respect to socialising with Australians and being driven to other ethnic groups might be the difference between the nature of Iranian and Australian society. In determining how well individuals who migrate to other countries are able to adjust to the new environment, Bhugra and Becker (2005) suggest that it is crucial to consider the nature of the society from which they come from and the one they migrate to. What they underscore is the distinction between collectivistic/socio-centric societies which emphasise "cohesiveness, strong ties

between individuals, group solidarity, emotional interdependence, traditionalism, and a collective identity” (p. 22) versus individualistic/egocentric societies which stress autonomy and independence for individuals. Bhugra (2004) hypothesises that people who migrate from a predominantly collectivistic society and enter a society which is mostly individualistic may find it difficult to adjust to the new culture especially if their belief and value system is socio-centric. Iranian *khoon-garmi* (warm-bloodedness) makes Haamed an outgoing person with a need to communicate and make friends with others in the new environment, but the individualistic nature of the new society is not welcoming to his needs. Therefore, he finds making friends with other migrants easier. Haamed and his friends have two things in common: being migrants and coming from the Middle East. These two features seem to be unifying factors in building their friendship in the diaspora.

Like his previous post on *tavagho*, Haamed’s performance in this post is a reminder of ethnic solidarity to the reader and demystifies some of the utopic views that some Iranians have toward the West. Most of Haamed’s writings are about the cultural differences in the context of migration trying to give a better and more realistic view of living in the diaspora as opposed to what Iranians may get through most Hollywood movies where life is a “bed of roses”. Furthermore, he seems to write such cultural points in the hope that he can persuade those Iranians who hold a general negative attitude toward other Iranians to value each other more, especially when they migrate to another country. He emphasises this point in one post:

Haamed 21/12/2008 post# 3

When I started this weblog I didn’t expect it to become a source of income nor did I open a friend-finding corporation....I only did this because I thought it will be helpful to those who want to come to Australia later. I also felt that I would write my real experience of living in Australia so that others have a better understanding of this place before they start their journey.... So when you reach here, don’t think that you should avoid other Iranians. At least answer my congratulatory emails.... My whole point is, don’t you think that you’re ultimately an Iranian and even in Australia it is other Iranians who can communicate with you more due to the common cultural background?...

He is keen on creating a situation via his posts so that Iranians trust each other more in the context of diaspora regardless of the general *shak/tardid* (insecurity) among them, and make them develop and solidify their ethnic and social *dowrehs* as migrants. As discussed below, sociality among Iranians in the diaspora is a very sensitive issue as some avoid each other. Haamed is critical of the way some Iranians view each other, and he hopes to encourage a positive attitude among Iranians via his posts.

Part of sociality for any nation in the diaspora is ideally socialising with one's own people. As individuals move to another country, they try to find each other and build their own community in the new environment. Ethnic density may be of help in reducing the emotional tension and stress of migration and may reduce the feeling of isolation and alienation for new migrants (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). One benefit of ethnic density is the social support that migrants can receive in another country through socialising with people from the same culture and background. However, Iranian ethnic density in Australasia does not seem to provide any support as there does not seem to be any strong social network among the new generation of Iranian migrants in Australasia. This may partly originate from the long tradition of *badbini* (mistrust) in Persian culture and the present structure of Iran that has made people vigilant in their daily interaction. This attitude is a kind of repelling force that limits Iranians in socialising with each other. Homaa has criticised this issue in several posts:

Homaa 04/03/2007 post#15

In one weblog, a commenter had left a comment like this: "a hundred Chinese can be put together in one room, but two Iranians can't live in one country". Are Iranians afraid of each other in a foreign land? This has always been my question. When we were new in Australia, as soon as we faced other Iranians, they stopped their talk [in Persian] so that we didn't understand they were Iranian. Oh this poor nation. Well, they are right. To be frank with ourselves, we are afraid of each other and the reason is not our gene, genus, nature, or anything like that. The reason is that all of us have poked our noses into each other's affairs repeatedly so that we have become a nosy nation. By all of us I mean the sick society in which we grew up; from school to university, amusement parks, and TV. They all have taught us how to interfere with other people's affair, and since we are nosy about other people or even our close friends and relatives, we fear that others may be nosy about us. As soon as someone speaks highly of himself/herself, we ask where they get the money instead of trying to concentrate on our own life. If someone criticises us, we want to slap them on the face instead of thinking about what they say. That's who I am.

Homaa starts the post by a quotation from a commenter which is a witty way of using a common proverb in Persian culture. The original proverb is something like “ten dervishes can sleep on one carpet, and two kings cannot live in one kingdom”. Dervish in this proverb refers to a member of a Sufi fraternity. Sufis are famous for their detachment from the materialistic world and for living a simple life. Homaa is trying to show her anger at how highly expectant Iranians are, and this high expectation has turned them into nosy people who want to know the details of other people and how they get successful. Therefore, the element of mistrust is available all the time among Iranians which causes Iranians to be afraid of socialising with each other. This type of Iranian attitude might be one of the reasons that some Iranians prefer virtual *dowrehs* in the hope that they get to know each other better online before any face-to-face communication.

While Homaa and some other bloggers may state such facts about some Iranians, this cannot be true among all in the Iranian migrant community. There are some bloggers that definitely oppose this kind of belief as they have received a lot of help from other Iranians and they have a good relationship with each other. Haamed is one of them:

Haamed 07/07/2008 post# 3

Some Iranians get on their high horse as soon as they receive their visa. They start to groan and complain about Iran and being Iranian and saying bad things about Iran. After they come to Australia and face some problems for a while, they forget all their mottos and slogans. It is better not to look at other Iranians like this so that we don't feel embarrassed later on. If you're reading this post now, just remember and be sure that good Iranians are many. I had heard bad things in the past, yet I didn't see anything but good things from Iranians here even from those Iranians who have been here for a long time....

Haamed is criticising the general attitude among many Iranians who always feel negative about Iran and being Iranian. This kind of attitude is quite common in the present society as some people think that the Iranian nationality is the source of all their misfortune. This has made them complain about anything related to Iran and being an Iranian. Such people see other countries especially the West as a utopia, and they think their only salvation is to leave Iran and live in another country, detaching themselves

from their Iranian identity. Therefore, when they migrate they try to keep their distance from other Iranians as they think other Iranians may bring them misfortune. Haamed is trying to advise new Iranian migrants to think differently about other Iranians especially in the diaspora as they can be of help to them. In the same way, Mehdi agrees with what Haamed has posted and criticises Iranians with this kind of attitude:

Mehdi 09/07/2008 comment#3

In fact there are people with different attitudes and personalities everywhere and this is true of Iranians as well. I personally have many good Iranian friends here [Australia] and they have helped us a lot. Fundamentally, I don't agree with the idea of avoiding other Iranians. This is usually the opinion of those people who have come here because they have had a bad experience with some Iranians, and they want to throw themselves in the arms of foreigners and become someone like them.

On the whole, it seems that creating a social life in the diaspora is an emotional challenge for some of the bloggers. Most of these challenges are the result of cultural schemata that impede sociality in the diaspora. Overcoming the problems of sociality may need more time as the bloggers are on average new to Australia and they still need to experience the dominant culture and be more flexible in their belief system. Nonetheless, the posts and comments in this section revealed that the creation of a virtual *dowreh* has been of great help to this group of Iranian migrants as it has provided an opportunity for them to share their stories of sociality in the diaspora with other members. This virtual *dowreh* has given them the chance to discuss the issues that have impeded their sociality in the diaspora by informing the audience of problems and seeking advice as how to remove the barriers that stop them from socialisation. In the next section, the focus will be on acculturation which is closely related to sociality and the emotional experience of the bloggers.

6.6 Acculturation and emotion

What happens to people who have grown up in one cultural context when they move to a new cultural context where they try to re-establish their lives has been the target of acculturation studies for a long time. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, p. 149) define acculturation as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”. They maintain that in the process of acculturation cultural changes occur for at least one of the two groups in contact. Berry (1990) states that one group undergoes more changes although changes may happen in both groups. While the original model of acculturation focused on changes at the collective level, Graves (1967) made a distinction between collective and individual (psychological) acculturation suggesting that acculturation is both a change in the culture of a group as well as in the psychology of the individual. The same is true of the bloggers in this study. The data suggest that the process of acculturation caused changes in the psychology of the individuals as well as the culture of the groups. As exemplified later in this section, individuals wrote about their psychological changes as a result of living in the new diaspora and these changes were discussed in the online community by other bloggers and readers acknowledging that the changes affected their Persian culture.

According to Berry (1997) there are three factors that lead to variation in the degree of acculturation. These factors include voluntariness where groups have come into contact with the new culture voluntarily, mobility and the spread of the new culture to people who did not look for it, and the degree of permanence for groups to reside in a different culture. He concludes that these three factors contribute to the variation in acculturation, variation which can be found in “the course, the level of difficulty, and to some extent the eventual outcome of acculturation” (p. 9). He maintains that in the process of acculturation two central issues arise among both groups as to how to acculturate. The first issue is the degree of importance that each group places on maintaining its cultural identity and the second one is the degree of involvement and participation in other cultures. Based on these two issues, he offers a conceptual framework which covers different acculturation strategies:

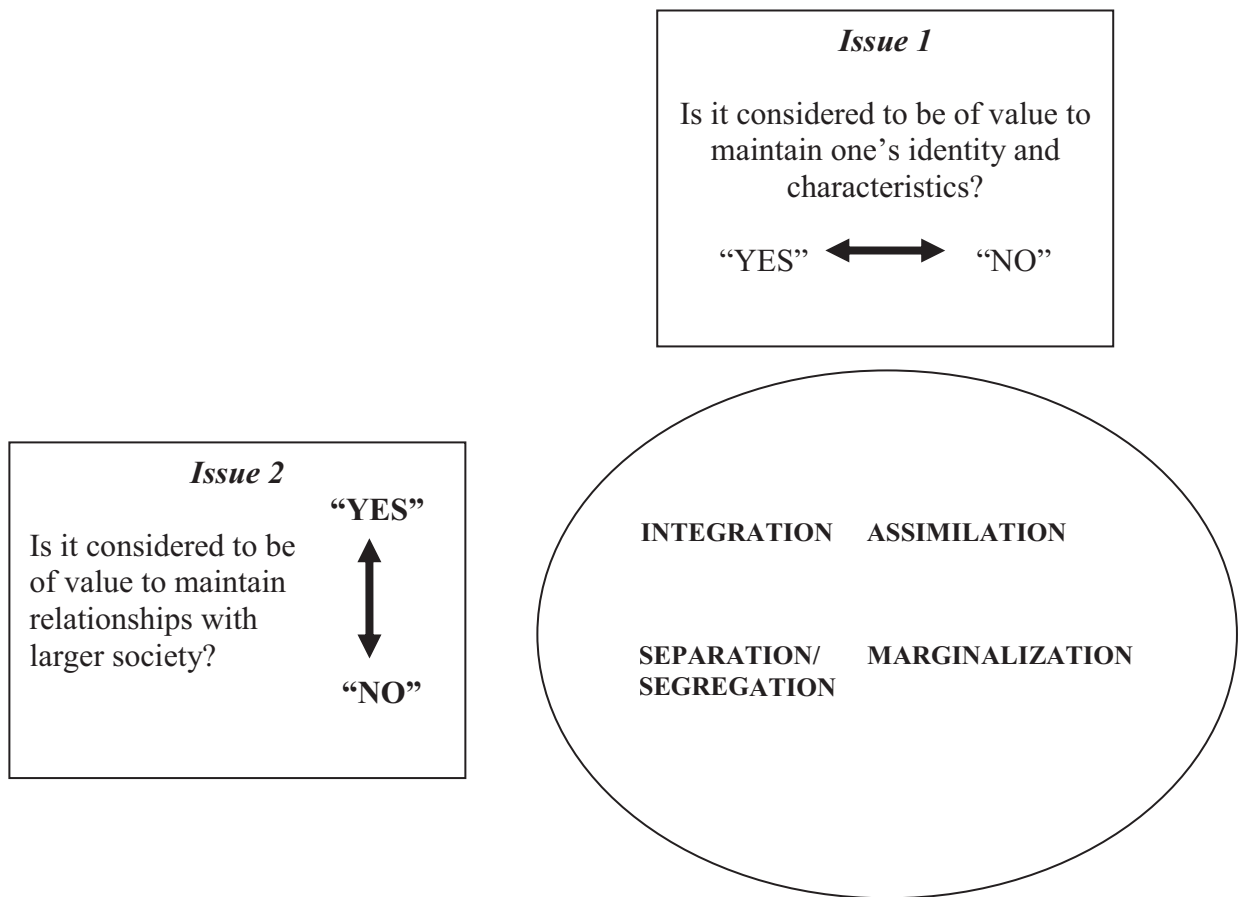


Figure 6.1 Acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997, p. 10)

The assumption which underlies this framework is that there is a non-dominant group coming into contact with a dominant culture where the members of the group are free to choose how to acculturate. Depending on the acceptance or rejection of the members of the non-dominant groups, four types of acculturation strategies might be utilised. If individuals do not try to maintain their cultural identity and move to accept the dominant culture, then “assimilation” takes over; on the other hand, if individuals hold on to their cultural values and resist changes, then “separation” strategies are used. The next strategy is “integration” where individuals show interest in the new culture and interact with it on a daily basis while maintaining their own cultural values. And finally,

individuals may draw upon a “marginalisation” strategy when there is little or no interest in maintaining their own cultural identity and the dominant culture. The use of any of these strategies depend on several factors which cause both group-level and individual acculturation.

The above framework works well for the bloggers in this study as they are all immigrants who have voluntarily chosen Australia, and they have freedom to choose how to acculturate. But before analysing their posts regarding acculturation, it is necessary to highlight the factors that are involved in the process of acculturation. For this purpose I draw upon Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework and introduce the bloggers’ posts where relevant. His acculturation framework, which follows, is a comprehensive one which is a combination of other research findings. He argues that all the variables in the framework should be taken into account in order to have a better understanding of psychological acculturation; otherwise any conclusion about individuals who are in the process of acculturation will be incomplete. Furthermore, he points out that it is not possible to include all the variables in a small-scale study. Therefore, in what follows, I will try to introduce and analyse the points that have been highlighted in the bloggers’ posts.

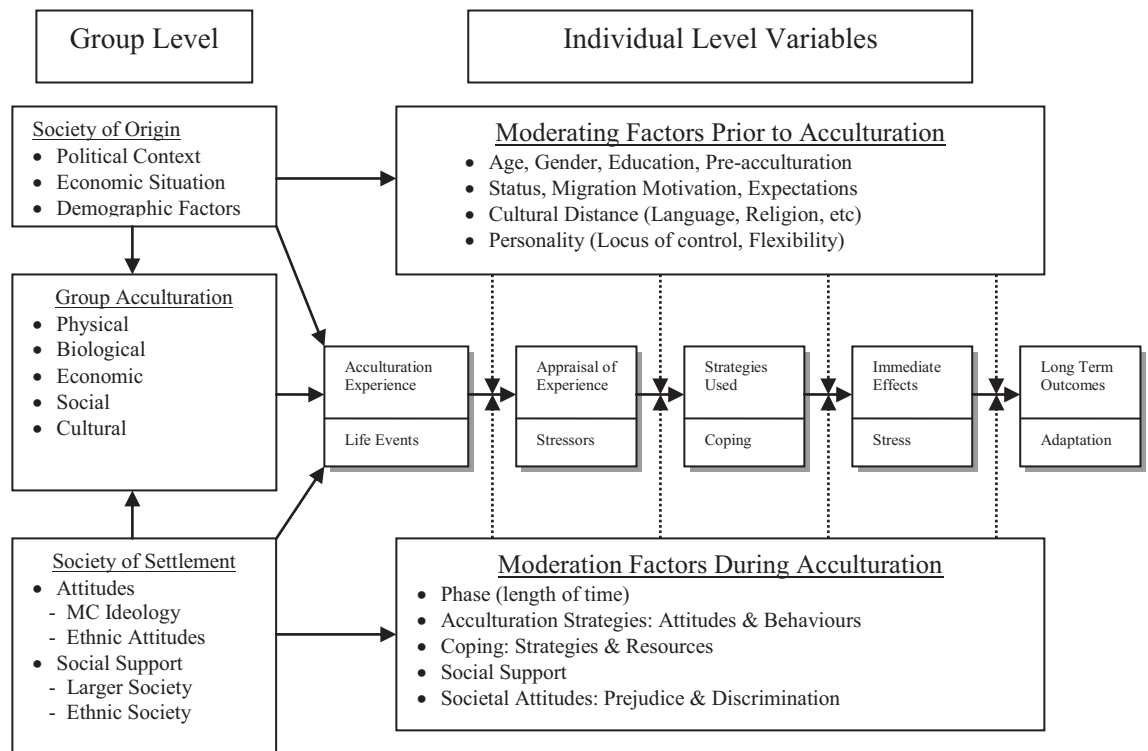


Figure 6.2 A framework for acculturation research (Berry, 1997, p. 15)

The framework consists of several major sections. As can be seen, group-level characteristics are on the left and individual variables are on the right. Factors on the top are those that already exist in individuals prior to any change and the bottom ones are those that arise during the process of acculturation. The middle part of the framework presents the processes that both group and individuals go through. Berry (1997) maintains that the flow in this framework is from left to right which begins with many changes that the cultural groups in contact bring to their collective features such as political and social structures and then moves to the individual level where different psychological changes may happen.

Starting with society of origin and society of settlement, it is logical to discuss the background of the Iranian bloggers from the perspective of pull/push factors in determining their migration. The present political context, the weak economy, and the young population of Iran who are competing with each other for job opportunities has forced some people to migrate. In other words, the concept of migration for some

Iranians including the bloggers is forced but voluntary. On the other hand, the society of settlement, Australia, acts as a pull factor due to a better political climate, a better economy, pluralistic nature of the society, multicultural ideology, acceptance of ethnic groups, and social support for them. Therefore, the society of settlement may become attractive to some Iranians and a favourite spot for migration. Domestic factors seem to have caused a lot of psychological pressure for the majority of the bloggers and they saw migration as a way of releasing the psychological tensions of living in Iran. Almost all the reasons the bloggers have for leaving Iran are tainted with negative emotions and how they were pushed into a corner by the system leaving them migration as the only choice. Homaa writes about her reasons of migration:

Homaa 10/04/2006 post# 6

I'm going to tell you what made us decide to go to Australia. Ten years ago when everybody was going to Canada, I had the chance to go, too. But I was waiting for my husband to be sure of leaving Iran as he believed that if a person couldn't feel comfortable in his own country, then he wouldn't be comfortable anywhere else in the world. On the other hand, as I had free tertiary education, I had to work for some years to get rid of my debt³⁹. Therefore, I had to stay and after that, I got busy with my job, and I was thinking that I would progress and get promoted little by little. But Alas! It was just building castles in the air. In Iran not even men, let alone women, can progress and get promoted without having a series of tools such as sycophancy and connections. You know that the whole system is corrupt and if you don't have any influence, then you get nowhere. Anyway, I got pregnant and got busy with raising my child and changed my job after a while. This story was going on till one of my co-workers, who was also my good friend, had the chance to go to Australia. He told me a lot of good things about Australia and its opportunities each time that I saw him. He told us so many good and amazing things that my husband, who was also sick and tired of everything, decided to apply for migration....

Her description of her workplace and expectations of life in Iran is mixed with despair, anger, and seemingly the lack of a promising future. On the other hand, her friend's description of Australia is so promising to her and her husband that they decide to migrate. Homaa's post shows how the society of origin had put so much psychological pressure on her and her family that Australia became a sort of utopia for them, a place to

³⁹ In Iran state universities are free with the understanding that graduates reciprocate with an equivalent number of years of public service.

reach their dreams. This kind of attitude is quite common in the bloggers' posts with respect to pre-migration views of the two countries. They have normally criticised the place of origin and thought of migration as a way of getting out of a miserable situation. But their views do not stay the same as they go through the process of acculturation.

Given that acculturation starts at the group level, there are a number of posts in which the bloggers have talked about changes that have affected their life, and even have advised other Iranians who are planning to migrate about how to deal with them. Among them are physical and environmental changes that have struck them quite unexpectedly. For instance, several bloggers have written about the host country's weather:

Homa 07/07/2007 post# 2

The first thing that I still remember from the first day that I arrived in Sydney is... the intolerable cold breeze that penetrated to my marrow, and made me shake till the end of winter. The following year, I came to the conclusion that I shouldn't keep myself very warm or I wouldn't get used to it. This year I still feel the cold weather to my bones, and I don't think I will ever get used to it.

Anis 08/09/2007 post# 2

Free energy

While a lot of countries around the world have entered summer, we're spending the second month of winter in Australia. Before coming here, by searching in different web pages and weblogs, we came to the conclusion that Australia has spring-like weather most of the year especially Brisbane. Therefore, we gave away all our winter clothes and bought clothes which were suitable for hot weather. However, we had made a mistake in some part of our calculation, and it was the fact that we were leaving the land of free energy. In fact, what I see here is that Aussies have adapted to nature more than us. In Iran due to cheap electricity, natural gas, and other oil products we always keep the temperature inside our houses at an ideal level, and most of the time we don't feel extreme cold or hot temperatures; the temperature in Iranian houses is spring-like most of the year.... We are working on becoming part of nature here, but whatever we do, we can't!

I feel sick of the weather here. The weather is really crazy here. Sometimes you see a lot of changes during the day so you don't know what season it is. Sunny in the morning, rainy at 10 AM, hot and humid in the afternoon, rainy again, cold again, and the cycle is repeated over and over. This weather gives me anxiety and depression all the time. The reason is that my body can't understand that when I wear a T-shirt I don't need to carry a jacket and an umbrella. My biology says T-shirts are for summer and umbrellas are for winter. Oh God how many years are needed to get used to it? The only thing that I hadn't seen in my life was lightening which I saw here as well. Thank you God! It was really frightening!

All three bloggers are complaining about how the weather has affected their life. Homaa thinks that she will never get used to the cold weather in Australia. The reason for this is expressed by Anis. Energy in Iran is cheaper than Australia and people are not that vigilant over its consumption. A lot of families keep their heaters or air-conditioners on day in day out during certain seasons in order to have a favourable temperature inside the house. Therefore, they do not feel the severity of the cold or hot weather. Paaeez is comparing the geography of the two countries. Iran has a distinct border between the four seasons in almost all regions, and the weather generally does not change dramatically during each season. This predefined schema has become a source of depression and anxiety for Paaeez as her appraisal of the new weather condition is negative. For Homaa, the encounter with the weather has turned into a bitter memory that she cannot forget even after two years. Her description of the weather gives the reader the impression that her experience of the cold weather is the same as someone who lives in the coldest spot on earth. On the whole, the three posts show how the geography of the region affects the acculturation of the bloggers as a group of Iranians in this part of the world, and makes their life uncomfortable.

In terms of factors that exist prior to acculturation, a number of statements can be made based on the writing of the bloggers. Age has been considered to relate to the process of acculturation. The general belief is that acculturation is easier if it starts at an early age. This aspect seems to be true of the bloggers as they have written about their children's fast and smooth adaptability to the new environment while it may not be a smooth process for them as they are in their twenties or thirties with a strong system of cultural values that have already been formed. Thus, the bloggers may make use of an

acculturation strategy in which they maintain their cultural identity and values in the home while adapting to the dominant culture in the society. Homaa has written about this fact after her citizenship exam comparing Iranian cultural identity with that of her Indian friend:

Homaa 04/10/2007 post# 2

I have an Indian co-worker who is my close friend. Close not in the meaning of intimacy but close because we have a lot of cultural things in common. She has created the same type of lifestyle that she has had in India on a smaller scale here with exactly the same torturing style that is common in that part of the world. She spends her weekends only with her Indian friends torturing herself by cooking several types of food in order to be a perfect Indian....She is a nice girl like any other Iranian woman who has the same character....sometimes my question is, "if we want to stick to our cultural values, then why Australia? And why not India or Iran? Then Mr John Howard expects people like me and my Indian friend to become Australians with a citizenship exam! No sir. If you're lucky, then we may become aware of the changes around us in the society; otherwise an exam can't convert a bigoted (*gheirati*) Iranian into an Aussie.

Homaa is subconsciously talking about the cultural identity that has been formed through years of living in a certain culture. She highlights how difficult and complex some aspects of culture are regarding receiving guests by mentioning that they are torturous but still should be practised even if they cause some trouble for them. In fact, she is using her Indian friend as a way of referring to how people in Iran have to prepare an elaborate *mehmaani* (reception) any time they are going to have guests; a process that is tiring and may take up to several hours. Then, she finishes the post by emphasising that migrants like her may try to adapt to the dominant culture outside their cultural identity zone, but this may not happen inside the *dowrehs* of family and friends. By publishing such a post Homaa is critical of some Persian cultural norms and social hierarchies such as *ta'aarof* (ritual courtesy) and self-lowering and other-raising communication strategies which are needed to save *aaberu* (face) in *dowreh* encounters. She thinks that such cultural traits are torturous but there is no way to escape from them even in the new environment, and people have to perform their cultural identity at any cost. She is signalling to the reader that they could have a hard time in the diaspora if they do not try to get rid of some aspects of their cultural identity that may cause them

trouble. The tone of the post toward the end clearly shows her criticism of the Iranian culture as it has made her into a *gheirati* (bigoted) person who is resistant to change. Homaa's post is in line with studies of Iranians in other parts of the world (see e.g. Bozorgmehr, 1997; Chaichian, 1997) that indicate Iranians are receptive of the host/dominant culture while keeping their own cultural identity.

Homaa's comment "like any other Iranian woman" brings us to the issue of gender as another variable that can affect the process of acculturation. The literature on Iranian gender and migration is somehow contradictory depending on the status of participants, location, educational level, and length of stay. However, the bulk of the research findings show that women have a more positive attitude towards acculturation. For instance, in a study of acculturation among Iranian refugees in the Netherlands Te Lindert, Korzilius, Van de Vijver, Kroon, and Arends-Toth (2008) found that Iranian women felt less discriminated against in the society and they were generally positive in their experience of acculturation; their experience was accompanied by more positive feelings and happiness. Other studies in the United States and Canada (cf. Hanassab & Tidwell, 1996; Hojat, Shapurian, Nayerahmadi, Farzaneh, Foroughi, Parsi et al., 1999; Moghissi, 1999) confirm that Iranian immigrant men showed a weaker adjustment and more cultural resistance while women were more flexible in their attitudes toward Western culture. Jamarani's (2007) findings on Iranian women's attitude regarding their status in Australia suggest that Iranian women were generally critical of the way the traditional structure of Iranian society views them and favoured the Australian government's support for women. They thought that the government support provides them with more self-confidence and helps them to be more independent, although some women in the study maintained that more independence may have a negative effect on Iranian family values. The same attitude is true of the bloggers as they have written about their experience as women in Australia. I assume that part of the positive attitude toward Western culture for Iranian women is the traditional patriarchal structure of the society and the religious ideology that assign different roles to men and women in Iran. Homaa has a post in which she has highlighted the equality of men and women. Her post is based on the information from the Australian citizenship test book that she had to study for her citizenship exam:

Homaa 02/10/2007 post# 1

There are a number of beautiful sentences in the book that I'm reading for the citizenship exam. Some of them are as follows:

Respect of all individuals regardless of background

Freedom of speech and freedom of expression

Freedom of religion and secular government

Freedom of association

Equality in the eye of law

Equality of men and women

Equality of opportunity

Tolerance, mutual respect, and compassion for those in need

Each of these titles has explanations that you can go and read. I expected the section on men and women to be longer, but there were only four sentences:

Men and women have equal rights in Australia.

Both men and women have equal access to education and employment.

Both men and women can join the Army.

Men and women are treated equally in courts of law.

Oh God, how happy and powerful I feel when I read these things!

In writing these points about Australia, Homaa is generally underscoring some of the discriminating differences between the two societies and criticising specifically the traditional view of Iranian society toward women. Her conclusion at the end is a combination of the happiness and power that she feels she has gained in the new location. Homaa's post received several comments which varied from congratulatory notes and wishes for good luck to motivational words for the exam preparation:

Aatrisaa 03/10/2007 comment# 3

Dear Homaa, congratulations on your becoming a citizen. I myself am ready to take part in any exam for that blue passport- is the colour of the passport really blue?

Saaghar 05/10/2007 comment# 8

Dear Homaa, I hope everything goes well for this exam. Unfortunately, we haven't been so lucky as they have changed the citizenship rules and we have to wait longer....

I'm telling you this so that you read the citizenship book more eagerly and get ready for the exam. I also keep this comment short as I want you to go and do your homework.

Regarding the male bloggers, while they have progressed in some aspects of acculturation such as dress code, and dietary habits and show flexibility, they are still resistant against the change of cultural identity. The following two posts by Hamid and Khashaayaar show the flexibility and resistance of two males:

Hamid 11/12/2006 post# 16

Impact of the environment

You may have heard that the environment can affect individuals. Well, some people say that when the nature of a person is formed, it stays that way and doesn't get affected by the environment anymore. But I don't think there is anyone who denies the fact that the new environment doesn't affect individuals even if it's very little. Well, I'm going to tell you about some of the impacts the environment has had on me here:

1. Back home there was no reason to shave regularly. When you see people with beards every day, then you become like them. Now due to the blessing of Sydney, I shave regularly.
2. I remember how strange it was to see a woman without *hejaab* (cover) in Iran by accident. Now I will have the same feeling in Australia if I see a woman with *hejaab*.
3. I remember I was surprised to see a person run in a public park in Iran, now I have joined the people who run in the street here.
4. I felt embarrassed to wear shorts in front of my mum, but in Australia I wear shorts almost everywhere except my workplace.
5. The effect of food is unbelievable here. I have gained 7 kilos in 7 months; one kilo each month and I don't know what will happen next the way I'm gaining weight....

Khashaayaar 15/09/2008 post# 3

After living here for almost three years, I still don't feel that I belong. There are a number of factors that give me this feeling. One of my anxieties is that I can't even imagine my children here; the image of my children going to school here. After three years, I still can't visualise building my house in these streets, I can't think of making my memories here. The images don't match with my mental framework. I don't know how to say it. I can't imagine my children playing in the alleys of Sydney. The question is not liking or disliking. I think any of us who thinks of the future makes an image of it whether right or wrong. My image of my family doesn't match with the streets and alleys of this place.

Hamid has expressed his flexibility in the new environment by adapting some of the cultural and social norms of the dominant culture. Titling the post “impact of the environment” he subconsciously describes how he has progressed in the process of acculturation and has come to accept some norms of the society of settlement. By contrasting some aspects of life in the homeland with that of the host society he tries to illustrate his adjustment to the new environment and how he has changed as the result of living in Australia. Of interest in his post is his attitude toward the culture of *hojb va hayaa* (modesty and virtue), as discussed before. He shows the reader how he has lowered his cultural script of *hojb va hayaa* in Australia by wearing shorts in public, something which is against *gheirat* (manhood) in the traditional structure of Iranian society and almost impossible to perform. In direct contrast, Khashaayaar expresses his cultural resistance by talking about how impossible it will be for him to imagine his children growing up in Australia. He seems to have kept the traditional Iranian family values even after living almost three years in the new environment. This kind of mentality makes it hard for him to think of raising children in a different country with a different culture. The idea of accepting some aspects of the host culture is so far-fetched for him that he cannot even visualise his future of having a family in the host society.

While education, pre-departure status, economic status, and migration motivation are considered as influential variables in the process of acculturation, they do not seem to have bothered the bloggers in this study in a negative and stressful way. There are a number of reasons which are reflected in their posts. The bloggers are all well-educated people with post-graduate qualifications and they all have immigrated as skilled migrant workers. This means that higher education was an advantage in finding jobs and thus causing lower levels of stress. The majority of them say they had good jobs and were financially stable before migration, and as we saw in Anis’ post, their job status is more or less the same in Australia as what it was in Iran. Therefore, acculturation in these areas might not have created any negative or major emotional experience for the bloggers as there are no negative or complaining posts on the weblogs.

However, cultural distance and factors such as language has impeded acculturation for the bloggers and it has demanded more cultural learning and greater distance from the dominant culture. Basically, the English language is one of the major themes of discussion among the bloggers and their readers and some think of English as the main

barrier that makes adaptation to the dominant culture a dream for them. Almost all posts and discussions of the English language are full of negative emotions. Homaa has several posts that are full of emotion and show how alienated she feels from the dominant culture when it comes to language:

Homaa 01/11/2006 post# 3

When I was in Iran, I always thought my English language was good. I always received top marks both at school and university.... Last year when we got to Sydney, I thought that I didn't have any problems with English. But when I started job-hunting, I felt miserable when I talked to employment agencies over the phone. I didn't understand anything....When I started my job, I tried very hard to listen more and speak less in order to get used to the strange accents around me. If I didn't understand them, I asked them to repeat themselves....But now I have another problem. The problem is that I don't understand their English when, for example, they propose the name Helga for one of our co-workers and everybody laughs; or one co-worker who had drunk a lot the previous night tells me at work that he was talking on the big white phone all night, and I ask him like a dumb person what he is talking about....Sometimes when they talk about comedy episodes on TV and laugh, again I don't understand them and just look at them like a person who has come from Mars. When I see these things, then I understand that I don't know any English. Since I don't have the cultural background, I always fall behind like a dummy....

Homaa 28/08/2007 post# 2

After living for a while in a new country, you start to feel doubtful about your English language and your behaviour. Since you have the IELTS certificate and you have studied English for several years, you think you are a god in English language; therefore, we speak any way that we want and get the job done. But as time passes, due to environmental factors such as co-workers, news, your children's school, daily shopping, radio, TV, and newspapers you understand how illiterate you are regarding the language and culture. Those poor people who had to understand us! Because of this, your self-confidence that couldn't be shaken even by an earthquake at the beginning starts to decline day by day. It reaches a level where you get anxious and you feel a kind of phobia toward society. I'm exactly like this now....Now I'm afraid of making mistakes and the types of strange looks that I receive when I talk nonsense or I'm unclear. Those strange looks get on my nerves....

Although this place [Australia] is good, beautiful, and attractive, it's not mine yet. It's not mine because I can't stop thinking in Persian when I'm at work and keep that part of my brain which belongs to the second language active so that I can take part in talks that are about me in the office. I feel stupid when I repeat the same thing that my co-worker seemingly has said two seconds ago and I didn't get it. I feel miserable when all the words escape from my mind and I have to go back to my brain's archive to seek the words for different concepts, and this is when I even hate the Persian language. I feel embarrassed when I cannot analyse in my brain the fact that if I don't understand my co-worker's talk, it's because I have become stupid. I feel ashamed when I become mute in our work meetings. Is it because I'm still not in control of my job or my English?...

Looking at the posts chronologically it seems that the issue of language is an unsolvable one for Homaa. Her post in 2006 reveals that she started her journey with a lot of self-confidence in her English ability. She thought that she would not face any problems in Australia as she was counting on her level of English. However, problems started to surface as soon as she started looking for a job, and the situation got worse after she started work. Part of the problem for Homaa, and perhaps many other new migrants, is learning English with minimum or no exposure to the culture behind that. She, like other Iranians, has learned language in an EFL context where the emphasis is mostly on fluency and accuracy rather than culture, and if there is any touch of culture, it is mainly American as the dominant system of English teaching is American. Consequently, people's English cognition is far from Australasia; even sky TV channels do not cover any Australasian programs. Hence, any casual talk at Homaa's workplace is problematic as she cannot understand the cultural points which are exchanged during the talk. Her second post is evidence of how environmental factors have shaken her English confidence. Her length of stay seems to be a debilitating factor bringing her marginality. She has reached a stage where she feels anxious and agoraphobic. She feels that she cannot tolerate the puzzled look that native speakers give her when they do not understand her speech, and this has made her nervous and she feels intimidated to converse with other people. Her third post several months later still shows her problem with English. She underscores the beauty of the society and the quality of life in Australia yet she believes the society does not belong to her due to the language barrier. Her mental state has reached a level that she calls herself stupid, which shows how miserable she feels.

The problem of language in the process of acculturation is true of other bloggers and commenters as well, and they feel marginal, too. Several commenters, who are also bloggers, have left comments for Homaa:

Hamid 08/11/2007 comment# 1

Oh, the problem of language won't be solved until the second decade of migration and it still won't be complete. I remember that when I was new here I used to mock the Asians who have been living here over 20 years for not having an Aussie accent or speaking good English. My assumption was that after one year I would master the language like a native. But after one year not only did I not progress but also my self-confidence dropped to absolute zero. The biggest pain is that as you move ahead your expectations for yourself become more and more, and this causes more disillusionment....

Pezhvaak 08/11/2008 comment# 3

I think the English language doesn't have any feeling for me. I mean it doesn't transfer the feeling that the Persian language gives me. Maybe that's why English doesn't stay in my long-term memory. This situation is really nerve-racking...

These two posts show the importance of the audience in the virtual *dowreh* where they support other members unconditionally. Hamid is trying to soothe Homaa's anxiety about her language problem by bringing his own story of language barriers to the community and share it with Homaa and others. Pezhvaak is also trying to support Homaa emotionally by mentioning his lack of feeling for English. What Pezhvaak implies in his comment is his background as a Persian speaker and his limited level of English constrain him in expressing his feelings. The Persian language and culture are intertwined with mystic poetry and love stories that are narrated chest to chest (meaning person to person) from generation to generation. Thus, in my experience, it is quite customary to see illiterate people in Iran who recite poems from famous Iranian poets and poetesses or narrate love stories by heart in *dowrehs* of family and friends. As children grow up in such *dowrehs*, they learn and recite such love poems and stories as part of their interaction with others. Nonetheless, such qualities are lost in another language and culture where Iranians such as Pezhvaak cannot transfer their feelings due

to insufficient language and differences in culture. This makes Pezhvaak complain about not being able to transfer his feelings outside the Persian language. Pezhvaak is trying to sympathise with Homaa by implying that the language barrier is a general problem for other Iranians as well.

On the whole, the above discussion reveals substantial evidence with respect to the acculturation process in the bloggers' writing. What their writing suggests is that the bloggers and some of their audience are still in the process of "enculturation" and cultural learning. What happens next in the process of acculturation is a question that cannot be answered at this stage, and more longitudinal studies of this virtual *dowreh* are needed in order to see the trends of acculturation. However, the discussion illustrated the significance of the virtual *dowreh* for this group of Iranian migrants that provides a virtual setting for the discussions regarding their feelings about their slow process of acculturation. It also brought to light the importance of the audience and their performance in the ongoing discussions of migration in this virtual *dowreh*.

6.7 Return and emotion

The final stage of migration for the bloggers is their decision to stay and live in the society of settlement, or after all the troubles that they have been through to emigrate, leave everything behind and go back to Iran. With respect to return, four themes emerge in their writing: (a) choosing to live in the new environment; (b) becoming transnational; (c) being lost and confused in the migration; and (d) staying in the host country at the moment but wanting to return. In this section the focus is on these four themes and how emotionally the bloggers have reacted to each condition. The discussion will be around identity issues and how accepting or rejecting a new identity affects acculturation for the bloggers.

Any migrant who is in the process of cultural transition as a result of migration must deal with new social and cultural pressures and norms. Part of the coping is the decision as to how/whether to integrate with the society of settlement. In order to achieve integration they have to develop their "cultural competence" (Padilla & Perez, 2003) for

their new environment. Cultural competence “refers to the learned ability to function in a culture in a manner that is congruent with the values, beliefs, customs, mannerism, and language of the majority of members of the culture” (Padilla & Perez, 2003, p. 42). If the acquisition of complete competence of the new culture takes place, then the individual may live peacefully in the new culture by adapting to the challenges and standards of the dominant culture. However, developing competence in a new culture is not easy due to the original socialisation of individuals and their social affiliation where individuals’ thoughts and behaviours get influenced by being a member of a group. In principle, this is in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) with the core concept of group membership of individuals. The theory posits that individuals “think, feel, and act as members of collective groups, institutions, and cultures” (Padilla & Perez, 2003). In the same vein, the display of emotion by the bloggers on their weblogs seems to be a social act where each blogger exposes the emotional experience based on being a member of a collective group in the diaspora.

6.7.1 Choosing to live in the new environment

The bloggers seem to have challenged their identity and to have their identity challenged in different ways in the new environment. Depending on the degree of adaptation or rejection, they have chosen one of the above themes. Anis, for example, feels very happy with her life in the diaspora and all her posts about migration and settlement have a happy tone:

Anis 23/09/2007 post# 1

Brisbane is the city I was looking for- good traffic, clean air, quiet life, and enough services. Although you may not find the excitement of high technology in bigger cities like Sydney or Melbourne, I like the peace and beautiful environment of this city. The weather is spring-like almost all months of the year....

These days the weather has become beautiful and favourable in my city. The weather is favourably warm during the day and there is a cool breeze during the night that makes me unconscious. That's the time I want to jump into God's arms and kiss him and thank him, and tell him I will never forget that last year at this time how sad and anxious I was. Some time ago a friend had asked me to talk about daily routines. The daily life is the same as anywhere else in the world. In the morning almost all people go to work and take their three or four children to school, and in the evening they go back to their houses. But there are a lot of differences between this city and my previous one. Here everything is quiet; everything is in its own place. You can find smiles on people's faces everywhere and they share it with each other easily. One morning if you go out in low spirits, they give you a lot of smiles and you start to believe that it's a nice day, and you just hadn't noticed. And if you ask somebody a question they wouldn't let you go unless they feel you got the answer. Here months may pass without hearing the honking of cars; and if you go around, you probably won't find any line of people or heavy traffic to waste your time. Here if you have some office work to do, you won't see anything but respect, politeness, and smiles.
I still love my new city very, very, very much.

In her first post she talks about the ideal city that she has been looking for, and she shows the reader that Brisbane has become her city of settlement. In the second post, she uses the phrase "my city" as if she talked about her hometown in Iran. The description of Brisbane and daily life shows how at peace she is with the quality of life, and how she has adapted to the new environment. My assumption of Anis' writing is that she is trying to compare Brisbane and its quality of life with that of the Iranian capital, Tehran. Iranians who live in Tehran experience the problems of the megacity such as the smoggy and polluted weather, streets jam-packed with cars honking their horns, and the rat race and fast pace of life on a daily basis. Anis seems to signal to the reader how her settling in Australia has helped her. Her posts are in sharp contrast with Paaeez's posts about Australia which were discussed at the beginning of this chapter especially the one about the meaningless happy nature of Australians in the sun (see page 158), which shows how positive she is with her life in Australia. Anis' posts received many comments expressing different views:

Mozhgaan 17/10/2007 comment# 1

Do not tell this many lies. It is all lies that you have written about. I have been living here for six years and all I can say is that you're lying. You're one of those people who tantalise other Iranians to migrate.

Negaahi 21/10/2007/ comment# 8

I'm really happy that you're content and don't have any *deltangi* (homesickness). I was like this when I was new, but when you stay here longer all the peace and quiet will become normal for you and then that's the start of your *deltangi*. Wait my dear friend for some years and then you will understand what I'm talking about....

Sepideh 21/10/2007 comment# 11

Thank you for bringing peace to our anxious hearts. When I read your beautiful and candid posts, the stress of beginning migration lessens a lot....

Mozhgaan directly attacks Anis and her attitude about Australia as she believes that Anis' depiction of life in Australia is unrealistic. She thinks that this kind of writing is misleading for other Iranians back home and does not illustrate the real Australia. On the other hand, Negaahi advises Anis that these are surface attractions and the real problems such as being homesick will start as time goes by. By sharing his experience of *deltangi* (homesickness) with Anis, Negaahi is criticising her for being so positive about life in the diaspora, and he thinks that the *deltangi* days are yet to come. Contrary to the views of Mozhgaan and Negaahi from the diaspora, Sepideh's comment from Iran has a different tone. She thinks that Anis' posts act as a tranquiliser for people like her in Iran and give them more hope to start their migration. Anis seems to be a source of inspiration for Sepideh as her writing brings reassurance to the story of migration.

While Anis has many posts that indicate she has chosen to integrate into the new culture, there are other posts that reveal she still has kept her Iranianness in many ways:

Anis 18/03/2008 post# 5

Yesterday we went to an Iranian shop and did a lot of shopping- from the vegetables for stew to mixed pickles. Wow! How exciting it is to eat Yek-o-Yek⁴⁰ sour cherry jam.

This short post shows that she has not changed her dietary habits, and she is excited to have access to Iranian products in Australia and be able to make Iranian food. Anis seems to have developed her new cultural competence parallel to her already formed cultural identity and she seems to be living biculturally in the new environment having considered Brisbane as her hometown. As illustrated above, Anis is very positive about life in Australia and there is hardly anything written about social stigmas of life in Australia. There might be several reasons for not writing anything negative about life in the diaspora and trying to suppress this. One could be her lifestyle in the diaspora. Going through her blog archive, her writing portrays her as a woman who has a limited social circle in the diaspora which could be intentional or unintentional. Almost all her posts are about her family life, her child's school, and her workplace and she feels happy about her lifestyle. She hardly has any post that shows her interaction outside this social circle. Another reason might be that she has a positive attitude in life and tries to see the glass as half full rather than half empty. Yet, an important reason for such a positive attitude, I assume, may be a deliberate presentation of self to the virtual *dowreh*. Her writings suggest that she wants to inculcate a positive attitude to other members of *dowreh* both in Iran and in the diaspora and tell them to get rid of feelings of *shak/tardid* (insecurity), which is typical of Iranians. She has expressed her positive outlook toward life in a post:

⁴⁰ A famous and popular brand in Iran (something like Wattie's in New Zealand).

Our outlook toward life

...people have very different tastes in life and their outlook toward life is even more different! It is possible that each individual looks at different issues differently under the same circumstances. The reason that I'm writing this is because of something that has preoccupied me for several days. Any of us may have dreams and wishes that may be the same as others', but the quantity and quality of our dreams and the ways to reach them are exclusive to each individual. In my opinion, this is exactly the thing that affects all our life and perhaps migration as part of it. I'm generally a very happy person and this doesn't mean that I haven't had or I don't have any problems or sorrow and grief in life....

I wrote all this to say that my outlook toward the world around me may be affected by my overall view toward life...If I write about peace and tranquillity, post beautiful photos, and write happy things, it doesn't mean that there is no evil, hardship and sorrow. It also doesn't mean that I don't see them or want to hide them from you. I just want to say that this is how I see life and think about it, and I'm happy with it. If any of you smile when you come to my weblog and close my weblog with more tranquillity than before coming to my weblog, then I think I have fulfilled my goal in this weblog.

Her post was welcomed by the audience and received different opinions. While the majority of the commenters were comparing their personalities with that of Anis and wrote how happy they were with her weblog and her writing style, Khashaayaar's comment once again highlighted the role of blogging in the diaspora and the effect it may have on the audience especially in Iran:

Khashaayaar 25/08/2008 Comment# 12

Hello dear Anis. I completely understand what you mean as I'm like you. When I was in Iran I always enjoyed my life and the same is true here. When I arrived here I was always writing about the good things in Australia. You can imagine how life can be difficult for a lonely person in *ghorbat* (foreign land), but I have been trying to enjoy my life. However, after a while I noticed that my audience couldn't understand this attitude in my writing. I felt that when the audience reads my posts, they think that my joy and happiness is because of the utopic nature of Australia. Thus, they unconsciously received incorrect information from my writing and they went astray. Anything that I did to tell them that it was my personality and was not related to Iran or Australia, nobody believed me. Finally, I had to stop writing at a certain period as I didn't want to make anyone feel confused and lost. After a while I decided to write again, but this time more carefully as I didn't want to play with anybody's future. I promised myself to be a bit different in my weblog. I think people like you and me who live in Australia have to be really careful about our writing....

In the above comment Khashaayaar puts forward his own experience of blogging in order to remind Anis of the importance of blogging in the diaspora and the way it affects the audience. He is indirectly advising Anis to be more realistic about blogging as he thinks writing positively about Australia and deliberately overlooking the problems and difficulties that Iranian migrants face may be misleading for the audience. Khashaayaar believes that the personality of diasporic bloggers should not affect the way they write as what they publish is taken at face value by the audience. In other words, he is advising Anis that diasporic blogs have certain missions along their personal aspects, and that is to provide information to the audience even via personal narratives of living in the diaspora. Therefore, it is essential that the bloggers write about both aspects of living in the diaspora so that the audience has a better and more realistic picture of the host society.

Overall, regardless of what the audience may think of Anis, she performs her identity as a transnational blogger positively. For this reason, she tries to avoid writing about bad incidents or social stigmas in the diaspora in the hope that she can have a positive effect on her readers.

6.7.2 Becoming transnational

The second group of the bloggers are those who have become transnational and travel between the two countries because they feel they cannot stay in Australia for a long time. This might be due to the cultural bereavement that some individuals feel as a result of living in a new culture. Bhugra and Becker (2005) believe that one way of reducing the feeling of cultural bereavement is to keep one's ties to the original culture. For some migrants this may be achieved by being in touch with their ethnic community in the diaspora and receiving social support from them. But as discussed before, due to the lack of a coherent community for the new generation of Iranian immigrants in Australia, individuals have no choice but to fly back home every now and then or, in the case of the bloggers, be part of a virtual *dowreh* in the diaspora. Paaeez writes about how she needs to go back to her family *dowreh* occasionally:

Last March was my third time of going back to Iran. I don't know why but Australia with all her beauty and attractions still can't keep me here for a long time. My desire to return gets stronger around Nowruz (Iranian New Year). This is when I visualise all my family members and relatives together having a wonderful time. This is the time of the year that I question my existence in Australia. Call me a spoiled girl, but I feel I'm like a battery; I need to be recharged every now and then and this charge comes from Iran. By Iran I mean everything that I identify myself with in that part of the world. I think my problem is that I like Australia but this doesn't outweigh my love for Iran. My feeling is like someone who wants to have her cake and eat it too....

Paaeez's post is an example of what Falicov (2005, p. 399) calls "the plight of immigrants" where a person's heart is their home and it is filled with "one's family, language, and culture" but the heart and those things that fill it are in two different worlds. She has described herself as a battery that needs to be recharged and this will not happen unless she goes back to the family as the centre of emotion. She is happy with life in Australia but nothing can make her stay for a long time as she has to meet her emotional needs by going back to Iran. Her post indicates that she is emotionally attached to her family and her past, and this acts as a trigger for her to be a transnational. In her post she addresses the reader by using the imperative phrase "call me a spoiled girl" before explaining her reasons for return. Using such a phrase may have different functions for her. The most important one is that she knows that there are people that definitely visit her page and read what she has written. Thus, she is signalling the reader not to be judgmental about her feelings of return if they want to leave any comments. She is using this phrase to tell the reader about the depth of her *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) on her family as to be a spoiled girl implies that she is really dependent on her family, and this may justify her feeling of going back home now and then. The comment space was full of emotional support for Paaeez agreeing with the feeling she expressed in her post. For example, Hamsafar wrote:

I can absolutely feel how you feel about going back home. We Iranians are born in the family, live with the family, and die with the family. In fact, no matter how old we are, we are always children to our parents and that's why they need to pamper us all the time. For me there is nothing sweeter than going back and seeing the face of my parents and all the beloved ones at the airport who are restlessly waiting on the other side of the arrival window. The joy of jumping into their arms and crying on their shoulders and telling them how much you have been missing them gives you ecstasy. You want the whole world to freeze in the moment and you stay in their arms forever.

What Hamsafar has described in the above comment shows the depth of *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) among family members in Persian culture. The comment is a justification of what Paaeez has written in her post and support for her occasional return to Iran. Parallel to Paaeez, Hamsafar describes the feeling of going back to Iran as the sweetest thing that brings ecstasy. The combination of Paaeez's post and Hamsafar's comment illustrates that occasional returns for many Iranians seem to be inevitable and that makes them transnational as they cannot stay for a long time in Australia.

6.7.3 Being lost and confused

The third group is the story of those bloggers who are struggling with their national identity and feel indebted to their country of origin. Some, such as Haamed, feel confused even after receiving their citizenship:

Haamed 12/12/2008 post# 1

Today someone gave an Australia flag to my little daughter as a present. I asked her if she knew what it was. She answered cold-bloodedly, "Oh yes, this is our flag." I asked, "where?" She replied, "Australia!" After this incident I have been thinking, where we are from? What is our flag like? If we're Iranian and love that country, then what are we doing here? If we're Australian, then why don't we feel patriotic toward this country? I don't know why I don't have the feeling of being rooted here...Although I'm a citizen now, I don't know what to say if we go to different places and we're asked where we are from? Should we say "Australian?" "Iranian?" ...

Haamed seems to have been caught in between the two nationalities which has caused him a confused state of national identity. He seems to be in a transition of cultural identity in the process of acculturation, a process that is “inextricably intertwined with identity” (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 13). This transition has brought him many questions that have preoccupied him. Growing up as an Iranian in a different social and cultural context where his cultural identity has developed, Haamed has faced identity challenges in the new environment. He is undecided in his identity commitment and confused in maintaining his commitment to the original nationality or the new one. One reason that has made Haamed write about this is his national identity as an Iranian and the dilemma that he is facing in accepting a new identity. He wants the audience to be part of this dilemma and seek other members’ opinions about his dilemma of identity. As discussed in chapter two, part of the identity crisis for Iranians in the diaspora is that they are proud of their Persian culture and history and they want to be identified with their past, but they are ashamed of their present image in the world. Haamed is no exception as an Iranian and this duality of identity has challenged him. By blogging this he has resorted to the virtual *dowreh* members in the hope that they advise him and take him out of this dilemma. The comments for Haamed’s post were not helpful as nobody had any solution for his dilemma. In some cases they even made his situation worse by leaving comments such as:

Ali 13/12/2008 comment# 1

Hi Haamed. I suppose your daughter’s understanding today may change into questions that would go on forever. I think you should get ready for that.

Comments such as Ali’s clearly show that the question of identity is a very complex one for many Iranians in the diaspora. This complexity makes it very difficult to discuss the duality of identity or advise each other what to do or how to resolve the dilemma. For this reason people may not show any interest in getting involved in Iranian identity discussions as finding an answer or a solution can be quite difficult and frustrating.

6.7.4 Wanting to return

And finally some bloggers find it difficult to adjust to the new culture as they believe there is no means for them to identify with the host culture, and they feel that they will always be a foreigner in the new culture:

Saeed 26/09/2008 post# 1

After almost three years of living in a city which is one of the best in the world in terms of quality of life, my decision to go back to Iran hasn't changed. The proportion of return versus stay in my brain is still a hundred to zero. Life in the West is quiet, free, and productive, but this life is devoid of something for me: *sarkhoshi* (gaiety). *Sarkhoshi* needs a partner. Foreigners are not a good partner for *sarkhoshi*, and life without *sarkhoshi* becomes intolerable...for me the reason to return is something of "selfishness"; whether I want it or not, I belong to that land. This belonging has happened because of an accident but is always with me. My experience tells me that I can't be a dweller in this part of the world. It is a misconception that a person can change his nationality. Nationality whether good or bad is like a sticker whose removal is almost impossible. This is a fact that we have to accept. Making connection with a foreign country demands a lot of time and energy. Language is a very simple barrier in this picture. Language can be learned but lack of a common past is something that can't be replaced by anything. When I see this distance, instead of making a lot of effort to join another culture, I prefer to use my energy somewhere related to my interest. My homeland is the only place that gives me this chance without consuming extra energy. I'm thinking of returning because it's the most welcoming place for me. Thinking of return is just out of "selfishness" and nothing else.

The post indicates how alienated Saeed feels toward the host culture. He is challenging himself with the question of identity, and thinks that it is difficult to change one's identity once it is assigned. The emotional tone in his post seems to come from his not being able to communicate with the new environment even though he states that the language is a simple barrier for him, which is in contrast with other bloggers and their opinion about English. He thinks that he has everything which is needed for a quiet and peaceful life, but there is no one with whom he can share the joy and pleasure of his peaceful life. What he thinks has caused the alienation from the host culture is the established identity which is part of him and cannot be changed easily. He points out that it is easy to learn the language of the new culture, but learning the language does not bring a common cultural background for a migrant. Therefore, lack of cultural

background will act as a barrier against understanding the new culture, and this creates a distance between the migrant and the dominant group. He believes that life for him as a migrant is without *sarkhoshi* (gaiety). The use of *sarkhoshi* implies that Saeed does not feel happy in the host society. The application of the word *sarkhoshi* in the Persian language equates with bliss. This word originates from Persian literature and is affiliated with wine, a symbolic representation of joy and happiness in Persian mythology and Persian poetry. The word consists of *sar* (head) and *khoshi* (mirth) which together denotes the feeling that alcohol has taken the individual to the peak of mirthfulness in which the body and soul is in a state of euphoria as a result of internal tranquillity and peace, a feeling that Saeed thinks is missing from his life in the diaspora. His post received some supporting comments from the audience who wrote how they felt about his experience. Among the comments one was interesting as the commenter interpreted Saeed's use of the word "selfish" for his reason to return as "identity" affiliation and not being selfish:

Mehdi 27/09/2008 comment# 1

I really liked your use of "selfishness", but I prefer to use "identity". We are all alive with our identity; if it is taken from us, then we will be suspended like a balloon in the air, like an astronaut in the sky, like a scuba diver in the sea. We need the gravity of identity.

Mehdi believes that what Saeed has called the selfishness to return is basically a matter of identity that has arisen out of comparison of the Iranian or in-group identity against the host culture or out-group identity. Three years of living in a foreign culture has brought Saeed a need to belong to a social group, and he feels that it cannot be achieved in his current context unless he goes back to his family and social *dowrehs*. He needs to go back to where he feels he originally belongs. Having the social identity of being an Iranian, he feels affiliated to this group identity and this has caused him some identity conflict as he does not identify himself with the new environment. Padilla and Perez (2003, p. 43) state that "we need to simultaneously fill the need to belong to a social group (e.g., Latino) while maintaining our distinctiveness from another group (e.g., Jewish)". In other words, the established social identity keeps people motivated to identify themselves with groups with which they feel affinity and attempt to be

separated from groups that they do not feel they belong to. In the above post, Saeed indicates his kinship with his Iranian background in his post, and he feels that living in another culture is void of joy and pleasure, and he needs to go back to where he belongs. Mehdi also shows his kinship with Saeed by interpreting Saeed's use of selfishness as identity. Mehdi believes that what Saeed has described in his post is a manifestation of identity which defines who Saeed is, and so is his desire to return back to Iran.

In closing, it seems that the bloggers' posts are indicative of the different stages of acculturation and the way the individuals see themselves in the process. However, there are a number of caveats that need to be addressed with respect to the acculturation. First and foremost is the length of stay of the bloggers in the diaspora. As mentioned before, on average the length of stay of the bloggers was three years when the data collection finished. This means that the majority are still in the process of experiencing the dominant culture, and the passage of time will be a crucial factor in indicating the degree of acculturation. Second, the background of the bloggers should be taken into account in their adaptation or rejection of the host culture; for example their previous status, social class, ethnicity, and religiosity could all be determining factors in their approach to the host culture. It was not possible to fully understand each blogger's background although there was some degree of self-disclosure on their weblogs. And finally, the issue of the bloggers' gender should not be taken for granted in the study of acculturation as Iranian women seem to be more positive about migration, and hence more capable of overcoming the identity crisis than Iranian men (Ahmadi Lewin, 2001). This may increase their desire to integrate and fit well into the new environment.

6.8 Summary

This chapter analysed the emotional challenges of the Persian bloggers in the diaspora regarding their experience of migration and living in the host society. The analysis revealed that the process of migration was not a joyous experience for the majority of the bloggers as they still were dependent on emotional support from the homeland in order to deal with their emotional experience. In terms of sociality in the diaspora, the data showed that Persian cultural schemata were somehow impeding their social life

with the host culture and with other Iranians. Furthermore, there was substantial evidence in their writing that suggested that the bloggers were going through different stages of acculturation. Depending on the amount of success or failure in dealing with the host culture and the new environment, the bloggers disclosed different feelings such as choosing to stay in the new environment or returning back to Iran, becoming transnational or living in the host culture with a confused and undecided feeling about what to do next.

What follows in the next chapter is a linguistic and socio-linguistic analysis of the emotional language that was used by the bloggers with respect to certain emotions in Persian language.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LANGUAGE OF EMOTION IN PERSIAN CULTURE

7.1 Introduction

Following the discussion in the previous chapter, the focus here is on the language of emotion in Persian and the way it is culturally constructed. The discussion is only limited to the emotional language that was expressed in the bloggers' writing; thus, the chapter specifically concentrates on the language of homesickness and self-conscious emotions. The aim is to carry out a sociolinguistic analysis of these emotion terms in Persian language and culture in order to shed light on the existing cultural differences between Persian and English language of emotion. The discussion opens by introducing the language of homesickness in Persian and then moves to self-conscious emotions. The discussion is supported by examples from the weblogs.

7.2 Homesickness

A large proportion of the bloggers' posts discusses homesickness and yearning for the homeland especially people left behind such as family members, relatives, and friends and familiar places such as childhood homes, streets, and neighbourhood shops. Hack-Polay (2007) claims that any movement from home, either voluntary or forced, will always lead people to homesickness. For this reason, feelings of homesickness and longing are general and widespread among migrants and transnationals and have been the target of recent research (see e.g. Baldassar, 2008; Svašek, 2008; Lambkin, 2008; Ryan, 2008). Van Tilburg (2006) defines homesickness as "an emotion which is felt after leaving house and home and is characterized by negative emotions, ruminative

cognitions about home, and somatic symptoms” (p. 37). The basic assumption behind homesickness is that when it is experienced it may be periodic for some individuals and continuous in some cases for others (Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1984). Furthermore, it is generally assumed that homesickness is experienced most intensely during the early days of departure (Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, Van Heck, 1996) although Fitzgerald’s (2008) study of the Irish Emigration Database contradicts this notion.

In order to analyse homesickness, some studies (cf. Fisher & Hood, 1987; Fisher, 1989; Van Tilburg et al., 1996) have made use of cognitive and psychological models of emotion. In these models homesickness has been studied with respect to the antecedent, the individual, the responses and reactions of individuals towards homesickness, and the social regulation and control of this feeling. The main antecedent of homesickness is the change of environment for the individual. Tuan (1974), a humanistic geographer, uses “topophilia” to describe the human relationship with his/her environment and states that topophilia includes “all of the human being’s affective ties with the material environment” (p. 93). This attachment to their familiar environment becomes stronger as time goes by. Any separation from the old and familiar environment, then, may cause people to develop feelings of homesickness. In some cases, even the adaptation to the new environment may be a source of homesickness (Van Tilburg, 2006). Fisher (1989) points out that displaced people may develop obsessive thoughts about their homeland and occasionally negative thoughts about the new environment at the same time. This kind of expression of homesickness was quite common in the blogs under study. Homaa, for example, writes about her homesickness in a long post called “Lunacy”, part of which is presented below:

Homaa 21/06/2006 post# 10

I feel homesick for my childhood home; that yard with the rectangular pond and the pomegranate, persimmon, and weeping willow trees which were more beautiful than everything else in winter. I feel homesick for my grandparents’ house; that house with that special scent was the house of my hopes. I also feel really homesick for our old house that they demolished and replaced with an apartment.... I feel homesick for everything; all people, my past and

For Homaa the memory of the homeland is so strong that she almost considers everything of her past as sources of homesickness. The childhood home, different trees, and so on that are normally taken for granted in daily life have a different meaning in the context of migration. It seems that migration has attached emotional meaning to all her past memories and belongings and has turned her into an emotional wreck. In another posts Homaa describes her feelings about the new environment:

Homaa 02/07/2006 post# 26

When we were new in Australia, I had a strange feeling. I used to think that an invisible hand had placed my husband, my child, and me in a big catapult and flung us to a distant place in an unknown world. This feeling was stronger during times in bed when I was looking at the sky. The feeling that you have gone somewhere where you don't know anyone and no one knows you. You feel you're like a dot; a feeling of contempt, a feeling of being nobody in this big world. This is the time that you start thinking of your past and why you have been struggling for nothing.... I don't know how to describe it but it's like a person who is dead but has been given another chance to start a new life again....

In the first post, Homaa's homesickness is mainly about all the familial objects and people who have been left behind in the process of migration. However, the second post shows how the new environment has created in her a feeling of being a nonentity, and made her think of her past. She compares herself to a dot to show how lonely she is; a feeling that was expressed by some other bloggers as 'being in an island'. Her writing in the second post suggests that she feels homesick due to the unfamiliarity of the new environment, and a feeling that may come from the lack of belonging and the loss of social network of all the people with whom she identifies. This has made the virtual *dowreh* a suitable space to express her homesickness to a network of Iranian migrants whose members she can rely on for emotional help and support.

People may differ in their reaction to the separation from home and familiar environments and thus be more or less vulnerable to developing homesickness. Some factors that may cause homesickness in people include identity traits, age, gender, culture, and family background (Van Tilburg, 2006). Although some of these factors such as identity traits and age need psychological procedures to measure and may not be

relevant in this study, I conclude that other factors such as culture, family background, and gender are potential variables that may make the bloggers feel homesick. Since *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) is strong in Persian culture, then breaking away from family ties will definitely cause some degree of homesickness for any Iranian. Furthermore, the frequency of posts on homesickness in blogs written by females is strikingly higher than male bloggers', which may show that female bloggers are more prone to homesickness or more expressive in exposing their feeling of homesickness.

Some studies (Baier & Welch, 1992; Fisher, 1989) have observed that homesickness for some people is a feeling that is experienced with embarrassment and sometimes denial. As a result, people may try to avoid admitting or confessing to homesickness. Contrary to this, the data show that weblogs for this group of Iranians were a suitable environment in which they acknowledged their homesickness. This might be due to the general nature of weblogs as they provide a chance to share one's feelings with others or the need for support from the virtual *dowreh* and sharing emotions with other members of the *dowreh*. In addition, being far from the homeland and living in the diaspora as a minority group with limited interaction with other people outside their social circle made the virtual *dowreh* a welcoming space to share their emotions with other members and seek support or empathy. The bloggers may have felt that their homesickness could be perfectly understood by other people who have the same experience of living in the diaspora with the same cultural background. The following comment by a reader in one of the discussions of migration and living in the diaspora may reveal the potential for such expressions of emotion in the weblogs and the virtual *dowreh*:

You see what kind of world we have come to these days where you have to type words that come from your heart and put them in a weblog so that someone reads them. Why? Because you're not in your country and any other place that you are, you don't have any congruity with other people around you. If you want to have a heart-to-heart conversation with them, then you have to first hold a series of comprehensive classes on familiarity with your culture in which you grew up in order to let them empathise with you and say something. Of course this method is not worth trying and doesn't soothe your heartache.

When I was in Iran, I could choose the groups of people who were more like me or who I wanted to be like from among the thousands of people surrounding me. I had many options. But what now? How can I explain to Westerners for whom moving and migration is like going from one city to another with only one suitcase that I feel homesick for the smoggy streets of Tehran. I feel homesick for crowded streets, the cry of vendors in the streets and all the things that used to bother me back home. How should I say to them that I'm dying to take part in political discussions in our taxis between taxi drivers and other passengers every time I took a taxi? There is no such thing here, and there is no use for all the social skills that I gained through the years little by little.... How should I explain to a stranger what my soul needs? When I was leaving Iran I tried not to forget to bring some Iranian music and photo albums with me so that they became a *marham* (salve) for my homesickness. ...What I'm trying to say is that it's only an Iranian who can understand what I have got inside my heart.

The comment illustrates a number of reasons why the bloggers wrote about emotional episodes such as homesickness in their weblogs without denying them or feeling embarrassed. The start of the writing shows the commenter's observation of having to write about your emotion in a weblog so that other people come and read it. This implicitly shows her isolation from the host society and the limited interaction with the new environment that has forced her to bring her emotion online. This is justified by saying that there is no congruity between herself as an Iranian and people in the new environment because of the cultural distance between Iran and Australia, and Australians cannot understand the heartache of a migrant with a different background. Furthermore, the comment shows that there are not so many options in the diaspora for her as a migrant to choose the type of people with whom she would identify as the concept of migration and movement is different for them. Consequently, talking about missing the streets of her hometown or taking part in layperson political discussions that normally take place in collective taxis in Iran would not make any sense to an outsider. In order to show the depth of her homesickness she mentions how Iranian music and

photo albums from the homeland have become a *marham* (salve) for her homesickness. She has changed the context of a Persian proverb *marhami baraay-e zakhm* (literally a salve for the wound) which is generally used to address the reduction of emotional pain in people by doing something about it. She has made use of such a proverb to illustrate that homesickness for her is like an emotional injury that needs treatment, and this treatment comes from her cultural identity. The combination of all these sociocultural factors and factors related to adjustment and assimilation in the host society seem to make weblogs for this group of Iranian migrants a very warm and intimate space in which they can express their emotional experience of migration openly since they know that they are well-received and understood by other Iranians. In fact, weblogs provide access to a virtual *dowreh* where they can get together as a bigger unit of Iranian family and openly discuss their homesickness for the homeland knowing that there will be sympathetic and empathetic people in the *dowreh* that understand their heartache of being far from the homeland.

7.2.1 The language of homesickness in Persian

In order to express their homesickness the bloggers and their audience have used the word *deltangi* repeatedly in their writing. I have translated *deltangi* into homesickness, nostalgia, missing, and craving depending on the content of each piece of writing. This word is a combination of two morphemes in Persian *del* (heart) and *tang* (tight) depicting the concept that someone's heart has become tight because of a sad experience. In order to understand this concept better I will analyse the concept of *del* in Persian and how it is viewed in Persian culture. In bilingual dictionaries *del* is translated as "heart, stomach, abdomen, belly, guts, mind, patience, middle". The primary meaning of *del* refers to the corporeal experience referring to the area below the chest similar to the abdomen in English. For instance, a person may say *delam dard mikoneh* (I have a stomachache) due to digestive pain. On a figurative level especially in Persian literature the word *del* is used as "heart" in English yet again with some difference in the application of the meaning. The difference in meaning is that 'heart' in English can be used to refer to a person's medical condition of the heart while in Persian *del* is not used in such a context. For example, in English one can say I had heart surgery while in Persian it is not possible to say I had *del* surgery. Persian has another word *ghalb* (heart)

which is a borrowing from Arabic to refer to “heart” in medicine. This characteristic of *del* allows the users of the Persian language to talk about all kinds of feelings by compounding *del* with other words. For example⁴¹:

Expression	Gloss
<i>del-tang</i>	homesick (heart tight)
<i>del-sard</i>	disillusioned (heart cold)
<i>del-khoon</i>	heart-sore (heart blood)
<i>del-negaraaan</i>	anxious (heart anxious)
<i>del-naazok</i>	touchy (heart thin)
<i>del-shaad</i>	happy (heart happy)
<i>del-paak</i>	honest (heart clean)
<i>del-navaaz</i>	sweet (heart caressing)
<i>del-baakhteh</i>	fallen in love (heart gambled/lost)

What all these expressions indicate is that *del* in Persian is the centre of human emotions, desires, and passions, and provides Iranians with a conceptual framework through which they represent their emotional experiences. In a comprehensive analysis of the concept of *del* in Persian Sharifian (2008) concludes that:

...*del* provides a conceptual base for profiling a relatively large number of conceptualizations in Persian. These include conceptualizations that regard *del* either as being equal to, or the container of, emotions, desires, patience, courage, compassion, and also thoughts and memories. Some Persian expressions reflect the conceptualization of *del* as something that can be tightened, opened, wounded, emptied, filled, burned, collapsed, pulled out, broken, or stolen....(p. 262)

⁴¹ All these examples are adjectives in Persian. *Del* can also be used in conjunction with nouns and verbs to make noun phrases or verb phrases.

Considering the polysemy of *del* in Persian, it is obvious that the way Persian speakers express their emotional experience is not easily translated into English as the English equivalents do not reflect the exact feelings of the speaker. In Persian some words cover a wide range of meanings depending on the context. One such case is the word *deltangi* that has been used excessively by the bloggers. In bilingual dictionaries the noun *deltangi* is translated as “melancholia, anguish, ennui, and tedium” and the adjective *deltang* as “sad, homesick, lonely, and nostalgic”. To any Persian speaker the English equivalents may sound meaningless as they do not reflect exactly the Persian meaning of *deltangi*. The reason may be that some English equivalents are related to mental and psychological states and some to physical tiredness. The adjective *deltang* can be a combination of sad, homesick, lonely and some other emotions such as missing or craving but not necessarily a nostalgic feeling. For example, a person may feel *deltang* because of a gloomy day in autumn or missing the family due to living in another location. Perhaps that is why “nostalgia” in the Persian language has no direct and clear translation that transfers the exact meaning of the word. In the Aryanpour English-Persian dictionary⁴² nostalgia is translated as *deltangi baraay-e mihan* (roughly homesickness for the homeland) and *ehsaas-e ghorbat* (roughly feeling of being a stranger). None of these definitions transfer the exact meaning of nostalgia in English:

1. Acute longing for familiar surroundings, esp. regarded as a medical condition;
2. a. Sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime; b. Something which causes nostalgia for the past.⁴³

My assumption is that due to the lack of an exact meaning of the word in the Persian language, Persian speakers use *nostaalzhi* (نوستالژی) which is an adaptation of the French version of the word “nostalgia” into the Persian sound system to express nostalgic experience. In modern Persian the word *nostaalzhi* is used by educated people in their conversation whereas the word may not be part of the layperson’s lexicon. In order to grasp a better picture of *deltang*, consider the following post from Paeez:

⁴² Available online at: <http://www.aryanpour.com/>

⁴³ Nostalgia. (2010). In *Oxford English online dictionary*. Retrieved, February 12, 2010 from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/128472?redirectedFrom=nostalgia#>

*Deltang*⁴⁴

Delam tang shodeh. Emruz deltangam! Injaa rooy-e sandali rooberuyeh veblaag chaahaar zaanu neshasteh-am baa lebaas-e maah va setaareh-ye sefid va soorati ke hanuz booyeh tamizi ba'ad az shostan-e baa narm konnade-ye Golrang mideh!! Booyeh khooneh...emruz havaa sard va paaeezi shodeh va man chaahaar zaanu baa lebaas-e maah va setaareh-ye Golrangi va zhaakat-e ezaafeh va livaan-e chai injaa neshasteh-am va bist hezaar kilometr az sarzaminam dooram...emruz havaa delgir va khaateraalist va man baa yek damaagh-e ghermez az geryeh injaa neshasteh-am va deltangam...deltang-e khooneh!...

Partial translation:

Sad/gloomy⁴⁵

I feel sad/gloomy. Today I'm sad/gloomy!
I'm sitting on a chair in front of my weblog with my moon-and-star-patterned clothes that smell of the freshness of washing and the clothes softener Golrang!⁴⁶ The smell of home. Today is cold and autumn-like and I'm sitting cross-legged with my cuppa twenty thousand kilometres away from my homeland. Today the weather is gloomy bringing back old memories and I'm sitting here with a red nose from crying and I'm nostalgic/homesick. I'm missing home!

Paaeez has titled the post *deltang*. By just reading the title one cannot decide which English word is suitable for the translation of her feeling since *deltang* can have only a general meaning of sadness when it is standing alone. She starts the post by writing *delam tang shodeh* (*del+am tang+shodeh* literally heart my tight has become) and continues *emruz deltangam* (*emruz del+tang+am* literally today heart tight I am). Again the start of the post does not give a clear picture of what kind of feeling she is expressing with these sentences, and the only thing that her sentences reveal to the reader is that she is going through a sad emotional experience as a result of something. Thus, the English equivalent for her feeling can be any English word that somehow

⁴⁴ Transliteration of the original post in Persian

⁴⁵ Perhaps other words in English that transfer sad and gloomy feelings can be used here.

⁴⁶ Golrang is a famous brand of detergents and toiletries in Iran. By using the brand name with an exclamation mark, she may mean that the smell of the softener takes her home and she feels *deltang* as a result. She may also mean that she is able to buy the brand in the diaspora in order to keep the memory of home alive.

uncovers this kind of feeling to the reader. Even reaching the last two lines where she talks about distance and old memories one cannot definitely decide which English word to replace as her emotion might be about the memories of the environment and hence 'nostalgia' or the household and the feeling of 'missing' them. Her signalling that she has a "red nose" as a result of crying gives the reader the impression that her feeling of *deltangi* is an expression of sadness which may originate from missing home. It is only the last sentence that reveals her feeling of missing home as she directly relates her sadness to missing home.

The analysis of Paaeez's post illustrates that *deltangi* in Persian depends heavily on the context in which the bearer is experiencing it. This analysis is in line with other cross-cultural lexical research that posits that "the set of emotion terms available in any given language is unique and reflects a culture's unique perspective on people's ways of feeling" (Wierzbicka, 1994). Based on this line of thinking, I will focus on the analysis of social and moral emotions in Persian language and culture and the way they reflect the subjective experience of Iranians in general and the bloggers in particular.

7.3 Self-conscious emotions

Wierzbicka (1992) states that any classification of emotion concepts is to some extent arbitrary because of the complex nature of emotion terms in any language. However, it is possible to have some basic groupings based on "certain semantic dimensions" (p. 550). For example, Goddard (1996) considers emotions such as shame, pride, love, pity, jealousy, and respect in English as social emotions reasoning that these emotions involve a second person or group of people as opposed to the emotion concepts which are individual such as sadness and happiness. While cognitive scientists use "social emotion" to classify the above emotions, social psychologists use "moral emotions" for some emotions such as shame and guilt as they are the emotions "that respond to moral violations or that motivate moral behavior" (Haidt, 2003, p. 853). Yet, some psychologists (cf. Tangney & Fisher, 1995; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007) consider emotions such as shame and guilt as self-conscious emotions based on the role of the self in these emotions.

This type of categorisation may not give a clear-cut picture of exactly how many groups of emotion words exist in a given language but will help the researcher to focus on emotions that have certain commonalities with each other. Based on this understanding and classification, I have chosen to focus on the category of self-conscious emotions in order to show how emotions such as shame and guilt are viewed in Persian culture and language. The following discussion is based on some of the terms and expressions which are embedded within the lexicon of the Persian language and are used by the bloggers in this study to express their emotions.

Shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride are generally called self-conscious emotions as they are evoked by reflecting on and evaluating the 'self'. In essence, what self-conscious emotions have in common and what distinguishes them from other emotions is their foundation in social relationships in which individuals evaluate and judge themselves and others as part of their interaction. In other words, these emotions are not experienced in a "social vacuum" (Kitayama, Markus, & Matsumoto, 1995). Lewis (2008) maintains that self-conscious emotions have received little attention owing to unclear elicitors of these emotions and this is so because "the elicitation of self-conscious emotions involve elaborate cognitive processes that have, at their heart, the notion of self" (p. 742). Therefore, in order to explore these emotions particular attention should be paid to the role of 'self'. Tangney (2003) argues that self-conscious emotions have self-regulatory functions and are basically emotions that reflect critically on the self and guide people's behaviour in regard to moral and social standards. Furthermore, they motivate individuals to stick to these standards and avoid violating them. In fact, the moral functions of self-conscious emotions "provide immediate punishment (or reinforcement) of behavior" (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 347).

In discussing the emotional experience of the Persian bloggers I pay special attention to the moral aspect of self-conscious emotions as it significantly affects the view of 'self' in interpersonal relationships and social contexts in Persian culture. As discussed in chapter five, prominent features of Persian culture are religiosity and dualism. As individuals grow up in this culture, they learn and internalise certain fundamental values and any violation of these values may cause emotional experiences such as shame or guilt for individuals.

7.4 Shame and guilt in Persian culture

In thinking about how the concepts of shame and guilt apply to Persian culture, it is helpful to refer first to the view of guilt and shame in the literature. There have been many attempts to distinguish shame from guilt especially in psychology and anthropology. The most radical and influential view in psychology is Lewis' (1974) definition of shame and guilt in which the key distinction between these two emotions is the role of the 'self'. She argues that in a shaming experience 'self' is the centre of evaluation and the focus is on the 'self' while in a guilty experience "the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something bad but is not itself the focus of the experience" (p. 30). In other words, shame experience equals "I am bad" while guilt experience equals "I have done something bad".

The anthropological description of the function of shame and guilt in different societies has culminated in classifying cultures into "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures". The most famous differentiation is the categorisation of Japan as a shame-based culture and the United States as a guilt-based culture by Benedict (1946) in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. In her analysis of these two cultures she concluded that the United States was a "guilt culture that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men's developing a conscience" while Japanese culture was shame-based due to its reliance on "external sanctions for good behavior" (p. 222). This view of cultures has been criticised on the ground that in various cultures both shame and guilt elements are present to some degree in both the individual and the society but the tendency towards one or the other is different (Creighton, 1990; You, 1997).

Based on various studies of shame and guilt across a number of cultures, it becomes obvious that there are some fundamental distinctions in the tendency and integration of these two emotions. However, as You (1997) remarks, "it is dangerous to use these distinctions to label specific cultures" because both of these characteristics are present in any given culture but one is more dominant than the other.

I base my judgment of shame and guilt in Persian culture on this line of thinking as my experience as an Iranian displays both of them. My assumption regarding Persian

culture is that both shame and guilt are integrated and interwoven into the society. From the shame perspective, Iran may fall into the shame-based category as individuals are afraid of exposure of any behaviour and the accompanying shame that may taint the individuals' self and other family members. As an example imagine a young Iranian who smokes cigarettes. In my experience, smoking has a very negative social value in Iran; therefore, a smoker tries to hide the habit as he/she knows that if other people, say neighbours or family friends, see him/her smoking, then the shame not only affects him/her but the entire family. In some cases the shame is deliberately exposed as a means of social control in order to let other people evaluate the individual and ultimately amend the behaviour.

Persian culture may also be labelled as a guilt culture based on the dominant religious ideology. In this sense, guilt is experienced when individuals feel they have violated some moral norms and standards. The person affected by guilt may utter the expression *ehsaas-e gonaah mikonam* (I feel guilty). The original meaning of *gonaah* is 'sin' with a religious denotation but is used in a guilt context where people feel they have done something morally wrong. My feeling is that self-justification and divine justification are both part of Persian culture. Therefore, Persian culture seems to be a shame culture in which the actual guilt is an internal and non-material experience. I think among the many definitions of shame and guilt in the literature, Lewis' (1974) conceptualisation of shame and guilt best describes the Persian culture. According to Lewis, both shame and guilt are feelings associated with negative evaluation because individuals feel they have violated certain norms and standards with respect to what is morally right or wrong. She further adds that the evaluation can be by the self or other people, but my observation of the weblogs shows that the evaluation of both shame and guilt is by the blogger (self) as all the posts are about the internal expression of these feelings. In a way, they resemble an emotional confession by the bloggers. For example, take a look at the following post by Homaa:

I have got a new *maraz* (disease). Instead of feeling happier from having more happy moments, I feel sadder and think of those who I left in Iran. I wasn't like this, but it seems that immigration and having a good time without my immediate family and friends doesn't make me happy. These four days I was only travelling and having fun.... But late at night when we were going back the sky above us was so beautiful and clear that it put me into a hallucination. I remembered many people. Thousands of questions came to my mind. Thousands of wishes and homesickness that turned my fun moments and travelling into depression.

In this post Homaa is reflecting on herself by writing about her change of feelings due to thoughts of her family and friends back home. The post is like a moral confession in which she reveals her guilt because she thinks having fun without family members and friends is the same as showing no care and forgetting about the suffering of those who are left behind. The feeling of guilt is so strong that she uses the word *maraz* (disease) to compare her feeling of guilt to a disease that is bothering her and growing worse. It seems that as she becomes happier in Australia, the guilt grows stronger. Toward the end of the post she compares her feeling to a hallucination that throws her into her past remembering people back home which causes her homesickness. The irony in her writing is that her feeling of hallucination is filled with homesickness and sadness instead of the joy and ecstasy that may come with a hallucination. This shows that her hallucination looks toward the past and not the future. This type of description implicitly shows that she is not happy having fun without her family members and friends, and she feels guilty as a result, which is typical of Iranians.

7.4.1 The language of shame in Persian

I will start the discussion by introducing *khejaalat* (roughly “shame”) and how it is used in Persian in interpersonal communication and then elaborate on both its social and moral dimensions. The reason to label *khejaalat* as both a social and a moral emotion is that the type of feeling it connotes in the Persian language can have both social and moral action tendencies. In fact, this is where the difference between the English and Persian usage of the concept may start as it does not fit properly into the social emotion classification in English. Unlike shame in English whose meaning involves other people,

khejaalat in the Persian language and culture can also be present in intrapersonal interaction where the source is inside the person rather than other people.

In bilingual dictionaries *khejaalat* is variously translated as “shame”, “embarrassment”, “blush”, “shyness”, “coyness”, “uneasiness”, “confusion”, and “bashfulness”. Nonetheless, with such a variety of translations none of the English equivalents capture the social and moral dimension which is understood by native speakers of Persian. Contrary to the negative connotation of shame in English, Iranians sometimes regard *khejaalat* and its synonym *sharm* (shame; modesty) as a type of positive attribute which is necessary in building morality in human beings and keeping them away from bad deeds.

There are a broad range of situations in Persian where a person may feel *khejaalat*. On a social level it may range from embarrassing moments or those that induce shyness where the individual feels he/she has done something inappropriate to situations where the person has some personal characteristics such as physical problems, ugliness, or difference in social class that cause a *khejaalat* feeling. In each of these situations the type of feeling that the person reveals may have a different translation in English. In order to clarify the point, I will analyse the application of *khejaalat* in a number of extracts taken from Homaa’s weblog:

Homaa 14/11/2007 post# 4

...I was so mixed-up today that I forgot to ask the salesperson for the chicken that I had paid for and left the shop. When he saw me after half an hour when I went back to pick the chicken up, he gave it to me without a word. I’m sure he had felt pity for a young woman with Alzheimer's disease; or maybe he had thought to himself that I was a *bimaar-e ravaani* (literally mental patient)...It was a bad feeling and I *khejaalat keshidam* (roughly I felt embarrassed)....

In this extract Homaa talks about an embarrassing social situation where she blames herself for forgetting her shopping. Her feeling is a combination of what the salesperson may feel about her and her own feeling of being mentally preoccupied. This has brought her a kind of embarrassing moment where she encounters the salesperson, and a

confusing and bashful feeling that any Iranian can imagine in such a situation. Her choice of verb with *khejaalat* gives the reader the impression that she might have been red in the face when she encountered the situation. Now consider the following extract:

Homaa 04/09/2006 post# 14

I'm craving an Iranian wedding party... so that I dance for so many hours that the people who are with me come and force me to sit down because of their *khejaalat* (roughly shame)....

In the above extract Homaa is trying to imagine an Iranian *dowreh* where her dancing may bring shame to her companions. Here the concept of shame is not only the result of the situation but also tainted with some moral values that may cause embarrassment and bashfulness. The moral value behind this experience is that traditionally and religiously it is not acceptable for women to dance in a public place especially in the presence of men who are considered *naamahram* (not intimate; not of close relationship, i.e. outside the *dowreh*). In such cases, women should protect their *zaaher* in public and not damage their public image. In other words, they should keep their *sangini va vaghaar* (literally gravity and dignity) and not do anything that may cause damage to women's face. Thus, the use of the word *khejaalat* is a combination of moral shame, embarrassment, and blushing to anyone related to her in that situation. The final extract shows another application of the word *khejaalat*:

Homaa 14/11/2007 post# 4

Today when I went to the hospital for my operation, I felt *khejaalat* (roughly ashamed and guilty) of myself because of my thoughts about death last night....There were so many young and old patients that had come to the hospital on their own that I felt *khejaalat* (roughly blushing, embarrassed) to have taken my husband with me. It was good that the hospital was private and classy and it was ok to have a companion; otherwise I would have sent my husband home from *khejaalat* (roughly shame and embarrassment)....

In this last extract, the first part of the experience is not directly related to the situation but derives from within the person. She feels that her bad thoughts about dying during the operation were not logical and therefore she feels *khejaalat* due to her illogicality

and cowardice. In this situation the elicitor of the emotion is not public but a private one in which she construes the elicitation of emotion as a failure of the self. She is ashamed of being a coward and not as brave as the other patients. This kind of feeling is where the distinction between shame and guilt becomes a bit unclear since the source of the emotion is private. In the Persian language this kind of feeling is considered positive as it allows the sufferer to learn something from that experience and try to use the experience to improve the self. The concept of *khejaalat* here is equal to *sharm* (shame; modesty) which is a positive form of shame in Persian culture and is used in contexts where individuals feel shame as a way of correcting their behaviour.

Sharm has both positive and negative valence based on the context and situation. In bilingual dictionaries the translation for *sharm* is almost the same as *khejaalat* but with the addition of the term “modesty”. *Sharm* in Persian sometimes acts as a moral barrier against the social elicitor to regulate unacceptable behaviour. It is like a cover that protects a person’s *zaaher* and *baaten*. With such a meaning, it is synonymous with the word *hayaa* (roughly modesty; self-restraint), an Arabic borrowing. Therefore, when a person feels *sharm* the feeling is accompanied by an element of modesty. It is also quite common to use the expression *sharm va hayaa* together in Persian in situations where the moral concept is felt to have been violated.

Naturally, *khejaalat* and *sharm* are often close to each other and may be used in the same context. The range of English equivalents may cover a range of words such as shyness, embarrassment, dishonour, feeling guilt, feeling awkward, etc. The following are some examples from some weblogs that illustrate the meaning of *sharm* in different contexts:

1. *pesaram hamish-e az harf zadan-e joloyeh dokhtaraayeh ham sen va saalesh sharmesh misheh.*

Literally: My son always feels *sharm* talking in front of girls of his age.

2. *ehsaas-e sharm nemikonid az inkeh hoghugheh digaraan ro mikhovid? Man ke sharmam miyaad.*

Literally: Don’t you feel *sharm* from eating [violating] other people’s rights? I feel *sharm*.

3. *man ye chizi ye jaaee khundam ke baaes shod sharm va hayaa ro ghoort bedam va ye soaal dar morede sex peporsam.*

Literally: I read something somewhere that caused me to swallow (ignore) *sharm va hayaa* and ask a question about sex.

In the first sentence, the blogger talks about *sharm* that causes her son to be shy in front of girls of his age. This is a personality element that Iranian children learn as rule of conduct in public which makes them define a moral border between themselves and the opposite sex. In the second sentence, the blogger is questioning the morality of violating people's right telling the reader that this kind of behaviour will bring moral shame on people and they should avoid this kind of violation. In the third sentence the blogger is trying to justify the moral violation of talking about sex as a woman which is taboo in Persian culture by using the expression *sharm va hayaa raa ghoort daadan* (literally swallow shame and modesty which is roughly translated as "to become morally shameless"). In the above sentences the concept of *sharm* is used with a moral connotation which is a protection of the self from failure. In these examples the concept of *sharm* is a positive attribute that is essential to building human morality. Now look at the following examples from the weblogs:

1. *ba'azi vaghtaa sharmam misheh ke begam iraani hastam.*

Literally: Sometimes I feel *sharm* to say I'm Iranian.

2. *az zan boodan-e khodam sharmam misheh.*

Literally: I feel *sharm* of being a woman.

In these two sentences the application of *sharm* is somewhat similar to dishonour and the blogger feels negative about her identity in the society. In such contexts *sharm* is a negative feeling that one may feel on account of something that is directly related to oneself. Here the feeling is a combination of anger, dishonour, embarrassment, and shame that comes to the person as a kind of criticism toward the self and identity.

What emerges from the above examples is that *khejaalat* and its counterpart *sharm* are different from any comparable equivalent in English, and any translation of these two words in English does not cover their broad range of connotational meanings in Persian.

In other words, the above discussion reveals that the concept of *khejaalat* and its counterparts in Persian are culture-specific and cannot be easily translated into English.

7.4.2 The language of guilt in Persian

Closely related to the concept of shame is guilt which may be considered as a central moral emotion in Persian culture. In Western culture both shame and guilt are considered to be negatively-valenced moral emotions and the two concepts seem to be synonymous to both community members and academics (Tangney et al., 2007). However, there have been many attempts to differentiate between these two emotions. Tangney et al. (2007) offer three categories of research for this differentiation. These categories include the focus on the events that elicit both emotions, the public or private nature of the event, and the degree to which individuals interpret the event that caused the emotion as self-failure or self's behaviour. Based on several studies done in psychology, they reject the first two categories and state that the third category is a good indicator of the distinction between shame and guilt. This view is based on Lewis' (1974) proposal on the source of the emotion where she attributes shame to a negative evaluation of the self and guilt to a negative evaluation of a certain behaviour. Since shame puts the self at risk, it is more painful and devastating than guilt as a result of a specific behaviour.

I propose that this proposition does not match exactly with the Persian definition of guilt. Guilt in Persian is usually accompanied by a spiritual component that brings more pain to the individual. In order to understand the concept of guilt in Persian, I first look at its meaning in Persian and the ideology beyond that. For this purpose, I start from the English to Persian translation. In bilingual English-to-Persian dictionaries guilt is variously glossed as "*taghsir*" (blame), "*jorm*" (crime), "*bezeh*" (misdemeanour; sin), and "*gonaah*" (sin). In the Oxford English dictionary, the following definitions are common for the word guilt:

1. a. The fact of being responsible for the commission of an offense. b. *Law* The fact of having been found to have violated a criminal law; legal culpability. c. Responsibility for a mistake or error.
2. a. Remorseful awareness of having done something wrong. b. Self-reproach for supposed inadequacy or wrongdoing.⁴⁷

While both English and Persian definitions of guilt generally cover all the legalistic concepts of guilt, the word *gonaah* (sin) is not a common definition for guilt in English dictionaries even though English has the religious connotation for guilt as well. This is where the difference in Western culture and Persian culture emerges as guilt in Persian is strongly rooted in religious ideology. In many English-to Persian translations, the phrase “feeling guilty” is usually translated as *ehsaas-e gonaah kardan* (literally feeling sinful) which I think is not a good translation. In my opinion, a better translation would be *azaab-e vojdaan* (roughly torture of conscience) but to any Persian speaker the concept of guilt is immediately translated into *gonaah* with a religious connotation. For this reason, I checked the word *gonaah* as a central concept in Persian culture for guilt in bilingual dictionaries to see its English equivalents. All the present dictionaries translate *gonaah* as “sin”, “transgression”, “crime”, “guilt”, “vice”, “misdemeanour”, “misdeed”, and “blame”. It is notable that the first meaning for *gonaah* is sin denoting that any single act of guilt is an act of sin that may come with spiritual punishment to the person. I assume that this aspect of guilt in the religious component of Persian culture gives the feeling a positive valence as in Persian culture it is believed that in any experience of guilt the person’s soul should suffer till the *baaten* (inner) gets purified. Therefore, the source of any guilt experience may be a certain behaviour, but that behaviour will definitely reflect on the soul of the person causing him to be spiritually preoccupied with the experience. Homaa has shown her guilt of living in the diaspora far from her family in quite a number of posts:

⁴⁷ Guilt. (2010). In *Oxford English online dictionary*. Retrieved, February 12, 2010 from <http://www.oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=guilt>

It had been three days that you were gone [dead] and I didn't know.
Nobody had told me.

You were that sick? Why when I was talking to you on Tuesday night and asked you if you wanted me to come and see you, you said, "No dear, I'm ok and it's these people [family members] who are making a fuss over it. There is nothing wrong with me."

I'm far from everything at the moment. You loved me that much that you didn't want me to be in trouble to come and see you? Why didn't you tell me? I even sent some spies from my husband's side to bring me some news, but they betrayed me and didn't tell me anything.

What is the use of my crying for you anymore? They tell me that I don't need to go back. They're right. It's three days that you're gone and I was taking care of my good and happy life here.

It's now too late for everything, too late. It's even late to suppress that pride that I have inherited from you and tell you I love you.

I should return now to see what? To see you in the grave? No. You? It's impossible. I hope it's not my leaving that caused *degh daadan*. Maybe you died of sadness? Mom says that you were talking to my picture all the time. Then, why didn't you talk with me? You wanted to surprise me? You wanted to burn me? Oh God! I'm being suffocated....

The language of the post is a good example of the expression of guilt. The content of the post is like a soliloquy or dramatic monologue in which Homaa expresses her feeling of guilt regarding her father's death. She feels guilty for leaving the family, and she feels that her leaving may have caused her father's death. She uses the verb *degh daadan* as a possible source of her father's death. This verb for which I have not been able to find any English equivalent is used in Persian for situations where a person gets so full of sad and painful emotions and reaches such a level that the overflow of those emotions may kill him. It is a mental state in which the person experiencing the emotion cannot communicate the sad and painful feelings to others by getting them off his/her chest and he/she will suffer consequently. Because of the *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) among Iranian family members, Homaa thinks that her distance and the rupture between her and the family has caused this event for the family, and she feels guilty as a result. Due to *raabete-ye aatefi* in Persian culture, families do not break sad news to other members especially if they are living far from the family. They think that

sad news will affect them emotionally while they are away. That is why Homaa talks about sending people as spies to their house to get some news about her father's health. All these elements have put her in a guilty position, and she has also reached the stage of *degh kardan* by stating that she is feeling suffocated. She is using the word suffocation metaphorically to show the depth of her guilt and her suffering.

In sum, the discussion of the language of guilt in Persian also reveals that guilt in Persian culture is viewed differently than in English, and any translation of the word does not fully capture the cultural meanings which are associated with it.

7.5 Vicarious/collective shame and guilt

Parallel to the personal experience of shame and guilt, some researchers have attempted to investigate group-based shame and guilt (cf. Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005; Tangney et al., 2007). This line of thinking is based on the assumption that interpersonal relationships and membership of a group can partly determine the self, and hence, the wrongdoings of other members of the group can reflect on the self. Tangney et al. (2007) argue that vicarious shame and guilt are the same as personal shame and guilt in many ways, and mention several studies that associate vicarious guilt with empathy and a tendency to take reparative measures and vicarious shame as a tendency to keep the self away from the elicitor. A useful approach to the understanding of this phenomenon in the context of the virtual *dowreh* is the one by Lickel et al. (2005). They consider two social dimensions in their study of vicarious emotions. One dimension is the sense of "shared identity" that people in a group feel they have and the other is the degree of interdependence with each other. They state that groups that share traits such as "gender, ethnicity, religion, and kinship" (p. 148) may share a higher level of identity as such qualities are vital elements of any person. Since for individuals shared identities are a means of identifying self, then they try to maintain a positive picture of their group identity and avoid a negative group image (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, as cited in Lickel et al., 2005).

Evidence of vicarious shame and guilt were present in the bloggers' writing. There were quite a number of posts and cross-blogging discussions and referencing in which the bloggers had written about the misrepresentation of their shared Iranian identity. In the context of diaspora, the source of vicarious shame seems to be the way Iranian identity is viewed by the majority of foreigners and their passivity towards changing views about Iranians. This is basically because the bloggers identify themselves as a minority ethnic group with certain cultural and religious norms, and they feel that their shared identity should be maintained in the diaspora. This kind of attitude has caused them "emotional dissonance" where their experience of emotions has collided with their identity. Jansz and Timmers (2002) define emotional dissonance as "a feeling of unease that occurs when an emotion is evaluated as dissonant with respect to one's identity concerns" (p. 84). They maintain that the source of the uneasy feeling is people's emotional experience rather than the sole event that caused it. The significant function of emotional dissonance is that it signals to people that there is a threat to their identity and something has to be done to regulate the emotional experience.

Vicarious shame and guilt and the consequent emotional dissonance have caused the bloggers to do something about their identity presentation in the diaspora. One of their biggest challenges is the false and perhaps negative shared identity image that they believe Westerners in general and Australians in particular have about Iranians. This has brought about a series of posts and discussions among the bloggers and their audience and the strategies that they employed to defend their collective national identity. For instance, Anis has written about her workplace and the way people see her:

Iranian?

My workplace is like a small family company with a lovely atmosphere. My job is the same as what I used to do in Iran and I think I have been lucky regarding this. One of the surprising things that has caught my attention for a while is the worldwide view of Iranians especially among Australians and others who happen to know nothing about Iranians. They think that we live in severe poverty, cover our face in public, don't go to university, and don't know anything about new technologies.

Believe it or not, during my first days at work my executive's wife who works with us was explaining to me how to use a device called a microwave if I wanted to make coffee for myself. When she was giving me instructions on how to use the microwave, I thanked her and told her that I knew how to use it. She was shocked and asked me if I had seen microwaves before?? I told her that I had seen all the things that are available here, and we have all of them in Iran. Poor woman! She was embarrassed and apologised to me.

Yesterday at lunch I told them that they didn't have snow. I told them that we have a lot of snow in Iran and we always went skiing. Then everyone asked me with surprise if we go skiing in Iran? They asked me if women could do these activities in Iran! It was interesting to me and I explained many things to them, and I promised to bring photos of people's lifestyles, their houses and parties to the company.

You should have seen them today. They could have been knocked over with a feather!⁴⁸ They were talking about women's clothes, the beauty of our houses and our ski trips!!! And the surprising thing for me was that the photos just showed usual and simple things such as a normal house and people with simple clothes.

After that my boss told me that he had a different opinion about Iranian culture and women's way of life before I started working there, and he apologised a lot telling me that it's all because of the scenes that they show on TV and analyse everything unidimensionally.

Now I'm wondering if maybe the thing that I showed them about lifestyles in Iran was unidimensional??

Anis' post can be analysed from several dimensions. In fact, both vicarious shame and guilt are present in her post. In the first part of the post she shows her shame regarding the way people around the world think of Iranians. She feels that her source of self-

⁴⁸ This is an equivalent of the Persian expression *az ta'ajob shaakh dar aavardan* (literally to grow horns from surprise).

identification and esteem, which is her Iranian nationality, has been jeopardised by being misrepresented. In the second part of the post she shows guilt and tries to repair the negative stereotypical image of Iranians by informing her colleagues of the quality of life in Iran through a number of photos. This is in line with the empathic and reparative dimension of vicarious guilt in which individuals try to make amends. At the end of the post she feels guilty on a personal level and tries to invite the audience to see what they think of the way she presented Iranian life as she thinks it was unidimensional. This guilt emerges from her only positive presentation of Iranians for she thinks she has given a good picture of life in Iran and she has excluded the negative aspects of the country. Therefore, she wants to know what other members of the group think of her behaviour and if they agree with what she has done.

Anis' post created a series of discussions in the virtual *dowreh* and the members shared their opinions with her in different ways. The following is a selection of some of the comments and the way the audience sees her reparative action. Generally, the comments can be divided into three categories. Some commenters support what Anis has done since they believe the face (*aaberu*) of Iranians should be preserved outside Iran, some believe that both sides of life should be demonstrated, and yet some *dowreh* members think that nothing can be done as some Iranians around the world have *aaberu rizi kardan* (dishonoured) the national identity:

Shivaa 23/05/2007 comment# 1

Dear, continue keeping the face (*aaberu daari*), but in reality we all know what kind of thinking is going on behind the technology, and the talented and educated people in Iran....

Bahaareh 23/05/2007 comment# 3

In my opinion, one of the prophetic missions of we educated people who want to enter the international arena and experience life with international standards is what you have done. If I were you, I would have done the same and tried to change the Iranian image even on a small scale such as the workplace. Therefore, your behaviour was not unidimensional at all.

Shivaa and Bahaareh both appreciate the way Anis has presented the Iranian face in the diaspora. This kind of view is quite customary among many Iranians as *aaberu* has special significance in Persian culture. O'Shea (2000) states that for Iranians "*Aberu* [sic], or honour, is a powerful social force. All Iranians measure themselves to a great extent by the honour they accumulate through their actions and social interrelations" (p. 101). The cultural schema of *aaberu* in Persian has both physical and moral conceptualisations. The word *aaberu* is a combination of *aab* (water) and *ru* (face) and it literally means "water of face" (Sharifian, 2007, p. 36). In Persian culture this may be used metonymically to refer to the general health and wellbeing of individuals or when individuals have sweat on their face because they feel that their honour or social identity has been threatened or damaged and thus brought them shame and guilt.

The concept of *aaberu* is not only an individual trait in Persian but it is also linked to the face of family, relatives, or any other group with which a person identifies himself/herself. Furthermore, it is not only the behaviour or personality that defines *aaberu*; it could be social status, class, financial situation, dress code, appearance, and so forth through which *aaberu* can be kept or lost. These layers of *aaberu* bring social obligations to many Iranians and make them sustain behaviours that enhance their face and refrain from actions which may endanger their face.

In my experience, many Iranians, including those in the virtual *dowreh* in this study, think that the West does not have a positive or accurate image of Iran and its culture. They think that the Western media have misrepresented the Iranian national identity. Therefore, they make an effort to uphold their national *aaberu* in the eyes of other nations, and that is why Shivaa and Bahaareh are supportive of Anis' attempt in demystifying the quality of Iranian life for Australians. In fact, the misrepresentation of Iranians in the world is a subject of discussion among the commenters of the above post and some are even angry and ashamed at how Iranians are presented:

Sepideh 24/05/2007 comment# 7

Dear Anis, I myself have heard a lot that, for example, we travel by camels. We had an English co-worker who came here from an Italian company. He told me that he didn't think that Iranian women could drive at all or even had tertiary education.

Maryam 24/05/2007 comment# 9

Unfortunately, this is the view that they have towards us. They are not at fault because, as your boss said, it's a reflection of the Western media. You don't need to go as far as Australia. Just consider Turkey, which is our neighbour. When I went there for the IELTS exam, there was a Turkish guy who was in the IELTS session with us. He had the same image of Iranian women and life in Iran as your colleagues, and we could give him a bit of a more realistic image of Iranians in half an hour.

Golsaa 24/05/2007 comment# 11

...Let me tell you [the situation] from France. A couple asked us about Iran when we were on the train. They told me that they had heard that Iran was very dirty and that the streets are full of garbage and lots of people are thieves. I was in shock from their talk for 3 to 4 minutes and it took me a while to explain to them that they were wrong.

Saaraa 25/05/2007 comment# 13

In Canada, those people who have little knowledge of Iran have the same limited vision of Iran, and you need to give them a lot of evidence to prove that they are wrong. Alas! What has happened to Iran and her civilisation?

Par 27/05/2007 comment# 18

...I think the problem is that these people [Westerners] mix us with Arabs. We don't identify ourselves with Arabs, but it seems that we won't be separated from them anymore....

All the commenters share their shame at the group level and feel bad at how the collective identity of Iranians has been presented around the world. As Sepideh and Par state, one of the major sources of misunderstanding for Australians is thinking of Iranians as Arabs. This misunderstanding has caused them to generalise their thinking to all countries in the Middle East, and this is where many Iranians feel the shame of not being recognised by other nations and the guilt of what to do to represent a better identity in the diaspora. Maryam, Golsaa, and Saaraa talk about the vicarious shame they have experienced by sharing the viewpoint of other nations regarding Iranians, and the reparative measures that they took to reverse their views about Iranians.

All in all, the above discussion of vicarious shame and guilt illustrates the importance of the virtual *dowreh* for this group of Iranians in the diaspora. It seems that the virtual *dowreh* has become a community of practice for the bloggers to discuss their in-group identity and the issues surrounding their national identity in the host society.

7.6 The language of pride in Persian

Pride in English is considered as a positively valenced moral emotion and some researchers generally see it as the opposite of shame (Goddard, 1996). Mascolo and Fischer (1995) define pride as an emotion which is “generated by appraisals that one is responsible for a socially valued outcome or for being a socially valued person” (p. 66). In contrast, pride in Persian culture has both negative and positive valence and there are different words and expressions that are used to reveal both dimensions in communication. In bilingual dictionaries pride is glossed as “*mobaahaat*” (roughly honour), “*behtarin*” (the best), “*sarbolandi*” (roughly honour; glory), “*fakhr*” (glory; pride), “*efaadeh*” (snobbery), “*ghorur*” (conceit), and “*takabbor*” (arrogance). The range of Persian equivalents shows the wide scope of meaning and their usage in the Persian language. Generally some of the words are used in a positive way while others denote a negative concept. *Mobaahaat*, *behtarin*, and *sarbolandi* are used to talk about positive pride, while *fakhr*, *efaadeh*, and *takabbor* are used when the concept of pride becomes a negative trait for individuals. The word *ghorur* has both negative and positive meaning depending on the context of talk.

One meaning that is missing in bilingual dictionaries for the word ‘pride’ is the Persian word *eftekhaar* (honour; pride); however, when the adjective proud is looked up in bilingual dictionaries the adjective form *mofstakhar* (honoured; proud) is among the Persian equivalents. *Eftekhaar* is one common word which is used by Persian speakers to talk about circumstances where people feel pride as well as honour and glory. The assumption is that when individuals feel pride for certain events, then the pride brings them honour as well. In order to clarify the meaning of *eftekhaar* I have taken some examples from some of the weblogs:

Zohreh 19/02/2007 post# 3

Having good friends in life has always been my top priority because I enjoy spending my time with friends more than anything else. During my life I have met some people whose personalities have shaped my life.... When I left Iran I thought I would lose many of my good friends, but when I received a package from some old high school friends I understood that they are always with me no matter where I am. As I know they read my weblog, I want to tell them how proud I am (*eftekhaar kardan*) of their friendship. Having dear friends like you, I feel I'm a successful woman. I feel *eftekhaar* of your friendship.

Haamed 10/11/2007 post# 1

After 23 months of living outside the country, I'm happy that I have gained many good experiences. One of them is that each nation has people that they feel *eftekhaar* of and people that they feel ashamed of....

Homaa 23/09/2008 post# 6

When a person is born in a country and grows up in it, then automatically it becomes their native land. That's how you're assigned a nationality and you learn to be proud of that. Before leaving Iran, I didn't care that much about my nationality, which I think is the same for everybody as it is taken for granted. But now that I live in Australia the situation has changed as I see how other people from other countries are proud of their nationalities. This means that I need to show chauvinism toward my country as well, but I can't as everything about Iran is negative here.... I really feel sorry that I'm an Iranian. There isn't much left to be *eftekhaar* of.

In the first post Zohreh uses *eftekhaar* with almost the same meaning as pride in English. She is proud of having friends that have influenced her life in a positive way. However, the context of Haamed and Homaa's writing shows feelings of *eftekhaar* not only as pride but also a combination of honour and glory. Haamed's writing is based on the phenomenon of an individual's achievement being collectivised to a national level which brings a nation pride, honour, and glory whereas Homaa is complaining about being an Iranian since currently some Iranians think that there is no honour or glory left in being an Iranian.

It appears that Homaa's attitude is one that can be seen among other Iranians who live outside the country. They try to introduce themselves as Persian or coming from Persia

when asked by foreigners since they believe that honour and glory can be maintained in such a way. The reason for using the word “Persian” is that for some Iranians the word is a manifestation of the Persian Empire and the glory of the Empire in the history of the world. They think that identifying themselves with the history of Persia may detach them from Iran as a Muslim nation, which is considered a source of shame for some Iranians especially those who live abroad. This kind of identity introduction sometimes causes miscommunication for foreigners as they think Iranian and Persian are two different nationalities. This kind of attitude raises foreigners’ curiosity and, as Zohreh writes about it in one post, they try to understand the reason for this:

Zohreh 21/05/2008 post# 7

I was talking on the phone with a friend and she asked me why we say Persian but not Iranian when we introduce ourselves? I answered that I think there are some peculiar reasons. One reason might be the present stupid political issues that governments around the world have caused for us... or maybe they want to look friendlier or they want to remind others of the glorious past of the Persians. Another reason can be that they want to separate themselves from the strict and orthodox Muslims, and they are looking to separate themselves from Arab Muslims insisting that they are not the same and they want to be introduced separately. Other reasons may be that they want to say that “we’re your friend”. We’re Persian like the Persian cat which is nice and delicate; or the Persian carpet which is expensive and famous around the world....

In her post Zohreh is trying to enumerate several reasons why some Iranians introduce themselves as Persian. Although she explains at the beginning of the post that she was answering a friend’s question, her nationalistic view toward Persian culture and identity is quite obvious. In her patriotic account for her friend, she highlights the glory of the Persian Empire, the difference between Iranians and Arabs, Iranians’ friendly attitude, and the famous Persian cat and carpet all of which are sources of pride, honour, and glory for Iranians. In fact, Zohreh’s sense of nationalism is in line with the elements of the pre-Islamic legacy of Banuazizi’s (1992) typology (see chapter two) of Iranian identity.

The discussion of pride in Persian also reveals the sociocultural differences between Persian and English. The examples in this section illustrated how pride in Persian is

used to manifest both positive and negative emotions of pride depending on the context of communication. The discussion of posts and comments also highlighted how the Persian bloggers think of their Persian pride especially on a national level in the host society.

7.7 Summary

Putting the whole discussion together, this chapter brought to the fore and examined the emotional language that was present in the weblogs. The aim was to document the type of language that is used in Persian culture to express certain emotions. In so doing, I specifically focused on the language of homesickness and self-conscious emotions in Persian as manifested in the bloggers' writing. The analysis of homesickness in the weblogs revealed that memories from the homeland and past belongings and the new environment were sources of homesickness for the bloggers. In order to talk about their homesickness, the bloggers and their audience used the word *deltangi* (literally heart tightness) as a central concept in expressing their homesickness. The use of *deltangi* revealed the centrality of *del* (heart) in Persian culture and illustrated sociocultural dimensions of homesickness in Persian.

In terms of self-conscious emotions, the chapter initially focused on shame and guilt by describing “shame cultures” and “guilt cultures” and then introduced Persian culture as a combination of both shame and guilt cultures due to the traditional and religious archaeology of the society. Built on the discussion of shame and guilt, the chapter led to vicarious shame and guilt and the way the bloggers had experienced it in the host society. The exploration of the data marked the negative image of Iranian identity held by Westerners as a major source of vicarious shame and guilt for the bloggers. Finally, the chapter explored the emotion of pride in Persian culture. The data revealed that pride in Persian has both positive and negative valence depending on the context in which it is used. Furthermore, the discussion of pride illustrated some of the reasons why some Iranians expose a dual identity in the diaspora and introduced themselves as “Persian” rather than “Iranian”.

The next chapter presents a summary of the study, conclusion, contributions of the study, and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary of thesis

This study investigated how and why Iranian migrants make use of weblogs in expressing their emotional experience of living in the diaspora. The study started by exploring a group of Iranian bloggers who were publishing in the Persian language from Australia. By focusing on the content of their weblogs, the study pondered over the sociocultural elements of emotion and the language of emotion that were manifested in the bloggers' writing. What follows is the summary and highlights of each chapter.

The first chapter began with my background as a researcher and how my migrant status turned into the object of this study. The introduction revealed the realities of the living conditions of a specific generation of Iranians who experienced two different regimes and a long war during their life time. My background also justified why I was a suitable researcher on this project as my age and generational experience empowered me to identify myself with the majority of the bloggers and their writing. The chapter also justified the reasons for studying the emotional experience of Iranian migrants in cyberspace as a new domain of emotion research.

The second chapter contemplated the emergence of a virtual *dowreh* among a group of Iranian migrants in the diaspora. The discussion started with an introduction to the Iranian diaspora and the history behind it and familiarised the reader with the reasons for the migration of Iranians to other countries. The discussion then led to the formation of a hybrid identity and a feeling of liminality among migrants as a result of living in the diaspora and the struggle for identification. It was argued that the feeling of liminality among Iranians may motivate them to seek ways of reviving some of their social and cultural values in the diaspora. An example of this was the social practice of

dowreh in cyberspace where Iranians could get together and practise some aspects of their cultural identities which were missed in the diaspora. In order to illustrate how the concept of *dowreh* works in Persian culture I specifically brought into focus a virtual gathering of a group of Iranian bloggers called “Friday for Living”. By analysing different aspects of *dowreh* and their manifestations in “Friday for Living” the discussion revealed the possibility of a virtual *dowreh* for Iranian immigrants in Australia. The examination illustrated that *dowreh* aspects such as group identity, commitment, shared practices, repeated performances, and furthering the interests of other members were present in “Friday for Living” in the same way as an offline *dowreh*. Furthermore, the members’ performances in “Friday for Living” demonstrated that their virtual gathering resembled an Iranian *khaanevaadeh* (family) where they could get together in an ethnic *samimi* (intimate) world of *baaten* in the Australian world of *zaaher* and spend some time together on the Iranian weekend, *Jome’eh*. In other words, this specific virtual *dowreh* provided an online ethnic space and a social circle where Iranians could meet with each other and practise cultural identities while living in the host society. The virtual *dowreh* acted as a community of practice where the members took part in joint activities and shared their stories and experiences. The discussion also illustrated that weblogs were multifunctional for Iranian migrants in the diaspora and they used weblogs to be in the circle of family and friends and enabled them to share their experience of living in a different country.

The second part of the chapter addressed the issue of language in Persian weblogs in the diaspora. By examining the use of language among the bloggers in their virtual gatherings and discussions, it was revealed that the language of weblogs for this group of Iranians in the diaspora was a hybrid of Persian written and spoken language combined with the jargon of the Internet and weblogs and terms and concepts that were bound to the host society. The analysis also illustrated that the type of writing that constituted the posts was not paratactic as observed in another weblog study (Nilsson, 2003), and posts were generally lengthy due to the diary-like nature of the weblogs in this study.

Following the discussion on virtual *dowreh* and the use of weblogs in the diaspora, chapter three focused on the archaeology and structure of virtual/online communities and the emergence of diasporic weblogs as online communities. As the focus of the

study was on weblogs, the chapter specifically zoomed in on those features of weblogs that allow people to communicate with each other and especially took into account the existence of sense of community (SOC) among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora. In order to find out SOC among the Persian bloggers in the diaspora the four dimensions of SOC by McMillan and Chavis (1986) were examined. The data revealed that the four dimensions were present in the bloggers' performances, and they provided the foundation for further analysis of the community. By running a social network analysis (SNA) among the weblogs, it was illustrated that there was a strong SOC among the bloggers within and across Australia as well as with other Iranian transnationals around the globe and in the homeland.

After establishing the existence of social ties among the Persian weblogs in the diaspora, the rest of the chapter dealt with the issue of weblog audience and the challenges it proposes to researchers. It was argued that it is important to focus on weblog audience as the audience is the heart of weblogs where most of the interaction between bloggers and their readers takes place. By applying Langellier's (1998) typology of audience, it was observed that audience types in the Persian diasporic weblogs were beyond the typology and there were more categories of audience for this group of weblogs based on their functions within and from the diaspora. The audience types that emerged from the data were divided into two categories: explaining and sharing the new, and explaining and sharing the old. The first category included migration information seekers, receivers of the host culture, receivers of the homeland news, and families and friends in Iran and in the diaspora. The second category encompassed receivers of the nostalgic past where the bloggers shared their nostalgia with their readers in the diaspora or invited their readers to different memes about the past, to support different ideas/ideologies. The emergence of these categories brought to light the importance of audience in weblog studies and the possibility of different audiences for different weblog networks.

The fourth chapter constituted the research methodology and design that were drawn upon in the course of the study. The chapter focused on online research and issues that online researchers need to address in any study of the Internet. Of importance was the issue of ethical consideration in Internet research and how to tackle research ethics in such contexts. Based on several studies (Waskul & Douglass, 1996; Herring, 1996; Bruckman, 2002; Sveningsson, 2004; Hookway, 2008) it was argued that the context of

online research is of utmost importance in defining specific ethical requirements, and it is not possible to have a single set of criteria to be applied to any online studies.

The second part of the chapter addressed grounded theory and the stages that are usually utilised in any application of the theory. Grounded theory and its stages were discussed fully along with their application in this study. The discussion revealed the power of grounded theory in the study as it allowed for the revisiting of the data and the emergence of themes regarding the emotional experience of the bloggers in the diaspora. The emergent themes revealed that most of the emotional writings and discussions in the weblogs and virtual gatherings were the result of living in the diaspora.

Chapter five discussed the effect of culture on the shaping of emotion. The discussion opened by introducing the ethno-psychological approach to emotion which places emotion at the heart of social norms, meaning systems, and moral values of a given culture. Then, the discussion moved to the view of 'self' in individualist and collectivist cultures and the way individuals develop a set of cultural identities growing up in any of these cultures. It was argued that cultural identities become an essential part of an individual's identity and any change in cultural identities may become a source of emotional uneasiness or discomfort. The rest of the chapter was the introduction of several Persian cultural elements that build Persian individual and collective identity and define the view of 'self' in Persian culture. These Persian cultural elements provided the background for the emotional experience of the bloggers in the diaspora.

After establishing the background on Persian cultural schemata, chapter six delved into the heart of the emotional challenges of the bloggers as reflected in their writing. The chapter ran a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the emotional experiences of the bloggers based on the themes that emerged in the process of grounded theory. The chapter started with the terminology of migration in Persian culture and the way migration is viewed in Persian culture and then discussed "existential migration" as a possible new reason for the migration of some Iranians.

The rest of the chapter discussed the four themes of migration and emotion, sociality and emotion, acculturation and emotion, and return and emotion. In terms of migration, it was illustrated that the experience of migration was not a cheerful one for the

bloggers as they felt they were detached from their homeland and their belongings. This made them rely more on the homeland and virtual *dowrehs* for support in dealing with the emotional challenges of living in the diaspora. Sociality was also full of emotional challenges as the bloggers' Persian cultural schemata impeded their socialisation with the host society. There was a lot of evidence with respect to acculturation in the blogger's writing. What their writing suggested was that the bloggers were still in the process of "enculturation" and cultural learning and it would be a matter of time to find out the degree of acculturation that each individual might undergo. The final section of the chapter revealed that there were different attitudes toward staying in the host society or going back to Iran. Thus, each blogger had a different emotional reaction based on their attitudes. Some bloggers were happy with their life in the diaspora while some could not stay for a long time and needed to go back to Iran every now and then. On the other hand, some bloggers were lost in the process of migration and were undecided as to what to do next while some others considered their stay temporary and they wanted to go back to Iran.

Chapter seven took the analysis in a different direction by exploring the language of emotion in Persian and the way certain emotions are culturally constructed. The chapter specifically focused on the language of homesickness, and self-conscious emotions as manifested in the bloggers' writing and analysed the language of these emotions in the bloggers' posts and their discussions with their audience. The analysis brought to the fore the linguistic and cultural differences that exist between how the Persian and English language express these emotions.

8.2 Conclusion

This thesis investigated two questions in the process of the study. The questions were formed based on the observation of posts, comments, and discussions on migration in the weblogs of a group of Iranians living in Australia. What follows is the answer to the questions based on the findings and discussions in the previous chapters.

8.2.1 How do Iranians in the diaspora use weblogs to revive their *dowrehs* lost in migration?

There is no doubt that migration is a process that detaches individuals from their original place and all their belongings. As part of this process individuals lose their social ties and networks and thus, may develop an emotional yearning for communication across distance and maintaining relationships with all the things left behind in the homeland. At the same time, encounters with the new environment and problems associated with living in the new location can be a source of emotion for new migrants. This makes individuals seek ways of establishing connections with the homeland or replacing their social network in the host society. Studies on migration have investigated the use of letters, telephone, emails and chat rooms among migrants and transnationals and the way they make use of them. With advances in Internet technologies and the ease of access, transnationals who live outside their territorial borders have been able to draw upon Internet technologies in order to establish digital diasporas where they can communicate and be in touch with their peers within and across diasporas and the homeland without the limitations of time and space.

The same thing is true of the Iranian bloggers in this study. They started their weblogs in order to maintain their old ties with the homeland and make new ties with other Iranians in the diaspora. This motivated them to use their weblogs as a channel of communication within, across, and from the diaspora in order to establish a virtual connection with other Iranians. Due to the migrants' limited interaction with the host society, the weblogs played a key role in their daily life and provided an opportunity for them to interact with other Iranians in the diaspora and the homeland. As the bloggers were an ethnic minority in the host society and somewhat isolated as a result, their shared history, culture, values, and practices unified them in their online interaction with each other. Thus, weblogs became a space where they could bring their stories of life in the diaspora online and share with each other their experiences and feelings of living between cultures and identities. In this process weblogs played different roles for this group of Iranians. They established a Persian virtual community in which Iranian immigrants took membership based on their common background and the experience of living in the diaspora. This virtual space was very influential in bringing the bloggers

together and building trust and getting along with each other regardless of any differences in class, social status, and religious or political beliefs. The element of trust and the existence of shared emotional connection among the bloggers brought them closer to each other and made them feel comfortable to express and discuss their emotional challenges of life in the diaspora. The virtual community was a space where they could receive support from other members or provide support especially in cases where the experience of migration had turned into psychological distress and caused emotional challenges for the members. As the bloggers were far from the homeland and away from the circle of family members, relatives, and friends, they depended heavily on the virtual community and its members. The virtual community was the only immediate Persian community in the diaspora where they could identify themselves and feel free to talk about any aspect of their life. In other words, the members of the virtual community provided a shoulder for each other to cry on and express their emotional experiences without having to conceal or suppress them as the members were quite aware of the feeling of being far from the homeland.

The blogs were also a place to practise cultural identities in the diaspora. One of these cultural practices was the revival of *dowreh* in a digital way. Weblogs provided an opportunity for this group of Iranian bloggers to reduce the feeling of liminality and the psychological challenges of living in the diaspora by establishing a virtual *dowreh* where they could get together as an ethnic group in the diaspora. In fact, the creation of the digital diaspora among Iranian bloggers was a channel for the revival of sociocultural practices such as *dowreh* that were lost in the process of migration and living outside the country. Therefore, weblogs and the online social network that they established were instrumental in creating a Persian home online with Persian ethno-cultural walls and hallways in the diaspora. This virtual *dowreh* welcomed any Iranian who was living in the diaspora and/or was in the process of migration and accommodated them in a *samimi* (intimate) environment where they could practise cultural identities by being in the virtual circle of family and friends.

8.2.2 Which emotions, and their linguistic expression, index Iranian diasporic identities online?

The discussion in this thesis concentrated on the cultural shaping of emotion and the way emotion is viewed in a given culture. The reason for such an approach to emotion was the fact that many of the emotional experiences of the bloggers in the study were the result of their cultural encounter with the host society (Australia) and the cultural contradictions and/or conflicts that arose as the result. The discussion revealed that the individual and collective identity of Iranians is composed of a set of norms and values that are deeply rooted in the traditional and religious structure of the society and that govern the individual and collective way of thinking and behaving. The combination of these values and norms, and the belief system has created a very complex culture that shapes individual and collective identity of Iranians. Along this process the emotional identities are also shaped as emotions are the “glue” of identity (Kofler, 2002) and “signals of identity confirmation and disconfirmation” (Smith-Lovin, 1990, as cited in Kofler 2002, p. 16). The result is the formation of a distinctive ethnic or national identity at the individual and group level that lays a framework of emotional culture at the heart of the nation.

Chapter five highlighted some Persian characteristics that shape the value system of individuals and construct Persian identity. Of importance were *baaten* (inner) and *zaaher* (outer) in Persian culture that define the boundaries of the self in relation to contexts of intimate and non-intimate relationships for Iranians. The discussion revealed that *zaaher* and *baaten* are two organising poles of the self that govern the private and public life of individuals and define the emotional identities in intimate and non-intimate relationships. As individuals migrate, they leave their intimate ethnic zone of *baaten* and enter a non-intimate world of *zaaher* in the host society where they have to negotiate their private and public aspect of the self in their cultural encounters with the new environment. Consequently, this may cause different kinds of emotional reactions in individuals. As people do not have enough access to their *samimi* (intimate) *dowrehs* of family and friends due to distance, the virtual *dowrehs* become a *samimi* ethnic space which allow them to enter the Iranian world of *baaten* in the diaspora. The *samimi*

nature of the online *dowreh* provides a palliative space where individuals can bring their emotional stories of living in the diaspora and share them with other members.

The analysis of the bloggers' posts and discussions in online *dowrehs* illuminated the emotional challenges that the Iranian bloggers were tackling at different stages of migration and settlement. The first obvious emotional challenge was the movement from Iran as they felt they were *az jaa kandeh shodeh* (uprooted) from their homeland and all their belongings. This kind of feeling made migration a sad experience for them and affected their life in the diaspora. For this reason, the majority of the bloggers were publishing their dilemma of living in the diaspora as they felt they were lost in their *roozmargihaa* (days that you spend like a living death) due to the loss of familial *dowrehs* and the lack of *raabete-ye aatefi* (emotional dependency) and separation from their emotional belongings. After settling in the host society, their encounters with the host culture were also full of emotional discomfort. Much of the emotional discomfort was the result of their Persian cultural schemata meeting the Australian culture. The bloggers revealed that some of their cultural norms and social values affected their sociality in Australia and limited them in their interaction with Australians. Some of the emotional challenges that they shared online with other members implied that Persian cultural identities such as *gheirat* (manhood), *hojb va hayaa* (modesty and virtue), *aaberu daari kardan* (to save face), *tavagho* (heightened sensitivity), *gham-o-ghoseh* (sadness and grief), and social hierarchies were among the major sources of emotion and detachment from the host society. The combination of these Persian sociocultural factors made adjustment to the host society difficult and caused a slow process of acculturation.

The differences between the bloggers' cultural identities and that of the host society caused the manifestations and discussions of certain emotions in the bloggers' posts and virtual *dowrehs*. A large proportion of posts and discussions were about homesickness and a yearning for the homeland. The exploration of the bloggers' writings revealed that both homeland memories and the new environment were sources of homesickness in the diaspora. Homesickness was indexed by *deltangi* (*del+tangi* literally heart+tightness) which reveals the centrality of *del* (heart) in Persian culture to express homesickness and the range of meanings that the word *deltangi* (homesickness) encompasses depending on the context in which it is used. The analysis of homesickness in the

bloggers' writings illustrated the sociocultural dimensions of *deltangi* in Persian and the reasons for the use of the word in expressing homesickness.

The second category of emotion that was manifested in the bloggers' posts and their virtual *dowrehs* was self-conscious emotions. In order to analyse self-conscious emotions chapter seven focused on shame and guilt by describing "shame cultures" and "guilt cultures" and placing Persian culture on a continuum with a tendency toward both. The analysis showed that the weblogs were inundated with shame and guilt experiences on an individual and collective level. The main reason for the abundance of shame and guilt in weblogs was the traditional and religious archaeology of Persian culture and the bloggers' encounter with the host culture.

Once the foundation of shame and guilt in Persian culture was established, the discussion led to vicarious/group shame and guilt and the way the bloggers had experienced it in the diaspora. Based on posts, comments, and online discussions it was illustrated that the major source of vicarious shame and guilt for the bloggers was the negative identity image that Westerners hold about Iranians and the misunderstanding of their collective identity.

The discussion of shame and guilt led to the emotion of "pride" as some bloggers wrote about their pride in Persian identity. The data revealed certain reasons as to why some Iranians develop a dual identity regarding their nationality by introducing themselves as "Persian" instead of "Iranian" in the hope that they can be identified with aspects of their history rather than the assumed Western understanding of their present image.

8.3 Contributions of the study

This study was a first attempt to illustrate the way Iranian migrants make use of weblogs to create virtual *dowrehs* and express and share the emotional experience of living in the diaspora. By focusing on a group Persian bloggers publishing from Australia I was able to bring to the fore the psychological challenges of both the new generation of Iranians and the new wave of Iranian migrants. This was a radical and

innovative step forward in studying emotion in Persian culture and language from cultural studies of several decades ago (cf. Beeman, 1986; Good & Good, 1988). This thesis illustrated how important 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 and/or share the emotional challenges of living between cultures and identities.

In terms of the sociolinguistics of emotions in Persian, this study was also a novel attempt in exploring and introducing the sociocultural artefacts that establish Persian emotional identities and indexing the language of Persian emotion in the context of migration. By focusing on the language of homesickness and self-conscious emotions as reflected in the bloggers' writing, this thesis explored and illustrated the sociocultural elements of these emotions in Persian. Ergo, this thesis opened up new windows to the world of migrants and the way they draw upon weblog technology as a channel for expressing and sharing the emotional challenges of living in the diaspora. The study also shed light on the possibility of creating diasporic virtual communities via weblogs where migrants can practise their ethnic rituals and identities while living in the host society.

The contribution of this study to the field of emotion is also evident. In terms of modality and research context, this thesis highlighted the possibility of weblogs as a source of data collection for studies of emotion. The study demonstrated that weblogs can provide a rich and accessible source of emotional writing produced by bloggers without the intervention of the researcher. This makes weblogs an invaluable source of data in any type of study of human emotion as writings are naturally (and very probably unconsciously) produced for the consumption of the reader rather than the researcher.

This study also contributed to semantics of emotion across cultures and demonstrated some of the similarities and differences of certain emotions such as homesickness and self-conscious emotions in Persian and English. In fact, the analysis of emotion in this thesis was an introduction of the linguistic and cultural production of certain emotions in Persian to studies of emotion worldwide. This can be the inception of a new line of research on universals of emotions and the sociocultural similarities and differences that may exist in Persian culture and language using semantic models of emotion such as

Wierzbicka (1996) to explore diversity and universals of emotion. This will be an important step in studies of emotion as currently the literature on the Persian language and emotion is at its infancy.

With respect to studies on weblogs and their audience, this study brought to the fore the importance of the role of comments in weblog studies and the shortage of studies on weblog audience. While other works such as Scheidt (2006) failed to take up the evidence of interaction between bloggers and their audience in comment spaces, the findings of this thesis illustrated the importance of audience in shaping virtual communities and networks especially for people in the diaspora. The audience in this study played a major role in the life of the bloggers as they were part of their daily life in the diaspora. The comment space where the audience was present was the main channel of communication between the bloggers and their audience where support was given and/or received. The results suggest that weblog audience is the heart of weblogs that keep bloggers and their virtual communities alive and pumps life into communities. This indicates that in any weblog studies the audience should not be taken for granted due to their unseen nature or the complexity of extracting the content of comments.

8.4 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

Although this study was broad in scope and addressed several issues regarding blogging in the diaspora, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the main source of data collection in this study included ten weblogs which may imply a small sample size. Although these ten 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 Australasia in particular. Future research could concentrate on a larger number of weblogs as the source of data in order to be able to generalise from sample to population. Having said that, the data from ten weblogs might have also represented a broader view of blogging in the diaspora. Focusing on and a detailed analysis of a single diasporic weblog may also produce interesting results.

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 from the capital of Iran, Tehran. This means that there might be a hypothetical border between the bloggers in this study and other bloggers who come from other regions in Iran. While this difference may not be noticeable on the surface, it is worthy of attention as people in the capital have a different lifestyle which may affect their world view and their interpretation of their environment based on their expectations. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the majority of the bloggers were people with an IT background who migrated to Australia under the skilled migrant category. This may also affect the world view of the bloggers and their expectations of life back home and in the diaspora. Therefore, the opinions and ideas explored in the body of this thesis 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.

Also related to demography is the issue of ethnic and religious minorities in Iran. As mentioned in the literature on the Iranian diaspora, Iran is a country of ethnic and religious diversity. This means that there are most likely Iranian virtual communities of minorities in the diaspora parallel to their offline communities. Focusing on Iranian virtual communities of ethnic and religious minorities in the diaspora may produce interesting results as this study addressed only Persian blogging in the diaspora.

Thirdly, future research may concentrate on other aspects of blogging or other emotions in the diaspora. This thesis mostly concentrated on the role of weblogs in the emotional experience of the bloggers in the diaspora and shed light on how weblogs are used to express emotions and share them with others. It specifically explored homesickness, and self-conscious emotions in the context of migration and the way they are culturally constructed and expressed in Persian culture and language. There were certainly other emotions such as, for example, positive self-conscious emotions, negative emotions such as regret, resentment, and failure that were not in the capacity of this thesis. Therefore, exploring the diasporic weblogs regarding other emotions may produce further results.

Another point that merits attention is the focus on the Persian weblogs in other parts of the Iranian diaspora. This study drew upon Persian weblogs in Australia. This means that the viewpoint of the bloggers with respect to migration are affected by and limited to life in this part of the world. In other words, the cultural, political, social, and economic views present in Australian society may have affected the bloggers' viewpoints and consequently been reflected in their posts and discussions. Future studies could explore how Iranians in other parts of the world use weblogs to reflect on their lives, and what roles weblogs play in their lives.

Last but certainly not least is the exploration of weblog technology and its effect on the isolation of migrant population from the host society. As illustrated in the body of this thesis, weblogs provided an opportunity for Iranian migrants 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. My own experience as a blogger and a migrant also gives me the impression that I have been spending more time in the virtual community than 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.

8.5 A final word

Living in New Zealand as a migrant was an inspiration in conducting this research. My background as an Iranian and as an EFL teacher provided an invaluable opportunity to delve into the life of Iranian migrants in Australia and delineate the emotional challenges of their migrant life as reflected in their weblogs to the outside world. I started this project as a member of the diaspora without any background in emotion, migration, and weblog studies. Through years of studying these subjects I expanded my knowledge and applied my understanding to the data in order to bring to the fore the emotional challenges of the Persian bloggers in this part of the world. It is my sincere hope that I have been able to draw a realistic picture of what this generation of Iranians have depicted in their weblogs regarding their emotional experiences in the diaspora. Furthermore, it is my hope that this thesis acts as a starting point for the future exploration of different aspects of Persian emotional identities in other Iranian communities around the world in order to improve the literature on Persian diasporic emotion.

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