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The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness

Next Generation Diaspora

Donya Alinejad

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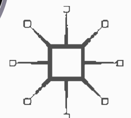

The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness

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Next Generation Diaspora

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Dedicated to my mother, Sima Asvadi

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Not to toot my own horn or anything," Sepideh said, "but I was doing what *Nokteez* did in the UK years before them." Sepideh and I were sitting together at the desk in the bedroom of her Santa Monica rental, both facing her wide, sleek computer screen as she clicked between the various sites she was showing me. Nokteez.com[1] was a London-based website that described itself as a project that "collects and shares slices of Contemporary Iranian culture, in the fields of art, music, design, theatre and film." To Sepideh, *Nokteez* was exemplary of the emergence of blogs and websites written in English by Iranian migrants outside Iran and focusing on Iranian cultural production. Sitting at her desk, she navigated swiftly between some of the sites and blogs she followed, as she told me about her work on a blog called *Parsarts*, which she had started up some years prior. With its byline, "Iranian Diaspora Life/Culture/Identity," Sepideh had begun *Parsarts* to highlight "Iranian life and culture abroad."[2] The striking thing about Parisa's blog was how rooted it was in her own particular way of being Iranian.

Something of an early adopter of blogging platforms, Sepideh had worked in web content editing, and soon after I met her in California in 2008, she began working for an online startup media company in Santa Monica. Her work for the blog had helped her gain and deepen contact with a range of others equally interested in questions of how Iranian-ness was taking shape outside Iran. And she had met, interviewed, and written about Iranian diasporic filmmakers, authors, and artists. Her friends described her as

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being especially active at the intersection of emerging digital technologies and Iranian diasporic culture, and she had been blogging about the topic since 2002. Embedded within a variety of social relationships and inspired by her personal reflections on her own Iranian and American-ness, Sepideh's blog was part of her ongoing process of figuring out how to relate to her own Iranian cultural background from a very situated experience of everyday life in Los Angeles (LA), California.

But Sepideh's world was a very different one than I had envisioned when I first set out in 2008 to conduct field research in LA about Iranian diaspora bloggers. Having been intrigued by the Iranian blogging phenomenon that rose significantly in the early 2000s, I was drawn to the unique border-crossing potential of blogs, for helping diaspora bloggers and readers participate from a distance in the predominantly Iran-based, Farsi language blog scene known as Weblogistan/"Veblogestan" (Amir-Ebrahimi 2004; Doostdar 2004; Hendelman-Baavur 2007; Alinejad 2011; Shakhsari 2011).[3] I was impressed by stories about the political potential of easy-to-use blogging applications and the brave acts of political dissidents in the Islamic Republic, including those who had gained large audiences internationally and those who eventually had to flee overseas to pursue their web publishing (and other) activities.[4]

I had previously conducted "virtual ethnographic" (Hine 2000) research on English language political diaspora blogs by Iranians, including conducting interviews with some of the key international figures in this political scene (Alinejad 2011). So in an effort to elaborate on that interest, I went to LA, the city known for being home to the highest number of Iranians outside Iran, with the intention of finding out more about the lives of those who were engaging with this Iranian blog scene from a distance. Sepideh was one of the people I met early on, and I asked her how involved she was with this online sphere and the diaspora-blogger-dissident phenomenon. Her response was one I came to hear echoed time and again by others in the course of my time in LA, and in particular from the children of Iranian parents who had grown up in the USA: "The time it takes for me to read those [blogs] is simply too long.[5] And the context they are writing from doesn't speak to me. Their experience is not mine." The response confronted me at once with a problem and an insight.

My initial interest had been mostly shaped by international media coverage of Iranian blogs, and my starting point was informed by previous research I had largely conducted online, about blogs written from dispersed locations. Contextualizing diaspora blogging within offline life

came with the challenge of locating where it was lived, and it also meant that the investigation would necessarily be shaped by that context. And so, it was. Several of those I met, interviewed, and befriended in LA could have fit the profile of the diaspora-blogger-dissident to various degrees. But getting to know them confirmed what Sepideh's response had also indicated: Iranian diaspora bloggers were much more diverse than I had imagined, and blog users who were politically engaged with developments in Iran were largely disconnected, in both their online and offline practices, from second-generation bloggers like Sepideh. Hers was a mode of Iranian diasporic internet use I likely would not have found out about without being in LA, and by conducting ethnographic field research in this context for over a year, I witnessed intensifications of engagement with diasporic Iranian cultural production by the children of Iranian migrants in this city. Sepideh's blog foreshadowed a number of young people's efforts toward starting up English language, web-based projects focusing on Iranian culture, history, and arts, and scholarly writing in ways that appealed to them.

The striking thing about these projects was that they were curated in line with the author(s)'s vision and were started by a generation of Iranians who had grown up outside Iran. This not only set them apart from diaspora bloggers with political ties to Iran but also set them apart from prominent Iranian diaspora websites—like Iranian.com, which was predominantly run for and by the first generation of Iranian migrants in the USA—which were more intended as broad, interactive discussion platforms. Instead, sites like *Ajam Media Collective, Btaarof, Jigaram.com*, and *Yaddashts*, predominantly produced by the US-based second generation, are small-scale projects, each with their own scope and particular emphasis. Non-existent just a few years prior, these projects sprouted up independently, and signaled a possible shift in how Iranian American-ness was being given meaning by a new generation who had their own experiences and ways of using digital media.

This made me interested to find out more about how this particular moment might indicate a change in what Iranian American-ness meant, and how a new generation of young people and their next-generation applications and devices might be developing a new, mediated engagement with the notion of diaspora. As an anthropologist I knew that, like all diaspora communities, the Iranian diaspora had never been a static entity but was always a dynamic social formation. And I situate my work with relation to research on Iranian diaspora populations in LA that has investigated the changing modes of belonging and identity formation over time (Naficy 1993; Sullivan 2001; Ghorashi 2002). And yet, with the

current high pace of technological advancement, it is overdue that scholarly work on Iranian diaspora also begins to understand the role of digital media. Furthermore, there is a demographic and historical particularity to this moment in which a new generation of Iranian Americans is entering adulthood in a post-9/11 America, still engaged in the (expanding) War on Terror in a variety of sometimes unpredictable ways. This adds a degree of urgency to the need to trace how the current use of communications technologies is implicated within mediated local, transnational, and translocal processes of self and other formation.

This book tells a situated story of internet use by a particular part of the Iranian migrant population: second-generation internet users living in LA. It is a story that diverges from my initial intention to focus on the diasporic-blogger-dissidents, whose long distance politics tends to dominate international news headlines and Western imaginaries about Iranians and the internet. It also diverges from the story of their parent's generation who mostly migrated to the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, and who are typically drawn to different kinds of websites and media practices. This book seeks to investigate how digital media practices are part of the cultural practices of becoming Iranian American for this generation. In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce the field site, outline my fieldwork practice, and define the main research question that this book seeks to address. The situated approach I took to conducting this research meant studying people's usage practices in conjunction with the broader social and cultural context within which they take shape, including the broader diasporic media context. And in the case of the LA-based Iranian community, exile media production was an important part of this.

Media Research Across Generations: From Exile Television to Internet

The Iranian media environment in LA has been suggested by Sreberny to be the most culturally rich in the Iranian diaspora (Sreberny 2001). In the context of my fieldwork, this was recognizable in the elaborate Persian language media production, which includes many print publications, radio stations, satellite television productions, and local cable broadcasts. A significant part of this industry is exile media production, which features both in the scholarship on Iranian diaspora and as a presence in the city's mediascape. Indeed, the significantly sized Iranian American population owes its presence to a considerable wave of exile migration around the 1980s.

Tens of thousands of Iranians have been in LA since the first wave of migration to the USA in the 1960s through the early 1970s (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009). This was a period during which USA–Iran relations were relatively amicable, and LA and Tehran became sister cities. However, the reasons for migration changed from the often-temporary student migration to more extended or permanent exile and political refuge due to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The latter led to a much more intense, second wave of emigration from Iran.[6] The third wave is thought to have been set in motion since 1984 (Jalali 2005) and can be attributed in part to the consequences of the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–1988.

In-depth accounts of migrational trends to the USA have been covered in other research (Bozorgmehr 1997; Modarres 1998; Ghorashi 2002; Mobasher 2006) and will not be recapitulated in full here. Emigration from Iran since the 2009 uprising and the crackdown on student protesters and other activists signal another, much more recent wave that has been less researched as yet. The question that these dynamics raise is whether exile remains a useful concept with which to understand Iranian migration. This question becomes all the more pressing because increasingly diverse motivations and experiences underlie recent emigration from Iran, leading to a wider variety of migration narratives than the notion of exile can encompass.

Naficy's *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Naficy 1993) is a seminal conceptualization of exile media. Naficy's theorization sees the state of liminality in which Iranian exiles find themselves as a stage that at once connects them to the lost homeland while also encouraging adaptation to commercial values in American society through exile television production. His work can be placed within a body of qualitative research on Iranian migration to LA that addresses both the traumas of dramatic transformations caused by dispersion and displacement, and the possibilities and advantages of mobility. This work[7] has tended to extend the application of exile as a conceptual frame for understanding the lives of Iranian Americans in LA to include adaptive and agentive social and cultural engagement by migrants. Recent research has also pointed to the usefulness of the exile framework in explaining continuities between the first and second generation. For instance, Maghbouleh situates the Persian language music industry—essentially an industry transported from Iran to LA after the Islamic revolution—within exilic modes of cultural production. She argues that these modes also generate second-generation claims to homeland and the appropriation of collective narratives of loss and

pain, experienced vicariously by the younger generation through a shared interest in Persian music (Maghbouleh 2010).

In addition, Malek's essay on contemporary (literary) cultural production in the Iranian diaspora invokes the productive elements of Naficy's conceptualization of exile to argue that this allows contemporary Iranian cultural producers in the diaspora to occupy an "in-between" positioning as part of creating a "third space" in the vein of Homi Bhabha's notion (Malek 2006). The persistence and adaptation of the exile frame in understanding contemporary diasporic practices is interesting, and its relevance can perhaps be explained by the lasting fissures between Iran and USA state powers. That is, a lack of open, diplomatic relations between the two nation-state regimes means relatively more restrictions on movement for citizens. The Iranian state's repression of the 2009 Green uprising also speaks to the sustained and systematic legal and political persecution of dissidents. Under these circumstances, the sustained pertinence of exile as a way to understand experiences of Iranian migration makes sense.

It may mean that the children of Iranian migrants share more in common with those of Cuban immigrants[8] than their Haitian equivalents who have been discussed as constituting a single "transnational generation" across borders due to ease of travel (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001).[9] Opportunities for return travel among the second generation of Iranians hinge on birth certificates, passports, parents' political background and circumstances of migration, severed social ties, family trauma, and fear of detention, on top of the usual financial and time considerations. Such travel is, therefore, neither a given nor fluid part of life for many of them, as (sometimes nebulous, sometimes clear-cut) obstacles mark the flows of their transmigrancy.[10]

Mason's work on Palestinian migrants shows how the second generation also engage with experiences of exile, and demonstrates that the role of transnational media such as books, songs, and poetry, as well as blogs and email, are particularly formative for the second generation's "'virtual' relationship with the homeland" (Mason 2007). This work shows how issues of exile persist in specific ways in the second generation's media use, and make it relevant to understand what role internet technologies play under circumstances where transnational mobility is impeded for the diaspora (Aouragh 2011). Without overlooking the contemporary traces of exile, my intention in this book is to assess how applicable the frame of exile is to the Iranian American second generation's lived experiences and media practices.

Anthropological work focusing specifically on the second generation of Iranian migrants is sparse. However, Sreberny (2000), McAuliffe (2007), and Maghbouleh (2012) present rich ethnographic accounts of the Iranian second generation in the West from the disciplines of media studies, human geography, and sociology, respectively. They reveal the nuances of diversity that come with the identifications that cross cut Iranian-ness (e.g. ethnic and religious). This attention to diversity is supported by Bozorgmehr's "internal ethnicity" notion, which also draws attention to axes of differentiation *within* the Iranian population in the USA (Bozorgmehr 1997).[11] The work on the Iranian second generation also reflects less attention for media production dominated by middle-aged Iranian men of the first generation, which, as Sreberny notes (2000), signals possibilities for greater gender diversity within the younger generation's media engagement. These changes to the Iranian American population over time and how it is studied are also compounded by the changes in the "host" society.

That is to say, the second generation has entered adulthood in a very different America than that into which their parents immigrated decades ago. Bozorgmehr's most recent documentation of post-9/11 consequences for Iranians in LA, and for Middle Easterners in the USA in general, has contributed to understanding and conceptualizing the negative changes over time that this immigrant population has collectively endured. But we also know that the Iranian second generation is doing relatively well in positioning themselves in American society in many regards. Maghbouleh's work on second generation Iranian Americans makes an argument for Iranian-ness as "an affirmative identity" (Maghbouleh 2012) that empowers young people to make collective bonds, as well as take critical stances toward the "host" society. And Bozorgmehr and Douglas' contribution points to an upward socio-economic trajectory for second-generation Iranian Americans (Bozorgmehr and Douglas 2011) in contrast to the thesis of "second-generation decline" (Gans 1992). Hence, the Iranian American second generation is developing its media uses within a host context that has changed much in one generation, and is a group that occupies an ambiguous positioning within that context.

In addition, changes in diasporic media production are underway as internet-based media are increasingly produced outside the exile media hub of LA. Other cities with large Iranian populations are home to Persian language web radio stations like Radio Javan and Biya2.com

in DC, and Iranican.com in Toronto.[12] As successive generations come of age and sites like these and others proliferate, LA's older exile community and its prevalence within the Iranian diasporic media sphere may well wane. Whether this signals a move toward new cultural industry centers and new modes of Iranian diaspora media production remains to be seen, as LA remains an influential reference point for Iranian American-ness globally, and as Maghbouleh notes, the LA Iranian culture industry also has gained influence inside Iran (Maghbouleh 2012). But the dominance of LA in the future diasporic media landscape is increasingly uncertain with the rise of new generations and media forms. And this signals a clear need for research that sheds light on precisely what kinds of changes are taking place, and which alternative analytical frames might best help to understand these socio-cultural and media-technological dynamics together. I use my focus on the city of LA as a way to deepen and delineate the situated understanding that my investigation offers.

The Place: Los Angeles as a Global Hub for Media and Migration

The city of LA is not just a neutral backdrop to this story. It places my respondents' lives within an urban environment with concrete implications for cultural transmission, media production, and modes of sociality. For instance, the distinct presence of Iranian Americans in many neighborhoods in and around LA County has strengthened the second generation's identification as "Iranian" due to them being surrounded by other Iranians, with ease of language transmission and retention as one of the results of this (Mahdi 1998). But like all cities, LA is not a homogenous place with singular effects on its population. Its development and infrastructural growth have shaped and been shaped by how various migrant populations have inhabited the city, especially according to class and ethnic distinctions. The early development of LA's Westside reflected economic competition with Downtown LA, resulting in today's LA landscape being rather two-headed. Both centers are steeped in affluence and reflect what has been argued is an approach to urban planning and architecture that excludes the poor and working classes (Davis 1992). The experience of living in and moving through the different spaces of the city can make this very clear at times.

Furthermore, the Westside emerged in the 1920s as a (European) Jewish center as a result of the film industry's (mainly Protestant) exclusion of this group despite their wealth (Davis 1992). This part of the city then experienced an influx of Jewish immigrants during the Second World War, which was combined with a new middle- and upper-class local populace (Fine 2004). It was mostly within the affluent Westside that my research activities were concentrated, but spanned from Orange County to the Valley with stops between. The Westside was the area of LA to which Iranian Jews gravitated upon their arrival, but experienced some difficulties because of the predominantly Ashkenazi background of the Westside Jews (Jalali 2005). The Westside—especially Westwood and Beverly Hills—are, nevertheless, largely settled today by the Jewish Iranian community, known for their affluence. East LA, by contrast, is known for its large Hispanic populations, and a relatively less wealthy and working-class demographic. As Fine writes:

> Multiethnic from the beginning, but dominated by the Anglo-Protestant downtown plutocracy, Los Angeles in the 1920s was moving towards its present configuration—massive westward spread, Westside affluence, and increasing racial and class segregation along east-west lines. (Fine 2004)

By 1930 East LA constituted the nation's largest Mexican barrio, booming in the early twentieth century with the key period in the city's industrialization (Romo 1983). Iranian American respondents who I met, who work, live, and grew up in this part of the city, spoke about a qualitatively different experience than their West LA counterparts, as did those whose families called South Central or other parts of LA home. This spatialization of the city shapes everyday life for its inhabitants, and the class and racial/ethnic diversity and hierarchies that play into this spatialization also have repercussions for ways of being Iranian Americans in LA.

Much of the work done on Iranians in the USA between the late 1980s and early 1990s was on Iranians in LA, California (Bozorgmehr 1998: 14). Perhaps most significantly this included Kelley and Friedlander's *Irangeles: Iranians in Los Angeles* (1993), Naficy's *Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (1993), and Waldinger and Bozorgmehr's *Ethnic Los Angeles* (Bozorgmehr and Waldinger 1996). This work, in turn, contributed to solidifying the presence of Iranians in LA (Feher 1998; Jalali 2005). It is noteworthy that most of this scholarship on Iranians in LA came from researchers and institutions based in LA and California, many

of whom were Iranian themselves, lending not only a self-contained quality to the city in its relationship to this particular immigrant population but also a merging of scientific and social dynamics around notions of being Iranian that was concentrated in this particular city and the (inter)nationally high academic standing associated with it and the state of California.

In addition, LA is a national and international center for media production. It is home to leading print news outlets and major entertainment production studios. These powerful institutions are also responsible for producing highly contested media representations of migrants and other minorities. LA Iranians find themselves in close proximity to a film industry that shapes their lives through its mass media representations of Iran, Iranian Americans, and Middle Easterners. But it is also the center of where American-ness is shaped by the film industry. Powdermaker's impressive 1950 ethnography of cultural producers in the Hollywood movie industry points out how the films coming out of these studios are themselves a "uniquely influential institution in US society" (Mahon 2000). She points out the nuances of the tensions between economic forces and artistic goals that are governed by the social system in which cultural producers in Hollywood operate. Although the music industry is not mentioned, this is another major part of the global commercial cultural production emanating from LA, and contributes to the power of LA as a center of global media influence through the "dreams it manufactures" (Powdermaker 1951).

From 1950s Hollywood to today's Silicone Valley, California is also a place of media genesis on a global scale when it comes to the ICT industry. Arguably, the dream being manufactured there is that of technologically enabled societal liberation, and the social system that actors operate within is that of the archetypal venture capitalism-fueled tech start-up.[13] The expansiveness of the tech industry (an important part of the California state economy) means that Iranian Americans and other ethnic minorities end up increasingly becoming a part of the workforce of this industry at different levels. From the heralded CEO of Google and the head of eBay, to the youthful employees who were interviewed at the Facebook headquarters as part of CNN's coverage of the role of Facebook in the 2009 elections, to Sepideh who worked for Google's Santa Monica branch, to tech journalist and author Cyrus who grew up in Santa Monica, Iranian Americans (the second generation included) are among those who not only use internet applications, but are also sometimes involved in their technical development and in (re)producing the discourses around them,

either in their capacity as professionals in the area of programming and web development, or as journalists who cover these developments. They are implicated as active participants in the ways the internet develops at the technical and discursive levels, and thus play some role in the history of the technological development (Agre 2002; Turner 2010). Their roles are also particular to the condition of living in proximity to media and technology hubs within California.

Finally, the city's infrastructure shapes access to telecommunications. The economic geography of the internet reflects a global tendency toward the concentrated development of internet backbone networks around already-existing telecommunications infrastructure in world cities (Malecki 2009). This supports speculation about the defining role of world cities in the development of global internet connectivity, by such prominent theorists as Emanuel Castells (2000) and Saskia Sassen (1995). However, as Townsend suggests, empirical investigation of these ideas was lacking as much as the lack of empirical investigation of opposite claims, such as Nicholas Negroponte's (1995) ideas that the internet's development would lead to a decentralization rather than a centralization of communications technologies around already-established urban nodes (Townsend 2001).

As technologies spread, empirically grounded work fuels debates over which explanatory models best encompass the changing processes of internet's infrastructural centralization around global cities (versus decentralization via other locales). With regard to the dynamics of inequality *within* (global) cities themselves, Townsend presents the startling finding that LA's distribution of domain names in comparison to San Francisco's, for instance, are much more unevenly distributed:

> [I]mmigrant and minority neighborhoods show little internet activity. Within the San Francisco area, the difference in domain name density between academic Berkeley and poor, ethnic Oakland is hardly on the scale that separates South Central Los Angeles from the affluent Westside. (Townsend 2001)[14]

I spent my fieldwork period staying in and visiting various parts of what is officially The Greater Los Angeles Area. This area refers to a region that includes five counties, including Los Angeles County, Orange County, San Bernardino County, Riverside County, and Ventura County, the combined populations of which give LA its megacity status. The city's

population within the Metropolitan Area and the Greater Los Angeles area, make it the second largest in the country after New York, based on a 2005 US Census estimate. Yet it is important to note that the patterns of uneven distribution of internet access and usage across Los Angeles means that the Westside focus of my investigation is by definition partial and skewed by the people and places in the city within which my study was situated.

The Los Angeles Metropolitan Area—where I ended up spending most of my time and where most of my respondents also tended to spend much of their time—contains various parts, some of which are officially "unincorporated" parts of LA City, such as East LA. Generally speaking, the city is divided into: Downtown LA, the Eastside and Northeast LA, South Central, the Harbor Area, Wilshire, Hollywood, the Westside, and the San Fernando Valley Area. I met people and attended events located across most of these areas, with a concentration in the Westside and Wilshire, where most of the gatherings took place and where several of my respondents, lived, worked, and studied.

The People: Who Is This Book About?

This book is about a number of young people I got to know during a little over a year of living in LA. Living among second-generation Iranian Americans in LA and observing their practices and speaking with them allowed me to follow them through parts of their daily activities, and therefore trace their enacted and discursive connections to other people, places, and things. I conducted ethnographic research that followed several children of Iranian immigrants in LA and the connections they made, spending time with them in various contexts, asking them about how they use digital media and think about their own internet practices and "the internet" more generally. My research practices also included developing friendships, and I came to share an apartment for several months with one friend, and have continued exchanges with others. I noted during fieldwork that despite the fact that most research on second generation migrants defines this group according to place of birth, this was an arbitrary, even meaningless cut-off point to use given the social dynamics and self-identifications among my respondents. Based on this realization (particularly for those who migrated with their families very early on in life), I defined the second generation as the children of those first-generation migrants who migrated as adults. This of course includes those who were the first in their nuclear

families to be born in the USA, but it also includes those who migrated as minors, together with their parents. Hence, I focused on a carefully selected group of young people whose parents had migrated to the USA, either before or not very long after their birth.

Formally, I spent a total of 13 months doing fieldwork in LA (between 2008 and 2009). I also returned to the field for over a month in 2013 where I presented some of my findings to an audience that included some of my respondents, as well as had informal conversations and shared parts of my writing for comments as part of efforts toward respondent validation. I started the process of accessing and selecting respondents by approaching a wide range of people, and thus my fieldwork included meeting and conducting interviews with both first- and second-generation Iranian Americans living in the city. These yielded roughly 70 conversations varying in length from 20 minutes to 4 hours, which were recorded in a variety of ways, from voice recordings and direct transcription to notes taken during, or impressions noted afterwards.

This material was supplemented by material from my field notes taken at dozens of events as well as based on shorter, informal conversations I had with people there, as well as interactions in people's homes. I also took photographs of some of these events, including photos of media (in the form of print booklets and sign boards). My notes also cover some of the interactions with a few of the young people I befriended more closely and whose family and friends I met and whose lives I became a part of for a longer time than the fieldwork period, two of whom I was already in touch with via my earlier research on Iranian bloggers. Due to my ongoing interactions with my respondents online, it became more difficult each time I returned to the Netherlands to say that I had left the field—an experience I am sure anthropologists of all (sub)areas are increasingly noticing.

When writing up the accounts my respondents shared with me in this book, I most often use people's actual first names, unless people asked me not to reveal their identities or where unavailable to confirm. In these cases I have used pseudonyms. During the writing process, I noticed that when engaging with versions of my work-in-progress, some respondents could recognize themselves and one another despite my use of pseudonyms. Hence, my effort to make use of people's real names is intended as a measure of avoiding a layer of obscurity, not only for readers in general but also for those about whom I am writing and their fellow community members who might know them.[15] I have omitted their surnames in most cases as I do not see value in identifying them to strangers.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that in some cases, links I make to online content can identify people beyond first names. I made judgments and selections about omitting or obscuring such links in certain cases, in particular when sensitive issues were being discussed, and noting that when I used verbatim quotes from online sources, search engine applications make these statements traceable (when made on publicly accessible websites), making the authors more easily identifiable.

Notwithstanding these considerations, more often than not, I have included links to material I refer to online in the service of context, interest, and research transparency.[16] Hence, in many instances the quotes and descriptions I present can be traced, verified, and reflected upon directly in their original, online form by the reader via the hyperlinks provided, including by those about whom I write.[17] My hope is that the details I include help to embed the knowledge this investigation produces within the community in question. It is to this same end that I incorporated the comments I received from respondents on the book manuscript into the text.

Although I approached a wide variety of people from the Iranian "community" in LA, including first-generation Iranian Americans, the key intention of this investigation is not to be comparative between generations, but to follow connections between the second generation and other relevant actors. My main respondents ended up being a group of about 20 people I conducted in-depth interviews with, and about ten people who I had repeated contact and closer friendships with and whom I came to rely on as key respondents. I mainly gained initial access through youth-oriented organizations for Iranian Americans including student organizations geared toward academic, social, and cultural programming for their members. They also introduced me to one another based on their knowledge of my research interests, putting me into contact with other people and organizations.

The people that drive the story of this book are mostly those members of the second generation who play a unique and active role in contributing to how Iranian American-ness is articulated in LA (whether among their friends and family, fans and followers, or wider publics). This is a task that also most often involves digital media in some important capacity, and they took up this task as educators, artists, intellectuals, students, photographers, poets, organizers, activists, DJs, filmmakers, and other kinds of professionals. Though not all necessarily "community leaders" in any formal sense, I would say that many of them, certainly, are part of a cultural *avant garde* when it comes to putting

their own formations of Iranian American-ness into practice, and giving form to Iranian American-ness through these practices.

I realized that rather than having taken the self-identification as "second-generation Iranian American" as a basis for defining my sample, I had been interested in people who actively engaged with the notion of Iranian American-ness. And so, the account I present is one focused on these people's practices of rejecting and denying this label, as well as stretching, re-shaping, and re-appropriating to fit and include them. I followed how they use the label critically, productively, and often from its margins. In this regard, my respondents often felt they were not typical Iranians in LA. Levitt and Glick Schiller distinguish ways of "being" from "belonging" transnational(ly); according to this distinction, my respondents are not only "being" Iranian American (through mundane social interactions that place them in connection with both Iran and the USA), but are also claiming "belonging" to a transnational Iranian American social field (which includes making a conscious connection with an identity label, "combining action and awareness") (Levitt and Schiller 2006).

I will explain more about social fields in the following chapter, but I mention it here to clarify that by telling these people's stories I do not want to give the impression that all Iranian Americans of the second generation are as explicitly invested in identity labels and cultural politics as my respondents are. That being said, we should heed Levitt and Glick Schiller's reminder that conscious engagement with migrant identity is not constant, but depends on young migrants' personal development throughout their life cycle, as well as important developments in the "homeland" (Levitt and Waters 2002; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Levitt 2009). Hence, even those who at moments in their lives actively participate in re-negotiating labels at other times seek to disengage from them (with varying success), for instance, preferring to be seen as a musician/writer/scholar rather than an Iranian American musician/writer/scholar. In other words, the variety of their positioning professionally, publicly, and personally, did not always explicitly involve identity claims to Iranian American-ness, but were also non-explicitly practiced through ways of being Iranian American in living their daily lives.

Despite their self-perception as somewhat marginal players within the community, my respondents' high education levels and predominantly middle-class backgrounds meant that they are well-connected, both with one another and with institutions, organizations, technological infrastructures, and even, at times, with the public debates that implicated them.

They also came from families and had career prospects where upper-middle class life would be attainable for them. Hence, while coming from an ethnic/racial minority in American society, as a whole they are among the city's most resourced minorities. And despite perhaps belonging to a minority group of the Iranian American population in LA, they also have the status of a potentially influential minority of a minority. My focus on this particular group necessarily makes this book's analysis a partial one. Yet, its contextualized depth means that the claims I make reveal things about how processes of mediation and migrant identification may work more generally.

Although I made efforts to include a range of people, practices, and voices when conducting fieldwork, I did not select my respondents so as to make up a representative sample of the religious/ethnic variety of the demographic makeup of LA Iranians. This was a result of accessing respondents through an informal web of contacts-of-contacts—a kind of qualitative social network tracing also known as snowball sampling. It is perhaps for this reason that my key respondents turned out not to include the Iranian Americans who explicitly identified as Jewish; rather most of them identified as having a Muslim cultural background or being practicing Muslims. A tiny minority mentioned having been raised Christian, and for others the issue of their religious self-identification did not feature explicitly in the conversations we had. It is also perhaps an indication of the group dynamics among them that the gender composition was split rather evenly between men and women.

My respondents' lives unfolded in a range of settings in the city, from people's houses, to college campuses, to workplaces, to stores, cafes and restaurants, to the cars they drive in between these places, to gatherings of various sizes and kinds, in living rooms, in parks, in cultural centers, libraries, museums and galleries, cinemas, and on street corners. In addition, as part of being in the field I was constantly using media. I visited the websites people told me about, watched the various ethnic media channels available to them in LA, including well-known local radio channels and certain satellite broadcasting, sometimes together with my respondents, as well as being exposed to the myriad of media messages more generally that came with living in LA. This included gathering information from and about websites that my respondents used. I did this by saving textual and visual content, often in the form of screenshots.[18] Furthermore, my respondents and I got in touch and communicated with one another through email, messaging, and social media applications.

Through these channels I learned about events in the field, and through web telephony and instant chat, I stayed in contact with some of them after leaving LA or during times they were away. This was not only because my research concerned internet and media but also because these web applications were, and increasingly are becoming, the standard tools of fieldwork. The abundance of various forms of media use as part of fieldwork practices speaks of the ubiquity of media in almost any contemporary ethnographic field site. In large part, I accessed my respondents' web- and wider internet use by engaging with them through it. This included being on Facebook and Twitter, exchanging emails and photos, chatting online, reading one another's blog postings, and so on. It also meant observing as they engaged with others through these applications. For instance, when people showed me photos they shared on social media by handing me their smartphone in a café, or in the rooms of their houses as they showed me web videos or blogs they liked or followed on their desktop computer, or when I was present when they interacted with one another in a group around someone's laptop, or as I sat next to them and they showed me who they were chatting with online.

Posing Research Questions from an Insider–Outsider Position

During the course of doing this research, I (re-)experienced some of my own ambivalence about being Iranian, as well as my increasingly mixed feelings toward the USA. I recognized some of my research experiences in the reflections of researchers who have written about the problematic fixities implied in the notion of the "native anthropologist" (Narayan 1993). My bilingual upbringing in Australia, my English language education in international institutions in the Netherlands, and my recognition of Western cultural reference points through consumption of English language media immediately made me a convincing American to most of those I met in LA. However, my outsider status was revealed in my story of being a resident of the Netherlands, having grown up in Sydney, Australia, never before having lived in the USA, and not identifying as American. I told people I met in the course of my research my own story as thoroughly as possible. And I think this particular positioning made it easier for me to look at American-ness from a critical distance without, at the same time, being a complete stranger to it.

My experience as a child of Iranian parents and living in a transnationally dispersed family since childhood also made my field experiences familiar to me in intimate ways. Growing up in Australia my mother would laugh while tenderly satirizing my (now late) paternal grandmother who lived in Tehran. My parents would talk about her memorably comical way of using the telephone in the family house, the house they shared with her and the rest of my father's family for the first years of their marriage before I was born. When people would call from overseas, her voice would rise from the moderate "*alo?*" ("hello?") with which she answered the phone, to a vociferous shout at the moment of realizing who the caller was and the distant location from which the call was reaching her. The volume of conversation would rise a little even when friends and family would call from Shiraz several hundred kilometers away, my mother described. But never as much as for an international call: a call from *khaarej* (overseas—literally "outside"). A little over a year after my birth, my parents re-located our small family to Sydney, where we were the ones on the other end of those international calls now. And my dear grandmother's shouting voice came to us across the ocean and over the wires we relied on and devices we spoke into.

It was not only with my grandmother with whom I was raised to speak over the various phones that sat in each of the living rooms we moved into over time in Sydney. I grew up knowing a range of relatives in Iran only through those phone conversations and the few precious photo albums my parents brought with them when they fled Iran during the war. Then there were the letters that came for my parents in Farsi, the script that was consistently and familiarly indecipherable to me for my entire childhood and yet which I remember so clearly as the writing of letters from afar and my mother's diary, a small book she had brought with her from Iran—the albums, those letters, and of course that all-important telephone. That was what we had of those people and that place.

And so my parents would encourage me to speak to these relatives over the phone as a child. Sometimes gingerly and sweetly enticing me with stories of how deeply those strangers had loved me as a small baby, sometimes coercing me with social obligation and cultural custom. And so I spoke and listened, sometimes with love, other times robotically. And later I wondered if I would one day laugh with my own (unborn) children at my parents' practices with the phone, the same way they had laughed about my grandmother. I also wondered what it would mean for transnational families like mine that a host of new communications technologies were

mushrooming in use across the globe. Technologies that most of my family members would never have envisioned becoming a part of our regular ways of being in touch with one another, but which I learned during my fieldwork were modes of communication some young people relied on to keep in touch with family in Iran. Indeed, during the fieldwork for this book, I attended a theater production put on by one of the Iranian student groups I had contact with. The play included a humorous skit in which the character of the Iranian grandmother in LA who was the lovable butt of a joke about how she used the internet telephony program, Skype, to make international calls to Iran, including that familiar idiosyncrasy: shouting.

It was interesting to see this trope played out in front of a full theater of people who likely got the joke on the same intimate level I did. It also raised questions about how these kinds of reference points to the minutiae of mediated transnational life might be shared to create a sense of community within pockets of Iranian America. How might other such cultural points of reference be shared? And how might these references, themselves, be mediated? For instance, through a theater play, blog posting, or podcast that connects them with their peers in LA or other places where the Iranian diaspora takes shape. How are these young people implicated in processes of cultural formation and transformation that place them at once amidst social surroundings in LA and transnational relationships with people and places far away? And how do these cultural transformations develop hand-in-hand with the technological developments apparent in everyday life? As I have discussed in this chapter so far, to try to address these issues I conducted ethnographic fieldwork that delved into the lives of my respondents as they traversed online and offline settings. In what follows, I outline how I approached the challenge of how I delineated my field site in a world of seemingly endless interconnections.

The Field: Delineating the Parameters and Practice of Online–Offline Research

The notion of "field" is central to how I delimit this study and define my research practice. In the 1990s, dynamic conceptualizations of culture saw anthropologists increasingly calling for methodological approaches that treat the cultural object of study as complex and fluid, rather than a static entity bound to a local site. This led to the persuasive proposal of "multi-sited fieldwork" (Marcus 1995), and discussion of the challenges of studying cultural "flows" and movement (Appadurai 1996). Since then,

the notion of field continues to be re-theorized in efforts toward a view of cultural practices that encompass people's modes of living in a mediated world (Bird 2013).[19]

Amidst the recent rise in social scientific attention for digital and internet technologies, anthropologists have made many efforts to position their discipline as one with already-existing methodological principles and tools that can fruitfully be applied to new digital objects of study (see Horst and Miller 2012). Yet as anthropologists engage in research on swiftly developing digital technologies and increasingly differentiated software applications, notions of ethnographic practice and concepts of the field require consideration anew. As John Postill and Sarah Pink state:

> For the internet ethnographer, the implications of the shift to web 2.0 and the rapid growth of social media platforms, applications, practices and activity are threefold. They create new sites for ethnographic fieldwork, foster new types of ethnographic practice, and invite critical perspectives on the theoretical frames that dominate internet studies, thus providing opportunities for re-thinking internet research methodologically. (Postill and Pink 2012: 124)

Regarding the emergence of new sites for fieldwork that call for new research practice, Coleman discusses socio-technical phenomena that rely solely on the existence of digital communication (Coleman 2010). And Boellstorff argues that the sociality of online worlds must be studied in its own right without the researcher seeking to methodologically merge it with or analytically reduce it to offline social worlds (2012). This calls for a theory of field that encompasses the complexity of online–offline practices that make up people's everyday lives. It has also led to a thriving area of work concerned with innovations in ethnographic methods in the context of digital media's rise (Hine 2015; Pink et al. 2015). Postill emphasizes the need for moving beyond abstract conceptualizations of the impacts of internet technologies, and thus also beyond the dominant yet under-determined concepts of "network" and "community" to the internet, which tend to generate broad explanations of this technology's supposed impact upon society. Postill theorizes "field" as an alternative to the ascendancy of these two concepts, basing this theorization on detailed analysis of social and political processes and their digital dimensions, and calling for scholarly attention for the multiplicity of social forms beyond networks and communities produced by careful empirical investigation (2012).[20]

Field is a useful notion for approaching digital media via its local incarnations, accessing this through specific users in the contexts of their daily lives. Such a notion of field applied to Iranian diasporic identity formation in this case includes the significant forces and actors that surround the second generation. The field of second-generation cultural identity formation is produced through how my respondents relate and respond to (1) their parents and influential older members of "the Iranian American community," (2) their counterparts back in Iran, (3) Americans in the USA—including a range of other "minority" groups, and (4) other parts of the Iranian second generation in LA and other places in the world. These groups and actors exert influences on the young people this book is about, shaping how they (think they should) live their lives. And it is by following these ongoing negotiations online and offline that I define my field. Finally, a notion of field produced through its participants' practices encompasses the existence of multiple (sometimes) connected local contexts. And in the theories of/inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, field is also defined by the set of social forces beyond the local, which structure processes within it. Hence, the outcomes of this situated study of the ongoing, parallel processes of cultural and technological change over time in a particular locale feed into a larger body of research contributing to answering questions of how human societies (and cultural identification processes, in particular) are changing with the rise of digital media.

The Structure of This Book

In this chapter, I have outlined the main question driving this research and described how it arose from a need to update research on Iranian diaspora by documenting and analyzing how culture is lived dynamically via new technologies. I have also outlined the methodological principles and choices that define how I will answer this central question. In other words, this investigation is situated by the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted on my respondents' media usage. By doing this I traced how "Iranian American" is defined and negotiated situationally, being co-constituted by a range of cross-cutting facets of my respondents' selves. This is as much an investigation of internet technologies as it is of second-generation Iranian American-ness, and I outline how I conceptualize "the internet" in Chap. 2, when I also discuss the theories of migration and media that inspire the ideas put forward in this book.

Chapter 2 deals with the conceptual debates within the multi-disciplinary fields of migration research and media theory. The chapter relates the dynamics that took shape within my field site to more than the local developments and the Iranian diaspora. It is where I sketch the positioning of my research with relation to migration studies research, and the area of second-generation studies in particular. I bring the work on changing migrant demographics and identities together with media anthropological approaches for understanding digitally mediated identity formation processes, making a case for the value of transnational frames for studying diaspora online and offline. Nevertheless, each of the three ethnographic-based chapters that follow this one includes a brief overview of debates that pertain specifically to the topic of the respective chapter, and can therefore also be read independently of the theory chapter.

Chapter 3 is the first of the three empirically driven chapters, and foregrounds notions of the past, heritage, and remembering. There I focus on the relationships my respondents have to the past. I discuss how history and heritage are engaged with through (digital) objects and stories that refer to Iranian and American pasts, asking: how do my respondents position themselves with relation to a past that they see as pertaining to them, as their own, and how is this past mediated in ways that speak to these young people? I argue that the ways these connections take shape relies on the styles of remembering that appeal to the second generation, and that they position themselves with the help of their internet usage that helps them contest, reframe, and engage critically with the past through the lens of their contemporary experiences of growing up in the USA. Their practices also show how the past is mediated through particular narratives and objects alike, such that the materiality of certain things and pre-existing institutions for remembering and heritage maintain their power.

Chapter 4 focuses on race. In it, I investigate how my respondents engage with ways of seeing the body and ways of seeing (and being seen as) Iranian Americans as a group (through various forms of political and media representation). I focus on the question of how my respondents represent their racialized bodies and narrate their experiences of racism through their uses of web applications. How do they use the internet to position themselves by mediating their experiences of racialization? I argue that certain styles of presenting the racialized body with the use of internet media are particular to the second generation and mobilize emergent forms of collectivity, showing how these draw on and disjoin from the previous generation's modes of positioning within a changing

context of racial discrimination. In a similar way to notions of home and the past, the issue of race constitutes Iranian American-ness for my respondents, but through a positioning that is only beginning to be discussed in research on Iranian diaspora.

Chapter 5 focuses on the Green uprising in Iran that took place during my fieldwork period in LA. The chapter starts out by acknowledging the dominant narratives about "social media" circulating around this period, and moves on to focus upon my respondents' practices and narratives during the same period. It shows how the events in Iran represented a moment in which Iranians in the diaspora came to practice their Iranian-ness transnationally, and how my second-generation respondents in particular came to see themselves as connected to Iran and Iranian-ness in ways specific to this moment. It also discusses the role of particular web applications and their use, showing how they offer certain possibilities and how these possibilities are also limited in various ways. Hence, in each of the chapters, the issue of my respondents' cultural belonging is approached from a different vantage point. Each chapter aims to elaborate upon a particular facet of Iranian American belonging I observed as important in the field and examine how the use of internet helps mediate that belonging. In closing, Chap. 6 summarizes the main conclusions from each chapter as they relate to the concept of second-generation "digital styles" and suggests this concept as a possible way in which to understand the processes through which second-generation migrant identities are mediated digitally.

Notes

1. The site has since become inactive. The last Twitter updates are from posts in 2010.
2. She writes this in her blog description.
3. Also referred to by some as "Blogistan" (Hendelman-Baavur 2007; Sreberny and Khiabany 2010).
4. I further discuss the literature on these Farsi language blogs in Chap. 5.
5. This was due to the language barrier in proficiency.
6. An additional intermediate wave has also been defined between 1970 and 1978, comprised of an affluent, urban populace who had become wealthy during these years of economic growth. Like the

first wave, their motivations for movement were also largely economic and professional, and they were dispersed throughout the country (Jalali 2005).

7. Zohreh Sullivan's work on Iranian exiled intellectuals in LA shows the productivity of diaspora within a literary studies tradition. That is, she sees exile as having more diverse, metaphorical meanings for migrant imaginaries than only loss and longing (Sullivan 2001). Ghorashi similarly foregrounds the productive possibilities of the liminal condition of hybridity, but she also argues for making a conceptual distinction between exile and diaspora. The former helps harbor sentiments of a lost national homeland, while the latter helps embrace new beginnings (Ghorashi 2002, 2005). Sreberny-Mohammadi makes a similar distinction, drawing on Brah's discussion of diasporic space, which leads her to understand Iranian diaspora as a "looking around" in an "all-around" and "multi-directional" gaze, in contrast with the inward looking of a focus on ethnicity and a backward looking of exile (Sreberny 2000).
8. The exile character of Iranian migration that has long defined it has invoked interesting comparisons with pre-/post-revolutionary Cuban immigrants/exiles (Bozorgmehr 1986: 3) and Palestinian immigrant experiences in the USA (McCloud 2006: 103).
9. Though the notion of a "transnational generation" may offer an analytical encompassment of the lives of young Iranians in Iran and how it is shaped by diaspora influences, that investigation lies outside the scope of this research.
10. Although this atmosphere is not without its changes and shifts with the changing of Presidents and (informal) policies.
11. The study of Iranian Americans is an area to which he and collaborators contributed a considerable amount of scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s (Sabagh and Bozorgmehr 1987; Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1988; Bozorgmehr and Waldinger 1996; Bozorgmehr 1997; Bozorgmehr and Sabagh 1998; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). This includes a particular focus on LA in some early work. The bulk of this is based on predominantly quantitative data and analysis.
12. Radiojavan.com; Iranican.com; Iranian.com; Biya2.com.
13. Scholars from various disciplines have pointed to the ways in which the beginnings and developments of networked digital technolo-

gies in California have become entwined with notions of communitarianism and an idealized vision of "community," millennialism, pioneering in a new world, and the fundamental transformation of society mixed in with elements of the transcendental, but also how this has undergone change and continuity over time (Agre 2002; Turner 2010; Zandbergen 2011).

14. Townsend has also argued vigorously that the dependency between cities (rather than competition) that comes with interconnected networks of communications technologies are shaping relationships and hierarchies between cities in more complex ways than a global cities thesis allows (Townsend 2001a, b).
15. I became aware during my fieldwork that many of those I spoke to were, themselves, either conducting academic research having to do with Iranian diaspora or related issues, or held an active stake in the public representation of Iranian American-ness. Hence, I feel obliged to make my account of affairs recognizable and accessible to this audience.
16. I did not see any basis for inferring that this research practice would cause any increased risk to the respondent. This was my basis for deciding if an issue was sensitive or not. I acknowledge that the effort to minimize risk is not the same as eliminating risk, and operate with the knowledge that despite these efforts there are no perfect ethical solutions in doing research and I am open to being held accountable by my respondents regarding how I represent them in the account I present in this book.
17. My choice is based on the assumption that in the eyes of at least some of my respondents, being certain about when I am writing about them and others whom they might know, lends a degree of transparency to my account. They may, thus, be in a better position to judge the credibility of the account. In general, I followed the basic ethical principles of minimizing risk as much as possible to my individual respondents, and maximizing my own accountability by being as transparent as possible about my own research process and sources.
18. Both screenshots and copy-pasted material from websites were copied into word processing document formats and later imported to the qualitative data analysis program I was using to organize and code the rest of my interview and observational material. Newer versions of such programs have the functionality of directly down-

loading material from websites and code segments of images (e.g. Nvivo 10). This was more difficult to do in the version of the program that I was using. Hence, screenshots were coded as whole images, and closer analysis of their content was done without the functionality of the program. Videos were generally not downloaded into the database, but the links to particular videos were saved.

19. This is a perspective that highlights the anthropological principle of holism. However, see Hine's work for a critique of holism in the endeavor of "virtual ethnography" and an embrace of partiality (Hine 2000). See Horst and Miller for a revitalization of digital anthropology's commitment to holism (2015).
20. He argues for field as something produced empirically in context, in the form of "the field of residential affairs" in a Malaysian town whose residents use internet platforms to engage as political agents.

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CHAPTER 2

Theories of Migrancy and Media

The 1990s and early 2000s saw a boom in work on diaspora and transnational migrant identities that broke new ground in this field of research (Basch et al. 1994; Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Ong and Nonini 1996; Tölölyan 1996; Cohen 1997; Portes 1997; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Sassen 1999; Vertovec 2001; Werbner 2002; Hall 2003; Bauböck and Faist 2010; Faist et al. 2013). This was a response to new kinds of migrant flows, which required terminologies that the existing migration studies frameworks did not offer. This body of work introduced transnational approaches that dislodged the unspoken primacy of the nation-state in migration research, and re-conceptualized diaspora to extend beyond a prototypical model of characteristics shared by groups of dispersed peoples. This meant that "diaspora" came to be theorized as more of a "consciousness," an unfixed mode of identification or a sense of belonging, rather than a set of shared characteristics alone (see Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1994; Vertovec 2006). Migration was conceptualized as a rich variety of flows spanning borders, and not as people's transgression of intrinsic nation-state entities. This was an intellectual breakthrough in how to frame the study of migration, and the insights it yielded furthered the scholarly understanding of the nation as a political and historical construct, situated amidst other crosscutting loci of identification, rather than being the ontological frame or natural unit of study.

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In this context, the notion of "transnational social fields" (Basch et al. 1994; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Levitt and Waters 2002; Levitt and Schiller 2006) was proposed and used as a way of thinking about the activities of migrants across nation-state borders, defining these activities not as fragmented experiences but as constituting "a single field of social relations" (Basch et al. 1994). This perspective underpins the argument that long-distance "homeland" identifications are not necessarily in competition with feelings of belonging in the host context, nor is either of these identifications static and self-evident. Instead, identifications with a range of social categories were argued as having the capacity to subvert state discourses of a relatively homogenous and unitary national identity.[1] While some treated transnationalism as a new social "phenomenon" (Portes et al. 1999) in itself, others called for the need within social sciences to hone the ontological and methodological approaches required to investigate the ranges of migrants' ongoing cross-border social activities and investments (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007).

Among transnational approaches to migration was the basic consensus that the children of migrants tended to claim their parents' country of birth as a "homeland" and/or point of identification to some extent, which suggested that processes of transnational identification were sustained over generations. This raised scholarly interest in understanding the mechanisms by which cultural change takes place over migrant generations. A specific focus also emerged on the issues that faced the children of migrants who were either born in their country of residence or arrived there at a very young age. Terming them second-generation migrants, the scholarship focused on what this new generation's lives meant for theoretical discussions and policy issues revolving around migrant identity, transnational lives, integration, and assimilation (Portes 1997; Waldinger and Perlmann 1998; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kasinitz 2004; Alba and Nee 2005; Purkayastha 2005; Kasinitz et al. 2006; Levitt and Waters 2006; Wolf 2006; Crul and Vermeulen 2006; Skrbiš et al. 2007; Thomson and Crul 2007; Anthias 2009; Nibbs and Brettell 2016).[2]

With relation to these debates, American sociology underwent a process of contesting and reviving theories of "assimilation," which argued that migrants would gradually lose attachments to the country of "origin" in a linear fashion over successive generations, becoming more culturally indistinguishable from the "host" country majority. Modeled on the experience of European migrants to the USA, this was the idea that successive

generations would gradually assimilate into "mainstream" America as their "ethnic" cultural influences gradually evaporated "into the twilight" (Alba 1985). Variations of assimilation theory led to adaptations of the original idea of "straight-line assimilation" via concepts of "symbolic ethnicity" (Gans 1979) and "bumpy line assimilation" (Gans 1992), which gave less historically deterministic explanations of assimilation.

Furthermore, these original claims were based on the model of European migration to the USA, and were challenged for being limited in their application to non-white migrant groups (see Zhou and Bankston 2016 for a most recent overview). The notion of "segmented assimilation" (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997; Waters et al. 2010) was put forward in order to acknowledge that the American society in which people were settling was not a homogenous whole and it therefore mattered which "segment" of that society newcomers would assimilate into. What also mattered to these authors was the difference between the rise of more recent second generations and their counterparts from the American pre-1956 immigration policy era (see Portes and Zhou 1993). This discussion has since yielded contemporary American migration sociology's increasingly nuanced interventions into both scholarly and public debates about how "the second generation" is/will be doing in America, placing emphasis on structural factors such as the legal and political legacies of the civil rights movement, and opportunities for aggregate educational and labor market productivity. These insights are largely expressed in terms of this population's projected social (upward or downward) mobility, and more recently include how newer generations of migrants introduce changes into American society (see Alba and Nee 2005; Zhou and Bankston 2016). Large-scale statistical study of migrant groups in urban centers forms most of the empirical basis for these debates, and the master concept of assimilation tends to remain a theoretical touchstone.

Scholars taking a "transnational social fields" perspective to migrant adaptation processes pointed out some of the shortcomings of assimilation theory at a fundamental level by arguing that "assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites" (Levitt and Schiller 2006), thus challenging assimilation theory's predominant tendency to treat migrants' cultural change as a zero-sum situation. The social fields work also expressly tries to displace the ideological power of the nation-state by avoiding the assumption that the social is organized according to the national scale, and rejects the use of analytical categories that place "ethnic" difference in contrast or hierarchies with relation to

national (non-ethnic) homogeneity per se (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Khagram and Levitt 2007). These authors avoid the tendency of placing cultures at one point or another on an axis of assimilation/non-assimilation, and argue for understanding the mutual processes of dynamic cultural formation as a necessarily incomplete and open one. Ethnographic transnational social fields approaches also provide a framework for explaining how notions of nation, ethnicity, locality, and globality are socially formed in situated processes of people's lived daily existences (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Glick Schiller and Caglar 2013). This work places relatively greater emphasis on the second generation's sense of belonging, processes of self-formation, and political participation, including how these hinge on temporally and spatially changing factors such as life cycle, circular (trans)migration practices, immigration policies, and intersections of gender and class (Levitt and Waters 2006; Anthias 2009; Levitt 2009).

Both sociological and anthropological approaches to second-generation studies tend to pay little attention to investigating the role of media. Despite being acknowledged as important, digital media in particular tend only to be mentioned in passing in studies of second generations, including in more transnational, ethnographically oriented approaches to migrant belonging (see Levitt and Waters 2002). This is despite transnational approaches to migration having long conceptualized dynamic circulations of messages and publics with the help of terms such as "transnational migrant circuits" (Rouse 1991), which acknowledge how mass and small media messages play a role in the ongoing forming of migrant selves, as people and messages move back and forth rather than constitute a unidirectional flow or singular movement. It has also been acknowledged that the role of media goes beyond mediated social interactions, and rather creates "transnational spaces of orientation" (Yang 2002) in a way that reflects Anderson's "imagined communities" (1991 original 1983), created without their members socially interacting with one another but being subjected to the nation by engaging with the same (print) media.

While seminal anthropological work has highlighted the powerful role of media in problematizing the idea that culture is bound to territorial spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997), work that focuses on migrancy and the role of digital media remains at the margins of migration studies, and even more so within second-generation studies. In this book, I present an in-depth account of the digital media usage of young Iranians in LA that contributes to and engages with the knowledge from migration studies about second-generation migrants, but

integrates a focus on digital media. In what follows, I turn to the work that media studies scholars have produced at the intersection between digital media and diaspora in order to develop my conceptual approach to the case of second-generation Iranian American web users in LA.

Digital Diaspora

Over the past half-decade, different variations of the term "digital diaspora" have created substantial buzz within studies from a range of academic disciplines on migrants and "Information and Communication Technologies" or ICTs. Conceptually, much of this work emphasizes the internet's role in changing notions of physical space. Diminescu's influential notion of the "connected migrant" (Diminescu 2008) argues that increased flows of migration have shifted analytical frames from treating immobility as the norm and the world as naturally sedentary, toward movement and migration being the norm and the migrant as the ideal-type in a mobile world. This argument shares basic similarities with earlier work on migration and displaced peoples (see Malkki 1995), but adds the emphasis that the homeland connections that migrants maintain through digital communications help them overcome the distance of dispersal by situating them within distant social contexts. Over a decade prior to the empirical substantiation of the "connected migrant," the same hypothesis about the possibilities that internet technologies offered diasporas were an object of reflection for anthropologists of migration. The following quote from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett brings James Clifford's seminal work on diaspora (Clifford 1992) together with the visions about internet technologies of his contemporary, Howard Rheingold.

> Increasingly, however, as distance becomes a function of time, the instantaneity of telecommunications produces a vivid sense of hereness and interactivity the feeling of presence. The result is an extreme case of physical immateriality of place. New spaces of dispersal are produced—traversed and compressed—by theologies of connection and telepresence. Physical location can be experienced as accidents of proximity, while common interests, rather than common location can become the basis for social life in a medium where location is not defined by geographical coordinates but by the topic of conversation (Rheingold 1992). There is a convergence between diaspora as we understand it from Clifford's account and the spaces of dispersal defined and mediated by communication technologies. It is at this convergence that we might rethink diaspora. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994: 342–343)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1994) draws on the seminal work of James Clifford on diaspora to propose "spaces of dispersal," which are characterized not by displacement and disarticulation from an earlier placement, but by movement that brings about the conditions for new articulations by socially reconfiguring time and space. Indeed, the main idea that seems to underpin much of existing work that conceptualizes diaspora with relation to internet technologies is that diasporic communities are somehow uniquely prescient of the internet's rise because of their geographic dispersal and an inherent desire to connect to one another over distances.[3]

This idea was integral to early work on internet technologies and the notion of connectivity. As referenced in the quote above, influential internet scholar Howard Rheingold described connections as allowing experiences of physical location to become "accidents of proximity" (see Rheingold 1993). Since then, empirical findings of internet studies on diaspora have continued to expand rapidly, and internet technologies become increasingly integrated into every part of everyday life for many people, including migrants. In the course of this development, the notion of "cyberspace" (borrowed originally from science fiction)[4] and the associated idea that the internet itself produces discrete spaces disconnected from locations in the physical world has been ontologically complicated by long-term ethnographic research in "virtual worlds" (Boellstorff 2008; Boellstorff 2012). Such theoretical contributions and debates about what it means to study the internet by grounding concepts within ethnographic investigation have remained relatively disconnected from recent empirical work on diaspora and the internet. Instead, treating the "online" and "offline" as distinct spaces tends to be reproduced, and the vision of a novel space carried by the internet's connections partly persists in Brinkenhoff's discussion of "digital diaspora" that argues that migrants sometimes use the internet to "escape into cyberspace" (Brinkerhoff 2009: 51).

Recent internet research that approaches diaspora from various disciplines also employs the notion of cyberspace prominently (Landzelius 2004; Everett 2009; Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010).[5] As does the only (online/offline) "cyberethnographic" account of internet use among the Iranian diaspora (including in LA), which sketches the features of "Iranian cyberspace" and its impacts on the diaspora (Graham and Khosravi 2002). While scholarship like this has been instrumental in growing the sparse empirical work on a variety of different diaspora groups' internet use,[6] the conceptual reliance on cyberspace persists while processes of mediated self/identity formation remain under-theorized. This raises the question

of whether notions of diasporic cyberspace help us understand the complexities of migrant identity formation within media contexts that span national borders but are also embedded within local, online-offline contexts of usage.

The conceptual delineation of a separate, online "cyberspace" has been problematized by approaches that claim the internet actually constitutes a multiplicity of media forms within itself, as well as being implicated within media spaces alongside other (digital and non-digital) media forms. The work of Andreas Hepp and others has expanded the "connected migrant" concept by arguing for the notion of the "mediatized migrant." This encompasses a wider range of media than the internet,[7] and sees media as part of a repertoire of mediated connections, one that fosters a "communicative networking" (Hepp et al. 2012).[8] The recent surge of interest in "mediatization" is concerned with the changes that come about with the increasing reach and ubiquity of media messages and devices into various aspects of people's everyday lives (e.g. politics, religion, migration, etc.) (Krotz and Hepp 2011; Hjavard 2013). Mediatization research has emphasized the importance of studying a wider media environment, highlighting interrelations between multiple media forms (Hepp and Krotz 2014b).[9]

Furthermore, analyzing digital media practices as part of a wider "media ecology" or "environment" has gained standing as a way of analyzing media worlds (Couldry 2010). In addition, the notion of "polymedia" has been suggested by digital anthropologists as a way to theorize the internet as a range of specific digital media forms that are interrelated according to how people switch between them in line with their needs and purposes. Hence, in adopting an approach that sees digital media as part of transnational social fields that include a variety of media, I aim to do justice to Hobart's claim that "recognition of the complexity of the lived world is what anthropologists can contribute to media studies debates" (Hobart 2010). I heed his call for including media-related practices (which he distinguishes from media practices or media-oriented practices) by incorporating a broad range of my respondents' practices—including those that are not *oriented* toward media (or the internet specifically). Rather than studying digital platforms separately, I am concerned with the relational roles of a range of digital media forms with respect to one another as they feature in lived practices. This avoids reifying users into a single user role, as some scholars have warned against, and favors situating people's uses of technologies within dynamic relationships that include multiple media forms and broader cultural practices (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2006).

Research on the digital practices of migrants has offered compelling accounts of how long-distance, digitally mediated connections across borders persist alongside incorporation into the host society, thus forming identities transnationally.[10] But an overall tendency persists toward conceptualizing digital diaspora formation in terms of "homeland" ties, or the production of "cyberspaces" that serve as a proxy for such ties.[11] This neglects conceptualizing the countless digital media uses of contemporary migrants, in particular, their located modes of digitally engaging with their "host" societies, how newer digital media forms are taken up in relation to older media forms, and the details of how people switch between media forms (not only online between platforms but also in their wider, offline media environments). I combine an approach that studies digital media within relational media environments with an approach to understanding transnational connections in terms of social fields.[12] I do this in order to understand what kinds of "host" and "home" connections emerge through digital media usage and in which kinds of combinations. Since I am interested in the second generation in particular, I discuss some of the work that deals with this subgroup's digital media use with the purpose of positioning the contribution I hope to make with this book.

The Digital Production of Second-Generation Identity

Research on second-generation migrants and digital media contributes to a growing field of study across academic disciplines (Gillespie 2000; Sreberny 2000; Panagakos 2003; Lam 2006; Wilding 2006; McAuliffe 2007a; Plaza 2010; Nibbs 2016; Leurs 2016). I draw in particular from those who have cautioned against overemphasis on cross-generational change/difference in much of the research on young migrants' digital media practices. As Gillespie points out, the combined focus on second-generation youth and digital media is taken by some scholars to automatically suggest intergenerational change with respect to the cultural values of parents (2000). In what hearkens to early critiques of sociology's "straight line assimilation theory," Gillespie argues that studying culture over generations should not treat generational progression as the source of cultural change per se, stating that:

> [S]uch polarised conceptions of culture and of generational differences impede an understanding of their interrelationships and overlap—like cultures, generations are not impermeable or fixed." (Gillespie 2000)

She emphasizes both “malintegration and solidarity between generations” (Gillespie 2000), drawing on Mannheim’s influential 1952 essay on generations that argues for viewing each generation as the repository of prevailing ideas (Mannheim 1952). This calls for a notion of transnational cultural change across generations that accounts for both rupture and continuity from the previous generation, rather than presuming the production of cultural new-ness by younger generations. In this view, generations are, themselves, produced relationally over time through the dynamic contestation of cultural formation, and should therefore be treated as one of the key intersecting co-constitutional axes of migrant identifications, and not purely objective demographic categories (Anthias 2009). Moreover, highlighting intergenerational differences alone implicitly suggests uniformity *within* generations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I follow the efforts of those who have destabilized nationally bounded notions of identity among the Iranian second generation by highlighting the differences between religious identities (McAuliffe 2007a; McAuliffe 2007b) and the diversity produced at the intersection between generation, gender, and media (Sreberny 2000).

Most of the existing work on digital media and second-generation migrants studies these young people in terms of their status within families and domestic spaces. This emphasis goes hand in hand with the tendency for this work to focus on children/minors. Important interventions have warned against assuming that young people (and children) are particularly susceptible to the supposed virtues and/or vices of the internet on account of their age alone (Buckingham 2006), and such suppositions have been criticized as being detached from actual usage practices. In addition to which, the common language of the digital native versus non-native dichotomy has been pointed out as problematically applied to young people’s digital media use (see Ginsburg 2008; Selwyn 2009). It is important to complement the work focusing on children with analyses of young adults’ media practices, which are more entrenched within their positions in society outside the family but also reflect the relatively greater autonomy and cognizance of migrancy that comes with (young) adulthood.

While yielding important ethnographic insights concerning the lives of children of migrants during the rise of digital media, the growing body of work on digital media and the second generation has not yet yielded cohesive theorizing of how diasporic second generation-hood is formed via digital mediation. Intergenerational research that does this includes work

on the Greek diaspora in Canada, which sees Greek satellite television as an "everyday fixture for Greek immigrants," whereas the second and third generations favor the internet for its accessible, English-language content and its international links to other parts of the Greek diaspora (Panagakos and Horst 2006). And it is argued in this case that digital technologies have helped to strengthen ethnic Greek identities among younger migrant generations who "already have some ethnic Greek consciousness" (Panagakos 2003). Others have suggested that the production of websites by the Caribbean second generation in the USA is, *itself,* a form of identity production for a group of young people with a burgeoning diasporic consciousness, allowing them to "participate in an evolving transnational Caribbean culture" (Plaza 2010: 164).

This raises the question of whether contemporary formations of diaspora are a consciousness that precedes mediation, or whether they are something produced *through* processes of digital mediation. I draw on Dayan's essay (2002) about diaspora communications, which points out that such "particularistic media" do not necessarily reflect strictly "ethnic," "migrant," or "diasporic" identifications even if they produce very particular diasporic audiences. Dayan uses Naficy's analysis of Iranian TV in LA to show that exile TV production and consumption serve as a means of cultural incorporation (a rite of passage) into mainstream American capitalism.[13] This promotes a theorization of media and identity that encompasses the processes of diasporic cultural production, not just in ways that reproduce categories of diaspora, ethnicity, and migrancy, but also produce shared imaginations that cross these boundaries.[14] In this book I aim not only to describe how some children of Iranian migrants use digital media in their daily lives, but also to contribute to the conceptual discussion of how migrant second generation-hood is formed. I hope to do this by drawing attention to processes of transnational digital mediation, and what they reveal about how a new generation comes to experience a sense of belonging to a diaspora.

By not privileging the place of these young people within their families, I describe my respondents' roles more broadly; as professionals, in their relationships with peers, and in terms of their awareness of and stakes in overlapping scales of social and political developments. This is also an account focused on the second generation's own perspective rather than being driven by the terms of public policy debates about successive generations' "integration"/"assimilation" or foregrounding older generations' concerns about how young people are growing up in the

diaspora. And by treating diasporic second generation-hood as a relational production through a range of media forms implicated within a transnational social field within which they are positioned, I avoid drawing simple oppositions between old, ethnic community media and new, digital, networked media. Instead I approach identity in light of theories highlighting migrants' multi-layered positionings (Anthias 2002). In what follows, I discuss where I think theories of media and culture are particularly useful for developing an understanding of diaspora identity that is produced dynamically through processes of digital mediation.

Mediating Cultural Identity

Lievrouw argues for situating the notion of "mediation" centrally in theories of media and communication as a way to merge the social and cultural with the technological in a process of mutual constitution (2009). She describes the shift toward theorizing the active role people play in assigning and negotiating the meanings of media content within social and cultural contexts. This draws on what science and technology studies have referred to as a "mutual-shaping" perspective (Boczkowski 1999), which acknowledges the power of people's everyday practices while also highlighting the "constraints and affordances of material infrastructure" (Lievrouw 2009). This perspective represents a version of Stuart Hall's analysis of coding and decoding culture but one adapted for theorizing the active interpretation work involved in using technological objects, and not only the work of decoding the cultural messages they carry. While Hall's is a semiotic theory of culture as text, media scholars inspired by this notion have emphasized how people not only interpret media texts, but also the meanings of material media devices. This interpretation happens when they are taken up in practices of use.[15] In this perspective, cultural production and technological mediation happen together at the same time.

The concept of mediation has also been used in cultural anthropology to analyze the relationship between socio-cultural processes and media. William Mazzarella calls for anthropology to study media as constitutive of and therefore integral to the processes of social life (2004). Birgit Meyer (2013) has similarly conceptualized media and culture as co-composed within a single historical trajectory. From this perspective, culture and cultural identity are always necessarily mediated, even when communication involves face-to-face interactions.[16] This is the vein in which Heather

Horst and Daniel Miller write that "humanity is not one iota more mediated by the rise of the digital" (2012). In other words, the processes of cultural mediation in the current moment are not so different from those of the past in many regards, and there is no prior, pre-mediated condition against which to contrast the current state of affairs.

If culture necessarily requires mediation, then the ways in which messages are communicated are revealing of how cultural formation takes place. Meyer argues that media have specific "aesthetic properties and propensities" such that they "do not simply transport messages neutrally but shape them" by virtue of these propensities (Meyer 2013). This transportation of messages through particular forms and formats reiterates the role of material affordances and constraints mentioned above. Meyer argues that these propensities of media constitute audiences by appealing to certain senses and raising certain sensibilities. Rather that cultural identities being less real because they are mediated, it is instead precisely the process of mediation that gives people a sense of inclusion as part of a media audience. It is through this mediation process that feelings of deep connection are produced, and Meyer uses the notion of "aesthetic formation" (Meyer 2009) to theorize how media bring people to experience collective belonging.

Although this theory comes from studies of religious community formation, I find it useful for understanding the non-religious formation of selves as well. And it is also especially useful for avoiding persistent assumptions that there is something peculiar about the internet that makes it and the social configurations it mediates "virtual"—a notion (still) often understood in opposition to "real."[17] This is despite long-term participatory research in online social worlds having shown that internet-mediated selves are not necessarily less real than selves un-mediated by the internet, and can even be experienced as "more authentic than actual-world embodiment" (Boellstorff 2008). Indeed, people are deeply invested in making sure the identities they encounter online are authentic. As Slater states of early internet chat forums, "authenticity is a fundamental criterion by which participants understand and manage their on-line experiences" (1998).

As Slater goes on to argue, the participants in these exchanges use strategies of authentication that fix the other in a body-like presence locatable in time and space. In line with this, he argues elsewhere that people engage in a "materialization" of digital objects, suggesting that digital objects have an ambiguous materiality and that people therefore give them mate-

rial qualities in order to be able to place them in orders of ethics, trustworthiness, and morality (Slater 2002). Rather than solids simply melting into air, digital communications can involve strategies of solidifying selves in order to make and understand meaning. In theorizing the development of digital technologies as embedded within social and cultural processes of change, these approaches see mediation as dependent on material forms and sensory experiences that produce senses of self and feelings of belonging. And it is in this sense that I draw upon them to understand how diaspora selves are mediated.

Treating digital technologies as always both media and message together rather than conceptually separating media objects from media texts, this perspective also attends to how people give material qualities to various objects in the process of using (them as) media, in processes of self-formation. This also helps to understands diaspora as constituted through connections both *across* distant places and located *within* certain places. That is, it situates self-formation within places that are, at once, the sites of interface with digital devices and software, mediated social spaces, as well as the offline social situations. In what follows, I discuss further how media anthropologists and other scholars have theorized the situated study of media through a focus on people's media practices as the means of revealing specific media affordances.

Affordances, Uses, and Practices

The notion of "affordances" has been applied to contemporary media to explain how mediation happens. An affordance is basically what an artifact makes possible for a person to do with it. As first articulated by Gibson (1979), "the theory of affordances" drew on and critiqued elements of Gestalt psychology to assert that the affordance of a thing or artifact is both its physical properties and the value it is attributed. That is:

> An affordance is neither an objective nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us understand its inadequacy. (Gibson 1979)

Later definitions of affordances, developed in the context of the sociological study of technology, highlighted how the concept helped recognize the "constraining, as well as enabling, materiality of artifacts" (Hutchby 2001). Hence, not just any interpretation or meaning can be given to a

technological artifact; an object does not lend itself to an infinite number of uses. What is important is that these properties of a technological artifact become apparent and perceived through the act of use. In this way, affordances not only constrain and enable certain activities, they are also only present in relation to the actual kinds of usage they are put to. This is what Hutchby highlights in Gibson's theory when stating that affordances are both "functional" and "relational" (Hutchby 2001). Hence, any web application will have certain affordances that we can only understand if we look at how it is made use of by people in a particular environment. As McVeigh-Schultz and Baym state, affordances are "defined by the relationship between the materiality of technological artifacts and the lived practices of communication" (2015).

Daniel Miller is among those who have most elaborately applied and developed the notion of affordances with relation to internet technologies, arguing that the internet comes into being only through a combination of how people make use of specific web applications and the given social and cultural context in which they are taken up. With Don Slater, he used the case of Trinidad to elaborate this perspective through a seminal ethnographic study of the internet (Miller and Slater 2000). This contribution responds to claims about internet technologies leading to the rise of "the network society" (Castells 2000), and "networked individualism" (Wellman 2002), ideas that attribute a causative role to networked digital technologies in societal changes.[18] Miller argues that rather than internet technologies being the driving force behind social and cultural changes, they are extensions of already-existing aspirations that people have (Miller 2011). While it highlights the agency of internet *users*,[19] Miller's approach can be seen as differing subtly from Roger Silverstone's[20] "domestication thesis" (Silverstone and Haddon 1996; Haddon 2004)[21] because instead of the idea that people domesticate media, he analyzes media appropriation as the sort of two-way power relationship between people and media technologies in which media might also domesticate people.

Together with Mirca Madianou, Miller has developed this idea into a theory of "polymedia" (Madianou and Miller 2012), which argues that people actively switch between multiple media forms that afford specific kinds of mediation in line with context-specific social conventions and moral expectations. According to specific media affordances, people make their choices about which applications to use. Insights like this emphasize the necessity for tracing people's practices of media usage in their day-to-day lives, making the ethnographic study of practices key to understand-

ing any digital developments. Yet, definitions of practice in media studies remain debated and open-ended (Bräuchler and Postill 2010), and this is equally true for notions of "the everyday" or "everyday life" despite their currency in various disciplines. To complicate things further, "digital media have extended their reach into the mundane heart of everyday life" (Coleman 2010), and thus, what we mean by "the everyday" is, itself, arguably being reshaped by people's digital media practices.

Nevertheless, the ethnographic approach that I take and my focus on practices of digital media usage are well-suited to analyzing mediated processes of identification that involve online spaces while being located in physical places. This attention to physicality is further reflected in Postill's claim that practices are "the embodied sets of activities that humans perform with varying degrees of regularity, competence, and flair" (Postill 2010). He places the role of the body central to the field of "practice theory," stating that "practice theory is a body of work about the work of the body" (Postill 2010), the body being the site at which the agency of the individual and the confining structures of society are concentrated. I therefore follow anthropologists who have focused on "media practices" as a means to understand social and cultural processes, including an emphasis on embodied, everyday practices of engaging with mediated messages *and* technological devices, thus developing an understanding of media that pays attention to the materiality of the human-technology interface. And yet, this focus on everyday-ness of phenomena may leave out important media events. Bird's discussion of "the mediated moment" draws on Liisa Malkki's work to point out what "we might also learn through examining moments that break up the everyday flow and bring people together to marvel, laugh, or discuss" (Bird 2013). With this in mind, I also trace the activities of my respondents as media users through more exceptional, anomalous moments as well, while situating them within the longer timeline of their use.

This focus on use and users is also well suited to understand contemporary web communication technologies that are focused on the user's active role. The proliferation of widely varied web platforms through which people access the internet (or the "network of networks" that relies on hardware, servers, cables, wires, and signals to connect computers and other devices to one another) has signaled a shift toward software applications that place the user centrally in their interface and their business models (the model of most social networking sites testifies to this). This has placed an emphasis on the "social" aspects and implications of web application

usage, and features that allow users to interact with one another have been popularly promoted as one of the main differences (if not the defining difference) between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, despite formal definitions of the difference between the "old" and the "new" web not being so hard and fast (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008).

My discussion of "the internet" in this book is based on the specific applications through which people access the network that connects computers to one another, such that "the internet" is not treated as a single media form. It is via these variegated web media formats (sometimes embedded into one another) through which people go online that the technology becomes increasingly important to investigate within specific contexts of use. I use the term "application" to refer to web applications, online software, or media platforms that have their own characteristics, including when I refer to email (which is technically a non-web service). I prefer these terminologies to "the internet," as I am more interested in the various (plat)forms via which people encounter the internet, each of which have their own design and affordances that can only be understood by taking a practice-based approach to understanding web media usage.

Notes

1. As Levitt and Glick Schiller write, "We define social field as a set of multiple inter locking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed (see also Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Glick Schiller 1999, 2003)" (Levitt and Schiller 2006).
2. This was essentially a body of work that looked at people with south to north migrant backgrounds, focusing on North American and European countries' second-generation migrant populations. The interest in these groups seems to have been driven by public discourses regarding "integration" and the social and economic "problems" caused by intensified migration flows to the West that intensified at this time and forcefully continue to the present day.
3. Framing migrant web users as the quintessential subjects of the modern world of mobility and technology (and therefore typical of future global scenarios) should not lead us to overlook the reality that migrants constitute a minority of the world's population, as small as 2%, according to one estimate (Kraidy 2007: 12).

4. Technologically deterministic analyses of the transformative power of the internet over society were particularly typical of early accounts when concepts and analyses were informed more by fictional notions such as "cyberspace" than by wide-scale, everyday usage (Hine 2008). Discussions of technological determinism concern whether technology causes the social changes that accompany technological change, or whether human agents intend/bring about that change (Lister et al. 2003).
5. Diaspora studies is an area where the notion of cyberspace has maintained currency perhaps more than any other field of internet studies. This, despite historical and geographical analyses pointing out the parallels with utopian ideas from the nineteenth century, and projects of the "conquering of space" as reproducing modernist ideals that were first born from that era (DeNicola 2012).
6. Instances of such work include the edited volume by Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010) and the special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* on *Migration and Diaspora in the Age of Information and Communication Technologies* (Oiarzabal and Reips 2012), which give an overview of recent literature on diasporas and digital media covering a range of migration cases.
7. In media and communication studies, the notion of mediatization became influential in the 1990s for describing how life (private, institutional, political, etc.) is increasingly lived through media, and how this modern media saturation signals interconnected social/cultural and communicative/media change. As Hepp and Krotz note in their Introduction in *Mediatized Worlds: Culture and Society in a Media Age* (2014), mediatization is a much older term than its rise in the 1990s within the media and communications literature suggests. The broader sense it has been used in prior to the recent abundance of digital media has more parallels to the discussion of "mediation" I presented later in this chapter.
8. These authors look at "diasporic media" as "a complimentary part of the whole media repertoires of members of diasporas. They are the focus of networking practices of migrants in the sense that via these media what constitutes the diasporic community is negotiated, as well as who belongs to it, and what it means to belong to it." (Hepp et al. 2012).
9. Lunbdy refers to the difference between mediation and mediatization not being mutually exclusive, while also referencing his differ-

ent concept of mediation in the context of research on religion (see Lundby's support of Andreas Hepp's account of the relationship between the two concepts in *Mediatized Worlds*, p. 22). Mediatization research emphasizes the importance of change and transformation, specifically societal change in line with a certain "media logic" (Couldry 2008). (See Couldry 2008 for an in-depth analysis of the strengths of the mediation and mediatization concepts from a communication science perspective, explored with reference to the case of "digital storytelling"). Theories of culture and technology that see these two things as being in a constant state of flux and change suggest that the study of cultural mediation is as much concerned with continual *change* as mediatization research (if not necessarily with particular, non-continual *changes* that take place at certain historical moments), with attention to the dialectical relationship between transformations in social meanings and technology.

10. Brinkenhoff's comprehensive discussion is exceptional in this body of work focusing on digital media and diasporas, in that it engages with migration studies' theoretical debate about assimilation over generations. Generally, even studies of digital media and migration that engage with second-generation dynamics do not engage with the central debates from sociological migration studies.
11. Elsewhere, I engaged with arguments about the deterritorializing and disembodying of the internet's impacts upon notions of home and homeland for the diaspora (Alinejad 2013), based on data collected during the same ethnographic period as the data for this book.
12. Horst and Millers' work on Jamaican mobile phone usage also uses a transnational social fields approach, although not from the vantage point of migrants. Based on Jamaican fieldwork it, helps to show how practices of social networking among people through mobile phones further traditional practices of networking in Jamaica, and become integral to transnational remittance flows within families (Horst and Miller 2006). Horst's work does situate itself amidst the body of work focusing on digital communications media for migrants, pointing out that much of it does not offer insight into how new technologies change migrants' everyday lives (Horst 2006).

13. Dayan draws on Naficy's discussion of exile satellite television (in which Naficy argues that Iranian exile television helps produce a liminal state that eventually leads to further integration into American society) to point out that "particularistic media are not always instruments of a secession"(Dayan 2002). That is, questions about whether internet is helping to "integrate" second-generation migrants into the host society (setting aside that this presupposes a lack of integration to begin with) are much more complex to answer than simply looking at whether these young people use internet to make long distance connections with Iran or with other diaspora Iranians (or not) and inferring that long distance connection means a lack of integration.
14. See also how Alexanian's study places her analysis of chosen Iranian websites against the backdrop of satellite television channels, revealing important shifts and changes in media production specific to the emergence of certain popular sites, and arguing that such websites create a "transnational Iranian public sphere" in addition to developing Iranian literary production by promoting heterogeneity of "diaspora" voices (Alexanian 2008).
15. I am referring here to Sonia Livingstone and the distinction she made by introducing the terminology of "media-as-object" and "media-as-text," stating that "people are always both *interpreters* of the media-as-text and *users* of media-as-object, and the activities associated with these symbolic and material uses of media are mutually defining" (Livingstone 2006).
16. The term "configuration" is used by Bakardjieva (2005) to reflect the ways people are configured by their use of media while they configure it through their usage.
17. Even though relatively early internet studies were also produced that challenged this conceptual opposition and methodological separation between virtual and real in research on and about internet communications technologies (Wellman and Gulia 1999; Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000), it is noteworthy that students and scholars of internet studies from various academic disciplines still apply this dichotomy to varying degrees of explicitness.
18. Indeed, the emphasis that influential scholars like Giddens (Giddens 1991) and Bauman (Bauman 2013) have also placed on the modern world's shift from stability to fragmentation of people, places, cultures, and identities has, in turn, been criticized by others to be

an overstatement of the impact of (late) modernity (Massey 1994; Featherstone and Burrows 1995; Ahmed et al. 2003).

19. Taking people's everyday lives seriously has partly led to the shift toward seeing people as *users* rather than "audiences," notwithstanding the valuable media scholarship on active media audiences that has been drawn on to develop new understandings of media *use*.
20. Silverstone's notion of mediation has also been influential in media and communication studies. As he writes, "mediation … requires us to understand how processes of communication change in the social and cultural environments that support them as well as the relationships that participants … have to that environment and each other"(Silverstone 2005), which suggests a two-way flow of influence. His notion further seems to mesh with the other notions of mediation mentioned here, in the sense that it sees media not only as socially embedded but also as a mutual shaping between the social and the technological. He states: "Mediation … extends into a concern with how culture is negotiated in the tactics of everyday life" (Silverstone 2005).
21. "Silverstone et al. (1992), and later Silverstone and Haddon (1996), isolated four intersecting processes that constituted television's domestication: appropriation, incorporation, objectification, and conversion. Objectification refers to the physical placement or inscription of the technical object, a commodity bought in the market and hence initially alien to the domestic fabric. The physical placement of material artifacts into a particular domestic environment, Silverstone and colleagues (1992) argue, objectifies the moral, aesthetic, and cognitive universe of those feeling comfortable with them" (Bakardjieva 2011).

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CHAPTER 3

Memory

“The internet is full of garbage,” the elderly bookstore owner said to me from behind the desk in his store. He went on:

> I don’t even really use the computer. But that’s where young people look for information. The youth don’t know the history and geography of their country [Iran] from books anymore. And I will stop selling altogether at some point. But I don’t mind; I’ve retired and do this because I enjoy it.

The gray-haired bookstore owner got up from his desk and moved slowly toward a table of books in the middle of the store. He picked up a thin pamphlet. Its glossy paper was emblazoned with color photographs of iconic images of *Takhte Jamshid* (the ruins of Persepolis, capital of the ancient Achemaenid empire) and the outside of an intricately decorated mosque dome. “Iran” was printed in Persian and Roman script along with the title, “From Ancient Persia to contemporary Iran: selected historical milestones.” “It’s in English,” he said, handing the colorful pamphlet to me. “This is the kind of thing young people like you might read.” He continued describing his business:

> Eighty five percent of our books are in Farsi, and many of them were written before or during the revolution. Young people are not interested in these books. The customers I have are from my own generation—we sometimes sit in the store and have some tea and talk about politics. These books are unique, and most of them are out of print now.

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As he spoke, the man motioned with an aged hand toward the wall of shelves reaching to the ceiling in his quaint store on Westwood Boulevard, the long-standing and well-known center of the Iranian American presence in LA. The bookstore owner was a respected figure in LA Iranian gatherings, greeted with much esteem and courtesy when arriving at a high profile “community event” in his dark suit and polished shoes. From time to time he would give an interview on local Persian language radio, in which he would draw on his knowledge of Iranian political history for an LA-based Iranian audience. Today, in the store, he turned his gaze to the boxy, gray computer monitor on his desk as he described his disinterest in “the internet.” He was well aware that some Iranian bookstores had embraced online sales in efforts to adapt and continue their businesses, but that was not for him. The computer on the desk was turned off, and the monitor half-covered by a cloth printed with a traditional Iranian *botteh jegheh*[1] design. A short walk up the Boulevard to another Iranian bookstore, and the mood about the local future of the Persian language book business was hardly different.

> It won’t be too long before I’m out of business. My books are almost all in Farsi and the younger generation doesn’t even speak it. My own daughter doesn’t understand me sometimes. My wife tells me to speak slower to her in Farsi.

The second bookstore owner picked up a book that was comparatively thin beside the others on the shelf. “This is the direction it’s going in. It’s what sells now,” he said, holding up the copy of Firouzeh Dumas’ *Funny in Farsi: A memoir of growing up Iranian in America*, the humorous and intimate story of a second-generation Iranian American woman and her family. “I don’t blame the youth for turning to the internet for information instead of books,” he added. “If I ask him, my son can look up and print historical and geographic information about Iran from the computer quicker than I can find in a book. And it’s in their language, English.”

Both men expressed clear concerns about the important changes they described. They sketched a scenario in which limited print editions of books, international shipping, language barriers, competition on the book market, and the coming of age of the second generation, together constituted a new situation. One in which the books they sold, and the knowledge they could pass on, were on the decline. While their storefronts were markers of the typical, established Iranian presence in the Westwood

landscape, the future they projected was one of change. Change to the technological, demographic, commercial, and urban conditions in which they operated, as well as to the nature of media flows between LA and Iran.

The anxiety surrounding these changes for their local businesses was partly caught up with an anxiety about the future of knowledge about the Iranian past for the next generation. However, the members of the younger generation with whom I spoke had their own ideas about how digital media played into their ways of engaging with Iran's past. And in the course of fieldwork, it became clear to me that although new technologies brought this generation new ways of remembering the Iranian past, these were far more complex than a scenario of an overall decline of books in favor of the internet. In this chapter I delve into how the young Iranian Americans I met engaged with various narratives about the past and Iran, focusing on how their web usage practices played a role in this engagement.

The notion of the past has been a key concern in research on the Iranian diaspora in LA, in particular with relation to conceptualizations of Iranian exile. Hamid Naficy (1993) describes Iranian exiles in LA as holding on to a pristine Iranian homeland from the past by fetishizing it (with the help of media). He discusses the past in terms of the distance and pain of exile, the nostalgia for a homeland objectified, imagined, and fetishized in souvenirs, photos, and so on. Naficy explains this as an attempt of Iranian exiles to protect the past against further loss. Whether in personal memories, national glorifications, or both, the past is understood as synonymous with an Iranian homeland that can be remembered or forgotten; both options are equally painful under conditions of exile.

But precisely by mediating this past through satellite television, Iranian exiles in LA participate in an industry of capitalist production that integrates them into American society (Naficy 1993). Halleh Ghorashi's work on LA Iranians about a decade after Naficy's book also describes how the Iranian past is remembered, but emphasizes that the key purpose for recollecting the Iranian past is to wage claims to diasporic belonging in the USA, rather than reifying a lost national homeland. As Ghorashi shows, the ancient Persian past in particular has been used as a source of possibility in the diaspora; mobilized and adapted as a means of both distancing from the Islamic regime and laying claims in the American present through identity politics (Ghorashi 2004). She argues that the past is not engaged with in terms of national boundaries (American and Iranian)

alone, but in terms of a diasporic belonging in the USA that goes beyond such boundaries (ibid.).

Considered together, these in-depth accounts of Iranian LA suggest that the way people make use of narratives about the Iranian past might have changed over time in the diaspora. I present my ethnographic account of a new generation of Iranian Americans of the same location as a means of shedding light on how the past is being engaged with in still newer ways, and particularly what it means that the second generation's remembering is also mediated digitally. To address this, I investigated people's everyday practices of remembering the past and web usage, and in doing so I bring together concepts of diasporic remembering with ideas about mediating memory. Namely, I draw on the idea that it is almost impossible to study how the past is remembered without studying media and representations of the past (Connerton 2006),[2] while also acknowledging that diasporic remembering is constantly shaped by the experiences and claims most important to people in the present (Ghorashi 2004).

Making a point about conceptualizing diasporic memory for migrant second generations in particular, Stok refers to how the children of migrants "construct their own diasporic narratives of home and belonging" but are at the same time "heirs to diasporic memories" from older generations (Stok 2010: 27).[3] This notion of the past as something inherited and yet self-constructed represents an apparent tension. One that is particularly pertinent to explore with relation to the second generation, if we consider them as positioned both in terms of continuity and rupture with the first generation. This interesting tension is a defining idea in seminal work on heritage formation, which sees heritage as the production of the past for a collective in the present, while framing that past as inherited from antecedent others (Lowenthal 1985, 1996).

I am interested in the particular processes of mediation by which the past is brought to bear for this new generation. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, heritage is experienced anew with each new mediation. In other words, it is (re-)experienced through its every performance or showing, and she is attentive to the historicity of media forms through which heritage is mediated. About the development of new (digital) media forms for new audiences, she states that "the very forms and media, not just the content, need to be reinvented for they are powerful instruments with their own agency" (Kirshenblatt-gimblett 2000). This idea about mediated invocations of the past is useful for understanding the role of digital media mediating the past as part of the formation of Iranian

American-ness for the second generation. It also encompasses a notion of the past that goes beyond life histories around pre- and post-migrational experiences in the Iranian diaspora (Sullivan 2001; Ghorashi 2002) to including other personal memories, but also how they intersect with certain Iranian and American national memories.

Digitally Photographing *Haft Sin*

As part of their Norooz celebration practices, many of my respondents shared photos and "status updates" on Facebook, as well as "tagging" (and being "tagged" by) friends and family members. Within this thoroughly social, yearly practice, the use of web applications increasingly became a part of the rituals around Norooz. Norooz literally translates from Persian as "new day." It is the Persian New Year and a celebrated time of renewal. In LA, it is by far the most widely enjoyed Iranian festivity, and is marked each year by celebrations on the first astronomical day of spring (or Spring Equinox), which takes place around March 21st. Malek's work on contemporary celebration of Norooz in the USA describes the tradition as an "ancient Zoroastrian festival" marking "the arrival of spring and the end of the dark season,"[4] and signaling new beginnings. Norooz is celebrated by a great many Iranian Americans across religious and ethnic denominations and has gained the status of a truly inclusive celebration among Iranian diaspora, viewed, as Malek states, "as a cultural event that can serve a unifying purpose" (Malek 2011).

The Persian New Year has its origins in the Zoroastrian festival from the Achaemenid Empire of the fourth century BC, and is currently celebrated in Iran and a number of Middle Eastern/Central Asian countries. In LA, Eid-e Norooz and the celebratory practices that take place around it are the most publicly acknowledged celebration associated with the Iranian American population living in the city. And the annual ritual typically involves a great deal of preparation and celebration, both in public spaces and within homes, including *khooneh tekooni* (traditional spring cleaning undertaking in preparation for the new year), *Haft sin* (the ritual altar assembled in people's houses), *Chahar Shambe Soori* (which takes place on the Wednesday leading up to the new year in which people jump over a fire at night—either in public spaces or on their back yards—in a purification rite), *Sizdah be dar* (an outdoor celebration that takes place in open spaces during the full day, usually public parks, and ceremoniously marks the 13th day of the new year, which is otherwise seen as a bad omen due

to the number 13), and *Eid-e-Norooz* (the celebration that comes at the moment of *Sale Tahvil*, the turning of the new year).

In the USA, although the relevant dates are not public holidays like in Iran, special television and radio programming at the New Year's commencement are consistently produced on Persian language broadcasts, wishing their viewers and listeners a happy new year. In LA, *Eid-e Norooz* (the Norooz celebration) has become a common celebration. Festivities have taken on publicly visible proportions over the years. Apart from the longer-running *Sizeh be Dar* gatherings in large parks in Southern California with attendees often in the thousands, and at times parts of Westwood Boulevard are closed down to make room for the events, complete with a stage, audiences, and festive programming. University student groups put on events, and banners are hung throughout parts of the city by Iranian American organizations wishing a happy New Year to passers-by, while Norooz programming is adopted by some LA museums. The most notable of which is Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), whose yearly program since 2009 has been one of the largest Norooz events in the county, with sponsoring from Farhang Foundation—an influential local organization that funds a great deal of the Iranian cultural programming in LA.

The use of public, city spaces, and county institutions means that the reception of these events by non-Iranian audiences is an increasingly important facet of the practice. And the ritual's entry into cultural programming brings with it an intention to educate broader audiences about the content and meaning of the tradition, as well as shed light on the Iranian (American) populace who celebrates it. Norooz celebrations have taken on layered goals that implicate various publics, and this reflects something similar to what Malek argues of the Persian Day Parade, which is usually held in the month after Norooz in New York City.

Organizers of such events are motivated by goals not only of educating the American population about Iranian history and culture but also of passing an appreciated Iranian culture and identity on to the second generation, who have experienced post-9/11 hostility, while re-educating those first-generation Iranian Americans who have experienced assimilation (Malek 2011). Malek argues that while processions or parades are not a traditional element of Iranian celebrations, these celebrations are re-purposed as a performative public practice within the context of the American tradition of the city parade (2011). While no such single public Norooz event stands out in LA in quite the same way as the street parade

does in New York, the various bases for Norooz's recognition by different bodies has brought it a degree of public acknowledgement in LA that goes far beyond it being known simply within Iranian American family settings. The public celebration of Norooz in LA and the USA becomes increasingly entwined into the local and national institutions, such that its cultural and political elements make it an institutional performance of Iranian American-ness.

The phenomenon of Norooz photo-sharing on Facebook is set against the background of this broader public context of the ritual celebration. Many of my respondents' postings included photographs and home videos of themselves with family and others during this period. But by and large these photos were specifically taken of the *haft sin*. Haft sin is a decorative and symbolic altar[5] that is the central part of the celebration of Norooz and what much of the preparation of the affair goes into. A family's *haft sin* arrangement is typically situated in a central living area of the house, during the weeks preceding the turn of the New Year.[6] Like the rest of the Norooz seasonal celebrations, *haft sin* is a practice transported from Iran to the USA via migration. And the posting of *haft sin* photos on Facebook and using social media platforms to wish family and friends happy New Year seemed to be becoming increasingly common.

For instance, Shideh, a student in her early 20s, used an "app" to share a photograph of a *sabzeh*[7] with a group of about 15 friends. S*abzeh* is one of the most important of the objects arranged on the *haft sin* table.[8] The text accompanying Shideh's message sent with the app read: "I've sent you a سبزه [sabzeh] using عیدی [eidi] (the seasonal gift-giving app)! Accept this gift and send one back!" Aside from the app that allowed elements of the altar to be sent, *haft sin* photos taken by people of their own *haft sin* tables were mostly posted via Facebook or emailed among friends and acquaintances. Aryana sent a *haft sin* photograph to a list of recipients during the run-up to the festive season, having adapted the photograph into a digital postcard that appeared as an attachment visible in her email. The text across the top of the photo read: "*Noroozetan Pirooz*!" ("Merry Norooz!" transliterated in English script). At the bottom of the photo was a text in English wishing the recipient a happy new year, under which her name was signed. The photo (with text incorporated) signaled a new trend that Aryana kept up for a few of the following years. It replaced the previous year's purely text-based email message for the same occasion. The photographs added a visual element to the widespread, ritual well-

wishing on email and Facebook that was typical of this period. And this visual addition mediated the visual components of the ornamental *haft sin* altars, each decorated with care and elaborately arranged into colorful and attractive compositions.

It became apparent with the annual repetition that my respondents' practices of tagging, emailing, using a specific Norooz app on Facebook, or posting photographs to their profiles were becoming part of the Norooz celebration itself. Some even commented on Facebook about the experience—or anticipation of the experience—of seeing so many *haft sin* photographs in their Facebook news feeds. The practice of sharing *haft sin* altar photos is by no means limited to the second generation or even to those living outside Iran. The *haft sin* altar is typically situated in my respondents' parental houses, and often not something they themselves, take part in assembling. However, this photo-posting practice was something they did play an active part in, regardless of whether they assembled their own *haft sin*. It is this practice of personalization through which my respondents make this practice their own.

They invest preparation into personalized messages and imagery for circulation, such as selecting a list of email recipients, preparing a personalized message and edited image, or crafting a posting for one's Facebook timeline/wall. A poignant example of this was Atiya's *haft sin* table as shared via a photograph on the social media site Instagram (and re-posted to her Facebook timeline). Atiya's photograph is stylized with an Instagram filter and features a *haft sin* that includes a framed photograph of her father. Atiya's father had passed away since I first met her in 2009 and the portrait of him included in the celebratory Norooz altar was a way for her and her family members to remember him as part of the family during a time that is typically dedicated to being around loved ones. Placing photographs of family members on the Norooz altar was not uncommon among my respondents. In Aitya's case, the framed photo on the altar celebrates Norooz not only by remembering and perpetuating an ancient ritual, but also by remembering an absent family member whose presence is invoked in spirit.[9]

In addition to the personalization/customization of *haft sin* photograph, this practice of posting photos of *haft sin* also transfers them from the private space of people's homes, in which they are typically situated, to the format of a digital media platform. What would otherwise have been a sight only for those in the physical presence of the altar in the domestic setting is extended into a different social sphere when shared on

Instagram and Facebook. In a way comparable to other public renditions of Norooz, this use of social media extends the practice to broader audiences of social contacts, including non-Iranian Americans. For instance, one of my respondents posted a Norooz post from the site *Turmeric and Saffron*, a popular food blog run by an Iranian American woman that provides recipes and basic explanations of Iranian cuisine for non-Iranian audiences. The site posts many *haft sin* photos each year that are stylistically continuous with the photographs it posts of food on a regular basis. This is a practice of explaining Norooz to wider audiences, while using forms that typically fit into the lives of these second-generation web users.

Returning to Malek's (2011) study of Persian Day parades, we see this (semi-)public aspect as an important facet of how Iranian-ness is practiced in the USA through celebrations around Norooz. Namely, they are not only celebrations among Iranian Americans, but also "performances" for non-Iranian (American) audiences. In LA, too, non-Iranian audiences are a key part of how practices around Norooz take shape in the public domain. And an important part of their public purpose is demonstrating the compatibility of Iranian-ness with American-ness. In fact, I suggest that typical public performance of Norooz reflects what Baumann calls "encompassment," one of the "grammars of alterity" he identifies (2004). He defines this as a hierarchical modality of inclusion in which self-styled others (in this case, Iranian immigrants) become part of the identity doing the encompassing of their difference (Americans).[10] In so doing, it subsumes Iranian-ness under the "melting pot" of American nationhood in the present.[11]

Indeed, Iranian American organizations themselves tend to contribute to and reinforce this grammar of encompassment by increased orientation of institutionalized practices of Iranian American-ness toward American audiences. Ghorashi has pointed out a similar orientation with the Mehregan Festival in Orange County (Ghorashi 2004). As she also suggests, this choice by the organization reflects a gain in collective minority recognition as well as absolving Iranians of links to "terrorism," so as not to jeopardize being subsumed into American-ness as an Iranian subgroup. As Iranian-ness becomes subsumed into American-ness through utilizations of Norooz, Iranian American-ness also comes to enjoy greater and broader public recognition.[12] Taking this point further, the most significant instance of institutional recognition for Norooz came in the form of the national-level "Norooz Resolution."[13] The below excerpts are taken from the Norooz Resolution H.Res.267 that was introduced in

2009 by Democratic Representative, Mike Honda, and passed in March 2010 by the House of Representatives. In the same month, the US Senate then passed a similar resolution (S.Res.463). This move was celebrated by the Iranian American organizations, National Iranian American Council (NIAC) and Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA). These organizations publicized their Washington representatives' involvement in the bill's progression. The bill's many Iranian American supporters had participated in the letter- and email-writing campaigns in the run-up to this event.

> In 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great established one of the earliest charters on human rights, which abolished slavery and allowed for freedom of religion, and this marker in Iranian history has had significant impact on the respect for human rights that Iranian-Americans carry today.

The USA is a melting pot of ethnicities and religion[s] and Nowruz[14] contributes [to] the richness of American culture and is consistent with our founding principles of peace and prosperity for all. In parallel to the successful national campaign for the Norooz Resolution, October 2009 saw the Norooz festival proclaimed by UNESCO as part of the "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity." Within this framework, Norooz was designated as the "heritage of humanity," while in parallel, the Resolution claimed Norooz as the heritage of people of Iranian descent currently living in the USA. For nationally oriented Iranian American organizations, like PAAIA and NIAC, the UNESCO decision was used to additionally bolster the campaign for the Norooz Resolution.[15] The Norooz Resolution draws a discursive link between the ancient Persian King, the values of Iranians in the USA today, and the "founding principles" of the US nation-state evident in "American culture."[16] The adoption of the Norooz Resolution integrates an ancient Persian past into an American national past.

I see the sharing of Norooz photos on Instagram and Facebook as reflecting claims to an ancient Iranian tradition through a different access to mixed (Iranian and non-Iranian) publics than publicly concerted Norooz celebrations in the spaces of the American city. The American audience, though present and important here as well, is defined less as local- and national-level policymakers, or Los Angelino museumgoers, but more in terms of blog followers/readers, Facebook friends, and email recipients. The practice parallels the dually intimate *and* public orienta-

tions that Norooz has in Iran as well, merging them into a single practice. Digital *haft sin* photo posts are neither a fully private/intimate family setting, nor an official public campaign. They reflect a more diffuse and unofficial modality of performing cultural difference, one that is imbricated with a style of media use that is familiar to these second-generation web users—personal photo-sharing. This practice thus reflects a much more effortless and circumstantial overlap between Iranian-ness and American-ness through ritual performance than other typical Norooz practices. This performance neither seems to ask for Iranian-ness to be subsumed under American-ness, nor to be distinct from it, but implicitly styles them both as part of the same digital mediation of an Iranian traditional past for the second-generation Iranian American present.

Blogging Persia

A speaking event was held at the University of Irvine in May 2009. The speaker was the eldest son of the late Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.[17] During the question-and-answer section of the program, an older gentleman near the front of the auditorium asked, "through history we have been peaceful people. How, through your leadership, can we show our culture to the world?" The would-be monarch responded by stating: "our current behavior should carry on that heritage and pride to the second generation." The brief incident was interesting for what it clarified about the goal of transmitting national "pride" to the second generation according to this influential figure in exile. Namely, that the second generation is bestowed with the role of carrying on and presenting positive attributes of Iranian-ness to the world based on a positive "history." Audience members like the older gentleman in the audience and other older members of the first generation were evidently loyalists to the Pahlavi royal family. There were also many second-generation audience members attending the event. Presumably, many of them were students of the University of Irvine, born after the fall from power of the Pahlavi regime and the family's subsequent exile in the USA, but present in large numbers to hear the speech.

As we exited the hall, Farhang, a young man who was an active member of Iranian American student organizing and involved with other Iranian American events, told me that he had enjoyed Pahlavi's speech very much and applauded the man's diplomatic tone. To Farhang, Pahlavi was a figure that exuded the civil level-headedness that was missing from current

Iranian heads of state. As we moved out of the hall, a young woman standing nearby told her friend a story from earlier in the day when she had accidentally came across Pahlavi in street. She animatedly described her excited reaction upon sighting him, describing the experience with the gushing energy of someone who had come across a famous person they admire.

The event as a whole was swathed in an air of ceremony and celebrity around the former royal family, over 30 years on from the establishment of the republic. Despite being deposed from royalty, the family had apparently not lost its national symbolic status. And judging by the large numbers of young people attending the event that day, the second generation's coming of age does not necessarily pose a threat to this status. Nevertheless, none of my key respondents were in attendance at this affair—it was a different crowd than I usually saw at events. In fact, the contemporary remnants of the Pahalvi Dynasty and its typical glorification of the Persian Empire was an important point of contention that preoccupied most of my key respondents. The public use of the ancient Persian past by Iranians in the USA has not been limited to loyalists to the Shah. Ancient Persia is also used in the diaspora as a way of celebrating Iranian nationhood, while avoiding invoking the Islamic Republic. Malek's work has dealt with this tendency in cultural productions among Iranian American groups describing public Iranian American events as reflecting a focus on:

> [T]he Iranian homeland and its ancient pre-Islamic history (part of a strong nationalist sentiment that echoes Pahlavi-era rhetoric), which serves to minimize the privileging of internal ethnic difference in the face of a favored Iranian identity. (Malek 2011)

On the one hand, pre-Islamic history is used to emphasize national unity in the diaspora. And on the other, this particular ancient symbolism also summons a particular notion of nationhood that many of my respondents associate with narratives of national unification from the Pahlavi era. Student organizer, Pouneh, was a vocal critic of the legacy of glorifying an ancient Persian past by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's predecessors, as well as those she claimed were influenced by these narratives in her environment.

> It's important to educate young Iranian Americans about all parts of Iranian history. Not just romanticizing the ancient Achamaenid period, but all of it. They are all important to learn about. And it's not just about talking about

> the pride you take in your history so you can feel good about yourself. You have to learn the good with the bad. Not just look at the good things so you can be proud. … I feel like people use the Achamaenid period as a perfect period. Reza Shah brought that back in Iran. He brought back how great of a civilization the Persian Empire was. But today they definitely romanticize the idea of what it was back then. Sure, there are impressive things that I learn when I study the history … but whether or not it's good or bad you should be proud of what your country has gone through to come to where it is today.

Pouneh felt invested in how young Iranian Americans learn about the Iranian past. Her approach does not eschew a notion of national pride, but positions her against the romanticization of a "perfect" national past within a particular national ideology. The emphasis is on learning comprehensively and Pouneh contended with selections of the past that reinforce the national ideology she is critical of, but which she saw as dominant in her surroundings.[18] The critical positioning with respect to secular (anti-Islamic) nationalist narratives about the ancient Persian past that Pouneh expresses was widespread among my respondents. Beeta was one of the editors of the online publication, Ajam Media Collective, and she shared this interest. One piece she wrote together with her co-editors for the site was particularly relevant in this regard. It was entitled *Ferdowsi's Legacy: Examining Persian Nationalist Myths of the Shahnameh*.[19] The piece took a myth-busting stance toward claims to secular-nationalist Persian cultural purity by laying out an argument based on a historical examination of the cultural mixes between Persian, Turkic, and Arabic linguistic and cultural influences from the seventh century. They based their argument around how the *Shahnameh*, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is interpreted through a culturally and linguistically purist lens, attributing this to the "politicization of the Shahnameh" in the nineteenth century by modern Iranian nation-building projects by the Pahlavi Dynasty.

They point out how the Shahnameh suited the Pahlavi dynasty's goals in two key ways. First, by linking ancient pre-Islamic Persia to the present day, the Pahlavis sought to distinguish themselves from the Semitic Arab World by underlining Iran's uninterrupted "Aryan" linguistic and, thus, racial credentials. Second, by portraying Ferdowsi as an anti-Arab figure, the Pahlavis created an icon of secular Persian nationalism that opposed Islam's "corrupting" influence, justifying the contemporary political projects of forcible secularization. According to this account,

Ferdowsi symbolized opposition to Arab influence and helped spread the three major myths outlined above in Iranian schools. Within Iranian studies, the mobilization of the discourse of original Aryan-ness has been argued to be a "myth," and yet a defining element of the twentieth century Iranian nation (Zia-Ebrahimi 2011). In the comments section under the piece, one of the three co-authors of the piece and second-generation co-founder of *Ajam*, Rustin, responds to a query about the piece's focus on debunking nationalist myths:

> Iranians growing up in the diaspora (myself included) have been raised with this nationalist narrative, and thus have been co-opted by it unwillingly. The purpose of this article is a response to a particular narrative that has been pushed upon us without any critical examination.

Rustin's comment reflects a more general position that several of my respondents were vocal about: a position in line with multi-culturalism and invested in eschewing Persian national chauvinism. In this example, these young people blog about the Shahnameh as a means of calling for an interpretation of the literary work that rejects ideological readings to Persian nationalist ends. It reflects how they use narratives of the Iranian past as part of claiming a position amidst the narratives that dominate in the environments in which they live. As Rustin writes in another comment:

> [T]he Shahnameh is often selectively read out of context to prove an ideological point, when in reality the text has multiple interpretations, not all of them overtly nationalistic.

I see these statements as part of a collective project by these young people to reject the aspects of ethnic purism residing in notions of Iranian nationhood, defined by those around them as Persian. And what they are doing signals a re-politicization of ancient Persia in a way that challenges Persian-centered ethno-nationalism. It rejects ethnic exclusion of those Iranians who do not identify as Persian, such as those from Turkic and Arab ethnicities in Iran and the diaspora. This can be seen as a contestation of what other scholars have also observed as the tendency among "Persian national chauvinists" to mobilize the "Persian" past as part of "inventing a golden pre-Islamic age of racial and cultural superiority" (Moallem 2005).[20] Some respondents note the racist and expressly anti-Arab expressions these ideas take on, including, among the second generation, mentioning that the

way people around them talk about "Persian Pride" sometimes includes these sentiments.

Daha's research on second-generation Iranian Americans argues that the label "Persian" and the history it is associated with boosts pride, self-confidence, and other positive feelings for her research group. She states: "the adolescents viewed identification as *Persian* as warranting cultural pride due to ancient Persian history, but *Iranian* as connected to the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Daha 2011). The notion of "pride" is mentioned in her work a number of times in the context of ethnic identification as a sentiment to be valued positively. From what my respondents expressed, positive ideas about being Iranian American for the second generation are forged through practices of producing morally invested historiographies, and articulating a politics of inclusion against secular-nationalist/chauvinist mobilizations of the past. I see a site like *Ajam* as doing this by placing discussions about the past and the current use of narratives about it into a new context of sociality that takes shape online, but is based in part on the social environments in which these young people operate. An environment influenced by vocal support of the secular Persian nationalism of the former Iranian royal family and their supporters such at the event I mentioned above.

Beyond its opposition to a brand of exile Iranian nationalism, their position is one I would characterize as a burgeoning "diasporic politics of solidarity." This is a term taken from the blog, *iPouya* (a longer-running one than *Ajam*) and is another example of this engagement with the study of the Iranian past from the perspective of a new generation of young academics in the USA.[21] Like *Ajam*, it is English-language, and (self-) edited by a young, second-generation scholar coming from the academic disciplines that touch on the field of Iranian Studies. And like *Ajam*, it is out to give voice and credence to less dominant perspectives on history and current affairs of the Middle East while also making a connection to mainstream cultural/media production, ranging from Hollywood films, international Iranian cinema, (Iranian) pop music, as well as references to academic literature and literary writing (in English). While different, these online projects present these young authors "a source" of sorts. As the tagline on Pouya's site states: "A Source on Politics, the Middle East, Film, and Humor." Through the young, highly educated audiences they cater to, these online projects are part of an effort to combine academic authority with a youthful popular appeal and a sense of solidarity with the (migrant) peoples from the region.

Malpas argues that digital media should be acknowledged as not only enhancing or extending "the experiential or interpretative engagement with cultural heritage," but also actually transforming those very experiences and interpretations of the past: "perhaps a change in the way in which cultural heritage itself appears to us, and so also a change in the way we understand, experience, and interpret ourselves" (Malpas 2007). The web projects I have described not only present alternative interpretations to Persian ethno-nationalism, they also do so in a way that appeals to the peers of their producers through a style of online communication that combines academic and popular content and writing genres side by side, creating a new environment for interpreting information about Iranian national history. But more than that, as my respondents' personal investments in these projects shows, it also allows them to position themselves in ways that permit a sense of belonging where certain nationalist narratives of the Iranian past that they were exposed to did not.

Gamification of the Coup

> I didn't learn anything really about Iran from my parents. I used the internet a lot to learn about Iranian culture and politics. I would just search and find certain things. Things like the CIA coup in '51 that removed Mossaddeq from power.[22] When I read that I felt really militant about it. I thought, "yeah America's really bad" (in self-mocking tone). But really (in more sincere tone). I got emotional about this when I found out about it.

The above is what Sepideh said about how she had learned about Iran and she refers in particular to the historic coup that removed the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadeq from power. This event remains a key political moment in Iranian national memory. Sepideh also describes her strong initial reaction to it upon discovery through online searches. Speaking about her experience of learning about the same event, another young woman in her twenties, Shiva—who was a journalism/communications student at the time—described with passion, the experience of having digitally accessed for the first time, the declassified CIA documents covering Operation TPAJAX. These disclosed the role of the UK and the US governments in the 1953 coup against then Iranian President Mohammad Mossadeq. She referred not only to the online availability of the documents but also to a set of CDs storing the digitized documents

that she had acquired from the former American Embassy in Tehran on a visit there when she was in Iran. Digital media accessed, both from Iran and the USA, were important in these young women's coming to know about this particular intersection between the US and Iranian pasts.

More broadly, the events around the removal of Mossadeq seemed to be undergoing something of a popular revival around the period in which I did my fieldwork. The historical feature film, *Women Without Men*, directed by Iranian diaspora artist, Shirin Neshat and fellow artist, Shoja Azari, was released in 2010. It received much attention in LA with a (partial) screening at LACMA in 2009 with a Q&A with Neshat herself, and a screening at UCLA in 2010 upon the film's official release. Later that same year, the documentary film, *American Coup*, was released and I observed a few of my respondents recommending the film to friends via Facebook. Then there was the digital comic book *CIA: Operation Ajax*, an interactive iPad graphic novel released in 2012, which uses "digital storytelling" to incorporate, graphic design, narrative text, and historical documentation into an account of this particular Iranian and American past. Around this same period (2011), a unique computer game, *The Cat and the Coup*, was released, which also dealt with this same historical period. This was created by BoomGen Studios,[23] co-founded by Reza Aslan and Mahyar Tousi, second-generation Iranian American men[24] working in the New York and LA entertainment industries.

The Cat and the Coup was designed by Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad, the latter of whom is the child of an Iranian father and American mother, and has lived most of his life in the USA, including in LA. He was responsible for art direction in the project. This computer game is played through the character of Dr. Mossadegh's cat, who interactively guides the character of Mossadagh, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, through the events of his life between the time of his election as Prime Minister and his death, a period that covers the event of America's first CIA coup. *The Cat* is described by its makers as a "documentary videogame" and the visual aesthetic of this computer game's different levels—which are the settings where gameplay take place—are influenced by the traditional art form of Persian miniatures.

In an online video that he posted about the making of the game, Peter Brinson explains, "this is not a game about alternate histories, but simply one you don't know." Kurosh emphasized this quote when I spoke with him. He also mentioned the potential of the game to remind a generation of young gamers growing up now of "a time when the US had a

good relationship with Iran" because for them, "this tension is all they've known." The format of a game that facilitates multimedia design was chosen to help these young people (Iranian and American) to engage with a history they otherwise might not know about via other media formats. Indeed, the starting-point assumption is that American audiences are not informed about how this particular part of their national history overlaps with the history of Iran, and so beyond promoting young Iranian Americans' knowledge of a specific event in Iranian history, the game also historicizes current Iran–USA relations more generally (Fig. 3.1).

Kurosh's interest in this project is partly personal as his family on his father's side was close to Iranian dignitaries, while his mother came from an American military family. Kurosh's own family history is, thus, laden with direct and indirect connections to power in both the USA and Iran, and the national histories this shaped. Kurosh positions himself with respect to both the family legacies and national histories in a way that reflects a critical yet invested stance, something I saw reflected recurrently among my respondents. Kurosh's involvement with *The Cat* project reflects a personal journey of discovery but one set up with the aim of educating young people about this chapter in intersecting Iranian, American, and British national and (post-)colonial histories. His approach is rooted in

Fig. 3.1 Screenshot from the documentary computer game, *The Cat and the Coup*

his expertise in pedagogical computer game design and encourages first-time learners of Iranian and American histories to engage critically with a relatively little-known past.

In 2009, during the uprisings that sparked a great deal of interest, support, and hope regarding Iran among my respondents in LA, recollections around the Mossadegh era and the fall of this historical figure re-emerged among amidst the social media postings of supporters of the Green Movement in LA. I noticed quotes and photographs of Mossadegh resurfacing not only on Facebook pages, but also in printed photographs at demonstrations. This took place within an atmosphere of hope for a more democratic Iran around this period, while remembering a past democratic trajectory interrupted, tracing the consequences of that interruption to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. With the sustained attention for Mossadegh in scholarly biographical histories of this cornerstone event, period, and figure in modern Iranian history, the appeal and relevance of this history continues to re-establish itself in recent years.[25]

In the *The Cat*, a story is told about this period in Mossadegh's life as the player progresses through the levels. The story is intentionally wrapped in visual allegory and symbolism, packaged with music and artwork that creates a suspenseful mood. The idea behind these design decisions is to ensure that the videogame "teases people into learning the history for themselves" rather than finding it presented to them in the videogame. This approach seems to centralize a particular form of "edutainment" (Buckingham and Scanlon 2005) that, rather than relying on content intrinsic to the computer game itself, triggers players to seek out and create one or more of their own narratives about this past based on external information. The information that went into the game's production is intended to take distance from presenting a single, ideologically informed-narrative. Kurosh tells me his sources for the historical information were mainstream American and British journalistic publications, such as CNN and The Economist. He made the decision to rely on such sources, because he wanted to do his best to avoid being accused of propagating an obscure, highly contested, or ideologically slanted or propagandistic version of the past, choosing therefore to draw on and highlight information and sources that mainstream audiences already found credible. In this way, the aim behind creating the videogame is to use art, design, music, and narrative to make the player curious about a time they know little about.

Kurosh has put the expertise he has cultivated in 3D computer graphics to use in a range of projects. Nevertheless, in *The Cat* project, he sees a need

to supplement digital media with other media forms, most notably, print. Kurosh says he sees this project as “another page in the Shahnameh” (*Book of Kings*—ancient mythological Persian epic written by poet, Ferdowsi). He cites how the book tells a story of great Persian leaders in a way that has survived over time. As Kurosh sees it, the game is telling a story from the modern history of the country instead of an ancient and mythical one like the Shahnameh, and one equally important to learn and preserve over time, relating it constantly to the present. Because the aim of preservation is so important to Kurosh, he takes certain measures to ensure it.[26] For example, the Persian miniature art form, he explains, originated from thirteenth century Iran, but has endured into the present and is still practiced. Miniatures are a visual form used to tell tales—among other things—of battles and other historic events. This is part of why Kurosh saw it fitting to use this art form in *The Cat*.

In addition, he saw this visual form as vesting the product with the care and quality that is more likely to see it survive over time—compared to if the events had simply been written down without the illustrations. Within the Persian miniatures (books of text and illustration) that have been preserved over centuries, Kurosh notes, “original illustrations have lasted over time where pages with just text have not.” This, he attributes to the materials and craftsmanship often used to make the pieces, as they were printed books that included the use of “time-tested precious metals” such as gold. Hence, Kurosh seeks to print a book that has taken the same care to make as those which have successfully lasted over centuries. The way he sees it, this will not only ensure the preservation of this story from Iran’s modern history, but will also pay fitting tribute to this ancient art form. He therefore plans to make a printed book version of the videogame.

The book project is important to Kurosh, because with digital media comes the risk of software platforms no longer being available to play the game as technologies develop or as degradation occurs. “Even a CD has a lifespan, but paper and gold will be here long after we are,” he said in a conversation we had near his place of work at USC’s Game Innovation Lab. Ultimately, Kurosh’s vision is to introduce the visual artwork of the videogame in book form to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) via donation to its collection of Islamic and Persian Art. He referred to the envisaged book’s accessibility and its “mixing of old and new” as being in line with the collection’s previous acquisitions. The proposed book project thus incorporates replications of traces from the past framed as inherited and preserved, while also generating a new product.

The past this book will narrate pictorially and in text is, like the game, intended to re-frame current relations between the USA and Iran.

And Kurosh's investment in print, paper, books, and the use of valuable materials in their crafting not only reflects the importance of the materiality of print media and the book as a particular print media form. It also displays the limitations he attributes to the digital media he himself primarily works with. His attention to the materiality of print was also evident from the large, color print of stills from the videogame that hung prominently, framed as an art piece, in his office space at the Innovation Lab on the USC campus. Evidently the digital storage or online gaming does not serve the purpose of a printed book kept within the walls of a museum building, or an art centerpiece framed and hung on a wall. In this case, practices of preserving a connection to the past appear to remain rooted in the primacy of older media forms and institutions that have shown their abilities to prevent degradation of historical objects over time.

For Kurosh, digital objects such as the videogame do not pass this test and his system of value for objects that preserve the past is not one that changes with the possibilities that digital media offer. Not even in this case when the printed, physical object (the book) would be a reproduction of the digital original (the online game).[27] The practices of this digital cultural producer seems to reinforce the pre-digital conventions of preserving history, namely, that "the concrete reality and density of stone, wood, or plastic as opposed to the materiality of digital codes and programming languages gives weight to the intensity of its interpretation" (Cameron 2007). At the same time, the game was a way to stylize and render the past into a product geared toward young audiences and was illustrative of how pedagogical gaming and other interactive "edutaiment" forms directed toward youth that I came across during the course of fieldwork[28] used particular aesthetic elements via digital audio visual media to place young people within a historical narrative through their role in the game.

Remediating Pop Cultural Nostalgia

One evening, as we browsed the shelves in Hediyeh's favorite bookstore, she picked up a recently published photo memoir about Iran. It was a thick, hardcover book, and as Hediyeh began paging through it we saw the large color photographs on its glossy pages. "See, this is what I mean," she muttered. Many of the photographs portrayed an Iran during the days

of the Shah, depicting him in ceremonious military garb, his queen by his side, her fashion style recognizable for the period and barely distinguishable from iconic Western equivalents from the 1960s and 1970s. These photos were followed by the black and white photos of throngs of people in the streets, iconic imagery from the Islamic revolution, which was in turn followed by photographs of the work of Shirin Neshat, featuring black and white photos of veiled women wearing black chadors. Hediyeh had earlier mentioned being tired of images of Iran that perpetuated what she thought were clichés of pre- and post-Revolution Iran, without the nuance that would appeal to or interest her. She closed the large book and we moved on.

On another night at a Silverlake wine bar Hedieyh brought up an idea she wanted to share. It was for a book; a sort of photo journal documenting the lives of "our parent's generation" through family photographs. A vehicle for putting Iranian pop culture on display through a glimpse of everyday life before the revolution, Hediyeh described the idea as being "like *Pomegranates* but then in book form." Pomegranates was the title of the music compilation put together by two of my respondents, Mahssa and Arash, who had met through their deep, shared interest in music and the music of this Iranian era in particular. Pomegranates became a mix of digitally re-mastered pop music from the 1960s and 1970s of Iran, made up mostly of funk, psychedelic, and folk songs. Mahssa's idea for representing a pre-Revolutionary Iran she had not lived in to an audience of young peers through pop culture was striking, and her book idea was interesting for its parallels and differences from the book we had previously happened upon together in the book store. The LA Times article that covered the release event of the *Pomegranates* album in 2010 quoted Mahssa as saying:

> I've co-opted the nostalgia that surrounds this music as my own, in a way, as my parents' memories of their past and the disconnection that has occurred post-revolution lent in a lot of ways to my struggle in identifying myself.[29]

The nostalgia inherited from parents is an important part of the meaning of a project like Pomegranates. Indeed, Arash's contribution to the Pomegranates project had included the collection of vinyl singles he had acquired from his mother. The memories of parents are an important source of information and inspiration for members of the second-generation like Mahssa and Arash. Yet they do not determine the product

that these two created together—that is a product of other influences and inspirations as well. Mahssa and Arash are driven not only by what they inherit from parents, but also their stylistic tastes and respective interests in production and a desire to share it with others.

Since the release of the *Pomegranates* album, a growing interest in the preservation and archiving of music and video material from the decades directly preceding the Islamic Revolution was evident among digital databases and websites set up by organizations like Bidoun and Iran Heritage Foundation to compile extensive catalogs of radio programs, music videos, and songs from Iran in the period between the 1950s and late 1970s. Aryana was among those who enthusiastically recommended the Iran Heritage Foundation project, *Golha*, to her friends, bringing it to their attention via a link posting on Facebook. The *Golha* Project Website is a searchable database of Iranian poetry and music, accessible via internet by the public, and contains over 1000 hours of audio material. The project's co-sponsor (along with the PARSA Fondation), Iran Heritage Foundation, describes it as such on their website:

> The musical and literary repertoire of the programmes known generally as Golha, 'Flowers [of Persian Poetry and Song]' was a [series] of weekly radio programmes aired on Iranian radio between 1956 and 1979 which covered the entire history of classical as well as contemporary Persian poetry, giving expression to the whole gamut of traditional Persian music and poetry.[30]

Similarly, Bidoun's project is one that digitally archives audio, but includes visual material (films) as well, and is available for public access via their website. In 2009, Bidoun entered a long-term collaboration with UbuWeb, an award-winning online archive for avant-garde media. To date, Bubu (the name combines Bidoun and Ubu) has hosted rare and hard to find sound and audio works from the likes of filmmakers Forough Farrokhzad and Artavazd Peleshian, as well as composers Ali Reza Mashayekhi, Halim El-Dabh, and Dariush Dolat-Shahi, among many others. In many cases, Bubu has documented the western avant-garde's encounter with the East; films by Claude LeLouch, Pier Paolo Pasollini, and Agnes Varda are also included in this growing collection.

These archives represented a reproduction of the original songs, and the curating, promoting, and creating the technological infrastructure involved in making these archives were a creative undertaking. Different organizations and individuals were engaged with these tasks in order

to make these repositories possible. In the case of Arash and Mahssa's curation of *Pomegranates*, the project was laden with the personal attributes each of them brought to the project, drawing from Arash's family heirloom albums that were invested with deep sentimental value, and Mahssa's niche expertise and long-running experience of searching for and finding vintage records. The volunteer time and energy these two put into the process of gathering and annotating these tracks for the album ultimately generated a product ready for contemporary sale and distribution.

A similar mode of compilation was reflected in Arash's 2013 podcast for *B|ta'arof Magazine* with a set of Iranian pop tracks from the same period, drawn from the same inherited collection. *B|ta'arof* is a print magazine with a connected website that Arash is a co-founder of, and which I come back to later on in this section. The following is part of how Arash describes the podcast on the *B|ta'arof* site, where it was released.

> Here are fifteen Persian Pop songs from the sixties, seventies, and eighties. The mix includes thirteen chehel-o-panj-dorehs released on the Iranian imprints Ahange Rooz, Apollon, Fine Music, Harmony Apollon, Juliet, Monogram, Pars Record, and Royal, bookended by two long player tracks produced in the United States for the labels Mainstream and Soundex. It is fitting, for a magazine of Iranian culture produced in diaspora, to begin and end with records made by Iroonis [Iranians] working abroad with non-Iranians.
>
> Efforts to eradicate Persian popular music have made the preservation of pre-revolutionary Iranian records difficult and necessary. I am forever grateful to my mother, Efat Sanai, for saving her records. A collector by nature, most of what you hear—torch songs, beat rock, soundtrack vignettes—originate from a cache kept in a red suitcase, stowed for over thirty years. Though many were carefully preserved in crisp picture sleeves, most bear the marks of heavy use.
>
> Here are fifteen songs that tell a story. The story's theme is longing, which is, of course, the primary obsession of Persian Pop. Enjoy.[31]

Creating and making available these digital archives means creating a repository from this particular time and place. As a guest on SWANA (South Asian, West Asian, and North African) Radio in a piece dedicated to Persian Pop, Arash explains the importance of the project of documenting this music by highlighting the destruction it has faced in the context of post-revolution Iran. "No systematic discography has been assembled and published. No comprehensive survey exists in print. We're doing this work

because it has to be done." While the musical compilation in the form of an album is different from the digital repositories mentioned earlier (in form and curative production process, for instance), there appear to be similarities in the drive behind these projects to document, showcase, and disseminate musical material from pre-revolution Iran, particularly of the 1960s and 1970s.[32]

In Arash's description of the podcast on the site, the theme of (romantic) longing, including Persian words in his writing, the reference to diaspora, and the connections to the story of Iran's pre-revolution years told through its music together implicitly speaks to others who recognize his positioning. It spreads a layer of familiar nostalgia over what would otherwise be mere record or archive. It draws on the recognition of young Iranian Americans like himself of a period that is familiar to them through their parents' memories. Even if the songs are not familiar, the context in which they are being remembered most likely is. These practices not only recall the past, but also implicitly refer to how this past is often recalled among Iranian Americans, that is, nostalgically. Nostalgia becomes a repertoire in the sense that, as Giaccardi describes, it is discussed as:

> [N]ot merely that of a *digital archive* meant to collect and preserve in time and space the representation of a specific heritage. Rather, it is a "*repertoire*"—meant to sustain the whole system of knowledge and social relations responsible for a heritage creation, transmission, and reproduction as a living system. (Giaccardi 2007)

I would argue that this "living system" is animated by the associations it has with a period that is recognizable for so many of its audience members. The chosen forms of the podcast and the album blur the lines between transcoding/remediating the musical material in order to keep it intact, and socially transmitting nostalgia and a feeling of wonder about this past through present-day entertainment.

The interest in this era is wrapped in nostalgia passed down from parents. But these archiving and preservation projects are started up by the second generation with their own creative visions. The passionate interests of my respondents draw on their parents' memories and knowledge but go beyond it to other sources of living memory and other enthusiasts. With reference to Maghbouleh's notion of "inherited nostalgia" it is possible to see how first-generation parents' "authentic relationships and

histories" connecting them to "the homeland" is in effect (Maghbouleh 2010). However, equally important is understanding how this practice of remembering opens avenues for creative production by this younger generation, and their own mode of engagement with the past.

When I asked Kourosh about whether he gets nostalgic when he listens to the records he has collected from this period, he told me: "I don't really experience it like that." He liked the hairstyles, the clothes, the songs, and the dances that are characteristic of a time in Iran's recent history. And the emergence of these styles is characteristic of a period in Iranian music and fashion that saw mixtures of Eastern and Western stylistic elements. The value of the "East–West encounter" described on the Bidoun website is reminiscent of some of my respondents' interest in this period when Iranian music was in an area of strong cross-border collaboration and mutual influence, when Iranian artists and media productions received regular international praise. This interest in Iranian music through the lens of international appreciation fascinated Arash particularly. He told me about a song Googoosh had sung entirely in Spanish—to him this signified an era in Iranian music history when pop influences flowed to and from Iran, and Iranian talent and creativity enjoyed international recognition.

He and Mahssa were interested in the ways the Shah's "modernization" policies had been a forceful push for Iran to enter the international music scene. The particular abruptness of that shift alongside the longer-entrenched traditions of Iranian musical production in Iran constitute a particular process of blending, one shaped by the musical practices, tastes, and traditions of the time, as well as by the imposed cultural policies of the then-monarchy. At the same time, the influences from Iranian classical and folk music and longer-running regional influences were an element that Arash and Mahssa both emphasized. For them and the many who shared their fascination, it was these particular circumstances of production and the mixture of familiar Western and Eastern musical and style influences that were as important a part of this cultural memory as the musical products themselves. In this way, a range of Iranian listeners but also others are envisioned as audiences and appealed to.

This appeal seems to lie not only in the popularity of musical "oldies," but also in vintage records as a *niche* area of interest, such that the (re) discovery of the music itself becomes part of the creative process because of its rarity and age. The broader qualities of the "vintage" style appear to be making a resurgence through these young people's practices of

remembering. The fact that this period is remembered in this particular way by this generation illuminates the value invested in retro, vintage, and nostalgic sensibilities that is not limited to the interest in the Iranian past. The fact that Mahssa runs a record store called Mount Analog that stocks music primarily on vinyl and tape is a testament to this. The meanings of Iranian American-ness are compounded by the contemporary "cool"-ness of nostalgic musical scenes more generally. (Re)Discovered in a context where niche musical styles are trendy among American audiences, Iranian nostalgia music seems to strike a balance between the popular power of "cool" and the air of connoisseur appeal that comes with being "rare." Hence, both nostalgia enthusiasts and casual listeners find themselves among wider music audiences with similar tastes.[33]

This discovery is something web platforms play a key role in given their searchability. For instance, I could hear Arash's excitement when he once invited me to "Check this out" as he sat behind his desk in his room and showed me an old music video that he found on Youtube in his latest search. Also, for Kourosh, Arash, and Mahssa, having this niche passion in the current digital times means that a small pool of enthusiasts is able to find one another online. Kourosh described developing a friendship around a shared interest in rare vintage records from Iran with another young Iranian American young man who also lived in Southern California. Having come into contact via the website Iranoldies.com, the two repeatedly met up face-to-face, eventually becoming friends in the process. Kourosh first got into contact with Arash through a MySpace page that Arash had started up entitled FarsFunk. FarsFunk was a site that posted images, information about, and samples of vintage Iranian records, including album cover art and photographs. Since the relative decline of MySpace and rise of Facebook since then, Arash set up a similar Facebook page entitled "*Pop Irani*" (Iranian Pop). Arash and Kourosh had conducted email correspondence with one another but had never met in person.

MySpace was also how Arash and Mahssa had come into contact. The common interest in Iranian Funk music formed the basis of their first encounters. At this time, Mahssa was a DJ living in New York. However, following a personal decision to move to and live in LA, she and Arash had met face to face and started the *Pomegranates* project together. These connections were made through the MySpace platform when it was becoming largely music-oriented. Social exchanges, relationships, and collaborations developed around contact made because of the niche inter-

est the two shared. While local distances, people's schedules, and their individual social propensities shape whether initial online contact develops into longer-term exchanges, it is clear that online communications form a key part of the process of seeking out contact around a niche interest. This interest in a particular style associated with the Iranian past and its various mediations are particularistic. However, they are also used as a means of placing the trajectory of Iranian pop cultural production in relation with the cultivation of American and other international musical tastes, including across generations.

Second-generation filmmaker and artist Maryam, who made an intimate documentary film about the journey of her father and his friends to the USA and their lives in 1970s California, made a point about this when speaking about this period. She claimed that current interest in the Iran of the 1960s and 1970s seems to overlap with a broader American nostalgia about that same period in the USA, a sentiment that she said was prevalent in the cultural references that this generation of young Americans are exposed to as well. Duyvendak writes about the meanings of nostalgia in America (which he contrasts with Europe) as a longing for "better times," a more cohesive and familiar nation of the past (Duyvendak 2011). He argues that this looking back also creates notions of collectivity, feelings of home, and inclusion/exclusion of certain people.

In contrast to his description of the rather culturally conservative past that revolves around the cohesion of the ideal nuclear family as the scaled-down nation, Maryam's comment above suggests that a more specific nostalgia for the period of the 1960s and 1970s in contemporary American popular culture is part of a more politically progressive national sentiment. And the nostalgic collective remembering of this specific American past might work to include Iranian Americans who remember both the atmosphere of protest and social freedom, and the appearance of popular styles attributed to this period in both countries. Maffesoli argues that certain shared sensibilities create a collective sentiment, stating that these shared sensibilities rely essentially on the cultivation of a shared style (Maffesoli 1996). In remembering this past, the style is not only remembered, but also cultivated for new audiences in the process. Smith argues of memory's role in heritage formation, that heritage is not just an aid to memory, but is "about the creation of shared memories that work to help create and maintain bonds between family and community members" (Smith 2006). Hence, remembering develops Iranian American selves as it regenerates sentiments of collectivity.

How these styles are mediated matters for collective formations. I noticed that the way people used and gave meaning to various web platforms revealed much how digital media were situated within a wider range of media forms important to channeling the past. This became particularly clear when Kourosh described his experiences of listening to old records in vinyl form. The first time he did this was an especially memorable incident for him. As with most of the 500 albums he had eventually collected and kept in his room, he had bought the record second hand online, and was excited to listen to it for the first time. He carried the album with excitement to the record playing equipment in the university library, as he did not have his own sound system that played LPs.

The sound quality was so remarkable that the experience of sitting by himself in the UCLA library, listening with headphones to this album in a sound booth after years of listening to downloaded songs or CD albums, made a poignant connection for him with this piece of the past. It was an interface that had required effort, but for Kourosh it had been more than worth it as he experienced it as closer to how the original product was (intended to be) consumed when first made. Kourosh's use of various web media bolstered his hobby and interest of collecting and listening to nostalgia music, but as this account illustrates, the mediation through LP, the embodied circumstances of the listening experience he recalls, or his "own sense of being in place and experiencing the moment of 'heritage'" (Smith 2006), was not achieved through web applications. Hence, digital repositories apparently do not mediate the whole breadth of experiencing the past that old records do.

Kourosh enjoys the special thrill of finding rare records from this period. These objects are rare not only because many have not withstood degradation over time, but specifically also because of the calculated destruction and banning of much of this music by the Islamic regime. For some, this makes the project of preservation all the more urgent. Kourosh's excitement at having obtained an original record is heightened when he has the opportunity to meet the artist at a concert. "Then I show them their records that they haven't even seen in decades. They really like it. And I get their autographs," he explains with a satisfied smile. He confesses that although he introduces many of his close friends to the music he is passionate about, he is reluctant to encourage people to become enthusiasts and start collecting records, as this would only create more competition on a market of already rare collector's items. His relationship with the past via certain media forms over others reflects further the media specificities

when it comes to experiencing the sounds and tactile remnants of recordings of the past.

In the examples I have discussed in this section, the past is captured as a stylized, artistic rendition that displays a retro aesthetic. There is an artisan aura about the consumption of a niche product that eschews mass production and is concerned with the care and detail that goes into the styling of the thing. As Cameron writes of historian Graeme Davidson's view on heritage:

> According to Davison, heritage represents a preoccupation with material remains, elevates materiality along with the unique and handmade as more valuable, and articulates a distaste for mass production. (Cameron 2008)

As I have shown, these young people's use of web platforms as part of engaging with the nostalgia for the Iranian 1960s and 1970s are intertwined with the use of other non-digital media forms. Digital media are used in important ways to "re-mediate" (Bolter and Grusin 2000) the content already mediated by other forms. And as Bolter and Grusin suggest, every new re-mediation tells us something about the relationship being developed with both the new and the old media form.[34] The relationship being developed here reflects how the cultural repository of digital archives establishes the memory of pop cultural pre-Revolution Iran. It is given a certain archival infrastructure[35] while also being merged with creative digital productions that represent the past in the present as pop cultural legacy. However, the limits to how digital media mediate nostalgia for people are also telling about digital affordances. Nostalgia, as Boym's seminal work mentions, does not rely on "virtual realities" created by technology, but relies on "the capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness" (Boym 2001). I suggest that this awakening relies in part on people's interactions with artifacts, their momentary bodily experiences, and their engagements with the materiality of made products that together "enable the sensory experience of history" (Seremetakis 1996).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed a number of memory practices drawn from my fieldwork among the second generation. I unpacked these here as facets of the formation of diasporic selves in a reflection of Stuart Hall's claim that "[i]dentities are the names we give to the different

ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (1998: 225). I have discussed how online photo-sharing practices are made part of the Norooz tradition, how blogging is part of contesting nationalist memories of ancient Persia, how the historic coup of 1953 is gamified, and how nostalgia for pre-Islamic Iranian music is digitally archived, re-mastered, and re-framed. These are all part of how digital media become integral to engaging with the past from the present in the interest of identity formation, and from this emerge specific web application usages as part of the cultivations of Iranian American-ness. The second generation engages with the Iranian past actively as they express specific ways of making this past their own, whether through ritual commemoration or contestations of ideological framing. In this way, they invoke their own customized ways of engaging with the past. Through their projects of documentation, critical engagement, and curation, members of the second generation appear to be re-politicizing the past, re-educating themselves, and re-defining Iranian American-ness together. Remembering and re-remembering the past from these positionings comes to make particular selves in the present, illustrating the mutual construction of the past and selves through practices of remembering. As Lowenthal states, "as we remake it, the past remakes us" (Lowenthal 1985).

Indeed, this engagement always involves inheriting a past that is not of the second generation's own making, but one that is excavated and discovered, connecting them with wider narratives of community, diaspora, and older generations. In fact, commonplace ideas about identity and the past often posit the link between them as self-evident; something that "just is." So powerful is this effect that, as Smith has pointed out, one shortcoming in heritage research itself is that:

> The idea of 'identity' tends to be unproblematically linked with concepts of 'heritage,' taking the link between identity and heritage for granted … the actual processes and activities that are enacted to forge links between heritage and identity are often not identified in the literature. (Smith 2006)

By focusing on the practices of remembering and the processes of mediating the past that are involved, I showed that these young people participate in the cultivation of certain styles of remembering Iranian American pasts through web media. As has been argued with regard to heritage, remembering, and style:

> The importance of style is the effectiveness by which certain styles link and revive shared sentiments and instigate strong feelings of togetherness. Seen this way, style is not something given. To be recognized and unfurl its effects, style has to appear, and in order to appear it has to be appropriated, animated, and embodied by people who identify with it. (Probst 2009)

With a focus on this dimension of collective diasporic identity formation, my discussion in this chapter was less about what is actually remembered and more on how it is remembered in practice. I showed that the styles I have discussed draw on sensibilities of what is current and cool in my respondents' social environments. Meyer (2009) argues that style has a central significance in the formation of communities and subjects. She emphasizes that the study of media must pay attention to the adoption of shared styles, since these "modes of doing things" are essential for "processes of subjectivation." In this sense, styles are seen as at once shaping subjects and giving them a shared identity (Meyer 2009). Through a set of idiosyncratic digital styles that have an appeal within this generation, these young people's mediated self-formation processes situates them with relation to collective modes of being.

Nedelcu has argued of migrant's ways of using the internet to find home and belonging that it can help underscore and defend particularistic values (2012). Indeed, the interest these young people express in nostalgic Iranian music, for instance, reflects an attunement to the productions of a particular genre in time and place. But while these invoke Iran and diasporic modes of belonging to Iranian-ness, they also span beyond Iranian national and particularistic ethnic identities. They overlap and intersect with protest narratives pertaining to an American nation, as well as local immigration histories, and regional histories of the Middle East. And so, second-generation Iranian American identities become infused with other influences through the processes of mediation. While the blog, game, and music audiences being produced more directly include the Iranian American second generation than the first generation, their messages of cross-ethnic solidarity through alternative historical narratives, intertwined Iranian and American national histories, and shared interests in pop cultural histories also make Iranian American-ness part of broader processes of styling selves online.

My discussion also revealed how digital mediations are related to other non-digital mediations of the past. More specifically, certain digital objects that re-mediate the past appear to be used to reinforce the importance of

certain physical objects. Hence, while digital objects appear to produce their own kind of reality,[36] *physical* objects still play a central role in the ways people seek engagement with the past. And web media can be used to reinforce that role as, for instance, the web practice of photo-sharing reinforces the significance of the material practice of heritage ritual performance in families that is being digitally represented. When it comes to discursive practices of posterity, conservation, rarity, and origins, physical objects are seen as mediating elements of the past that the web applications used do not. This shows the ways in which digital media are integrated into otherwise mediated cultural practices of remembering and constructing narratives of the past, and demonstrating that digital objects have their own physical and aesthetic qualities that produce their "affectual tone" (Cameron 2007, 2008). They are more than merely a referent that is "a servant to the 'real'" (Cameron 2007). They represent a facet of how much respondents become "do-ers" of heritage performance with the help of web applications.[37] Digital media are therefore apparently more effective for certain purposes than others, and therefore rely on an elaborate media ecology that hangs together to call the second generation into the fold of Iranian American-ness.

Notes

1. Referred to in English as "Paisley."
2. The charting of this field owes much to the seminal works of Pierre Nora (1984) and Maurice Halbwach (1924), the work of whom anthropologist Paul Connerton refers to when sketching the developments in the study of memory (2006). David Berliner's (2005) critical tracking of the notion of memory in anthropology also explored and nuanced the importance of the study of memory for understanding culture and identity (see also Connerton 1989).
3. "Later generations have not experienced migration and have no memories of the time before it (Brah 1996: 194). They are the heirs to diasporic memories that are told and re-told, reappropriated and reinterpreted in light of the here and now. Throughout their lives they construct their own diasporic narratives of home and belonging out of these memories, together with their own experiences, their 'migration routes and migrant roots' (Kuah-Pearce and Davidson 2008: 2). Often, for descendants of migrants the question 'Where do I belong?' is more pressing and the

meanings they give to home are more complex (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 217)" (Stok 2010: 27).

4. In the paper mentioned, Malek goes on to give the background to the historical celebration, explaining that it is "traced variously to the Persian King Jamshid (of Firdawsi's *Shahnamah* [*Book of Kings*]) and to the Zoroastrian prophet Ahura Mazda [note: though some consider the prophet to be Zardosht, while Ahura Mazda is the god of good and Ahriman the god of bad], from whom many of the traditions and celebrations that commemorate Norooz arose. Because Norooz is the New Year celebrated not only by all Iranians but also by Tajiks, Afghans, Turks, and a large number of ethnic groups spread across the lands of the former Persian Empire, it is often viewed as a cultural event that can serve a unifying purpose. Beginning on the vernal equinox, during the thirteen days of Norooz, families and friends pay each other visits, exchange gifts, and spend as much time together as possible" (Malek 2011).
5. *Haft sin* is a ritual altar that is prepared for the celebration of the Persian New Year. It consists of a table with seven (in Persian *haft* means seven) objects beginning with the Persian alphabet letter S (pronounced: *sin*).
6. The turn of the year occurs at the yearly spring equinox which takes place on a day in the late March.
7. Sabzeh is a dish of wheat germ that is decoratively tied in ribbon, usually a red one, as in the case of Shideh's photograph.
8. It was not clear in all cases whether the photographs had been taken in one's own family house, one's place of residence, or whether those who posted them had taken these photos themselves at all or (re-)used them from elsewhere on the internet.
9. I also noticed that in Shiva's living room at her parents' house, the haft sin altar was arranged in front of an array of family photos of herself and her siblings. The practice of using photos of people in or around the haft sin display is a demonstration of family ties, especially in spite of the absence of some family members. This absence may be due to a loss in the family as in the case of Atiya's father, or because of migration and transnational families. Though these are diverse modes of remembering family members/relationships through *haft sin*, connecting to an ancient past becomes a

practice through which the specific sociality of Iranian family relations is ceremoniously reinforced.

10. This is reminiscent of the recognition that other minority groups receive in designations such as Jewish Heritage month, Black history month, and other accreditations by the US government that acknowledge the lineage of particular minority groups in conjunction with the history of the American nation. The Resolution lends credence to American nationhood and its narrative of being consistently inclusive over time.
11. All the terms quoted here are taken from the original text of the Resolution http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hres267/text.
12. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes about heritage in the form of "festivals devoted to the traditions of a single ethnic group" and sponsored by various state, local, and federal agencies, as running the risk of promoting a "banality of difference," neutralizing difference and rendering it inconsequential, while participating in a "discourse of pluralism and unity in diversity." She describes "Americanization organizations" in the USA of the early twentieth century as using festivals in this way by design (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). It could be argued that festivals like Mehregan and initiatives like the Norooz Resolution do as much to include difference as they do to render it a banal part of American nationhood.
13. Another example from the local level of the city of LA was in 2011, when the City Council hosted a Norooz celebration and the Mayor of Los Angeles gave a speech at City Hall in Downtown LA for Norooz. This yearly local ceremony reflects the political sway of "the community" of Iranian Americans in LA. This was reported by the LA Times in March 2011.
14. The different spellings of Norooz are chosen by different organs and individuals. In direct quotes I use the spelling of the source I use. In all other instances I use what I think is the closest English transliteration to the Farsi pronunciation and a commonly used version of the spelling that is Norooz. This is also one of the ways in which I saw the word being spelt. While UNESCO sanctions the use of various spellings, these also refer to diverse pronunciations of the word by various practitioners of this ritual across the region and not necessarily different spellings of the same word used by

Iranians. The official and everyday spellings of Norooz remain a moderate source of contention, which I also noticed in the field.

15. Norooz is practiced as part of inter-personal relationships, in private settings, and in groups of Iranian Americans with shared practices and understandings of the celebration. It hearkens to an ancient past that pre-dates both the Iranian nation-state and the introduction of Islam and is therefore a relatively successful unifier of Iranians of different political and religious denominations. This is an important part of why it was and is an effective node around which to mobilize support for collective recognition in the public realm for Iranians in the diaspora.
16. Leaving aside the questions raised by the American nation encompassing a set of principles that are framed as predating the nation itself.
17. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was the last Shah of Iran, taking the throne after his father in September 1941, and ruled until 1979 when he was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution.
18. In a much more recent interaction with Pouneh about this text and how I quoted her, she even stated that she was now far more critical of the kind of nationalism that we talked about.
19. Alex Shams, Rustin Zarkar, and Beeta Baghoolizadeh posted 01/17/13 http://ajammc.com/2013/01/17/ferdowsis-legacy-examining-persian-nationalist-myths-of-the-shahnameh/ (accessed 18/08/16).
20. As Moallem also writes: "Under the Pahlavi regime, the construction of a civilized and uncontaminated pre-Islamic Persian was essential in extending this age of ignorance to include the time of the conquest of Iran by the so-called barbaric Muslims, a gesture intended to reinforce anti-Arab and anti-Semitic ideologies." The age of ignorance she refers to is a reference to the work of Tavakoli-Taraghi whose 1998 work Moallam states shows that the period before the constitutional revolution of 1904 was framed by some historians as an age of "ignorance (*bikhabari*), stagnation, and despotism" (Moallem 2005).
21. iPouya.com (accessed 10/5/14).
22. 1953 was when the coup overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh; 1951 was when he was elected Prime Minister and passed a bill to nationalize Iranian oil with popular support in Iran.

23. BoomGen Studios is an "incubator of commercial entertainment" focusing on telling stories from the Middle East.
24. Although Tousi came to the USA in his youth and followed his undergraduate education there, Aslan was born there.
25. See Christopher de Bellaigue's highly praised *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup* (2012).
26. Even though there are a number of other examples of the Shahnameh being re-made, re-told, and carried on for a younger generation of Iranians, it is notable that they tend to come in a mixture of digital and printed forms. Recent examples I heard about included a Shahnameh illustrated book, *Shahnameh: The Epic of the Persian Kings* sold in various (limited and collectors) editions, by project creator, Hamid Rahmanian; the *Feathers of Fire* shadow puppet show, conceived by the same creator and about a central story of the epic; the online multi-player game, *Seven Quests*, based on the Shahnameh; *Rostam: tales from the Shahnameh*, a comic book. These examples show there is great interest in appealing to younger and changing (diaspora) audiences with these epic stories, and that a multitude of different genres and media forms are used to mediate this past according to the present circumstances and audiences. Further research would be needed to find out what the objectives and affordances of these different forms might be.
27. The book can also be seen as a reproduction of the original *Shahnameh* rather than the computer game. But in either case it retains the status of a reproduction.
28. Games for language learning as well as YouTube animated videos were among the content and software devised for learning about Iranian culture, history, and language, which I saw primarily directed at young people and the second generation.
29. Hundley, Jessica, "Persian folk, funk, psychadelia win new generation of fans," http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/04/entertainment/la-ca-persian-funk4-2010apr04 (accessed 1/12/14).
30. Iran Heritage, "The Golha Project: Digital Archive," http://www.iranheritage.org/golha_project/ (accessed 1/12/14).
31. Saedinia, Arash, "Podcast," http://www.btaarof.com/podcast.html (accessed 1/12/14).

32. Ajam Media's Mix Tape is another example of a digitized compilation disseminated via a website. Jarahzadeh, Kamyar, "Ajam Mixtape #2: Psychedelic Sounds from Iran and Beyond," http://ajammc.com/2014/02/16/ajam-mixtape-2-psychedelic-from--iran-and-beyond/ (accessed 29/11/14).
33. The vintage music genre and the wider popular fascination with re-discovering music from the past has parallels to World Music as a broader genre that may also interact with ethnic/diaspora music tastes. Although the music in question could be categorized as vintage world music I do not enter the discussion about world music (and the commercialization of) minority/ethnic cultural production here.
34. Hinton and Hjorth put it succinctly when they state: "Far from old media being superseded by new technologies, a cyclic relationship ensues. An example can be found in analogue and digital photography whereby rather than the digital erasing the importance of the analogue, much of the digital is in fact haunted by the analogue" (Hinton and Hjorth 2013: 123).
35. The creation of such repositories as discussed here raises issues concerning how digital archives can themselves become incorporated into institutionalized heritage discourses and practices. As Cameron writes, "Interestingly, current definitions of digital heritage in the UNESCO charter admit new work in different media as heritage and give them equal standing. … [T]hese new products are tethered to systems of significance and discourses of preservation and conservation. Digital materials include texts, databases, still and moving images, audio, graphics, software and web pages, among a wide and growing range of formats. … Many of these resources have lasting value and significance, and therefore constitute a heritage that should be protected and preserved for current and future generations" (Cameron 2008).
36. When I state that digital objects produce their own kind of reality, I refer to Cameron's reference to Gordon Graham's 1999 notion of the "virtual" not being "a semblance of something else, but an alternative type of entity with properties similar and dissimilar to those with which it is contrasted" (Cameron 2007).
37. As Smith argues, the "idea of performativity highlights the emotional and physical experience of heritage and stresses the idea of 'doing'" (Smith 2006). Seeing heritage as performance empha-

sizes how something becomes heritage through the process of being part of the doing of the performance. Hence, the way Norooz becomes heritage for the second generation also includes internet mediation.

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CHAPTER 4

Race

"Check it right, you aint white." This was the slogan of a 2010 census campaign to encourage Arab Americans to fill out the US Census by answering the "race" question by writing "Arab" instead of checking the box, "White." In the same year, and also for the first time, a coalition of Iranian American organizations encouraged Iranian Americans to make a similar decision by checking something other than "white" in the race rubric. The campaign[1] encouraged Iranian Americans to not only fill out the census but also indicate their "race" as "other" and then write in "Iranian American," "Iranian," or "Middle Eastern." On Facebook, some of my respondents also drew attention to the parallel Arab American campaign and its catchy slogan. The Iranian American campaign was unique in its success at bringing together a broad range of Iranian American organizations around a single issue: the accurate counting of American residents of Iranian descent. The Iranian American campaign's somewhat more serious slogan was, "Stand up and be counted."[2]

Yet the campaign[3] also had its humorous side, most notably represented by a comical Public Service Announcement (PSA) that was spread on YouTube in the run-up to the weeks of the US Census' administration.[4] The short video starred Iranian American comedian and actor Maz Jobrani and was a collaboration with the Canadian-based organization Iranican, which circulates its podcasts and video reports via its website. The Iranican site has a relatively young Iranian American audience, and some of my respondents listened to it. The video was quickly shared by a great number of my contacts via Facebook, and Jobrani received a

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good deal of news media attention for his involvement in the campaign, including international news coverage of the new phenomenon of Middle Eastern American minorities claiming non-whiteness in an official and organized way.[5]

In the campaign video, Jobrani plays multiple characters that represent various Iranian stereotypes. These costumed impersonations were exaggerated depictions of a range of first-generation, male, Iranian types. Among them are a self-important and wealthy doctor, a young and showy lady's man, a very recent arrival from Iran, and an elderly man who has ostensibly grown old in the USA. All the characters are approached at their homes by the same national census worker character. The census worker is a temperate, friendly, young, second-generation Iranian American woman who helps them fill out the forms. Humorous moments ensue in the interactions between Jobrani's characters and the census worker in each case. The video cuts between these different scenarios, finally showing a parallel between them all as it culminates in the punch line of the sketch. Namely, when it comes to the question about "race," they all unequivocally give the same response when asked what their race is: "Italian."[6]

The video draws attention to a recognizable trope among a great many Iranian Americans, namely, the Iranian American who practices racial/ethnic covering by disguising or misrepresenting his/her origins, non-Iranian, non-Middle Eastern, and non-Muslim.[7] Interestingly, the video sketch also implicitly gives a generational characteristic to this trope, as is seen in the interaction between the second-generation census worker and the various other characters who are all first-generation immigrants. The message of the video is to show the importance of filling out the census accurately, with attention to the "race" question.[8] And it does this by poking gentle fun at the known tendency in many first-generation Iranian Americans to avoid claiming difference from the white American majority. I came to see the 2010 census campaign as an indication of how wide the reach was of a change I noted among my second-generation Iranian Americans respondents. A change in how they had started to see themselves racially, and how they want to be seen by others, including a US state that officially categorizes Iranian Americans as white.[9]

Race has only recently begun appearing in social scientific research on Iranian migrants in the USA (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Mostofi 2009; Farnia 2011; Maghbouleh 2012). In particular, it is discussed with reference to post-9/11 conditions of Islamophobic discrimination against Iranians living in the USA. A larger amount of scholarship has been

dedicated to Muslim Americans and South Asian Americans, including the second generation (Joshi 2006; Jamal and Naber 2008), and some have included Iranian Americans in discussions of post-9/11 lives of Muslims facing discrimination in North America (MacCloud 2006; Moghissi et al. 2009) with more of a focus on the immigrants' religion than race (see also Raji 2010). Despite this increased attention, racialization[10] of Iranian Americans remains a particularly under-studied area. And in particular, few have historicized the racialization of Iranians (and Middle Easterners) in the USA as part of a single process that precedes 9/11, and continues dynamically for more than a decade in its wake. As Minoo Moallem points out the representation of "Islamic fundamentalism" as a discourse that has peaked after the events of 9/11, while having been "a discourse that has been decades in the making" before these attacks (2002).

In this chapter, I focus on how my second-generation respondents see themselves with relation to the present atmosphere of racialization, taking into account how they relate to their parents' generation's ways of positioning themselves racially, which spans the period before 9/11. I discuss a number of instances of my respondents' use of web applications to engage with issues of racialization, mostly relying on blogging practices that my respondents administer and/or contribute to in discussions of racialized self-representation. I do so by situating their practices with relation to some of the most significant representations of Iranian Americans in their media environments via film, television, and books. I also contextualize my discussion of young Iranian Americans' digitally mediated engagement with racialization within a changing American racial landscape. I am referring to a context marked by the contemporary paradox of the American post-race era and its discourses of color-blindness.[11] One that works to make racism itself invisible precisely at a time when certain racialized minorities are thrust into heightened visibility.[12] In the case of Iranian Americans, the problem of racial invisibility also revolves around the problematic relationship that Iranian Americans have (had) with being subsumed under existing American formal categories of whiteness.

Nakamura has suggested that practices of representing race and racialized bodies are more prevalent with the rise of Web 2.0 compared to the less advanced web interfaces of Web 1.0 (2007). Contributions in this vein move discussions of race and internet away from a focus on the absence of bodily cues and racial markers online (Chon 2000) and toward a more complex understanding of the relationship between web usage and (representation of) bodies. With an interest in my respondents' racialized

self-representations via web applications, I take an approach to racial difference and whiteness that understands race as a regime of seeing the body, drawing on the work of Seshadri-Crooks (2000). I to argue that my respondents present their narratives of discrimination and race with reference to the body as a site of contestation, showing how they appropriate certain styles of claiming and framing bodily differences so as to make them a source of inclusion, at times even transgressing the racial categories they mobilize.

Visibly Different, a Different Kind of Visible

The collective memory of the Iran hostage crisis that started in Tehran in November 1979 remains a salient one among many LA Iranians. Some of those I spoke with recalled this as a time of discrimination and alienation of Iranians in the USA, describing direct recollections of this period from their early childhoods. Others were made aware of it through narratives passed down from older relatives and friends. Stories of social exclusion, vandalism, and violence against individuals, their property, and their families were among the experiences recounted about this period. It was also a period revived in the film of Iranian American director, Babak Shokrian, *America So Beautiful*, which is set in LA during the hostage crisis. The hostage crisis from the vantage point of LA Iranians is an important event that helps to trace the arc of Iranian American practices of racial covering, one that connects the first and second generation of Iranian Americans.

First released in 2001, the screening of *America So Beautiful* in 2009 in West LA by the Levantine Cultural Center, including the director's Q&A, spoke to the film's sustained/revived resonance, as did the well-filled theater of attendees. The audience members appeared to be largely of Middle Eastern descent and included a few members of the Iranian American second generation. The film tells the story of a young Iranian man who immigrated to LA in the 1970s and became drawn in by the promise and glamor of the LA disco scene. This became an escape from his everyday life of working at his uncle's Iranian grocery store. In light of the worsening American perceptions about Iranians at the time, the film includes a nod to techniques of racial covering through name-changing and misrepresenting one's national background in the face of discrimination, by showing how they play into the main characters' techniques for being included into American society and inter-personal relations in LA during this tense period.[13]

The backdrop of the hostage crisis is evident in the film almost entirely through the American news coverage during this period. Television screens and radio reports covering the affair subtly but repeatedly find their way into the main characters' lives at meaningful moments in the story. It was also this media coverage that many of my respondents reported awareness of. Indeed, media scholarship on the period and its consequences for the lives of Iranian Americans has highlighted the great significance of American news media coverage. According to Sreberny-Mohammadi, the coverage "equaled and even surpassed average nightly coverage of the Vietnam war" (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1995). The vast media coverage of the event was dominated by an ABC network television show entitled "The Iran Crisis—America Held Hostage: Day xxx,"[14] which would begin each program with the number of days the crisis had been ongoing, presenting an update on the events every evening at 11:30 pm (Mahdavi 2005). The show would "broadcast scenes from outside the Embassy in Tehran, where the crowd burned and trampled American flags, waved fists, and chanted "Death to America … it was against this backdrop that most Americans formed their perceptions of Iran and Iranian Americans," writes Mahdavi (2005). The consequences immediately following the hostage-taking included the US government taking action that affected Iranians living in the USA.

> On November 13, 1979, Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, issued regulations requiring post-secondary students who were in the US to submit special proof of their continued eligibility for student visa status. Failure to comply with the regulation subjected students to deportation. … During the period in which the regulation was in effect, 57,000 Iranian students were screened regarding their legality, 7177 deportation hearings were held, and 3088 Iranians were ordered deported. (Mahdavi 2005)

Tehranian additionally draws attention to the state-level measures that were taken against Iranians in the USA and in particular Iranian students at American universities (see Tehranian 2008). Mahdavi describes this as a time when Iranian Americans went from "a position of obscurity in the US community to one of notoriety for holding hostage the citizens of one of the most powerful countries in the world" (2005: 243). This shift signaled a stark increase in a negative form of visibility for Iranian Americans as a group in the USA, and scholars have argued that the role of US television news media during the Iran hostage crisis played a significant part in framing events in terms that created harmful stereotypes about Iranians

and shaped the experience of Iranians in the USA (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1995; Keshishian 2000).

As depicted in Shokrian's film, *America So Beautiful*, the response of many Iranian Americans to this increasingly tense atmosphere was strategies of racial covering. The term, "whitewashing," was applied by several of those I spoke with. This was used to refer, with hindsight, to the practice of covering Iranian American-ness by attempting to "pass" for white or to try to be indistinguishable from the American racial majority. Whitewashing was a term I heard many times, and while it was used in slightly different ways, it seemed to feature centrally in how many Iranian Americans of the second generation gave meaning to their relationship with being racialized in the USA. John Tehranian, second-generation Iranian American author, lawyer, and public figure among Iranian Americans, uses the notion centrally in his book, *Whitewash: America's invisible Middle Eastern minority.* His book highlights the legal ways in which Iranian Americans, as part of a wider category of Middle Easterners, have been subsumed under the category of white (rather than making up an ethnic/racial minority) in the USA, showing how Iranian Americans have been willingly allowing themselves to be racially categorized in this way and why. He writes of contemporary Middle Eastern Americans:

> [R]esponding to the rising tide of discrimination, many Middle Eastern Americans have embraced whiteness and assimilation through the strategic implementation of covering tactics involving association, appearance, affiliation, and activism that downplays their ethnicity or race. In the short term they have benefited from such strategies, which enable them to opt out of the less factored racial category and all its accompanying hardships. Yet this tactic has also left Middle Easterner Americans at the margins of the civil rights movement and with little collective social or political force. (Tehranian 2008)

Tehranian outlines whitewashing as a problem. Not only does it alienate Middle Eastern Americans from historical struggles in the USA the rights of racial minorities, but it has also failed as a means of protecting Iranian Americans against discrimination in the post-9/11 backlash. Elsewhere in the book, however, Tehranian states that the second generation is signaling a shift away from practices of racial covering.

> [T]he younger generation of Iranian Americans is much more likely than prior generations to not only eschew covering techniques but to celebrate actively their ethnicity and even insist on their non-whiteness. (Tehranian 2008)

While I recognized precisely this dynamic in the positioning of many of my respondents, the processes behind this generational shift remain under-researched. Speaking about this change, one of my respondents narrated the shift away from an atmosphere of severe discrimination in terms of changing local environments in the city. Shahdad is a college graduate in his 30s who grew up in LA and said he noticed how older stereotypes about Iranian Americans have given way to new ones over time. Among a group of peers, he recounts an event in which his uncle's car was vandalized by people in the neighborhood where he lived, and reflects on the differences between that time and the present LA in which young Iranian Americans like himself live.

> There weren't as many Iranians back then. It's interesting to see how [we are] growing up in society and how white people view [us]. [Before] white people would say like, they're terrorists, they're Arabs. Very negative things.[15] Now the conversation's really different. It's like, Iranians are very family-oriented. They're rich, they're educated, or snobby, or stuck up. It's interesting to see how the dynamics have changed.

I take Shahdad's comment to reflect the experience of a generation growing up and dealing with a new set of stereotypes, particularly in those having emerged over a period of Iranian Americans establishing a strong and increasingly visible presence in LA specifically. The changes Shahdad refers to indicate a decline in the tensions around stereotypes of the past based on tense events inside Iran, and a shift toward a new, more local stereotype; one of Iranian Americans as wealthy and privileged. Virtually all my respondents were aware of this way of being seen by others.[16] They often expressed uncertainty as to whether this was a positive or a negative stereotype, and most often did not see it as applying accurately to them.

No other televised program solidifies Iranian Americans' arc away from being the hostage crisis-perpetrators and toward being the rich, LA snobs as much as the show, *Shahs of Sunset*. In 2012, this long-anticipated program was released as a new reality show on cable television broadcaster, *Bravo*. It focused on the lives of five wealthy "Persians" in LA and was broadcast nationally. The initial announcement and casting calls as well as its first airing early in 2012 sparked much debate.[17] Discussion involved Iranian American observers, but also drew coverage by publications like the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and CNN.

Years prior to this show's release, Iranian Americans from different walks of life raised concerns about its representation of "LA Persians"

in line with existing stereotypes[18] about flamboyant consumption, investment in appearances, abundant wealth, and party-oriented lifestyles.[19] These included web-based communications, for instance, via Iranian.com[20] as well as conversations among friends and on social media. Amidst the controversy, one particular concern expressed by some of my respondents had to do with the perpetuation of ideas about Iranian Americans being part of a wealthy, LA elite. Although their responses were not uniform, the problem that some of my second-generation respondents raised was about how this representation signaled a form of inclusion into the American pop cultural mainstream via their symbolic inclusion into LA's wealthy elite—a kind of wealth-washing that could be seen as an innovation on earlier forms of whitewashing.

Parallels appear here to Brodkin's work on Jewish immigrants (from Europe) in the USA, which argues that race was, in part, shaped by the kind of work immigrants did and the professional and income status they came to hold, such that whiteness was synonymous with living a middle-class life, while the working-class was excluded from white American-ness (Brodkin 1998). Brodkin describes Jews in America (whose racial categorization, much like Iranian Americans, has long been ambivalent in this context) as being excluded from the white side of the American race binary because of the strong association of Jewishness with working-class culture and socialist politics before WWII (1998). Based on a different historical period and using different methods, Ignatiev's oft cited book, *How the Irish Became White* (1995), is another analysis of how a group initially excluded from American whiteness came to be white, albeit through a working-class positioning, which contrasted itself positively against black slavery (see also Roediger 1999). These historical analyses of how the status of economic wealth and/or higher class positioning were used as means of accessing whiteness by migrant minorities in the USA reveal not only how the construction of whiteness is endemic to the historically contingent formation of American nationhood along race and class lines, but also how whiteness is to some extent aspired to by the minorities themselves. This can be taken to explain the racial covering practiced by Iranian Americans, and how these practices seem to be shaped by class. Blair (1991) researched Iranian American name-changing practices in the early 1990s, and found that the higher the income and wealth status of Iranian Americans, the less likely they were to change their names from Iranian ones to European/American-sounding ones.[21] This paints a picture of name-changing practices being used by those who do not have

access to other modes of covering racial difference, such as inclusion into whiteness via wealth and class.[22] What these practices, apparent aspirations, and similarities with these other groups additionally suggest is that Iranian Americans have long been excluded from whiteness, regardless of their official designation as white.[23]

While my fieldwork experience confirmed for me that various practices of racial covering persist, this made it all the more interesting that my second-generation respondents were critical of such performances of whiteness. The racial covering of the older generation is increasingly seen as an ineffective inclusion strategy rooted in a different time and set of experiences. And for the relatively new organizations that organize Iranian Americans as a distinct and visible category by for instance supporting the Census 2010 campaign,[24] claiming collective difference from the American majority is couched in a strategy of anti-discrimination through claiming difference. The arc I have sketched here represents the breaks and continuities in the stereotypes, media representations, and (self-)racialization (practices) of Iranian Americans that are most relevant to what my respondents experience locally and how they recount it. These important traces set the backdrop for my exploration of second-generation engagement with race through practices of web-based self-representation in the remainder of this chapter.

Racially Ambivalent Bodies, Decisive Representations

A number of my respondents narrated childhood memories of discrimination, and I came to see these accounts of early experiences with how their bodies were seen represented in their web uses as well. Asa was one such example as she communicated with her audience through her own Tumblr, as well as Instagram, and Facebook. She was also featured in a post on the design blog Pinar&Viola, in which she told the story of her experience of being seen as different, and focusing on her memories of how she felt growing up in the "Iranian Diaspora":

> Up until I was a teenager, I lived with my family in the immigrant ghetto of Hamburg (before German unification). The general political climate in Germany was very active in the 80s with the lefts and German punks on one side and the neo-Nazis and skinheads on the other. As immigrants, our days were filled with the struggles of hatred and racism, and thereby our lives were in a continuous state of resistance and uprising …

> A couple of years after the Berlin Wall went down, the situation for refugees took a turn for the worse and my parents decided it was time to move again, this time to Los Angeles. In the 1980s, Beverly Hills had become an affluent Mecca for the Iranian Diaspora. My family was no longer affluent, and did not become so in America. I grew up in the margins of this society—in the slums of Beverly Hills, so to speak.

Asa speaks about her youth being shaped by "racism," "living in the margins," and being an "immigrant." From the vantage point of adulthood, Asa's statement shares and (re)frames her childhood stories of exclusion. The blog posting itself features a series of posed, full-body color photographs of Asa in different outfits and in different settings, as well as the embedded video of her song *Fesenjoon* and other photographs and music videos. The multiple photographic and video representations leave a clear image on the viewer of the young woman's physical appearance in a way that struck me as entirely congruent with her "offline" face-to-face persona; colorful, extravagant, decorated, sensual/erotic, confident, and attractive with her long black hair and brown skin complementing the bright colors around her, and her (often sexualized) body is central to these self-representations. In the blog post, Asa draws a clear connection between her personal experiences and her political intervention:

> The ASAsin Manifesto is the outline of a politics of identity. It is a personal reflection on the current state of affairs in the US and in the world. Over the past years, our ability to think critically has been repeatedly put to the test. In the aftermath of violent strikes on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the world is experiencing the onset of a new era of permanent war against real and invented enemies of the American Empire. The media has bombarded us with propaganda and manipulated the emotions of the people, causing more hatred and perpetuating violence. … My politics are personal and this is my story.

Asa has since appeared as a central character on the reality show, *Shahs of Sunset*, and her social media presence has become more frequent in the course of the show. The text and photo content she consistently posts on Instagram also shows, or makes reference to, her body. And while many of these photos fit Asa into glamor ideals of feminine beauty, she often uses her descriptions of Instagram photos to frame her body as "curvy," explicitly pointing out its difference from a mainstream beauty ideal of thinness.[25] To her young fans she is something of a role model for embracing

her difference, including the particular physical particularities of her body as a woman and a member of a racialized minority. She also uses iconography to highlight her Middle Eastern-ness, especially in the photo and video art pieces she showed me and I saw on blogs and social media sites, often invoking images of the hijab, militancy, Farsi script, hefty amounts of gold jewelry and dark eye makeup, and sexualized body parts. In Asa and Firouzeh's cases, the claim to difference is a critical appropriation of the remembered experience of being seen as different by others from a young age and making creative work and styling themselves in part by using that experience.

Asa uses blogging and social media practices to claim and frame her experiences of difference using textual and visual representations of her racialized, sexualized body. And these practices align with her rather uniquely bold, exhibitionistic (public) persona as a response to being seen as different. Other young people I spoke with claimed difference in their own ways and in line with childhood experiences with how their own bodily traits were seen by others, including others inside their own families. Shiva, for instance, said she grew up with an aunt and other older relatives, who admired her light complexion and hair color. But their compliments and attention were off-putting to her. She described feeling uncomfortable being appreciated for attributes over which she has no control, and expressed an uncomfortable awareness of the beauty ideals associated with whiteness in such encounters. She associated these ideals with her older relatives and their generation's veneration of whiteness carried over from Iran. Her comments echo those of several others from the second generation, who position themselves against what they see as a persistent aspiration to physical features of whiteness. Shiva's experience is echoed in the writing of author Jasmin Darznik (child of an Iranian mother and an American father who grew up in Orange County) on *Iranian.com*, when she shares a short piece about her own experiences with her physical attributes.

> To illustrate, among my parents' set, there has always been a clearly delineated hierarchy of Iranian beauty that, not coincidentally, takes as its ideal typically European features. A brief list of such coveted physical attributes would have to include fair skin, light hair, small nose, slim physique, and "colored" eyes, with the highest value placed on blue eyes, then green, and then hazel. Rarely did all these come together in one person (they certainly did not all come together in me for me to feel their force), but they didn't

> have to. A set of blue eyes, for example, carried unlimited mileage on an otherwise unremarkable face. One of my own relatives, a homely woman in all other respects, had from childhood been lavishly praised for her alabaster skin. Now well into middle age, she continues to indulge the most supreme pride in her farangi-like complexion and has taken to gazing approvingly at my very similar pallor.
>
> I see only ugliness in all this. While I can't say if it's an unconscious revolt to this troubling hierarchy of beauty (would that one could harness desire into calculated protest!), the fact is that my own evolving aesthetic favors the darker Middle Eastern and Mediterranean type.

Yet another account of childhood experiences with looking different comes in the form of a passage in Firouzeh Dumas' popular 2007 memoir of growing up as a second-generation Iranian American in Orange County, California. In the book, *Funny in Farsi*, Dumas makes reference to the painful teasing she experienced at the hands of her classmates in primary school for the shape of her nose. The account is part of an idiosyncratic and humorous story of an upbringing in the USA, from the viewpoint of the child of immigrant parents.[26] In one of the book's later chapters, "A Nose by Any Other Name," Dumas returns to the nose issue, this time as an adult, and presents it in terms of a national obsession of Iranians with noses and "nose jobs." This is presented as an obsession she makes personal efforts to overcome, offering a story about the importance of confidence.[27]

These examples reflect how these young women position themselves with relation to how their bodily features are seen via different modes of representation. What I saw in common across the different modes of communication was a morally invested statement about intimate experiences of being the subject of the gaze of others. A gaze that racializes them in different ways in their everyday lives, but which they engage with by rejecting praise for whiteness (and condemnation of non-whiteness) by those around them, and use their personal narrations to express their position on. For these young people, personal blog writing features among the recently emerging spaces for reflecting on early experiences of discrimination.

But other digital media were also used to subvert articulations of self-racialization. Justin's documentary film, distributed online, was one example of this. "My skin is pretty light. A lot of Iranians say they mistake me for an American," says Justin in one of the opening shots of the autobiographical film, *Warring Factions*. As this voiceover plays, Justin can be seen pointing demonstratively to the skin on his upper arm. He is one

of several second-generation Iranian Americans I came across who have "mixed" backgrounds—Justin's father is Iranian, and his mother is white American. In his documentary film, from which the above quote is taken, his own personal positioning as American, Iranian, and Muslim (terms he applied to himself in the film's introduction) are central to the film's investigation of Iranians' and Americans' perceptions of one another. Justin's film does this in large part through the use of the popular international hip-hop dance genre called b-boying (or breakdancing/breaking) which he practices, and which features strongly in the film as he travels from his home in California to meet Iranian hip-hop dancers who live in Tehran. As the title suggests, the personal story that the film tells is set against the somber backdrop of hostility between the USA and Iran (and the larger Muslim world).

One of the film's scenes presents the backlash against Muslims and Middle Easterners in the USA after 9/11. This is portrayed as a turning point in Justin's life. It depicts a re-enactment of the moment of hearing the news of 9/11 within the setting of an impassioned classroom discussion in which he sits, feeling increasingly excluded by the comments around him, and ultimately walking out of the shot. In the film, we also see Justin play with his white appearance as he attends a military air show in Flagstaff, Arizona. He interviews and records the sentiments of participants at the event about American military interventions in the Middle East, while not revealing his identification as either Iranian or Muslim during these exchanges. Like some other Iranian Americans I spoke with, his light complexion meant that Justin was categorically taken to be a white American. Like many members of the second generation, Justin's speech and accent are indistinguishable from others born and raised in the USA. "Passing" as white takes little if any effort. Yet, his film is concerned with—and is itself part of—his various efforts to negotiate his multiple and overlapping self-categorizations and allegiances. In my correspondence with him shortly afterwards, Justin expressed happiness at hearing people laughing and otherwise reacting at just the right moments in the debut LA screening.

Justin sees his appearance as affording him something of an undercover status. He mentions that being seen with his wife is the thing that often gives him away. "She blows my cover," he says jokingly. Justin's wife identifies as a young, first-generation Iranian American Muslim woman and wears a headscarf. Justin is clearly not bothered by his cover being blown, as the persona he cultivates through his blog, Mashouf TV, is one

whose life is marked by experiences of discrimination at US border checks because of his travel history to Iran and the Iranian side of his family, this revealing both the connections he has to Iran and his practice of Islam, which are not immediately visible from his appearance. The experience of arduous border checks is also one that features in his film and, as such, explicitly complicates his white appearance with his inclusion into the very common experience of increased or additional questioning in airports that became a common experience for Iranian Americans in the years after 9/11.

Sepideh expressed a comparable attitude about being mistaken for being white in her everyday interactions, especially with other Iranian Americans. Sepideh often has to explain to others that both of her parents are Iranian by origin. She has a fair complexion, and during our conversations, she repeatedly raised complaints about often being told by others that she does not look Iranian. At one point, Sepideh commented that she sometimes prefers communicating with other Iranian Americans online, for instance, through comment threads on websites or blogs. She has been active in using a variety of websites to engage with other Iranian Americans, and has noticed that in internet-mediated communications where she represented herself through only her name and with no reflection of her physical appearance, others had less reason to doubt or undermine her Iranian-ness than in face-to-face interactions, as her atypically light coloring and physical features did not generate the usual confusion or skepticism. Sepideh said that this allowed her to avoid a situation where she had to make an effort to be seen as Iranian as a ground for engaging with others from that position. This made her feel more comfortable and included.

The topic of racial discrimination was not discussed openly within the organized spaces of large-scale Iranian American "community" events in LA. On one such occasion I attended a roundtable discussion meeting convened one evening by a group of second-generation students on campus, as part of an Iranian American student conference called, "Knowledge is Power." A wide range of experiences with, and personal approaches to, everyday racial discrimination were recounted by participants who spoke in turn; some meeting one another for the first time, a few already familiar. For instance, a student spoke up to describe her childhood experience of being placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class despite having been born and raised in the USA. It was an experience that still affected her in college, she told us, as it made her doubt her own abilities.

At the end of the roundtable meeting, Pouneh, a long-time student organizer, lamented that despite the energetic conversation that night the discussion about discrimination was rarely engaged in among Iranian Americans. “I loved this discussion … [it’s] definitely something that, as a community, we’re kinda missing,” she said to the group in closing. Pouneh also bemoaned the lack of support from larger sponsors (Iranian American organizations) in the coordination of meetings like this one dealing with issues that ordinary young Iranian Americans are faced with. For her, that evening’s discussion reflected her broader experience with organizing among young Iranian Americans, namely, that these issues were evidently relevant to young people around her but lacking institutional support from larger Iranian American organizations to discuss further and take action on.

Despite the relative general reluctance to talk about racism, the stories shared that night discussed experiences of being seen as different, not because of the immigrant newcomer’s difficulties with language or unfamiliarity with customs, nor with being marked by one’s accented speech, nor “cultural” quirks in the eyes of others, nor lack of familiarity with values/norms. It was not the kind of difference that would dissipate over time through an ambition to “adapt.” In other words, it was not the kind of difference that the first generation might deal with, as those conditions did not apply to the cases of these young people. Their stories instead reflected a tendency to locate difference in one’s own appearance, look, and body, even from a very young age. It is a difference that is experienced as seen in their bodies, and these are narratives they feel should be included more explicitly as part of the experiences of “the community.”

In this way, the second generation’s position lays bare the racial logic underpinning the exclusion of immigrants on the basis of (an essentialized) “cultural” difference. There is a similarity here to research on Asian Americans, which has argued that even into third or fourth generation Japanese and Chinese Americans, “being ethnic” is a consistent expectation (Min and Kim 2000), exposing the reality that in their cases difference is seen as biological as opposed to cultural. However, racial logic, Lentin and Titley explain, has never separated natural from cultural differences; “race naturalizes and classifies the cultural attributes of human groups, ordering those deemed inferior and superior” (Lentin and Titley 2011). For the second generation, this naturalized difference is experienced as residing in the physical body rather than in cultural markers of difference.

The disembodied but racialized self that early research on race online described as springing from participants’ perspectives on racial issues

rather than from physical cues (Burkhalter 1999) falls into the backdrop here. One other hand, other early work on role of the body in relation to the rise of web technologies was discussed in terms of new forms of cyborg embodiment within cybernetic paradigms of tracing connections between the biological and digital (Hayles 1999). More recently, others dealing with "embodiment" in the context of digital media have emphasized the "virtual" as a transcendental field of potentiality where the possibilities for racialized bodies are explored (Karatzogianni and Kuntsman 2012). In the instances I have discussed, web media are indeed utilized for self-representation of racialized bodies through various written, photographic, videographic forms, and I continue this discussion further in the rest of this chapter. Yet, rather than forming cyborg bodies or configuring racial difference in a separate, virtual realm, this process of mediated self-production reflects a use of the racialized body to launch a positioning with respect to the emergent discussions of whiteness and Iranian-ness that my respondents are engaged in. These involve peers, family members, and take place via other media formats and face-to-face encounters.

In a context where racialization is beginning to be embraced and appropriated through representations of experiences of exclusion, my respondents engage in a nascent politics of racial positioning. And they appear to use personal, autobiographical, confessional, intimate styles of narrating past experiences, framing them as racializing encounters not only with those around them but also with themselves. In a comparable way to Nibbs' description of young second-generation Hmong claiming non-whiteness online (2016), my respondents use web platforms to represent themselves as non-white. But in contrast, rather than engaging with a "broader diasporic society" or envisioning their online communications as constituting a different social sphere transcending their locality, these instances highlight how online engagements with race add a layer of personal particularization. They are representations built around the relationship of each person to their particular personal experiences with their own bodies, within their peer and family settings. And they are preoccupied with the production of the authentic self through the foregrounding of the visual irrefutability of the racialized body. Considering that most of the web-based self-representations of the body I have discussed here are those of women, it is interesting to look more closely at this web-based engagement with the racialized body by paying particular attention to gender.

Gendering Middle Eastern-Ness

> There's quite a different perception of Middle Eastern women as victims, as the oppressed, which I think most Middle Eastern women can't stand. Although, especially in the world of publishing, it's interesting how much this image has been perpetuated. And how much money has even come out of that image.

Porochista Khakpour speaks here in a video interview posted on the website, *Big Think*, a site that aggregates blogs, videos, and podcasts featuring the ideas of a variety of contemporary thinkers, professionals, authors, and "experts" in a multimedia digital format.[28] In the video interview she explains how she has noticed that much contemporary writing focusing on the Middle East places women at the center. Her first novel, *Sons and other Flammable Objects*, deals specifically with the worlds of Middle Eastern American men, exploring the relationships of its male protagonists. At the annual IAAB diaspora conference that Porochista attended in November 2012, the young novelist and essayist shone a spotlight on the commercialization of literary art, referring to the roles of publishers and agents whose market-oriented demands tend to interfere with women writers' voices.

> When was the last time you saw a book by an Iranian author that *did not* feature on its cover a Persian carpet, pomegranates, faux Middle Eastern arabesque fonts, or a woman in some sort of headscarf? Big publishing and mainstream media in the U.S. seemed just as eager as the Islamic Republic to cast highly photogenic women in veils-and-lashings tearjerkers; they relegated their writers, particularly women, to victim ingénues. Yes, these are true stories, but only one type of story, which is particularly frustrating when so many others remain untold.

Porochista's sentiment about the level and type of attention that Middle Eastern—and, among them, Iranian American women—have garnered in recent years is more widespread. Coming up against the idea of Middle Eastern women as oppressed victims is not limited to publishing, as Amitis' experience as an artist reflects. Amitis recounted a first-hand experience of a potential (male) buyer who she found expecting to see a similar self-victimization in her own pieces.

> He wanted my work to go in a certain direction. And it was this direction I'm seeing a lot of the women artists in New York go in: 'I'm a woman art-

> ist, I'm so oppressed, and won't you save me.' And it wasn't going in that direction. And I'm starting to see that again. And I'm a little perturbed by it because I thought we were passed that. If anything, the artists I've met here on the West Coast are the ones trying to kick that notion out of the way. There's been a real active engagement of kicking that notion out of the way. So I'm a little disturbed by that.

Amitis emphasized a tendency among audiences as well as a tendency among female artists themselves to portray women in Iran as victims of their own male-dominated society. As Amitis described it, this was a particular phenomenon of the diaspora and not the Iran-based artists she had contact and collaboration with. She saw this as being encouraged by the audiences in the USA, whether intentionally or not. She spoke earnestly about the problems this image of Iranian women raised for her.

> This is a strategy of war. That's one thing that's very important to recognize. That this is something people do during a time of war. It's always to pit the men against the women. To displace that connection that people have with one another. But also to fetishize the women of the region. The combination of, "they're really ugly, they're really stupid" and then, "they're really beautiful, exotic, they need to be saved."

Through their (comments about their) work, these women engage with what it means to be a Middle Eastern woman in the American creative industries in which they are active. Professionally and politically, they are in a position to tell their own stories and tell them publicly in ways that are relevant to a progressive American audience. But they are also highly aware of trends in representing Middle Eastern and Iranian women, and the trends they identify reflect what Moallem argues more generally about the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. That is, that "Islamic fundamentalism has become a generic signifier used constantly to single out the Muslim other, in its irrational, morally inferior, and barbaric masculinity, and its passive, victimized, and submissive femininity (Moallem 2005).

While pointing out this dually gendered representation of the Muslim other, these women also point out how problematic images of Iranian women as victimized paradoxically thrust forward the careers of the women who produce them. This refers to images of lives being marked by Islam, their male-dominated "culture," and their own subjugation. Focusing on weblogs by Iranian women, Shakhsari argues that in a time

of war, (Farsi) language skills become particularly marketable and profitable, as do certain narratives of the Iranian diaspora; hence the rise in these narratives:

> In the market for information and expertise, some diasporic Iranians become entrepreneurs who participate in the production and marketing of a particular form of knowledge about Iran. (Shakhsari 2011)

Based on her ethnographic work among bloggers in Toronto, Canada, Shakhsari argues that the dominant representations of "Weblogestan" are gendered by the discourse of the "war on terror." Her research shows how women bloggers negotiate their subject positions through blogs, while also being subjected to dominant representations that limit the shapes that their agency takes, making them complicit with those "hegemonic nationalist and neoliberal discourses" (Shakhsari 2011). This can be related to Hamid Dabashi's argument of a wider scope in his book, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (2011), about the phenomenon of the intellectual "native informant," in which he indicts certain high profile Iranian Americans, among others, for their complicity with Western imperialist agendas, which incorporate the misuse of Muslim women's emancipation.

Ghorashi's discussion of Muslim women in the Netherlands is also illuminating here, as it highlights a stark distinction emerging between notions of the "unemancipated other" as opposed to the "emancipated self," a distinction she argues is inherent to the recent and drastic increase in the visibility of Muslim women in the West (Ghorashi 2010).[29] Through novels, performance art, interviews, opinion pieces, essays and more, the second-generation women I spoke with articulated their positioning against gendered representations of their otherness, speaking mostly from within their own professional circuits and toward broader audiences. This was how they took up critical intellectual positions from perspectives of second-generation actors within American creative industries, not speaking from experiences of their subjugation to Islamic fundamentalism as women, and exposing tendencies within these industries to align such experiences with a gendered Islamophobia.

One interesting way in which this comes to involve web platforms is Amitis' creation of a fantasy alter-ego for herself that features repeatedly in her work; a woman named "Sandy Sand Ninja Najib." Inspired by wrestling super hero characters and the eroticization of "ethnic" women, the Sand Ninja is embodied by Amitis dressing up in revealing clothing or

in a state of partial undress, with a darkly drawn set of connecting eyebrows, heavy lipstick, and gold jewelry. Amitis set up a Facebook profile for this ironically fashioned and flamboyant persona, on which some of her Facebook friends comment and post photographs and links to articles, addressing her as "Amitis" but expressing their adoration for "the Sand Ninja." This is part of how the Sand Ninja's profile describes her:

> Exile, her family debt, as well as financial and language constraints keep her isolated from her homeland, people and culture. She constructs an identity made up of her own melancholic recollections of her people as well as a pan-"middle eastern" look created by Western projections and stereotypes.

The humorous, tongue-in-cheek, and provocative depiction on the profile page provides a creative space for deconstructing the dominant images and narratives around racialized women's bodies. Interestingly, it also plays on the notion that exile can create a caricature version of a "culture" of the "homeland," which in this case lends itself to self-exoticization. Amitis photographically documents her use of the Sand Ninja's persona in various locations in LA as part of her artwork, and then posts the photos on the Facebook page. The use of a caricature like this represents the subversion of certain images of Iranian American women and expresses the frustration of being categorized by others according to such labels. The aversion to simple categorizations is further evident in Porochista's statement as guest editor for the Guernica web magazine in 2011, albeit with less emphasis on visual media and the body.[30] The following is what Porochista wrote in the introduction of the special edition she put together about the category "Iranian American," which included the work of a host of varied Iranian American authors.

> [C]ategorization and its many cons had haunted me since I came to this country as a wee preschooler. With looks described as exotic at best and a hyperethnic multisyllabic name regarded as unattemptable at worst, I was coronated an ambassador of my particular brand of other just by virtue of being someone else's first. When I was four, I decided to be a writer *precisely because* the realm of the imagination freed me from confinement regarding how and to whom I was born.

The paths through which these young women's self-representations make their way to web platforms are very much dependent on the forms their art takes. For instance, Porochista's online editorial emerges as such because

she is an author and essayist, and Amitis had already invented Sand Ninja years before she decided to give her a Facebook account. In fact, when Amitis first mentioned the character to me, she also said that due to spending most of her time teaching art students from low-income parts of the city and with whom she did not communicate online, the web had little impact on her artistic practice. But her active use of Facebook since then and the platform's design around the individual profile, which also calls for visual content, makes it a well-suited channel for mediating the Sand Ninja persona. These women's self-representations seep online via the specific audiences and forms of cultural production that they are trained and proficient in. Their web practices reflect their wider rejection of the simplistic, Orientalizing representations dominant in their professional media environments. The alternative representations they propose are a claim to difference on one's own terms by women who know they usually tend to be visible on others people's terms. But the particular mode of (mediated) visibility they claim is more complex than promoting a supposedly more accurate representation of Iranian American women as a replacement.

One the one hand, their statements echo wider efforts by my second-generation respondents to diversify and represent the multi-faceted-ness of Iranian American-ness. Another example of this is *Document: second generation Iranian Americans in Los Angeles*, a unique initiative and explicit endeavor to represent Iranian American-ness in an innovative way. *Document* was a photography exhibit displaying portraits of second-generation Iranian Americans by second-generation Iranian Americans. Amy, the curator of the exhibit, described this project for the public in the following way on the UCLA Fowler gallery's website:

> In cultivating this collaborative project, I wanted to examine documentation as a representational process by offering four Iranian-American photographers' perspectives on who we are, stressing the importance of including multiple voices in documenting our own Los Angeles communities.

The virtual gallery was originally planned to accompany the show, but this web presence clearly held secondary status within the project to the physical exhibition. Through editorships and curatorships that demand authority and expertise in particular areas of cultural production, a project like *Document* implicitly acknowledges and counters racialized stereotypes, without claims to alternative non-white racial categories, but as an attempt at humanization through visual representations that call for

the public pondering of the boundaries of Iranian American-ness. On the other hand, however, I also saw my respondents' complex, mediated self-representations as reflecting new, racial self-categorizations by taking up subversive claims to being non-white. For instance, Sand Ninja takes on a "pan 'middle eastern' look created by Western projections and stereotypes." This pan-Middle Eastern category is also taken up in other ways by a number of my respondents, as a means of claiming difference while rejecting stereotypes. I discuss this further with relation to their web uses in the following.

Pan Middle Eastern American-Ness

In the aftermath of 9/11, a program of special registration was set up. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) document the measures and their effects as they were felt immediately after the attacks in their study:

> Men older than 16 who were citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Syria allegedly terrorist-training countries who had entered the U.S. before September 10, 2002 and planned to remain at least until December 16, 2002 were required to register with the INS before December 16, 2002. On December 16, 2002, other countries were added to the list. Failure to report to the INS was cause for deportation. Ironically, many people who obeyed the order were deported anyway. [...] Over 80,000 men had registered by early May 2003.

The two scholars also mention some longer term results of these measures:

> Special registration resulted in the arrest of several hundred Iranians in Los Angeles who were deemed in violation of their visas. This order created unprecedented demonstrations and protests from the Iranian American population in Los Angeles, the largest such concentration in the U.S. Having designated the Islamic Republic of Iran part of the "Axis of Evil," individuals bearing Iranian passports were denied visa issuance and subjected to Special Registration even though Iranians had nothing to do with 9/11. In November 2003, almost coinciding with the first anniversary of Special Registration, the government reversed its decision of requesting men from a number of Arab and/or Muslim countries to repeat this procedure annually. During its implementation, this initiative was not effective in apprehending any terrorists.

In LA, the phenomenon of special registration was repeatedly invoked as part of post-9/11 profiling of Iranian Americans and Middle Easterners in

the USA. It was framed as problematic by its critics, because of the baseless official association of Iranians with the perpetration of the attacks on the WTC and Pentagon, and also because it undermined the rights of the US residents criminalized because of this measure.[31] Among other things, the policy showed an additional dimension of how racial discrimination is gendered by using profiling to imply that Middle Eastern men posed a particular threat. The striking thing was that I saw some of my respondents engaging creatively with this image of the Middle Eastern American young man as terrorist.

Scholar Moustafa Bayoumi asks the question *How Does it Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America*, in the title of his 2008 book, which features the very same question posed by W.E.B Du Bois in an evocative piece on being black in America, first published in 1897 (Du Bois 2007). Hip-hop artist Omar Offendum is known for his politically "conscious" lyrics that draw attention to his "bi-cultural" background as a Syrian American. The connection is that both these men spoke and performed respectively at the 2011 Camp Ayandeh (Camp Future), the social and pedagogical environment of IAAB's summer leadership camp. These Arab American men use their work to take a stance against anti-Muslim and anti-Arab discrimination. The organization's aim of "alliance-building" includes alliances between Iranian American and Arab American youth.

This reflects the commonality between ways of experiencing racial difference and discrimination between these two groups of Middle Eastern American youth, a connection that is also evident on Justin's blog. For instance, in a short video trailer that includes Yassin Alsalman. Alsalman is a young, male, second-generation Iraqi Canadian rapper, speaking about how the hip-hop music genre plays a positive role in the lives of people like himself. He is featured speaking in a high quality video about his book, *Diatribes of a Dying Tribe*. Alsalman goes by the artist name, The Narcycist, and makes the following statement in the video.

> It's an example of how hip hop has been used to create an identity or help create a space for people who feel underrepresented or misrepresented. Arabs, in this case.[32]

Justin's blog, Mashouf TV, on which the video is posted, has the by-line: "The online adventures of director Justin Mashouf". Alsalman's book is described there as being

> [A]bout the jumbled reality of North American life. The destructive components of juxtaposing cultures, the birth of immigrant internationality and the resilient art that comes out of struggle and oppression.

My respondents' connections with second-generation Arab Americans reflect an interesting engagement with the experience of migrant second generation-hood that is specific to an experience of being Middle Eastern in the USA. In Justin's case, he performed together with The Narcycist and Omar Offendum at an art and music festival in Chicago in 2010, which was organized by an inner city Muslim action network. The Chicago performance was after Justin "initially met both of them online," he wrote to me after I shared with him my tracing of the links between the works of these three young men via Justin's blog.

Second-generation Iranian American author, Porochista Khakpour, mentioned above, writes in an opinion piece for the New York Times about the emergence of a "pan-Middle Eastern identity,"[33] one that arose specifically in the wake of 9/11 when all Middle Easterners were "lumped together" according to Khakpour.[34] And she has been speaking publicly about this phenomenon up until as recently as 2012.[35] The "racialization of religion" in the USA (Joshi 2006) suggests that phenotypical features that have come to be associated with a racial group come to take on connections to religious identities. In this case, boundaries between the categories of Muslim and Middle Eastern Americans[36] seem to blur as racialization processes merge groups. In the process, the category of Middle Eastern American gains currency as a way for young Iranian Americans to see themselves under these circumstances, and offers people a basis for putting these new boundaries into practice on their own behalves. As Andrew Shryok argues,

> [T]he fact that many Arab Americans now believe anti-terrorism policies have constituted them as a "distinct racial group" says a great deal about the trauma of 9/11, the experience of marginalization and stigma, and how these are reshaping identity politics among Arabs and Muslims in the United States. (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009)

The same applies to some of my respondents as well. Justin connects with other Middle Eastern American and Muslim American individuals of second-generation migrational backgrounds, and embracing the hip-hop musical genre is an interesting vehicle for making these connections. One

theme that emerges in his blog postings and also features in his autobiographical documentary film is the experience of border-crossing impediments as an Iranian American, an experience that was referred to by other Iranian Americans I spoke with and was also featured as the main theme in a music video by the artist, The Narcycist, for his song, P.H.A.T.W.A.[37] Justin and The Narcycist[38] both identify publicly as Muslims and both share a passion for hip-hop. And Justin's reference to this artist via his blog is part of a way of being Muslim that tends to be seen as particular to this generation among my respondents, in particular for its connection with other Muslim Americans and its lack of engagement with the experience of living in the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of my respondents, a young college educated woman called Behnaz who also identifies as Muslim, talks about how she sees this generational difference.

> I think [newcomers from Iran] think Iranians have to either be Muslim or not be Muslim. They don't link up with the strength of others like Arabs and Pakistanis and Afghans who have been more comfortable with being Muslim. I wish there could be more relaxed ways of being Muslim that wouldn't get so much criticism from both sides [both other Iranian Americans and Americans].

The Iranian diaspora in LA has been commonly defined as a largely secular immigrant group in terms of public practice and their self-distinctions from the Islamic Republic. In one instance, Saman, the second-generation son of the owner of a well-established Muslim cultural center in LA, stated that the Muslim Iranian Americans he knew felt more like a minority religious group than the majority they were in numbers. He acknowledged it was sometimes difficult to be Muslim within a diaspora that has fled the grave mistreatments they experienced in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Islam and being Muslim is uniformly left out of self-representations of Iranian Americans in large public organizations. In this sense, the (internet-mediated) self-representations of people like Justin not only position him against border controls, but also against specific associations that other Iranian Americans in his environment have with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mobilizing hip-hop and Middle Eastern American-ness is one way of being Muslim that reflects the second-generation positioning of a young man like Justin.

This is the utilization of a subcultural form that not only has a widespread appeal among youth within LA, an important urban locus for

hip-hop's historical development, but this same subcultural form has also been mobilized in response to the sphere of global discourses of "the war on terror" and international relations between the USA and Iran. In the process, these self-representations shape adherences between Iranian Americans and other Middle Eastern Americans around their shared experiences of racialization within, and with relation to, the USA. This reflects how "new spheres of co-operation," (Kasinitz et al. 2006) work between second-generation groups as part of their incorporation into Americanness. Through various media uses, a racial politics of pan-ethnicity finds expression within young people's claims to identity. And it is especially noteworthy that these claims are expressed in relation to 9/11, the "war on terror," international border crossings, and Orientalist tropes, particularly in light of the international basis of the pan-ethnic formations. In a comparable way, Espiritu (2004) points out the disruptive effects of American expansionism in the Far East, which she argues created a basis for solidarity between the peoples who were forced across the Pacific as a result of it, creating a basis for an Asian American pan-ethnicity. The anti-terrorism policies exercised by domestic agencies like Homeland Security, as well as ongoing US military intervention in the Middle East, are both indirectly and explicitly referenced in the claims to pan-ethnicity I came across as well. Discussions of Asian American pan-ethnicity have also pointed out that it is a response not only to racialization, but also to increasing ethnic heterogeneity in US society (Omi 2001), and this is nowhere truer than in the LA metropolis. What is different about what I have described is that Middle Eastern Americans have not merged or begun large-scale representative organizations like other pan-ethnic groups like the Latinos and Asian Americans have in the USA, suggesting that this emergent category has not (yet) been normalized in the way others have.

The role of web applications I have discussed includes varied incorporations of creative productions like documentary film, performance art, and literary writing into web formats including websites, blogs, social media applications, and web videos. Primarily reinforcing rather than effacing the role of the body, digital representations of the self, signal a re-embodiment of Iranian American-ness, in the sense that the body is where the experience of racial discrimination most viscerally takes place, and it is also the site from which self-authored narrations emanate. What emerges is an identity politics that places Iranian American-ness within the boundaries of a burgeoning Middle Eastern American-ness. There are similarities here to Franklin's discussion of how everyday internet usage among Pacific

Islanders gives space to debates and divides within a single ethnic/racial group, as these "online debates," she argues, end up developing post-colonial, subversive subjectivities (Franklin 2003).[39] She proposes that the everyday self-representations being contested are intended as much for the subjects themselves as for the general public, and that discussions tackling what are usually sensitive issues are an important part of how subjects make sense of and "define their own identities" in between diaspora life and their life "back home" (Franklin 2003).

A similar web-based self-formation is what I argue for, although I see them not as products of using web platforms per se, nor necessarily negotiated through interactions within online spaces, but are formations of an identity politics styled online from a specifically second-generation perspective. The media formats used to articulate this politics in the instances I have described are aligned with conventions of the particular forms that people already have expertise and experience in, but are also styled in accordance with their passions for particular musical, subcultural, and literary genres. These creative expressions arguably play an instrumental role in the formation of a pan-ethnicity that (as yet) only takes the form of symbolic solidarity rather than being institutionalized or formally organized.

Kazinitz et al. have reviewed the sociological research on the effects for second-generation immigrants of being positioned close to American minorities. They sketch a paradox in which, on the one hand, contemporary second-generation immigrants keep the strong ethnic networks that the first generation have maintained and thus increase their upward mobility while not "assimilating" into existing racialized minority groups with longer histories of discrimination and lower socio-economic status. On the other hand, the second generation may adopt an "oppositional" or "reactive ethnicity" that brings them closer to these existing racial minorities, which is thought to make them "skeptical of the possibility of upward mobility and particularly about the value of education" and ostensibly lead to downward mobility (Kasinitz et al. 2006). In their discussion of the intersection between race, class, and second-generation ethnic identity, they also argue that racial similarities between the children of new migrants and long-standing racialized groups increase the second generation's propensity to socio-economic downward mobility (Kasinitz et al. 2006). In what I have shown here, the self-styled symbolic pan-ethnic alliances are articulated in the cultural and political sphere, and not only in the social and economic ones, which drive the existing analyses of the consequences of pan-ethnic formation. In what follows I discuss further

instances of how this pan-ethnic self-formation forms what I see as an anti-racist politics that is given shape through web media forms.

Forming a Diasporic Anti-Racism

Hakha, a second-generation Iranian American man in his late 30s is a lawyer living with his partner in the neighborhood of Silverlake. During a conversation one evening at a café in his neighborhood he raised the racial hierarchies that he sees Iranian Americans being a part of. Referring to Iranians among other immigrants of color, Hakha's position was that:

> Skin color does still make a difference everywhere, and here you'll see that because Iranians can more often look white, they are seen as more equal [with whites] in that hierarchy. I do think that Iranians who pass—and there are many who do in the generation born here—have a much easier time than other immigrants because of their perceived race and also class.

Hakha was critical of how some Iranians stand to benefit unfairly in the USA, based on their racialized appearances as white. And he made observations about the wider hierarchies of race and class Iranian Americans were implicated within. He was by no means alone in remarking this, as some of my respondents also mentioned how Iranians themselves sometimes perpetuated such hierarchies. Iranian racism toward African Americans was one area of concern in this respect—a self-awareness made evident by a YouTube video[40] that emerged, and was shared by a number of my respondents in 2012, as well as a few prominent Iranian American public figures. The video depicted a young, gossiping Iranian American woman who is sitting on a park bench next to a young black man about whom she is making racially prejudiced comments in Persian on her cell phone to her aunt. She is surprised by the man when he turns and starts speaking to her in Persian, revealing that he understood her conversation about him and that he is also "Persian."

Taking my respondents' comments and the emergence of these digital media productions together, the parallels between racism among Iranian Americans (often attributed to older relatives) follows the racial hierarchies at work within wider American society. Likewise, political stances against racism follow mainstream liberal American ideas of citizenship in a progressive society. And so, the identity politics of the second generation also openly rejects Iranian American racism toward other racialized

groups, dismissing it, as Hakha does above, as an unfair means of advancing in American society by benefiting from phenotypical factors (among others) that place Iranians closer to whiteness than other racialized groups. Nowhere is the issue of race more an area of contention than when my respondents discuss Iranian-ness with relation to the whiteness associated with the original Aryans. The below passage was the opening to a blog posting by Pouya, a second-generation blogger from Orange County and graduate student in International Relations (whose site was also visited by some of my other respondents), which was linked to an article on another website. It engages with the discussion about the Walt Disney blockbuster, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, where Jake Gyllenhaal plays the role of a prince of Persia.

> That a rather fair actor with Swedish and Ashkenazi heritage plays the lead role in a story set in ancient Iran caused a minor controversy. Some enlightened people believe that Hollywood missed an opportunity to transcend its stereotypical depictions of non-Europeans, particularly Middle Easterners, by offering the part to a brownish hero. Of course, in private discussions, many Iranians, always prompt to portray themselves as "Aryans," concurred that Gyllenhaal accurately embodies how their ancestors must have looked, before Arabs invaded and imposed both their religion and complexion at the point of the sword.
>
> So far, nothing unusual. What is surprising and alarming, however, is that serious intellectuals condoned these views. Asked to comment on producer Jerry Bruckheimer's declaration to The Times of London that many Iranians were "blond and blue-eyed" until "the Turks kinda changed everything," American-Iranian author Reza Aslan asserted that, indeed, Iranians were Aryans. "If we went back in time 1700 years to the mythological era," Aslan said, "all Iranians would look like Jake Gyllenhaal." This pronouncement highlights the resilience of what I call the "Aryan syndrome" in modern Iran. A historical detour is necessary to show why it is so problematic.

This piece was written by the London-based scholar, Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, and originally posted by Tehran Bureau under the title *Iranian Identity, the 'Aryan Race,' and Jake Gyllenhaal.* Other respondents also linked to the piece via their Facebook pages or posted it to friends' pages. To those I spoke with, the film constituted a high profile case of "whitewashing." This label was used in coverage by Iranian American bloggers and other (entertainment news) channels with reference to the choice to cast Jake Gyllenhaal as the "Prince of Persia." The attention for the film was pal-

pable among Iranian Americans in LA when, in 2009, an event called "Dismantling the Axis of Evil: Reforming Middle Eastern Representations in Hollywood," co-hosted and sponsored by the Levantine Cultural Center and PAAIA, took place in Downtown LA. Before the controversy came to full public light with the release of the film in August 2010, the debate had already begun to bubble.

In a full auditorium on the evening of the event, Aslan, consultant on the Hollywood blockbuster, shared the stage with Tehranian, author of *Whitewashed* (mentioned earlier in this chapter). Aslan is the founder of BoomGen Studios,[41] an online video channel that targeted youth and second-generation Middle Easterners, The event breathed of the disquiet of a community about unjust popular representations, a familiar concern about mainstream media and depictions of Iranian Americans for some of my respondents. This concern was vividly sustained by the video shown to the mostly Iranian American (and Middle Eastern American) audience at the event's outset. It was a compilation of clips from Hollywood films over the past 20 years depicting Arabs, Iranians, and Muslims as backward and primitive, dangerous terrorists, wife-beaters, and all-round "bad guys."[42] The mostly Middle Eastern mixture of middle-aged and young professional audience watched in amazement, and sometimes amusement, at the drastic and skewed portrayals. Despite the grim title of the event, and the obvious exasperation of some audience members, the tone of the meeting was kept consistently light and entertaining by the MC, comedian, actor, and public figure within the Iranian American community, Maz Jobrani, whose own work routinely plays on the labels of "terrorist" and "evil" faced by Middle Eastern Americans.

The girls I sat with in the audience—one, a friend I had arrived with, and two other second-generation women, probably in their 20s who we met that night—began chatting around me. They had a burning question. They asked me to put the question to the panel on all our behalves. "Why Jake Gyllenhall?" I asked Reza Aslan. "The girls and I are wondering why you support the casting of this white actor, when John and others tonight have agreed that "Whitewashing" is hurting, not helping, Iranian Americans?" John Tehranian, author of *Whitewashed: America's invisible Middle Eastern Minority*, sat nodding on the opposite side of the panel. The young women seemed only semi-satisfied with Aslan's semi-serious response: first, he offered an ambiguously sardonic mention of the "well-known" axiom that Iranians used to be blue-eyed and light-haired and so Gyllenhall would have a historically accurate appearance after all. Then,

more earnestly, he proclaimed that ultimately the monetary success of the film, with its positive portrayal of a Persian hero, was the best positive publicity that Iranian Americans could hope for, which is also why he thought they and the rest of the audience should support it (financially) by seeing it in the cinema. Speaking more casually to some of us after the event that evening Aslan referred to how "our" older relatives would find legitimacy in a representation of an ancient "Persian" character as appearing white because of a common notion among them of Iranians as Aryan.

Like Pouya on his blog, and Reza Zia-Ebrihimi (the author of the original piece Pouya references, quoted above), a few of my respondents expressed disappointment with regard to Aslan's stance. They disputed Aslan's practice as extending scholarly historical credence to what was thought of by several of my respondents (as well as in the excerpt above) as old wives tales at best and Nazi ideology at worst. For people like Pouya and others (like Beeta and Pouneh who were among those who referenced the same piece of Facebook and brought up the issue in their own academic and activist activities), this raised concerns about the perpetuation of racist myths. This was especially the case since the self-application of "Aryan" among Iranians is associated with fuelling anti-Arab sentiment,[43] inter-ethnic prejudices, and superiority complexes around Persian-ness (also discussed in the previous chapter). Few second-generation individuals or groups are as influential as Reza Aslan when it comes to representations in mass media productions (as discussed above in the context of his collaboration on the *Prince of Persia* film). Aslan considers his production studio, BoomGen, as a means for changing "this country for the better," by allowing young people to tell their "stories about the Middle East." The following quote was taken from a web video and TEDx talk he gave in 2011.

> In order to understand each other we have to rely on our stories. It's storytelling that builds those relationships. It's about the arts, about film, about music, about movies. My company, Boom Gen Studios, helps make films and movies that deal with the stories coming out of the Middle East because we know that it's stories that change people's minds.

Aslan's project to represent Muslim Americans (including those with Iranian American backgrounds) is, at once, a commercial and philanthropic endeavor, and presents itself in the form of the Aslan Media website. This site is dedicated to addressing the exclusion and targeting of

Muslim Americans in the USA, and together with BoomGen focuses on producing and disseminating media representation of the Muslim world, the Middle East, and its people through both news/non-fiction genres as well as more entertainment-oriented productions. The contentions between Aslan and others I have mentioned here who are less influential reflect some of the internal differences among members of the second generation. This not only reflects the different ways people position themselves with the use of web media, but also the different degrees of influence their online self-representations have for changing mainstream representations and how.

Research on the frequently raised problem of the "digital divide" has been challenging dichotomies between the "haves and have-nots" when it comes to notions of "access"[44] regarding internet technologies, and arguing instead that hierarchies of usage reflect various kinds of access which are not determined by hardware alone (Selwyn 2004). The problem of exclusion of minority groups from media production more broadly has been extensively documented in media anthropology and cultural studies, with a focus on cases of indigenous and post-colonial media production (Ginsberg 2003; Shohat and Stam 2003), showing that exclusion from (and access to) media production is neither straightforward nor absolute. And so, it is important to understand the power dynamics that shape the influences, and audiences that any mediated identity politics manage to reach. In the following, I discuss a process of coming up against limitations of web-mediated self-representation as part of a burgeoning political engagement.

The Sustained Invisibility of Second-Generation Stories

In a café not far from the university campus where I had met her, Behnaz told me about a recent encounter with a particular US government agency.[45] She described her personal experience as having led to a strong fear of surveillance by law enforcement and a sense of anger and betrayal directed at "America." Strikingly, it had also led her to feel disenchanted with some Iranian Americans around her due to a lack of support she was experiencing at the time. While reflecting on the worst parts of this encounter, Behnaz said her experience paradoxically had come to show her how American she was.

> The more American you are, the more comfortable you feel to criticize America. […] I feel more a part of this society since this happened,

> and more aware of the politics behind it. I feel more responsibility as an American to contribute to making America a better place. [...] I appreciate talking to like-minded people, and they are more American. I don't have this with people who have just come from Iran and think that America can do no wrong. [...] On the contrary, I believe in the right of all Americans to express themselves, and in the freedom that is necessary for that. I don't see this belief so much in people who have come more recently.

Because of the circumstances Behnaz finds herself in, she feels her sense of American-ness comes with the responsibility to contribute to American politics and society, including through criticism. In the process, she also became more attuned to the American far left's political and intellectual tradition of exposing structures of racism in America, including critical discourses on racial profiling with traces of US civil rights era framing of citizenship rights. Behnaz positions herself both against the "security" policies that negatively marked her experience, as well as the first-generation newcomers from Iran who acquiesce to these policies, and this positioning is shaped by her second-generation status. As Philomena Essed's discussion of post-colonial race and migration states, this represents a shift that takes place in a late stage of the migration process. Namely, "[t]he feeling of 'I am in their country and I'll act like they want me to' gives way to 'what are my rights and what future do I want for my children?'" (Essed 1997).[46]

Behnaz expressed disappointment in the responses she received from the Iranian American organizations she had approached, saying they had all told her that they could not offer support because the issue of profiling was "too political." So, Behnaz started her own website as an endeavor to use web media to reflect the networks of support she has access to among her contacts and "the community" more generally. When I spoke with her, she was disappointed that the site was not receiving many visits and she was looking for ways to make it more public and recognized. Although many people had shown great support during the case, Behnaz soon found that technical and design aspects of the site, as well as her disconnection from larger media outlets, meant that her site struggled to attract much of an audience.

Behnaz's experience was a rather exceptional case among those I encountered, but stories of those who have had encounters with similar US government agencies circulate among my respondents, shaping their understanding of the problems effecting Iranian Americans as

a group. Lentin and Titley's distinction between "good and bad diversity" can help get a grasp on the wary reactions that Behnaz recounts from Iranian American organizations to her story. According to this distinction "good diversity" requires celebration and cultivation, and "bad diversity" is diverse matter out of place (Lentin and Titley 2011).[47] That is, as certain representations of Iranian American-ness dominate others, find larger audiences, and enjoy wider resonance with existing narratives of American-ness, certain other self-representations are relegated to the margins, despite the fact that both make use of public web pages for self-representations of difference.

So, even within a context where the younger generation of Iranian Americans is claiming identity politics online as a means of gaining new visibility, certain experiences remain less visible. According to Negar, this had to do with a lack of institutional support for those feeling the effects of racial profiling. I spoke to Negar because Behnaz told me she was one of her few Iranian Americans peers who she could talk to and who understood and supported her circumstances. Negar[48] expressed concern that the large Iranian American organizations' approaches to defining Iranian American difference did not address what she considered one of the most pressing vulnerabilities facing Iranian Americans: namely, the lack of legal advocacy. She wondered why there was no Iranian American equivalent of the organizations that Arab Americans and other "minority groups" have, noting that no comparable advocacy groups exist in the USA, specifically for Iranian Americans. She explained:

> So whereas Latinos and other communities have community-based organizations working with them, we don't have that. We're seeing an emergence of organizations who are interested in doing public interest work on Iranians in the community IAAB, PAAIA, but … their focus is not to help individuals and galvanize community energy. NIPOC either, they don't do advocacy. So let's say I had an immigration problem or the FBI came and visited me. None of these organizations would be [ones] I could go to for support. They're more cultural based organizations. I could go to them and ask them to connect me if they know anybody.
>
> In the United States there's the NAACP. They have a legal defense fund on legal advocacy. There's a Puerto Rican legal defense fund, an Asian American legal defence fund, every community has these kinds of advocacy groups. And in addition to doing individual advocacy, they do actual impact litigation to challenge policy at a political level. These [Iranian American] organizations lobby, they don't file lawsuits. We don't have advocacy groups.

> NIAC is probably the closest thing we have because it interfaces with the government on a regular basis. They have a policy agenda. But that's it, as far as I know.

The concern Negar expresses here is tied to the troubling consequences she associates with a lack of advocacy funds for those who cannot afford legal defense if racially profiled by government/law enforcement agencies. To Negar, this limits the extent to which people are able to claim and organize around difference in their day-to-day lives. According to her, not being able to afford legal defense if racially profiled by the FBI may lead people to practice racial covering out of apprehension for the consequences of being seen as different. Her worry is that "whitewashing" will persist regardless of efforts invested in positive publicity campaigns about Iranian Americans by large organizations that focus on "culturally based" agendas, public relations, and lobby work. This is a concern about how socio-economic inequalities and lack of institutionalized support limit people's possibilities to openly present themselves as different, in particular, those who are the poorest of the Iranians in America.

In line with this concern is Negar's worry about the way large organizations like PAAIA reproduce stereotypes of Iranian Americans as uniformly wealthy, highly educated, and a "successful" immigrant group in LA and in the USA. And she is by far not the only one who has expressed this worry to me. Her concerns raise the contention that the kinds of organization being inherited from the first generation are not equipped to deal with the problem of discrimination and class inequalities because of their focus on "cultural" notions of Iranian-ness. And the newer organizations are as ill-equipped to deal with this issue because of their focus on convincing the public that Iranians are a model "community" and a wealthy immigrant group.

Like Negar, Pouneh is also under the impression that Iranian Americans around her try to emulate higher class positions in order to avoid discrimination. She refers to the persistence of whitewashed Iranian Americans in her environment suggesting that some willfully feign whiteness as a strategy of being treated with more privilege and acceptance by others, stating, "you'll be treated differently if you're whitewashed. … Iranians are the most privileged [minorities], depending on how whitewashed they are." People's performances of class and socio-economic status are connected with emulating whiteness and covering racial difference. And both these young women consider practices of whitewashing problematic and

unconstructive in bringing to light the problems of racism that Iranian Americans face. This rejection of representing Iranian Americans as uniformly leading comfortable middle-class lives in LA also appears in the creative styling of public personas by some of my respondents. Azad's story is a good example of this.

> Yes I grew up here [in Santa Monica], but the question is how did we live here? My father is legally blind, so we lived off government money and the friends I have are Mexican and Black. Right? [looking towards his African American friend who was sitting next to him]. My growing up experience was really a melting pot. … I didn't really have a lot of contact with the Iranian community because I didn't feel similar to them economically. One time I went to a party with my girlfriend. She lived near Sabone/Sunset and had invited me to a house party in Beverly Hills. There were expensive cars lined up in the street in front as I arrived. I felt really out of place. That's something about this generation. … Hiphop was an interest of mine for some time. I started out with spoken word poetry and it became rap.

A young man in his early 20s, Azad is an aspiring rapper. He has relied heavily on social networking sites to gain attention and pursue a career as a recording artist. It is important to note here that African American experience of race in the USA, as both imposed categorization and self-identification has been important not only in its own terms, but also, from the late 1960s on, as a template for identity claims of all sorts, including those based on gender and sexual orientation as well as based on "ethnicity" and "race" (Brubaker and Coopers 2000). It is also relevant to understand this and other young Iranian Americans' interests in hip-hop music can be seen as an engagement with a nowadays globally recognized pop cultural music genre, but it can also be analyzed at once as part of a locally rooted class and racial positioning.

The rise in popularity of hip-hop in LA (and the particular subgenre of "gangsta rap" a strain of hip-hop with strong roots in LA), came with the deindustrialization process that took place in LA during the 1960s and 1970s and the rise in crime rates as a result of the dilapidation of the Watts neighborhood in South Central LA (Kelley 1996). This fuelled an increasingly militarized response on the part of the LAPD in the 1980s, which in turn led to gangsta rap being primarily directed against police violence, domination, and discrimination, as argued by Robin Kelley (Kelley 1996).[49] The development of hip-hop music in LA has a particular trajectory that is shaped by the history of the city's own development.

The remarkable popularity of hip-hop and its gaining prominence in mainstream American pop culture in the USA since its beginnings, signals what Cornell West calls the "African Americanization of American culture"(West 1999). Yet, it seems to retain relevance for Azad, as a young person who cannot relate to Iranian American-ness as entailing a life of privilege and feels more affinity to the "oppositional culture" (Thomson and Crul 2007; Schneider and Crul 2014) they find in hip-hop. Not only have African Americans taken up such cultural forms of opposition in LA. It is interesting to note the similarities between what some of my respondents are doing and Traber's discussion of how American middle-class whiteness has been rejected through various forms of "resistant self-fashioning" in the USA (e.g. punk) (Traber 2007).

Traber's investigation of American culture from a literary perspective argues that self-marginalization through association with non-whiteness is taken up as a demonstration of agency and a drive to break with the mainstream. However, when people position themselves in oppositional ways, they often actually embrace a conventional logic of liberal individualism, according to Traber, proving them once again complicit with the power formation and values of the mainstream. The point is illuminating for what it suggests about the adoption of subcultural styles, distancing from whiteness, and indeed about the contemporary construction of whiteness in the USA. I have tried to show how certain oppositional styles emerge hand-in-hand with a politics of positioning oneself as a minority subject in a liberal multi-cultural society, and with relation to a state apparatus that recognizes difference or "the politics of diversity" (Lentin and Titley 2011), as a valid basis for inclusion. This does not appear to be a road to falling into socio-economic marginality as certain second-generation studies suggest. The discussion also reveals how contemporary American whiteness is produced here as the necessary mainstream counterpoint, in relation to which oppositional self-styling takes on meaning. This is a more dynamic notion of whiteness than Ignatiev and his inspiration, Roediger, argued for in their historical models of American whiteness as the dominant category into which newcomers aspire to eventually disappear.

While elements of that strategy persist, especially among first-generation Iranian Americans, my respondents stake personal claims to an anti-racist non-whiteness defined by the multiple racisms they observe and encounter, both among Iranian Americans, and in their other daily experiences in LA. These include things like the cross-racial encounters made possible by their urban and inter-personal surroundings, the media messages they

are exposed to, and their encounters with law enforcement authorities and the legal state. This reflects a model of racial construction more in line with Back's emphasis on the changing and multiple racisms that are constituted within the various specific contexts of everyday life, which are in turn infused with wider discourses on race and the nation (Back 1993). It appears these young people's (media) practices enable them to "enhance the capacity to harness otherness," as has been argued of the role of the internet in migrants' identity practices (Nedelcu 2012). And yet, as websites are part of some Iranian Americans' rise to more powerful positions in prominent media production circuits, new inclusions and exclusions are created when it comes to whose stories are told and who/what represents Iranian Americans difference. It becomes clear that a "politics of diversity" waged via websites revolves around self-narrations of difference, and when this lacks broad-based collective organizing and institutions oriented toward the inclusion of those at its margins, it is limited in overcoming exclusion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed my second-generation respondents' claims to difference in the context of the racialization of Middle Easterners and Muslims in the USA. I did this by focusing on their practices of self-representation in their broader media environments, and paying special attention to their web use in this regard. The current atmosphere of heightened visibility of Iranians as Middle Easterners and as *de facto* Muslims with racialized bodies shapes how my respondents' use web media.[50] My discussion has supported research cautioning against assumptions about the disappearing body (and with it race and gender) in studies of internet-mediated self-representation:

> The Internet is certainly an infrastructure and a medium that seemed to many to be race free or color blind but is in fact imbued with racial politics as a result of the digital inequalities evident in its demographics, its political economy, and its content. It has also become an increasingly active purveyor of images of race as well as narratives about them. (Nakamura 2007)

As I have shown in this chapter, a host of web platforms became part of my respondents' projects to position themselves politically, according to their experiences of being seen individually and/or collectively as white/non-

white, middle-/working-class, men/women. This included their modes of making the racialized body visible through personal, autobiographical forms of self-expression. And I discussed the particular ways in which different subcultural and artistic styles were taken up to reflect on gendered experiences of discrimination. Operating within media environments marked by unequal power relations, my respondents follow identity politics models to make claims to inclusion (within the multi-cultural nation-state). Their sharing of experiences of discrimination and reinforcement of the boundaries of racial and minority categories echoes the idea that a "recourse to identity politics is often a direct reaction to the essentialisation of culture imposed upon 'the other' that segregates white and black, Christian and Muslim, national and migrant" (Titley and Lentin 2008: 18).

In this mode of rejecting of whiteness as a conservative mainstream category through producing digitally visualized and narrativized representations of experiences of being seen (individually or collectively) becomes an authentic claim to identity via its apparently undeniable presence in the body. In this way, the body as a site of difference is framed via blogs, Instagram, documentaries. It is the indisputable tie to other racialized groups as well as to a moral order of anti-racist resistance in the USA and is given a certain digital materiality in this process. This process can be understood in terms of Charles Taylor's idea of a quest for an authentic self, one formed through its relation to a wider world that makes claims upon it (Taylor 1991). The production of the self in this way relies on the creative and artistic modes of representing the self through (digital) media (via notions of "voice" or "direction"), and this tendency persists even in projects that seek to complicate the unitary category of Iranian American by challenging dominant media representations and clear-cut categories (perhaps precisely in these such projects). Indeed, particular web forms, and the artistic conventions according to which they are mobilized, seem to lend themselves to the confessional paradigms of an identity politics of authenticity.

The account I have presented suggests that this oppositional identification neither calls for concern about the second generation's decline, nor is potent against authorities' apparent racial profiling practices. Among the new anti-discrimination narratives that are emerging, there is still a relative invisibility of stories of discrimination that are "too political" or too working-class, and which tend to be elided in media representations of marketable difference. In other words, there are a variety of ways

of being seen as different, and not all of them are celebrated or recognized equally within dominant discourses of multi-culturalism and diversity, or gain access to the stylistic means of reaching equally broad audiences. What we see here is the expression of an increasingly differentiated Iranian American-ness, multiply striated by a range of political alliances that cross-cut it with gendered, religious, and personalized identifications. The styles of expressing this involves a variety of media forms, and partly ends up drawing on difference as it has tended to be produced in creative and cultural industries, that is, as a commercial and/or a "post-political" moral good.[51]

Notes

1. Launched by the new organization that was also set up in 2010 called the Iranians Count Census Coalition IraniansCount.org., "The Iranians Count Census Coalition Releases the Special Tabulation Results from the 2010 U.S. Census," http://www.iranianscount.org/ (accessed 29/11/14).
2. This slogan is recognizable from a host of other census campaigns directed at racial and ethnic minorities in the USA, including campaigns for undocumented immigrants, whose numbers are known to be underestimated in official counts, just as is the claim of many about Iranian Americans, especially in California.
3. See NIAC's promotional brochure for the whole text Iranian American Census Project "It's in our Hands; Stand up and be counted" http://www.niacouncil.org/images/PDF_files/census%202010%20brochure%20english.pdf (accessed 29/11/14).
4. Iranican, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgoLjFJ0rVg. (accessed 29/1/14) The official PSA video for the campaign was a more serious one than the more humorous production, Iranican, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgoLjFJ0rVg (accessed 29/1/14).
5. See, for instance CNN's coverage: Blake, John, Arab- and Persian-American campaign: 'Check it right' on census," http://edition.cnn.com/2010/US/04/01/census.check.it.right.campaign/index.html (accessed 29/1/14).
6. Racial covering on official forms, in particular, was associated by many with an additional factor of Iranian Americans being reluctant to give information to the US government. This is a tendency associated especially with the older first generation who mistrusted

the US government like they mistrusted the Iranian government, or thought that the information would not remain confidential. Similar explanations were given in the context of voter registration campaigns targeting older Iranian American citizens in the 2008 presidential election. As I show elsewhere in this chapter, issues around racial covering extends beyond aversion to official registrations and government data collections into contested everyday practices. However, it is relevant to note that this aversion to official collection of data cannot be reduced to older Iranians' generalized and misplaced distrust of government. A possible legitimate cause for concern about the use of census data about Middle Eastern Americans is that in 2004, The Census Bureau provided detailed information about Arab Americans to the Department of Homeland Security, as reported by Clemetson, Lynette for the New York Times http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/30/us/homeland-security-given-data-on-arab-americans.html?_r=0 (accessed, August 5, 2016).

7. Indeed, it is pertinent to note that the overall results of the 2010 census did not show any significant increase in the numbers of Iranian Americans who indicated racial difference. In fact, it indicated a decrease. For one analysis of this phenomenon see: Hosseini, Hossein, Iranian Americans and the 2010 census: did we shrink?" http://www.payvand.com/news/12/may/1170.html (accessed, 29/11/14).
8. As has been noted in a discussion of the civil rights movement and racial measurement in the USA, the use of the census as a tool for promoting proportionate representation of various racialized groups in schools and workplaces is modeled after its framing in this way as a result of the civil rights movement, even though goals of demographic institutional inclusion were a very specific form of minority inclusion that the civil rights movement itself did not originally have in mind (Prewitt 2004). Kimberly Crenshaw's (1991) critique of the way minority categories claimed by some racial identity politics projects exclude multiple axes of difference is also relevant here.
9. Formal racial categorizations in the USA on the Census are overseen by the federal agency, the Bureau of the Census, which as Yanow states, first heard substantial opposition to the categorizations and ways people were being counted since the 1990 census

(Yanow 2002). This led to certain revisions in certain category names and definitions. However, the definition of "white" according to the US Census has essentially remained the same since before the revisions were made up until the most recent census in 2010. Namely: "'White' refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East or North Africa. It includes people that indicated their race(s) as 'White' or reported entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian." According to the "Definition of Race Categories Used in the 2010 Census" in a report issued by the Census Bureau and compared to the pre-1990 definition given by Yanow (2002).

10. My use of this term is inspired by Omi and Winant's classic work, first published in 1986, on race in American society, which was influential for seeing race as made through a dynamic historical process of social construction rather than a static or strictly biological thing (Omi and Winant 1994). I also follow in line with these and other authors who, by pointing out how race has always been constructed with relation to culture rather than biology, analytically privilege the use of "race" over "ethnicity."
11. For perspectives on the workings of contemporary American and Western European racism that foreground this shift toward a so-called post-racial world that denies racism as a problem (or a problem only of a past when racism was exercised through overt violence), see for instance, Lentin and Titley (2011), Bonilla-Silva (2011), and Goldberg (2009).
12. The election of President Barack Obama as the USA's first black president reenforced this post-racial framing of the debate about racial discrimination in the USA. The fact that this president is also one who furthered military intervention and sanctions in the Middle East under the banner of the "war on terror," national security, and democracy has complicated implications for the position of Middle Easterners in the USA. Securitization and militarism are not *about* race, but their consequences take shape along racialized lines on a regional scale. This carries over to experiences of racial discrimination in the USA, to which numerous examples from my respondents in testify.
13. See the extensive work that Betty Blair has conducted on personal name-changing by Iranian Americans in the USA, which I return

to later in the context of class and racial categorizations in the USA (Blair 1991).

14. The show later became *Nightline*.
15. I return to the issue of anti-Arab sentiment and the positioning of my respondents later on in the chapter. Here, I interpret the meaning of this statement as referring to being generalized as Arab Americans because of the stereotypes that Arabs have been burdened with in the context of relatively recent association with terrorism. The phrase may also refer to ignorance about the fact that Iranians do not make up the linguistic region commonly referred to as the Arab world because Iranians speak Persian.
16. Some who grew up outside the city also help this stereotype about Iranians living in LA, and expressed surprise as to how accurate these stereotypes could sometimes be. First-generation young Iranians held similar general views about their second-generation counterparts.
17. One of the main reasons why this show was able to cause such opposition even before its casting was due to it being made on the model of an earlier program by the same network called *Jersey Shore*, a show known internationally for its low brow entertainment factor and portrayals of negative stereotypes associated with the descendants of Italian immigrants to the USA. The show was also an extreme success on MTV where it first aired.
18. With the show's release, these concerns were not immediately appeased by its content. However, it was interesting to see that the show's premise explicitly framed a tension between extravagant lifestyles and family obligations. From Shahdad's quote mentioned earlier in this section, and according to recurrent other statements from respondents, the family orientation of Iranian Americans is another strong association and stereotype that is mentioned as prevailing about Iranian Americans. The show seems to deploy them in combination, placing them side by side in tension. See also Maghbouleh's piece for Salon http://www.salon.com/2012/12/01/shahs_of_sunset_the_real_iranians_of_los_angeles/.
19. Not only entertainment but the international news coverage of Iranians in LA has also tended to focus on the great amounts of wealth, education, and entrepreneurship among Iranian Americans who migrated from Iran during the 1980s. For one of the most recent examples, see coverage on BBC news magazine: Amirani,

Shoku, "Tehrangeles: How Iranian Americans made part of LA their own," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19751370 (accessed 29/11/14).

20. As a gauge for the level of widespread attention for the controversy about this show, I should note that the blog posting I wrote about this issue received the highest number of hits compared to my other postings I placed on Iranian.com and I was even contacted by a journalist working for the Amserica.gov, a news site run by the US State Department that covered the controversy around the show well before its launch.
21. Also based on personal e-mail correspondence in 2015.
22. See also Maldonado on the racialization of labor (Maldonado 2009).
23. Farnia has traced domestic exclusion of Iranian Americans via an analysis of American empire and foreign policy toward Iran and in the Middle East, arguing that US interests with regard to Iran emerged as part of the same process through which Iranians were "peripherally racialized" in distinction from other Middle Easterners in the USA (Farnia 2011).
24. Most notably in the context of this chapter, these include the Public Affairs Association of Iranian Americans (PAAIA), the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), and Iranian Americans Across Borders (IAAB).
25. From her Instagram account in July 2014: "skinny is not something I strive to be. I'm happy with my body," Soltan Rahmati, Asa, http://instagram.com/p/qxZ8s0TJSH/ (accessed 29/11/14).
26. The book also describes the many ways she and her family stumble over being Iranian American as newcomers to the USA, and the ways she sees her parents as awkward, embarrassing, and atypical from the young age of seven and the ways she negotiates her own Iranian American-ness as she grows.
27. The "propaganda" Asa mentions points to the problem of racialized post-9/11 media representations. However, both her and Duma's experiences in (high) school are recollections from a pre-9/11 childhood.
28. http://bigthink.com/experts/porochistakhakpour.
29. Along similar lines, in earlier work on Iranian refugee women in the Netherlands, Ghorashi writes: "Dominant images of femininity

in Dutch society shape the perception of migrant women as 'the victimized other.' According to these images, Dutch women are modern and emancipated, while Iranian women—as women from the Middle East—are seen as oppressed and traditional. Such stereotypical perceptions not only disregard that in every society some women are 'modern' or 'progressive' while others are 'traditional' and 'conservative,' but also ignores the struggle of these Iranian women activists against traditional ideas in Iran. In this way, these women face a new burden they did not expect, namely the dominant stereotypes of Middle Eastern women, in which they are seen as dependent and passive victims (van Baalen 1997; Lutz and Moors 1989; Spijkerboer 1994). This construction of an 'imagined other' can be seen as part of a process of othering of the Orient, which Edward Said (1978) named 'Orientalism' (see also Jansen 1996; Lutz 1991; Spijkerboer 1999)" (Ghorashi 2005).

30. Khakpour, Porochista "The Others," http://www.guernicamag.com/features/khakpour_11_1_11/ (accessed 28/11/14).
31. For more work on the impacts of Congressional Bills, INS practices, and law enforcement policies after 9/11 on Middle Eastern men in the USA, see reports by Cainkar (2002, 2004).
32. Mashouf TV, "Diatribes of a Dying Tribe," http://mashouf.tv/?p=6 (accessed 1/12/14).
33. This is very similar to Kasintiz's account of the emergence of the identity of "Asian American" and "Latino" in the American context among the second generation of a variety of different immigrant groups with different experiences of migration (Kasinitz 2004).
34. The piece also appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* and the *New Yorker.*
35. Pan-ethnicity is also something Neda Maghbouleh has spoken about for a podcast for the Ajam Media Collective site mentioned in the previous chapter http://ajammc.com/2014/08/19/neda-maghbouleh-on-the-limits-of-whiteness/.
36. This raises interesting questions about how (second-generation) Jewish and Christian Middle Eastern Americans experience the developments described here.
37. The pronunciation of the title as Fatwa (decree issued by a Sunni or Shia Islamic religious leader) and the use of the spelling of the slang word Phat (cool) is a play on words ("Phatwa") at the junc-

tion of language commonly used in hip-hop music and language commonly associated in the West with radical Islam.

38. The Narcycist has since decided simply to go by the name, Narcy.
39. She also says that this is done in ways that are under threat by dominant commercial interests that seek control over internet media.
40. Rugger Productions, "Black Saffrom," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mf0eq9101w (accessed 29/11/14).
41. BoomGen Studios is a successful media bureau based in New York City, through which Aslan's collaboration took place on the *Prince of Persia* project. The bureau is described in an online business profile as: "Continuously collaborating with emerging and established talent, BoomGen Studios functions as an incubator for powerful ideas with mainstream commercial potential—projects that align with the company's mandate of creating media that effectively furthers the social discourse between the "Western World" and the "Muslim World" while staying committed to mainstream commercial appeal and profitability." http://www.indeed.com/cmp/Boomgen-Studios (accessed 28/11/14).
42. The compilation was very similar to the short compilation made based on Sara Sadat-Hosseini's book, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. One of the panelists, Ahmed Ahmed, was Arab American comedian who was also active in challenging stereotypes of violent Arabs in his "axis of evil" international comedy tour, which included Maz Jobrani.
43. See also the discussion of use and reframing of nationalist Persian histories in Chap. 2 on heritage.
44. Debates around the "digital divide" originally revolved around the disparities between people's access to technologies in more versus less developed countries, featuring problems of racial and economic inequality, but has since come to include discussions of disparities within countries, including developed countries (Selwyn 2004).
45. Behnaz's negative experiences with the FBI were something she shared with me at the time of my field research. However, in the publication phase of this manuscript's development, Behnaz informed me that she does not want any of the details of her experience documented here or elsewhere. For this reason alone, I have removed information that would identify her. While this has come

at the cost of the detailed description of her story and the links to web material, my decision has been to prioritize Behnaz's own sentiments about the published text. The wider analysis I present is based on the details of this case taken together with the others I describe, but some of the details of this particular person's case have been left out in accordance with her wishes.

46. According to Essed this takes place in the third stage of migration of which she says there are several. The first is characterized by "a rock-solid belief that one will return: the only question is when." This stage is succeeded by a stage in which migrants start to focus more on their improving their position in the new country. And third—the stage referred to above—is characterized by an increased interest to not only participate in the new society, but to also take responsibility for it. "This is not only true for the ethnic group they consider themselves part of … but also for society as a whole, and not only for questions of ethnic relations, but also for the environment, disarmament, the neighbourhood, or the position of old people" (Essed 1997). This has parallels to the activities and ways of thinking demonstrated by several of my respondents. While I do not mean to suggest that this third stage has only started with the second generation, cases like Behnaz's and others I met suggested to me that second-generation members are most optimally positioned to participate in American society from this vantage point. Essed's stages of migration highlight the shift "from looking back to planning the future." Halleh Ghorashi's (2002) work on first-generation Iranian immigrant women also highlights the significance of this shift in the dealings of migrants—though she sees it as less of a uniformly staged process than a strategy of her migrant women subjects. The focus on the future that involves not only participating in society but contributing to the quality of it—presumably in line with some societal ideals rather than an ethnic minority agenda—seems to be the intent of my most involved respondents. There are as yet very few examples of this in practice as Iranian American representative bodies tend to be dedicated to (the votes/contribution money of) their ethnic constituencies.
47. According to their account, the existence and cordoning off of "bad diversity" in practice "is integral to the reworking of the multiculturalist ontology after the failed experiment" (Lentin and Titley 2011). In other words, the significance of publicly defining

what kind of diversity is bad or unacceptable is a consequence of the proposition that the multi-cultural experiment has failed. This is particularly discussed with relation to the context of the European Union, where this failure has been declared in clear terms by heads of state and opinion makers. I see the relevance of this idea in the ways people are positioned with relation to the American nation. Good diversity accepts and promotes the narrative of the inclusive multi-cultural nation and bad diversity is that which highlights a history of exclusion of successive new minorities and continues, in this case, with Muslim and Middle Eastern Americans.

48. Negar preferred to remain anonymous in the context of this topic, which is why I chose not to include any details about her.
49. With the rise in popularity of this musical genre, white rappers have taken the stage since the 1980s and through the 1990s into the present (Hess 2005). Kelley also notes a rise in popularity of gangsta rap among white suburban consumers in the post-LA rebellion political climate.
50. Understanding the way internet media is involved in this process has been focused mostly on the use of internet by Muslims; see the extensive work of Gary Bunt (2000, 2003), and ethnic groups that have very different historical migration trajectories than Iranians in the USA (Brouwer 2006). Less so has this work engaged directly with the notions of race and racialization in increasingly internet-mediated everyday circumstances (for exceptions, see Leurs and Ponzanesi 2011; Leurs et al. 2011).
51. “This does not invalidate celebrating diversity as a normative commitment, and nor does it suggest that the diversification of public imaginaries is not crucially important. However it raises questions about the constructions of diversity which proliferate, and whether the rapid ascension of diversity as a post-political commitment is because the centrality of cultural difference as a prime social aesthetic constructs it as sure-footed political territory, a made-over version of what Ghassan Hage has described as “global middle class multiculturalism” (2003)” (Titley and Lentin 2008: 21).

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CHAPTER 5

The Green Movement

The much-anticipated June 2009 Presidential elections were set to take place in Iran while I was conducting fieldwork in LA. I could not have predicted that the outcome would become the most hotly contested outcome of an Iranian election, and kick off a historic social movement. In the immediate aftermath of the election, I saw from my vantage point in LA how the hashtag #iranelections reached the top of Twitter's trending topic list,[1] becoming what Negar Mottaheddeh describes as "the first long-trending international hashtag in Twitter's history" (2015).[2] This indicated the enormous relative scale of text and image content about the election and the burgeoning protest movement it had sparked being distributed on Twitter during that period. It was apparent right away that social media applications like Twitter played a central role in how my respondents were engaging with the latest developments in Iran on a day-to-day, sometimes hourly, basis. As el-Nawawy states in his discussion of the international news coverage of the 2009 elections, "the news media, particularly Internet, webcams, blogs, and Twitter, played a critical role in the coverage of this election and its aftermath" (El-Nawawy 2010).

Beyond helping people to stay updated on the unfolding events from a distance, however, social media produced an important sense of identification with those in Iran for Iranians outside the country. Alexanian states, in her examination of "how Iranians have used social media to connect to the events in Iran as a form of activism and in the performance of Iranian identities," that "the use of social media became central to the emerging narrative about the potential for revolution or social change" (Alexanian

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D. Alinejad, *The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness*,
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2011).[3] Mottahedeh similarly highlights the "sense of simultaneity and solidarity" (2015) with what came to be known as the Green Movement (Jombesh-e Sabz) after the campaign color of the candidate opposing the incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Through this surge of attention and solidarity, I also noticed that "the internet," certain social media platforms in particular, as well as a wider range of technologies primarily including encryption software, took on a newsworthy status in themselves. This was also a time when stories about certain technologies came strongly to the fore of coverage and analyses provided by a range of broadcast, print, and online news, including sources with more niche audiences such as tech blogs.[4] The election aftermath and the street protests that ensued became a global media event, and analyses of this event were intimately tied up with analyses of social media platforms' potentialities for revolutionary change.[5] My respondents, themselves, were also highly aware of the extent of their own reliance on various web platforms for staying updated, finding themselves in a situation that was completely new to them, one in which a major social and political upheaval in Iran was taking place in their lifetimes.

The literature on web platforms and the Iranian, and other recent social movements in the Middle East, has discussed important roles that social media has taken on with relation to the international audiences of these movements (Manoukian 2010; Sreberny and Khiabany 2010; Hirschkind 2010; Alexanian 2011; Mottahedeh 2015). In Iran, in particular, the ban on Western journalists in the country meant that to a very large extent, social media was what brought this movement into being for distant audiences. As Manoukian points out in the case of Iran and the role of digital media during the 2009 uprisings, the coverage of the events by protesters through social media not only created a space for expressing dissatisfaction and discussing dissent but also played an important role in reporting the events to wider audiences (Manoukian 2010). This (self-)reporting role shaped how the movement came to be perceived by the outside world, and social media representations of the movement were essential to how it was made "real" for these audiences through mediation.

> [M]ediation penetrates current forms of political action to the extent that relevance and even "reality" are measured by the media traces actions leave. Photographs, videos, and blogged testimonies are what made the protests real, especially for distant spectators. (Manoukian 2010)

If digital media contribute to the "reality" of the protest movement for those following from afar, how does this shape how they might identify with those movements? Considering the Iranian diaspora specifically, through what kinds of digital media uses did they come to experience it? And what did this mean for a generation of young Iranians, many of whom had relatively little prior political engagement with Iranian democracy. In this chapter, I present an account of the process through which this protest movement became a part of my respondents' lives, and how this phenomenon was situated within their wider practices of social media use.

Smartphone Videos and the International Formation of "The People"

Apart from Twitter, the videos of street protests filmed by participants/"citizen journalists" were the initial media products that drew the attention of the international press and audiences worldwide. They largely depicted dramatic and spectacular images from the scenes of protest, and the ensuing crackdown in Tehran streets by state authorities, including a great deal of violence exacted against the bodies of protesters. The following is a blog posting I wrote on my fieldwork blog on June 11, 2009, about social media and the street protests:

> For a moment, I saw into the face of a riot policeman up close through his transparent plastic mask as he rushed the camera-person, who then turned and started running with the rest of the crowd—the camera still filming but shaking to the point where you could only see some feet, some people's backs, the ground, and hear the screams of a woman: "don't hit, don't hit." More and more of the established news agencies are airing these home-made clips since foreign reporters were ejected and banned from the country in the days following the initial uprising.[6]

Like so many of my respondents, the videos I watched during this period mobilized very strong emotions. Whether they were posted to YouTube, or uploaded directly to Facebook, they shared the same amateur style (often shot from street level within the protests or people's apartment buildings with their commentary to one another). The often dramatic urgency of the events being depicted (e.g. physical attacks on non-violent protesters), and the fact that these visual accounts together constituted a quantitative sea of footage uploaded and shared online made these videos

a key part of how the movement was received in LA. What they also shared was that they were likely all shot with mobile phone cameras.

Among my respondents, there was a veneration of those who were doing this documentation as brave, accompanied by added attention for the mobile, networked electronics devices that were allowing them to do it. One of the most popular political cartoons that circulated on Facebook among my respondents and in the news media at this time was one that appeared in various different online and print publications at the time. The two black and white figures whose speech bubbles we read are mullahs standing on a balcony overlooking a mass of protesting citizens who are all holding networked mobile devices with screens showing Twitter, Facebook, and e-mail, many of whom are holding up mobile phones to take photos. One of the Mullah's says angrily to the other, "Expel the correspondents!" The other's exasperated response is, "But they are *all* correspondents!!" This cartoon was also referenced by Mahasti Afshar in a talk she gave on September 8, 2009, in the panel discussion, "New Politics, New Media," given in front of a full house at the USC's Annenberg School of Journalism alongside co-panelists, Mike Shuster and Roger Cohen.[7] She commented at the time that, "the green movement tagline has become 'you are the media.'" The narrative that people, themselves, were the media in this case was a recurrent element of the mainstream coverage of the events in the press that most of those in LA had access to.[8] This seemed to pose social media as one and the same thing as the person using it. Social media was presented as the perfect channel for mediating the movement.

> In 1979, Khomeini disseminated tapes secretly. In 2009 the opposition used cell phone and online media. The difference between those two media uses actually spells the difference between the essence of these two movements. In '79 one message was preconceived and disseminated secretly through mosques and bazaars. In '09 a message evolved in real time through accidental leaders and regular people having a conversation. The open friendly social media represented the democracy people wanted. The tapes in 79 were about one charismatic leader that dictated a message. End of conversation, beginning of dictatorship.

The comparison between Iran of 1979 and 2009 garnered much analysis during this period. And in the aftermath, scholars of big and small media continued this probing. Media scholar, Annabelle Sreberny, states that seen in historical continuity with the "small media" of 1979 (leaflets and cassette tapes that were highly consequential in the revolution)

"internet has just become the newest site of contestation and the latest set of technologies to offer an alternative mode of communications to those directly controlled by the state" (Sreberny and Khiabany 2010). Naficy[9] argued regarding the post-election Iranian protests that, "be they old or new, mass media are not in and of themselves sufficient to create revolutions." He emphasized that the tragic failure of the movement to achieve its goals suggests that contemporary Iran lacks the political, economic, and social conditions that increase the probability of revolution, rather than any media technologies.

Whether historicizing or essentializing the movement, mobile devices and social media made the hardware/software combination that was deemed the quintessential media for conveying the message of the movement. In narratives circulating in LA (and probably elsewhere), this was largely attributed to its possibilities, relative to other small or mass media, to circumvent authoritative dissemination and government control. Imbuing these technologies with this association likely shaped how their products were viewed by these audiences, adding to the already strong sense that what was being seen was a genuine people's movement. The experience of my respondents as having access to certain unfiltered information and moments of dramatic documentation, reinforce this notion of internet offering access to (the perspective of) "the people."

I see a relation here to the notion of "the street" as defined by Hirschkind (2010) in his discussion of the role of blogs and other digital media in Egypt. Hirschkind discusses how in the midst of political repression by state Egyptian forces, social media applications offer unique analogies of "the street," doing this through the use of new language forms and video styles. This has similarities with Doostdar's argument about the emergent (speech) genre of blogging (Doostdar 2004), which also analyzes the implications of the use of colloquial as opposed to formal language in (digital) written form, which transgresses the conventions of formal written and is similarly deemed "vulgar." Doostar[10] mentions his respondents finding this genre a more "authentic" mode of expression. However, Hirschkind argues that blogging in Egypt represents not simply an "authentic voice of the people" (2010), rather this style is effective because it distinguishes itself both from an authoritarian government discourse and from the pedagogical styles of persuasion of Islamic political parties through "written colloquial."

Of further relevance, he argues that the blogging genre cultivates and objectifies "the experience of a violated national subject" through

a variegated montage of video representations of acts of state repression (Hirschkind 2010). In the case of social media covering the Iranian protests, a similar sort of collective montage was created for diaspora YouTube audiences (among others). These media products, considered individually and as a whole, offer the aesthetic of an unprocessed version of developments compared to other available outlets (in particular, television news broadcast formats with their voiceovers and headers). While the blogs of US-based news outlets were important for background and analysis, the video footage, photographs, and evocative Tweets shared via social media (sometime tweets were shared on Facebook in cross-media sharing) mobilized visceral responses from the users. Indeed, Naficy[11] calls the digital video production of Iran's Green Movement an "embodied production mode" that results in the "raw footage of affect." The aesthetics of this digital corpus, built by varied independent producers, creates the experience of having a direct, unedited sense of important instances as they are shared online.

This imagination of an embodied mode of production on the producer's end, and the striking images and sounds conveyed (such as protest marches of millions of people in Tehran streets) shapes a reified understanding of "the Iranian people" for the consumers of these videos. However, this category of "the people" was itself subject to heated contestation in this post-election period, where both Ahmadinejad and Moussavi claimed to be the rightful representatives of "the people" (Mottahedeh 2015). With a historical perspective that draws on Manoukian's work, Mottahedeh argues that the category of "the people" specifically arose in the Iranian context (*mardom*) during the 1979 revolution, in contrast to the "crowds" of the riotous constitutional revolution of 1911 (2015).

In 2009, the videos shot by mobile devices brought "the people" as an entity into being for a global audience, and it was largely undisputed who was referred to here—the Ahmadinejad supporters that constituted large masses of people in the streets were not the focus here. This particular quality of social media, more generally in this case, is something Morozov touches upon in his observations about the role of digital media in reporting during the Iranian protest. In a discussion of the implications of social media usage for the role of traditional foreign correspondents, Morozov sardonically suggests that many saw Twitter as giving Western audiences the possibility of "finally unshackling ourselves from the inherent biases of cigar-smoking and Martini-sipping white men" (Morozov 2009). According to this assumption, media seem to promise more direct

access to this distant pro-democracy movement by virtue of relying on user-generated content from participants in the events themselves.

"The people" were constituted in terms of an Iranian nation, but emerged first and foremost in the international imagination as a force in defiance of the Iranian state. And this was possible due primarily to the international mediation of crude video images and control-circumventing tweets produced from the perspectives of seemingly random demonstration participants. In this sense, "the people" were indeed themselves the media channeling the message of the Iranian movement abroad, including to the diaspora. With this nationalist orientation and state-centered project, how did my second-generation respondents come to identify with "the people" of this movement? In the following I discuss the ways in which some of them participated in the flurry of social media communications during this period.

Transnational Identification with the Movement

A few of my respondents and their friends voted in the 2009 Iranian Presidential election with absentee ballots. Pouneh and Taraneh were two of them. It was the first Iranian election in which they were eligible and interested enough to vote, and they joined the hopeful atmosphere inside the voting location on June 12, as long lines of voters formed, a BBC radio reporter interviewed people, and young people showed up in Green clothing. Having cast their votes for reformist candidates, Pouneh and Taraneh's hopes and involvement in the Iranian elections, along with those of many of those who had spent their afternoon together after voting that day, changed sharply to disappointment and dismay soon after.

After some surprise and disappointment at hearing the results in favor of Ahmadinejad, the clear first sign of outrage about the actual vote-counting process I noticed was a Facebook update from one of the young men who had been at the voting station. He posted that the election had been announced already via Iranian state television, a matter of hours after the voters in LA had gotten back home. This was followed by the widespread circulation of a photograph of the televised graphic statistical breakdown showing Ahmadinejad's 63% final lead.

In her research on internet and diaspora politics, Bernal suggests on the basis of research on the Eritrean diaspora's engagement with political web postings that internet is not simply facilitating communications that pre-existed internet, but that it is "making possible new kinds of com-

municative spaces and practices." Bernal argues that "new ways of practicing Eritrean politics" develops through websites that engaged with news and analysis inside Eritrea. The growth of studies on LA Iranians reflects an increase in "cultural" organization, in contrast with long-distance Iranian politics, given that in this context anything "political" was deemed divisive and even dangerous because of its associations with the Iranian regime and political landscape (Shahidian 2000; Ghorashi 2004; van den Bos 2006). However, this is increasingly displaced by more explicitly politically oriented organizations that define "politics" in terms of US party and electoral politics and encourage new forms of participation in the USA (Motlagh 2008; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Ghorashi 2007).

Alongside this, there is a context of increased diaspora political engagement with Iran, not within the framework of the old political factionalisms that emerged around the revolution and tend to delineate much of diaspora politics, but within the framework of "civil society" and "human rights." Internet becomes an important part of this in the way it is publicly promoted and covered, and also in the way it is put to use through transnational diaspora networks (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009). Attention for internet in the Iranian diaspora's involvement in politics has also included the significant number of bloggers outside Iran contributing to the Persian language blogosphere (Kelly and Etling 2008). Research on internet and the Iranian diaspora has also focused on the first generation or has been non-specific with regard to generation (van den Bos 2006; Alexanian 2011).

When it comes to the web use for long-distance political engagement, the second generation's practices have remained largely under-studied (McAuliffe 2007; Alexanian 2011). While the relevance of Alexanian's pertinent argument is clear here in that the diasporic engagement with this event via social media was a performance of Iranian identity. In this particular case, this event and the media through which it was engaged with by the second generation brought a new (dimension of) Iranian diasporic identity into being for this generation. That is, the novel "spaces and practices" for political exchange that opened up via social media also relied on the mobilization of Iranian-ness for a new generation. The situation reflects Sokefeld's (2006) discussion of diaspora political participation in which he argues that social movement theory is useful for understanding how members of the diaspora are formed through their political involvement.

> As identities become politically effective only when they are employed and endorsed by a certain number of people, we have to ask how these people are *mobilized* for such an identity, how they are made to accept and assume it. Rather than being regarded as something that from the outset provides continuity and fixed structures for social life, as in primordial approaches, identity becomes an issue of movement and mobilization. (Sokefeld 2006)

The particular forms that solidarity took in this context can, thus, be seen as mobilizing Iranian-ness through the ways certain symbols of the movement circulated. I saw this taking shape through how the colors and styles of street protesters in Iran were depicted visually and adopted in the LA (media) environment. The three images in the figure below are examples of Facebook profile pictures that the bulk of my respondents adopted during the protests. Both the form and content were adopted based on the demands and styles seen in the Iranian street protests. The color green that had been the campaign color of Moussavi's supporters was adopted as the color of the movement as a whole that rejected the outcome of the election, distrusting the process as having been fraudulent, and demanded to know what had happened to their votes. A few of the photographic images of the protests appearing at this time took on iconic qualities, partly due to the intensity with which they circulated via social media as well as print and broadcast news channels. They depicted some of the common visible practices associated with the movement in the mainstream international media, including the way in which protesters adorned green headbands and wristbands, how some protesters covered their faces, and of course their amassing physically in public urban spaces.

In LA, street protests were called as well. These were typically called for via a Facebook event page, and I noticed how the student protesters that stood in the LA demonstration site adorned themselves with the same markers as those depicted in the photographs we had all seen online. I saw and photographed street protesters in LA with the recognizable placard slogans, colors, and head/wristbands. I also noticed that some people started choosing green profile photos with a black diagonal strip on the top left corner. There were also profile photos appearing that consisted of a completely black background and a green strip in the top left corner. These appeared around the time when the first deaths of protesters were being reported, and people began adapting their social media avatars to symbolize their respect and solemnity for those in the movement who had lost their lives. The strip adorning the top corner

of the black square avatar suggested the practice of tying strips of cloth around the head to make a headband. These online and offline practices, in which the second generation could readily participate in one way or another, were arguably the primary mode for large numbers of those outside the country to actively position themselves with relation to the Green Movement. I saw this as what Baubock describes as a transnational politics that diaspora wage in relation to a "homeland" (Baubock 2009), and a politics that was waged through specific, recognizable styles. These mobilized the second generation's participation at a key moment when many of them felt compelled to engage for the first time in Iranian political developments.

This event also put some of my respondents in new relation to their friends/contacts, as it also drew solidarity from their non-Iranian peers. Some of these young people came to be seen as authorities on relevant news and perspectives on the developments at a time when being Iranian was relatable and "cool" by virtue of the young, technologically savvy, urban image of the movement underway in Iran. After all, this was a moment, as one of my respondents called to tell me one day, when American Apparel stores in West LA were handing out free t-shirts to their predominantly young, fashion conscious customers with the words Free Iran (*Iran Azad*) emblazoned across the front of them in both English and Persian. My respondents felt called upon by the Green Movement to engage with Iranian politics in their own way for the first time. The international appeal and recognition of certain styles associated with the movement was what mobilized them to position themselves in solidarity with the movement through practices that merged seamlessly with their existing (social media) practices and symbolically made them a part of the same movement as those protesting in Iran. This included the adoption of the English translation of the key slogan—Where Is My Vote—that protesters in Iran had themselves provided. This engagement also merged with their wider practices of producing their political selves as pro-democratic and humanitarian, and developed in accordance with the generally very positive messages that circulated about the movement more widely and in their direct environments. In this context, some of my respondents also began to express the ways in which their relation to this historic moment was very different from the positioning of those inside Iran. And beyond the initial peak of solidarity, I noticed my respondents giving different meanings to the social media platforms they were using than in this initial period. This signaled the emergence of some modes of social media

use that grappled with the difficulties of mediating political identities and making connections with the movement in Iran via social media.

Screening the Movement

For some of my respondents, Facebook became a serious and urgent news space in this period. This was a change from the dominantly apolitical and casual social media fare that characterized their experience. For Taraneh, this changed her Facebook experience to the extent that it was difficult for her to go back to the way she had used Facebook before. As the events in Iran subsided and her use of Facebook began to go back to normal, she considered deleting her account as going back to her previous use of the platform felt too shallow. She was not the only one for whom Facebook had, during this period, temporarily changed from a frivolous space for everyday socializing to a serious one. Hakha talks about the extent to which his Facebook usage became more politicized because of the influence of the Iranian uprising, but he also refers to the period of the 2008 Obama presidential campaign in the USA, less than a year earlier when talking about his first experiences with politicizing his Facebook use. Some months after the Iranian elections, this is what he told me how he responded to a question about whether his Facebook feed had become more politicized in the past months.

> No. Well … at some level, yes. Because American politics has been really vibrant in the last year because of the presidential election and Obama and these things going on. But not anywhere the same intensity [as the Iran coverage on Facebook]. … Every single video is so dramatic—you can just go to my Facebook page—it's up and down. Since then things have calmed down at some level, but they're punctuated by spikes on certain days. I still look everywhere for things that are useful and repetitive and actually show what's going on back home. Just because people aren't in the street it doesn't mean things aren't happening within the clerical leadership or the maneuvers by the government. So those are things I still share in case there's anyone in my Facebook community who's interested. So I actually get comments.

Hakha also mentioned how he still actively collects material from Twitter and different websites, posting links to this information on Facebook "so that it becomes viral, and also for it to be resonant," among his over 1000 Facebook friends. His Facebook use seeped into other his engagement on

(social media) platforms and outlets for news in this time. He looked back on the recent peak of the events and his engagement with news online:

> Blogs also. I was feeding for anything. Just through Google news and Google blogs you can go a lot of places. Through Iran News Digest. Some of the Facebook pages of people—political people. The comments on news articles. The comments refer you to another place. I just kept following it. Takes you all over. I spent a lot of time doing that.

Hakha invests time and energy in following the news and then writing status updates that synthesize information and express his opinion. I noticed later on that this characterized his Facebook use more generally, but as he also told me, it was intensified around Iran at this time. He mentioning noticing when friends would pass along the short texts he wrote, saying that he appreciated that people were listening and spreading the word. These kinds of reactions seem to keep Hakha invested in the task of informing others about what is going on in Iran, and taking Facebook seriously as a meaningful space in which to continue investing emotionally and politically. The recent political events seem to have intensified Hakha's investment, so much so that he expressed an implicit awareness that he might be going overboard for some of his friends who did not share his level of interest. But he was not concerned, as he knew those friends could "hide" him if they wished not to see his posts.

For many of those I spoke with, the events in Iran changed the way they related to Facebook. While for many this change expressed itself temporarily, a close look at some cases shows how the experience made them reflect on how (un)suitable their Facebook spaces/networks were for intense political engagement. On the one hand, the relatively frivolous social basis for accruing Facebook friends over time had created an audience and a pool of information to draw on for posting about Iran. At the same time, however, this base was an imperfect fit for the purpose of intensive political engagement. And the use of Facebook during this period demanded adjustment, either on the part of friends or themselves. But having this pre-existing network was of key importance to social media's role here.

This was perhaps demonstrated most clearly in Taraneh's attempts to use Twitter during the height of the "Twitter Revolution." She told me about her first serious attempts to start using Twitter once having heard a lot about its importance for Iranians on the news. She started an account

and started "following" the main Twitter handles reported via blogs and other sources circulating at the time. However, she soon neglected the account, saying its use felt strange and unfamiliar to her, especially since she had no prior connections (followers/others to follow).[12] And so, she did not know how to assess and trust the information she ended up receiving this way. Feeling impeded in branching out at this crisis period, more people seemed to feel restricted to social media practices they were used to, but pointed out how this was limited in the kinds of opinions and information it exposed them to.

While social media were used feverishly by most of those I spoke to during this period, some also expressed feeling something lacking. Facebook's social spaces came to be seen by some as echo chambers, as they observed the strong circulation of many of the same videos and articles, accompanied by similar personal commentary and lacked much critical analysis, reflection, or accurate and nuanced understanding of what was going on. One second-generation graduate student commented on Facebook that her university department's mailing list was in fact a more fruitful space for thinking about the events than Facebook during this period. In the following interaction between three female friends, Facebook was itself also used to raise this issue. Amitis also expressed concern about the limitations of YouTube's spectacular depictions. She was skeptical of the kind of news that the video footage of street protests was able to highlight. She said:

> Online, when you see stuff it's decontextualized. And people are drawn to certain images; hyper-exaggerated images, not the mundane; not the day-to-day. But those [the day-to-day] are the things that are creating change.

This concern by Amitis reflects her awareness of the particular affordances of web applications like YouTube and Twitter (with their focus on the visual and on instantaneity and brevity) and how these may limit the access she and others outside Iran have to the developments. What I saw happening was a shift from treating social media platforms as part of an immediate experience of the movement to experiencing a shallow and limited engagement from which a contradiction emerged between the frivolity associated with the platform and the seriousness of political conflict. This seems to have been overshadowed in early stages by the urgency and shock of the events around the street protests, and possibly also the narratives in the news narratives about a "Twitter revolution." But this gave way to distrust of the apparently limited perspectives that social media were fram-

ing. The transnational solidarity that had been put into practice by the diaspora in attempts to amplify the pro-democracy, civil/human rights-based message of the movement online with the help of certain styles was later accompanied by a heightened awareness of the diaspora's distance from Iranian society, even as they had probably never felt closer to it. My second-generation respondents identified with the movement from this complex positioning, reflecting how the screens of the digital devices were not only instrumental in making the Green Movement real for them but also experienced as barriers, obscuring certain elements of the movement from them by not letting them through.

This was exacerbated by their reflection on the vastly different relation their social media use had to mainstream news media than the social media use of those in Iran. Justin was another young person who posted actively about the green movement on social media, but also viewed the mainstream news coverage in the USA as reflecting double standards, and mainstream American political agendas, with regard to the Middle East. In an e-mail exchange around this time he explained:

> I think media images of Muslims have improved very little since the aftermath of 9-11. Even though coverage of Iranian protesters may seem like an improvement of representation of Muslims, coverage of crackdowns of Iranian protesters has been completely disproportionate with coverage of the recent deaths of Palestinians and victims of US drone attacks in Pakistan to name a few. It seems the media only gives legitimacy to struggles in the Muslim world that oppose US targeted regimes.

To differing degrees I also heard the second-generation followers of the events through social media, mainstream news sites, and combinations of both sources, question the pictures they were seeing. On Facebook, his blog, and in person, Pouya cautioned overlooking the significance of the mobilizations by the government in the months after the protests, as he observed that there were still so many people—perhaps a majority of the population—that were not only supporters of the Islamic Republic but of Ahmadinejad. With the purpose of furthering analysis based on the actual political situation in Iran, he shared videos of these mass street gatherings in support of the Islamic establishment on his Facebook page as a way to draw attention to what was left out of the coverage of the post-election movement by the Western media and the "citizen journalists" whose videos went viral on social media. Pardis' experience in Iran during

her holiday visiting her family over the summer also reflects concern about the social media hype and its exacerbation through its uptake on televised news outlets in the USA. After returning to LA a few days prior, she expressed surprise at the difference between the atmosphere in the locale she had spent most of her time versus the atmosphere upon return to LA.

> I was in Tehran. And I was also in some area of *shomal* (the north) for a while. And then we went to Garmsar which was the total opposite of all the stuff you see on the TV. They were dancing in the streets when Ahmadinejad was elected and even before the election there were so many people, young people of my age, older people, so many people advocating for Ahmadinejad. And the TV and media here doesn't even show that. And if I wasn't in Iran I wouldn't even believe that. And if I didn't go to Iran I would have been one of those people on the streets protesting for us to have foreign intervention and for America to go and help Iran and do this and that. But when you go there and see that these people don't really want a revolution, maybe not yet anyway, you're not going to go stand on the side of the street with those people here because you know that those people there don't really want that yet. If I wouldn't have gone to Iran, I wouldn't have known that. I would have just gone on whatever I see on TV, I wouldn't have really delved deeper to find a better answer, because CNN and all these TV outlets were showing what they showed. And I think a lot of people don't really use their resources to really delve deeper. Only because I went to Iran, during this time, when I came back I have a different outlook on that. Maybe in that way my image changed, because I thought whenever there would arise a chance for a revolution to come about and kick this regime out, I thought everybody would be united and everybody would want it. Even in Iran and outside. I thought everybody would want it. But that's really not the case. It's really not the case.

Bakardjieva's complementary notions of "amplification" and "reduction" take us some way in understanding how social media serves to mediate certain qualities of the movement over others (Bakardjieva 2005). She posits that technological mediation involves the reduction of some aspects of the mediated object while amplifying others, stating that, for instance, "the person experienced through the telephone is brought to me across a great distance [amplification] at the expense of being reduced to a voice [reduction]" (Bakardjieva 2005). The account I have presented here also complicates this model by showing how the experience of mediation is dynamically caught up in the times and places in which it takes place.

They indicate the intricacies of matches and mismatches between the media practice and the kinds of connection it is meant to mediate. Gershon's "media ideologies" (2010) are useful in this regard, which basically refers to how people use specific media forms according to the meanings of the particular messages they want to convey (Gershon 2011). The examples I have discussed takes this concept beyond inter-personal interaction and to the realm of how the notion of a collective such as a social movement in the "homeland" becomes part of the imagination of a diaspora and how a new generation experience their connection to it as direct, immediate, or "real." One important dimension that social media brought to my respondents' sense of connection with the movement in Iran during this intensely transnational moment was the temporally "live" experience of the events. In the following I show how I saw this mobilize certain kinds of participation with relation to the movement.

Simultaneity and the Live-ness of Being Online

In a conversation I had with Taraneh during this period, I asked about whether the connection she felt with people in Iran had strengthened because of the protests and her following them. She said: "No. It only reaffirmed it, but it's not like I felt it deeper, because I [already] felt it *so* deeply before." In this conversation Taraneh also brought up her feelings about the killing of Neda Agha Soltan, a young woman whose death during the protests was caught on a mobile device and circulated internationally via internet, turning her posthumously into an iconic figure for the protests. Taraneh stated:

> I feel really close to that [the event of Neda's death] because I was really stressed, especially since she was young. But there are people here who take it way too far. All these "I Am Neda" posters, and "I Am Neda" bracelets. I'm like, no, you are not Neda. You were sitting in your home, safe, in the US. You're not Neda. Your cousins may potentially be Neda, or you may potentially turn into Neda when you go to Iran, but you're not Neda. Stop acting like, *toham enghad shoja-i* [you're as brave]; like you're in the streets. That made me really mad.

In line with the experiences described earlier about a sense of distance from the political situation in Iran, Taraneh is clear about a lack of physical proximity she and people around her have to the unfolding events. And

she expresses this acknowledgement of distance as part of her connection to those in Iran, not in spite of it. She even went on to say that even if she were present in the street protests, her participation would be different than those for whom this election's outcome effects the freedoms of everyday life. She expresses a sense of being removed not only from the locale of protest, but also from the social and political context in which these events take shape and the longer-term circumstances they shape. For Taraneh, someone who grew up in LA visiting family in Iran from time to time, her social media use at this time reinforced her diasporic position of solidarity from a distance. The sense of shared Iranian-ness does not overcome a heightened awareness of lived distance. In this section, I argue that social media did less to produce a sense of proximity for my respondents and more to afford a connection through the sensation of a distant, collective simultaneity.

Levitt and Glick Schiller have called for theorizing simultaneity in the lives of transnational migrants and how their daily rhythms and activities correspond to life and practices across borders and space (2004). They acknowledge the processional nature of transnational migrant life, with its ebbs and flows "in response to particular incidents and crises," also specifically mentioning, for instance, election cycles.

> Studying migrant practices longitudinally reveals that in moments of crisis or opportunity, even those who have never identified or participated transnationally, but who are embedded in transnational social fields, may become mobilized into action. (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004)

Such a heightened sense of simultaneity strongly characterized the experiences of many of my respondents during this tumultuous period, including members of the second generation who had previously had little involvement. It was perhaps most intense in the lives of those for whom staying up-to-date about the Iranian political scene was not only a personal and emotional preoccupation but also a professional one. Golnoush, Editor in Chief of the news website Tehran Bureau, was one of these people. In a report published by NPR on June 29th, Golnoush's experience was described in the following way:

> In the past week, Niknejad has barely left her computer. She is completely disconnected from the suburban reality on the other side of her living room window. "It's like a screen to me. It's like maybe a picture on the wall.

> What's happening here doesn't engage me anymore." Then pointing to her laptop screen, Niknejad says, "to me—that's what's *real* right now."

Taken in the context of earlier remarks that Golnoush made on the phone to me about her connection with the journalists in Iran with whom she works, this experience does not suggest a traversal of space. Rather, it is precisely the "virtual" status of her operation that makes her acutely aware of the implications of physical location. Golnoush pointed out how Tehran Bureau's status of being located outside Iran but operating in part inside the country is new, uncertain, and experimental. She described herself as staying up at night, wondering about the implications of the work of the site inside Iran. She went on to say:

> We want to be credible and have good connections. Good, so that we should be able to get a quote from people about something important when it happens. The problem is that when I wanted to get credentials for our correspondent in Iran, they told me that we were not registered anywhere under the jurisdiction of any laws because of the fact that our agency was online. They didn't see us as a legitimate agency because of our online publishing rather than print publishing. But despite this, one of our correspondents says that he wants to go to Iran and write for us even though there may perhaps be problems with *Ershad* [Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance].
>
> What surprises me at times is that sometimes people think certain things are not controversial. There is one woman who often tells me that to her writing about certain things is fine, even when I think it might be problematic. She was writing about certain taboo topics that I thought serious enough to mention to her that it might cause problems for her being in Iran. But she said it was okay and didn't see it as a big deal. Another correspondent wanted to know whether it's dangerous to be doing certain reports, but I have to just tell him that I don't know how dangerous it will be because these things are up in the air right now.

Golnoush's account recognizes the barriers and boundaries of operating transnationally between Iran and the USA and the uncertainties that accompany it. But the sheer bulk of information she was receiving during this time compressed her attention for the events going on there up to the minute. As she explains, at some point, she started sharing information via the Facebook and Twitter accounts of Tehran Bureau, because of the constant updates that she did not have time to process comprehensively. TB's Facebook page shared information they received from trusted sources

inside Iran.[13] The evocative reports convey the sense of emergency associated with first-hand updates about beatings and arrests.

The international reliance on not only Twitter but also on high quality, journalistic "liveblogging" sources in English was what made Tehran Bureau so important during this time (Alinejad and Mutsvairo 2015), including for my respondents. With the speed of incoming new information online, some told me that their speed of reading in Persian was too slow to match their impassioned interest in following reports in real time, demanding a fast-paced mode of staying up to date with changing information. Arash, for instance, told me about sources they consulted such as The New York Times' blog, The Lede and Andrew Sullivan's blog for The Atlantic called Daily Dish. The photo blog Tehran 24, the popular site Tehran Bureau, and the cultural blog Tehran Avenue were all English language sites that posted content from inside Iran during this period as well, and which my respondents either talked about visiting or posted links to on social media. An important dimension of this was the relative independence it afforded the second generation from the first generation, since outside such an urgent and global news event, parents would more likely be the first to find out about and pass on information via their closer contact with family members and friends in Iran.

The "live-ness" that social media engagement made possible was also evident in moments that made the time difference between LA and Tehran palpable. For instance Sepideh followed the frequently updated, English language Twitter account of "mahdi." After posting regular tweets until three o'clock in the morning in Iran, mahdi announces that he is going to sleep and makes an appeal to his followers to "Please keep #IranElection trending topic on top,"[14] which was something some of my respondents tried to help to do by re-tweeting information apparently shared from the scene of events and using the hashtag, #IranElection as well as related hashtags. Mahdi's call was indicative of how closely many were following the events, some staying online until late at night and returning online again early in the morning to check what had occurred in the meantime. The English language postings contributed to keeping the Iranian election trending globally.

The reports on Twitter significantly slowed down in the middle of the night, Tehran time. And this feeling of following Tehran time enhanced the sense of simultaneity despite the nine-hour time difference from LA. And even Twitter's technical maintenance on the site followed the cycle of Tehran's days and nights.[15] This live sense of engaging with events

as they unfolded and also at the same time as others were trying to make sense of them mobilized a strong feeling of camaraderie. It meant that people wanted to come together to talk about what they were seeing, reading, and feelings. And so, Facebook events started circulating to hold vigils, and solidarity gatherings locally.

This was especially a time when first and second-generation peers inhabited the same spaces and events, interacting about common interest in the fate of those in Iran. At one of these vigils, a few of my second-generation respondents showed up to sing protest songs side by side with first-generation students who had relatively recently migrated from Iran, as well their older family members. One elderly woman said her grandchildren had brought her along since she had not heard about the event on account of not having a Facebook account. Here the key media was the microphone that was passed around to amplify the voices of those who had stories and updates from contacts in Iran, and statements of solidarity to share, which were amplified by the speakers. The same speakers that would shortly afterward be connected to a sound system that played the music to *Yaare Dabestani* as people lit candles and swayed along to the rhythm. This song was the unofficial anthem of the movement, and was sang and played at gatherings in LA around this time. Taraneh told me she was able to sing along, because she had learned the lyrics on Youtube. Such events created a moment in which many of my second-generation respondents were highly adept at immersing themselves, and the sense of simultaneity that Twitter and English language liveblogs in particular offered was key to connecting them to the movement in this way.

The collective engagement with the news was not only social in the sense that it led people to want to interact to make sense of them, but also affective in the sense that people described having visceral bodily reactions to hearing the latest reports. Taraneh's status update on Facebook on June 14 stated that she had "an intense headache that pounds harder every time she reads the news" about Iran. This was the kind of connection that tied moments of her life to events in Iran in the instant that she learned of new (ostensibly negative) developments. This reinforces the sense of simultaneity under the stressful circumstances. The knowledge from face-to-face gatherings and online communications that this immersive experience was being shared at the same important moments by large numbers of other people, including one's peers, was a source of feeling connected not only to the movement in Iran but also to others in one's vicinity by virtue of the same modes of engagement with the movement, followed in real

time. It was interesting how the role of the telephone played into this, as phone communications emerged in understated instances, contributing to the experience of simultaneity. In one instance from June 15, Mahdis reposted to Facebook a tweet by a journalist covering Iran from outside the country, which referred to what she had just heard via phone:

> @GEsfandiari—People shouting in Tehran now on rooftops "We Don't Want a Midget Dictator" [referring to Ahmadinejad] Heard it myself over the phone (you can't kill our humor).[16]

The phone is a channel here to what is going on "in Tehran now," a message that is then transferred to social media and spreads online. Indeed, the trusted connections with those inside Iran that had already been built were drawn upon via the phone in this crisis situation, where there was a premium on getting reliable information quickly. I was sitting with Pouneh and a group of her friends when her parents called to update her on the latest they had heard from family members by phone. Once she had hung up, she immediately relayed what she had heard to the group. Whether through phone chains like this relying on family relations in which phone conversations were a more usual practice, or via social media postings about the content of phone conversations, the integration of the phone within the immersive experience of events added to the sense of simultaneity with Iran. At the same time, such communication was complicated by the circulation of cautionary stories about the need to avoid political topics over the phone for fear of phone lines being tapped, possible repercussions from the state, and unintentionally putting loved ones in danger.

The intensity of engagement at this time was not only exceptional in the sense that it disrupted many people's usual everyday social media patterns. It also temporarily disrupted and intensified the pace and practice of doing fieldwork, such that the aim of looking at everyday media practices seemed overshadowed by a task closer to looking at practices of the hour and minute, rather than day. The compression of time during this period drew my respondents into varying degrees of identification with this movement. Not through giving them the idea that they seamlessly became a part of it, but through participation in a collective and located set of media practices online and offline, together with others around them, at the same moments. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly discuss two interesting social media practices that I noticed at this time. These reflected social media practices that were familiar among the second

generation prior to the movement's rise in Iran, and which became integrated into their online solidarity.

Co-hashtagging and Sharing YouTube Remixes

It was clear that some of my respondents saw it as their responsibility to help keep international attention on the events in Iran, conceiving of international audiences as a potential deterrent for the Iranian government's further brutalization of protesters. Some of my respondents explicitly called for this goal. For instance, when pop icon, Michael Jackson's, death began to trend on Twitter, Mahdis called for keeping the Iran election hashtag trending by combining #Iranelection with popular hashtags related to Michael Jackson together in the same tweet.[17] Interestingly, she also used Facebook to post a status update calling upon her friends on that platform to participate in this strategic cross-tagging practice on Twitter. This can be seen as an instance of how van Dijck has argued social media platforms not only shape usage, but also leave room for users to twist around the inscribed usages (Dijck 2013). The hijacking of a hashtag like #MJ, which was having a sudden drastic peak in popularity, in order to raise the media visibility of an unrelated topic is a form of hashtag that goes against the usual grain of Twitter use. It is not only unintended by the platform's design, but a practice that also reflects a fluency with the logic of the Twitter platform itself—knowing how a rising hashtag can be latched on to and how this might be a more effective way to spread one's message than uses intended by design. Beyond a particular technique of using Twitter as a platform, this practice shows the relevance here of the claim Wasik makes about virals:

> If there is one attribute of today's consumers, whether of products or of media, that differentiates them from their forebears of even twenty years ago, it is this: they are acutely aware of how *media narratives themselves* operate, and of how their own behavior fits into these narratives, that their awareness feeds back almost immediately into their consumption itself (emphasis original). (Wasik 2009)

Hence, this can be seen as an instance of a wider attempt at intervening in how the mainstream news cycle is shaped by social media trends. It assumes a relationship between Twitter and broadcast news that had been longer running, but presumably exacerbated in a situation where news correspondence from Iran was sparse. It also reflects the propensity of the

cumulative content of a hashtag like #Iranelections toward being molded and developed by users in unexpected ways.[18] Given the relatively heavier use of English language Twitter hashtags outside Iran than inside Iran, #Iranelection can be said to have been shaped by the diaspora and international audiences more than protesters in Iran.[19]

Co-hashtagging #Iranelection with a tag like #MJ was also an attempt to use pop culture to reach audiences that were not already interested in the events in Iran by virtue of being Iranian or having a specific interest. A hashtagging practice like this also placed my respondents' engagement with the Iranian protest movement within a broader context of more mundane and familiar practices of everyday social media use. But perhaps the most evocative mode of social media use demonstrating this embedding within common conventions was the proliferation of YouTube remixes.

Watching the many YouTube videos from the Iran events, I noticed that as the original protest footage circulated online it quickly became adapted, built-upon, and developed into what can be called a genre of its own. Interactive multimedia audio-visual montages of a popular protest movement were circulating while these events were still in the process of unfolding. These productions often combined protest footage with a soundtrack and photographic stills, and utilized a mode of montage fit with the broader remix culture that has developed on YouTube more generally. That is, the use of materials from previous Youtube videos to create video tributes or parodies that reference the original and are posted to the same platform. In the case of videos of the Iranian uprising, videos that are repeatedly used in these practices of montage and collage appeared to be ones that already had the greatest circulation due to having gone viral and having been broadcast by mainstream media channels. The tragic video of the young woman, Neda Agha Soltan, who was shot and killed on a Tehran street while walking toward a protest gathering was perhaps the most exemplary instance of this phenomenon of a web video "going viral" and being subject to remixes in the process. Mottahedeh documents over 900 videos of Neda on YouTube, which includes these kinds of reproductions (2015).

These montages were not only created as web videos. They were also present in the images people printed and displayed on placards at demonstrations. One such placard placed Neda in a printed collage of other protest scenes of violence against young, unarmed protesters and photographs of beaten, bruised bodies. This was evidently intended to invoke the solidarity of LA protesters with the green movement's fallen and battered victims. The image of Neda's bloodied, lifeless face was taken up

by countless news media outlets. LA-based and other Iranian musicians and artists wrote and produced songs in her honor as well as in solidarity with the movement. The role of this particular "viral video" was highly significant in the cycle of media production that included a vast array of professional and non-professional media producers.

Arguing for digital media's capacity to make users into DJs, media theorist Lev Manovic emphasizes the importance of the collage-/montage-making role of digital media.[20] In this perspective, the potential of remixing of elements of media in a new way is what creates an "aesthetics of new media," based on riffing and spinning existing content. Indeed, from what I observed, such remixing and/or aggregating of digital content through the process of partial digital reproduction was an important part of how social media applications were used to build solidarity through mobilizing emotions. And they drew on older, familiar practices of making collages of printed images and the kinds of televised musical montages in films and music videos.

The speeches given, music played, and the printed collages on placards all displayed in gatherings show how digital audio-visual material transferred to other settings and forms of communications rapidly, and creates a fluid traversal of content between the initial raw digital video content of the events in Iran that went viral, the remixes that reflected a more charged modification and circulation use of this material, and the offline productions circulating in dedicated collective spaces emerging in LA at this time. This range of digital and non-digital media forms is used to communicate not only what is going on in Iran, but also how audiences in LA should receive it. The music, the chants, and the repetition of the same/similar content over and over in various forms, together indicate to audiences what is important and what parts of it they should collectively feel moved by. These mash-up style videos might have allowed their producers to express their emotional engagement while adding value through their creative alterations. But what I saw was that for a much wider group of people these images, stories, and sounds mobilized networks of emotional empathy and solidarity through their intensive circulation across different platforms and social spaces.

Conclusion

Many have commented with hindsight about the Iranian Green Movement having been the precursor to the uprisings of the "Arab Spring" that were set off across the Middle East and North Africa in the years closely following 2009. Social media platforms played roles of varied import in all of

these developments, often having first been uniformly heralded internationally as the quintessential media of social change. This mirrored how at the height of the Iran protests, Twitter was considered by a great deal of the Western journalistic coverage to be "the medium of the movement."[21] As some observers noted early on as well, this had much more to do with Western journalists and news audiences who were used to collecting and disseminated information about Iran via Twitter than about the role of social media in mediating the organization of the protests.

In Iran, despite repression, Green Movement activists and public figures have far from disappeared from social media in the meantime. And the connections its leading figure claims to the later movements of the region are perhaps clearest in the following account by Bajoghli and Keshavarzian:

> In the midst of the eighteen-day Egyptian uprising that culminated in the overthrow of Husni Mubarak, the leader of the Green Movement, Mir Hossain Mousavi, wrote on his Facebook page, "The starting point of what we are now witnessing on the streets of Tunis, Sanaa, Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez, can be undoubtedly traced back to the days of the 15th, 18th, and 20th of June 2009 when people took to the streets of Tehran in the millions shouting 'Where is my vote?' and peacefully demanding that they get back their denied rights." A popular chant shared on Facebook and later in protests in Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Rasht drew parallels between the events in the region and the frustration of some of the Iranian protesters: "Tunisia could do it, but we couldn't" (*Tunis tunist, ma natoonistim*), referring to Tunisia's ability to bring about a revolution following its protests. (Bajoghli and Keshavarzian 2016: 179)

In the context of the developing relationships between social media and the movements in this region—a relationship that is far less sensationalized today than it was during the period I studied—uses of and narratives about social media continue to change. Highlighting the liberating role of social media has apparently fallen out of favor with Western audiences as the repressive violence of counter-revolution, civil war, and various forms of (state) terrorism take their toll on revolutionaries. It is with these developments in mind that we may continue to historicize earlier reactions to the role of social media and social movements, including their international representation to Western mass media audiences.

In this chapter I took the period shortly leading up to the 2009 Iranian Presidential elections and the months that followed as a focal point, and

looked at narratives that emerged around web applications at this time in my fieldwork environment. I zoom in on this event/period not only because of its significance in Iranian and regional political history, but also because from the vantage point of my field site, this event placed social media in a new light, for both my respondents and I. This was a break with the self-evidence and invisibility of social media integration into many day-to-day media practices, and it made social media a hyper-visible part of the Green Movement. This global media event invoked a progressive and pro-democracy Iranian nation through the objectification of protest actions, drawing on discourses of universal human rights and popular civil rights movements. Replete with images of English language slogans, young women's faces, and representations of state violence and oppression by an Islamic state, the movement came into being for my respondents through a process of mediation. This was shaped by the styles of web media use that lent it political and emotional preponderance in my respondents' lives, and gave form to their acts of solidarity with it.

It is through these styles of social and political engagement that the second generation's experience of connection with Iran through web platforms was both intensified at this historic moment and developed in parallel to extended family relations. Some second-generation web users like Golnoush occupied a key role in doing this, because of a combination of their in-between American and Iranian positioning together with their use of web affordances for journalism, a case I go into further elsewhere (Alinejad and Mutsvairo 2015). Each in their own way, the members of the second generation I had befriended in the course of fieldwork, made sense of the movement by making sense of their media environment, by navigating a complex landscape of social and political meanings between the circumstances in Iran and their own context in LA. Their ways of positioning themselves with relation to Iranian-ness in this period was inexorably linked with their pre-existing political identifications, their specific modes of web media use, and their collective experiences within the spaces of the city they inhabited.

Notes

1. This status is reached by a Twitter hashtag when it has the most new tweets that include the hashtag within the 140 characters allowed in an update.
2. With 22,500 tweets posted with this particular hashtag per hour on June 16, and 221,744 tweets about Iran in general on the same day (Mottahedeh 2015).

3. This was based on her study of Iranians in LA and Toronto.
4. For instance, see: the Wallstreet Journal Evgeny, Morozov "The Digital Dictatorship," http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703983004575073911147404540 (accessed 29/11/14), or PBS:Rezvanieh, Farvartish, "Pulling the strings of the net: Iran's cyber army," http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/02/pulling-the-strings-of-the--net-irans-cyber-army.html (accessed 29/11/14). These stories included a focus on the surveillance and censorship side of internet in Iran, and also the role of internet in Iranian democracy (see e.g., BBC: Shiels, Maggie, "On Iran's virtual front line") http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8186761.stm (accessed 29/11/14), ABC News: Setrakian, Lara,"Iran's pres. candidates recognize the web as a go-to to win" http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/Mideast/story?id=7605453, (accessed 29/11/14), and the Washington Times, "Editorial: Iran's Twitter Revolution," http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/16/irans-twitter-revolution/.
5. Earlier moments like this included the Moldovan post-elections protests in which social media were also thought to play an important role, though those protests received a fraction of the international press coverage of Iran's Green Movement and "Twitter revolution."
6. Alinejad, Donya, *The revolution will not be tweeted* http://donya-onlocation.blogspot.nl/search?updated-max=2009-11-06T17:39:00-08:00&max-results=7&start=7&by-date=false (accessed 22/08/16).
7. Mike Shuster was an award-winning diplomatic correspondent for National Public Radio News who traveled frequently to Iran and covered the Middle Eastern conflict in his work. Roger Cohen was a British-born journalist and author with regular columns in the New York Times and International Herald Tribune, among which his writing as a correspondent based in Iran. Mahasti Afshar was an Iranian American observer based in LA who had lived in the USA for decades. She had directed various heritage conservation foundations and endowments, and held a Ph.D. in Sanskrit and Indo-European Oral Literature and Mythology from Harvard University. When I met up with Afshar after this event, she informed me that she had since started serving as Executive Director to PAAIA.

8. Mottadeh gives a very different meaning of the phrase, *Resaneh Shoma Hastid* (You Are the Media), when she writes about it in terms of people's physical bodies in Iran than online citizen journalism received by those in LA and elsewhere. "These three words, which appeared repeatedly on #iranelection websites, walls, posters, and images, marked a real shift in the context of the post-election crisis. The congregate in the streets was too dangerous. The security forces were aggressively engaged and the government's cyberarmy was monitoring social media. It was hacking accounts and redirecting websites. The state was eager to suppress the opposition's various protests and to restore quiet after the election. Protesters were being tracked, their mobile phones confiscated on the streets. This and the intermittent access to landlines and to stable and secure internet connections made the use of digital and handheld media unpredictable. Protesters themselves had to become the carriers of content. Their status updates and event announcements would have to live in them … and instead of being re-posted they would have to be delivered personally to everyone they met" (Mottahedeh 2015). These apparently different interpretations say a lot about the location of those receiving the message.
9. Keynote Speech by Dr. Hamid Naficy at Iranian Alliances Across Borders Annual Conference, November 2012.
10. While both Hirschkind's and Doostdar's research focus on blogs in Egypt/Iran highlights the different ways in which blog writing as a genre produces consequences in the national contexts in question, I am more concerned here with the transnational representations of a movement that social media mediate. The implications inside the Iranian context lie outside the scope of this research.
11. Keynote Speech by Dr. Hamid Naficy at Iranian Alliances Across Borders Annual Conference, November 2012.
12. Nevertheless, seeing Taraneh again in 2012, I noted that she had since become an avid user of Twitter, live tweeting the IAAB conference we both attended in November of that year. Her comfort and fluency with Twitter at that time was in stark contrast with the awkward and uncomfortable start she had talked to me about two years earlier.
13. It is noteworthy that these reports also include the status of internet connections and access to sites like Facebook, suggesting the

significance of these sites in communicating information beyond controls.

14. https://twitter.com/mahdi/status/2158594497?lang=nl.
15. Twitter made a decision to change the time of their scheduled routine maintenance in order not to disrupt the use of the site by tweeters in Iran. Reports circulated about the involvement of the US State Department in this decision by Twitter. I have touched on this elsewhere: Alinejad, Donya March 15, 2011 *The death of the 'Twitter Revolution' and struggles over internet narratives* http://www.arsehsevom.net/2011/03/the-death-of-the-twitter--revolution-and-the-struggle-over-internet-narratives-2/ (accessed 19/08/16).
16. https://twitter.com/GEsfandiari/status/2180471100?lang=nl.
17. The widespread proliferation of Michael Jackson's death was not limited to Twitter but seemed to also pervade Facebook, although in the form of memes. Taken from the Facebook Memology blog entry that covered the Top Status Trends of 2009 under the heading "celebrity deaths": "No celebrity death had as immediate of an impact on status updates as Michael Jackson's. Mentions of his name were 10,000 times higher on June 25, the day he died, than the previous day, and no other unexpected news event can compare to the burst we saw on that day. Despite the huge impact of this story, mentions of his name lasted only about a week, with a resurgence during his memorial 12 days later." Posted December 21, 2009 https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/facebook-memology-top-status-trends-of-2009/215076352130 (accessed 1/12/14).
18. See also work on tagging and "folksonomies" by Geismar that highlights the interactive, user-oriented, and participative notions around tagging practices within the context of the public's engagement with museum collections (Geismar 2013).
19. Another largely unknown consequence of these international connections is reflected in reports revealing that a "unit of the British intelligence agency GCHQ tried to influence online activists during the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests and the 2011 democratic uprisings largely known as the Arab Spring." Al-bassam, Mustafa, *British spies used a URL shortener to honeypot Arab Spring dissidents* http://motherboard.vice.com/read/gchq-url-shortener-twitter-honeypot-arab-spring.

20. Manovich, Lev, "Post-Media Aesthetics," http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/post-media-aesthetics (accessed 1/12/14).
21. Grossman, Lev, "Iran Protests: Twitter, the medium of the movement." http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1905125,00.html (accessed 1/12/14).

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The children of migrants now make up one-tenth of the American population, making their fate "enormously important to the future of the country" (Waters et al. 2010: 25). However, the bulk of theorization about second-generation migrants in the USA has tended to focus on describing and predicting socio-economic, labor, and educational success as various functions of "assimilation" within the country of settlement (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Kasinitz 2004; Waters et al. 2010). This has led some migration scholars to draw attention to lacks in theorizing how identifications as diaspora, ethnic, and second generation are formed (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Anthias 2009; Levitt 2009; Glick Schiller and Caglar 2013). Their work pays attention to how second-generation senses of belonging develop within transnational social fields, investigating how children of migrants are positioned relationally in dynamic ways in the course of their spatially and temporally situated lives. While mentioning the importance of new communication technologies, this body of qualitative work in migration studies has not yet yielded in-depth, long-term investigation of the specific ways in which digital media play into processes of identity construction for the second generation. Conceptualizations of digital diasporic formations that have emerged tend to be based on the study of web media in relative isolation from other media, and/or take for granted the pre-existence of diasporic identities rather than explaining how they are formed through digital mediation processes. And so, as I discussed more elaborately in Chap. 2 of this book, both within migration studies and media studies, there remains a need for ethnographically

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grounded theorizations of digitally mediated migrant identities and second generation-hood in particular. This need is all the more significant given that for the first time in history the children of migrants are coming of age in the current midst of what has been heralded as a digital era.

In this book I have sought to answer the question of how this new generation makes use of digital media forms as part of the cultural practices through which migrant second generation-hood is formed. And I have done so by focusing on the Iranian American diasporic context, presenting an ethnographic account focused on a set of second-generation web users and their everyday cultural practices of being Iranian American in ways that take shape both "online" and "offline" at once. I took LA as my field site because of this location's important status in the academic scholarship and the cultural and media topography of the Iranian diaspora, using this field location to situate my web research within the dynamic context of people's everyday social and political lives. My approach to "the internet" has been defined by an interest in observing and interviewing people about their actual practices of using a multiplicity of predominantly Web 2.0 applications, each with their own affordances, within wider social and media environments. This approach is informed by theories of digital media that see web affordances as knowable only via in-depth study situated within the cultural and spatial environments in which people take them up.

I focused on a specific set of young adult web users' practices pertaining to issues of Iranian American-ness without purporting to give an account that can be generalized directly to the whole of the Iranian American second generation, let alone beyond that. Even among my own group of respondents, new applications and devices came onto the market and people started to take them up during and after the time I conducted this fieldwork, at a rate that would constantly require fresh bouts of field investigation in order to stay updated. The account I present is therefore shaped not only by the particularities of the locale and my own positioning as a second-generation Iranian woman and young adult with my own web proficiencies (and lack thereof) but also by the particularities of the time at which I conducted this fieldwork. The strength of this account is precisely in these specificities, since investigating the peculiarities of these users' lives at this moment sheds explanatory light directly on the complex processes at work within them; processes that can, in turn, be related to wider theories and compared with other cases. In unpacking such terms as "diaspora," "identity," and "culture," some of the most

problematized notions in anthropology (of migration), I identified certain themes that generated most engagement, contestation, and self-reflection by the young people who I spoke to and spent time with in the field. I then honed in on and analyzed how they involved web media forms. The themes that emerged were memory, race, and the historic Iranian Green Movement of 2009, and I have dedicated a chapter to the discussion of each of them, respectively.

Chapter 3 is where I discussed memory and my respondents' uses of web applications for engaging with various aspects of the past. Focusing on certain practices of remembering through which the second generation makes the past their own, I showed how certain web practices make ritual, educational, and personal practices of remembering appealing to the second generation. Through a variety of media forms this generation connects intimately and emotionally to the older generation of Iranians around them through a combination of nostalgia and tradition, while also engaging in other web practices of criticizing certain historical narratives they associate with an older generation of Iranians in LA. This process takes shape within a broader media environment where the role of web media develops with relation to physical objects, including historical artifacts, books, and ritual altars, all of which turned out to have their own affordances for mediating the past. The chapter argued that through web media, second-generation users positions themselves within and against particular narratives about the past, as critical, active, and invested participants. The particularities of their engagements can be seen as styles of using digital media that integrate cultural production, digital media use, and feelings of belonging into a single, evocative experience of connection with a past that they relate to as at once their own and larger than themselves.

In Chap. 4, I discuss my respondents' ways of dealing with the long-running racialization of Iranians in the USA. Although the issue of race has only very recently started becoming an area of interest within scholarship on Iranian diaspora, questions of race are salient in how the second generation uses various forms of digital media to represent themselves. Concentrating on their practices of racial self-representation, I show how my respondents use applications like blogs, websites, and social media profiles to respond to mainstream media representations of Iranian-ness. In a context of high societal visibility (as Iranian, Middle Eastern and/or Muslim Americans), my respondents deploy modes of appropriating visibility using emerging categories of non-whiteness within discourses of multi-cultural inclusion

and diversity. This signals a clear break from the older generation's ways of organizing Iranian American-ness often by eschewing racial difference. It also shows the visual affordances of certain digital media platforms for representing race and racialized, gendered bodies. I argue that through the practices of my respondents, web media practices become inextricable from the active development of artistic forms and genres of stylized self-narration, which are used to combine claims to inclusion with compellingly conveying experiences of racialized marginalization.

Chapter 5 discussed my respondents' web practices around the rise of the 2009 Green Movement in Iran, acknowledging the dimension of the protest movement not only as a global medium but also as embedded in longer-running techniques of social media use. I argued that the role of social media in mediating the protests shaped how the movement came into being for the diaspora and other international audiences, and how the second generation was able to position themselves with relation to it through various styles of solidarity. The second generation's web practices during this period was comprised of actively making sense of the social media environments they were participating in, and creatively and emotionally connecting with the protest movement in ways specific to experiencing a social movement from afar through social media. These acts of transnational solidarity drew them into seeing themselves as part of a long-distance Iranian diaspora from a second-generation positioning.

Taken together, the discussion of these themes highlights the importance of the second generation's fashioning of Iranian American-ness in ways that appeal specifically to them, but connect them with broader notions of Iranian-ness and American-ness. These ways of styling web use and Iranian American-ness together are co-constituted by gendered, racializing, and socio-economic influences, as well as the phase of young adulthood they are in. These factors are not only determined by the American context's designation of such categories alone but also shaped by narratives about race, gender, nationhood, class, technology, and modernity that travel within an Iranian American transnational social field. Digital media practices are an integrated part of this layered process of transnational self-fashioning, in ways that both construct and cross boundaries of Iranian American-ness. In the remainder of this chapter, I elaborate the implications of what I have argued in the preceding chapters of this book by introducing the notion of second-generation digital styles in relation to concepts of diaspora, the second generation, and the role of digital media in societies of increasing mobility and communicative connectivity.

Digital Styles, Diasporic Selves

In her discussion of "digital diasporas," Jennifer Brinkerhoff raises a decades old and highly relevant insight from Clifford Geertz's anthropological study of dispersed religious groups. She traces this through a more recent discussion by Steven Vertovec of how religious diasporic consciousness is characterized by the adaptations that migration forces people to make to their previous practices and beliefs. And she refers to this within her conceptual discussion of second generations of diaspora online. She states:

> As early as 1968, Geertz summarized this change in diaspora consciousness as a shift of the primary religious question from "'What shall I believe' to 'How shall I believe it."' (Geertz 1968: 61; qtd. In Vertovec 1997: 283) (Brinkerhoff 2009: 36)

Brinkerhoff does not explicitly take this statement about the "how" of religious diasporic practice and belief further in her argument about diaspora and digital media. This is despite the fact that "lifestyle" appears as a recurrent, if mostly implicit, issue in her discussion of digital diaspora. The role of "style" also features in various degrees in certain insightful discussions of second-generation digital media use (see Leurs 2016), bringing together online writing genres with youth subcultural modes of living. I suggest that viewing the role of digital media as giving rise to specific formations of "styles" is a useful way of thinking about how diasporic identification processes are lived more generally.[1] In line with this, *digital styles* can be thought of as the media-technical and accompanying socio-cultural articulations of meaning that together call certain selves into being. These styles do not have any universal logics that accompany digital technologies but depend on cases of use.

As I have tried to show through the study of this ethnographic case, digital styles draw their particular appeals for the Iranian American second generation from the fact that they invoke particular recognizable eras and areas of place and time, and the particular (media) aesthetics associated with them. These styles are deployed for and by the second generation, hearkening to specific frames they recognize, despite (and sometimes precisely because of) the fact that these are very particularistic references. This points to how the social meanings of digital media are very much tied up with generations and can even be seen as defining generations (migrant

or otherwise). In terms of Mannheim's classic idea of each generation as a repository of prevailing ideas (1952), we can see the progression of generational cohorts as being formed through the uptake of certain kinds of media (at particular stages of technological development), in accordance with tacit, shared understandings of how they fit into cultural practices.

Influential notions of "networked" community, society, public, and self (Castells 2000; Wellman 2002; Boyd 2010; Papacharissi 2010) have helped direct attention to how social formations are shaped by new communications technologies. For instance Twitter hashtagging practices are thought to produce networked selves within loosely convened and fleeting publics (Papacharissi 2010), and certain kinds of publics are produced by virtue of the networked infrastructural characteristics of social media (Boyd 2010). My discussion has suggested that while a networked mode of connecting may be endemic to a variety of web platforms, we can learn interesting things about the textures and qualities of various forms of digitally mediated social connections, by looking at how they are digitally styled in accordance with ways of being that draw from other creative forms, genres, and conventions of production.

My account shows how styles of digitally connecting with the past, racial difference, and a protest movement rely on complex assemblages of digital media applications, physical objects, and bodies located in time and space in order to produce compelling experiences of the self and communities. Indeed, digital styles thus also refer to the material dimensions of mediation, which become apparent through embodied experiences with media forms. And this materiality becomes evident on various levels with relation to how it is perceived in contexts of use. My discussion has presented, for instance, the materiality of mobile phone devices used in street protests in Tehran, as entwined with the audiovisual materiality of a platform like Youtube and the genres of amateur video and homage-paying-collage that had developed both prior to and within the conventions of Youtube. And this in turn is seen as entwined with the materiality of the sensory experience of the user in LA for whom Youtube is the repository of videos like this, serving as a lens through which the movement comes into being, implicating them in the process through mobilizing feelings of solidarity (or aversion) that are expressed through gathering physically with others who feel and act similarly.

In this way I emphasize the inextricability of the different "scales" of materiality that McVeigh-Schultz and Baym discern in their analysis of social media affordances (2015) and how they feed into a coherent experience of mediation that forms the self in compelling ways. This might be a useful way of understanding the processes through which identity is mediated, and how the production of selves comes to be experienced as meaningful. That is, by looking not only at connections expressed online, but also at the broader technologies of styling the self in which they are embedded. Miller's account of the use of Facebook for styling the self in Trinidad draws on the emphasis placed on performativity by both Turkle and Goffman's seminal notions of the self (Miller 2011). I see digital styles as contributing to creating these experiences of the self and its relation to others in communities by appealing to people's sensibilities of how to live life as an Iranian American from the second generation. That is, the work that goes into producing a digitally mediated experience of the self (and its connection with others, my implication) relies on certain broader conventions of self-formation, or as Miller suggests, personal philosophies that research respondents have about the self and social media.

The digital styles I have discussed in this book appear as authorial, curatorial, fashionable, specialized, bricolaged, and urbane. Styles also imply more specific and capricious modalities than the conventions of genre denotes, rather digital styles can change as rapidly as trends in application uses rise and fall. And while I have hoped to show in this book that digital styles most often emerge as particularistic and niche, this does not reflect withdrawal into "ethnic" subdivisions or exclusive long-distance national loyalties. On the contrary, they are connected with, and vie for belonging among, a variety of other selves implicated within the Iranian American transnational social field. And this includes crossings and complications of Iranian American-ness.

This point is pertinent to the study of Iranian diaspora in particular, for which the notion of "exile" has been a prevailing reference frame, featuring in basically every discussion of Iranian diaspora identity, including some analyses of the second generation. Within this frame, the rise of digital connections between the diaspora and Iran have led scholars to claim implicitly or explicitly that digital connections are helping to overcome the condition of exile by re-emplacing people online, and relieving the national object of loss (Naficy 1998; Khosravi 2000).[2] My respondents demonstrated a much more varied range of applications, purposes, and motivations for accessing

the internet than is encompassed by discussions of long-distance, border-crossing communications and productions of de-territorialized “homeland” imaginaries. Rather, their transnational modes of positioning toward the country of “settlement” and “origin” are intertwined with one another, and the ways they are exhibited shift with relation to social, political, and technological developments taking place on various scales.

I introduced this book by describing why Sepideh did not consider the widely referenced Iranian American website, *Iranian.com*, a space that offered a sense of belonging to her as a member of the second generation. In this book, I have discussed examples of people from the Iranian American second generation reading and blogging on this site, and Graham and Khosravi (2002) have also discussed the site as an example of how “Iranian cyberspace” facilitates inter-generational communication among the first and second generations of the Iranian diaspora. Web applications can indeed be seen to afford emergent second-generation social spaces for interaction. But long-term immersive research among this group shows that web media are part of a process of forming identities and developing senses of belonging, in ways that rely integrally on particular styles of web usage and living Iranian American-ness. Beyond technologically conveying messages, these are compelling because of the subtle cultural cues they simultaneously mediate. In this book, digital styles are a way of understanding how the respondents find, produce, and constitute audiences that together imagine particular ways of being Iranian American that appeal to them specifically but also symbolically join them with others beyond the specificities of Iranian American-ness. The notion of digital styles argues that it is the style in which the digital communication takes place that shapes the contours and textures of these collective imaginaries.

Notes

1. “Anderson’s remark, made somewhat in passing, that communities are to be distinguished “by the *style* in which they are imagined” (1991: 6, my emphasis), hints at the importance of scrutinizing how the binding of a people into imagined communities actually occurs and is realized in a material sense” (Meyer 2009: 6).
2. Others question the relevance of the exile frame before the widespread proliferation of the internet in daily life, citing the degree of establishment and engagement of Iranian Americans in their new country (Bozorgmehr and Waldinger 1996; Bozorgmehr 1997).

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