Institute for Advanced Science,
Social and Sustainable Future

MORALITY BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

Contextual theologies and orientalism: a case study of a selection of iranian muslim weblog

Mahdie Ghanian¹*

¹ *Georg-August-University Gottingen, Goettingen, 37073, Germany.*
*Correspondence: mahdieghanian@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Anti-Muslim sentiment has been intensified since 11 September, in which Muslims are often considered as 'others', 'terrorist' or 'violent'. Although we are exposed every day about Muslims in general from media in the West we know a little about these issues from the eyes of an insider and how Muslims themselves narrate their religion. Cyberspace has created a new cultural space for public discourse through languages. **Methods**: This research investigates Muslim voices in cyberspace to show how Iranian Muslims represent their religion on their weblogs. The narratives of ten blogs written by Iranian Muslims were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The theoretical framework of this study is based on Edward Said's Orientalism Theory. Target blogs are written in English or Persian language. **Findings**: The result displays that although Iranian bloggers live in various Western countries, such as Germany, England, Canada, and the United States; they narrate and share their Shia culture and identity in their virtual pages. **Conclusion**: This research highlights how Iranian Muslims use blogs as a platform to represent their faith and culture, challenging the stereotypes and misconceptions prevalent in the West. **Novelty/Originality of This Study**: The study provides insights into how Iranian Muslims utilize cyberspace to narrate their own religious and cultural experiences, offering a perspective that contrasts with the often negative portrayal of Muslims in Western media.

KEYWORDS: blogs; iranian; muharram; muslims; ramadan.

1. Introduction

'The majority of Iranians follow Islam, which is divided into two main sects: Shia and Sunni. 'The differences between the Sunni and Shia schools of Islam arose from a dispute over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad after his death in 632 AD, as well as over the type of leadership that should exist within the Muslim community.' (Blanchard, 2010) 'This issue was initially resolved by the election of a companion of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, as the first Arab Caliph and his successor.' (Blanchard, 2010) 'While this decision was widely accepted by Muslims, there was a group that supported Ali bin Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, as well as the husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatimah. Ali played an important role during the Prophet's lifetime, but he did not have a senior position in the Arab tribal structure and was therefore ignored.' (Blanchard, 2010).

"Muslims constitute the second largest religious community in Germany after Christians." (Halm, 2013) "Sunnis make up the majority of the Muslim population of Germany (74 %), followed by Alevi (13 %), and Shia Muslims (7 %)." (Halm, 2013).

'As part of the Muslim community in Germany, these young people endeavour to interact with non-Muslim groups and explain their lifestyle. An example is 'Open Mosque Day', where traditional mosque associations open their doors to the general public as a way to build trust with non-Muslims.' (Toguslu, Leman, and Sezgin, 2014) 'In contrast, some Muslim youth may choose not to strive for recognition. They may feel that the non-Muslim majority will never accept their way of life and decide to stay away from public life in Germany, seeing German society as a negative and corrupt environment.' (Toguslu, Leman, and Sezgin, 2014) 'As a result, they may start to create their own environment where they feel safe from outside influences and temptations, while following their own interpretation of Islam.' (Nordbruch, 2010).

Eckert and Chadha conducted interviews with 28 Muslim bloggers in Germany, and their results showed that 'Muslims who are in a marginalised position in the country utilise blogs as a platform to create alternative spaces where they engage in various discursive practices. The aim of these practices is to define their own identities as well as to challenge and change dominant narratives in society and the media.' (Eckert and Chadha, 2013) Muslim minorities not only 'express views that differ from public opinion more freely in cyberspace due to the lower risk of social ostracisation,' but also 'build new social networks among fellow migrants as well as with German citizens.' (Kissau, 2008).

Whereas researchers have focused largely until now on how Islam and Muslims are represented in various news media, research that explores the issue from the perspective of Muslims as insiders are still rare, more precisely; research on different weblogs which has authenticity regarding their original first-hand information presented. Cyberspace especially Weblog pages provide a unique opportunity for minority groups like Muslims in the Western society in which their voice can be heard. In this study, I am seeking to narrate Muslim's voices on the cyberspace.

2. Literature Review

There are considerable Media studies that demonstrate the problematic nature of media representations of Muslims and Islam in the West without considering the dynamics of Muslim communities. A lot of these images construct negative representations and the stereotyping picture of Muslims sometimes linking Muslims with terrorism and violence.

'Issues such as Islamophobia, social distancing, and fear of terrorism often take centre stage in the news and dominate the media. The media's focus is often influenced by current events, and their reporting shapes narratives that can influence public views. However, these narratives often provide an in-depth perspective on events.' (Hassan, University of South Australia, and International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, 2015).

Categorization of these already established prejudices helps us to improve our understanding of the current situation of Muslims in western society. Migration, ethnic, racial and religious diversity are the bedrock of a multicultural society. Levels of Islamophobia, feelings of social distance and concern about terrorism are rooted in prejudice against Muslim in western society.

2.1 Islamophobia

Islamophobia recognizes Islam and Muslims as the 'minority of the worst', characterized by the 'behaviour of the least desirable.' (Vertigans 2010, 29). 'Islamophobia refers to a negative and hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims. It is a form of fear and lack of knowledge about the unfamiliar. In recent years, the term has become increasingly recognised and has become part of public, political and academic discourse.' (Hassan et al., 2018)

2.2 Social distance

'The concept of social distance describes the extent of emotional closeness and intimacy one feels towards members of different groups in society, and how this characterises their personal and social relationships.' (Hassan et al., 2018). According to Park, one of the early pioneers of the concept: 'Prejudice is the instinctive and spontaneous tendency to maintain social distance. In its early use, the concept of social distance was used to analyse 'race consciousness', defined as 'the mental state in which we are often suddenly and unexpectedly aware of the distance which separates us, or seems to separate us, from another class or race which we do not fully understand.' (Park, 1924)

2.3 Fear of terrorism

Since 11 September news about Muslims and Islam, has been placed in the centre of media news coverage. And mostly Muslims story has been linked with negative feelings or attitudes.

Altheide examines the role of news media in amplifying terrorism by highlighting 'fear and uncertainty.' She states that the media's role in spreading fear has become increasingly apparent since the United States 'discovered' international terrorism on 11 September 2001.' (Altheide, 2007) Altheide's research also examined 'how politicians used symbols to establish a link in the public mind that associated Iraq and Muslims with terrorism, as well as how the resulting fear was used to justify increased social control within the country.' (Altheide, 2007).

'Islamophobia is a term often used in a limited way to describe current forms of Orientalist discourse; however, it fails to accommodate diversity and ignores contradictions and semiotic tensions due to an ethnocentric framework that simplifies the view of the Other, assuming that there is only one interpretation of Islam.' (Saeed, 2007) As a result, such discourses that often appear in the mass media create a direct link between Muslims and fundamentalist ideologies.

2.4 Theoretical frame: Orientalism

The theoretical model in this research is based on the Theory of Orientalism proposed by Edward Wadie Said. Edward Said is a Palestinian literary theorist known for his work entitled Orientalism. In this book, he expresses his views on Orientalism and the study of Eastern culture. According to Said, knowledge about Orientalism is closely related to the imperialist society that shaped it, so many works were born to serve power (Said, 1978). 'The Orient is almost entirely a European construction, being a region filled with romanticism, exotic creatures, haunting memories, and breathtaking landscapes.' (Said, 1978) Said describes Orientalism as 'a way of understanding the Orient that is based on the special position of the Orient in the Western European experience. The East not only borders Europe, but is also the region with Europe's largest, richest, and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural competitor, and one of the most prominent and frequent representations of the Other. Moreover, the Orient has been instrumental in defining Europe (or the West) as an image, an idea, a personality, and an experience of opposites.' (Said, 1978) 'Orientalism reflects more of the culture that created it than the object of its target, which was also shaped by the West. Hence, the history of Orientalism has an internal consistency and an attack on the West.' (Said, 1978)

Said states that 'Orientalism as a whole stands apart from the East: that Orientalism only makes sense when seen from the perspective of the West, not the East, and this understanding is strongly influenced by various Western techniques of representation that make the East visible and real in discourse about it.' (Said, 1978) 'These representations were based on institutions, traditions, conventions, and agreed codes of understanding, not on the real and often amorphous East. The main difference between the representations of

the Orient before the end of the 18th century and afterwards (which belong to what I call modern Orientalism) is that the distortions in those representations became increasingly widespread in the later period.' (Said, 1978)

Edward Said has studied the subject of Orientalism with comprehensive knowledge and sufficient information. He does not accept the Western representation of the East. He believes that Orientalists cover social, political, ideological and economic goals into their work, and provide an image of the East which is in line with the wishes of governments and Western colonial societies. (Said, 1978)

3. Methods

There are many wastewater treatment technology options that can be applied. The main challenge is to select the most appropriate and efficient technology for specific environmental conditions. This technology must be adapted so that it can be implemented well. Some basic technologies that are often used in Indonesia include Anaerobic Baffled Reactor (ABR), Anaerobic Filter (AF), Upflow Anaerobic Sludge Blanket (UASB), and Aeration Pond (KA). The choice of technology depends on processing needs, environmental conditions, space availability, and the manager's ability to operate and maintain it.

This research uses a qualitative method with a content analysis approach to Iranian Muslim blogs. In the context of online culture, blogs play an important role and are a valuable source of information for social research, as they provide data that is both private and public. Bloggers can express their views, thoughts and religiosity through blog posts, so I chose blogs as the main object of this research and analysed the narratives contained in them. Using a planned sampling technique, 10 Persian and English blogs written by Iranians were analysed using qualitative content analysis methods. These blogs are mostly written by first-generation Iranians who have migrated to Germany, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom for employment or higher education. Access to these blogs was gained through Google searches and the Iranian Bloggers website.

A blog is a web page that resembles a personal newspaper, accessible to the public. Blogs are usually updated regularly, with content organised by time sequence. Blog content often reflects the characteristics of the author or their subjective views, where most blogs have a consistent train of thought and follow a particular theme.

'It is thought that the first weblog was created by 'Tim Berners-Lee' who at that time introduced a new website connected on the internet. Later, in 1996, the second weblog was introduced by 'Anderson Mark.'' (Behbahani 2004, 14). 'The first Persian weblog appeared around 2001, about five years after this medium appeared, by 'Salman Jariri,' followed by 'Hosein Derakhshan' who launched his blog.' (Behbahani 2004, 15). Among the weblog writers, there is a group of individuals who record their daily lives and share them through their networks. The features of the virtual space allow some people to convey their thoughts and ideas honestly, revealing their true identity, which may not be able to be expressed in the real world due to cultural restrictions or pressure from authoritarian regimes.

"Religious bloggers are often individuals who are considered talented writers, able to present compelling and persuasive narratives about their identities and their spiritual journeys. Meanwhile, people who are unable to share their own journeys tend to be consumers of the stories created by religious bloggers." (Nisa 2019, 11)

According to Shokrkhah, "Blogs can be seen as an alternative medium that, on the one hand, offers a different perspective from big media because blogs are not tied to power or wealth. Such blogs are often called E-zines. On the other hand, blogs that focus on personal experiences without being tied to political, economic, cultural or social issues are known as Me-zines." (Shokrkhah 2004, 21)

Accessing data from blogs is relatively affordable and does not require a recording or transcription process, as the information is already available in text form. This allows researchers to collect and analyse large amounts of data more efficiently.

'The essence of qualitative content analysis is to retain the advantages of quantitative content analysis while adapting it to a qualitative-interpretative approach. Qualitative content analysis places more emphasis on context and relationships, while still utilising the advantages of quantitative content analysis.' (Kosari 2008, 197) 'The purpose of content analysis is to provide insight and deep understanding of the phenomenon under study.' (Downe-Wamboldt 1992, 314) 'Blogs provide rich textual accounts of everyday life from a first-person perspective, but there are practical, methodological, and ethical challenges in conducting research on blogs. These challenges include sampling, collecting and analysing blog data; issues of representation and authenticity; and questions of whether blogs should be viewed as private or public media, and whether bloggers should be considered research subjects or authors.' (Hookway and Snee 2017, 1)

'As well as considering the ethics of citing material from blogs, researchers also need to be aware of copyright issues. If bloggers are recognised as authors, then they should be given appropriate attribution.' (Hookway and Snee 2017, 11) Therefore, in this study, ethical permissions related to sampling blogs, identifying authors, and citing material were carefully considered.

The sample of blogs is selected from Iranian Muslims weblogs and analyzed by the qualitative content method. The target weblogs are written in English or Persian language. All of selected bloggers are Muslim and Shias. The purposive sampling is based on researcher evaluation. Because the number of statistical community (the number of Iranian Muslim weblogs) is uncertain, since the number of these blogs is constantly decreasing or increasing, and there may also be a sudden change in the content of the weblog, so the method non- accidental (preferred and purposive) sampling has been selected. A criticism of purposive sampling is that the sampling frame is not clear and the researcher has access to a limited number of individuals or elements of the target statistical community. This selection is more based on the goals and objectives of the research thus it is more relevant to the subject of study "Units of analysis in the content analysis are divided into analytical units and content units. Analytical units are the subjects or people who are being studied in social science research." (Babbie 1990, 250)

In this research, the analytical unit is the weblog. The content unit can be a paragraph sentence, image, article, or any part of the content that can be defined in a specific time and physical constraints. (Riffe et al. 2019)

In this research, content units are weblog's posts and the categories are constructed inductively, according to the research topic which is Muslins narration of their religion, "once a minimal set of categories has been formed; these categories are used deductively to analyze the context of the text." (Kosari 2008, 197)

In this study, the content of weblog's post consists of three main categories. The first category is Ethic. The second category is Muharram and the third one is Ramadan. The second category is divided into two subcategories: 1-Mourning 2-Nazri

The Third category is also divided into two subcategories: 1-Fasting 2-Eftari

The first category (Ethic) is consisting of those weblog posts reflecting Islamic values and moral paradigms generally indicate the concept of good and bad in each person's behavior which typically generates must/must not borders that determine values such as right or wrong, virtue, justice in human behavior. Similarly, ethics comprises a set of individual and social behaviors. Therefore any blog posts that determining Muslim's moral affairs has been chosen in this category.

The second category is Muharram. 'Muharram means 'forbidden' because it is one of the four holy months in which fighting and warfare are forbidden.' (Black 2018, 132) 'Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar and is a time of great sorrow for Muslims because in this month Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the

youngest son of Fatimah and Ali, died at Karbala, which is now in Iraq.' (Hyder 2006, 87) This month has deep sacred significance for the Shia. Imam Hussein, along with 72 of his followers, was martyred by Yazid's forces during this month. Shias mourn and commemorate the death of Imam Hussein during this month. Nazri is food that is distributed for free to people as a form of charity to Allah. I grouped every blog post that contains content related to the month of Muharram in this section.

The Third category is Ramadan "Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset learning self-control and empathy for those in our world who live in perpetual states of hunger." (Black 2018, 139) It is obligatory to all Muslims to fast in this month. Fasted Muslims eat Eftari while opening their fast after sunset. As far as it was possible for me I tried to search for Iranian blog posts that contain concepts related to Ramadan month, fasting and Eftari.

Therefore, according to the content of weblog posts, the narration of the Iranian Shias about their religion put into the three above types, this is represented in the following shape:

Ethic	Muhharam	Ramadan
	Mourning	Fasting
	Nazri	Eftari

Fig 1. Key points in the Iranian Shia narrative

Among selected Iranian Shias blogs 3 bloggers residing in Germany, 3 bloggers residing in England, 2 bloggers residing in Canada and 2 residing in the US. Six of the bloggers were male and 4 were female. I selected blogs that present personal data, memories or emotional topics mostly those who concentrate on their daily life, Therefore, Scientific's blog, or those mostly with News, photos purposefully removed in this research. The blog I target in my studies is also updated at least once or twice in a month. These bloggers were often first-generation of Iranians who immigrated and settled down in foreign countries to pursue their studies or finding better job opportunities, thus they are very significant sources for the study of the Shia minority group in the Western societies. The following table is a profile of bloggers.

Table 1. Table of Bloggers' Characteristics

Comments	Occupation	Marital Status	Sex	Weblogs Name
Masud amir Khalili lives in Germany		Unclear	male	Philosophy of History
She lives in Germany		Unclear	Female	Woman Born Maku
She lives in Germany		Unclear	Female	Habashe
He lives in England		Unclear	Male	Vatan
She lives in England		Unclear	Female	Aghaghiya
He lives in England	Employed	Married	Male	I'm Muslim and Iranian
She is 30 years old and lives with her family in	Student	Single	Female	Moonlight

Southern California.				
He lives in America	Employed	Single	Male	Still vague and uncertain
Ershad Hoseini is 23 years old and lives in Canada		Single	Male	Islam religion
He lives In Canada	Employed	Married	Male	Red Cross

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 First axis: ethic

This part which is the first axis of my studies, I am narrating the Ethical content of Iranian Muslim weblog's Post. Ethic discusses the traits that construct human personality meaning that drive him away from evil and sin based on the Islamic value system. Although moral assumptions are immensely relative and different from culture to culture still religion has been very important to provide special frameworks for human beings. One practice might be acceptable in one religion and culture while prohibited in another. For example, I can address the alcoholic drinks such as wine which is strictly forbidden in the Islamic religion, while might not be an issue in other religions.

It is customary among Muslims to base their moral Ethics according to Hadiths which are narration from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Imams passed on Ummah generation by generation. Author of the weblog I'm Muslim and Iranian states a narration from Imam Ali:

Imam Ali Said: There is no greater wealth than wisdom, no greater poverty than ignorance; no greater heritage than culture and no greater support than consultation. (I'm Muslim and Iranian weblog, 12 March 2020)

So, as you can see, 12 Imams, especially Imam Ali, who is the first Imam has a special place among the Shias. The Shias not only narrate the hadiths of Imams, but they set them as a role model in their lives.

A Muslim submits to God's command and avoids any kind of idolatry and dualism. Author of Islam religion weblog explains who is a real Muslim:

A true Muslim is one who submits to divine commandments both in speaks and in practice, that is, in the language of confession to the unity of God and the mission of the prophets and the Prophet, as well as in practice the religious commandments and ordinances such as social laws. Respect the rights of others, respect for the rights of citizenship and ... and individual laws such as prayer, fasting, and so on. The Qur'an refers to a true Muslim as a believer. (Islam religion weblog, 26 October 2018)

"The Holy Quran was gradually revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) over 23 years." (Black 2018, 126) "Ghadr is a Celebrates night the angel Gabriel received the words of the Quran from God and began transmitting it to the Prophet Muhammad." (Black 2018, 141). It is exactly not clear which night of Ramadan month is Ghadr but usually, Iranian Shias believed, it is one night among 19, 21 and 23 of Ramadan. Muslims believed that on this special night Sprit comes to the earth and worship God. Thus on these 3 nights, Shias usually stay awake and read Quran and worship. The author of Philosophy of History weblogs states about the importance of this night:

The night of Ghadr is more precious than thousand-night guards. We do not want to stay awake tonight as ordinary waking up - a celebration that is worth hundreds more. (Philosophy of History, 24 February 2020).

4.2 Second axis: Muharram

Muharram is at the center of Shia culture and it differentiates Shias from other Muslims. In this section, the weblog post which is related to Muharram is divided into two subcategories:

Mourning: 'Every year on the 10th of Muharram, the first month of the lunar Islamic calendar, Shia Muslims display a distinctive side of Islam by emphasising spirituality through fervour and ritual, instead of focusing on the laws and practices common in the daily lives of Muslims.' (Nasr 2006, 31) 'On this day, Shiites commemorate the death of one of their most revered holy figures, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad known as Imam Hussein. The day is known as Ashura, which comes from the Arabic word meaning 'Tenth.' Ashura becomes a moment of collective penance through lamentation and confession. This practice is a hallmark of the Shia tradition and has no counterpart in the Sunni community.' (Nasr 2006, 32)

During Muharram, Iranians, especially Shias, mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his 72 companions in Karbala. Imam Hussein has a special place in Iranian Shia culture, and mourning for him is an integral part of their ritual.

Author of I'm Muslim and Iranian weblog writes about Ghariban night and describes her feeling about Muharram. Ghariban night is a Shia religious ceremony held at the sunset of Ashura. Burning the tents of Imam Hussein and capturing of his family by the Yazid's troops is the theme of the ceremony. At the Ghariban night ceremony, mourners mourn by lighting candles:

And finally, that night arrived ... Ghariban night...I can't believe that the Muharram decade was over so soon ... I wish we could have felt this night again and again soon ...May God grant us again and we will see these days again and most importantly, be able to use them... Iranian Muslims! I state my condolences to the martyrdom of Abu Abdullah al-Hussein. Surely, if the Iranians were in Karbala, history would have changed. (I'm Muslim and Iranian weblog, 15 July 2021).

The author of still vague and uncertain weblog writes regarding pilgrimage to Karbala:

During the occupation of Iraq, a group of our families plans to travel to Karbala. Many would say that it is not wise and that the journey to Karbala is dangerous. In response to one of the acquaintances' blame, one of them said: 'you are not in love to understand' It took me about ten years to understand. Travelling to that area was dangerous. I had no holiness in any place that would be worth seeing. So what was the need? For me, love of a physical place didn't mean it was absurd. This time my opinion is changed. Many of the things I love now are meaningless to many. (Still vague and uncertain weblog, 27 April 2023).

The author of Woman Born Maku compares Yazid war attack on Imam Hussein and his companions on Ashura day with empire attack on defenceless nations and writes:

It has been millennia, centuries, many years and many lands become Karbala and many days become Ashura. For thousands of years, when emperors, kings, caliphs and rulers have invaded a land, water and earth and run blood, the earth becomes saturated by the blood of Karbala and the bitter day of Ashura. (Woman Born Maku weblog, 1 March 2019).

The importance of Imam Hussein among Iranian Shias is to the extent that an Iranian student who studied Islamology chooses the testimony of Imam Hussein as his research topic. The author of Vatan weblog states:

The testimony of Imam Hussein is the subject of research by a German student. A student of Islamology in Germany writes a thesis on "The Testimony of Imam Hussein and its Relation to the Martyrs of Iran and Iraq War. If the issue of martyrdom is studied academically and using scientifically accepted and authentic Islamic sources, it is proven that martyrdom is not terror and terrorism, but merely a lifelong sacrifice for the sake of godly satisfaction. Its manifestations are to resist oppression and oppression and to pursue freedom and freedom many. (Vatan weblog, 24 October, 2022).

Nazri: Nazri in the Persian language used for the foods which are distributed freely among people for God sake. Providing foods to people in Muharram month is a tradition among Iranians.

Author of the moonlight blog speaks about distributing Sholezard (special Iranian cuisine combined rice, sugar and saffron) among his friends on Ashura day:

On Ashura Day a few weeks ago, my mom made Sholezard exactly at the final of my class! Then I text to everyone to come and get it. Then I realized how much I loved it. To sum up it was a blessing. (Moonlight weblog, 4 December 2019)

Making and distributing Nazri is a desirable and collective action that requires the cooperation of many people. Many Iranians help each other to make Nazri during Muharram, as the author of Woman Born Maku says:

Ash-Nazri always had another taste and memory on religious days, In the Muharram month, and our neighbours gave Ash-Nazri. The one who made the Nazri wanted helps from the neighbours for cleaning and preparation of materials. Neighbouring girls and I would gladly help them. We cleaned and crushed vegetables, rice, carrots, and cabbage. Our elders used to say that doing these things and helping others is Hereafter storage. (Woman Born Maku weblog, 13 September 2019)

I observe a lot of Discourse about Imam Hussein, Ashura and Nazri in my target weblogs.

4.3 Third axis: Ramadan

Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims; in this month Muslims are fasting and worshipping god and read the holy Quran. The weblog's posts which are related to the Ramadan are divided into two sub-categories:

A) Fasting

Fasting means not eating foods for a special period. Not only Iranian Shias but also world Muslims are fasting from sunrise to sunset on the holy month of Ramadan.

In her piece, the Moonlight blogger discusses Ramadan rituals and the experience of fasting. She stated that fasting and Ramadan TV series gave her a sense of attachment to her Iranian identity. For this reason, she watches one of the series via satellite and another via the Internet:

Honestly, these days, I have a sense of fasting and this gives me a sense of being Iranian. I see these Ramadan series, one of them through TV and the other Via Internet. (Moonlight weblog, 9 August 2021)

The Author of Islam religion weblog explains his feeling about Ramadan:

It was yesterday I had entered the great -Rajab month, I'm promising myself to use the two months of Rajab and Shaban in the best way, and started this year's Ramadan with greater spirituality and a better mood. (Islam religion weblog, 13 October 2018)

Also, the Author of Aghaghiya weblog explains her feelings about Ramadan and compare her sense of Ramadan during different periods of her life:

Ramadan Also the days of old Ramadan, when I was a kid, Sincerity of Ramadan was greater than these days, those years, I felt the depth of pure moments of prayer with my small heart. I used to go to the mosque with my mother everyday afternoon... (Aghaghiya weblog, 13 August 2023)

The author of weblog Habashe in her post mentioned about the importance of reading the Quran in Ramadan month:

Ramadan came and went and Eid-Fitr passed. It is said that Ramadan is the descent of the Quran and read the Quran. (Habashe weblog, 14 October 2007)

The author of weblog Red Cross explains one of the reasons for fasting to his foreigner friend however it seems that his friend was not convinced.

A long time ago, when I was 15 years old, a foreigner friend of mine once asked me why I fast during Ramadan. I began to say, like school books, to understand the pain of the poor, and so on. Then he told me that this year when you fasted and you understand why you are fasting again next year? (Red Cross weblog, 20 October 2022)

B) Eftari

Eftari is a meal that fasted Muslims eat after Azan Maghreb (sunset praying) to break their fast.

The author of the weblog of Red Cross writes about attending to an Arab mosque in Toronto and eating Eftari there:

It was four years ago in Ramadan month that I would attend any ceremony. At a mosque in Toronto owned by Arabs, There were many programs on Saturday from morning to Eftar. There were a lot of lectures and other works until the time of Azan and they gave Eftari to the people. I was gone too. The population was very large. I was probably the only Iranian and the only Shia there…. (Red Cross weblog, 10 November 2023)

Furthermore, Red Cross blogger explained the quality of food that the Muslim Student Association of the University of Toronto was giving as Eftari to students:

This year the Muslim Student Association of the University of Toronto is giving a free Eftar every night. For the first two or three days, I didn't get the idea that because it was free, it wouldn't be appropriate. One day I accidentally went to find out what I was doing wrong from the very first day because the food was really good. Every day on average they give one hundred Eftars, which makes about $ 5,000 a month. (Red Cross weblog, 6 November 2023)

One of the elements of Iranian Islamic identity that gives the author Moonlight weblog a sense of being Iranian is the Ramadan ceremonies among relatives and friends:

These days I was very fond of the old days and remember when we were all in Iran. And usually, during the month of Ramadan, every family would invite all of the families once and eat Eftari together. (Moonlight weblog, 16 august 2017)

As you can see, Iftari and fasting are the third central discourse in Iranian Muslims weblogs.

5. Conclusions

Shia religion and the cultural heritage along with it are intertwined with Iranian culture and become an integral part of their identity. It would not be an exaggeration if I claim that all Iranian have different memories or experiences regarding Muharram ritual or Ramadan Eftari. Weblogs can be the best data source providing an opportunity for Shia Iranians to narrate their Shia identity while the news is showing negative attitudes towards Muslims. Said hopes to offer his readers that Orientalism should not be replaced by Western Studies, to have a clear understanding of the Orient; we don't need to refer to the West. Looking to the east from the Western eyes leads to a kind of shallow understanding and currently, this risk may be greater than before. The answer to the East will not find in the West, however, the East must be understood from angles and lens of the Eastern nations (Said 1978) Thus in this text, Iranian Muslims are studied from their own perspective. In the era that we are witnessing negative news about Muslims in the mainstreams media coverage, blogs provide an opportunity for the Muslim voice to be heard. The bloggers of this study narrate their Shia discourse consciously or unconsciously, which allows blog readers to have an understanding of their epistemic context. Therefore, the audience of their blogs read their writings far from prejudice or judgment and gets to know their world. Since the writing language of some of these blogs is English, it is possible for non-Iranian readers to become familiar with their religion and traditions.

Although bloggers live in western countries such as Germany, Britain, Canada and the United States, their commonalities are being Muslim and Iranian. The dominant discourse of blogs is Shias narrative of ethical issues, Muharram rituals and Ramadan. Iranian bloggers love Imam Hussein and his dynasty, they mourn for his oppressed testimony in Ashura day. One of the most beautiful Iranian customs is hospitality. Iranian Eftari tablecloth is open during the holy month of Ramadan, relatives and friends are invited to Iftari. Iranian Shias giving Nazri in Muharram a lot. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that you will not find an Iranian in Ashura and Tasua that has not eaten the Nazri food of Imam Hussein. A

Weblog is an alternative media which Iranian Shia's bloggers promote their Shia's culture and identity in the Western mainstream society by using it.

Author Contribution
The author contributed fully to the research.

Funding
This research did not receive funding from anywhere.

Ethical Review Board Statement
Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement
Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement
Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Open Access

References

Altheide, D. L. (2007). The mass media and terrorism. *Discourse & Communication*, 1(3), 287–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307079207

Babbie, E. R. (1990). *Survey research methods* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Behbahani, R. (2004). *Phenomenon of blog* (July and August). Tehran: Book of Months.

Black, K. (2018). *Rhythms of religious ritual: The yearly cycles of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvwrm4gj

Blanchard, C. (2010). *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites*. Congressional Research Service.

Downe-Wamboldt, B. (1992). Content analysis: Method, applications, and issues. *Health Care for Women International*, 13(3), 313–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339209516006

Eckert, S., & Chadha, K. (2013). Muslim bloggers in Germany: An emerging counterpublic. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(8), 926–942. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713501930

Halm, D. (2013). The current discourse on Islam in Germany. *Migration & Integration*, 14, 457–474. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-012-0251-7

Hassan, R., Lester, L., Collins, E., Prentice, P., University of South Australia, & International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding. (2018). *Australian Muslims: The challenge of Islamophobia and social distance*.

Hassan, R., University of South Australia, & International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding. (2015). *Australian Muslims: A demographic, social and economic profile of Muslims in Australia* 2015.

Hookway, N., & Snee, H. (2017). Blogs in social research. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 1–16). Singapore: Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2779-6_19-1

Hyder, S. A. (2006). *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian memory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kissau, K. (2008). Internetnutzung von Migranten – Ein Weg zur Integration. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 39, 29–34.

Kosari, M. (2008). *Qualitative approaches in political science*. Abas Manochehri. Tehran: Samt Publication.

Mathewson Denny, F. (1975). The meaning of "ummah" in the Quran. *The University of Chicago Press*, 1(15), 34–70.

Nasr, S. V. R. (2006). *The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future* (1st ed.). New York: Norton.

Nisa, E. F. (2019). Internet and Muslim women. In M. Woodward & R. Lukens-Bull (Eds.), *Handbook of contemporary Islam and Muslim lives* (pp. 1–19). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73653-2_71-1

Nordbruch, G. (2010). Islamische Jugendkulturen in Deutschland. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 27, 34–38.

Park, R. E. (1924). The concept of social distance as applied to the study of racial attitudes and racial relations. *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 8, 339–344.

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Watson, B. R., & Fico, F. (2019). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*.

Saeed, A. (2007). Media, racism and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media. *Sociology Compass*, 1(2), 443–462. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00039.x

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism* (1st ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Shokrkhah, Y. (2004). Bloggers: The first signs of public journalism. July - August, 79. Tehran: Book of Months.

Toguslu, E., Leman, J., & Sezgin, İ. M. (Eds.). (2014). *New multicultural identities in Europe: Religion and ethnicity in secular societies*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press.

Vertigans, S. (2010). British Muslims and the UK government's "war on terror" within: Evidence of a clash of civilizations or emergent de-civilizing processes? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 61(1), 26–44. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01300.x

Biographies of Author(s)

Mahdie Ghanian, Georg-August-University Gottingen.
- ▪ Email: mahdieghanian@gmail.com
- ▪ ORCID:
- ▪ Web of Science ResearcherID:
- ▪ Scopus Author ID:
- ▪ Homepage: