

Podcasts and Digital Diasporic Identities: A Case Study of Iranian Diasporas

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Author bio

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Abstract

The present work explores the formation and expression of digital identities within Iranian diasporas, with a particular focus on podcasts. While Iranian diasporas remain underexplored within diaspora studies, this study addresses this gap by analysing four podcasts from different Iranian diaspora communities to illustrate the diverse roles that these digital platforms can play in shaping the interconnected identities of Iranian migrants. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital media contributes to the expression of complex diasporic identities.

KEYWORDS: podcast, Iranian diaspora, community, belonging, identity, digital identity, digital practice

INTRODUCTION

In modern Iranian history, sound technologies — from minarets to radio — have played an important role in connecting Iranians. But it was, above all, audio cassettes, the forerunners of podcasts, that enabled Ayatollah Khomeini to spread his revolutionary message from exile in Neauphles-le-Château, France, and connect opponents to the Shah scattered in exile.¹ More

¹ Agnès Devictor, "Prologue. La révolution islamique. Cinéma, année zéro," in *Politique du cinéma iranien : De l'âyatollâ Khomeyni au président Khâtami* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004), 34.

recently, the arrival of the internet in Iran, where media is subject to heavy censorship, has encouraged the emergence of blogs, podcasts, and independent channels on social networks such as Telegram. These new practices have proliferated in opposition circles and within the Iranian diasporas in the United States, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Europe, or Australia, helping to create new forms of relationships and belonging.

Podcasts experienced a significant boom in the 2010s, around the same time as the democratisation of the smartphone. Often emerging from independent initiatives and interactive by nature, like blogs, they foster the creation of diverse virtual communities that know no national boundaries. In this way, podcasts produced in a diaspora help to strengthen ties within the same diaspora, but also between diasporas spread across several continents, connecting migrants living in various contexts. Podcasts also help to create links with other communities outside the diaspora (Black, queer, women, etc.), highlighting the entangled nature of digital identities.

While academic research on migration and the use of new technologies is expanding, Iranian diasporas remain understudied. The aim of this essay is to investigate the effect of podcasting on the construction and expression of community identities and feelings of community belonging within Iranian diasporas. The ‘Iranian diaspora’ refers to all Iranians who have emigrated abroad and their descendants who still identify with their Iranian origins. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates the Iranian diaspora to comprise 3 million people,² and the sociologist Nader Vahabi, a specialist in the Iranian diaspora, estimates that each year between 200,000 and 220,000 Iranians leave their country.³ This diaspora is scattered across the five continents and largely middle-class, owing to generally high levels of education and integration.⁴ However, due to the individualistic, voluntary and non-postcolonial nature of the exodus, the sociologist Seyed Mahdi Etemadifard emphasises the strong heterogeneity of the Iranian diaspora, going so far as to reject this term, preferring the expression ‘archipelago ethnicity’.⁵ For him,

² Seyed Mahdi Etemadifard and Tahereh Khazaei, “Divergent Heterogeneities in Iranian Migration in France: Semantic and Theoretical Limitations of Diaspora,” *International Migration* 59, no. 4 (August 2021): 207–220.

³ Thibaut Cavallès, “40 ans de la Révolution iranienne : analyse d’une diaspora,” *France Culture*, February 16, 2019, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/40-ans-de-la-revolution-iranienne-analyse-d-une-diaspora-1580584>.

⁴ Etemadifard and Khazaei, “Divergent Heterogeneities in Iranian Migration in France,” 207.

⁵ Etemadifard and Khazaei, “Divergent Heterogeneities in Iranian Migration in France,” 207.

Iranians living outside of Iran form ‘scattered clusters,’ with poor community solidarity. Therefore, I will use the term ‘Iranian diasporas’ in this paper.

While the rise of podcasts, like other new technologies, over the past two decades has altered how Iranian migrants experience their Iranian identity abroad, particularly by strengthening their ties with the motherland and with Iranians in other countries, it is worth examining the impact of new technologies on Iranian diasporic networks. By connecting these various ‘clusters’, do podcasts contribute, alongside other vectors and practices, to the identity construction of Iranian migrants? Do they reinforce communal feelings and transform these into a vast transnational Iranian diaspora? Do they reflect the profoundly ‘entangled’ nature of the identities of Iranians living abroad?

After exploring the concepts of ‘e-diaspora’ and ‘digital identity’ in diaspora studies, digital diasporas studies and media theory, and applying them to the specific case of Iranian diasporas, we will analyse four podcasts produced by members of the Iranian diasporas to understand the role of podcasts in shaping diasporas in the digital age. These four podcasts, broadcast from three different countries, each with different integration contexts and languages, provide a limited but diverse set of examples that highlight the different ways podcasts are utilised both locally and transnationally within Iranian diasporas. Their analysis focuses on two main aspects: first, the stated purpose of the podcasts, their content, and their targeted audience, and, second, the impact of these podcasts on listeners, based on the limited feedback gathered for this study. The goal is to understand the role podcasts play within the intricate web of relationships in Iranian diasporas.

1. How Are New Technologies Shaping ‘e-Diasporas’?

The term ‘diaspora’ originally refers to a scattered people, stemming from the dispersion of Jews after the Babylonian Exile. According to sociologist Sandra Ponzanesi, the modern diaspora refers to “a postnational space that problematises the relationship between nation, soil and identity.”⁶ She asserts that the digital revolution and the advent of digital connectivity, while transforming relationships to spatiality, have also profoundly transformed feelings of belonging

⁶ Sandra Ponzanesi, “Digital Diasporas: Postcoloniality, Media and Affect,” *Interventions* 22, no. 8 (2020): 977–993, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1718537>.

and self-identification. We can now speak of ‘e-diasporas’ or ‘digital diasporas’; that is to say, new ‘digital diasporic networks’.⁷ Kerstin Andersson is a specialist in Migration and New Media studies who has developed an overview of research on the impact of new technologies on migrants. She catalogued the multiple definitions of the concept of ‘digital diaspora,’ which emerged in the 2000s, describing it as: “new forms of coexistence, a technologically mediated diaspora, a diaspora organised on the internet, an electronic migrant community, and an immigrant group that uses ICT connectivity to participate in virtual networks for a variety of communicational purposes.”⁸

While the notion of ‘home’ and the migrant's relationship with the ‘homeland’ are central to understanding a diaspora, diasporic identity functions through the common interest of diaspora members in their culture of origin. Andersson highlights the constitutive role of media in the construction of social and political life in a diasporic context and in shaping diasporic identity. She also introduces the concept of ‘transnationalism,’ inseparable from the notion of diaspora, which she defines as “the process by which migrants forge and sustain multistranded relations and create transnational social fields.”⁹ Thus, new technologies have aided in the creation of online communities among diasporic groups using internet technologies, such as podcasts, for different purposes, particularly cultural reproduction.

According to Andersson, ethnic identity is constituted, among other things, by what this ethnicity produces and consumes on the internet, which has ‘a socialising function’ as it creates a sense of coherence and cultural unity. Community ties are created “at the intersection of online and offline spaces and local and global contexts.” Due to their decentralised, participatory, and unregulated nature, new technologies play an important role in fostering communicative practices that create a sense of belonging and attachment to the homeland. They promote the creation of creative virtual spaces, which can be termed a ‘diasporic public sphere,’ where individuals invent new forms of community and citizenship.¹⁰

According to Ponzanesi, new technologies, such as podcasts and social media platforms, strengthen and diversify the role and sustainability of diasporic connections. Thanks to the digital

⁷ Ponzanesi, “Digital Diasporas: Postcoloniality, Media and Affect,” 978.

⁸ Kerstin Andersson, “Digital Diaspora: An Overview of the Research Areas of Migration and New Media through a Narrative Literature Review,” *Human Technology* 15, no. 2 (2019): 142–180, <https://doi.org/10.17011/ht/urn.201906123154>.

⁹ Andersson, “Digital Diaspora,” 143.

¹⁰ Andersson, “Digital Diaspora,” 159.

ubiquity enabled by the internet, spaces that have been eroded by living abroad can be recreated virtually. Ponzanesi explains that, after letter-writing, sending photographs, making phone calls and sending video cassettes, the internet, social networks and podcasts play an important role in establishing diasporic communities, maintaining traditions and multilingualism, and creating new forms of affective relationships and belonging.¹¹ Thus, in addition to their role in reinforcing a sense of community, new technologies also encourage hybridity and cosmopolitan affiliations. They boost the intersection of the various identity characteristics of migrants such as gender, age, social class, sexual orientation, political orientation, etc.

2. New Technologies Influence How Migrants Perform Their Iranian-ness Abroad

The advent of the internet and new technologies has helped meet certain community needs within diasporas, particularly by promoting the production and dissemination of content specific to the migrants' culture of origin. The media anthropologist Donya Alinejad conducted research on Iranian diaspora bloggers, particularly in the USA. In her book *The Internet and formations of Iranian American-ness* (New York, USA: Springer, 2017), she argues that web media practices have played an important role in the identity formation of second-generation Iranian Americans.¹² Iranian blogging platforms written in English experienced significant growth in the 2000s, especially with content focused on Iranian cultural production. These platforms have connected Iranians living outside Iran, who are interested “in questions of how Iranian-ness was taking shape outside Iran.”¹³ Although these virtual platforms are “produced from dispersed locations”, they have a “unique border-crossing potential,”¹⁴ a characteristic that can also be seen in podcasts in the following decade.

These practices, which often emerge independently and individually, differ from those of the previous generation, who experienced traditional media and communication practices, such as print media, radio, cassettes, and migration networks. Small-scale blogging projects indicate a possible evolution in how Iranian American identity is experienced and interpreted by this new

¹¹ Ponzanesi, “Digital Diasporas: Postcoloniality, Media and Affect,” 982.

¹² Donya Alinejad, *The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness* (New York: Springer, 2017), 1.

¹³ Alinejad, “The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness,” 1.

¹⁴ Alinejad, “The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness,” 2.

generation.¹⁵ According to Alinejad, second-generation Iranian migrants in the United States are more focused on expressing their Iranian identity abroad, in contrast to the first-generation migrants, who tend to be more politically engaged with Iran rather than with their country of residence.

Similar trends can be observed in numerous podcasts and channels, often produced by second-generation Iranians, in various languages, reflecting on how to live one's Iranian-ness abroad and one's migration experience. Iranian diasporic podcasts frequently include interviews of Iranian guests on culture-related topics, such as the podcast *Masty o Rasty*, hosted from Canada by the Iranian-born artist King Raam, which aims to “delve into the taboo issues of our culture,”¹⁶ musical shows like the radio station *Radio Setareh* broadcasted from Tel Aviv, or autobiographical narratives reflecting on dual nationality, like the French podcast *Loin de l'Iran, près de nos soeurs*¹⁷ (Far from Iran, close to our sisters).

Likewise, the Persian YouTube channel *Dastavard: successful Iranians in America*, hosted by Iranian American actor Max Amini, allows Iranians abroad to develop a sense of community and identify with Iranians from the diaspora who share with them the same migration experience. Similarly, the podcast in English *Successful Iranians*, founded by Iranian British headhunter and coach Johnny Nash, is introduced as “dedicated to showcasing successful Iranians around the world” and to “highlighting the good and the great of the Iranian community.”¹⁸ In a post on his TikTok page, the host explains that his podcast aims to transform “identity into community,”¹⁹ thus stressing his goal of fostering a sense of belonging among a global Iranian diaspora. In the five episode podcast in French *Femmes, vie, liberté, les voix de la diaspora iranienne*²⁰ (Woman,

¹⁵ Alinejad, “The Internet and Formations of Iranian American-ness,” 3.

¹⁶ King Raam, host, *Masty o Rasty* (podcast), 2020–2024, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://open.spotify.com/show/35RtCrgybsUG3dosldneKK>.

¹⁷ Anahid Djalali, and Juliette Pierron-Rauwel, hosts, *Loin de l'Iran, près de nos soeurs* (Podcast audio), 2023, accessed on 11 September 2024, <https://www.slate.fr/audio/lain-de-liran-pres-de-nos-soeurs/>.

¹⁸ Johnny Nash, host, *Successful Iranians* (podcast), 2023-2024, accessed on 11 September 2024, <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/successful-iranians/id1671789646>.

¹⁹ Johnny Nash [@johnnynash121], *Identity vs Community* (Vidéo), *TikTok*, accessed on 11 September 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@johnnynash121/video/7383346068488031520>.

²⁰ “Femmes, vie, liberté, les voix de la diaspora iranienne,” *Radio Nova* (radio station), 2022, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://www.nova.fr/news/femmes-vie-liberte-les-voix-de-la-diaspora-iranienne-210025-16-12-2022/>.

life, freedom, the voices of the Iranian diaspora), several members of the Iranian community living in France are interviewed, including photographer Reza, the founder of the ‘Pouya’ Franco-Iranian center in Paris, and Franco-Iranians taking part in demonstrations in support of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. This podcast provides Iranians living in France with a sense of community at a time when political events in Iran are causing feelings of isolation and helplessness among Iranians abroad, even though the targeted audience of this podcast is not limited to the Iranian diaspora. This podcast, broadcast by *Radio Nova*, both raises awareness about the Iranian diaspora settled in France, which is not very visible nor organised, and indirectly enables French-speaking Iranian listeners to feel united with the rest of their community.

These examples echo Andersson's idea of ‘cultural unity’ previously mentioned. Podcasts developed within the Iranian diaspora enable Iranians abroad to develop characteristics that are typical to diasporas in general, namely an “ethnic consciousness and sympathy with fellow ethnics outside the homeland,” “a collective memory of the motherland,” and “marginalised groups and identity politics,”²¹ similar to associations within a community, but in a virtual manner. The preference for virtual spaces by some individuals seeking social and emotional support may be due to the poor community solidarity among the Iranian diasporas and the practices of newer generations. Virtual spaces also allow for the discussion of taboo subjects, which are more difficult to address in a physical environment. These podcasts thus contribute to the identity construction of Iranian migrants, alongside many other practices performed in both physical and virtual spaces.

These podcasts often have an explicit community focus, such as the podcast in English *Del Beh Del Podcast: Heart-to-Heart Conversation with the Iranian Diaspora*, broadcast from the United States, which will be discussed further, or the podcast in English *Ajam Podcast* developed by *Ajam Media Collective*. Created by an Iranian American, *Ajam Podcast* aims to produce knowledge about Persian culture and history in general,²² not limited to Iranian, and addresses a broader audience than just the Iranian diaspora, including contributors from various nationalities.

²¹ Etemadifard and Khazaei, “Divergent Heterogeneities in Iranian Migration in France”, 208.

²² On *Ajam media collective*'s website, this podcast is described as “a Space for Persianate Culture, History, and Politics.”

Some episodes, such as “The Paradoxes of Dual Citizenship,”²³ explicitly target individuals who have experienced migration.

²³ Ali Karjoo-Ravary, host, “The Paradoxes of Dual Citizenship,” *Ajam Media Collective* (podcast), August 31, 2020, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://ajammc.com/2020/08/31/ajam-podcast-22-dual-citizenship/>.

3. Analysis of Several Podcasts Aimed at an Iranian Diaspora Audience

There are many podcasts or channels in various languages produced by members of the Iranian diaspora, with audiences both in Iran and abroad. I have chosen to limit this study to two podcasts in English produced in the United States, claiming to be “community podcasts” and aimed primarily at Iranians living abroad, a podcast in Persian produced in Israel, and a podcast in French created by an Iranian-born journalist. The idea was to select podcasts broadcast from different countries, with varying integration contexts, and in different languages, to have a diverse set of examples that illustrate the various ways podcasts are used locally and transnationally within Iranian diasporas. These examples aim to illustrate the role of podcasts, alongside other social and digital practices, in how Iranians in the diaspora perform their Iranian-ness and highlight the importance of certain community-focused podcasts can play in the daily lives of Iranians living abroad. While these podcasts are a valuable source of information, they are not representative of the diversity of podcasts produced by different Iranian diasporas. These four examples may not necessarily be generalised to all uses of virtual spaces by Iranians living abroad.

3.1. *Persian Girl Podcast*: Reaffirming Identity, Connecting Diasporas and Advocating Social Progress.

Persian Girl Podcast is a podcast in English created in 2019 by Millie Efraim and Natalie Sanandaji, two Jewish Iranian-Americans. Their stated aim is to create a space for Mizrahi (i.e., Middle Eastern Jews) stories and, more specifically, a space for Persian Jews’ stories. The two founders feel distinct from both Europeans and Jews from Arab lands. As a result, several episodes deal with Persian Jewish culture, such as “Reclaiming Motreb: The Dardashti Family Legacy.”²⁴ Here, their goal is to pass on a heritage and reaffirm a cultural specificity, thus preventing it from dissolving into the majority culture of the country of residence on the one hand, and into the majority culture of the Iranian diaspora as a whole on the other. On the podcast's Instagram page,

²⁴ Millie Efraim and Natalie Sanandaji, hosts, “Reclaiming Motreb: The Dardashti Family Legacy,” *Persian Girl Podcast* (podcast), February 29, 2024, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2vFRnuXrSZ0EyiFgLFaAnI>.

whose description is “sharing voices from the diaspora,”²⁵ we see posts aimed at promoting Persian Jewish culture, for example by highlighting Judeo-Persian poets, old photographs of Iranian Jews, Jewish-Persian cuisine recipes and more. In addition, numerous posts are dedicated to topics related to the experience of exile.

The target audience is primarily Iranian Jews in the diaspora. The fact that the targeted audience is the second generation of Iranian migrants explains why the podcast is in English and not Persian. Although the primary target is Iranian Jews, the two founders of the podcast claim that their main aim was to reach out to the Iranian diaspora, connecting members and giving a voice to Persian women. They present their podcast as a “new platform for Iranian individuals to speak openly and candidly about their experiences in their communities.”²⁶

The episode entitled “Marrying Outside the Persian Culture”²⁷ targets the broader Iranian, not just Persian Jews. The guest is a self-proclaimed agnostic Iranian woman from a Muslim family who married an Indian man. Similarly, the episode “Persian Mothers of LGBTQ”²⁸ is designed for an Iranian diaspora audience of all faiths and may also apply to those living in Iran. This demonstrates that this podcast, like many aimed at diaspora audiences, promotes social progress. Some episodes even cater to anyone with a dual cultural experience. In line with Ponzanesi’s argument, *Persian Girl Podcast* strengthens diaspora connections and encourages hybridity. Similar to some community-focused weblogs, this podcast helps construct a virtual community that acts as a ‘network of socio-emotional support’ within the diaspora.²⁹ The community-building function of this podcast is evident. For instance, *Persian Girl Podcast*’s Instagram page is followed by Iranian-

²⁵ *Persian girl podcast*, Instagram, [accessed on 11 September 2024, https://www.instagram.com/persiangirlpodcast/?hl=fr](https://www.instagram.com/persiangirlpodcast/?hl=fr).

²⁶ “Meet Millie Efraim and Natalie Sanandaji of Persian Girl Podcast in Hancock Park,” *VoyageLA*, July 17, 2020, <https://voyagela.com/interview/meet-millie-efraim-natalie-sanandaji-persian-girl-podcast-hancock-park/>.

²⁷ Millie Efraim and Natalie Sanandaji, hosts, “Marrying Outside the Persian Culture,” *Persian Girl Podcast* (podcast), June 29, 2021, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2dVGO4xb9x2Y8CRGYT1pSq>.

²⁸ Millie Efraim and Natalie Sanandaji, hosts, “Persian Mothers of LGBTQ,” *Persian Girl Podcast* (podcast), September 9, 2022, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2jwdjRWKKJWiIpiNJYmo8X>.

²⁹ Samad Zare, “Virtual Coexistence in a Persian Diasporic Weblog Community,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 5, no. 8 (2018): 83, <https://www.ejecs.org/index.php/JECS/article/view/109/pdf>.

Israeli singer Liraz, who shares some of the posts, indicating the presence of a genuine transnational e-community. Furthermore, this podcast underscores the deeply entangled nature of the e-diaspora, situating itself at the intersection of several communities: Persian Jews, women, second-generation immigrants promoting social progress, and the broader Iranian diaspora.

3.2. *Del Beh Del Podcast: A Safe Space to Talk About Taboo Subjects and to Encourage Cosmopolitan Affiliations*

Del Beh Del Podcast: Heart-to-Heart Conversation with the Iranian Diaspora is a podcast founded by the Centre for Iranian Diaspora Studies at San Francisco State University broadcast between 2021 and 2022. On the university's website, it describes itself as "focusing on difficult conversations between members of Iranian diasporas."³⁰ The podcast aims to provide a safe space for people from the Iranian diaspora to talk about difficult topics, such as "stigmatisation of mental health issues, cultural obligations, class, nationalism, sexuality, gender."

The episode "Collective for Black Iranians,"³¹ for example, aims to celebrate the diversity of Iranian diasporas, as well as connecting Black and Afro-Iranian communities. As the guests come from different continents (France, Iran, US, Canada) and different communities, we can speak here of an 'e-diaspora', creating new transnational bonds between several communities. This example highlights how podcasts can participate in the unification of scattered diasporas, fostering a virtual community bound by shared experiences, such as the one of migration or ethnic identity. The two episodes "Out of the Diaspora" (part 1 and 2) deal with the gay Iranian experience.³² The aim is to provide a space for this community, the hosts believing that other LGBTQ communities, notably White American and Arab, do not allow subjects specific to queer Iranians to be addressed

³⁰ Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies (CIDS), "Podcasts," accessed September 11, 2024, <https://cids.sfsu.edu/podcasts>.

³¹ Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies, host, "Collective for Black Iranians," *Del Beh Del Podcast* (podcast), March 8, 2021, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/del-beh-del/episodes/Episode-2-Collective-for-Black-Iranians-es0ggi>.

³² Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies, host, "Out of the Diaspora (Part 1 and 2)," *Del Beh Del Podcast* (podcast), July 2021, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/del-beh-del/episodes/Episode-4-OUT-in-the-Diaspora--Part-1-e13jtrm>.

and the dominant discourses in the USA confine themselves to denouncing homophobic persecution in Iran.³³ The lack of accessible queer Iranian histories disconnects diasporas, according to Leith Ghuloum, a guest on the episode “Out of the Diaspora”³⁴ who has conducted research in gender studies on Iranian queer identity in Los Angeles. According to him, apart from this podcast, no other space exists that addresses the gay Iranian identity. From this perspective, the episode connects the Iranian queer community scattered across several countries, with the aim of creating a queer Iranian e-diaspora, which without these virtual links would probably not experience a sense of community. Here, ethnicity intersects with sexual identity.

Nevertheless, while these episodes aim to cultivate a community consciousness among Black or queer Iranians, there is no clear indication that this podcast actively contributes to the building of such a collective identity, nor whether this translates into the physical world. However, in the comments section of the podcast's Instagram posts, listeners frequently express feeling personally connected and represented in the discussions.³⁵ These reactions suggest that the podcast helps its audience realise they are not alone in their struggles, offering a sense of solidarity and reducing feelings of isolation. Thus, this example shows how podcasts can, among other methods, support the affirmation of the identity of migrants, which is inherently plural and multicultural, and not limited to a single ethnic identity. This podcast shows that digital diasporic connections extend beyond the boundaries of ethnonational identity³⁶, building “new hybrid spaces of belonging”³⁷.

3.3. *Radio Setareh*: A Music Radio Show Aimed at Connecting the Transnational Persian Community

³³ Leith Javadi Ghuloum, *Recovering the Hidden Archives of Queer Tehrangeles* (MA thesis, San Francisco State University: 2022), 33, <https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/h128nm635>.

³⁴ Ghuloum, “Recovering the Hidden Archives of Queer Tehrangeles,” 14.

³⁵ *Iranian Diaspora Studies, Instagram, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/iraniandiasporastudies/>.*

³⁶ Laura Candidatu, and Sandra Ponzanesi, “Digital Diasporas: Staying with the Trouble,” *Communication, Culture and Critique* 15, no. 2 (2022): 266, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cc/cac010>.

³⁷ Candidatu and Ponzanesi, “Digital Diasporas,” 264.

Primarily a Persian music show broadcast from Tel Aviv, *Radio Setareh* offers a selection of Persian music, particularly songs produced by Iranian artists before the 1979 revolution, such as Morteza and Toraj, as well as Israeli artists of Iranian origin like Liraz. The spirit of the show is definitively one of nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary years, often perceived by exiled Iranians, especially those from minority religions, as a golden age.³⁸

While this radio show is primarily aimed at Iranians residing in Israel, as evidenced by some short passages in Hebrew and *Radio Setareh*'s subtitle ('the radio of Iranians living in Israel'), the presenters also address Iranian listeners worldwide, as explained in Persian and Hebrew on the radio's home page.³⁹ The target audience of the podcast is thus clearly the Persian community, regardless of location, but especially towards the Persian Jewish community, as evidenced by the photos posted on *Radio Setareh*'s Facebook page.⁴⁰ These posts aim to celebrate holidays such as Jewish holidays like Sukkot or Rosh Hashanah, Israeli holidays like Israeli National Day, and the Persian New Year or Nowruz. They also commemorate events such as Yom Hazikaron, which honours soldiers who died for Israel, and Holocaust remembrance. The study of the Facebook page posts reveals that most listeners share their comments in Hebrew, Persian, or a mix of both, and to a lesser extent in English. Listeners with Iranian Jewish-sounding names also mention being located in the United States and the United Kingdom, two countries that host significant Persian Jewish communities.

This podcast seems to encourage cultural reproduction among migrants by promoting a common cultural heritage. However, this cultural heritage remains frozen in the past, with songs that mostly date back to the pre-revolutionary years. Contemporary songs are mainly those by Israeli artists of Iranian origin; only a few contemporary Iran-based artists are featured. This indicates that the virtual or e-community formed by *Radio Setareh* listeners intersects with several communities: expatriate Iranians, Jews of Iranian origin, Persian speakers, music enthusiasts, and Iranians from the generation that experienced the pre-revolutionary years.

³⁸ Esther Parisi, *Juifs et Iraniens: La communauté judéo-persane depuis la Révolution en Iran et en Israël* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2019), 46.

³⁹ *Radio setareh* (radio station), accessed on 11 September 2024, <https://www.radiosetareh.com/>.

⁴⁰ *Radio Setareh*, Facebook, accessed on 11 September 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/radiosetareh>.

It is noteworthy that this virtual initiative, although relatively modest in scope — *Radio Setareh* has 7,000 followers on Facebook — has tangible real-world impacts. *Radio Setareh* sponsors numerous tours in Israel on a monthly basis, such as an Iranian music festival by the Dead Sea in the summer of 2021, and an event celebrating Iranian women in June 2024, where kosher Iranian meals were served. These events likely provide opportunities for *Radio Setareh* listeners to meet in person, as well as for other Iranians residing in Israel to connect. In this context, the e-community transforms into a physical one, although only the listeners living in Israel are likely to participate to the events sponsored by the radio. Thus, this cultural initiative facilitates connections between Iranian migrants and their heritage, fostering a sense of community around their shared cultural roots.

A response from a listener of *Radio Setareh*, based in the UK and born to Jewish Iranian parents, shows how a radio show can impact on one’s sense of belonging within the Iranian diaspora.⁴¹ He explained that he discovered the radio station on Facebook about ten years ago. Since then, he listens to the show four times a week and said that “it has become like a big family,” with the show “bringing all Persians together with love and respect,” showing that a community-focused podcast can enhance the sense of belonging to a transnational community. He described the host, Eliran, as “really caring about the Persian community,” demonstrating how this figure has succeeded in making the radio a unifying initiative, enabling members of the diaspora to maintain a connection with their linguistic and cultural heritage. This listener also mentioned that the show stopped for a few months after the attack on 7 October 2023, before starting again to provide support to listeners distressed by the situation, exemplifying solidarity within the diaspora.

3.4. *Mille et une Voix de l’Iran* (A Thousand and One Voices of Iran): A Podcast Aimed at Building Bridges Between France and Iran

Mille et une voix de l’Iran is a podcast in French broadcast from Paris between 2017 and 2018. Each episode, lasting about twenty minutes, features an interview —often with an Iranian personality—, a summary of Iranian news, a French press review on Iran, an Iranian cultural

⁴¹ Anonymous interviewee, listener of *Radio Setareh*, interview by the author, via WhatsApp, September 11, 2024.

agenda, and the explanation of a Persian expression. Some guests are based in Iran, and their remarks in Persian are translated.

Comprising 20 episodes, this podcast was developed by the online media outlet *Lettres Persanes* (Persian Letters), an information platform in French specialising in issues related to Iran and its diaspora. It was established in 2015 by the Iranian-origin journalist Rooh Savar based in France. In the crowdfunding appeal for *Lettres Persanes*, the target audience was defined as ‘people interested in Iran’ and ‘people with friendly or familial ties to Iran’.⁴² The aim of both the online magazine and the podcast was to allow their French-speaking readers and listeners to learn about Iran from the perspective of Iranians. The goal was to change the French-speaking public's perception of Iran, fill the information void about Iran in France, and combat clichés propagated by the French media.

Mille et une voix de l'Iran is not directly aimed at the Iranian diaspora in France, although it features guests from that diaspora. It specifically aims to create links between Iran and France by introducing Iranian culture to a French-speaking audience. This is exemplified by episodes dedicated to topics such as fashion in Iran⁴³ and Iranian cinema.⁴⁴ All the episodes connect French news to Iran, such as episode 15 “Milad Jokar : Nouveau Président Français, Nouvelles Relations Franco-Iraniennes?”⁴⁵ (Milad Jokar: New French President, New Franco-Iranian Relations?). Broadcast just before the second round of the 2017 French presidential election, this episode explores potential Franco-Iranian relations depending on the election outcome.

By familiarising the audience with Iranian culture and news, this podcast contributes to creating an e-diaspora of people across French-speaking countries who are either interested in Iran

⁴² Ulule, “*Lettres persanes*” (Crowdfunding campaign), last modified July 12, 2016, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://fr.ulule.com/lettres-persanes/>.

⁴³ Suzanne Shojaei and Rooh Savar, hosts, “La mode en Iran,” *Mille et une voix de l'Iran*, October 1, 2017, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://roohsavar.com/podcast/1001-voix-de-liran/2017/18-la-mode-en-iran/>.

⁴⁴ Suzanne Shojaei and Rooh Savar, hosts, “Nader Takmil Homayoun – L’amour au coeur du cinéma iranien,” *Mille et une voix de l'Iran*, June 12, 2017, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://roohsavar.com/podcast/1001-voix-de-liran/2017/17-nader-takmil-homayoun-lamour-au-coeur-du-cinema-iranien/>.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Shojaei and Rooh Savar, hosts, “Milad Jokar: Nouveau président français, nouvelles relations franco-iraniennes?,” *Mille et une voix de l'Iran*, April 30, 2017, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://roohsavar.com/podcast/1001-voix-de-liran/2017/15-milad-jokar-nouveau-president-francais-nouvelles-relations-franco-iraniennes/>.

or have family bonds to the country. However, unlike the *Persian Girl Podcast*, its primary goal is not to strengthen ties within the Iranian diaspora. *Mille et une voix de l'Iran* takes a less personal approach and does not focus on the migratory experience but instead targets the society of the country of residence. The absence of a podcast produced within the Iranian diaspora in France that addresses this topic may be partly attributed to the French integration system, which promotes assimilation into a unified republican identity and discourages the expression of multiple cultural identities. As a result, this podcast does not seek to foster a sense of belonging within the diaspora and instead adopts a very different approach from previous examples. Nevertheless, by showcasing Iranian culture and featuring guests from France's Iranian diaspora, it highlights the presence of an Iranian community in the country and makes it visible, even though this was not the podcast's original intention.

These four examples alone, which are initiatives of relatively small scale, are insufficient to identify trends and shared patterns in content production and consumption of podcasts produced within Iranian diasporas. However, they illustrate the existence of various digital initiatives among minority or underrepresented communities within the Iranian diasporas (religious and sexual minorities, women, etc.), aimed at asserting and rendering these groups visible within the transnational Iranian diaspora. The choice of language reveals the targeted audience of the podcast: a podcast in Persian tends to address first-generation Iranian migrants or those whose parents are Iranian, whereas podcasts in the language of the migrants' country of residence target a broader audience, including second-generation migrants or those with mixed parentage. Moreover, these examples highlight that the identity construction of Iranian migrants and their relationship to their original identity vary according to the integration model in place in the country of residence. As reflected by the podcasts studied in this work, the United States applies an assimilation model in which the newcomer retains their customs, while France is committed to an integration model in which the migrant must adapt to the country's rules. Nonetheless, if few podcasts broadcast from France raise issues related to dual identity and exile, there are multiple French initiatives aimed at promoting a better understanding of Iranian culture.

CONCLUSION

This study has illustrated the various roles that podcasts can play within Iranian diasporas. By providing platforms for dialogue that intersect gender, religious, national, and racial identities,

podcasts enable migrants, particularly from newer generations, to express and navigate their multifaceted identities. In this way, podcasts reflect the entangled nature of the identities of Iranian migrants. Podcasts also create spaces that help maintain connections with both homeland culture and diaspora communities, foster solidarity on local and transnational levels, reduce feelings of isolation, affirm a shared identity, and preserve cultural heritage. Furthermore, these podcasts contribute to the spread of progressive social ideas within conservative communities, addressing taboo subjects and fostering inclusive ‘e-communities’ that bridge gaps both within and outside the diaspora. Thus, podcasts play a role, alongside other practices, in strengthening community feelings within Iranian diasporas. They help migrants develop or affirm their sense of belonging to a specific diaspora, a particular group within their diaspora, or a broader transnational Persian community. Regarding the latter, this tends to translate more into personal feelings of the listeners rather than the creation of genuine transnational connections, even though some examples demonstrate that guests on these episodes are present across multiple continents. Additionally, podcasts produced within Iranian diasporas foster connections between the homeland and the host country, promoting mutual understanding between the two cultures.

Nevertheless, while some of the podcasts discussed in this study explicitly aim to create transnational connections and strengthen the sense of community belonging, it remains challenging to determine, without fieldwork with listeners, the extent to which these podcasts, often originating from individual initiatives with relatively small audiences, actively and effectively contribute to the identity formation of migrants. This is particularly true given that they are entangled with a myriad of other digital and physical practices. However, *Radio Setareh* demonstrates how the connections forged through a podcast centered on music translate into initiatives that encourage in-person meetings, thereby creating a genuine community.

In the future, conducting ethnographic fieldwork on this subject from a digital anthropology perspective would be invaluable, as it would provide feedback from listeners and consequently a deeper understanding of how listeners incorporate their engagement with podcasts into their migration experience and everyday lives, and to what extent podcasts play a role, or not, in their diasporic identity construction. Expanding this research to include a broader range of Iranian diaspora podcasts would also allow for the identification of emerging trends and shared patterns in content production and consumption. Comparing different digital platforms alongside podcasts could also reveal how diverse digital tools work together to strengthen community bonds

or create new ones. Additionally, a comparative analysis across various diasporas using podcasts could offer insight into distinct digital practices of Iranian migrants, while also highlighting shared patterns common to diaspora communities.

What can be affirmed here is that podcasts contribute to the development of ethnic group consciousness by building networks of social interactions among group members and strengthening existing connections. These podcasts transcend geographical boundaries, fostering bonds between diasporas dispersed across various cities or countries. They serve not only as cultural connectors but also as catalysts for social progress and cohesion, illustrating the impact of digital media on diasporic identities and communities.

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