

# Homi Bhabha and Iranian-American Literature of Diaspora: Is Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* Postcolonially Funny?

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**Abstract** From late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of Iranians have migrated to Western countries. Some of Iranian immigrants especially women in diaspora began writing memoirs which represent the questions of ethnics, identity, language and other problems they have grappled. Living in Western countries with different cultures positions emigrants in a state of ambivalence. This ambivalence creates a metaphorical lesion in their identities. In such conditions, Iranian diaspora searches for new identities through different ways. This searching is represented in Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* (2003), narrating the life of Firoozeh and her life-style in America. With its humorous tone, her memoir deals with social aspects of living in Western culture and dilutes political features of most memoirs written by Iranian women in diaspora. This article aims to analyze Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* through Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theories of hybridity, mimicry and stereotype in order to represent how the characters of *Funny in Farsi* in specific and the Iranian immigrants in general can obtain new identities in the Western communities. It is concluded that the sense of superiority in Firoozeh is gained through celebrating her new, hybrid identity in the third space while her parents' reluctance is depicted as inferior and humorous.

**Key words** Diaspora; *Funny in Farsi*; Hybridity; Mimicry; Stereotype; Third space

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## Introduction

Some Iranian women in diaspora have begun writing memoirs in recent years to express their inner feelings. Writing memoirs allow them greater latitude in expressing their opinions about living in Iran and residing in diaspora. They could propagate their attitudes through the popularity of their works all around the world. By reading the memoirs of these Iranian women, it can be understood how Iranian immigrants in Western countries confront many problems in terms of ethnics, identity, language and economic complications in diaspora. Living in Western communities challenges the position and identity of Iranian immigrants; indeed, they are in a state of ambivalence in Western culture. In such conditions, Iranians in diaspora lose their original identities and through different ways, they begin searching for new identities to be able to live with Western people.

The difficulties of living in diaspora and searching for new identities are reflected in Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* (2003). It is a collection of unified short stories that narrates the life of Firoozeh, a little girl who moved from Iran to America. When she was seven, she and her family all moved to Whittier, California in search of a better life. Her father, Kazem, studied in America at a graduate school in Texas. Kazem believed that America is the land of dreams and his insufficient knowledge of English is enough for a prosperous life in America. Unfortunately, his claims were false and Firoozeh tried to adjust herself to American culture, leading to many humorous and awkward encounters. The book follows Firoozeh and her family, as she deals with issues such as trying to earn money, marrying François, and the anti-Iranian feelings many Americans share during and after the Iranian Hostage Crisis.

This research singles out Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* for analyzing the conditions of Iranian immigrants because Dumas's memoir is different from any other memoir of Iranian women in diaspora. Its difference is egregious due to foregrounding sociocultural issues of emigration and blurring the political aspects, unlike other memoirs (Grassian 126). Those memoirs range from historically charming to shocking, sad or tragic. Some address political subjects, like Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), others grapple with the difficulties of adapting to a life in exile. Some wrote about nostalgia, like Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005),

while others such as Marina Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran* (2006) show Iran as a giant prison (Ramazani 294). Nevertheless, Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* is about social aspects of living in America expressed with humorous tone. On the one hand, most of Iranian women in diaspora have had Iranian elite families such as Azar Nafisi and Lily Monadjemi whose sociocultural backgrounds affect their works which are mostly about political matters. On the other hand, Dumas belongs to non-aristocratic family and this issue may be the reason of her apolitical memoir.

Title and cover of many memoirs, which deal with political matters, tell about their content such as *Prisoner of Tehran* (2006) and *Journey from the Land of No* (2005). They portray the colonial expectations of Muslim women in veil. The apolitical title and cover of Dumas's memoir are special subjects that few articles paid attention. Thus, it is the main reason that this paper selects *Funny in Farsi* among other memoirs. Many articles which have been written so far, draw their attention towards political memoirs, for instance, Marandi and Pirnajmuddin (2009) focus on Azar Nafisi and Azadeh Moaveni. Some articles which have been written about memoirs of Iranian women in diaspora briefly mentioned Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* without analyzing it in detail. However, this article attempts to fully scrutinize *Funny in Farsi* through Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theories.

After some explanations about sociocultural background of some Iranian women in diaspora as well as discussions about title and cover of the memoirs, this article will explain Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theories of hybridity, mimicry and stereotype and the applications of these concepts to the context of immigration. Through Dumas's stereotypical perspectives toward her parents which show generational conflicts, the paper will express the differences between the first and the second immigrant generations. The purpose of this article is to analyze how the characters of *Funny in Farsi* are searching for new identities to be able to live in the community of America.

### **Sociocultural Background of Iranian Diaspora Literature**

Most of women in diaspora who have written memoirs have had Iranian elite families, such as Azar Nafisi, who is the daughter of one of Iran capital's mayors and her mother was one of the first female members of parliament in Iran before the Islamic Revolution (1979). Sattareh Farman-Farmian, the narrator of *Daughter of Persia* (1996), is a princess of Qajar Dynasty who ruled Iran until late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lily Monadjemi, the writer of *Blood and Carnation* (1993) and *A Mother of Survival* (2010) is a descendent of Nassar-Al-Din Shah, one of the kings of Qajar Dynasty (1848-1896). Marjan Satrapi who wrote *Persepolis* (2003) is

another descendent of Qajar monarch. Davar Ardalan, the author of *My Name is Iran* (2008) is the daughter of Laleh Bakhtiar, one of the most prominent Iranian-American women scholar, and the only woman who has translated the Koran with feminist flavor. It seems that most of what is being written about Iran is presented by a particular class of Iranian society. Few writers like Marina Nemat, Gina Nahai, Susan Pari and Firoozeh Dumas belong to non-aristocratic family (Fotouhi 33-34).

The opinions of these Iranian women in diaspora about Iran can be understood due to their sociocultural background and their viewpoints toward Iran. These views have reflected in titles and covers of their memoirs that range from political to nonpolitical. The titles and book covers of the memoirs of Iranian women inform us much about their contents highlighting the urgency of life, death, revolution and the question of mandatory veiling and unveiling (Fotouhi 31). We can name, *Unveiled: Life and Death among the Ayatollahs* (1995), *Out of Iran: One Women's Escape from the Ayatollahs* (1988), *In the House of My Bibi: Growing Up in Revolutionary Iran* (2008), *Honeymoon in Tehran: Two Years of Love and Danger in Iran* (2009), *Rage against the Veil: the Courageous Life and Death of an Islamic Dissident* (1999). The title of *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America* (2003), reflects none of these political issues. The word of *Funny* is the evidence of universal motif, humor, and *Farsi* is a sign of ethnic implication. According to the title of this memoir, it can be understood that Dumas did not use a political tone in her social analysis of Iran and Iranians. This light and humorous tone of Dumas's memoir attracted the attention of not only the American readers but also the conventional Iranian readers who did not see any questionable matter in this memoir (Grassian 129).

The book covers of the memoirs can also be considered as important notions. Some of them, such as Nafisi's *Things I've Been Silent About: Memoirs* (2008) and Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter* (2004), illustrate the notion of silence, veiling, oppression and imprisonment and accentuating the differences between women in Iran and women in the West. More than half of Iranian women's memoirs have similar cover image of a woman whose face hides under a veil. Half-veiled face, with piercing eyes staring at the audience is the typical image that one can witness on the covers of *Unveiled* (1995), *Prisoner of Tehran* (2008, Fig. 1), *Journey from the Land of No* (2004), *Rage against the Veil* (1999), *In the House of My Bibi* (2008, Fig. 2) and *Watch Me* (2010).

The cover of *Funny in Farsi* (Fig. 3) illustrates none of these images. It demonstrates balloons and a cartoonlike woman in the shape of Mickey Mouse. All of these evidences depict that *Funny in Farsi* does not deal with politics, which

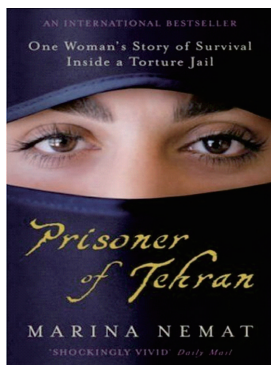


Figure 1

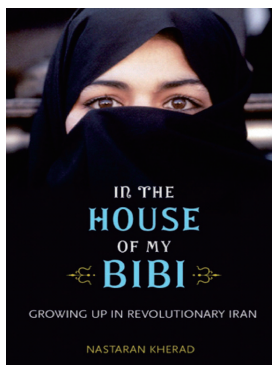


Figure 2

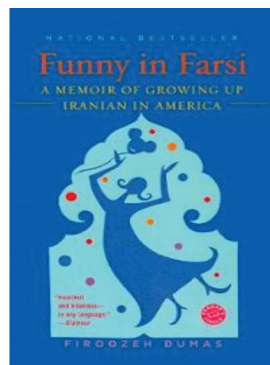


Figure 3

is why Dumas's memoir differs from more popular Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005) and other memoirs of Iranian women in diaspora which are loaded with political issues.

### Review of Literature

Ramin and Jalalizadeh (2014) explore the already-hybridized self and psyche of Firoozeh Dumas as an Iranian-American. They claim that Dumas writes about Iran as well as America to reflect how she could establish a peaceful relation between different parts of her identity. This paper considers how she has depicted her homeland and the country she currently lives in. Samadi Rendy (2015) focuses on postcolonial and postmodern theories of bilingualism and gendered identities. She examines the relationship between bilingualism and female characters' identity formation in recent memoirs of Iranian women in diaspora, especially Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* (55). Tahani-Bidmeshki (2007) has devoted some parts of her article to *Funny in Farsi* entitled "Reading Funny Lipstick through Jihad." She explores the cross-sections of nationalism and feminism in Dumas's memoir. She addresses Dumas's political experience within the discourses of nationalism and feminism. She explains Dumas's self-orientalization through her discussions of the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Fotouhi's "Self-Orientalism and Reorientation" deals with gender dichotomy in the Middle East and the interest of the West in understanding this dichotomy. She employs Edward Said's theories and contends that the memoirs of the Middle Eastern women are involved in self-orientalisation. She examines most memoirs of Iranian women and she does not focus on one specific work. Zand (2015) pays attention to Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* and its Persian translation. Her study aims at comparing the signs of hybridity in immigration literature and its Persian translation

to discover if the translator saved the elements of hybridity in translation and his ideology had any effects on dehybridizing the text (208).

“Translating the Self” (2006) deals with a number of Iranian-American women’s memoirs and the question of language as a key element of cultural identity. It examines the Iranian-American women writers in terms of their relationship to Persian language as a key component of the self. It shows that those Iranian-American memoirists, who narrate their journeys between Iran and the United States, represent their translation of self across the boundaries of language (Elahi 461). “Constructing an Axis of Evil” (2009) has studied the memoirs of Iranian women in diaspora including Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Marjaneh Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and Azadeh Moaveni’s *Lipstick Jihad*. It concerns with why many Iranian intellectuals are considered as people who are negatively influenced by the Western culture (Marandi and Pirnajmuddin 23).

A large number of articles were penned about political memoirs and a few papers were inscribed about Firoozeh Dumas’s apolitical *Funny in Farsi*. Among different approaches which have been applied to Iranian-American women’s memoirs, Homi Bhabha’s theories of hybridity, mimicry and stereotype are selected, since they are concordant with Dumas’s *Funny in Farsi*, the memoir of an Iranian immigrant (Firoozeh herself and her family) in America.

### **Theoretical Framework: Homi Bhabha’s Postcolonialism**

Homi Bhabha argues about the hybridity and impurity of cultures. Hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are always in contact with one another which eventually leads to cultural mixedness. This impurity of cultures refer to an original mixedness within every form of identity (Huddart 4) perceived in the immigrants living in Western countries. According to Bhabha, people who are in a hybrid position feel that they do not belong to a particular culture (Leitch and Cain 2377). The colonized, the immigrants and other minorities experience the situation of being in the hybrid space. They appertain neither to their own culture nor to the dominant culture, in other words, they are on the borderline of cultures. Being in this borderline means shaping in-between status or an identity which is central to the creation of new cultural meaning. To give privilege to in-between-ness is to undermine solid, authentic culture in favor of unexpected, hybrid and fortuitous cultures. According to Bhabha, the proper location of culture is on the boundary (Huddart 4-5). He believes that one who is in the place of boundary begins his or her presencing and this presence is accompanied by ambivalence (Rivkin and Ryan 936).

Based on postcolonialism, the colonized acquires ambivalent feelings toward the colonizer after a long relationship with the colonizer. It includes binary and contradictory feelings of desire, infatuation, and repulsion. Bhabha contends that this ambivalence turns the identity of the colonized to a hybrid position. The situation of being in ambivalence and duality is clearly perceived in the identity of Iranian-American women such as Firoozed Dumas. The postcolonial theories of Bhabha can also be exerted to the context of immigration as well. Through his perspectives, this article attempts to represent the hybrid conditions of Iranian-American women who live in diaspora, in general, and the hybrid situation of Firoozeh Dumas and her family in America, in particular.

Bhabha argues that hybridity does not refer only to space, but also to time. Being in the 'beyond' is to inhabit an intervening space; to dwell 'in the beyond' entails a revisionary of time. Hybridity means a return to the present, to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future in its hither side (Rivkin and Ryan 938). In the place of beyond or intervening space, the past, present and future of a hybrid person mingle together. For an instance, an immigrant brings past to present and the combination of past and present makes a new sense of identity. This encounter with 'newness' is not a part of continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. This process renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space. It innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The process of past-present is the necessity of living in different culture (Rivkin and Ryan 938). In the memoirs of Iranian-American women such as Firoozeh Dumas's, the characters bring their past in Iran to their present in America and this past-present process introduces new identities to Iranian-Americans. Being in the place of hybridity constructs the feeling of displacement and disjunction in the colonized or other minorities and these feelings lead to unhomeliness (Rivkin and Ryan 937). The immigrants such as Iranian-Americans experience displacement and disjunction in the Western culture and due to these feelings, they are in the uncanny or unhomely situation which does not totalize experience of being a Westerner.

In the postcolonial context, mimicry becomes a way for inferior to imitate and be like the superior. According to Bhabha, the imitator will not be one hundred percent the same as the original one. Mimicry is the process of reshaping, but not totally perfect "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86). In the process of mimicry, the imitated should be encountered by the imitator. In this encountering, the imitator tries to copy what the imitated has, and the two must encounter in one space, which is both mental and physical. Bhabha refers to this space as the third

space. It “overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity” (Bhabha 86). Third space occurs in an encounter between the colonizer and the colonized in undetermined space beyond the colonizer and the colonized. In this space, hybridity is constituted and mimicry is processed in its negotiation. For Bhabha, mimicry is the play between equivalence and excess, which makes the colonized both similar and also terrifying: “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (Bhabha 86).

In this understanding, hybridity and mimicry cannot be separated at all because hybridity shows a borderless encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Mimicry means the effect resulted from this encounter which makes the colonized imitate the colonizer while the imitation is never the same. The dissimilar imitation becomes the mockery. Mimicry is “a flawed colonial memesis” (Bhabha 87). The flaw in imitation which leads to mockery represents the resistance of the colonized to colonialism in general. Mimicry can be interpreted as a strategy of resistance (Huddart 39). Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity, third space, and mimicry are brought to the context of immigration in terms of behavior and language of the characters in *Funny in Farsi*. The memoirs of Iranian-American women show how the immigrants try to imitate the behavior of the Americans and through these imitations they depict their resistance toward American culture.

By stereotype, Bhabha means that colonial discourse depends heavily on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. It shows that the Other is already fixed as unchangeable, known and predictable, but at the same time, the Other is also contradictorily residing in a state of disorder. This justifies the colonizers’ domination. Such contradiction in the colonial discourse itself reveals the resistance within colony (Huddart 28). The colonizers form their own identity in relation to the Other, but such an identity is characterized by ambivalence, which involves a process of fear, desire, ambivalence and paranoiac identification (Bhabha 61). Stereotype is employed for the characters of *Funny in Farsi*, to reveal the attitudes of Firoozeh and her parents, especially her father, since they try to find new identities in the context of diaspora as the new hybrid space.

### ***Funny in Farsi* through the Lens of Bhabha**

Firoozeh Dumas, an Iranian-American female novelist, who has been living in America since her childhood, strands in two different cultures: Iranian in which she was born and the American in which she grew up. She lives in a third space, neither to Iranian nor to American culture but somewhere hybrid. This sense of hybridity has been represented in “The Wedding,” one of the most important short

stories in *Funny in Farsi*, where she narrates her dating with the future husband, the dissatisfaction François' mother and her marriage. In this story, Firoozeh is going to celebrate her wedding both in the church according to American tradition and *Aqd Aroosi* ceremony (marriage contract) according to Iranian tradition: "François and I had agreed that we would be married both in the Catholic Church and in a traditional Persian ceremony" (Dumas 145).

Her decision depicts her ambivalent and hybrid situation. She wants to embrace both sides of being an Iranian Muslim as well as a Christian American. Her in-between situation turns her to a different person with new identity. Being on the boundary reveals her presencing. For Bhabha, the proper location of culture is on the boundary and one who resides in the third space begins presencing. Yet, this presence is accompanied with ambivalence. Firoozeh's decision to hold her wedding in the style of both cultures represents her position in the third space and the impurity of her culture and identity.

Firoozeh dwells in the beyond, in an intervening space. Her past and present gather in one space and she cannot separate her past in Iran from her present in America. We can refer to the story of "You Can Call Me Al," where her past always innovates and interrupts the performance of her present:

"What made Las Vegas even more awful were my memories of real vacations we had taken in the past. In Iran, vacation meant going to the Caspian Sea. Every summer, my father's employer, the National Iranian Oil Company, allowed its employees the use of its villas in Mahmood Abad for one week. Mahmood Abad, a town on the Caspian shore, was a two-day drive from Abadan." (Dumas 53)

She always compares her past in Iran with her present in America. Firoozeh recalls the past but through her recollection, she reinscribes it and via this process, she encounters new identity. This newness acknowledges a hybrid space. Her memories are neither similar to her past nor akin to her present. It creates a sense of the newness, hybridity, as a result of cultural translation. There is a partial presence in her recollection of the past as a result of living several years in America. When she wrote her memoir in 2003, she was a mature woman and the culture of America had permeated into her mind. Therefore, there is a partial presence of American culture in her memories which renews the past and refigures it. According to Bhabha, the 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity of living in different culture.

The act of mimicry is palpable in the behavior and speech of Firoozeh's

mother. Her mother, who lived in Iran more than half of her life, cannot speak English, as reflected in the story of “Hot Dogs and Wild Geese.” With her arrival at America and encounter with the Americans, the way she imitates the language of the Americans is bordering on mockery:

“I always encouraged my mother to learn English, but her talents lay elsewhere. Since she had never learned English in school, she had no idea of its grammar. She would speak entire paragraphs without using any verbs. She referred to everyone and everything as ‘it’.” (Dumas 11)

Thought mimicry of Firoozeh’s mother is the result of her encounter with the Americans, her imitation is never the same. Her mimicry leads to mockery as a result of the flaw in her speaking English. She is not eager to learn English and her reluctance represents her resistance to the American culture and language. Living in America forces Firoozeh’s mother to encounter with the Americans in the third space. Since mimicry happens in the conditions of being in a place of hybridity, hybridity and mimicry cannot be separated.

This act of mimicry can clearly be seen in the behavior of Firoozeh’s father, Kazem. He desires to be more American than the Americans when he imitates their behavior and language. In “The Gutter,” he underestimates the participants of a bowling match on a television show and believes that he can do bowling better than the American contestants: “My father’s comments ranged from ‘You should’ve gotten that!’ to ‘I would’ve gotten that!’ From our sofa, bowling looked easy, and we couldn’t understand why so many contestants failed to win the jackpot” (Dumas 15). He takes part in a bowling match and fails. His failure in imitating the Americans is also represented in the story of “You Can Call Me Al.” Whenever he finds an opportunity, he goes to Las Vegas to gamble with the Americans, but he is always the loser:

“My father headed straight for the blackjack tables. Everyone except gamblers knows that gambling never pays. My father always believed that he was this close to the big one, but because of some unforeseen event, like someone else winning, he’d lost.” (Dumas 51-52)

Kazem tries to be like the Americans but this act of reshaping is not totally perfect, almost the same, but not quite. His repeated defeats in his affairs reveals this colonial tension that he cannot experience being an American. He tries to imitate the

behaviors and acts of the Americans when he encounters them but the flaws in his mimicry always lead to mockery.

As the story of “Hot Dogs and Wild Geese” shows, Kazem knows himself as an American citizen because he was educated in America for two years, but his way of speaking English destroys his pretentiousness:

“My father spoke a version of English not yet shared with the rest of America. . . . [His] inability to understand spoken English was matched only by his efforts to deny the problem. His constant attempts at communicating with Americans seemed at first noble and adventurous, then annoying.” (Dumas 8-9)

Kazem’s behavior throughout *Funny in Farsi*, ironically, represents the narcissistic desires of the colonized. He aims to be more American than the Americans and in that mimicry he finds himself superior to the Americans to the extent that he considers himself as Self and the Americans as Others. Kazem forms his own identity in relation to the Americans but his identity is characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, he desires to appear as an American through imitating the behaviors of Americans and on the other hand, he fears to lose his position as a superior person.

Firoozeh herself tends to be more American rather than Iranian. In “The ‘F Word’,” she depicts this inclination by changing her name from Firoozeh to Julie. Her name as a signifier for Iranian identity is shifted to Julie, with the excuse of “simplicity,” Firoozeh was derogatively pronounced as Ferocious by her schoolmates (Dumas 64). It seems that her intention for changing her name is to obtain an American identity:

“To strengthen my decision to add an American name, I had just finished fifth grade in Whittier, where all the kids incessantly called me ‘Ferocious’. That summer, my family moved to Newport Beach, where I looked forward to starting a new life. I wanted to be a kid with a name that didn’t draw so much attention, a name that didn’t come with a built-in inquisition as to when and why I had moved to America. . . . I finally chose the name ‘Julie’.” (Dumas 63-64)

Her encounter with the American students impels her to imitate the Americans and change her Iranian name, but her act of reshaping is not totally perfect and she cannot be one hundred percent the same as the original Self of the colonizer.

This fact can be proved by her return to Iranian heritage: “When I went to college, I eventually went back to using my real name” (Dumas 65). After her “flawed colonial memesis” (Bhabha 87), this return shows her ambivalence, her presencing in the boundary. Firoozeh cannot fix her position and identity on one specific culture. She belongs neither to America nor to Iran, but the hybrid third space. Her position in the Third space motivates her to translate American culture and this cultural translation is not a unified, homogenized experience. It happens in the place of hybridity. By changing her name from Firoozeh to Julie, it can be understood that she is on the boundary and this position forces her to mimic Americans. Her ambivalence is palpable in her constant movement to and fro (changing and returning to her name). In this instance, hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence intermingle in time and space both mentally and physically. It is impossible to separate hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence due to their interrelation.

The Hostage Crisis in Iran (1979-1981) during the Islamic Revolution (1979) was the main reason for Firoozeh’s inclination to American culture. The Iran Hostage Crisis was a political action between Iran and the United States in which fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days by Iranian university students who took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran. After the Hostage Crisis, Americans were representing their hatred toward Iranians in Dumas’s narrative. In “I-ranians Need Not Apply,” through utilizing pun and humor in “I-ran” and “Iran,” she narrates the hardships of being Iranian. For Dumas, having an Iranian identity meant to be ostracized from American community: “With each passing day, palpable hatred grew among many Americans, hatred not just of the hostage takers but of all Iranians” (Dumas 117). Therefore, Firoozeh tries to obtain new identity rather than being faithful to her Iranian background. She fills this gap by marrying a westerner, François. She believes that her marriage to a western man leads to a new, hybrid identity, compensates for her inferiority, and helps the process of Americanization. In “Bernice,” her view toward her husband is a stereotypical one. She sees him as superior and tries to obtain his superiority by marrying him. Only beside her husband, she feels like a western celebrity:

“People see my husband and think of Gene Kelly dancing with Leslie Caron. People see me and think of hostages. This is why, in my next life, I am applying to come back as a Swede. I assume that as a Swede, I will be a leggy blonde. Should God get things confused and send me back as a Swede trapped in the body of a Middle Eastern woman, I’ll just pretend I’m French.” (Dumas 41)

Dumas wrote her memoir from point of view of an American woman. In narration, Dumas shows herself more American than Iranian and it can be proved by her stereotypical representations of Iranians through describing her parents. She considers herself superior to them. In “Leffingwell Elementary School,” she depicts her mother as an uneducated and backward woman: “After a few awkward attempts by my mother to find Iran on the map, Mrs. Sandberg finally understood that it wasn’t my mother’s lack of English that was causing a problem, but rather her lack of world geography” (Dumas 6).

Firoozeh’s superiority is represented in her fluent English at the age of seven acting as her mother’s translator. She also illustrates her mother as a stereotypical Iranian woman who does not have any right to decide for herself. Her mother shows no resistance against her husband’s decision when he dictates the choice: “My mother rarely questions my father’s choices, and when she does, he answers her with one of his typical opinions: ‘Anybody with a brain can tell that’s a no vote’” (Dumas 119).

Dumas’s description of her mother’s lifestyle, indicating the patriarchal society of Iran, is the stereotypical representation of a submissive, indecisive Iranian woman. She employs humor in her memoir and this humor arouses a question: does Dumas use humor in *Funny in Farsi* to laugh at Iranians or to mock Americans? The butt of satire and the humorous aspects of *Funny in Farsi* are mostly directed to Iranians and their portrayals as stereotype. Dumas uses humor in recounting the stories of her parents and her uncle. She employs this humor intentionally to show the inferiority of the colonized and her superiority as the paragon of a hybrid American.

Some critics believe that for Dumas, this light tone or humor allows readers to identify with her family and to understand and appreciate the universality of humanity (Grassian 123-126). Though in her interviews, she believes in equality for all human being, her claim is only partly reflected in her practice (Grassian 126). Her desire to be more American than an Iranian reveals her residence in the third space. Her inner contradiction represents her ambivalence. This ambivalence in her speech and act is depicted by her stereotypical view toward her parents.

### ***Funny in Farsi* Portrays the First and the Second Generations of Iranian-Americans**

Dumas’s viewpoint towards her parents represents the conflict between two different generations. Characters in the memoirs of Iranian women in diaspora can be divided into two generations. The first generation advocates the mother tongue

and national values. At the same time, they try to transmit these principles to the next generation. The first generation is expected to be faithful to the value system of Iranian community in diaspora; therefore, they are not interested in learning new language. On the contrary, the second generation of immigrants adjust themselves easily to the new society and eagerly learn English. Because of participating and being educated at schools or universities of the host country, the second generation integrate into the new society and this society invites them to learn the language in order to feel the sense of belonging. Yet, this belonging is never complete, as we witnessed in the case of Firoozeh. *Funny in Farsi* represents the insufficiency of basic education in the host country or social interactions for first generation. That is why these characters struggle with learning English.

The second generation have more social contacts in the new society and they learn the second language willingly (Rendy 58-64). In *Funny in Farsi*, Firoozeh's mother belongs to the first generation. In terms of language, she sticks to her mother tongue and never learns English well enough (Dumas 11). Since she has limited education, she cannot acquire English to communicate with other people. That is why the daughter plays the role of an intermediary, an interpreter: "My mother soon decided that the easiest way for her to communicate with Americans was to use me as an interpreter" (Dumas 10).

Later in "The Wedding," when Firoozeh introduces her fiancé, François, to her parents, her mother cannot understand her daughter's friendship with a man before their marriage. Iranian values related to courtships are represented as stereotypes of arranged marriages: "Dating, like the rodeo circuit or trout farming, is a completely foreign concept to my parents. They, like all their sisters and brothers, never dated, their marriages having been arranged by family members" (Dumas 142). Firoozeh's mother cannot assimilate American culture. Since Firoozeh belongs to the second generation, she eagerly learns English and adapts herself to the culture of America. In order to belong to the new country, she tries to embrace the hybridity of social life, the third space.

## Conclusion

Scrutinizing Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* through the lens of Bhabha's hybridity, mimicry and stereotype in the context of diaspora, this paper reveals that Iranian people who immigrate to the Western countries confront a different culture that challenges their Iranian beliefs and values. Dumas has portrayed the conditions of Iranians in diaspora. In their encounter with the Americans, Firoozeh and her family face identity crisis. They try to mimic the behavior and language of the

Americans but this mimicry leads to mockery when it comes to Firoozeh's parents. Their failure to be Americans creates humorous events in the story. In other words, their imprecise manner of speaking English and the narcissistic and preposterous demeanor of Firoozeh's father alludes to their deficiency of being native citizens and consequently lead to hilarious events. They are in the third space, a place of hybridity where ambivalence is born. In this space, they feel that they belong neither to Iranian culture nor to American culture but somewhere in-between. It is in the hybrid place that Firoozeh and her family begin their presencing. Being on the boundary means obtaining new identity and introducing creative invention into existence. This sense of newness is the necessity of living in a different culture. Firoozeh and her family can manage to live beside the Americans with their new identities that they acquire in the third space. However, Firoozeh's presencing is privileged because unlike her parents who did not learn English and were faithful to most Iranian values, she embraced hybridity.

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