The Making of Exile Cultures

Iranian Television in Los Angeles

Hamid Naficy

University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis
London

and in periodicals about television must partly be attributed to the failure of program producers to take into account the diversity of their target audiences. Just because they all share the fact of displacement, a national language, and, to a large extent, opposition to the Islamic Republic does not mean that they have no differences. But until the late 1980s exile producers exploited the commonalities of their audiences and suppressed their differences for their own economic gain, and to enlist political solidarity favoring monarchist nationalism. As such they have acted more to consolidate Iranian ethnicity than to promote assimilation.

Since the late 1980s, however, a series of factors have contributed to modifying the homogenized notion of the audience as a unified biological or national family: proliferation of producers and programs; emergence of women producers; availability of multiple transmission channels, particularly cable television; specialization through targeting of microaudiences based on gender, age, education, profession, religion, and language; termination of the Iraq-Iran war; reduction in the bellicose mutual rhetoric of Iranian and American governments; and the reduction of the culture of politics and ascendency of a politics of culture among the exiles.

All the women producers began (and ended) their shows in the late 1980s (*Didar, Ma, Sima va Nava-ye Iran*). Live phone-in shows, transmitted nationally via satellite, began during this period (*Emshab ba Parviz, Harf va Goft, Sokhani ba Ravanshenas*). Exile-produced serials increased in number and quality. A few shows, such as *Tapesh* and *Diyar*, attempted to target young audiences by programming music videos. The program *You and the World of Medicine* became the first regularly scheduled Iranian program in the English language. The political discourse of exilic television also widened, with the introduction in this period of the anti-government guerrilla show (*Sima-ye Azadi*), the Assembly of God religious program (*Mozhdeh*), and the somewhat pro-Islamic cultural program (*Aftab*). Clearly this diversity of programming targets hitherto unaddressed constituencies, or creates constituencies where there were none. Such transformations show that one of the keys to the survival of Iranian exilic television will be its ability to keep up with its audiences and act as a means for both assimilation and exilic identification.

Over the past decade, Iranian exilic television has developed certain structures for production, transmission, syndication, time-brokering, cross-fertilization, advertising, and audience segmentation that have helped to create an ethnic economy and an Iranian national and exilic identity. At the same time, by rationalizing the industry and introducing market forces into production, transmission, and consumption, these structures have helped exilic television to facilitate the assimilation of its audiences.

4
The Exilic Television Genre and Its Textual Politics and Signifying Practices

How the Shows Are Seen

For many Iranian exiles, Sunday lunches are big affairs, an occasion for the entire nuclear or extended family and friends to get together for a late meal. Up to the mid-1980s, many restaurants offering Iranian food in Los Angeles had installed in a prominent place a television set or a video projection system. On these screens, the customers could watch old music videos and TV serials made before the revolution and imported from the homeland. They could also watch exile-produced TV shows such as Iranian, Jonbesh-e Iran, *and* Jam-e Jam, *which have for years been aired on Sundays in one block from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. The narrow rooms typical of the restaurants and the symmetrical seating arrangement created a kind of classical quattrocento perspective, with the television screen forming its vanishing point. No matter where you sat, at least one side of the restaurant faced the screen squarely and you were forced to look at it. Even though the volume was often turned up so high as to interfere with conversation and the image broke up frequently, no one seemed to mind. It was as though the customers were facing an electronic altar or* qebleh *(prayer niche) that displayed sacred icons of an idealized homeland and an irretrievable past.*

Watching the Sunday shows during social functions, however, was not limited to public occasions and places. In homes, too, these pro-

grams provided a moving background for Sunday lunches and children's birthday parties. Television thus became part of public and private rituals. Even during the inevitable dances and obligatory singing of the birthday songs, the set would remain on with the sound turned down. During periods of crises, such as the bombing of Iranian cities, Scud missile attacks, and waves of assassinations and executions at home, television would suddenly move to the foreground. The news headlines or a particular film clip would bring a quick hush to the crowd. Eyes would be glued to the set, the silence broken by an occasional angry outburst. The celebration would resume, infected by the news of home.

Interestingly, not all viewers of Iranian programs are Iranian or are of Iranian descent. Shared cultures and history allow cross-viewing among not only Iranian subethnics but also other Middle Eastern populations in diaspora. My friend's mother, an elderly Jewish emigre from Palestine, likes to watch Iranian programs even though she does not understand Persian at all. It seems the nostalgic music and visuals of exile music videos remind her of her own childhood and homeland.

Exilic Television as a Ritual Genre

The approach to the analysis of television adopted here considers exile television as a genre, with its own televisual flow, textual strategies, and signifying practices. This might be called a "generic ritual" approach, since it seeks to understand not only the genre itself but also its interplay with the evolving community that produces and consumes it. For a community living in the liminality and anarchy of exile, the television that it produces and consumes is a vehicle through which the exilic subculture and its members, collectively or individually, *construct* themselves in the new environment. Television for them not only reflects but also constitutes and transforms the community. The televisual exile genre is without precedence, as it is produced and consumed by people outside of their own culture and society. The long time frame, the critical apparatuses, and the common grounds necessary for codifying and internalizing the genre conventions are largely absent.

As a ritual genre, exile television helps to negotiate between the two states of exile, *societas* and *communitas*. Societas is the rule-bound structured world both of the homeland from which the exiles are separated and the host society to which they are acculturating (Turner 1969). Communitas, on the other hand, is the formless, liminal state in which the rules and structures of both home and host societies are suspended, and aspects

of sacredness and religiosity—here, ritual—take their place. When social structures are threatened, communitas emerges, and helps the exiles maintain similarity through elaboration of differences based on ethnicity and locality. This is a concept that appears to fly in the face of attempts made by structuralists to negate the concept of community in favor of universal structures. We are in a historical period characterized by waning of traditional universalist ideologies such as colonialism, neocolonialism, and communism and we are witnessing the world over, in preindustrial and postindustrial nations alike, people continuing to aggressively assert their locality and ethnicity through marking their boundaries.[1] Such boundaries are largely symbolically constructed, sometimes imperceptible to outsiders, redefinable by the members of the community itself, and maintained through manipulation of symbols of that community.

Rituals gain additional prominence when the actual social boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred, or weakened. Communal celebrations (weddings, barmitzvas, batmitzvas, discos, political demonstrations, anniversaries, calendrical festivals) occupy a prominent place in the cultural repertoire of the exiles, and commercially driven exilic television as a ritual functions in parallel with these social rituals to maintain individual, communal, and national boundaries.[2] It introduces a sense of order and control into the life of the viewers by producing and replicating a variety of systematic patterns that set up continually fulfilled (or postponed) expectations: narratological and generic patterns (program format, formulaic plots, stock characters, regular hosts and newscasters, a familiar studio set), patterns of consumption (scheduled airing and repeated airing of programs, interruption of the text for commercials, household environment, and viewer activity), and patterns of signification (subjectivity, mode of address, iconography).

Together all these narratological, consumption, and signification patterns produce an electronic communitas, which creates for exilic producers and viewers alike a sense of stability out of instability and commonality out of alienation. Part of the work of exilic popular culture, including television, is to produce a repository of symbols and a web of signification with which exiles can think and through which they may differentiate themselves from the host society. That is why exile is such an intensely symbolic and semiotic space and exilic television so integral an element in it.

As ritual, exilic television not only aids in creating an exilic communitas but also facilitates the transformation of the communitas toward the host societas. As such, exilic television helps the exiles maintain a dual subjectivity and a syncretic identity. There are many characteristics that set apart the exilic genre from other televisual genres. At the level of texts and inter-

texts, the exile genre is characterized structurally by nested texts, flow, and schedule, and by the magazine format; narratologically and ideologically by the narratives and iconographies of fetishization and ambivalence; thematically by nostalgic longing for a reconstituted past and homeland and the metaphoric staging of return to the origin; and politically by the construction of a particular imaginary nation-at-a-distance in exile.

Televisual Texts

Determining what the unit of analysis for television should be and what a televisual text is has proven to be a problem largely because television texts are so multipurpose, polyvalent, and amorphous. Raymond Williams formulated the television text as a rather hermetic and seamless "planned flow" in the construction of which viewers play a more or less passive part (1975). Horace Newcomb's concept of the "viewing strip," on the other hand, foregrounded the active role of viewers in constructing the texts they watch (1988). In an effort to move away from text-based analyses toward locating television within the political economy of production and consumption, Nick Browne proposed the concepts of the "supertext" and the "megatext" as textual units of analysis. The supertext includes the program and all the interstitial materials surrounding it—teaser, titles, credits, advertisements, station identifications, program promotions, and public service announcements—its position within the schedule, and the relation of the schedule to the "socially mediated workday and workweek." The megatext consists of "everything that has appeared on television" (1984:177). Although these concepts take into account the television's textual environment and advance our understanding of the way the texts are linked with the political economy of consumerism, they fail to account for viewer activity, which, as will become evident, is much more complex in exilic than in mainstream television.

Much of the cultural studies work conducted in Britain, beginning with the work of Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, focused on establishing links between the production of television texts and their reception by audiences. The ideological, ethnographic, and feminist analyses that followed explored the links between the signifying practices of production and the socially structured audiences, thus turning television texts into writerly (in Barthes's sense, 1975), open (in Eco's sense, 1979), and producerly (in Fiske's sense, 1987b) thereby accounting for multiple readings.

"Liveness" characterizes the televisual flow and its textual components. Even when the event is prerecorded, its simultaneous transmission and reception affirms its live ontology and the ideology embedded in it, which Jane Feuer has defined as "the ideology of the live, the immediate, the direct, the spontaneous, the real" (1983:14). This ideology dominates the magazine and the talk-show formats, the quintessential forms of both mainstream and exilic television. The liveness of exilic television, however, has a fundamentally different character in that it unfolds in a liminal space, activating memories of elsewhere, and it is received in an exilic household.

Nested Exilic Text, Flow, and Schedule

The "text" of exilic television is what might be called a "nested text," in the sense that it is an exilic supertext nested within an exilic flow that is embedded within an ethnic flow which itself is nested within the mainstream television's megatext. The exilic supertext itself is a split or a double text because the program (text) is infused with sounds, images, and discourses primarily driven by the values, culture, and language of the homeland while the interstitial materials, particularly commercials, are driven chiefly by the consumerist ideology, values, and culture of the host society. Thus exilic television supertext is an instance of Derridean "double reading and writing," in which neither of the adjacent texts obtains primacy, as each resonates with or against and deconstructs the other. Split subjects produce split texts, and exilic supertexts both inscribe and erase cultural, racial, ethnic, historical, and linguistic differences and tensions which can be read when attention is paid to their interpermeability and resonances. The result is that the cohesiveness of the communitas created by televisual texts is threatened constantly by the implosion of the dominant host values by means of both the commercials interrupting the texts and the commodification practices of exile television itself.

Exile television programs are usually broadcast by television stations not as single entities but in clusters, forming an exilic flow. Los Angeles cable companies schedule *Iran* and *Shahr-e Farang* programs back to back on Friday nights and *Negah* and *Diyar* on Sunday nights; KSCI-TV schedules a series of Iranian programs from 7:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M. on weekdays and from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. on Sundays (see Table 8). These exilic flows are themselves nested, particularly in the case of KSCI-TV, within an ethnic flow containing clusters of programs from many national, ethnic, and linguistic groups (programs in 16 languages are aired). The majority of these programs are imported from home countries. Chinese programs occupy the afternoon and early evening slots, Korean shows dominate the prime-time hours on weeknights, and Japanese shows the prime-time hours on weekends (Table 21).

This conception of a multilingual nested ethnic televisual flow is radically different from the monolingual, monochannel, monocultural flow television scholars have formulated and studied. What is more, this ethnic flow is not insular. Through viewer activity and channel selection, it is inserted yet again into the larger megatext of television, which includes all broadcast channels. Exile television programs, therefore, are consumed within a triple-tiered viewer-strip selected by the audience. Exilic and ethnic viewers can travel across these nested flows (exilic, ethnic, and mainstream) because they are generally familiar with more than one language. For a majority of the monolingual viewers, however, the exilic and ethnic flows remain generally unreadable.

The ethnic flow at multiethnic stations is characterized not so much by seamlessness as by segmentation. It is also intensely hermeneutic, as varied politics, nationalities, ethnicities, religions, cultures, languages, classes, news values, narrative strategies, modes of address, physical locations, tastes, gestures, faces, sights, and sounds clash with one another.[3] This segmentation penetrates to even below the level of nationality as many emigre and exile communities are themselves not homogeneous.

The diversity of the Iranian population in terms of internal ethnicity, religiosity, and language allows its members to access not only Persian and English-language programs but also Armenian, Arabic, Assyrian, and Hebrew programs not necessarily produced by Iranians. Access to multiple texts produced in multiple languages by multiple nationalities and ethnicities makes the flow not only interethnic but also intraethnic. This textual access means the ethnic flow is replete with excess and alternate meanings, going beyond either intent or hegemony.

The oppositional use of this excess is made possible by the differences and contradictions among the exilic, ethnic, and dominant texts, which access brings to the fore. This semiotics of excess turns the viewer activity into a rather complex and intertextual one, both along the exilic and ethnic flows (syntagmatic intertextuality) and across the nested texts (paradigmatic intertextuality).[4] Because the exilic supertexts are nested within an ethnic flow, viewers are constantly made aware of the minor status of the exilic texts themselves and their own minority status as an audience in exile. A syntagmatic viewing of the exilic supertexts can serve to consolidate a sense of cohesion and hermeticity around the notions of exile and nationality. A paradigmatic intertextual reading of it, which places it within its commercial environment, the ethnic flow, and the mainstream megatext, however, creates multiple splittings and deconstructive nuances across all the texts, which serve to continually problematize the cohesive exilic, ethnic, and nationalistic readings. The exilic supertext and flow are thus not only excessive but also ambivalent and unstable.

Mainstream television establishes its relationship to the real world through the schedule, keyed to the workday and the workweek. As a result, the schedule tends to reproduce and naturalize the "logic and the rhythm of the social order" (Browne 1984:176). However, the exilic and ethnic television schedule—at least that produced by multiethnic stations—reproduces a radically different logic. Multiethnic stations lease their time not to the most popular shows but to the highest bidder, regardless of the type of programming. The majority of exile and ethnic programmers, in turn, do not make their programs with the schedule in mind, since the stations can change their airtime or bump them off the air on short notice. As a result, Iranian exile morning programs are not vastly different from afternoon or evening programs. The schedule then reflects the exile's own liminal condition, its formlessness, the endlessness of its time, its ambivalence.

The Magazine Format

The magazine format dominated exile TV in the first decade of its existence. Like most genres and rituals, the magazine format is not unchanging; here, it is a symbolic construct that changes with time as it responds to and inscribes the evolution of individual subjectivity and collective identity of the exiles. In this sense, exilic television by definition is both processual and contradictory as it encodes the tensions of exilic evolution, adaptation, and resistance. In the magazine format, the program unit typically consists of a collection of usually single-topic miniprograms linked by commercials. Historically, the format's use in the public affairs area resulted in talk shows and news magazines (the latter will be highlighted here).

The magazine format is one of the most proliferating and least studied forms of television and it is central to my analysis of the exile genre.[5] There are many variations, but in its classic form, the news magazine consists of several important structural features that set it apart from daily television newscasts and talk shows.[6] Like its printed namesake, a television magazine is transmitted on a specific day and at a specific time on a daily, weekly, or monthly schedule. Like printed magazines, it contains several self-contained segments, which are much longer than a typical item on a newscast. Unlike talk shows, which are usually studio-bound, the news magazine's segments are usually shot on location. Television magazines rely on a regular cast of anchors and reporters—stars of the format—who supply it with a public image, a sense of continuity, calmness, knowledge, authority, reliability, and humanity.[7] The enunciative strategy of the format is generally as follows: the regular in-studio anchors or hosts in-

troduce a segment, which is then reported by a correspondent in the field. In some cases (*60 Minutes*) the anchor and field reporter are the same, in others (*20/20*) they are different. Advertisements follow the completion of one segment, to be followed by another in-studio introduction to the next segment.

The magazine's mode of address is live and direct, with anchors and correspondents facing the camera and speaking directly to the invisible audience at home. The program's guests, likewise, speak without a written script to the hosts who act as intermediaries between them and the audience. The phatic banter and the "ritual of hospitality" between the in-studio hosts and guests or between anchors and field reporters enhance the "liveness" of the medium. All this is undergirded by the currency, urgency, and "realness" of the social issues the format usually tackles. The news magazine format can thus be characterized by immediacy, intimacy, and intensity.

A side effect of the ritual of hospitality is the creation of a sense of familiarity and familiality at the level of enunciation. At the reception end, too, these familiar and familial attributes are mobilized again by reception of the program within the home environment and by the pattern of viewing, which is often collective.[8] The direct address and the direct gaze of the anchors and reporters tend to suppress individual subjectivity obtainable through the primary process and suture. Instead, they foreground a kind of collective subjectivity, made available through the secondary process and through language.

The magazine's narrative regime is presentational, not representational. It is also self-reflexive and self-referential, and does not use the realist illusionism that dominates dramatic programming. Unlike these programs, the magazine does not hide its narrative and enunciative apparatuses (direct address and presence of reporters, cameras, microphones) or its own existence.[9] While dealing with the individual and social issues that real (empirical) people face in their daily lives, magazine shows do not ignore drama. News magazines generally do not use reenactments (although there are recent tabloid exceptions in mainstream programming), but they inject drama into the treatment of their "stories" by selecting sensational topics and exciting, villainous, or heroic personalities, and by employing classic dramatic structure. Further, although the magazines subscribe to the standard values of "objectivity" and "fairness," they do allow the expression of a wider and deeper range of opinions than do newscasts.

The magazine format's relationship to advertising was spelled out most clearly in the inception of the format by NBC in the early 1950s. Unlike the single-sponsor programs, then usually produced by advertising agencies, the "magazine concept" promoted the idea of inserting spot ads by multiple sponsors within programs produced by the networks themselves (Barnouw 1978:47). This arrangement allowed the networks to retain control of both the contents and the revenues. It is this same arrangement that drives exilic magazine programs.

The Exile Magazine

Structurally and narratologically, the exile magazine format is a composite genre combining features of both hard-news and tabloid magazine formats. At the same time, it contains certain elements that differentiate it from both of these forms of mainstream television and mark its exile status. Typically, the exile magazine contains the following seven elements: a program opening containing a visual logo and a musical signature; greetings by the program host and introduction to the program; advertisement, chiefly for ethnic products; then a newscast featuring news of the homeland, the world, and the United States, delivered often by regular news readers different from the host. While news usually is defined as political news, when it comes to news of the community in Los Angeles, it is often limited to entertainment news. Various types of news are separated by advertisements. A segment containing one or more of these constituent elements follows: a comedy skit, a segment of a continuing satirical or soap-opera serial, news commentary, interviews with people in the news or with experts in law, medicine, real estate, and financial matters. This segment may contain more than one commercial break. Then come current stocks, weather, sports, and fashion reports, and then one or more musical numbers, including music videos. Often the musical numbers are preceded or followed by a publicity interview with the performer.

From this taxonomic listing of elements of the magazine supertext, it becomes clear that the exile magazine, unlike its mainstream television counterpart, is an extremely heterogeneous, composite genre, combining both fictional and expository narratives and their various subgenres. In essence, this is a "montage" genre in which a number of genres and discourses meet head to head. Its principle of cohesiveness is not continuity but clash, not seamlessness but segmentation.[10] The hosts and commercials are the chief producers of continuity within the exilic supertext and flow.

The segmentation of the format, and the multiple ownership of programs by one producer, provide a built-in mechanism for intertextuality and self-referentiality, whereby producers and hosts can refer to and promote across a number of programs (and even media) the various programs in which they have an interest. This enhances discursive exposure, and

Fig. 11. Sportscast on *Iranian*.

also the earnings of the producers. That the "magazine concept" forces the exile producers to rely on spot ads instead of single sponsors means that they are not theoretically very susceptible to economic influence from a few powerful commercial sponsors. However, the exigencies and vulnerabilities of exile, at least in its early phase, open the producers to heavy political (even financial) influences brought on by powerful political factions.

Program Types

Throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, the magazine-style supertext dominated, although there were programs that did not fit into the form as tightly as others. Reflecting the processual nature of the exile genre itself and of television in general, which must continually change to find new audiences, during this period producers attempted to differentiate their programs from one another by varying the mix of the seven format elements noted above. This resulted in a gradual emergence of a number of types within the exile magazine format, which are listed here with one sample from among the current programs:[11] newscast (*Jong-e Bamdadi*),

news-feature magazine (*Sima-ye Ashna*), news commentary magazine (*Cheshmandaz*), cultural talk show (*Harf va Goft*), news magazine (*Iranian*), variety magazine (*Jam-e Jam*), pop music magazine (*Diyar*), satirical magazine (*Shahr-e Farang*), serial magazine (*Negah*), live phone-in magazine (*Emshab ba Parviz*), women and family magazine (*Didar*), religious magazine (*Mozhdeh*), ethnic magazine (*Bet Naharin*), medical talk show (*You and the World of Medicine*), guerrilla magazine (*Sima-ye Azadi*), and program-length advertising magazine (*Sobh-e Ruz-e Jom'eh*). It must be noted that each type of program may not necessarily contain all of the elements of the magazine format, but it will contain many of them in varied combination. For example, a news magazine may contain more news than a variety magazine but it will also contain at least one musical number. Likewise, the variety magazine contains some hard news. In the same vein, the interview on the news magazine may be focused on news and current affairs, while that of the variety magazine would deal with the entertainment field.

Gradually, several programs became so specialized that strictly speaking they can no longer be called magazines, but even these retained some of the features of the format. In the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, *Negah* devoted much of its half-hour broadcasts to airing two engaging soap-opera serials produced in exile, but it retained some of the format elements: opening logo and musical signature, greetings by the host, phatic banter with co-host, news, interview with a psychologist about the topics raised by the program, and advertisements. In 1992, the Assembly of God religious program, *Mozhdeh*, came on board. Although the program is commercial-free and devoted to proselytizing, it uses a number of hosts, choral and musical religious numbers, and interviews with and testimonials from Iranians who have converted to Christianity. The basic structure of the magazine has remained remarkably intact principally because it is a flexible format capable of responding to and encoding the shifting and multiple exigencies of exile. This flexibility has allowed it to give access to diverse voices, even though the magazine's familiar format, regular daily or weekly broadcast schedule, and longevity (some programs have been on the air in the same time slot for over a decade) have served to regulate and contain the flux of exilic liminality.

Variation in the mix of format elements helped to recast the concept of audience from an amorphous, familial, and homogeneous mass to a number of different targetable clusters. The principles of variation were the broadcast time of the program and gender, age, politics, and ethnoreligious affiliations of audience members. Significantly, language differences were suppressed. This is understandable; the first step in identity formation for most exiles is to differentiate themselves from the host society by

reducing their own internal differences. Due to the absence of a reliable rating system, the producers were guided in this targeting practice more by trial and error than by demographic studies.

The exilic and ethnic television schedules are in considerable flux and although they are unable to closely replicate the social order of the work-week and the weekend, the producers of exilic television attempted throughout the years to link their shows to the time of broadcast, however loosely, and to the life patterns of their increasingly assimilating audiences.

Program Contents

The two daily morning programs are current affairs programs. *Jong-e Bamdadi* presents hard international, national, and local news, including extensive coverage of Iran and of Iranians abroad, while *Sima-ye Ashna* is chiefly a news magazine, emphasizing soft feature stories and film clips from around the world. Both programs target adults who view the programs before leaving for work. The morning medical programs (*Pezeshg-e Khub-e Khanevadeh, Mardom va Jahan-e Pezeshgi*, and *You and the World of Medicine*), in relaxing talk-show and interview forms, offer medical and health tips to the eldest members of the family, those men and women who stay at home during the day. *Sobh-e Ruz-e Jom'eh* is an infomercial or advertising magazine, in which the host, using a talk-show format, talks amicably and persuasively to the camera or with a guest about an Iranian product or service, interspersing his presentations with well-known poetry and proverbs. These interviews and presentations are interrupted by prerecorded spot commercials for products and services.

Prime-time programs are generally more entertainment-oriented and can potentially attract audiences different from those of the morning shows. Of these, *Iran* seems to be targeting a younger viewer. Its younger host has an informal and hip style and his program is loose in form, upbeat in tone, feature-oriented, music-dominated, and less concerned with the politics of home. The program has featured a number of television serials, such as the satirical serial *Da'ijan Napele'on* (Uncle Napoleon), produced in Iran before the revolution, and the drama serial *Amir Kabir*, made in postrevolutionary Iran. *Shahr-e Farang* is a satirical variety magazine. Its host is a well-known comic who mixes satirical commentaries about current events and personalities in Iran and the United States with dramatic serials he has produced on life in exile.[12] *Iran va Jahan* is currently chiefly a variety magazine, containing news, news commentary, music videos, and tourist films about Israel. The religious program *Mozhdeh* carries no commercials but uses its magazine format to proselytize for the Assembly of God church.

Fig. 12. Newscast: *Jong-e Bamdadi*'s Nureddin Sabetimani.

Weekends for Iranians are traditionally occasions for visiting friends and for extended-family get-togethers. As a result, daytime Sunday programs provide a very diverse mixture of adult and family programming. *Iranian* and *Jonbesh-e Iran* provide news, interviews with Iranian political and cultural figures, and one or two music videos, while *Jam-e Jam* provides news and many entertainment segments, particularly music videos. *Negah*'s most innovative feature has been the airing of a series of well-produced soap operas (*Ro'ya-ye Emrika'i* [The American dream] and *Payvand* [Connection]) that explore the tensions of Iranian families and young couples in the process of acculturation. Sometimes the serial is followed or preceded by an interview with an expert on immigration or family counseling. *Diyar* is a musical variety magazine targeting younger viewers, and it is devoted entirely to entertainment news, interviews with Iranian entertainers, and various types of music videos. *Aftab*, much of whose programs are imported from Iran, attempts to stay away from straight political news and to operate instead in the cultural domain.

Each week its host presents commentaries that attempt to link Iranians living abroad with those who have remained at home. The magazine format and the two-hour time slot allow him to present a melange of segments: dramatic and satirical serials, portions of feature films, and animated cartoons for children. (Although, over the years, a few of the exile programs tried to target Iranian children, they failed to attract them because of a dearth of existing programming, the high cost of producing new materials, and the impossibility of competing with American mainstream children's programs.)

Following the model of American mainstream television, late-night exile programs employ chiefly the talk-show form of the magazine, with the recent addition of the phone-in feature. Clearly, the intended audiences for these shows are adults. In *Emshab ba Parviz*, aired live nationally, the host interviews one guest each time about a single topic and takes phone calls from viewers. *Sokhani ba Ravanshenas*, too, is a live call-in show, during which audience members discuss with the psychiatrist-host of the show their personal and familial problems. *Harf va Goft* is a live interview show in which the host talks with one or more individuals about some aspect of culture and life in exile. Often films or other works of art are shown and the contents explored with the artist or a critic. *Midnight Show* is the longest-running talk show, the format of which is flexible enough to allow its host to interview his guests either in the studio or on location and to cover news and cultural events of interest to Iranians. *Pars* is a variety magazine, containing music videos, news, hard news, entertainment news, and news commentary. *Agahi-ye Behtar* is a program-length commercial for ethnic products and services, produced and hosted by the same person who runs *Sobh-e Ruz-e Jom'eh*. Although the guerrilla magazine, *Sima-ye Azadi*, does not carry advertisements for consumer products, the entire program is a commercial for its producer, the Mojahedin guerrilla organization, which is engaged in armed struggle against the Islamic government in Iran. This program, too, utilizes a magazine format presided over by a host who links the various segments, including a newscast, videotaped reports of the Mojahedin activities, speeches by the organization leaders, musical numbers, and antigovernment music videos.

Although women have produced three programs (*Didar, Ma*, and *Sima va Nava-ye Iran*), none has survived. Women's issues and tensions in the family structure in exile were foregrounded in *Didar* and *Sima va Nava-ye Iran*. The former dealt with them in a variety talk-show form while the latter used the soap-opera format as well.

Iranian ethnoreligious groups have in the past produced a number of programs. *Mozhdeh* is entirely devoted to preaching Christianity, while

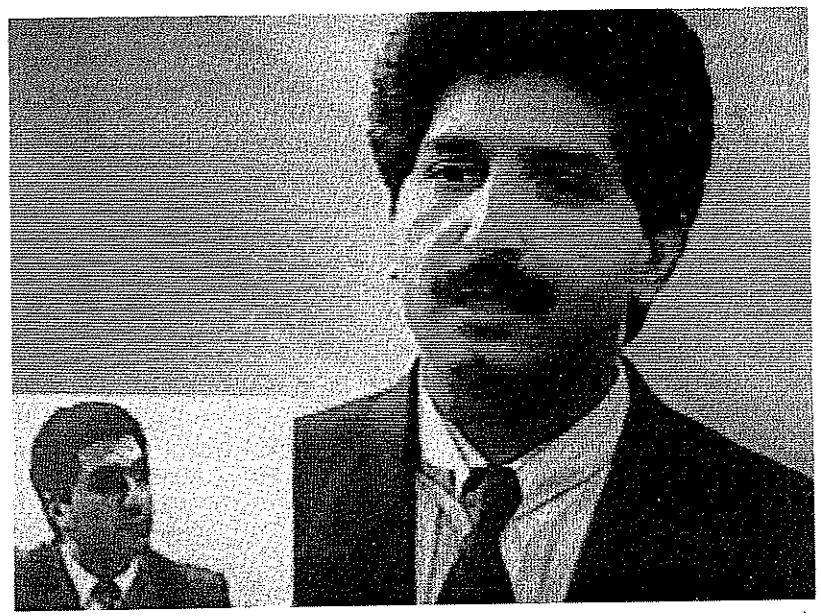

Fig. 13. Interview show: *Midnight Show*'s host, Nader Rafi'i (*right*), interviews Reza Pahlavi.

Assyrian programs tend to focus on issues related to the Assyrian ethnic and religious communities in diaspora. Although various ethnic and religious minorities are represented among producers of other programs, it cannot be said that these programs are openly ethnic or religious. Rather, because of fear of bad publicity and persecution, ethnicity and religious affiliations have become submerged presences encoded at a latent level in the programs. For example, the overall discourse of *Jam-e Jam* and *Iran va Jahan*, both produced by Jewish Iranians, is not religious or ethnic, but news and news commentary about Israel forms a greater part of their newscasts and they seem to carry more advertising from Jewish businesses. Satirical segments produced by the Armenian Rafi Khachaturian (*Jan Nesar* and *Khub, Bad, Zesht*) are not ethnic or religious. In fact, they are highly political, against the Islamic regime in Iran, and they poke fun at the foibles and frailties of all Iranians. Programs produced by Iranian Baha'is, too, do not foreground their religion or ideology, although they may favor Baha'i concerns. For example, *Mona's Execution*, a harrowing music video recreating the execution of a Baha'i girl in Iran, was aired by

Cheshmak, produced by an Iranian Baha'i. Finally, during much of the first decade of programming, none of the Muslim producers highlighted Islam in their discourse. Its presence was limited to references to the politics of the Islamic Republic in the news or the periodic condolences or congratulations offered audiences on the death days or birthdays of major Islamic religious figures. In the early 1990s with *Aftab*, the creation of an Islamic Center in Beverly Hills by Iranian Muslims, and the gradual acculturation, depoliticization, and democratization of the exiles, Islam and Islamic issues began to surface. *Sobh-e Ruz-e Jom'eh* dared to feature in June 1992 a religious sermon (*rowzeh*) to commemorate the death of imam Hosain, the slain martyr of Karbala.

The ethnic flows and the megatext of KSCI-TV and the cable companies in which exilic programs are nested place at the disposal of Iranian ethnoreligious minorities ethnic programs produced by others with whom Iranians share cultural, linguistic, or religious affiliations. Jewish Iranians may watch *Israel Today, Phil Blazer*, or the Jewish Television Network; Armenian Iranians may watch *Armenian Teletime* or *ANC Horizon*; Assyrian Iranians may view *Bet Naharin*, Arab Iranians may watch *Arab American TV, Alwatan*, or *Good News*; and those interested in the religion and practices of Islam may watch *Islam*.[13]

The basic magazine format has endured, although many variations in the mix of its elements have been introduced. These variations and the differing signifying practices of the aforementioned programs clearly demonstrate that the conception of Iranians as a homogeneous mass of exiles or as a cohesive biological or national family is no longer tenable. Programmers have succeeded by trial and error in segmenting and targeting their audience by age, politics, religion, profession, interests, ethnicity, and gender. They do not usually couch their programming strategies in the cold and calculating terms of commerce, however. Instead, they often differentiate themselves and justify their format variation by claiming a greater stake in and allegiance to an "essential" and "authentic" Iranianness.

Subjectivity and Mode of Address

Televisual and cinematic signification differ from one other on a number of levels. The most significant of these is the process by which viewer subjectivity is formed. Theories of cinematic spectatorship have highlighted the function of vision and voyeurism in the constitution of the subject (Mulvey 1975, Metz 1982). This function is said to be driven by the primary process, which Freud associated with the prelanguage unconscious and with the pleasure principle. It is chiefly concerned with affect and

sensory data, particularly visual. The primary process is remarkably single-minded and insatiable and does not distinguish between real objects and persons and their images. If it is blocked from attaching itself to one object, person, or memory, it will seek another. As I have shown elsewhere in this study, it is this process that is responsible for the fetishistic iconography of exile television, whereby the lost or absent homeland is recovered through overinvestment in the signs that stand for it (such as the flag and its colors, the map of the country, dead and tortured bodies, and national monuments). It is also the same process that drives the nostalgic narratives of return to the homeland and to nature. These processes are operative chiefly in the magazine format's logos, music videos, and narrative portions which rely on vision and affect more than on words.

Freud also posited the secondary process, which works in tandem but in opposition to the primary process. This process, associated with the preconscious and the reality principle, tends to tame and hold in check the impulsiveness of the pleasure principle by "binding" it chiefly to language (Silverman 1988:69). By submitting the unbounded pleasure principle to linguistic structuration, the secondary process tends to reduce the intensity of the affective and sensory values of the mnemic traces. This is the process that forms the basis of televisual subject positioning, particularly in the case of the magazine genre, which is driven chiefly by words and the direct address. Since the exile magazine contains both expository and fictional forms, however, it encourages a split subjectivity that must oscillate between the primary and the secondary processes, between affective sights and sounds and linguistic structuration, and between fictional and real-world issues. If the former promotes fetishization within the visual track, the latter encourages fetishization within the audio register. This is because while subject formation in the case of the narrative portions may occur primarily through scopophilia, in the case of expository sections it is driven primarily by epistephilia. This textual and subjective duality is undergirded by a further split (explained earlier) in which program matter is largely encoded by home while the ads inscribe host cultural values. These multiple dualities and splits resonate sympathetically with ambivalent identities—which typifies exilic liminality.

The direct address of the hosts, reporters, interviewees, and commercials, which bare the device of enunciation, enhance the overall sense among viewers of being continually addressed. The direct address, moreover, tends to suppress individual identification by situating the viewers not only within language but also within the home. The "leaky," segmented, and contradictory supertext of television as well as the extratextual environment of the home in which it is received (telephone calls,

doorbells ringing, lighted rooms, presence of children, availability of a kitchen nearby, neighborhood noises) tend to suppress the intensive gaze characteristic of cinematic viewing. Instead, a type of distracted and cursory gaze, what John Ellis has called "glance," is encouraged (1985:137). In the case of ethnic and exilic television, the viewer's glance not only takes in the television set but also the home interior, which is ethnically and exilically coded by souvenirs, photographs, flags, maps, carpets, paintings, food, aromas, art objects, and handicrafts from the homeland. The reconstitution of the television signal by viewers within such a highly coded environment tends to enhance the collective experience of being (dis)placed, in exile.

Viewers read exile television programs not merely as textually positioned subjects but also as historically and socially located individuals who bring to their viewing their national, cultural, ethnic, and ideological orientations.[14] Spectatorship cannot be disengaged from the viewers' preconscious and conscious activity.[15] Neither can it be divorced from the viewers' rules of social interaction, nor should we universalize the Western psychic structure, which is based on a strongly individuated self. Cinematic techniques of spectator positioning, such as shot reverse-shot—in film the armature of suture—are not universal and can be culturally coded and read. If rules of the Iranian system of courtesy (called *ta'arof*) are applied, for example, an over-the-shoulder shot in television can be read as an impolite gesture, because one character has his back to the viewers. Turning one's back to someone, especially a stranger, is considered very impolite in the discourse of ritual courtesy. An example of this type of reading is provided by *Zendegi-ye Behtar* (2/12/1990), in which the host interviewed a real-estate agent and the pop singer Martik. During both interviews, the host was taped from over his shoulder or from a three-quarter angle, with the result that his back was to the audience for much of the time.[16] Noting that he had violated one of the key codes of courtesy, at the end of the program the host faced the audience and apologized for having turned his back to them.[17]

The spectator is positioned not only by the text but also the orientational schemas of the society, which in the case of Iranians includes ritual courtesy, modesty of vision, and veiling and unveiling practices. These schemas and practices have a profound effect on the constitution of a communal subject in cinema and I have discussed them at length elsewhere (Naficy 1991a).[18] The familial and communal structure of the self among Iranians also works against the notion of television and cinema creating a unified, stable, and individuated subjectivity.[19]

Epistephilia and Collective Subjectivity

Words are necessary to express and shape both the fear of and the fact of the changed consciousness that exile engenders. Exilic television (along with independent transnational cinema, feminist films, and politically radical documentaries) relies greatly on such words. Epistephilia and the direct address of the exilic supertext destroy the distance and absence necessary for gaze-driven voyeuristic scopophilia. Instead, they institute glance-driven viewing, based on presence and on language. As a result, while in fictional narrative cinema the spectator is engaged through sexual pleasure, in expository nonfictional magazines the viewer draws pleasure through social engagement. Bill Nichols noted this difference in his discussion of documentary films:

> The engagement stems from the rhetorical force of an argument about the very world we inhabit. We are moved to confront a topic, issue, situation, or event that bears the mark of the historically real. In igniting our interest, a documentary has a less incendiary effect on our erotic fantasies and sense of sexual identity but a stronger effect on our social imagination and sense of cultural identity. (1991:178)

In exile words play an important role in creating social imagination and cultural identity. There is an insatiable drive among Iranians in exile for information, knowledge, and the exchange of ideas and words. Epistephilic desire is well suited to the television magazine because the magazine's expository form invokes and promises to gratify the desire to know. This desire and its expectation of fulfillment in exile sets into motion a generic contract between viewers and television producers that is not only binding but also spellbinding. This may partially account for the behavior of Iranian audiences, who complain constantly about the number of commercials interrupting the programs (sometimes totaling over 40 minutes in an hour-long show) but who apparently cannot help but continue to watch. The spell, however, is cast not only by epistephilia but also by the segmentation of the televisual supertext itself, which tends to psychologically intensify the desire to watch, thereby making spectators continually available for commercial messages (Houston 1984). In exilic television, each commercial interruption or delay in obtaining epistephilia constitutes a lack that tends to intensify the desire, thus encouraging continued viewing.

The status of the gaze requires further elaboration. As already noted, television suppresses the probing voyeuristic gaze and promotes the cursory glance. Moreover, the exilic magazine format, integrating a variety of genres and styles including documentary and nonfictional footage, ac-

commodates a variety of what Nichols has called "ethical looks," which link the style of filming and looking to the moral and political points of view of the filmmakers and to their ethical implications. This is because the subjects in documentary cinema are usually social actors who live in history, not screen actors inhabiting the diegesis. What the viewer sees in this type of cinema is a record of how filmmakers look at and regard their fellow human beings. There is considerable tension between an ethical and moral standard requiring those who film real events to place the public good uppermost, and the exigencies of producing commercially viable television, particularly in exile. The fact remains, however, that the magazine format's reliance on concern with the real, the social, and the collective means that its credibility rests upon some fulfillment of public good.

Collective Address and Collective Subjectivity

Television's direct address is a strategy of presence, while cinema's narrative address is one of absence. The narrative space of classic narrative cinema effaces the presence of the spectators and encodes it as absence; the expository space of the television magazine recognizes and highlights the presence of the viewers. The televisual direct address has an added dimension of nowness, promoted by the technology of the apparatus, which removes the distance between transmission and reception at home. As a result, the subjectivity that the television magazine cultivates, based on its live ontology, the copresence of image and viewer, direct address, epistephilia, and the primacy of language and thus the secondary process is collective and in the present tense, while cinematic subjectivity, based on the separation of enunciation and reception, and the image and thus the primary process, is individualistic and in the past tense.

Because of its composite form, the exilic magazine encodes both absence and individual and presence and collective subjectivities. Collective subjectivity tended to dominate because of producers' previous conceptions of audience as a mass of homogeneous exiles, and because of the collective mode of address, which targeted neither individuals nor segments of the population but the entire family and exilic community. Early on, then, most exile programs attempted to provide materials suited to all family members, including cartoons and special segments for children. In terms of the manner of address, many of the program hosts continue to use either a collective term of endearment to address the audience such as "you dear ones" or a familiar, poetic form of address reserved for intimate friends, such as "greetings to you, my lovely, my fellow countryman, my unique one."[20] Likewise, many program hosts use collective transitional phrases when going into commercials, such as "let's watch

the following messages *together*," "*we'll be together* again after these messages" (emphases added). These types of formulaic, collective, and poetic forms of address, repeated many times during a show, encourage a familiar, familial, complicit, copresent discourse in which the relationship between program hosts and viewers is not so much based on individual psychological identification driven by scopophilia as on a collective communitas developed by means of epistephilia, in the formation of which both the hosts and viewers participate. The direct address of the commercials, too, which regularly aim their sales pitches at what they call "the Iranian community," further emphasizes the collective conceptualization of audiences. In this it can be seen that Iranian exilic television is intensely communitarian.

Such efforts at creating a community of address are enhanced by the nature of the magazine format itself, characterized by what Michael Arlen has called the "ritual of hospitality" between the hosts and guests (1981:310–12). In this type of program, in-studio hosts invite guests to visit the set, which is often made to look like a living room. In the case of exilic magazines, both the set and the ritual of hospitality are informed by the exiles' traditions and cultural orientations. Many early shows were staged in a set that resembled a typical Iranian drawing room in which nonfamily visitors are received formally: a sofa, a few comfortable chairs, a coffee table, a large bouquet of flowers on the coffee table, and large plants in the background. The exilic format relies on life-size close shots, an expository form of enunciation, formal dress, composed posture, a formal style of communication characterized by literate language (not vernacular), and appropriate invocations of rules of ritual courtesy in introducing guests, speakers, and program segments. These rules require that, as guests who come to viewers' homes via the magic of television, the hosts camouflage their personal emotions under a veneer of politeness and civility. Programs always begin with the hosts greeting the viewers, sometimes in effusive terms (which displays humility and ritual courtesy). Even when Los Angeles-produced programs are syndicated to other cities in the United States, greetings specific to each city are inserted at the head of the program.[21] When viewers perceive that codes of courtesy have been violated, they complain to the producers:

> Sir, right now I am watching an Iranian television program and I see that the news anchor is appearing in front of the camera with a T-shirt. As long as I remember, television anchors have read the news to the camera wearing a proper suit, tie, and a clean shirt. (*Sobh-e Iran*, 2/3/1989, p. 15)

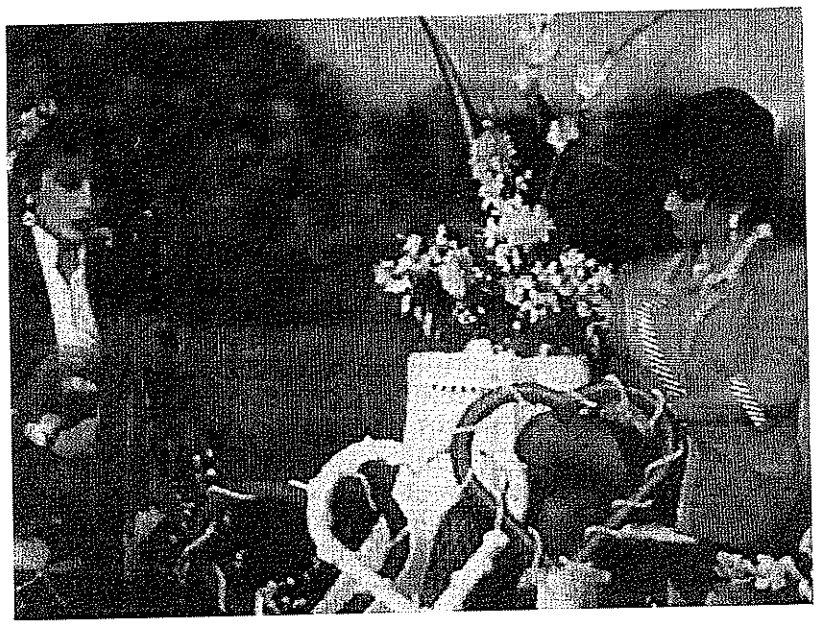

Fig. 14. Interview setting: *Jam-e Jam*'s 1992 New Year program.

When there is bad news to impart, the system of courtesy authorizes the display of personal emotions, particularly sadness and grief—core values for Iranians. In April 1988 during the bombing of Iranian cities by Iraqis, the news anchor of the morning program *Jong-e Bamdadi* (Nureddin Sabetimani) began his newscast not with news about the incident but with a personal metadiscourse on the news designed to prepare the audience for the bad news he was about to read. He said:

> I would have preferred to begin the carefree hours of the morning with the most pleasant and comforting love poems instead of with disturbing news. But how can we sit back and witness our country becoming such an arena of battle for traders of war? . . . Has this spring morning in Iran begun with delicacy and freshness that we should begin ours with tranquillity? . . . Are we separate or different from the Iranian nation? So let me begin with a poem about spring, a spring without pansies.

Then he read a highly emotional, elegiac, and patriotic poem about his homeland before presenting the news. With these statements he not only

cushioned the bad news but also made himself vulnerable by revealing his inner self and his own personal emotions to his unseen audience—that is, he displayed intimacy and sincerity instead of objectivity and cleverness.[22] When bad news is not properly processed through politeness it can lead to audience displeasure. Ali Limonadi, producer of *Iranian*, told me of an engineer who called him after a broadcast and threatened to sue him on the grounds that his newscast had caused his mother to faint and go into convulsions (2/4/1989). In the case of Sabetimani, who did deliver the news with appropriate processing, one would expect a sympathetic response. I do not know how the audience reacted to his presentation, but the only public reaction, printed in *Rayegan* magazine (4/22/1988, p. 22), corroborates the expectation. In an editorial, the weekly not only quoted the newsman and his poem at length but also praised him lavishly for his display of sincerity and patriotism.[23]

Such a collective feedback completes the circle of courtesy, for ritual courtesy is not only a "social contract" between interacting people in a face-to-face situation but also an "implied contract" between viewer and program,[24] where the contract is implied not by the traditions of the text, as in film, but by the social context—the cultural orientation of both program makers and viewers. In such a conception, every narrative may be considered to be a medium of exchange "determined not by a desire to narrate but by a desire to exchange" (Barthes 1974:90). What is being exchanged is not only textual pleasure but also social relations between two interactants: the viewing public and the film-television texts. This interaction, however, is not between two equal sides, since in an Islamist reading of the spectatorship the screen occupies a hierarchically more privileged position.[25] Nor is it between familiar partners, since in such a reading the screen is considered to be unrelated or a stranger (*namahram*) to viewers (Naficy 1991a). Ritual courtesy, designed to deal with hierarchical and formal relations, must be inscribed as a component of viewing, particularly in television and its most collective form, the magazine format.[26] Television cannot then violate the protocol of formal relations between strangers without incurring the discomfort and criticism of its audience.

Even though formal and polite in its presentational mode, the exile magazine creates a familiar and familial community of address. What turns the formal into the familiar is exilic space, which in its liminal stage finds the formality of the ritual courtesy of the homeland to be comfortingly familiar. This is enhanced by the familiar form of address that some hosts occasionally use. What turns the polite into the familial is the sense that hosts and audience share not only the copresence of the television medium but also a common language, culture, value system, and orientational framework. This concern with collective cultural institutions, par-

ticularly with the family structure and the native language, which are perceived to be threatened, tends to enhance the communitarian structure and discourse of exile television. I will deal first with the configuration of the family structure and then the native language as methods by which exile television creates a type of community of address.

Exile media repeatedly and regularly focus on the threat to the constitution of the family. Deterritorialization problematizes, even severs, the bonds with tradition, culture, ethnicity, language, status, family, and nation that tend to interpellate individuals as subjects within ideologies and politics and locate them within the state or civil societies of the homeland. That many exiles enter the host society without their families elevates the threat of severance and deepens the sense of tragedy and loss.[27] Even for those who leave their homeland with their families, the familial tensions are great because of the conflicts that exile sets into motion between generations and gender roles within the family, and the discrepancies it creates between here and there and now and then. These conflicts and discrepancies cause some Iranians to regard family life in exile as unmanageable and altogether undesirable. Consider, for example, the following desolate imaginary picture of a family in exile, which appeared in the weekly magazine *Javanan* (12/2/1988, p. 3):

> Whenever I was alone at home [in Los Angeles] I would imagine that I was married, that my wife would return home from work tired, take a shower without my noticing it, and cook her own meal and eat it alone. I would imagine my son dancing and stomping his feet with his girlfriend upstairs and when confronted with my protest he would shut his door and urge me to be quiet. I would imagine my daughter arriving home drunk and stupefied at midnight, turning the key in the door, and stumbling down the hall to her room. I would imagine the phone ringing the next morning and the school counselor calling me for a new round of counseling, the police summoning me for investigation, and the psychologist urging me to pay his office a visit.

Since, in the case of Iranians in America, the exiles are moving from a familial culture to an individualistic culture, the self is under tremendous pressure to transform accordingly—a process fraught with fear and loathing. The symbiotic, reciprocal, and emotionally intimate relationship that some nostalgic exiles think characterized family life in the homeland comes under serious questioning in the new environment, particularly by women and children, who seem to be the primary agents of acculturation and change. The self cannot maintain an intact sense of "we-self," and because of the change of social context, it loses the grounds on which contextual ego-ideals and successful hierarchical relationships are formed. Familial tensions in exile are so great that many exile periodicals and radio programs carry regular sections in which psychologists and counselors answer questions from readers and listeners about family problems. These professionals also appear regularly on exilic television for short interviews or full-hour discussions with in-studio audiences. *Sokhani ba Ravanshenas*, which began in 1992, is entirely devoted to phone-in questions and answers between audiences and the in-studio psychiatrist-host of the program. The Christian program *Mozhdeh* has attempted to deal with family tensions from a religious point of view.

The use of the native language is another significant marker in exile television's construction of a collective community of address. As I have noted, until recently, with the exception of Assyrian-language programs, all other Iranian programs in Los Angeles were in Persian. Exclusive use of the native tongue is caused not only by Iranians' recent arrival here (they are still liminars) and their nationalism, ethnocentrism, and resistance to assimilation, but also by their desire to validate and consolidate an essentialist Iranian subjectivity in exile. In the discourse of Iranian ritual courtesy this is tantamount to "raising" the exiles to a privileged status. Ignoring the native language causes negative audience reaction, particularly from the older generation. For example, when in the mid-1980s *Iranian* aired a five-minute English-language news commentary for six months, the producer received many negative comments from viewers, forcing him to discontinue the experiment.[28] Overreliance on the native language, however, discourages younger people from watching exilic television. Based on my interviews with program producers and analyses of audience demography elsewhere in the book, it is evident that middle-aged and elderly people form the largest segment of the Iranian television audience. Young people, in their conversations with me, have shown a clear disinterest in television programs that fail to address them and their problems directly. Manuchehr Bibian, producer of *Jam-e Jam*, summed up the dilemma of generational division that television producers face:

> Young people who have learned the English language obtain their music and news from American television channels. Children watch cartoons on American television with which we cannot compete. But there are people who were 25 years or older when they left Iran; they are accustomed to Persian music and proverbs and they cannot speak English as well as their mother tongue. There are those among this group who cannot believe they will die in exile. Our television programs give these people what they want. (Interview, 3/4/1989)

Fig. 15. Discussion show: Parisa Sa'ed hosts *Ma*.

By foregrounding the Persian language, television producers cater to the older age group who are their most loyal viewers, and leave the young people to the assimilative power of American pop culture.[29]

The ways exile producers and viewers use the magazine format to engage in collective social construction and negotiation of reality turns exilic television into what Newcomb and Hirsch have called a "cultural forum" (1983). Such a forum can disseminate information, express shared beliefs and values, and assist the producers and viewers in their acculturation, and their construction of individual and collective identities. The magazine form can both present ideologies and comment on ideological problems. By adding the live phone-in format, the magazine has evolved into a multivocal cultural forum in which a variety of views by various peoples of different ethnoreligious affiliations are exchanged in varied accents. In the process, perhaps more questions will be posed than answered—even about exilic television itself—but this is precisely a chief function of television as a cultural forum, particularly in liminality, when there are more questions and criticisms than answers.[30]

The notion of cultural forum and collective subjectivity necessitates a

reverse flow of communication, from viewers to programmers. Such an exchange does occur in exilic television, more directly and intimately than in mainstream American television. Exile productions are often very small, one-person operations in which the producer is often host, director, and advertising sales manager. To obtain advertisements and audience feedback, exile producers, unlike their mainstream television counterparts, urge advertisers, businesses, and viewers to contact them personally through the phone numbers that are flashed on the screen. In their interviews with me many producers pointed to viewers' calls as significant indicators of the size of their public or the popularity of certain topics or personalities. This type of direct interaction increases discursive traffic and assists in establishing a personal and collective link between program producers and their viewers.

Cultural productions not only air the tensions of communitarianism and fragmentation, ethnicity and acculturation, liminality and incorporation, but also often disavow or displace them by ideological rearchaization and reconstitution under the sign of some type of essentialist collectivity, which may predate history and time. The story of the Simorgh is invoked in exile as a way of reconstituting a communal self and a national Iranian identity. This ancient story is best told by the great twelfth-century Iranian mystic poet Faridoddin Attar, in his allegorical epic *Manteq al-Teyr* (The conference of the birds), which tells the story of thousands of birds on a quest for a legendary king of the birds called Simorgh (literally "thirty birds"). After much hardship only thirty birds survive and arrive in the Simorgh's palace, only to discover that the Simorgh they were searching for is none other than the thirty surviving birds themselves, reflected in a mirror (Attar 1971). This and other mystical allegories are so well known to Iranians as to have become encoded into their consciousness. One way to decode it is this: the Iranian self is a communal one—all are one and one is all—and every one is potentially the bearer of a singular, unified truth, or capable of absorption into the unique supreme Being.[31] The homogenizing work of the Simorgh paradigm in Iranian culture far surpasses Attar's allegory, as it shadows over myths and ideals of selfhood, heroism, and nationalism that are drawn upon heavily in exile (Naficy 1990b:231–33). The use of the paradigm in exile, where literary and business establishments are named after the Simorgh, would seem to either disavow the threat of fragmentation of individual and national identities by exile or rearchaize these identities by reconstituting them under the essentialist Iranian communal self, the Simorgh ideal.

The music video *Ma Hameh Irooni Hastim* (We're all Iranian), sung by Andy and Kouros, the duo rock stars of Iranian exiles, provides a rich televisual example for both fragmentation and reconstitution of the com-

munal self and the collective national identity in exile.[32] The video consists of a fast-paced collage of an Andy and Kouros concert in front of a tumultuous audience. It creates an alluring narrative charged with sex, mystery, power, and wildness by means of huge, short-duration close-ups of body parts, musical instruments, and a frenzied audience (mostly females) in an atmosphere saturated by rolling fog, flashing lights, and chiaroscuro lighting. The two singers sing an up-tempo song in Persian that first differentiates Iranian exiles by naming the diverse regions of the country from which they have originated, and then reconstitutes them as a homogeneous population united in their desire for a return to the homeland:

> You are a native of Khuzestan
> You are a child of Abadan
> You are a native of Kermanshah
> You are a native of Kurdestan
> You are a native of Azarbaijan
> You are a child of Kerman
> You are a native of Baluchestan
> You are a child of Sistan.
> Regardless of where we are from,
> We are all Iranians
> Waiting to go back home.

Having united the exiles in their desire to return, the singers proceed to further unify them by suppressing regional differences. Here, the video becomes dialogic: the singers query the audience about their native regions, and the audience responds to each query en masse.

SINGERS: Who is from Khuzestan?
AUDIENCE: We are from Khuzestan.
SINGERS: Who is from Kurdestan?
AUDIENCE: We are from Kurdestan.
SINGERS: Who is from Tehran?
AUDIENCE: We are from Tehran.
SINGERS: Who loves Iran?
AUDIENCE: We love Iran.

This video posits that regardless of regional and ethnic differences, Iranians are all members of the same nation and national family. It becomes a modern reworking of the ancient Simorgh paradigm, at a time that the ideals encoded in it are threatened. In the liminality of exile, nationality supersedes ethnicity. It is only much later, and in order to gain political power in the host country, that the exiles will turn to ethnicity.

It is ironic, however, that exilic television tends to reconstitute the familial self and communal identity largely as a consuming self and identity. This is because the magazine format is disproportionately filled with expository materials and commercials for products and services, which impede individual subjectivity but aid the formation of collective subjectivity based on consumerism. In this case, it is not so much the intense emotional relations among family members and significant others that are responsible for creating unity as it is economic relations and the pleasures of consumption.

Exilic television's relationship with the familial self and its treatment of the family unit is made more complex because collective subjectivity, which television creates and caters to, is neither fully stable nor unitary. In it an individual subjectivity is unfolding. This is an uncertain, liminal subjectivity, one that is not always already in place. By and large, in its first decade, Iranian exilic television ignored the drama of this unfolding individual identity and the reconfiguration of the traditional patriarchal family structure demanded by it. Television was dominated by forms, such as the magazine, that usually give access to the public self, and there were very few examples of forms, such as dramas, more suitable for expressing emotions and exploring the dramas of self-fashioning and identity formation. With the exception of music videos and occasional serials—*Ro'ya-ye Emrika'i* (The American dream), *Payvand* (Connection), and *Faseleh* (Distance)—none of the other components of the magazine format explored in any extended, dramatic, or narrative form the interior world of emotions, affect, and the evolving self or the nuances of family life.[33] In *The American Dream* serial the unit of analysis is a transplanted family consisting of a young couple who must deal with their ties to the home country, their relatives abroad, and their own relationship with each other in the new society—all in the context of their status as foreigners forced to live in a society that is hostile to them and stereotypes them negatively. Among other issues, *Distance* also deals with a mother-daughter relationship in exile. By focusing on the dynamics of the family relations and by pitting the collective national identity against the individuating hybrid exilic identity, these shows express the instability and complexity of that identity.

Aesthetics of Exilic Repetition

In cybernetics redundancy and repetition ensure accurate transmission of signals. Redundancy reduces variability, indeterminacy, and unpredictability. If in times of normalcy humans seek the thrill of the unexpected, in times of chaos they seek certitude—the expected. Exile as a time of chaos demands stability, which can be found in television as ritual, fetish,

Fig. 16. Serials: Mother-son drama in exile in *The American Dream*.

and nostalgia. Exilic television produces discursive and symbolic order and rigidity in the face of personal and social disorder and fluidity.

Repetition and redundancy are encouraged by the exile magazine format and its postmodern pastiche style, which tend to suppress narrative singularity in favor of expository diversity and segmentation. Repetition takes many forms. Images are either replicated synchronically within the frame itself or repeated sequentially and diachronically within the flow. This is especially true of the commercials and certain fetishized and stereotyped icons, which are repeated a number of times during any one program.

In exile, repetition is a way of reassuring the self that it will not disappear or dissolve: "It is as if the activity of repeating prevents us, and others, from skipping us or overlooking us entirely" (Said 1986:56). Two contradictory processes seem to be involved: one an affirmation of the "old" identity in the homeland (relatively unified, usually familial), the other a confirmation of the "new" identity in exile (syncretic and generally individuating). The nostalgic tropes of home that are circulated repeatedly within program logos, texts, and music videos in exile represent an affirmation of the old

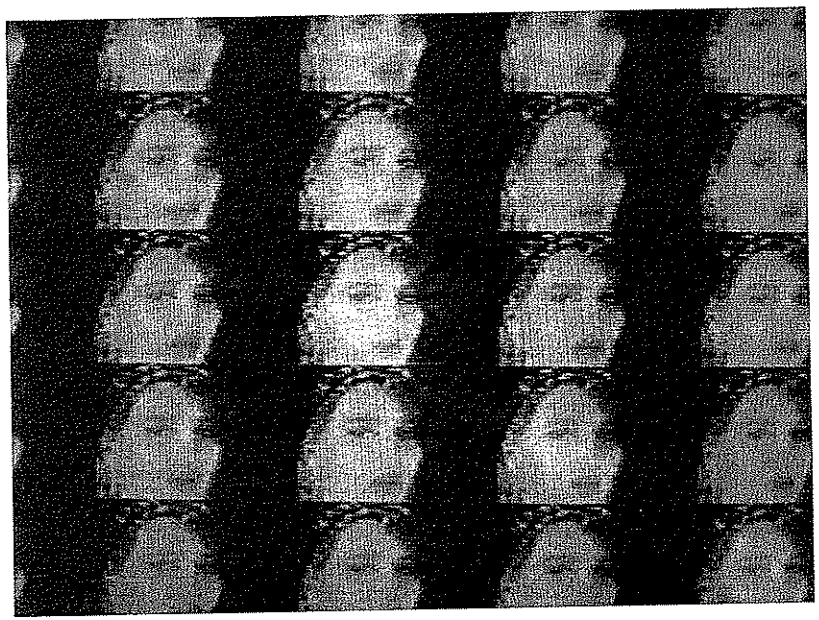

Fig. 17. In-frame repetition: Fattaneh's image in her music video, aired by *Jam-e Jam* in March 1992.

self, a way of reminding ourselves not to overlook ourselves. The validation of the new self figures the individual as a consumer; an individuating self in exile; and a member, if not of a physical community, at least of a symbolic community (communitas) in exile.

The formation of the new self as a consumer is evident predominantly in commercials. Recently arrived in this land of affluence and waste, the average exile from the Third World, who in the past more than likely cycled and recycled all products, from food cans to old tires, requires indoctrination through repetition to become a guiltless consumer. The incessant repetition of commercials on Iranian television not only makes economic sense for the advertisers and program makers but is productive ideologically, inculcating consumerism. The high educational level and financial resources of recently arrived exiles from Iran make them more receptive than some to the ideology of consumerism, and more adept at integration into that ideology and economic system. In postmodern consumer ideology the adoption of a consumer lifestyle and consumption of products extend to the creation and consumption of media for communi-

cation, propaganda, and advertising so globally widespread and locally intense that it has been dubbed "mediolatry" and "semiotic fetishism" (Mitchell 1986:202). The active Iranian popular culture in Los Angeles, which within less than a decade has produced the following varied menu of media, provides an instance of such mediolatry: nearly 80 periodicals, 62 regularly scheduled television programs, 18 regularly scheduled radio programs, and 4 telephone newscasts were produced. During this period, some 180 feature films were screened in public theaters in Los Angeles and 26 features produced. By 1992, over 700 music cassettes had been produced in Los Angeles, half-a-dozen discos with a mixture of Iranian and Western music were in operation, and Iranian rock concerts were being staged in such bastions of American pop culture as the Shrine Auditorium and the Hollywood Palladium. The menu was rounded off with a plethora of poetry reading nights and academic and semiacademic conferences, seminars, and lectures.

The affirmation of the individuating self in exile can be seen in many aspects of televisual production: changing program format, from a general magazine catering to all family members to more specialized formats; evolution of the notion of audience from a homogeneous mass to targetable clusters; development of an advertising-driven schedule; syndication and networking of programs; and increasing professionalization, involving division of labor and inscription of aesthetics and ideological systems of mainstream cinema and television. The self in exile, however, is not an autonomous, always already individuated self; rather, it is a self in process of formation and differentiation and as such it is hybrid and ambivalent. The textual practices of the heterogeneous, segmented supertext and flow of exilic television inscribe and promote these multiple subjectivities.

The confirmation of the new communal identity, as a national group uprooted in exile or an ethnic group with roots within the host society, is also complex. The liminality and ambivalence of exile produce profound crises of identity and "ethnic anxiety." Living with such crises is painful, and they must be resolved. One way to accomplish this, suggests Michael Fischer, is through repetition of the individual experience, which "cannot be accounted for by itself" (1986:206). It must be repeated in order to establish its realness, its validity. Moreover, since the unitary experience of a single individual is deemed insignificant and insufficient in exile, televisual repetition is needed in order to establish the truth of living as a community in exile. By circulating fetishes of there and then and the nostalgic narratives of return, television tends to affirm the old "authentic" self, and by repeating representations of consumer lifestyle here and now it tends to confirm a new emerging "consumer" self.[34] Taken together, it can be seen that television assists the exiles in constructing a hybrid self and identity, not by producing absences but by multiplying presences of the home and the past and of the here and the now through the magazine format and its ontology of liveness and copresence.

This exilic recapitulation (affirmation of the old and confirmation of the new selves) is part of an aesthetics of seriality and intertextuality fostered by the postmodern world of late capitalism, characterized by dissolution of centers, amorphousness of texts and boundaries, indeterminacy of meaning, and multiplicity of subjectivities. The pleasure of television's system of intertextual seriality and simulation is not so much derived from innovation and "shock of the new" as it is from pull of the permanent, and "return of the identical" (Eco 1985:178).

These multiple notions of repetition characteristic of Western postmodernism provide the context in which the exiles, through their cultural productions, can stage repeatedly their own imaginary returns to their own originary schemas and values. For them, however, this "return" is not wholehearted; it is charged with potential choices about which there is much ambivalence: a return to the old originary identity, or a turn toward consumerist subjectivity, or a move to construct a third, syncretic identity. Thus the repeated circulation of narratives and fetishes that embody both the exilic search for the schema and for the permanent, and the craving for the current and the new not only rewards our ability to textually foresee narrative developments but also serves to reinforce the internalization of a split subjectivity and of a syncretic identity in exile.[35]

The Ideology of Professionalism

With the development of structures of commodification and assimilation such as advertising-driven schedules, varied magazine formats, live transmission nationwide, time-brokerage, syndication, and audience segmentation, there has emerged not only a certain diversity in televisual discourses but also an ideology of professionalism—both of which have begun to gradually erode the authority and the univocality of the discourses of the first years of liminal exile. Stuart Hall defines professionalism as "practical technical routinization of practice" (1977:344), and it can be seen in the division of labor and the variety now becoming evident in Iranian television programs. One person no longer produces, tapes, edits, hosts, and distributes a program by him- or herself. The number of producers has increased, as have the number of hosts, who are not necessarily producers any more. A single program may contain a number of segments, each produced and presented by a different male or female host, thereby increasing not only the variety of faces and voices but also the polysemy of discourses. Likewise, the division of labor has extended to

technical personnel, which have been growing in number, experience, and specialization. In addition, in Los Angeles a number of advertising agencies have emerged that obtain and place the majority of the ads on Iranian television.

Variety is another element in professionalization, which is undergirded by the diversification of program types and formats. The rigid magazine format evolved into other types, with many shows emulating mainstream American TV. Experimentation with narrative forms led to the airing of over a dozen satirical serials and soap operas about exile.[36] A new genre of exile-produced music videos influenced heavily by American music videos also emerged, which provides a discourse as well as a metadiscourse about assimilation and consumerism.[37]

Professionalism entails internalization of ideological, narrative, and aesthetic codes of the profession. In Los Angeles, Iranian television is being produced, transmitted, and consumed in a highly media-conscious and media-sophisticated context, whose codes and values have gradually been internalized by exile producers (and audiences). At the most obvious level, this entails simulation and imitation of the predominant televisual formats of mainline media. For example, *Midnight Show* seems to pattern itself after ABC's *Nightline* (in an ad its host is called "Iran's Ted Koppel"), *Ma* (whose host is sometimes labeled "the Iranian Barbara Walters") was modeled after the syndicated *Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Arya in L.A.* in much of 1989 resembled KABC-TV's tourist magazine show *Eye on L.A.* (taking its audience to various tourist spots around town), *Jong-e Bamdadi*, with its heavy news emphasis, is like *CBS Morning*, and *Sima-ye Ashna* resembles ABC's *Good Morning America*.

Internalization of American ideologies of liberal democracy and consumerism and the codes of professionalism, intellectual property, and ways of seeing and narrating the world does not occur automatically or naturally, especially for exile producers from non-Western worlds with vastly different cultural frameworks. They require training, which is often provided by the stations broadcasting exilic programs. KSCI-TV's procedure for training, and in effect interpellating, foreign-language producers is inscribed in the Foreign Language Program Monitor Form, quoted in full below.

KSCI-TV's Foreign Language Program
Monitor Form

Title of Show: Date:
Airtime: Length:

If the answer to any of the following questions is YES, please explain on reverse side.

DID THE PROGRAM DEAL WITH A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE?

DID THE PROGRAM CONTAIN OFFERS TO THE VIEWER INVOLVING LOTTERIES OR GAMBLING?

WERE THERE ANY PERSONAL ATTACKS?

WAS THERE ANY OBSCENITY?

WAS THERE ANY OFFER TO THE VIEWER THAT MIGHT BE A FRAUDULENT SCHEME?

DID THE PROGRAM HAVE ANY POLITICAL CONTENT, SUCH AS PRESENTATIONS BY CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE?

WAS THERE ANY ADVERTISING THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FALSE OR MISLEADING?

WAS THERE ANY ADVERTISING WHOSE SPONSORSHIP WAS NOT CLEARLY EVIDENT?

HOW MANY MINUTES OF COMMERCIALS WERE SHOWN?

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTENTS:

SOURCE: KSCI-TV.

This form is given to the foreign-language monitors whom the station hires to view and evaluate ethnic programs as they are being aired. If a programmer continually receives negative evaluations from the monitor, his contract can be terminated by the station with a month's notice. The items in the questionnaire are in effect the station's standards and norms of professionalism disguised in an interrogative form, and the monitors are asked to carefully judge adherence to them. According to a KSCI-TV official, Iranians were particularly singled out for extended monitoring on a regular basis because of the volatility of their politics; the antagonistic competition between exilic periodicals and television programs; and the excessive airing of commercials, far beyond the station's standard 14 minutes of ads per hour-long program (extended to 20 minutes for Iranians). In addition, extended monitoring was motivated by a desire on the part of the station to avoid jeopardizing its broadcast license.[38]

The criteria embedded in this form and the station's power to terminate a show with a one-month notice place the programmers in a relatively vulnerable financial and political position, with the result that they discourage substantial investment due to fear of short-notice termination, and encourage short-term tactics to maximize immediate profits. Timidity regarding controversial matters and a reduction over time of partisan poli-

tics are also a result.[39] Those U.S. laws dealing with copyrights, libel, slander, and obscenity are enforced by this regime,[40] and "professionalism" is inculcated in producers by the fostering of appropriate routines and procedures of television production. All of this naturalizes the codes and values of the dominant host culture.[41]

The ideology of professionalism involves employing the dominant codes and rules of narration and representation. Increasingly Iranian television programs have began to subscribe to the routinized rules of the host country's discourses, encoded in the four narrative and programming regimes of mainstream television: classical Hollywood cinema style for narrative and dramatic serials; seamlessness and segmentation of the televisual flow; objective news value for newscasts and public affairs programming; and variation as a principle governing programming, counterprogramming, presentation, and format differentiation—all devices used to establish individual program identity not through sameness, as was the case in the early phase of exile when home infused the discourse, but through difference. In effect, by adopting and routinizing these regimes of professionalism in their practice, Iranian producers (and viewers) are interpellated unknowingly into American consumer capitalism, individuated subject positioning, and representative democracy. Significantly, however, the presence of such professionalism not only signals the incorporation of Iranian exilic television into the dominant cultural mode of production but also masks that incorporation by naturalizing it.

Iranian exilic television in its first decade structurally reflected and shaped the lives of its producers and audiences. Reflecting the formlessness of liminality, it first emerged as a hermetically sealed collection of audiovisuals put together with great individual effort by producers and addressed to what was thought to be a homogeneous audience. A ritual exilic genre of television was developed with its own generic conventions, strategies of signification, viewer positioning, and transmission and consumption patterns. The emergence of these strategies of structuration and commodification signals the evolution of Iranians from liminality toward incorporation, and from exile into ethnicity. This process, however, is neither linear nor consensual as much of the traditional sociological literature would seem to posit. It is, rather, a conflictual and dialectical process involving resistances, differences, reversals, and leaps forward, during which features of both liminality and incorporation may coexist for quite some time—a truly syncretic culture. These tensions, ambivalences, and syncretic practices characteristic of exile are more evident in the programs themselves and in the intertextual interplay between them and their interstitial materials, a subject discussed in the next chapter.

5
Fetishization, Nostalgic Longing, and the Exilic National Imaginary

Returning to the Homeland

The warm midnight air of August that suddenly hit me was the first sign that I had arrived in Iran. As I stepped out of the plane onto the ramp—the last person to get off—I encountered this incredibly warm air, so thick and warm that it had become a material thing into which I stepped. Ghosts of other planes seemed to silently float in that dark thickness like grey whales in water. I was remarkably calm. For a moment I flashed back on the image of the Pope years back landing in his homeland of Poland, or that of the American hostages held in Iran returning home, kneeling down on the tarmac to kiss the ground. I dismissed the idea immediately as too sentimental. I also had no sense of panic or fear of the pervasive security system, even though I had worried about it earlier. It had been thirteen years since my last stay in Iran in 1978, the year the revolution took out the Shah. I did not know whether my name would be on the list kept by the airport security and this began to gnaw at me as passengers lined up for the first of what turned out to be four checkpoints. At the first, the customs agent asked what the address of my residence in Iran would be. For a moment I panicked because I could not remember the house number. I told him I had been away for many years and could not remember it. My candor brought a smile to his face. "How about 280," he said. Considerably relieved, I said: "That'll do."