

Babak Tabarraee

LEAVING HOMELAND: THE EVOLVING CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MIGRATION IN THE IRANIAN CINEMA OF THE 2010s

Abstract

Many of the Iranian films released inside Iran during the 2010s address the latest wave of Iranians' emigrations since 2009. Examining the dominant tropes of migration in their narrative subsets, this article argues that the Iranian cinema of the last decade offers a paradigm shift in its conceptualization of migration which may reflect a gradual change in Iranian society. This study proposes that while some recent Iranian films have maintained the pre-established traditions of depicting the hosting countries of immigrants on utopic and/or dystopic terms, a high number of movies have instead presented temporary or permanent migration as a natural, self-evident, and righteous choice. Analyzing the representational strategies of these films obfuscates the imagined borders of a global community of Iranians and problematizes the classic definition of *farangistan* (foreign lands) by lessening its otherness from *Iranshahr* (the land of Iranians).



INTRODUCTION

Iranian cinema has directly reflected the latest wave of Iranian migrations in the 2010s. During the eight Iranian years of 1389 (21 March 2011) to 1396 (20 March 2018), 103 domestic films were screened in Iranian movie theatres that addressed the permanent or temporary move to *farang* (foreign, mostly Western, countries). Considering the total number of 543 Iranian films released in this period, this amounts to the astonishing rate of 12.8 films per year or 18.96 percent overall.¹ Situating these films within the century-long traditions of Iranian modern media, this article suggests that they add a new trend to the well-established religious, political, scientific, economic, and psychosociological discourses on migration.

Babak Tabarraee is Assistant Professor of Instruction and Coordinator of the Persian program at The University of Texas at Austin. Email: babak.tabarraee@austin.utexas.edu

I argue that a considerable variety of both the arthouse and popular films produced and screened in Iran in the 2010s introduce migration as an individual right while leaving its causes open to interpretation and implying familial conflicts as its most significant consequence. The shift of focus from the causes and destinations of emigration to its depiction as a natural, self-evident, and righteous choice in these films problematizes the classic definitions of *farangistan* (the foreign lands) and its otherness from *Iranshahr* (the land of Iranians). The former is no longer merely a distanced dystopia (the homogenous land of the infidels and enemies) or utopia (the cradle of civilization and scientific progress). Thus, the duality of Westophobia/Westoxification becomes less realistic. Moreover, by turning from a collective symptom into a component of individual identity, the phenomenon of migration in the Iranian politicized public sphere is acknowledged and critically accepted.

This study is based on analyzing the representation strategies of over one hundred films made by Iranians residing inside the country and that succeeded in acquiring the screening and distribution permits from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Iran. The exploratory model of this article has two important implications. First, it addresses a gap in the scholarship on migration and Iranian cinema. Pioneered by the research agenda of Hamid Naficy in the 1990s and the 2000s, Iranian migration scholars have hitherto concentrated on diasporic cinema and exiled media rather than films that have been officially produced inside Iran for the consumption of national audiences.² Moreover, the success of filmmakers such as Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof in the circuits of international film festivals has overshadowed the fact that many of their critically acclaimed works have not been legally released in Iran. As a result, the Anglophone scholarship of Iranian cinema has continued to canonize works of art and emblems of resistance at the expense of hundreds of films that do not conform to their aesthetic and/or political readings.

Second, this study can potentially compensate for the shortcomings of current methodologies employed to examine Iranian migrations – an issue that is highlighted in the conclusion of this article. What I suggest here is an investigation of the cinematic strategies for narrating migration with the underlying objective of demystifying what cinematic migrations may represent about Iranian society today. I use the term representation strategy in two senses: its common meaning in media studies as studying the mechanisms and functions of the audiovisual texts, and as a certain trend in critical approaches to

migration studies that considers migration as representative of the transformations in sending and receiving societies. Stephen Castles, for example, suggests a necessary link between migration theories and societal change in general. He suggests that instead of trying to achieve a general theory of migration, one should pay attention to the role of migration in the broader context of social transformation and the rapid global change.³ A change detected in the media representation of migration in a given media culture may consequently lead us toward theorizing on a change in that culture at large.⁴ While providing such a theory is not within the scope of this study, the possible relation between social change and migration certainly encourages contemplation of the media's interactive role in reflecting and contributing to the development of change against a historical backdrop. The main sources of data here are films, but a variety of traditional and modern media products would serve a similar purpose, from travelogues and television programs to the texts of social media produced and distributed domestically. In this case, however, films may bring unique advantages for the historical role that cinema has played in shaping and reflecting Iran's relationship with the West over the past 125 years.

Since the first encounters of Iranians with cinema, moving images have served as mediators between Iran and *farang*. The first documented account of an Iranian watching films dates back to 28 May 1897 at Palace Theater in London where an Iranian entrepreneur reported his amazement over this "American invention."⁵ Sahhafbashi's travelogue to *farang* locates cinema alongside the other aspects of Western modernity, which, to him, were in startling contrast to the overall identity of Iranians at the time. This primary attitude persisted for a long time in the accounts of the many other astonished Iranian film viewers.⁶ For the next thirty years, the concept of silent moving images for Iranians was equal to the kind of aesthetics of display and astonishment that Tom Gunning has famously theorized as "a cinema of attractions," in which the attraction was mostly resulted from "exhibitionist confrontation."⁷ This is evident in those short documentaries that Muzaffariddin Shah and his court photographer, Mirza Ibrahim AkkasBashi, took in Belgium and France in 1900.⁸ These early instances of Iranian *cinéma vérité*, as well as the short films taken in Tehran in the early twentieth century, show an obsessive interest in the wonderfully irregular phenomena of the world. The European carnival of flowers or the animals of the royal zoo in Tehran were deemed equally wonderful in these works.⁹ Another Western import

by Muzaffariddin Shah, the peepshow, showcased the same functions. The strip of images from foreign countries in this device was so different from the reality of Iranian audiences' daily life that they immediately otherized the instrument by calling it *shahr-i farang* (foreign city).¹⁰ *Farang* was the wonderland, and moving images were the easiest way to watch its wonders from a safe distance.

Starting from the era of silent cinema, the history of film in Iran has also shown close ties to the history of intellectual movements and modern concepts of nationalism. In *Iranian Cosmopolitanism*, Golbarg Rekabtalaei traces the formation of vernacular modernity by the mediation of cinema in Iran until the Islamic Revolution in 1979.¹¹ In addition to the progressive nudges of the intelligentsia, though, an undesirable yet continued element of this history has been the many forms of imposed censorship. During the reign of both the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Republic, all films have been required to obtain production and/or distribution licenses. In other words, what and how Iranians could observe on their screens have been heavily regulated to guide the evolvement of national identity, especially vis-à-vis what was considered non-Iranian. On the other hand, the high quantity and extreme popularity of cinema in Iran endow films with a powerful social weight; they are not just what the government wants to mediate. Thus, Iranian films convey a synthesis of the concerns and interests of both the society and the cultural authorities regarding modernity and Iranian identity. And representations of migration have been among the most recurrent themes of this equation.

According to the four volumes of Abbas Baharlu's unique guide to Persian-language films, *Filmshinākht-i Iran* (Iran's Filmography), 1,195 feature-length films were made in Iran before the 1979 revolution, and 1,712 additional films were made—though not necessarily released—in the first thirty-three years after the revolution (until 2011).¹² Even a simple survey of the plot summaries provided by Baharlu shows that different configurations of Iran-*farang* connections, including traveling abroad, foreigners in Iran, or various forms of confrontations between the residents of Iran and foreign countries, have been increasingly present in the Iranian cinematic narratives.¹³ Although the ultimate mission of this article is to provide an analysis of the Iranian films addressing migration in the 2010s, acknowledging the contribution of this cinematic history to the stasis and dynamism of the meanings of leaving one's homeland for *farang* is also critical. Hence, the rest of this article is divided into three sections: the first two elaborate on how some recent Iranian films have reproduced or

modified century-long conceptualizations of *farang* as dystopia or utopia, and the third section introduces a new mode of sensibility about migration exclusive to the Iranian new cinema.

THE FIRST CINEMATIC TROPE OF *FARANG*: DYSTOPIA

One of the earliest perceptions of *farang* in modern Iran depicted it as *balād-i kufr* (lands of infidelity). Originally containing a religious connotation, this umbrella term is colloquially used in Persian today for all the places that Iranian traditional values are reversed or ridiculed.¹⁴ I contend that this negative outlook has historically found cinematic expressions in four narrative frameworks: the Westoxicated characters returned from *farang*; failed romances between Iranians and non-Iranians; leaving Iran for forbidden pleasures; and the category of betrayers, traitors, and cowards. These four subcategories have been shaped in Persian fictional and dramatic literature as well as the movies produced in Iran since the early twentieth century. While each of these subsets has become pervasive at different historical turns, their overall implication of *farang* as a cultural dystopia has remained with Iranian cinema until now.

First, and maybe the most persistent of them all, are narratives revolving around the *mustafrang* characters: mostly men—and occasionally women—who return to their hometowns after a period of residence in *farang*. The newly adopted habits and behaviors of these characters show a striking contrast to the Iranian traditional values. These narratives almost always convey the explicit message that because of their Western acculturation, these characters are polluted with various forms of perverse cultural values and thus could not be trusted in the country anymore. These *farangī-maāb* (behaving-like-Westerners) characters have come to be known as *gharb-zadih* (West-struck) following the critical writings of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad and Dariush Shayegan in the 1960s and the 1970s.¹⁵ However, their presence in Iranian narrative and dramatic arts dates back to the late Qajar era. In fact, originally, they were not cinematic inventions.

In the first modern Persian short story, Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh's *Farsi shikar ast* (Persian is sugar), first published in January 1921 in the Berlin-based *Kāvih* magazine, there is a character who has just returned from a Francophone European country.¹⁶ The behavior, actions, and diction of this character are replicated in many future cultural products, such as the protagonist of Hasan Muqaddam's play, *Jafar khān az farang āmadih* (*Jafar Khan Has Come from*

Foreign Countries), first staged in Tehran's Grand Hotel in May 1922.¹⁷ After a temporary sojourn in Europe, both these characters imitate the Western bourgeoisie behavior to a degree that it seems they have forgotten their mother tongue. In this way, they are precursors to the personality that Fakhriddin Shademan denominates as *fukulī* (the one with a *faux-col* or detachable collar) and introduces as the worst enemy of the Iranian nation in his critical treatise, *Taskhīr-i tamaddun-i farangī* (Appropriating Western civilization), published in 1948:

Fukulī is a shameless half-tongued Iranian who has learned just a little bit of a foreign language and less so of Farsi, and now claims that he can describe for us the civilization of a foreign land that he does not know with a language that he does not understand.¹⁸

Anti-Western sentiments abound in these works. In *Farsi shikar ast*, the narrator himself has experienced "five years of wandering around and eating [his] own heart out," and now has no hesitation in announcing "to hell with the Westerners altogether."¹⁹ In *Jafar khān az farang āmadih*, Jafar's mother and cousin are afraid that he has become an infidel because they have heard that the people of *farang* eat the meat of bears and monkeys, produce liquor from the skin of their dead priests, and make cognac out of old shoes and dirty socks.²⁰ And even though Shademan believes the only way to truly appropriate the Western civilization is to correctly learn the Persian language and the Western culture, his nationalistic prejudice and elitism make him state that no one should be allowed to go to *farang* except "the erudite and seasoned persons."²¹

In films, these precondemned characters were sometimes pure evil. In *Lālih-yi ātashīn* (*Fiery Tulip*, Mahmud Nozari, 1962), for example, a young man recently returned from *farang* maligns his father and brother in order to win over a girl.²² Other times, they were shown as misled and confused characters susceptible to wrongdoing. *Bun-bast* (*Dead-End*, 1964), written by the famous poet Ahmad Shamlou and directed by Mehdi MirSamadzadeh, begins with the voice-over of one such character who narrates to the audience how he had nothing to do in Paris but to go to bars and cabarets and aimlessly wander about the city. When he returns to Iran, he gets involved in a criminal case that seems to be the karmic consequence of his years of debauchery. Finally, in some other examples, these people were depicted as halfwits who

could no longer understand anything about the sensitivity of their people. Ali Hatami's free adaptation of Muqaddam's play, *Jafar khān az farang bargashtih* (*Jafar Khan Has Returned from Foreign Countries*, 1987), for example, shows a crazy Americanized Jafar Khan in silly clothes who keeps insulting everyone until he finally leaves the country once again.²³

Iranian new cinema contains fewer examples of comical or dramatic condemnations of these characters, but they still exist. While these updated forms of the *farangī-maāb* personage are still misfits contaminated because of their distance from the homeland, they have not carried over the diabolic, confused, or crazed qualities of their precedents. Instead, they imply a different message about the loss of traditional patriarchy. In other words, the way these characters talk, walk, and behave offers an accurate visualization of what Al-e-Ahmad defined as the outcome of the Westoxification: men who are superficially religious but subservient to the West, know a little bit of everything but do not have any expertise, and, more importantly, have become effeminate.²⁴ One recent incarnation of the emasculated *farangī-maāb* man is an Iranian-Canadian professor of modern Persian poetry in Mani Haqiqi's *Panjāh kilū ālbālū* (*Fifty Kilos of Sour Cherry*), the third-highest-grossing film of 2016. This contemporary *fukulī* has returned to marry an Iranian girl who despises his spoiled character. He fakes his suicide to get the bride back, but the side effects of the pills reveal that he might be not as masculine as expected from a groom-to-be. Once again, then, comedy becomes the vehicle for projecting the fears about going back and forth across the borders.

The second subset of this category details doomed-to-fail romantic relations or marriages between Iranians and foreigners. In the *Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Hamid Naficy describes how the "foreign bride" comic subgenre became popular in the commercial cinema of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁵ Naficy's most famous example is Nosratollah Vahdat's *'Arūs farangī* (*Foreign Bride*, 1964), in which a *lūtī* (chivalrous and roughneck) taxi driver realizes the impossibility of his marriage to a Western girl because of the significance of *ghiyrat* (patriarchal honor and zealotry) to him. The *lūtī* and *jāhil* (illiterate tough guy) types faded from Iranian cinema after the revolution, but the pessimism toward international romance continued.²⁶ In Asghar Farhadi's *Le Passé* (*The Past*, 2013), for example, the illiterate taxi driver is replaced with an intellectual-looking man who goes to Paris to finalize his divorce process from an unstable French woman. Interestingly, in several recent films, the equation has reversed toward what can be called the

“foreign groom” films. The marriages, of course, are still unsuccessful. A critically acclaimed example is Behruz Afkhami’s *Āzar, Shahdukht, Parviz va dīgarān* (*Azar, Shahdukht, Parviz and Others*, 2014), which was based on a novella written by its star, Marjan Shirmohammadi.²⁷ The film won the best screenplay and the best film awards from the thirty-second edition of the Fajr International Film Festival.²⁸ A young returned-from-*farang* woman in the film (Shirmohammadi) reveals to her father that her British husband has turned out to be gay. This is too much for the father, and he starts to look for a suitable Iranian husband for her. Here, the idea of shattered masculinity is more clearly transferred from the Westernized men to Western men, which nevertheless leads toward the implied impossibility of an international marriage much to the satisfaction of the conservative layers of the Iranian ruling system.

The third group of *balād-i kufr* films presents the experience of the forbidden pleasures of *farang* with an admonishing tone. The prototype of these lambasted pleasure-seeking characters might be the hero of Iraj Pezeshkzad’s satirical novel, *Hāj Mam Jafar dar Paris* (*Haj Mam-Jafar in Paris*), published as a book in 1954. Haj Mam Jafar is a seemingly religious businessman of Tehran bazaar whose travel to Europe reveals his latent desire for French wine and blonde women. The “foreign-travel movies,” introduced by Naficy as a close relative of the foreign-bride films, are extensions of the same mentality, whether they actually show foreign countries, as in *Dowr-i dunyā bā jīb-i khālī* (*Round the World with Empty Pockets*, Khosrow Parvizi, 1970), or merely talk about them, as in *Mamal Āmrīkāī* (*Mamal the American*, Shapur Qarib, 1974).²⁹ *Farang* in these films is a fun place to be, but not as real, warm, friendly, safe, and welcoming as one’s own homeland. These films sometimes portray a traditional macho figure who goes to *farang* to discipline a *fukulī*. In *Ibrām dar Paris* (*Ibram in Paris*, Ismail Kushan, 1964) for instance, a *lūtī* butcher goes to Paris to bring his brother back and prepare him for getting married to the girl he has chosen for him. Once in Paris, he finds out that his brother is engaged to a French girl, and even worse, he has totally forgotten the principles of patriarchal *ghiyrat*. With small changes, this pattern is repeated in many films even to this day.³⁰

This subset of the *balād-i kufr* films has been extensively reproduced in the Iranian comedies of the 2010s, albeit within the red lines of depicting *farang* on Iranian screens. A recent example that reflects the traditional fears of Iranians about what happens abroad is the second-highest-grossing film of 2016, Manuchehr Hadi’s *Man*

Sālvādur nīstam (*I'm Not Salvador*). A religious couple apparently wins a free trip to Brazil from a travel agency. All through this trip, though, the man is worried about contacts with the *nā-mahram* (non-mahram), his wife's hijab, or having any haram drink or food. Of course, nothing goes as he wishes; he is mistaken for a samba dancer named Salvador, and the rest is a usual plotline for mistaken identity comedies with an Islamic twist. The reverse exoticness of non-Islamic cultures and the possibility of cinematically showing non-Muslim and non-Iranian women without hijab is at the core of many such recent comedies such as *Khānum-i Yaya* (*We Like You, Miss Yaya*, Abdolreza Kahani, 2017) which was filmed in Thailand and *Paradise* (Ali Atshani, 2018) which was filmed in Germany and Spain.

The last group of this category came into prominence mostly after the revolution, though these films did exist even before 1979. This group includes films in which an explicit or implicit political dimension is added, and the *farang* is introduced as the territory of various enemies. The characters who leave Iran in these films are sometimes blatantly introduced as traitors. Particularly in the first two decades after the revolution, a high number of government-sponsored films presented the leavers as either affiliated with the previous regime or the opposition groups in political films, such as in Rasoul Mollaqlolipour's famous *Panāhandih* (*Refugee*, 1994). A related subcategory includes the "cowards" who were afraid of the new regime's revolutionary courts, the consequences of the Iran-Iraq war, and social changes in general. The range of examples for this subcategory extends from the sympathetically depicted literary characters of the fiction writer Goli Taraqqi to the ridiculed cowards of the state-sponsored cinematic productions such as *Chihār Isfahānī dar Baghdad* (*Four Isfahanis in Baghdad*, Seyyed Mohammadreza Momtaz, 2017).³¹ In some of the seemingly apolitical films, however, betraying your country is subtly replaced with different forms of immoral acts toward other people, such as killing a relative to obtain the money to go to Las Vegas in *Buqz* (*Hatred*, Reza Dormishian, 2012); stealing money from an innocent roommate in *Darband* (Parviz Shahbazi, 2013); or marital unfaithfulness, such as what we see in Peyman Maadi's *Barf rū-yi kāj-hā* (*Snow on the Pines*, 2013) in which a married man goes to London to comfortably cheat on his wife and stay with his mistress. Although these films contain a light criticism toward the circumstances within the country that lead people to decide to temporarily or permanently leave their homeland, the *farang-is-bad* tradition is still highlighted in them, and by association, whoever leaves the country is

criticized on various levels. In other words, *farang* has remained a dystopia in these films even if the homeland is not revered as an accessible utopia.

THE SECOND CINEMATIC TROPE OF *FARANG*: UTOPIA

An equally unrealistic perception of *farang* introduces it as lands blessed with safety, prosperity, freedom, and development. This positive imagination is evident in three major groups of plotlines and characters: characters leaving the homeland in pursuit of furthering their education or undergoing medical treatment, characters going abroad to increase their financial or social capitals, and those who aim to escape socioeconomic problems and set themselves free from legal and cultural limitations. Similar to the dystopic tropes of *farang*, its utopic configurations as the acme of scientific progress, irresistible wealth, and a haven for freedom-seekers have lasting historical roots.

The most persistent pattern belongs to the characters who leave Iran for academic or medical reasons. Even in the more recent reincarnations of this group, no one questions why these people go abroad to study in the fields that are already taught in Iranian universities or treat diseases that are already treated in Iranian hospitals. Portraying *farang* as the cradle of progress has historical origins that neither the intellectual movements of the 1960s nor the Islamic Republic managed to eradicate. Sending students overseas has a two-hundred-year history in Iran. Abbas Mirza, the viceroy of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar, sent the first recorded Iranian student to *farang* to study medicine in 1810. A year later, he sent two other students to study painting, medicine, and chemistry.³² Since then, student migration was continuously funded by Iranian governments and criticized by intellectuals, especially during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In his editorial to the November 1964 issue of *Vahid* magazine, Seifollah Vahidniya lists the various problems of student export. At the time, he stated, 20,000 Iranian students were living in other countries, whose expenses equaled a quarter of the total budget of the Ministry of Culture, or ten times more than the budgets of Isfahan, Ahwaz, and Shiraz universities together.³³ The United States was a particularly popular destination. Stefan Trines mentions that following the 1949 bilateral “commission for cultural exchange between Iran and the United States,” and the American-led coup of 1953, there was an expansion of Iranian student mobility to the US, peaking in 1979–1980. The 51,310 Iranian students enrolled in American universities in this academic year made Iran the biggest source of foreign students in US

universities.³⁴ Even today, despite all the sanctions, financial problems, and visa complications, the number of Iranian students in other countries is at a relatively high number. In the academic year 2013–2014 in Canada, for example, Iranian students comprised the second largest group of international PhD students and the sixth-largest group of international master's students.³⁵

Justified and implicitly approved, these academic migrations are presented in recent films with some dramatic obstacles in the form of interpersonal complications. For instance, in *Kan 'ān* (*Canaan*, Mani Haqiqi, 2007), a woman is admitted to a graduate program at a Canadian university, but her husband is not willing to join her. In *Salām Bamba 'ī* (*Salam Mumbai*, Qorban Mohammadpour), the fourth-highest-grossing film of 2016, a medical student falls in love with an Indian girl whose wealthy family hinders the continuance of his education. And in one of the few cases that address the much-debated phenomenon of brain drain, the 2018-released *Zard* (*Yellow*, Mostafa Taqizadeh), a group of inventors have a fellowship contract to go to Italy, but the sudden illness of one of them makes their trip impossible.

Another group of idealistic representations of *farang* shows different forms of politically or financially justified migrations. The vanguard of such films is doubtlessly Ardeshir Irani and Abdolhosein Sepanta's *Dukhtar-i lur* (*The Lor Girl*), made in India in 1932 and released in Iran a year after. The protagonists of the film, Jafar and Golnar, have to escape from the Qajar era bandits to India.³⁶ The film presents India as a very developed country. We see the couple staying in a beautiful mansion, wearing Western-style clothes, and playing the piano. Interestingly, India remained the symbolic land of the affluent in many future films, including *Mādmāzil khālih* (*Mademoiselle Aunt*, Amin Aminin, 1957) and *Ganj-i qārūn* (*Qarun's Treasure*, Siamak Yasemi, 1965).

Later, labor migration to Far Eastern and Arabic countries for wealth and financial stability became a common theme presented in a few social films before and after the revolution. Japan, in particular, was a popular destination in films of the 1990s, such as *Yik bār barāyi hamīshih* (*Once and for All*, Sirus Alvand, 1991), *Mard-i āftābi* (*The Sunny Man*, Homayun Asadian, 1995) and *Zīr-i pūst-i shahr* (*Under the Skin of the Night*, Rakhshan Banietemad, 2000). There are fewer films of this kind in recent years, but the same theme persists in films like *Pul-i chūbī* (*Wooden Bridge*, Mehdi Karampour, 2011), in which a woman travels to work in Dubai in order to save money for her ultimate immigration to the US with her husband.

The final variation of this model has mostly – if not solely – appeared in post-revolutionary and especially recent films. Enabled with innovative strategies to both address limitations and bypass censorship, there is a new image of *farang* as a haven for those who want to escape from the social problems that they face at home. A recurrent character type in these films is the apolitical artist, usually a musician, whose art is frowned upon in their country and thus have no choice but to emigrate as, for instance, in *Par-i parvāz* (*Wings for Flying*, Khosrow Masumi, 2000), *Kasī az gurbih-hā-yi īrānī khabar nadārih* (*No One Knows About Persian Cats*, Bahman Ghobadi, made in 2009 but never released in Iran), and the second episode of *Ṭīhrān, Tīhrān* (*Tehran, Tehran*) titled “*Sīm-i ākhar*” (“*Last String*,” Mehdi Karampour, 2009). Another group comprises minorities under pressure, such as a transsexual girl in *Āynih-hā-yi rūbih-rū* (*Facing Mirrors*, Negar Azarbayejani, 2014) who needs to go to Germany for her surgical operations because her father, as well as many of her fellow citizens, do not recognize her sexual identity.³⁷ Finally, there are cases in which a young person, usually a woman, has left the country for unsaid reasons that are not necessarily questioned in the film, and then their lovers or spouses want to join them in whatever way possible. Two recent examples include the fifth-highest-grossing film of 2017, *Uksīdān* (*Oxidant*, Hamed Mohammadi), and the first episode of *Pāp* (*The Pope*, Ehsan Abdipour), made in 2013 and released in 2018. Although why these women have left is not revealed, inference from some textual cues and contextual signs suggest that they were not happy with the limitations targeting women in the Islamic Republic.

A final point of comparison between the migration-to-utopia-themed films of the last decade and those of older times is their creative expression of the home country’s circumstances. The visualized or implied *farang* in many of the earlier films of this type did not necessarily stand in stark contrast to a dystopic homeland. *Farang* was more technologically advanced, and one might improve their welfare by immigration. And yet, staying in Iran was not necessarily equal to one’s demise or disappointment. This, however, has gone under a drastic change in recent years. Films such as the politically charged *Bih uimīd-i dīdār* (*Goodbye*, Mohammad Rasoulof, made and banned in 2011) and the allegorical *Hujūm* (*Invasion*, Shahram Mokri, 2017) do not show what living in the foreign lands may look like, but they assert that staying home means incarceration or worse. Not surprisingly, these implications have often led to the ban, censorship, or severe criticism of many such films.

PARADIGM SHIFT: LEAVING IRAN AS AN INDIVIDUAL RIGHT

The topic of migration has become more critical to Iranians in recent years, as evidenced by the latest wave of Iranian emigrations following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's contentious victory in the 2009 presidential election.³⁸ Donald Trump's pugnacious policies concerning Iran – including his executive Order 13769, which extremely limited the entry of Iranian citizens to the US, as well as his withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which deteriorated Iran's economy by paralyzing sanctions – foregrounded the urgency of attending to many Iranians' desire to leave their homeland.³⁹ Even the officials of the Islamic Republic and their closely monitored administrations in Iran have occasionally admitted to the exponential increase of interest in leaving the country among Iranians. According to a consultant to Iran's Vizārat-i rāh va shahrsāzī (Ministry of Roads and Urban Development), as of February 2018, close to 1.5 million Iranians were waiting for the approval of their visa applications to immigrate just to the two countries of Canada and Australia.⁴⁰ With the same urgent tone, the head of Iran Migration Outlook – a research center hosted at Sharif University of Technology and supervised by the Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology – warned against the danger of an upcoming “spread of mass migration” on 30 November 2020.⁴¹ It is not surprising, then, that migration has become a major theme of more Iranian films in recent years. The critical distinction of these films from their predecessors, however, lies not merely in their higher quantity but in the unprecedented way that many of them chose to define migration within the political, economic, and artistic boundaries that have shaped Iranian post-revolutionary cinema.

Many of the Iranian films made and released after 2009 leave the causes of emigration to the audiences' interpretations. Informed by their lived experiences in the country or extratextual information, the audiences make their own judgment about the nature of migration. It is never explained, in *Judāyī-i Nādir az Sīmīn* (*A Separation*, Asghar Farhadi, 2011) for example, why the couple had decided to emigrate in the first place. When Simin says that she does not want her daughter to be raised “under these conditions,” the divorce judge asks her twice “what conditions?” to which she has no answer. This lack of an explicit explanation can be seen in many other films, especially in the case of emigrated children in *Āqā Yūsef* (*Mr. Yusef*, Ali Rafii, 2011), *Mushkil-i Gīti* (*Giti's Problem*, Bahram Kazemi, 2016), *Kafsh-hā-yam kū?* (*Where Are My Shoes?*, Kiumars PourAhmad, 2016), and *Gita* (Masoud Madadi,

2016); and women, as the objects of romantic or motherly love, in *Pinhān* (*Hidden*, Mehdi Rahmani 2012), *Chih khūbih kih bargashtī* (*It's Good to Be Back*, Dariush Mehrjui, 2013), *Māhī u gurbih* (*Fish and Cat*, Shahram Mokri, 2014), *Dar dunyā-yi tu sā'at chand ast?* (*What Time Is It in Your World?*, Safi Yazdanian, 2015), and *Sā'at-i panj-i 'asr* (*Five O'Clock in the Afternoon*, Mehran Modiri, 2017). In all of these examples, the unsaid reasons for migrations can only be inferred or speculated. Leaving homeland in these films is presented as something that does not even need to be explained. The immigrants are not necessarily going to a better or worse place than their country. They certainly feel the urge to go, but the writers and directors of their cinematic stories refrain from judging their decision. This narrative choice is rooted in an inter-related network of political, financial, and cultural grounds.

Fear of censorship may partially justify this form of causal silence. Since the distribution and exhibition of films in Iran are almost exclusively organized by the government, losing the possibility of screening a movie indefinitely, or until the censor is satisfied, may seriously damage the financial and artistic aspirations of everyone involved in the production. The risk is certainly higher for those products that look, first and foremost, at the national market for returning their capital and making benefits. Therefore, it is only natural that the producers and filmmakers avoid provoking the sensitivities of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance as well as the various powerholding classes in the Iranian theocratic system. Jettisoning the utopia/dystopia polarization, then, seems to be only a rational solution for the Iranian film industry.

Yet, the fact that these filmmakers have had relative freedom in choosing their subject matters must be kept in mind. They could have opted for a topic other than migration in order to fully express their characters' motives and the cultural consequences of their actions. After all, portraying migration even in this seemingly neutral covering has not shielded these films from the attacks of the right-wing media sponsored by the most conservative layers of the Iranian ruling system. Many critics of this camp have repeatedly accused the more artistically driven migration-themed films—like *A Separation*—to have been intentionally made to satiate the postcolonial policies of international film festivals.⁴² Similarly, they lambast popular films for their touristic and superficial image of both Iran and the West. For instance, a newspaper article reviewing “migration-comedies” such as *Los Angeles-Tehran* (Tina Pakravan), *Colombus* (Hatef Alimardani), and *Texas* (Masoud Atyabi), all released in 2018, complains that instead of

perceiving Iran as homeland, these films show it as a land in which people have been involuntarily born and live. The unsigned author of this article concludes with a quotation taken from a famous graffiti in Aleppo: "Homeland is not a hotel that we can leave because of its bad service."⁴³ Therefore, in Iran's politicized media environment, any representation of migration would be potentially condemned for either *siyālmamāyi* (tarnishing) of the actual situation or *saṭhīnigarī* (looking from a shallow perspective).

While there is no escape from the politics, political justification of narrative choices may be reductionistic. Profiteering from the Islamic Republic's imposed rules of representation may also partly explain the high number of migration films. For more than four decades, Iranian filmmakers have been prohibited from depicting veiless women. But, taking advantage of inconsistencies within the often arbitrarily interpreted rules of hijab, filmmakers are allowed to show women without veils on the condition that those actresses are foreign citizens filmed outside the Iranian borders. Producers of Iranian pop cinema have certainly utilized this opening in the past decade. Spending several hundred million rials more for traveling to Iran's neighboring countries, Eastern Europe, South America, or East Asia, the producers of these films guarantee the attendance of audiences who, following the silent-cinema-principle of the "cinema of attractions," take pleasure from witnessing their accustomed prohibitions. A final economic consideration may be the foreign distribution of these films for the increasing population of diasporic Iranians to whom the theme of migration is an everyday reality. Although modest, the limited screening of these films in major cities of North America and Western Europe, as well as revenue earned from selling copyright charges or renting films to subscription-based networks such as *imvbox.com*, can still be extremely valuable to the Iranian producers due to the extortionate rial-dollar exchange rate.⁴⁴

Most importantly, the cultural impact of the perception of migration by most consumers of Iranian films – citizens residing in the country – needs to be considered. The warm reception of those migration films that have been discharged from positive and negative connotations has encouraged the national film industry to produce similar products. Moreover, Iranian film critics and reviewers outside of the circle of state-sponsored media have mainly remained apathetic toward the proliferation of this new cycle – a stance that can only double the films' imagery of the suspension of judgement over the topic of migration. This cinematic and critical dissociation is derived

from the internalization of migration as a popularly accepted fact of Iranian life. Put simply, migration has become a natural phenomenon. In accordance with the Persian proverb *chīzi kih ‘yān ast, chih hājat bih bayan ast* (What is evident needs no explanation), critical reflection on the meaning of migration in these films has been transferred to their unconscious depths, and extensively, their silent consumers.

This process is similar to Louis Althusser’s framing of ideology as an unconscious system of representation of images, concepts, and structures that are “perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects.”⁴⁵ The bottom-up direction of cinema as an agent for social change, however, causes these films to function as a form of opposition, or resistance, against the hegemonic power that Antonio Gramsci ascribes to political normalization.⁴⁶ These films avoid judging the intention and/or action of migration, therefore enabling their viewers to witness and assess their subject matter—that is, the issue of migration— independently or, at least, at a distance from the politicized perspectives of both the Islamic Republic’s ruling system and the oppositional forces of the diasporic media. This phenomenon recalls the concept of “the evidence of film” that French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has used for describing the “just” or fair distance from which Abbas Kiarostami’s camera would observe its subjects to report on a natural catastrophe like the earthquake in his *Zindigī va dīgar hīch* (*And Life Goes On*, 1992).⁴⁷ The same “just distance” is preserved here for recording the motivations of these new emigrants. Emigration in these films is a self-evident reality that can only be discussed on an interpersonal level. Like having children, it can be encouraged or discouraged by different groups and authorities but cannot be forced upon individuals.

Doubtless, the ever-increasing number of immigrants and the internet-based technologies that have facilitated their communication with relatives at home have played a significant role in this ostensibly apolitical shift. Scholars have keenly observed and analyzed the share of social media in sociopolitical changes in the global south, especially in Iran.⁴⁸ And yet, rarely have they acknowledged a simple but deeper function of the internet as a border-blurring agent. The new image of migration in recent Iranian films is, on the one hand, a consequence of the technological revolution of the internet and its subversion of the traditional opposition of homeland versus foreign lands. In the above-mentioned titles, leaving Iran is no longer a case of deductive theses about *farang* or *vatan* (homeland) with predetermined judgmental attitudes. Both the stigma and honor of going to *farang* are replaced in these films with the normalcy of merely moving to a new place that is

neither too foreign nor idealized. And those who have left are still present, either off-screen or in the frame-in-frame technologies of video chatting, and so they seem to be somewhere within the imagined borders of their homeland: an expanded and dematerialized conception of *Irānshahr*.

On the other hand, the intermingling of homeland and foreign lands via social media and in the new Iranian films carries along an implicitly subversive transition from the top-down ideological constructs to the bottom-up, inductive, and experiential worldviews. Certainly, the *mediation* of the media – whether films or social media – keeps affecting this process. Nevertheless, by moving from the realm of the big tropes to the small experiences, the reality of migration in the Iranian politicized public sphere gets acknowledged and critically accepted by both the nation and the state. Lessening the centrality of *vatan* and the otherization of *farang*, the new emigrants and travelers face much less societal judgment in these films. In fact, the Iranian migration films of the 2010s have mostly replaced the critical, national, and collective dimensions of leaving homeland with tensions that remain at the individual and familial levels. Fundamentally, in many of these films, the immigrants' decision to leave the country only affects their involved families.

For instance, the whole narrative in *Judāyī* is propelled by the clash of Simin's decision to go and Nader's to stay. Hence, a separation. In *Sa'adatābād* (*Felicity Land*, Maziar Miri, 2011), a woman secretly has an abortion because she does not want to lose the opportunity of a three-month trip to Germany. In *Nārinjīpūsh* (*Orange Suit*, Dariush Mehrjui) and *Man mādar hastam* (*I Am a Mother*, Fereydoun Jeyrani), both released in 2012, the entire lives of the main characters are changed because of the departure of women/mothers to Western countries. In *Nahang-i 'anbar* (*Sperm Whale*, Saman Moqaddam, 2015), *Dar dunyā-yi tu sā'at chand ast?*, *Uksidān*, and *Pāp*, the films center on the depicted young women's departures for the West and their lovers' subsequent restlessness. Interestingly, in many of these films, those who want to emigrate are women. As one film critic in Iran has stated, this is partly because of a recent tendency in Iranian films to focus on the problems of the new urban middle class in Iran.⁴⁹ However, the presence of women as decision-makers in immigration is also concurrent with new research that shows the share of Iranian women in both domestic and international emigration has been increasing.⁵⁰ These examples and data clearly point to the incongruity of the Iranian women's wants and needs with the patriarchal rules of their everyday

life—a fact that only reaffirms the hidden force of the new and seemingly apolitical representations of migration on Iranian screens.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the cinematic image of migration offers a methodological advantage over the current models of migration studies, at least in the case of Iran. Not only do such investigations reveal the significance of the subject to the population inside the country, but they also move beyond the failed attempts at providing descriptive models of the phenomenon. Due to the confusing statistics and a lack of consensus over the socioeconomic meanings of different migration waves, the academic approaches to studying Iranian migrations have not been sufficiently assertive or up to date.⁵¹ In particular, statistical inconsistency impedes many kinds of relevant descriptive research. In 2012, for example, *Sāzmān-i šabt-i aḥvāl-i Iran* (Iranian National Organization for Civil Registration) announced that 3.5 million Iranians were living outside Iran, while only two years later, the speaker of *Shawrāy-i ‘ālī-i irāniān-i khārij az kishvar* (High Council of Iranian Affairs Abroad) estimated that number to be somewhere between 5 and 6 million, equal to 7 percent of the Iranian population.⁵² Similarly, in August 2017, an Iranian news agency claimed that based on the local statistics, Iran has an annual outmigration rate of about 60,000 people, while the United Nations and International Monetary Fund (IMF) considered the correct number to be between 150,000 and 180,000 per year.⁵³ Iran’s officials have exacerbated the situation by constantly changing their stances in different periods as a consequence of their erratic political agenda. In December 2017, for example, Iran’s head of *Bunyād-i millī-yi nukhbigān* (National Elite Foundation) denied the existence of a 2009 report by IMF which ranked Iran as first among countries with the highest rates of brain drain. In his interview, Sattari asserted that since the Iranian government welcomed mobile students, they now had to deal with the waves of reverse migration by the students who wanted to return and work in their country.⁵⁴ As Ali Akbar Mahdi has stated in the case of Iranian immigrants in the US, this statistical inconsistency cannot be easily removed due to political complexities and contrasting cultural concerns of Iranians inside and outside the country.⁵⁵

In place of reliable data, migration scholars have tried to explain the motives and effects of Iranian migrations from political and economic standpoints. These explanatory studies usually depend on one of the social theories of international migration as their underlying

foundation.⁵⁶ The limitations in their frameworks, however, sometimes reveal contrasting assumptions and outcomes. For example, Taghi Azadaramaki and Mehri Bahar advocate a migration networks theory for explaining the close ties of the Iranian emigrants with their homeland, while Mohammad Chaichian adopts a world system theory to explain how Iranian emigrants became enabled “to respond to the demands of a global market” and, therefore, have had looser ties with their home country after the 1979 revolution.⁵⁷ Left unsaid in many of these theorizations is the question of how the sending nation interprets its out-migration.⁵⁸

Regardless of the inevitable limitations and discrepancies in the descriptive and explanatory models of studying Iranian migrations, the theorizations about the causes and consequences of international migration usually overlook the significance of cultural viewpoints on the indigenous meaning of this phenomenon. Instead, this article has argued for analyzing the domestic products of a national cinema because they can provide a much-needed exploratory model for studying a semantic field of a locally-cultivated concept of migration. This is doubly important in the case of Iran, where cinema is still a respected form of art as well as a popular venue of entertainment. Despite the economic obstacles and the everchanging red lines of the ruling system for all official media, the Iranian film industry is highly prolific and produces between sixty and seventy narrative features each year. Moreover, these films have provided a conspicuous battleground for the ongoing culture wars between the policymakers and the resistive forces of arts and entertainment. What is screened in the theaters of Iran, then, can provide synthetically coded texts of a nation’s interests and concerns on controversial issues such as migration.

Following this rationale and by analyzing the representational strategies of migration in over one hundred Iranian cinematic productions, this article has suggested that the films of the past decade offer modifications in the traditional patterns of visualizing migration. The emergence of a new cinematic mode of representing migration in these films further indicates a change in the national perception of concepts such as patriotism and nationalism in Iranian society. In 1932, the ending of *Dukhtar-i lur* emphasized the significance of reverse migration for nationalistic reasons. Learning about the progress of the country under the Reza Shah’s forced modernization, Jafar suggests to Golnar to return home with the hopes of serving their country.⁵⁹ For decades, serving one’s homeland continued to be one of the main

pillars of nationalistic feelings. New Iranian films, however, signify a shift in this paradigm. In the case of student migrations, Mohammad Chaichian explains this evolution as the transformation of national sentiments from returning to serve one's country to an "internationalist national identity."⁶⁰ Similarly, for the new generation of Iranian cinematic characters, living abroad is neither a sin nor a blessing, and an individual's responsibility toward herself is prioritized over serving her homeland. But this new sentiment toward one's nationality does not equal a rejection of nationalism. In *Mādar-i qalb atumī* (*Atom Heart Mother*, Ali Ahmadzadeh, released in 2017), for instance, there is a very Westernized young man who says he will come back from Australia to Iran if there is a war. A Christian girl going to Italy in the same film does not hesitate to announce her dislike for the Hollywood movie, *Argo* (Ben Affleck, 2012), because "it shows Iran in a bad way. Everybody is stupid, uncultured, and jackasses . . . all of us!"

Media products, in their broadest definition, subtly represent these gradual changes in the public perceptions of nationalistic concepts. In a classic article published in 1973, Mohammad-Reza Shafiei Kadkani described how the classic conception of *vatan* in Persian poetry has evolved over the past centuries from ethnoracial considerations to geographical and then religious boundaries.⁶¹ The recent Iranian films, too, show a corresponding evolution in both the concept of *farang* and the meaning of leaving one's homeland. This article has argued that while the historically dystopic and utopic perceptions of *farang* have continued to exist in the Iranian society and cinema, the films of the first two decades of the twenty-first century offer a socially justified perspective on migrations in which *farang's* otherness is replaced with glocal accessibility.

The glocalization of migration in Iranian cinema should be seen in the continuation of film and digital technologies' role in fostering Iranians' sense of interconnectedness to the rest of the world. The belligerent foreign policies of the Islamic Republic over the past four decades have generated a feeling of isolation among many Iranians, which is represented by the obsession of many Persian websites with various international polls that introduce Iran among the saddest countries in the world.⁶² This perceived distance from the world is further confirmed in Iran's place among the "individual passport power rank" of the website Passport Index. As of 21 September 2021, Iran stands as the 190th country among the 199 countries on this list. An individual using an Iranian passport can only travel to eight countries without a visa.⁶³ Moreover, obtaining any type of visa to

many European and American countries – whether before or after Trump’s travel ban – has become increasingly difficult, expensive, and time-consuming for Iranians. Instead, literature and cinema have historically played a mediating role for many Iranians inside this country by building an imagined bridge between them and the world outside. Watching foreign films via the extensive underground and pirated digital networks of film distribution as well as the global success of Iranian movies in the circuit of international film festivals have certainly contributed to this feeling of regaining contact and stature. Beyond the distribution and reception modes, however, the cinematic products made for the consumption of the local audience best showcase the interaction of the medium of film and the underlying cultural changes within society. Thus, the new wave of migration-centered Iranian films can serve as a trustworthy indicator of an undergoing change of attitude within the Iranian society toward concepts like migration, nationalism, patriarchy, and individual rights.

NOTES

¹ My main sources of data for the numbers presented here are the eight annual box office charts of the website *Cinema Network Magazine* and the box office sales mentioned in the eight volumes of *Kitāb-i sāl-i cinema-yi Iran (The Annual Book of Iranian Cinema)* in the *hijrī shamsī* years 1389–1396. See “Furūsh-i kull-i film-hā-yi ikrān shudih dar sāl-i (1389–1396),” *Cinema Network Magazine*, accessed 1 January 2021, <http://www.cinetmag.com/Movies/BOxofficeWeekend.asp>; and eight volumes of *Kitāb-i sāl-i cinema-yi Iran* for this period (Tehran: Intishārāt-i māhnāmih-yi film, March 2011–2018).

² For an excellent theorization about diasporic cinemas, see Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³ Stephen Castles, “Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformation Perspective,” in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1565–86.

⁴ A practical example of this approach can be seen in what Subarno Chattarji did about the change of Indian media attitude from negative to positive in their representation of nonresident Indians and the people of Indian origin. Chattarji explains that initially these groups were seen as corrupted by the morally licentious West, but, gradually and in line with the liberalization of the Indian economy and the processes of globalization in general, the moral rhetoric was jettisoned, and a “welcome home” message was propagandized both because of a “resurgent nationalism” and for absorbing the possible investment of the migrants. Subarno Chattarji, “Media Representations in

India of Indian Diaspora in the UK and US," in *The Cultures of Economic Migration*, ed. Suman Gupta and Tope Omoniyi (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 171–83.

⁵ Ebrahim Sahhafbashi Tehrani, *Safarnāmih* (Tehran: Shirkat-i mu'allifān va muṣannifān-i Iran, 1979), 39. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Persian into English are the author's.

⁶ To read many of these accounts, see Behzad Rahimian, *Ru'yā-yi ṣādiqih*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Nazar, 2016).

⁷ Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions," *Wide Angle* 8, no. 3 (1986): 66.

⁸ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol.1, *The Artisanal Era 1897–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 44–45.

⁹ Cinéma vérité is a style of documentary filmmaking in which the presence of the apparatus of cinema, usually the camera, is acknowledged. The first Iranian short films, such as *Jashn-i Gul-hā* (*Carnival of Flowers*, 1900) and *Shīr-hā-yi Bāgh-i vahsh-i Faraḥābād* (*The Lions of Farahabad Zoo*, 1900), exhibited this style of film in which both the filmed subjects and the fact that their moving images could be recorded on film were equally important and emphasized. See Naficy, *Social History*, 1: 44–47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ Golbarg Rekabtalaei, *Iranian Cosmopolitanism: A Cinematic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹² Abbas Baharlu, *Filmshinākht-i Iran*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Qaṭrih, 2005–2016).

¹³ My own calculation, based on both observing primary sources and consulting secondary sources, shows that the number of films with such themes increased from 65 titles in the forty-nine years before the revolution to 218 titles in the thirty-three years after the revolution.

¹⁴ For an example of the negative perceptions of this concept in a religious context, see Ayatollah Mohammad Hosein Hoseini Tehrani, *Vilāyat-i faḡhīh dar hukūmat-i Islam*, vol. 3 (Mashhad: 'Allamih Tabātabāi, 2001), 140–41.

¹⁵ The terms *gharb-zadih* (West-struck) and *gharb-zadigī* (West-struckness) were especially popularized through the publication of these two books: Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, *Gharb-zadigī* (Tehran: originally self-published in 1962, electronic publication by Ketabnak, n.d.); and Dariush Shayegan, *Āsiyā dar barābar-i gharb* (Tehran: AmīrKabīr, 1977).

¹⁶ The narrator of this story is also returning from a foreign country. The whole story is about his arrest and the time he spends in a prison cell with several characters, including this other Westernized character. This story was published as part of a collection of short stories. See *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Jamalzadeh, Mohammad-Ali: ii. Work," by Hassan Kamshad and Nahid Mozaffari, originally published on 5 December 2008, last modified 10 April 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jamalzadeh-ii>.

¹⁷ Hasan Muqaddam, *Jafar khān az farang āmadih* (Tehran: Fārūs, 1922).

¹⁸ Fakhridin Shademan, *Taskhūr-i tamaddun-i farangī* (Tehran: Chāpkhānih-yi Majlis, 1948), 13.

¹⁹ Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh, *Yikī būd, yikī nabūd* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1977), 22, 34–35.

²⁰ Muqaddam, *Jafar khān*, 2–3.

²¹ Shademan, *Taskhūr*, 106.

²² For all the films cited in this article, I have added the name of the director and the release date of the film in parentheses immediately after the first mention of the film title.

²³ The political implications of this post-revolutionary adaptation are important. Hatami changed the setting to Isfahan of the late 1970s and attacked the Pahlavi government for taking advantage of both the bazaar and the academy.

²⁴ Al-e-Ahmad, *Gharbzadigī*, 8–9.

²⁵ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 2, *The Industrializing Years 1941–1978* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 243–44.

²⁶ Naficy describes how beginning in the 1960s, these two stock characters formed new subgenres in Iranian cinema. See Naficy, *Social History*, 2: 269–70.

²⁷ See Marjan Shirmohammadi, *Āzar, Shahdukht, Parviz va Dīgarān* (Tehran: Sālis, 2012).

²⁸ “Barguzīdigān-i sī-u-duvumīn jashnvārih-yi film-i fajr mu‘arrifi shudand,” *Mehr News Agency*, 11 February 2014, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2234553/>.

²⁹ Naficy, *Social History*, 2: 241–42.

³⁰ Some examples are *Yik isfahānī dar New York* (*An Isfahani in New York*, Shaollah Nazerian, 1972), *Tijārat* (*The Trade*, Masoud Kimiai, 1995), and the 2017-released *Man yik irānīam* (*I’m an Iranian*, Mohammadreza Ahanj).

³¹ See, for example, Goli Taraqqi, *Khātirih-hā-yi parākandih* (Tehran: Bāq-i āynih, 1992).

³² Ali Seyyedīn, *Az Maktabkhānih tā madrisih* (Tehran: Nashr-i ‘Ilm, 2012), 29.

³³ Seifollah Vahidniya, “Javānān-i irānī dar khārij,” *Vahīd*, no. 11 (November 1964): 1–6.

³⁴ Trines, “Dējā Vu?,” 6 February 2017. Ali Gheissari reminds us that one should not confuse the high number of Iranian students abroad in the late 1970s with the phenomenon of brain drain. Because of the low admission rate of the limited number of universities in Iran, many of the young people who could not pass the national entrance exam (*kunkūr*) decided to continue their studies in foreign countries, and many of them were supported by their families, not the government. See Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 76.

³⁵ “International Students in Canadian Universities, 2004/2005 to 2013/2014,” *Statistics Canada: Education Indicators in Canada: Fact Sheet Catalogue no. 81-599-X – No. 11*, last modified 20 October 2016, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/81-599-x/81-599-x2016011-eng.pdf?st=dEW_Seqw.

³⁶ The censorship in later years never allowed for similar plotlines of migrations because of safety, even if nationalistic sentiments were clearly stressed.

³⁷ The emigration of officially unrecognized sexual identities is also implicit in *Bahman* (*Avalanche*, Morteza Farshbaf, released in 2016), a film about a young boy who was probably homosexual, and in *Mādar-i qalb atumī* (*Atom Heart Mother*, Ali Ahmadzadeh, released in 2017), a film about a young girl who was most likely homosexual. Also, while the racial minorities have not sufficiently been represented in Iranian films, they are present in Persian literature. For example, in her novella, *Zīr-i āftāb-i Khush-Khīyāl-i ‘asr* (*Under the Daydreaming Afternoon Sun*), Jeyran Gahan shows how some members of a Jewish family immigrate to Israel. See Jeyran Gahan, *Zīr-i āftāb-i Khush-Khīyāl-i ‘asr* (Tehran: Chishmih, 2011).

³⁸ For an overview of Iranian migration waves, see Nader Vahabi, “La diaspora iranienne en France: Profil démographique et socioéconomique,” *Migrations Sociét*, no. 158 (2015): 19–40.

³⁹ National Security and Defense, “Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” National Archives, 6 March 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states-2/> (archived presidential White House website); Meg Wagner and Veronica Rocha, “Trump Withdraws US from Iran Nuclear Deal,” CNN, 9 May 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/trump-iran-nuclear-deal/>.

⁴⁰ “Abdoh Tabrizi: 1.5 million irāni dar šaf-i muhājiratand,” *Asr Iran*, 5 December 2017, <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/577073/>.

⁴¹ Bahram Salavati, “Jāmi ‘i-yi Iran dar āstānih-yi vurūd bih fāz-i muhājirat-i tudihvār,” *Iran Migration Outlook*, 30 November 2020, <https://old.imobs.ir/2020/12/29/%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1/>.

⁴² See, for example, “Fahim: Sīnimā-yi muhājirat-i imrūz-i mā vaṭanfurūshī ast” [Fahim: Our migration cinema today is selling out our homeland], *Tasnim News Agency*, 20 July 2019, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/04/29/2056159/>.

⁴³ “Safar bih hīch” [Travelling to nothing], *Youth Journalists Club*, 18 December 2018, <https://www.yjc.ir/fa/news/6766905/>.

⁴⁴ Despite the lack of official and reliable statistics, the following numbers can provide a general understanding of the financial advantages of any foreign distribution for Iranian films. According to the website of the newspaper *Donya-ye eqtesad* (The World of Economy), each dollar was exchanged for 243,520 rials on average on 27 March 2021. See “Qiyamat-i dular” [Dollar price], *Donya-ye Eqtesad*, last modified 27 March 2021, <https://www.donya-e-eqtesad.com/fa/tiny/news-3751184>. My search on the website of *cinematicket.org* – the largest Persian movie ticket booking website – shows that movie tickets are sold for any amount between 80,000 rials (\$0.33) and 300,000 (\$1.23) rials on the same date.

⁴⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1985), 233.

⁴⁶ Anne Showstack Sassoon, “Hegemony,” in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 201–3.

⁴⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film: Abbas Kiarostami* (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2001), 70.

⁴⁸ In addition to the many recent journal articles on the matter, the following two books provide a fairly comprehensive perspective upon the development of the sociopolitical functions of the internet in Iran: Niki Akhavan, *Electronic Iran: The Cultural Politics of an Online Evolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013); and David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi, eds., *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ See Rober Safarian, “Khudshīftigī-i ṭabaqih-yi mutevassīṭ dar film-hā-yi irānī-i du dahih-yi akhīr,” *robertsafarian.com*, last modified 31 January 2017, <http://robertsafarian.com/?p=2352>; and Safarian, “Zan-i shiytān chih shikliyih?,” *robertsafarian.com*, 7 June 2014, <http://robertsafarian.com/?p=2040>.

⁵⁰ Mahmud Moshfeq and Masumeh Khazai, “Tahlili bar vīzhigī-hā va ta’yīn-kunandih-hā-yi muhājirat-i mustaqīl-i zanān dar Iran,” *Muṭālī’āt-i rāhburdī-i zanān*, no. 67 (Spring 2014): 89–117.

⁵¹ There is an evident disagreement between Iranian scholars and politicians over the nature of migration traditions and crises. Some scholars believe that Iran has historically been on both the sending and receiving ends of migrations. For example, Hasan Amin mentions eight historical periods of Iranian out- and in-migrations, beginning from the passage of the Aryans from the south of Siberia to the Iranian Plateau and extending to the current stage of what is generally known as Iran’s crisis of brain drain. See Hasan Amin, “Muhājirat-hā-yi irānīān,” *Hafiz*, no. 98 (October and November 2012): 15–16. Similarly, the researchers of “Stanford Iran 2040 Project” conclude their quantitative analysis of the waves of Iranian migration and brain drain

by stating that “the likely intensification of human capital flight from Iran will continue to deprive the country of one of its most valuable resources for future development.” See Pooya Azadi, Matin Mirramezani, and Mohsen B. Mesgaran, “Migration and Brain Drain from Iran,” (working paper 9, *Stanford Iran 2040 Project*, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, April 2020), 22, https://iranian-studies.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6191/f/publications/migration_and_brain_drain_from_iran-stanford_iran_2040_project.pdf. However, powerful voices within the Iranian ruling system sometimes reject the claims about an ongoing migration crisis in the form of the so-called brain drain. The vice president for scientific and technological development, for instance, has called such claims “one of the lies against the Islamic Republic.” See “Sourena Sattari: Yikī az durūgh-hā ‘layh-i jumhur ī-i islāmā mowzū ‘i farār-i maghzhā ast,” *Alef*, 29 April 2020, <https://www.alef.ir/news/3990210137.html>.

⁵² “Haft darṣad-i irānīān khārij az kishvar zindigī mīkunand,” *BBC*, 10 December 2014, http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2014/12/141210_u14_iranian_abroad.

⁵³ “11 Kishvar bā bishtarīn mīzān-i farār-i maghz-hā,” *Tabnak*, 1 August 2017, <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/717591/>.

⁵⁴ Sourena Sattari, “Durūgh-i buzurg darbārih-yi ti‘dād-i muhājirān-i dānishjū-i irānī,” *ISNA*, 30 December 2017, <https://www.isna.ir/news/96100904309/>.

⁵⁵ Ali Akbar Mahdi, “Muhājirān-i irānī dar āmrīkā,” *Jāmi ‘ishināsī-i Iran*, 1 September 2007, <https://go.owu.edu/~aamahdi/Iranian%20Immigrants%20in%20the%20US%20interview.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Joaquin Arango and Karen O’Reilly independently categorize the explanatory theories of migration into six groups: neoclassical, new economics of labor migration, dual labor market theory, world system theory (evolved from dependency theory), migration networks, and systems approach. See Joaquin Arango, “Theories of International Migration,” in *International Migration in the New Millennium*, ed. Danielle Joy (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 15–35; Karen O’Reilly, *International Migration and Social Theory* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 39–65. Even the noneconomic explanations sometimes use the same theoretical templates to make their point. For example, Stefan Trines’s account of the rise and fall of Iranian students in the US adopts a systems approach in order to investigate the educational relations between the two countries. See Stefan Trines, “Déjà Vu? The Rise and Fall of Iranian Student Enrollments in the U.S.,” *World Education News + Reviews*, 6 February 2017, <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/02/educating-iran-demographics-massification-and-missed-opportunities>.

⁵⁷ See, respectively, Taghi Azadarmaki and Mehri Bahar, "Emigration and Sociocultural Change in Iran," in *The Cultures of Economic Migration*, ed. Suman Gupta and Tope Omoniyi (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 143–57; and Mohammad A. Chaichian, "The New Phase of Globalization and Brain Drain: Migration of Educated and Skilled Iranians to the United States," in *International Journal of Social Economics* 39, no. 1–2 (2011): 18–38.

⁵⁸ For example, in an article published in the Iranian journal *Guftugū* in 1996, Ali Akbar Mahdi reported back from a conference held in Washington, DC in which all the presentations were about the issues of Iranian immigrants in their hosting US environment. See Mahdi, "Īrānīān va Farhang-i muhājirat," 79–82.

⁵⁹ The last lines of the film clearly bear the weight of nationalistic and political propaganda. I translate them here.

Jafar: "Golnar, do you remember how we said goodbye to Iran with tearful eyes? All this time, we prayed that God bestows a boon and happiness to our homeland. Thank God that we didn't die before seeing such a day. Isn't it a shame, then, to still stay in a foreign country? To see these progresses up close with our own eyes, it's good to return to Iran. Maybe we can even serve our country somehow."

Golnar: "Yes, by God. Let's go!"

Jafar: "Are you willing to go back too?"

Golnar: "Of course! Don't women also love their homelands?"

Jafar: "So, I should get going to prepare for the trip!"

⁶⁰ Chaichian, "The New Phase of Globalization," 18.

⁶¹ Mohammad-Reza Shafiei Kadkani, "Talaqqī-i qudamā az vatan," *Alifbā*, no. 2 (1973): 1–25.

⁶² On 31 December 2020, a Google search from the state of Texas in Farsi with the phrase "ghamgīntarīn nardum-i jahān" resulted in 7,510,000 results, while the same search with the English phrase "saddest countries in the world" resulted in 1,240,000 results. Many of the Persian websites, whether affiliated with the official media inside the Islamic Republic or hosted outside the country, have repeatedly reported and interpreted the polls conducted by Gallup and other institutions that perform such analyses. For a sample of such news items from the news agencies supervised by the Islamic Republic, see "Iranī-hā ghamgīnand?," *ISNA*, last modified 22 July 2014, <https://www.isna.ir/news/93043117903>; "Iran va Iraq jozv-i dah kishvar-i ghamgīn-i jahān," *Tabnak*, last modified 26 April 2019, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/894642>; and "Ghamgīntarīn-i mardomān-i jahānim," *IRNA*, last modified 28 April 2019, <https://www.irna.ir/news/83294366>.

⁶³ "Global Passport Power Rank 2020," *Passport Index*, accessed 21 September 2021, <https://www.passportindex.org/byIndividualRank.php>.