Nostalgia Without Memory: Iranian-Americans, Cultural Programming, and Internet Television

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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) in repairing the fractured post-revolution Iranian culture. Most internet television programming is currently produced by second generation Iranian-Americans who feel responsible for reviving the old Iranian culture that was fractured after the Islamization of Iranian culture in post-revolutionary Iran. These second generation Iranian-Americans employ the affordances of IPTV in their cultural production to connect to the larger community of Iranians around the world and to Iranians in Iran. They use Internet television to invite Iranians to look from the outside into the Iranian culture and try to improve the cultural misfortunes that Islamization may have produced. In this process, as the technologies of communication quickly changes, the linkage between the Iranians in diaspora and Iranians in Iran proves to be an important signifier in the process of globalization.

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To Iran, the land of my inspirations.

INTRODUCTION

Iranian culture has been undergoing an increasingly rapid change since the emergence of the internet and in particular Web 2.0 technologies. Although culture is always in motion, this process has sped up as technologies of communication have evolved and found their way to Iran.

For hundreds of years, Iranian culture promoted hermetic strands. Although Iranian culture is open and cosmopolitan, it is often veiled with allusive codes requiring insider knowledge to be read correctly. Even a genial invitation to dinner or an offer of help in a future activity is never to be taken at face value. These may be genuine or face-saving devices for saying no, and in either case require repeated small steps to acceptance or testing to gauge the sincerity of the invitation.

We are talking about a culture that employs closed, impenetrable walls and numerous hallways in its architecture to maximize privacy in the home environment; encourages the use of metaphors and symbols in speech to protect one's message from intruders; and has given birth to hundreds of poets and intellectuals who often favored politics in everyday speech.
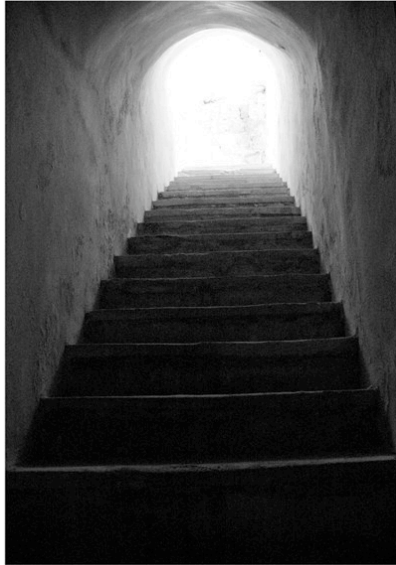
The advancement of communication technologies has increasingly invited users to participate in and contribute to the world of information, introducing new possibilities for change to the Iranian people.

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Islam became a core of the government regulations. Although civil law and bureaucratic procedures from before the Islamic Republic remain in effect, requiring constant negotiation, Muslim fundamentalists have striven to consolidate the Iranian culture with the Islamic culture. In the interim of expansive Islamic propaganda in Iran, the internet became the only interstice for young Iranians to reach the rest of the world and interact with other cultures. In this society, the possibility of Western culture penetrating into Iranian culture through the internet excited people, particularly younger generations.[1]

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[1] Dr. Nima Mina, Professor in London University, featured in
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGvN00XvjK0

Following Iran's 10th presidential election on June 12, 2009, the world observed how new digital technologies have provided opportunities for younger Iranians to rise up and revolt. The rallies in favor of democracy and reform within the Islamic state quickly gave way to demonstrations against the regime and inevitably favored totally replacing the current regime. Web 2.0 technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, IPTV and iReport – still fairly new among Westerners – proved to be powerful enough to potentially change the destiny of a nation.[2]

When I lived in Iran[3], I participated in a cultural conference [4]where Abbas Edalat [5]elucidated the significant role of the internet in the life of young Iranians. Up until this conference, every time my sister or I used the internet or a computer, we noticed the annoyed faces of our parents who believed that time spent behind a computer was a waste. Fortunately, my parents were present at the conference as well. Edalat, who resided in London, UK, identified the ways the internet could encourage our closed (hermetic) Iranian culture to progress and catch up with other countries both technologically and culturally. His only hope for improvement in our overly Islamisized society was the internet. As a result, he persuaded Iranian parents to encourage the use of the internet in their homes. Thereafter, our parents no longer believed the internet was a waste of time. Several years later, it offered us our greatest hope for government reform.[6]

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[2] By Ari Berman, http://www.thenation.com/blogs/notion/443634, AFP
[3] I grew up in Iran and never left there until 2002 when I turned 20 years old.
[4] Annual Award Ceremony of Iranian Association for the Popularization of Sciences, Kish Island, 1996
[5] Edalat is a Professor in the Imperial College in London. He is also the founder of Science and Arts Foundation (SAF)
[6] Riz Khan, Aljazeera- English, June 23, 2009 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZnk69Qo9Tc

Prior to the internet[7], many students squandered their time tracking down artifacts of Western popular culture through underground sources. These items usually entered Iran with travelers who would hide them in their underwear or wrap them around their legs under their pants to avoid detection.[8] A videotape of a Michael Jackson concert would be copied and circulated again and again, dramatically reducing the quality. Similarly, posters of singers and popular culture icons were reproduced repeatedly until they lost their colors and detail.

Once the internet became pandemic,[9] accessing these artifacts became easier and less demanding. Fewer people became involved in the trafficking of popular culture. Music, video clips and celebrity photos became accessible to almost anyone. Most importantly, the internet provided a way for families to reconnect with their relatives in diaspora. For me, this was the first time I could connect to my cousins who lived in the United States.[10] Soon, some cultural exchange (which was absent after the Islamic Revolution) began to grow. This window of communication exposed more Iranians to Western culture. Indeed, in recent events, the internet has formed a bridge between Iranians in Iran and those in diaspora, helping to shape a participatory democracy (or a democratic regime) in the aftermath of Iran's 10th presidential election.

As I will discuss in chapter one, in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, a substantial amount of Iranian literature, history and art gave way to Islamic ideologies and culture.[11] The education system was replaced by an utterly Islamic system with the primary goal of producing a Muslim military nation. Economic sanctions, imposed by the

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[7] BBS networks became popular in Iran a few years before internet
[8] Iranian customs is strict and allows no non-Islamic items to enter Iran.
[9] Twenty million Iranians are online today.
[10] Long distance phone calls were used among adults and mostly for emergency purposes.
[11] Reza Rohani, Debuty of Production, Kanoon Parvaresh Fekri (1979-1988)

US and other major countries, cultivated this Islamic system even more.[12] As a result, the need to interact with foreign cultures was felt by almost everyone in Iran. The vanishing of Iranian culture – that is, the one that existed prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 – and its replacement with Islamic culture created a cultural vacuum among the young generation in Iran. [13] This emptiness in identity demanded cultural exchange. As censorship increased in the name of the Quran and Islam, more young Iranians relied on the internet and new media to connect to the world, satisfying this cultural scarcity.

In the past three years, blogging has played a significant role in the lives of young Iranians in Iran.[14] In his recent interview with Aljazeera-English, Ethan Zuckerman from the Berkman Center for Internet & Society said: "… when you have a crackdown in the traditional press, you'll see citizen media emerge as an alternative to it. We have seen this in Fiji, we are seeing it in Madagascar, and it is not surprising to see it happen in Iran. In Iran citizen media has a real history… some opposition figures moved online when there was a crackdown on the traditional press in 2003-2004."[15] So the internet became rapidly popular among Iranians.

QUESTIONS

Considering the enormous influence of internet technologies on Iranian culture and the escalating possibilities for cultural exchange, I became interested in investigating

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[12] Based on findings of US-Missing Opportunity Research Initiative – Critical Oral History, Brown University

[13] Roxan Varzi (the author of *Warring Soul: Youth, Media, Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*), Azadeh Moaveni (the author of *Lipstick Jihad*) and Pardis Mahdavi (the author of *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*) all talk about this emptiness among Iranian Young generation but no analysis or understanding is provided about why.

[14] For more information on Iranian blogging (Weblogestan), read works of Alireza Doostdar and Orkideh Behrouzan.

[15] Riz Khan, Aljazeera- English http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZnk69Qo9Tc

the role of online Iranian-American media portals in the formation and transformation of

Iranian identity – not only because they target many Iranians in diaspora, but also

because their content is consumed in Iran, as well. Thus my project started with frequent

trips to California, where a large number of ethnic Iranian media portals exist. Although

there are many different ethnic media producers and distributors in the Iranian

community, I concentrated on three case studies: Iranican, Radio Javan and Bebin.TV.

Iranican[16] is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization in Silicon Valley.

Founded in 2005 as a lifestyle show on television, it was revamped in 2007 as a web-

based organization in an attempt to reach the younger Iranian community in diaspora.

Iranican's infotainment efforts consist of a bi-weekly radio talk show (distributed by

Radio Javan), occasional video reports of major Iranian cultural events and festivals in

cities across North America, and a blog that involves the viewers in discussions about

Iranian identity and culture.
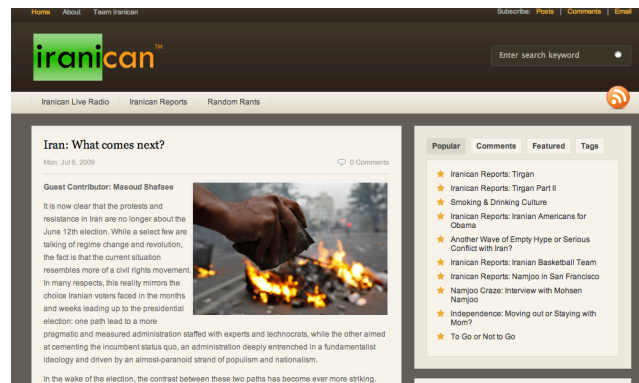
Based in Atlanta and Washington D.C, *Radio Javan* was founded in 2004 and has

since grown to become the largest distributor of Iranian Music online (24/7), with a social

networking feature to connect Iranians in diaspora to the Iranians in Iran.

[16] Iranican comes from the two words: Iranian and American.

Based in Los Angeles, CA, *Bebin.TV*, was the first Iranian internet protocol television station (IPTV). Started in 2006, it initially targeted second generation Iranian-Americans but quickly became popular among Iranians around the world. Recognizing that a significant portion of its audience was in Iran, Bebin.TV established the Marjan Television Network in London in January 2009 to target Iranians in Iran through satellite television (HotBird).[17] Since March 2009, this new organization has been programming for their two new satellite channels that will begin to broadcast in October 2009. *Manoto* (me and you) will be targeting the generation of young Iranians in Iran, while *Kavosh* (Discovery) will be targeting the adults.[18] Each program will have its own webpage, which includes a blog in Persian/Farsi. There will be a social networking feature on the website that allows viewer interaction with hosts, as well as SMS web polls and other Web 2.0 functionalities.[19]

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[17] It will be targeting the Iranians in Europe as well. Online Bebin.tv stopped programming in Late December 2009 to prepare for the new organization in London. The blog is still available and occasionally users comment on the previous programs.
[18] broadcasting documentaries licensed translated and dubbed from the likes of Discovery, History Channel, Food Network, ITV etc.
[19] This information was disclosed in an email on July 10th, 2009 from Kayvan Abbassi. Note: Bebin.tv's future is unclear at this stage.
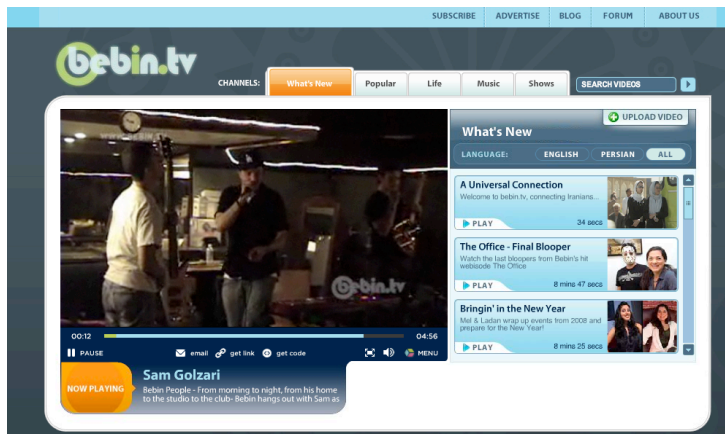
Some other big Iranian internet portals also attempt to connect the Iranians in Iran to those in diaspora. For instance, *Gooya* is a Persian website started by Belgium-based journalist Farshad Bayan in 1998. Bayan began by creating electronic copies of popular Iranian journals such as Payam-e Emrooz, and later became the dominant news distributor, with the highest Iranian ad traffic in recent years.

Iranian.com, founded in 1995, by Jahanshah Javid, is a community site providing a free forum for the introduction, exchange and collection of ideas, stories and images related to Iran and Iranians in diaspora.
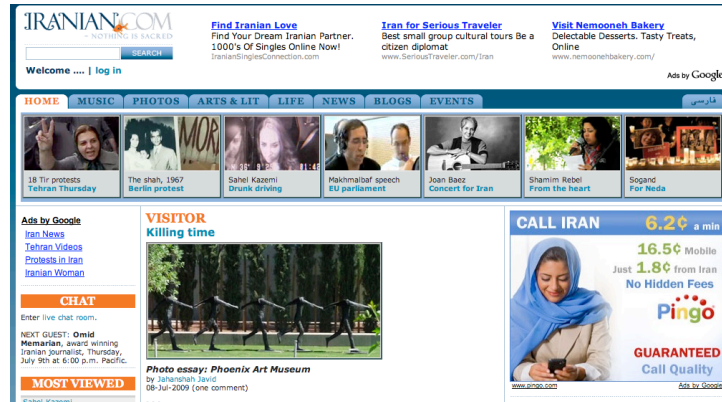
Balatarin is an Iranian Farsi-language community website to share and tag content from everywhere on the web. The underlying idea is a mixture of reddit, digg, newsvine, and del.icio.us.

BBC (since 2001) and *VOA* also provide their satellite Farsi programs on their websites.

Since I started working on Bebin.TV as my major case study in Summer 2008, some conditions have changed. 1) As I just mentioned, Bebin.TV is becoming a satellite station targeting primarily the Iranians in Iran. However, this thesis focuses on the content and programming of their internet portal channel and the affordances of IPTV and not the satellite (broadcasting) technology. 2) Since the recent political upheaval in Iran, Bebin.TV's plan to produce cultural and entertainment programs for Iranians in Iran through their new satellite channels fell short of its objectives as the young generation in Iran united in fabricating a change in Iran's political and social system in the aftermath of

Iran's presidential election. Prior to the election, Kayvan Abbassi, the founder of Bebin and the two new satellite channels, informed me of his plans to produce exclusively entertainment programs using the American reality TV model. All the scheduled programs were to intentionally avoid speaking about religion or politics. However, since June 12th, Kayvan and his team stopped programming for their satellite channel to observe and understand the perspective of the young generations in Iran. They had previously planned for an "Iranians have Talent" show to take place in London, Stockholm, Dusseldorf and Dubai, with auditions happening in January and February 2010. The finalists were to be decided by Iranian viewers (via SMS and phone) in front of a live audience in Dubai from March 22nd to March 31st (the New Year holiday in Iran). Indeed, the producers had already selected the celebrity judges. However, on July 3rd, Kayvan wrote me an email to ask for feedback in light of the recent events:

> The show will be the most expensive show on Iranian Satellite. However I don't feel comfortable about the show anymore. I feel it might backfire, as I am not sure if in five months Iranians will have forgotten the recent events. I just feel young Iranians have matured from a few months ago and at this stage shows like this might not be popular.

Both parents and Iranians in diaspora naively judged the current young Iranian population, assuming that they had no goals or motives in life other than pursuing pure entertainment and materialistic pleasure. Yet as the current events have shown to everyone (including the government), the young generation in Iran is in fact determined to change its destiny, challenging the assumptions that Kayvan had built his new program upon.

In spite of this, what you will be reading in this thesis is primarily based on research done prior to the recent election in Iran, and the timing did not allow me to

consider future outcomes. Thus this thesis is predominantly focused on Bebin's Internet

Protocol Television (www.Bebin.TV). Of course, this doesn't alter my argument, if

anything, recent events have underscored the 1) pervasiveness of new networked media

technologies and 2) their affordances to a new generation "looking outside" and debating

their future. In this regard, Kayvan's programming strategy may be the least of his

problems: the move to satellite versus the demonstrated affordances of the web may be

just as out of sync with a new generation in new times as reality talent shows.

METHODS

Over the past year, I met with a variety of other people on the production side of

the media industry. Bebin.TV turned out to be the most interesting because of its

demographics, reaching an Iranian audience in Iran, as well as the cultural content of its

programs.

In March 2008, I started exploring Bebin's programming online and have actively

followed the discussions on the blog ever since. I have also followed other channels – in

particular, Iranican and Radio Javan, whose activities paralleled those of Bebin.TV. At

first I planned to make a documentary film project about the effect of Iranian internet

portal media in developing a transnational identity among second generation Iranian-

Americans.

In March 2008, I began an online survey to identify and formulate my initial

questions for each of these groups. I emailed the first set of questions to Iranican and

Bebin.TV members in advance. Many of the questions were related to their life stories

and memories that I found useful in understanding their motives and desire to produce

programs for Iranians, even though this population at least partially identified themselves as Americans.

In July 2008, I went on my first fieldwork trip to Southern and Northern California to meet the members of Bebin.TV (LA) and Iranican (Mountain View). I interviewed every member of each of these two teams separately (including the founders and owners, TV hosts and performers, board members, writers and marketing managers) and followed up with them through phone, email, instant messaging and Facebook. In almost all my initial interviews in July 2008, I recorded everything on camera, which at times became problematic because the camera size intimidated some of the interviewees and made them conscious of their performance.

After this initial phase, the follow-up interviews on the phone and through email became most interesting and useful. I interviewed Radio Javan (Atlanta and D.C) exclusively through email and Facebook pages. I followed up my interviews with more frequent trips to California (LA and the Bay Area) in October 2008, December 2008, January 2009 and March/April 2009. By late December 2008, I became more intimate with my correspondents and I was invited to their housewarming parties and gatherings, giving me a chance to meet them in a less professional atmosphere.

In October 2008, I decided to interview the parents of second generation Iranian-Americans to understand the home environment and ideologies with which they were raised. So I participated in a meeting of a well-developed community of Iranians in Northern California, known as Payvand (http://www.payvand.com/), as they were organizing their Mehregan festival show. [20] However, this trip was not successful because although the community seemed welcoming and interested at first, I felt that I

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[20] Mehregan is an old traditional festival for celebrating Fall.

was unable to build the trust I needed to have permission to videotape or interview them. Yet the skeptical responses I received and the programs I watched during that weekend gave me insight into the community of Iranian parents in Northern California, which turned to be useful in unpacking my argument in the final chapter of this thesis.

In December 2008, I interviewed the members of Iranican again and met them at a big Yalda [21]Party, which was partially organized by them. There I got a chance to hear and learn about their cultural interactions with one another. In January 2009, I traveled to LA for more interviews with Bebin.TV, but by then the programming for Bebin.TV had stopped and some members had already moved to Europe. Following this trip, I started a ning site (a social networking site online) to initiate discussions about Iranian identity among second generation Iranian-Americans. This website is still ongoing and at times I receive interesting and relevant responses. I also started a blog thread on Iranian.com to hear the thoughts and input of others about this project. This thread brought many more to my ning community site.[22] I also got involved in Iranican.com's blog discussions and since the topic of my work was relevant to their radio talk shows, they made me an admin on their website to post any discussion on their blog.

In April 4-5, I participated in a bi-annual IAAB (Iranian Alliances Across Borders) conference, the Fourth International Conference On the Iranian Diaspora in Berkeley, CA, which brought together scholars, students and members of the global community to discuss the current state, accomplishments and future of the Iranian diaspora. Some of the scholars and artists that I met through this conference were

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[21] Shabe Yalda is a traditional ceremony for celerating the longest night of the year.
[22] IamIranian.ning.com

extremely helpful in shaping my approach as I was writing my ethnography work into a thesis.

Finally, I looked at the responses of Bebin's audience members both from the producing community (Iranian-Americans) and from Iran. In its short career, Bebin has managed to find an audience that is nearly 60% Iranians residing in Iran.[23] Interestingly, this number shows the influence of this group, a minority in Iran, on the larger Iranian community.[24] Bebin's primary audience is the young generation;[25] and with more than 75% of the Iranian population under thirty years old[26], it is targeting a large audience. I subjected the moments, blogs, interactions, even language use of Bebin's audience to close analysis. I was particularly interested in a generational shift – not just a generation of technology, but also a generation of Iranian-Americans. How did young people's use of media and their perceptions of Iran differ from that described so well by Hamid Naficy in his work on Exile TV?

These developments are happening quickly. I am aware of this fact, and approach my work as a snapshot of a particular media moment, "freezing" a set of complex interactions. By examining Bebin as an instance of contested identity (Iranian-Americans) – that is, as a site connecting two different but related cultures where people can discuss the meaning and markers of their identities – I hope to give insight into the dynamics of cultural exchange.

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[23] Kayvan Abbassi provided the snapshots of the google analytics of Bebin.tv in various stages of their practice
[24] Because of the significant number of audience in Iran, Bebin is launching the first Iranian cable TV targeting specifically the young generation in Iran.
[25] Bebin's mission Statement: http://Bebin.tv/blog/about-us/
[26] Approximately 53 million people are under the age of 30 in Iran. The approximate total population in Iran is 70 million people.

Bebin is mainly funded by double-migrants from Europe, which makes them particularly distinctive among California's Iranian-American community. This distinction is important to their role in shaping the Web 2.0 affordances of Bebin into a tool for bridging the complementary but different needs of the younger generation in Iran and that in the US.

In order to understand and analyze Bebin.TV's work, I find it necessary to start by explaining the patterns of Iranian migration. Although no reliable demographic information exists, we know with certainty that even though a small number of Iranians migrated to the US between 1951-1952 (in pursuit of jobs) and later in 1970s (for higher education), 1979's Islamic Revolution completely changed the pattern of migration. Thirty to forty billion dollars were moved from Iran to the US by the major Iranian venture capitals[27]. The majority of Iranian-Americans involved with any sort of Iranian media are those families who left Iran after 1979's Islamic Revolution. In most cases, the departure was not by choice; rather it was from fear of execution, indefinite imprisonment, or losing wealth.

Since the Islamic Revolution, the first generation of Iranian children born in diaspora have reached the age to produce their own media content independently and without the interference of the first generation Iranian-Americans, sometimes referred to as "exiles."[28] In the pattern of Iranian immigrations to Western countries, identifying the notion of exile verses immigrant is crucial. The characteristics of these groups are completely different. Gholam Hussein Saedi, a distinguished Iranian playwright who died

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[27] Ali Ansari, 1992
[28] The majority of second-generation Iranian-Americans are in their late 20s.

of alcoholism in Paris a few years after the revolution, defined the difference between exiles – or as he puts it, "refugees" (*avareh*) – and immigrants. He believed that an immigrant voluntarily leaves his country to seek a better living, to study or to pursue a better quality of life, while a refugee is someone who is forced to leave his country because of the threats he is facing. The refugee is always hoping for or nurturing dreams of return.[29]

Soon after the revolution, many of the defeated and exiled political parties, as well as celebrities and artists, established their own media programs. For some it was a way to negotiate ideas and regain their lost power through propagandizing their ideologies such as Mojahedin-e Khalgh;[30] for others, it was a way of uniting with the rest of Iranian community in diaspora, thereby creating a platform for communicating and exchanging news such as Tapesh.[31] In each case, the producers and audiences lived in communities primarily consisting of exiles. There was, however, a group of Iranian immigrants who immigrated to the US for education or family reasons who did not consider themselves exiles.[32] Perhaps they would have moved to the US even without the repression following the Islamic Revolution. This group tended not to consume any of the exile Iranian media and refused to participate in any political planning or the events supported by the exiles.

MEDIA AND IDENTITY

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[29] Analysis of '*Avareh*' in Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims, 1990*

[30] Founded in 1965, People of Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI) was originally devoted to armed struggle against the Shah of Iran, capitalism, and Western imperialism. The PMOI's ideology of revolutionary Shiaism is based on an interpretation of Islam inspired by Ali Shariati.

[31] Naficy, *"Exile Discourse and Televisual Fetishization"* in *Media and Otherness* 1993

[32] Based on my ethnographic fieldwork 2008

Hamid Naficy identified exile television stations primarily responsible for the creation of the imagined community of exile Iranians, particularly in Los Angeles[33] . He explained the process of assimilation through the progression of discourse in exile TV programs. According to Naficy, between 1981 and 1987[34] news from home (Iran) and repackaged pre-revolutionary popular culture material (music videos and such) dominated exile television[35]. During this period, the ideas of home (Iran) dominated exile TV. Little attention was given to American culture and values. [36] In Naficy's view, this liminality phase created paralysis and "deterritorialization," but it also opened the space for the exiles to play and "reterritorialize" themselves and define new identities. The liminality phase ended when the exiles were assimilated into the host culture. But assimilation is "neither total nor irreversible" [37]:

> … liminality is a continuous state, a "slipzone" of denial, ambivalence, inbetweenness, doubling, splitting, fetishization, hybridization and syncretism. Locate in the slipzone, where home and host culture overlap and slide over and under and past each other, the liminar exiles are between the structural force fields of both social systems, and as a result they are able to question, subvert, modify, or even adopt attributes of either or both cultural systems. It is this distance from and ambivalence towards the authority of both cultures that make the boundaries of exile "positionality"—the separation of self from other, younger generation from older generation…[38].

All of the exile TV shows were highly partisan and opposing the Islamic

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[33] Naficy, 1993:88
[34] The first Iranian TV program in exile was aired in March of 1981.
[35] Naficy refers to this as an emerging "exile genre". With the exception of "Sima-ye-Azadi" TV Station produced by Mojahed-e-Khalgh, all the programs included heavy commercials airtime.
[36] Except the cornucopia of consumer goods and entertainment. Naficy describes a dual structure to programming- content about Iran was death and destruction, mourning; but the advertising was colorful, and all about the cornucopia of goods that are available in America and that Iranian business can sell to you. These programs reflected the exile experience during the liminal state of becoming, in which liminars (exiles) were on the threshold between two cultures (Iranian and American).
[37] Naficy, 1993:113
[38] Naficy, 1993: 86

government in Iran. In fact majority of them were in favor of monarchy [39]. Naficy placed televisual fetishization at the core of his study of Iranian exile TV. In particular he theorized a fetishized "Iran" in exilic programs. As Iran was undergoing rapid fundamental change under the Islamic Republic, the discourse of Iranian exile TV remained generally stable. The television programs often commemorated the original and authentic Iran (which was disappearing quickly) through fetishization. This fetishization as Naficy described projected a secular and non-Islamic community[40].

As the exile community assimilated into the American culture, exile TV increasingly fetishized the homeland and the past, failing to take into account the reality of the changes taking place in Iran.[41] Exile programs often incorporated terms such as "Iran," "national," "the Nation," "Pars," and "Aryan" into their show titles to emphasize Iranian authenticity and nationalism. In addition, music videos employed the theme of return.[42] In Simay-e Azadi TV Station (produced by Mojahedin-e Khalgh), political activists appeared on TV to show the scars left on their bodies or limbs removed from their bodies by torture[43]. By doing this, exile TV invited identification and pleasure in the return to loss and as a result, the fragmented self in exile was made "whole again through symbiosis... The fragmented, disappearing body in exile [was] restored to its relative former unity" through superficial activities.[44]

With the end of the hostage crisis and the Iraq-Iran ceasefire, two major sources

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[39] Naficy, 1993: 91
[40] Naficy, 1993:102
[41] Naficy, 1993:102
[42] Naficy, 1993:108
[43] Naficy, 1993:108
[44] fashion, make up, makeover, body building, and reconstructive surgery

of trauma were removed, and an inherent ambiguity took its place in the context of exile TV.[45] Trauma and exile are tied together. As long as trauma exists, the exile condition persists. To keep the exile condition stable, Iranian exiles used their memory to stay in the liminal phase. As George Steiner points out, "it is not the literal past that rules us, … it is images of the past."[46] Exile TV used the images of the past to maintain the memory of the fetishized Iran, uniting exiles even after the traumas were removed. In short, Iranian TV in exile has reflected and shaped the lives of its audience (first generation Iranian-Americans) by helping them negotiate their relationship with themselves and with their home and host cultures[47].

> Iranian TV created a hermetically sealed discourse in Persian language using the relative uniformity and homogeneity of émigrés politics, program matter, generic conventions, targeting of audience, formatting, deployment of authority figures, adoption of and official life style and finally circulation of ideas and products from home… Television created an imagined community by casting a symbolic and ideological net around its spectators, in which it continually captured and fetishized representations of home. This symbolic, electronic enclosure is in effect a private Iranian oasis in exile that bestows a degree of cohesiveness and stability on the exile community and buttresses it against the trauma of loss, the panic of loneliness, and the feat of the future.

Although Exile TV provided a stable past by fetishizing and stereotyping Iran, the emerging internet protocol television (used by second-generation Iranian-Americans) breaks a lot of boundaries in the broadcasting world. By bridging the communities of Iranians both in Iran and out, it cracks the image of the fetishized Iran. While the "carefully constructed condition" of stability for exiles continues, the affordances of IPTV help their producers to understand and create a more realistic image of post-

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[45] Naficy, 1993: 111
[46] George Steiner, 1971:3,8—Quoted by Naficy (Naficy, 1993: 111)
[47] Naficy, 1993:112

revolutionary Iran.[48] For instance, Bebin.TV invites the viewers to share and distribute

their videos on Bebin's website, while VPODs (Video Publishing On Demand)

encourage Iranians to record from wherever they live their own lives, telling the real

stories of people. By using the participatory features of Web 2.0, Bebin.TV connects

Iranians around the world, allowing real voices to speak for themselves. This model,

although not as successful as they had hoped for, has encouraged both groups (Iranians in

Iran and Iranians in the US) to share their videos of everyday life with each other. As a

result, the stereotyped image of the fetishized Iran that was created by exile TV for many

years could no longer persist as the second generation Iranian-Americans could see the

lives of Iranians in Iran through real footage coming from there. Exile TV did not want to

accept that not everything was destroyed for Iranians in Iran after the Revolution. But

now in Bebin VPOD sections, people in Iran can upload new videos of the Ramsar Hotel,

which had a popular casino prior to revolution—and it looked just fine.

http://www.Bebin.TV/index.php?bcpid=823324966&bctid=1445018069 [49]

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[48] The exile TV still festishizes Iran by reproducing images of ruins to keep the memory of trauma going
[49] Vpod Clip from Ramsar Grand Hotel, the "Old Wing" used to be the Casino before the revolution. This

Darband video--- Shabaye Darband—Vpod

http://Bebin.TV/blog/2008/03/04/macktak/#more-860

IPTV also shows producers the media that was most consumed among Iranians by

tracking audience's IP addresses, which was previously impossible. In July of 2008,

Kayvan Abbasi, the founder of Bebin.TV, told me that he could not find much data on

what Iranians like to watch:

> Unlike the media in the US and UK, where you can research to figure out what
> each demographics want to see, there is no stat on what everyone wants to watch
> in Iran. Iranian Television is national and no one in the government in Iran cares
> about what people want to watch. As far as satellite goes because it is illegal in
> Iran, there is no survey done about it that people would participate. You can't
> count on them.[sic]

But the affordances of IPTV give Kayvan and his team the opportunity to figure out what

Iranians wanted to watch and from which locations in at least two ways: 1) by measuring

what percentage of clips were seen to the end and from which one of their shows, and 2)

by allowing the Bebin.TV team to get direct feedback from the more involved viewers

(the viewer who would take time to comment on the programs). "We figured out that the

viewers lost interest after watching two minutes. We then tried to figure out why. Was it

the quality? The subject?", said Kayvan. Both of these plans have helped them to produce

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hotel has fantastic view of the city and the mountains. Recorded in June 2007.

more interesting programs for their targeted audience, and the audience responses over time has proven their increasing success since 2006. IPTV also enables more audience interaction. As I will discuss in chapter two, for example, if the audience criticizes the language of the performers and hosts, the Bebin team adjusts its programs in response. These responses were often directly related to the comments but in a respectful manner, intertwined with the context of the story and other layers that would specifically reflect on cultural issues.

William Uricchio claims that the state and commercial broadcasting control regimes in both Europe and America between 1950-1980 "have tended to provide something of a conceptual default to our thinking about Television: they have offered stability to our unstable and not always comprehensible medium"[50]. In Iranian exile TV, we observe a similar stability between 1981-2005, when the first Iranian IPTVs started to emerge. According to Uricchio, IPTV is not the end of television; rather the "stability" of the broadcast era was a short blip in the history of television's transformation.[51] In studying Bebin.TV, which is the most successful IPTV among Iranian populations, it is important to distinguish the affordances of exile TV (broadcast TV and satellite), which continues the same formity and conceptual default (content wise), from those of the on-demand internet portal TV. As Uricchio argues, scarcity in the broadcast era was constructed and deployed in the service of larger hegemonic goals. He terms this scarcity *constraint*. In exile TV, the conceptual default of thinking about television was deployed in the service of making a united Iranian community. Naficy holds Iranian exile TV

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[50] Uricchio, 2009: 3
[51] They did not come around until after 1981 and after the flux of Iranian's immigration due to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

responsible for creating a viable "ethnic economy" and making a visible Iranian community in Los Angeles. As he previously observed, Iranian exile TV avoids anything that separates Iranians from each other, particularly religion. The debate about religion, which is a dominant factor in Iranian people's lives, is purposely absent in exile TV to keep the small population of Iranians in diaspora (with various religions) in one imagined community. They also avoid targeting specific age groups, instead focusing on the whole family and providing programs that can attract the majority of their audience without focusing on any special interests.

On the other hand, Uricchio suggests that as broadcasting receded and shared its place with IPTV, significant modifications were imposed on the receiving apparatus, offering promises of more interactive services. He sees IPTV as playing a major role in weakening the once monolithic broadcasting networks and in the emergence of new producing and consuming practices through developments such as YouTube. Among exile TV, produced by first-generation Iranian-Americans, an anxiety for this transition developed which lead them to criticize the second-generation Iranian-American IPTV producers severely, often about things that the second-generation could not improve without the first-generation's support and help. In short, very unconstructive criticism emerged. Exile TV generation criticized the second-generation Iranian-Americans about the language (accent) and their lack of knowing cultural customs. This anxiety comes from the fear of getting away from the 'constraints' that the exile TV producers had at the core of their programming because of having to compete with the much more flexible IPTV. This anxiety stems from fear of competition from the much more flexible IPTV programming. The on-demand feature that IPTV provides gives the audience a choice to

decide to watch what they want. This has made the life of the old celebrities harder and took away a major market from them. Raha's Bebin TV music rating program introduced a standard in the music world that did not exist previously. In the past ten years until 2005-06, young Iranians in Iran listened to more Western music than Iranian music that was coming from LA because the singers were familiar and the theme of the songs remained relatively the same. However, since the ratings system was introduced (not exclusively by Bebin.TV), competition was created among artists.[52] The older artists were forced to compete with new talents. And so recently more Iranians are listening to Persian music again. The music industry is changing. New rhythms are introduced, thanks to people like Namjoo. And this all facilitated by IPTV.

ON-DEMAND REPORTS: REAL PEOPLE, REAL NEWS

As the current post-election events unfolded in Iran, Iranian satellite channels (produced by the same exile generation) failed to provide firsthand information and news from Iran. Since the reporters of other foreign channels were deported from Iran or in some cases arrested, traditional media channels (including CNN and BBC) had to rely on amateur videos and reporters. For the traditional news reporters, it was hard to assess the credibility of the news because the stable model they relied on did not account for amateur production. As France Press Agency (AFP) notes:

> Internet pictures that show civilians being fired on with militia groups, the unfolding events in Iran, are the biggest story in the world right now. But with foreign journalists readily restricted, the world's traditional media is struggling to bring its fact checking skills today on the flood of material from the incident.

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[52] Survey done in 2006

But while the traditional news reporters (including exile TV) wrestled with how to cover the story, within Iran itself thousands of people were making their voices heard. Blogs from within Tehran, social networking sites and videos on YouTube, and less professional footage told the story to the world.

STRUCTURE

In chapter one, I explain the abrupt vanishing of Iran's long history, culture and art in the aftermath of the 1979's Islamic Revolution. I explore the Islamization of Iran's culture industry and, drawing from my own experience growing up in Iran, highlight the key factors in the birth of an empty weststruck[53] nation.

Thereafter, I compare Bebin.tv to Shahnameh (the Book of Kings), written in poetic verses by Hakim Abulghassem Firdusi around 1000 AD. Shahnameh tells the mythical and historical past of Iran from the creation of the world and ends with the tragic defeat of Iranians to the Muslim Arabs. Aside from its literary importance, Shahnameh was written in pure Farsi unmixed with adoptions from Arabic and is the primary source for reviving the Persian language and culture that was fractured for over 200 years under the influence of Arabs.[54] In this chapter, I try to answer whether or not Bebin.TV is pivotal in reviving and repairing the fractured Iranian culture that gave way to Islamic ideologies after the Isalmic Revolution in 1979, the same way that Shahnameh revives the Iranian culture and language that would otherwise be long forgotten.

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[53] Translated from Persian word "gharbzadegi"= Westoxication
[54] Persian was morphing during this period from Middle Persian forms to the New Persian we recognize today as Firdusi's language of choice and that was honed under the Samanids in today's Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Khorassan.

In chapter two, I identify the threats facing Iranian language and culture from the second-generation diasporic media (including Bebin.TV). Although in chapter one I discuss the role of Bebin.TV in repairing the fractured Iranian culture, in this chapter I investigate the problems that this process involves. In all of their programming, Bebin and other second-generation Iranian media portals speak in Finglish (a mix of Farsi and English), which has received criticism from both first-generation Iranians in the US and the older generation of Iranians in Iran. I argue that the negativity toward Bebin.TV from this group resulted in the creation of a separate Iranian-American imagined community, in which language (Finglish) becomes a signifier and an important factor for membership. Critics believe that this mode of speaking (which also penetrated blogging and SMSing among Iranians in Iran) will result in irreversible damage to the language and culture of future Iranians. However, no one seems to be providing guidelines or support for the second generation Iranian Americans to improve their Farsi language. As usual, the first generation Iranian-Americans (exiles) are not supporting this group. As a result, Bebin and other members of this community circulate Finglish as a kind of status symbol. This status symbol is exported to Iran as well, and the adoption of English words in the vernacular by the younger generation of Iranians is apparent to everyone who visits Iran. Ultimately, I try to answer whether or not Bebin's usage of Finglish in their programs can have implications for the Farsi spoken in contemporary Iran.

In the third chapter, after explaining the existing literature on nostalgia, I define a concept that I refer to as "nostalgia without memory." This chapter is the most abstract part of this research, as it investigates the reasons involved in the sensation of nostalgia among the second generation Iranian-Americans in regards to Iran, and among the post-

revolution-born Iranian generation (75% of the total population) in regards to the history, culture and art that was disappeared before they were even born (or Revolutionary ideologies of parents). I conclude this chapter by tracking down the elements involved in this process that are not necessarily coming from the Islamic Revolution.

As discussed earlier, this thesis examines Bebin.TV and the affordances of IPTV and Web 2.0 to understand the role of second generation Iranian-Americans in the process of repairing the Iranian culture that has been fractured after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. As pilot research for future scholars, this study attempts to raise questions that can be furthur explored in understanding Iranian identity and culture and in improving the cultural poverty.

Chapter I

"But Look" (Bebin.TV) and the Media of Cultural Fracture/Repair/Creation

CULTURAL FRACTURE

Imagine a community that has no evidence of its past. Imagine a country, which does not possess any object to explain its history, a nation unable to tell its convictions, dreams and achievements to the future generations. Imagine a country where no music is played, no song is sung and whose arts, history and science cannot be remembered. Imagine a country in which displaying other cultures is not permitted. In such a country there is no museum. [55]

Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Khomeini banned music and Islamic fundamentalists burnt down hundreds of theaters. In the early 1980s many of the intellectual writers and *gheshre daneshjooyi* (academics) escaped from Iran into exile. Those who were active in the political arena in the final pre-revolutionary years were in danger of execution or indefinite imprisonment; as a result, many fled. Thereafter, a three-year period of Cultural Revolution began (1980-1983). During this period, all the universities were closed to replace their system with rules and texts that aligned with Islamic ideologies. In addition, many writers were executed or went into exile. Most professors lost their jobs to newer Islamic academics. Soon, though, the Iran-Iraq war stabilized many of these changes for an indefinite period. War diverted people from the revolutionary ideas and the intense Islamic propaganda left no space for any other ideas to spread.

Immediately after Khomeini's arrival in Iran (1979), seventeen top members of Iran's writer's guild went to see him in person to discuss issues regarding censorship[56]. Iranian writers who had contributed to the revolutionary ideas and prepared the university

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[55] Museums and Heritage/Legacies, translated from Farsi: published on the back of an internal museum newsletter in Iran, Author Unknown.

[56] Saedi: 48

students to protest against Shah regime had dealt with censorship all their lives. Like

many other Iranians who chose Khomeini as the nation's leader, the writer's guild was

optimistic about Khomeini's reformist approach. They believed that if they went to him

directly and asked for his help in regards to censorship, the new government would put an

end to this problem and allow for freedom of speech (the reason why many people

revolted to begin with).[57] Gholam Hossein Saedi, an Iranian playwright, ethnographer

and psychiatrist, was among the writers who visited Khomeini in person. In his memoir,

written in exile, Saedi wrote[58]:

> ...after a long lecture about writing, Khomeini told us to write only about Islam.
> 'Islam is important. From now on, Islam.' We wanted to stop censorship; he made
> an Islamic frame around our work.

On 7th of March 1979 the first attacks on women's rights began. Shortly after, a

war was declared on the Iranian Kurds, then on the Turkmens, followed by the

vandalizing of bookstores and headquarters of political organizations. A bookseller was

injured; a student selling newspapers was beaten; books were torn and a car carrying

written words was bombed. *Kayhan* magazine was bought by a supporter of Khomeini.

Ayandegan was closed down after Khomeini said that he won't read *hatak* (irreverent)

papers. "Laws of Journalism" were decreed "according" to freedom of speech "within the

proper limits of Islam." And Khomeini ordered his followers: " Break these pens!"

The early years of revolution were significant years in determining the destiny of

the nation. Saedi asserted that during these early years Khomeini made his hostility clear

toward academic society, although academics were a major force in helping the

revolution take place. It is believed in Iran that during the Islamic Revolution, people

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[57] Hammed Shahidian, *Writing on Terror*
http://www.iran-bulletin.org/IB_MEF_0/WritingOutTerror_w6.doc
[58] Saedi: 50

knew what they didn't want but they didn't know what they wanted, so Khomeini became

an easy figure that fit many people's expectations. Iran's revolution took place very

quickly, but its seeds had been planted by the intellectual community for many years.

Khomeini was aware of the different ideologies of the academics and knew that sooner or

later they would attempt change. Thus as soon as he got into power, he started an

ideological war with intellectuals. The writers were no longer an elite group.[59] In his

memoir, Sa'edi describes his encounter with a revolutionary man in front of Tehran

University after the revolution[60]:

> One day I was walking near the university... Someone yelled: "stop" I looked
> back and saw that he was a 'lumpen' with a chain in his hand. "Hey yo
> intellectual!"... "Intellectual spectacled!", he said. "What is that under your arm?"
> I said:"book". He said: "throw it away...We made the revolution happen then you
> want to get in power...I broke 50 bank's windows, how many did you break?" I
> thought to myself if I say I didn't break any or if I say 49, he will beat me. So I
> said: "51". He said:"ok. You can go now."

In an interview with Iranshahr in Paris, Saedi talked about the aftermath of

Islamic revolution and Khomeini's negativity toward *daneshgahi ha* (members of

academia, students and faculty). He described how when Khomeini arrived in Iran, he

was supposed to give a talk in front of Tehran University; but when he got to the

University, he excused himself by saying that it was too crowded and instead headed to

Behesht Zahra (Iran's largest graveyard). By doing this, Khomeini implied that the

revolution took place by those who died in the fights rather than the intellectuals. Saedi

believed that Khoemieni's rejection of the academics was in fact his way of "negating

knowledge, culture and art"[61]. This, then, is the story of how thinking and academia lost

its value at the time. On the other hand, during the early years of the revolution hundreds

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[59] Hammed Shahidian, *Writing on Terror*
[60] Saedi: 37
[61] Saedi: 87

of theaters were burnt down in protest of their un-Islamic content. [62] Those artists and entertainment industry members whose work was obviously not aligned with Islamic ideologies went into exile, often choosing Los Angeles as their new place of residence.

I was born in 1981 – the year that Khomeini encouraged people to have more kids to expand the revolution generation, which he said would wear mines on their waists and martyr themselves under tanks. When I started school, traces of the 60s and 70s culture and art (when my parents' generation grew up) had completely vanished. Instead, there was an Islamic system (Shi'ite). The school textbooks were changed. Courses ranged from Islamic ideologies (dini) to Arabic language study, and even Farsi literature textbooks were modified to fit the Islamic regulations. In sociology they taught us the significance of having a supreme leader. In economics we learned about Islamic economy regulation. The only courses that were immune from Islamization were mathematics and the sciences – and even those books opened with a page of Khomeini's portrait to unconsciously brainwash people and make them comfortable with his image. In every classroom, even in the poor regions where there was hardly any chalk to write with, there was a picture of Khomeini hanging from the wall.[63] All the necessary efforts were made to prepare the generation of Khomeini's revolution to praise the Islamic revolution and not expose them to anything else.

In schools, every morning Iranian students had to pray for the prosperity and perpetuation of our Islamic republic before heading to the classroom. We burnt US flags and paper dolls of Uncle Sam on the 13th of Aban (November 4th) every year, celebrating

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[62] Rex Theatre was burnt down when the audience was inside on Aug 20, 1978
[63] Soon after Khomeini's death, Ali Khameneyi was named Iran's supreme Leader by Rafsanjani as Khomeini's choice and consented to by the Assembly of Experts. Since then, the portrait of Khameneyi was added to every classroom and offices around the country.

the occupation of the US embassy in 1979. We decorated our classrooms with colorful papers and crafts every 22nd of Bahman (February 11th), the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, chanting songs to support Khomeini and the Islamic regime.

It is significant to note that the main population of the Iranians today is from among the young generation who grew up after the Islamic revolution. Most of them were not exposed to many non-Islamic ideologies until satellite TV and the internet emerged between 1994-1997. To enroll in a good school, parents and students had to pass a series of interviews that were centered on Islamic ideologies. In particular, around 1991 I remember that each student and their parents were asked whether or not they possessed a video player at home. Video was a stressful media artifact to Muslim clerics, that could let any modern or western value sneak into the Iranian households without the government's interference.[64] Inevitably parents had to teach their children to learn to lie to be able to participate in any social event (including schooling). We knew that the correct answer to "Do you have a video player at home?" was "No." A smarter question which trapped a cousin of mine was: "Have you seen the Little Mermaid?" which meant the same thing but harder for a child to lie about.

Around 1991, many families bought video players and following that a new underground occupation was created: VHS salesmen. These men would take VHS tapes door to door (only to trusted people) in black suitcases on a weekly basis.[65] At times they

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[64] Television and Cinema in the 1970s, poetry's free style (Nima Yoshij), Short stories of Jamalzadeh, and novels of Hedayat in 1920s and 1930s, and newspapers (Kermani, Afghanim, et alat) in the 1890s and perhaps ever photography in 19th century and the first movie camera under Mozaffaradin Shah (as thematized in Makhmalbaf's Once Upon a Time, Cinema) were all experienced as "stressful media artifacts" in the sense described here.
[65] You had to get referred to one of them by a trusted participant.

would get arrested and you would have to look hard (sometimes for months) again to find a new one for your family.[66]

It was not until 1994 that satellite television was introduced, and many people started to watch channels like Channel V[67] and BBC.[68] Suddenly, a completely new culture sneaked into our daily lives. The most shocking of all for me was the presence of colors – reds, yellows and blues – that were only in my paintings and definitely not in the activity that consumed most of my everyday life, school. From 6:00 AM to 2:30 PM, I was surrounded by women and girls dressed all in gray.[69] Blacks, browns, grays and navies were the colors that I grew up with; in comparison, MTV videos looked incredibly glorious and stunning.

I remember days that my sister and I were just fascinated by the pictures. We fell in love with Michael Jackson, getting involved in an incredible underground world of fandom. Many from our fan community were in different schools. Now after years of studying media in the West, it stuns me to recall the ways that we (MJ fans) circulated notes through a chain of connectors, eventually getting our messages to the right person (another one of his fans). And what was on those notes? Simply an expression of love to Michael Jackson, often using an alias for him.[70] My suspicious parents found one of the notes, which never got to the right hands; I only found out about this five years later, when we were moving from our home to a new place.[71]

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[66] Another similar occupation for female saleswomen was created. Women would sell women's brand underwear and lingere.
[67] A music channel targeting Asia (similar to MTV).
[68] A very small group of people had access to Satellite prior to 1994. That's probably one of the ways many of the VHS tapes were copied from, specifically Music Videos.
[69] Or navy depending on the school uniform.
[70] In my fan community we called him F.
[71] The note was carefully kept in one of my mom's valuable pursues that held our passports and birth certificates.

Eventually, BBS networks (1995) and later the internet (1997) arrived in our lives. Because our school was so Islamic, and any information coming from places other than internet or satellite was so plain and colorless, we spent a significant amount of time online. Relationships started with BBS; there was no other social interaction with the opposite sex in our militant Muslim country.[72]

We were an unfortunate generation, born following Khomeini's Fatwa,[73] trapped in a reality that knew no other. Yet we make up 75% of Iran's entire population! Because we were the first generation of this propaganda regime, we became guinea pigs. No one, not even our parents, knew how it would play out. Many of our parents reinforced the Islamic ideologies that the republic demanded. There was a chance that this method would have a positive result.[74]

What satellite television and the internet brought to our young generation was knowledge of the other reality (western culture) beyond our reach, and that knowledge brought depression. We tried to dress like they did on MTV, wearing exaggerated make up, getting fit, getting the best hair cuts, getting nose jobs, learning to dance professionally, collecting as many posters as we could – all of which was interpreted as meaningless rubbish by my parents.[75]

Good or bad, in a repressed or a democratic society, children grow up. So did we! And we built our own reality, completely different from that of our parents or the government. However, this may not be true for all Iranian families. During this time,

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[72] We all went to non-coed schools.
[73] Khomeini's fatwa was to give birth to as many children possible to grow the Islamic population and have enough people to fight in the war.
[74] Our parents grew up in a much different reality and with different ideologies.
[75] I was really good at break dance. But there were far more other possibilities and styles. In many of our underground parties we had dance competitions. And people would really put their soul in them.

many families lived relatively the same life they had before the revolution. But since they were in risk of exposure (fear from government) they kept their lives a secret and protected their identities, only socializing with their own social circles. This was perhaps the initial phase of many future underground movements (music, arts, etc). Although *Kanoon Parvareshe Fekri* (a major print company in Iran) and the public libraries made books back to pulp to replace them with new Islamic books, some of the books were saved in the not-so-Muslim families; however the majority of people have had no access to such books.

In any case, what's obvious is that in the past thirty years of the Islamic Revolution, no significant text has been written, no rich TV show has been made (excepting Modiri's satire work), and no writer or intellectual (nonpolitical) was active in Iran. The academic writers became political and the rich texts were journalistic.[76] Most rich books published after the revolution were translations of foreign works and were inevitably censored by Iran's cultural ministry. Cinema was an exception. Because of the international focus on Iran due to the "hostage crisis," the cinema became a vehicle to clear this mess. There was a lot of investment made by the government (Farabi organization) to train new filmmakers who could present a better picture of Iran.[77] So a new group of artists emerged, including Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Abbass Kiarostami and others. Some received more exposure after the revolution and found a new way to influence the culture.

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[76] Saedi, 1985
[77] Beheshti, *Iran: A Cinematograph Revolution*, Documentary film

But these developments in cinema and the arts started when Mohammad Khatami was Minister of Culture and loosened up restrictions.[78] Sadly, since Ahamdinejad's election (2005) we have had no international film prize because most films were not funded and did not get permission to be made. Since then, the only prizes Iran received were honorary.

Evidently we were not exposed to the previously intellectual culture that leads itself to the revolution. Some people had access to the popular culture artifacts that were being produced in diaspora, mostly music, through underground sources. But the higher intellectual texts (such as Saedi's work) were not easily accessible to people. And so this new revolution generation that I came from was not exposed to many of the cultural artifacts that came from the highly intellectual community of Iranians. Even Shahnameh[79] (the Book of Kings) – which was supposedly legal in Iran, considered by a majority of Iranians to be a major history text – was not taught in schools because it promoted the monarchy that the Islamic republic was opposing. In fact the parts that were taught promoted revolution rather than monarchy. For example, Kaveh's revolution against Zahak (one of the kings in Shahnameh) was taught in schools in order to promote the revolution that boiled up from the poor (Kaveh was an ironsmith who lost his sons to Zahak's monarchy).

In my family's home, we owned many of the cultural artifacts that were supported by the current government. We owned most of the Persian poetry books (Hafez, Rumi,

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[78] Khatami was an open-minded cleric who later became Iran's president between 1997-2005. He won 70% of the votes. However, because he fell short of the promises he made to people, in 2005, many people did not participate in the presidential election and Ahmadinejad became the president.

[79] *Shahnameh*, written by a great Persian poet, Firdusi, is the history of Iran's past, preserved in a majestic verse. The Shahnameh was written aproximately 1,000 years ago, and is a record of pre-Islamic influence in Iran.

Sadi, Baba Taher, Iraj Mirza) but we did not own a copy of Shahnameh. Shahnameh was never censured during the Islamic government but it was no longer the center of debate in the context of Persian culture; rather, the Quran and other Islamic texts took its place. My father, coming from a highly cultural and intellectual family of writers, always persuaded us to study and learn about various Iranian texts but I cannot recall Shahnameh being among them.

As a result, during this specific time, lots of the stories, folklore and arts disappeared from the culture. Instead, in our school setting we spent 50% of the time learning about Islam (history, language, and rituals) and another 50% on pure sciences (math, physics, chemistry and biology). I studied Islam since my first year in elementary school until 2003 when I left Iran. Only in college where I majored in Cinema (directing), I took about 30 units (out of 140 units, requirement for a Bachelors) in Islamic sciences. Ironically, neither I nor other students in my class remained Muslims. In terms of the arts, the focus was directed to Tazhib (an Islamic form of art used to design Quran verses) rather than Miniature (which illustrated women). Miniatures were not illegal, but they also were not immediately visible to the younger generation. So most of our time was devoted to Islamic arts and literature which took away from the time we could have spent on learning about the intellectual culture that existed previously in Iran and influenced our parents' generation to rise up and revolt. The missing texts included works written in the golden age of Iranian literature, 1340-1350 (1960s).

Moreover, Iranians in Iran socialize with their own social level. In Iran, a *farhangi* (cultured) family does not really socialize with a *bazari* (business) family. Similarly the rich do not know much about the poor. And the Zoroastrians, Muslims, Jews and

Armenians restrict their interactions to only those people of their own religion. As a result, children of Muslim families have no opportunity to access any of the secular Marxist literature (which are the richer texts, written by academics in Iran prior to the revolution). So for example, until recently, I never read anything from Gholam Hussein Saedi or Sadegh Hedayat (a famous Iranian writer). Furthermore the monarchists did not read most of the Islamic or even the revolutionary non-Islamic texts. In Iran the cultural exchange that you have in the US does not take place so easily. People are skeptical about others, and there are various conspiracy theories among people. As a result, there was a significant reduction of access to the intellectual literature among my generation (the generation that came after the Islamic Revolution). Regrettably not only the literature was missing but also the knowledge of its existence. Perhaps if I knew about Saedi previously, I could somehow gain access to his work through underground channels; but the fact that I did not know about it is another tragic story.

When I moved to the US, I noticed that a significant number of second generation Iranian-Americans knew more significant stories about Iran than my generation did in Iran. To be more accurate, they knew different narratives about Iran than many of us who grew up there. They knew the Shahnameh stories much more elaborately than I did. For them Shahnameh was central to understanding Iran. And they knew of the many writers, artists who went to exile and wrote great literature in Farsi. Here I mean the intellectual Iranian-American children, not the *bazari* people.[80] Many of these narratives came from artists or writers who were executed, went into exile, or lived a quiet life. Either way, these books and works were not easily accessible in Iran. Second generation Iranian-

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[80] I am trying to compare the knowledge about Iran among the children of intellectual families versus the children of intellectuals in Iran.

Americans may not know the written Farsi language, but many of them know more of the non-Islamic oral stories. This is even more apparent among double migrants such as Raha, Tiam and Babak (some of the key members of Bebin.TV). I believe this is because the intellectual community of Iranians who went to exile had limited financial resources and therefore were unable to migrate to the United States (which required much more money and effort);[81] so they first went to European countries. Another reason to choose Europe as a place of residence for this group was that they were hopeful to change the result of the revolution in a short time. So most of these families wanted to stay as close as possible to Iran. They maintained their intellectual lifestyles, which influenced their children as well. However, the war between Iran and Iraq stopped hope for another revolution. The war resulted in two significant generational gaps: 1) the Iranians in Iran were dealing with basic things (such as trying to save their lives or feeding their families); and 2) they were trapped in a highly propagandistic regime. Khomeini used propaganda to encourage the youth to join the army. Nearly 500,000 Iranian sons died in the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War.

IRANIAN-AMERICANS VERSUS DOUBLE-MIGRANTS

The "cultural capital" was not equally dispersed among Iranians in diaspora. The intellectual members of Iran were mostly among the *Tudeh* party (hezbe tudeh), which promoted Marxist and communist ideologies. They chose different cities in Europe as their centers. For example, Raha told me that Stockholm (in 1980s) was the center for the *Tudeh* party, whereas Paris was more attractive to *Mojahedin*. The United

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[81] There is no direct flight from Iran to the US. Travelers need to take another flight from Europe in order to travel to any of the American cities.

States, however, was the center for the "old money" people and the entertainment industry members. These were the people who were not very interested in high Iranian culture and literature and did not know much about it. Many of them were aristocrats and in favor of monarchy. As a result, even though there was more available cultural material in Los Angles than anywhere else, the children of these families were not exposed to this literature and history. Moreover, the second generation Iranian-Americans were not interested in taking Farsi classes. However, almost everyone I interviewed was forced to register in these classes by their parents, and none of them was enthusiastic to learn the written Farsi. I believe that this lack of enthusiasm goes back to the culture of the Iranian families in the US. The culture of Iranians in Europe was more intellectual and highly informed of the Persian literature and values, and perhaps this motivated the Iranian children to learn the language. By contrast, the Iranian culture in Los Angeles did not have a strongly-informed literature. Iranian TV, Iranian bookstores, Iranian live theatre performances, community events and Mehregan festivals were among the activities that were available to the Iranian children in the US. A good example of a double migrant who enthusiastically learned Farsi on his own is Raha, a producer for Bebin.TV who grew up in Sweden. He would listen to Iranian music and then would try to look at the printed lyrics (lyrics were usually found in the cassette boxes) as the song was being played. This way he could figure out what each letter sounded like, and if he had questions he would ask his parents. Eventually he learned Farsi through the lyrics.

In contrast to Iranians in Iran, second generation Iranians of the diaspora had access to various channels to learn about the Iranian culture. In Iran, however, even I had to read many books in our bathroom. I remember particularly a book that I found on my

mom's childhood bookshelf in my grandparents' home; I took it with me to read. On the inside page it said *Farzaneh, 15 years old*. Farzaneh is my mom's name. I took the book and read it when I was 18 years old in a bathroom, scared of getting punished because the book contained some romantic chapters that undoubtedly were censored in the Islamic Revolution version. The book mysteriously disappeared before I could finish it. My mom had discovered it and without any conversation between us she confiscated the book. To this day I am wondering why in my mom's mind this book was not corrupting her at fifteen, yet it was corrupting me at eighteen! And this is exactly what I am trying to highlight in this chapter. Something happened during the revolution, so that even the intellectual families (the ones who were left behind in Iran) were brainwashed by the Islamic ideologies.

CULTURAL REPAIR

As suggested earlier, the emergence of IPTV and in particular Bebin.TV is a valuable phenomenon that increases the potential to reshape cultural time in at least two ways. Bebin.TV expands the availability of the history, literature and art that previously existed in Iran and repairs what has been missing in Iran for thirty years. At the same time, it puts all these cultural artifacts (in an audio visual form) next to each other and in one place. This is similar to what Hakim Abulghasem Firdusi did with his Shahnameh. He collected oral stories of Iran and put them in verse in *one* book. It took him thirty years to do it, because he was one person with a lot of work. Bebin is doing similar work with the help of many people. One of Bebin.TV's strategies is to expand its library by inviting users to upload their videos. Bebin calls this VPOD (Video Publishing On

Demand). If more people participate in this process, the reviving of our fractured culture can take place faster, and it may include input from different layers of society that otherwise have been invisible to the eyes of different classes.

Usually when people want to learn about Iranian culture, Shahnameh becomes a primary resource. Shahnameh can teach us about Iranian patriarchy and depression and many more elements of Iranian culture. In my opinion this is what Bebin is doing as well. Bebin.TV is trying to repair Iranian's culture in two specific ways. First, they are collecting and distributing the arts and literature that existed prior to revolution. They create short clips on the history of Iran and Iranian kings. They make documentaries about musicians, actors, writers and other artists. And they put all of these materials in one location, so that someone like me who comes from a semi-conservative family gets to know about Mahasti, Samad, Dayee Jan Napoleon and Iraj Pezeshkzad. Things that I previously had no access to are all gathered and placed in one location. The current Bebin.TV has short clips about many cultural artifacts and historical events. The short clip style is a good strategy, because there is so much history to cover and having shorter clips fills this gap faster, so that the audience can later look for the things that they were most interested in. (Watching all of dayee jan napoleon can be really time consuming.) I spent a lot of time watching most of the clips they produced between 2005-2009. This was because they were my research case study, but at the same time I learned a lot about Iranian cultural history. It raised lots of questions about my parents' generation. I wanted to know why my parents didn't tell us about this history. It's one thing to have a repressive government, but it's another thing to have censorship in your own family home. Why did we not have Shahnameh at our home, when we had many other poetry

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books? I was brought up among writers and in a cultured family. But why did they censor things that formed our culture? On the other hand, Bebin.TV is producing documentary clips about the present moment in Iran – things that Iranian-Americans might not know about. These clips include stories behind Iranian food, music (6 and 8 beats), some chapters of history (nader shah, koroush, etc.), and narratives of specific places (Shomal, etc.). By having these two approaches, Bebin is filling the gaps for both groups (Iranians in Iran and Iranians in America) to bring them together. This may eventually bridge these two different generations of Iranians.

Shahnameh was written when Arabs were occupying Iran. Iranian language and culture was fractured by Arab and Islamic culture. Intellectual language was Arabic. As a result, Shahnameh helped repair the Farsi that had disappeared for over 200 years. So the Farsi that I speak today owes itself to Shahnameh. Considering the recent revents in Iran, one might wonder how long the current government in Iran will last, and what will happen after? How long are we going to have to live with censorship? But no matter how long this regime lasts, the damage is done. As Saedi says:

> No society exists that has no culture. I repeat. No society exists that has no culture. But culture is animated and is vital! If you block the movement of a culture, in any nation, it will cry, as if a giant beast lays his feet on a human's neck! And death is inevitable.

I argue that people at Bebin.TV and other similar portals (Iranican, Radio Javan, etc) have the capacity to help repair the Iranian culture, to build bridges for the next generations and to pick up the literature and art and expand them in new ways. Bebin.TV and the emerging new media technologies can potentially help avoid what Saedi pictured Iran after the revolution:

This is what Mullahs did and do. After destroying the entire cultural heritage and blocking any effort for cultural vitality, they are driving this totaled machine in reverse gear without looking into the mirror. 'Sooghot (crash) is inevitable in the deepest 'dareh' (chasm).

No intellectuals or writers have emerged over the past thirty years. The arts, literature, and music have stopped evolving. We no longer have people who could be influences for a cultural change in Iran the way Saedi, Shariati, Hedayat, Golshiri and Golestan could. Saedi believes that the six months before and after the revolution were the golden age of Iranian intellectualism, where people could talk about and express their ideas to others. However, Khomeini's regime eliminated everyone it could. The term *daneshgahi* (academics) was an insult. Thinking was not promoted much. Intellectuality was a taboo. During the three years of the Cultural Revolution, the universities were closed; the books were turned to pulp to produce new Islamic materials. In this community that has 'no evidence of its past' and possesses 'no object to explain its history, dreams and achievements to the future generations', an outlet such as Bebin.TV can be extremely valuable. Demographics show that Bebin.TV can fill the gaps between generations. Until February 2008 (before Bebin was censored by internet companies in Iran), 60% of their audience was from inside Iran. When Bebin came around, I was not in Iran anymore.[82] So I was never able to talk to my friends and see how many of them and from which families watch Bebin.TV. But I have been reading many of the blog posts that are from Iranians in Iran on Bebin's site. I was also not present during the fever of blogging in Iran. When I was in Iran, BBS networks were popular among people. Some Yahoo groups also became popular. But generally speaking, most people had strong virtual ties and the average medium class young generation spent at least two hours a day

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[82] I left Iran in 2003 and have not returned since.

online. People had to deal with slow internet connections to download clips. But they were so desperate and eager that even if a two or three minute clip would take three days of downloading, they would do it. There was no DSL at the time and we had to connect to internet with a telephone line.[83] And so many families had two phone lines and one was devoted to the internet. (The telephone bill was a significant amount in the monthly expenses.) So this demographic (60%) proves that Bebin.TV was much appreciated in Iran. There is basically no competition in terms of production for the younger generation. Kayvan, Bebin's founder, says: "if a TV station targets programs to young people, they will get an audience. And that's what happened to Bebin."

At first glance, it may seem an exaggeration to compare Shahnameh to Bebin.TV, but you may see what this comparison hints at. Taking it to another level, as pointed out by Michael Hilmman, Shahnameh illustrates many cultural values in Iranian culture. Iranians are patriotic, they cherish sadness and suffer from depression. Shahnameh ends tragically. The Iranians are defeated by Arabs and there is no hope left. This has often been used culturally in everyday language as well. People say "Akhare Shahnameh Khoshast" (The ending of Shahnameh is joyful). Which is basically a dark satire and it means that the destiny of Iranians is tragic. This despair is fundamentally rooted in the Iranian culture. Another significant element that has been used in Shahnameh is the patriarchy that is evident in the father-son relationships. An interesting story in Shahnameh is the battle between Sohrab and Rostam. Rostam marries the daughter of Touranian king, Tahmineh, but returns to Iran soon after. Tahmineh will have a child named Sohrab that is Rostam's son. But neither Rostam nor Sohrab knows about each other until later. In an attempt to overthrow Kai Kaus (Iran's king at the time), Sohrab

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[83] DSL is available in some areas of Iran now.

attempts to find his father in the battlefield. The story ends tragically as Rostam

mistakenly kills Sohrab only to find out about his relationship with him after his death. In

this story and various other stories in Shahnameh, the patriarchy in the Iranian culture is

deployed. Iranians are always looking for someone to save them – a hero. Rostam is the

ultimate image of this hero. He is the representation of this ideology among Iranians.

Sohrab is half Iranian, half Touranian. But Firdusi always recognizes him as

Iranian. In our modern time, Sohrab can be a representation of Iranians in diaspora. He

looks for his dad. What is a father? His father creates the identity (Iranian identity) that

he is searching for. So searching for his father is indeed his pursuit of his Iranian identity.

When Rostam and Sohrab finally meet in the battlefield, the search for his identity

(father) ends with his father not welcoming him in his homeland. Hilmman suggests that

Rostam was in denial but he could have all the reasons to know that Sohrab was his son.

But instead he kills him (a symbol of Iranian patriarchy).

This is similar to exile TV, the media produced by first generation Iranian-

Americans who migrated to the US following the 1979's Islamic revolution in Iran. The

tension between Sohrab and Rostam is comparable to the tension between exile TV and

the new generation of Iranian media. The exile media does not want to welcome Bebin

and other newly established channels. Similarly, Rostam does not want to accept Sohrab.

Ironically in this story, Sohrab wants to find his father to overthrow the Iranian king, Kai

Kaus, so that he and his father can rule in Iran. He has no intension of defeating his

father. Sohrab was in love with Afrasiab's daughter (Turan's King) when he found out

who his real father was (Rostam) and went to dethrone Kai Kaus, put Rostam on the

throne, and then dethrone Afrasiab. In fact, he wants to combine the two powers and rule

Iran. In comparison, Bebin.TV wants to work with the older generation to repair the culture and reform a new identity among Iranians, but the exile media does not welcome them. They want them gone. So they get various criticisms (particularly about the language) that I will explain in the next chapter. This generational gap is not also just among Iranian-Americans, but also in Iran among younger and older generations. There is cultural resistance among the older generation. So when second-generation Iranian-American scholar Roxxane Varzi[84] goes back to Iran, she meets various Iranian parents that are complaining about the emptiness among the young generation. They are often introduced as *Tokhali* (empty) and lost. But they are not given any rights and are often criticized.[85] No one really gives them rights, not even their own parents. With all the censorship, how could this current generation have the background to be intellectual or determined in life? The confusion is often undermined with no correct or fair analysis. They (including the parents) took away our culture (the revolution generation) and replaced it with Islamic propaganda. And it did not work out. It's not fair to blame us. The people in Iran criticize the children because they are not religious or traditional. In Shahnameh, Sohrab dies. The fact that young generations of Iranians in both places (Iran and in diaspora) are looking for their identity is very important. And if they are not welcomed, we might as well have another ending of Shahnameh.

CULTURAL CREATION

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[84] Roxxane Varzi spent twelve years researching and writing about post-Revolution public culture in Iran. As an Iranian-American who was born in Iran and left shortly after the Revolution she found that even though she had missed the war with Iraq it was omnipresent. She is the author of *Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*
[85] See *Passionate Uprsisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution* by Pardis Mahdavi 2008

Bebin.TV and the young generation in diaspora are doing an important job not only in restoring the Iranian culture but also by bringing new possibilities for change. And thankfully the internet gives them an advantage. When Saedi expressed his concern about reaching out to Iranians in Iran from exile,[86] he did not envision a day where information could be easily accessible in every home and family; neither did Khomeini. Today, almost any sort of information is accessible from Iran. Even if media are filtered, there is always a way to break the filters and read more and know more. So Bebin.TV members are contributing tremendously by providing the background information that can help improve Iranian culture and redefine Iranian identity. They help and encourage people to participate in this process and ultimately this helps people practice democracy. Bebin's blog includes both negative and positive feedback and allows users to engage in a "deep play"[87] to come up with alternative responses in the path of making a better Iranian identity. For Iranians who always looked up for a hero, whether it be Rostam or Khomeini, being able to participate in writing their own destiny is exceptionally valuable. For the first time, people hear each other's words. And since many of the Iranians are closed by nature and don't like to share their ideas, having a virtual platform allows them to easily take on alternative identities and participate in the social and political arena.

In addition, Bebin.TV encourages users to upload their own videos. VPODs were adopted from current TV model. In this model people can have a voice, and their work is in the same place that professional works are. The affordances of Web 2.0 and in particular IPTV allows Bebin to accumulate Iran's cultural artifacts and history in one place. Bebin has become an outlet that fills this gap among the Iranian-Americans or

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[86] Saedi Memoir
[87] Clifford Geertz, *Deep Play*

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even the Iranians in Iran who were deprived of all these resources. There is now a place for every Iranian to start their search for an identity. Here, I want to bring examples from Bebin to better legitimize this comparison of Shahnameh to Bebin. There are multiple levels involved in each of these modules (clips and blog posts about them). It is kind of deep play.

What Bebin is not doing in its cultural restoration mission is including the debates around Islam. Even though the Iranian culture is highly influenced by Islamic ideologies, Islam is absent in all these programs. Similarly in Shahnameh there is no Arabic word used in the verses, even though it comes from an Arabic-speaking society. The hope is to get Iran back to the Zoroastrian traditions even though most Iranians are not Zoroastrians. But this religion is generally respected by everyone. There is in fact not enough literature for people to know about this religion. But many believe that Islam is the reason that we are dealing with so many identity issues. So in this respect the debate around Islam is purposely absent in all the discussions of Iranian culture and identity.

I like to divide Bebin's programs into two big categories: 1) The programs that are meant to fill the gaps, introducing artists, writers, and so on; and 2) the programs that include subtle criticism of the various things in culture in hope of encouraging a better Iranian identity. So the Shahnameh does not end tragically anymore and no other Sohrab gets killed by his father. A good example of this is *Office*, a TV show (the first and only Iranian web show), with 100 webisodes . In *Office*, the actors constantly take new roles and identities, raising interesting questions regarding Iranian culture. And this is a great place to test these identities. Each of the episodes is also embedded in the blog, where members can blog and give feedback. So more than just a single group of people can

participate in the formation of even the criticism of Iranian culture. In this way, *Office* is basically a point of view. It suggests something and invites others to share their ideas as well. These episodes criticize patriarchy, the absence of sex talk and the Iranians who think they know everything about everything. Bebin producers get feedback and then they see if this works or not. Sometimes when the society is not ready for something – for example, sex talk – just raising the question can help. One blog post, 'prostitute' (Jende), brought interesting layers of discussion. What Bebin is doing here is raising questions, even if we are not yet ready to talk about it.

Iranians are always dealing with identity problems. I believe the ones that are in Iran are dealing with an even bigger identity crisis. For Iranian-Americans, they can fill the gaps that they feel in their American identity with some parts of Iranian culture. They already have a replacement that comes to help them. But for Iranians in Iran, those gaps are basically their whole identity and culture. And without a cultural background knowledge they will always have to deal with an identity crisis. It is easy for someone like Pardis Mahdavi to go to Iran and talk about an empty culture.[88] But people like her do not seem to understand that there are many conflicts in Iran. One example is that the majority of Iranians see their identity problems as stemming from Islam. The ones that are practicing Islam identify themselves as Muslims (omate Islam) rather than Iranians. Iranians who are in between (not exactly Muslims or anti-Muslims) want to be Iranian, but there is nothing other than an Islamic identity now. What does it mean to be Iranian when there is no cultural background available? This is why Iranian youth identity is in crisis. If you eliminate Islam from the context of Iranian identity then there is not much

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[88] An Iranian American who claims that many Iranian young people practice unconventional sexual activities. She is the author of '*Passionate Uprisings*'.

left. This cultural vacuume is what is happening among the young Iranians in Iran. They try to avoid Islam, but it is everywhere. They have no replacement for it. The young Iranian-Americans already have a replacement and Iranian culture can help them varnish their culture. They are not really after their identity, rather they are searching for an ethnic authenticity.

On the other hand, my generation in Iran did not know where to go and what to follow. In the past thirty years after the Islamic revolution, we did not have a single good writer or a single good intellectual to look up to. We only read foreign literature. Diasporic media, such as Bebin, have reshaped cultural temporalities. In the first place, these IPTV have produced a spatialization of audiovisual culture. Bebin perpetuates and magnifies this even further. The effects of these processes warrant extended consideration. Bebin consolidates Iran's historical archive, mopping up dispersed texts from the past. This simultaneous availability is very important for Iranians who need to catch up with a lot of information. The weight of the past relative to the present seems to increase.[89]

WEB 2.0, TV SKITS & DEBATES: AMUSING TO DEATH

Here are summaries of some clips that further develop my argument:

Art of Debate

A blogger, Kasra, wants to know about education in America, so Ladan, a host on Bebin.TV, brings up some highlights in American education that raise compelling questions in the blog. In one particular instance, Ladan quotes Bill Gates as stating that American high schools are obsolete. While Kasra appreciates Ladan's blog post, Alireza

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[89] Will Straw, "*Embedded Memories*"

from Iran starts a huge argument claiming that US education system was best in the world and it was nothing like Iran's education where each student was expected "to be a Leonhard Euler at 12th grade." He also discredits Bill Gates, "a Harvard drop out who got his degree thirty years later because of his.. reputation." And he goes on to argue that college education in the US is very flexible while it was not in any other countries. Ladan responds to him patiently, pointing out that her original blog post was about high schools and not universities. The discussion goes back and forth, and each time Alireza's language becomes more repulsive. Ladan articulates her ideas while at the same time respecting Alireza's point of view. This is a good example of the ways Iranians in Iran and Iranian-Americans participate in a debate. Unfortunately, as Kayvan said to me in July of 2008, Iranians did not learn to debate in a healthy manner. In Iran, articulating your ideas equals disrespecting others. This blog post is helping the cultural change that I claim Bebin.TV is trying to do in at least two ways. First, the subject of these discussions highlights differences and similarities between the American and Iranian education systems. This enlightens both groups about the two different education systems for the respective members of each group. Secondly, it displays the art of debate unfortunately unavailable to Iranians in Iran. Seeing how Ladan states her opinions respectfully and even in response to the offensive language that Alireza uses, can help Iranians in Iran to be more aware of this problem in their culture. At the same time, this blog allows folks like Alireza to practice the art of debate and learn to articulate himself without necessarily insulting the other person.

Promoting Public Awareness

Bebin allows some unheard voices to have a platform for debate. One of the hot issues in contemporary Iran is the debate on HIV/AIDs. In Iran, because of the Islamic government, the debate about sexually transmitted disease and addiction is absent, yet demographics shows that a great number of Iranians are diagnosed with HIV and even a greater number are dealing with drug habits. The Islamic government does not want to publicize such information and does not inform people about the ways they can protect themselves from HIV, rather than accepting the fact that non-Islamic activities (sexual activities) are happening in Iran. Kamyar Alaei and Arash Alaei, two physician brothers, are credited with encouraging Iranian authorities to tackle the stigma of HIV/AIDS "in a country where sex, drug abuse and the disease itself are taboo subjects." Bebin gave them the platform they needed to reach out to Iranians in Iran and talk about AIDS openly. In this video, Kamyar talks about the problems that many sick people encounter in Iran and yet don't pursue medical attention because they are worried about getting in trouble for un-Islamic behavior (such as alcohol consumption). As an example Kamayar talks about his own uncle who died of a heart attack and did not seek medical attention due to the consumption of alcohol the same night he had a heart attack. He waited until morning to become sober and go to the doctors. But it was already too late. And he passed away shortly after. Kamyar and Arash were arrested in Iran in 2007 and are serving three to six years of imprisonment. Iran's state media quoted the Intelligence Ministry as saying the men were among four people engaged in "creating social crisis, street demonstrations and ethnic disputes." Their crime was worrying the society about trivial matters and spying for the US. In this example, the blog becomes a portal to reach out to people for awareness. At the same time, this clip points out the problems that the repressive

government is causing for a significant group of people in Iran. In the video, Kamyar states that although there are only 14,000 registered HIV patients in Iran, an estimated 70,000 people currently have AIDS in Iran. (This number was 30,000 two years ago and only 10,000 three years ago). Kamyar suggests that: "Iranians believe that they are indestructible. And so they don't want to accept that AIDS is not an issue for them. AIDS is a taboo among Iranians and unfortunately, this caused the disease to spread faster." According to the Alaei brothers, many of the HIV victims do not go to a doctor. "The problem is that the society does not want to accept it.... doctors, dentists, and health practitioners are part of this society and grew up with the same culture," Kamyar said. He wanted to give a talk in San Diego about HIV among Iranians, and they asked him to change the title to "Health in Iran" rather than "HIV in Iran" because "Iranians get offended and they don't want to accept that AIDS is a problem in Iran as well. When I brought up AIDs, people got really upset with me," said Kamyar.

Later Kamyar talks about the problem of secrecy and *Abero* (face). According to Kamyar, HIV victims in Iran take a medication that makes their faces look normal but "if you look at their legs there are lots of holes which are the side effect of this medication. But because *Abero* is important, the victims would rather use this drug to keep their disease confidential." Kamyar believes that it is the responsibility of media producers to bring this awareness. Yet as he says none of the current 30+ Iranian satellite channels talk about AIDS.

The Debate on Sex: Pornography

Office episode # 77

In an *Office* episode, Masoud presents his idea for a new Bebin show, *Persian Online Pornographikision.*

Mani: You mean porn?

Masoud: No it is different.

Mellissa: What is the difference?

Masoud: We first videotape a man and a woman and then they start doing this kind of thing (he imitates a man grabbing a woman's breasts).

Tiam (looking to Camera): If Masoud pitches his idea to the boss he will certainly get fired.

Tiam (looking to Masoud): This is a great idea.

Masoud: It's not over yet. Then they will take off their clothes like this (he starts by taking his jacket off, he is wearing a suit).

The group all together say: That's enough...

Mellissa (looking at the camera): He is going crazy. Men have no respect for women.

Mani: It's not a bad idea. But remember to keep Iranian girls out of this. You understand that right?

Masoud: What about boys?

Mani: Of course they can be in it! We do it ourselves.

Raha: How dare you bring this topic?

Tiam: Raha let him talk for God's sake. Masoud the idea is great.

What I find particularly interesting in this episode is that the double standard of Iranians is well exhibited here. Look at what Mani says: "not to include our women," even though he and his Iranian male friends can participate. This ideology is rooted in Islam. In Islamic law, Muslim men are allowed to marry non-Muslim women as long as they believe in God. But Muslim women are not allowed to marry any non-Muslim man.

This is because in Islam the religion is inherited through the father, and marrying non-Muslim women will expand the Muslim population. On the other hand, if Muslim women marry non-Muslim men, their children will inherit their father's religion; therefore, the family produces fewer Muslims. So it is okay for Iranian men to marry or sleep with non-Iranian women just as Mani suggests.

If pornography is bad, why should the male actors be excited about it and not the women? Another interesting fact about this particular episode is the debate around it on the blog. Amir from Ireland complains about the topic, stating that there are thousands of other topics about Iran, Iranian culture and youth in Iran and also abroad." And he does not appreciate the outcome of this episode.

On the other hand, a few of the viewers rated this episode as the best *Office* episode. Kaveh, another Bebin viewer, makes a distinction between freedom of speech and employing cultural taboos in the context of Iranian culture. He argues that this episode is against the values of all Iranian families without considering their religion and it is the same across the globe. Danesh from England writes:

> You guys grew up outside Iran with corrupting American values of genocide and adultary. Why do you have to disrespect Iran's traditions and coustoms? Who says that Iranians should follow Westerners in adopting cultural values. Sex is a personal matter. But in the west they trade sexuality and women. I am not 'basiji' (from military) or religious. [sic]

Reza, a fan of this episode, calls Danoush *poshte koohi*, which literally means from behind mountains. 'Poshte Koohi' is used to refer to fanatic people who did not see modernity coming. Another viewer, Mansour, believes that this episode fits well with Iranian culture. Finally, this debate turns out to be about practicing democracy. Saman Yazdani wrote on the blog (in English): "Democracy means you say what you want and I

do what I like." It ends with another post from Danoush (in Farsi): "Those who believe in freedom of speech, do not do 'fahashi' (insulting others). Then you criticize the mullahs? if we can't agree to disagree then what's the point of this blog? what is the point of only highlighting the positive things?" As you can see this episode was followed by some controversial debates. These debates, I believe, are necessary for people to learn and discuss ideas about democracy. As you can see Saman's picture of democracy equals chaos, and clearly Danoush does not believe that freedom of speech can be applied to anything. So this kind of blog is valuable in contributing to the process of learning and practicing democracy.

Where is Iran?

To undermine Iranians who pretend to know everything, the Bebin.TV team interview many Iranians in an Iranian festival near LA. They ask people to locate Iran on this map:
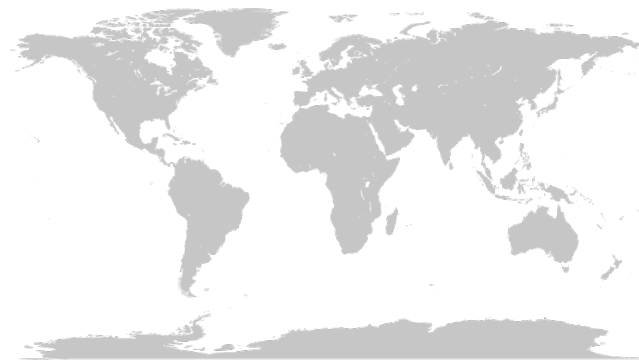
The majority of them can not find it on the map, and some refuse to do it while others confidently point out to wrong spots on the map. This includes many of the older generation of Iranians as well. Only a small number of people can locate Iran on the

map. One middle age man says, "Iran is the center of the world, for its civilization and intelligence of people." Yet he refuses to locate it on the map.

Obviously, the Bebin team has noticed that many Iranians talk about everything without bringing references. In Iran, the culture is oral and people do not necessarily include their sources. They often say: "migan..." (they say). And no one really wants to know who said whatever was said. At the same time, Iranians allow themselves to talk about everything. Just recently, when I was at an Iranian-American party in Northern California where Iranican members reside, I noticed that the members of this channel talked about all the problems in Iran and presented a solution in less than thirty minutes for each of them. They talked about Ahmadinejad and what people in Iran should do about him and also the obvious problem of Islam. In all the cases they provided a solution, and they seemed to feel satisfied to have such ideas. They truly believed that they knew how to improve the present situation in Iran better than the people inside Iran.

This episode of Bebin.TV with mapping is an attempt to undermine this culture. Bebin members want to make people conscious about their lack of knowledge about some things and help them understand that it is okay to not know everything.

Conspiracy Theories

In this documentary-style clip, Mani refers to a BBC report that claims that the people who are strangers to their government have a higher tendency to come up with conspiracy theories in explaining things. He says that psycologists believe that people like to assume a stable picture for earth and when something strange happens they come up with conspiracies so that this picture remains the same. Iranians have a lot of conspiracy

theories because Iran has faced many obstacles in the past few decades, and people often come up with conspiracy theories instead of trying to face them and solve them. Mani gives Bahrain's winning in soccer against Iran as an example. People came up with various stories to explain why Iran lost to Bahrain in Soccer. These theories included bribing, alcoholic consumption and stories about prostitution in reference to Iran's national soccer team.

As argued in this chapter, through many such clips, Bebin.TV not only tries to repair the Iranian culture that has been fractured in the Islamization process in post-revolutionary Iran, but also promotes debating the future of Iranian culture. Each of these clips has multiple levels of meaning that together help improve the Iranian culture. In the following chapter, I will look into the problems involved in repairing the Iranian culture.

CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE DEBATES AND

CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS

As discussed in the previous chapter, second generation Iranians in diaspora have played a significant role in repairing the fractured Iranian culture at this moment of Iran's history. As a result, studying their methodologies and approach is valuable for Iranian studies scholars and researchers to understand this process better and be able to suggest practical solutions to improve the programs. In this chapter, I will look at the controversial debates, particularly the debate on language, that have been raised around Bebin and other similar producers.

The most prominent critique that second generation Iranians in disapora receive is in regards to language. Most second generation Iranians outside Iran, particularly those who grew up in the United States, are not fluent in Farsi. In contrast with the exile generation, second generation Iranian-Americans use Farsi-Englisi also known as 'Fargilisi' or 'Finglish' [or "pinglish," /p/ and /f/ are variants]. 'Fargilisi' was coined by second generation Iranian-Americans, and 'Finglish' is the term that defines the same concept among Iranians in Iran. However, Finglish generally refers to Farsi transliterated using English letters.[90] To avoid confusion, I will use 'Fargilisi' to refer to the language used among Iranian-Americans[91] and 'Finglish' to refer to transliterated Farsi using English letters.

Everyone in Bebin speaks this language (a combination of Farsi and English) since none of them are fluent in Farsi. Although in most cases, they took Farsi classes during their childhood (and some even at college level), most of them cannot read or write Farsi and even have a distinctive American accent in their spoken Farsi. Leaving aside their accent, they use many English vocabulary words when they speak Farsi. It is

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[90] Finglish is often used in SMS communications in Iran.
[91] Combination of Farsi and English (similar to Spanglish)

almost as if the English vocabulary is an extension of Farsi among the members of this "imagined community." However, they only use the easy Farsi words that they learned in their family home and include all other specialized terms from English vocabulary. This is of course not invisible to the Iranian viewers in Iran and the first generation Iranian-Americans. In many of Bebin's programs (which are a combination of video and blog posts), we can observe controversial debates around language initiated by the audience on Bebin's official blog (www.Bebin.tv/blog). While some of the viewers use Bebin's language weakness to undermine all of their programs, many of their fans bring up the language problem hoping that their criticism helps Bebin produce better quality programs by improving the hosts' Farsi.

Bebin's approach in response to most of these critiques is compelling. The Bebin team replies to these critiques not only on their blog but also by extending the topic to their regular TV shows such as *Office* or *Mel Talk*. Often the issue on language is brought up as the narrative calls for it. They do not specifically reply to the language issue but rather weave their responses into the context of the story. Take a look at this example:

Office episode #68

Mani (in Farsi & to the camera): Since my Farsi is excellent, the boss asked me to teach Farsi to my American colleagues. [His tone is very arrogant.]

[Mani stands in front of a whiteboard. On the board 'baba nan dad' (Dad gave [me] bread) is written using Farsi letters.]

Mani (to everyone): 'Baba' means daddy. And 'nan' means bread. Repeat after me.

Ladan (to the camera): We are not stupid. He was supposed to tutor us only a little bit.

[Raha enters the room, wondering about the situation in the office. Masoud volunteers to explain.]

Masoud (in Fargilisi): We received some complaints from the audience about our Farsi. So we are having a class to improve our Farsi.

Mani: Don't say complaints! Say '*shekayat*'[92]. We speak Farsi here!

[Mani tries to convince Raha to sit in his class and learn Farsi.]

Raha: But isn't my Farsi better than yours?

Mani: Better than me? You grew up in Sweden. I got my diploma in Iran.

[Mani invites Raha to participate in a spelling competition in which Masoud becomes the mediator. Masoud feels helpless and cannot decide what words to use for the competition.]

Mani: Just say some words. You are not literate in Farsi to read something for us. Just drop some words.

Masoud: nane aga zane kheyli badakari bod. [This sentence does not have any meaning and some terms are non-existent in Farsi. However, the participants write this meaningless sentence.]

[Masoud says some more Farsi phrases for them to write. The spelling competition finally ends:]

Masoud says: But how can I judge your spelling without knowing the Farsi alphabet?

[Mani suggests that they take it to the boss. Turns out that Mani who grew up in Iran received a lower grade than Raha. This situation makes Mani upset.]

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[92] *Shekayat* means 'complaint' in Farsi.

Mani: This is Masoud's fault. He only used Farsi words. I got 20 out of 20 in religious studies in high school. I can read Quran like a '*bolbol*'(nightingale)[93]. Couldn't you have us write some Arabic words?

This episode has multiple levels of meaning and criticisms. First, Masoud is illiterate in written Farsi, yet his assigned role as a mediator and judge represents those who evaluate Bebin's Farsi. In fact, Bebin is questioning those who claim to know Farsi (such as Mani in this story) without having sufficient literacy of this language. Similar to Masoud, they might not even understand some of the things they say, yet they allow themselves to judge the Bebin team's Farsi literacy.

On the other hand, Masoud represents the viewer that is Bebin's main target. If the Farsi literacy of the viewers is comparable to Masoud's, who hardly speaks any Farsi (almost exaggeratedly), changing the language from Fargilisi to pure Farsi might cost Bebin a large number of its audience. This specific audience cannot relate to pure Farsi programs.

Moreover, in this same episode, Mani who presumably grew up in Iran,[94] loses to Raha who grew up in Sweden and learned Farsi on his own in this Farsi spelling competition. Mani asserts that the problem is that he knows more Arabic words than pure Farsi terms. And he blames Masoud for not including Arabic terms in the Farsi spelling competition. As evidence he speaks of his good performance in Islamic and Arabic courses that he had to take in high school in Iran. There is an interesting fantasy here, since Bebin claims that some of Bebin's members (such as Raha) have a better understanding of Farsi than those who grew up in Iran. This episode blames this on

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[93] '*mesle bolbol khandan*' (reading something like a nightingale) means that the person can read it perfectly and with no errors.
[94] In reality, Mani grew up in Sweden. But he often plays the role of a newcomer from Iran.

Islamic courses that, as Bebin suggests, introduced Arabic terms into the Farsi language over the past thirty years. While it is in fact true that many Islamic courses were added to the school curriculums in Iran, the spoken Farsi among regular people remains relatively the same as the Farsi spoken prior to 1979's revolution.[95] Most of the Arabic words that are used in Farsi were adopted hundreds of years ago and during the Arab occupancy in Iran. Bebin's claim here has no basis and is only a defensive statement to their critics. The Iranians who grew up in Iran can still read and interpret old Farsi texts such as Shahnameh, Divane Hafez and Masnaviye Molavi (Rumi).

From a different standpoint, this episode suggests that introducing English words into Farsi is okay because Arabic has already adulterated Farsi. The Farsi that some viewers are trying to protect is full of Arabic terminologies and is not pure Farsi. So in Bebin's view, people should not worry about English words entering Farsi. This episode is followed by forty-one blog comments. Among the many positive comments, Mohammad from Iran complains about Ladan and Melissa's bad Farsi. Fozolbashi, another blogger, insists that if Mohammad did not mention his geographical location, everyone could still tell that he was from Iran. Kaveh sarcastically suggests to Mohammad that he watch Satellite programs (Exile TV) to hear pure Farsi and to enjoy their various programs (exile programs do not have that much variety).

This is one of the many criticisms of the language that I found on Bebin's blog. Shima, from Sweden, even wrote her blog post in the Farsi alphabet that might have not even been accessible to Bebin team:

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[95] Other than Mullahs or Ayatollahs who use extensive Arabic vocabulary in their speech

اما دخترهاي ناز و باحال من يك سوال دارم شما ويديو اقاي تهران را ديديد يك پسر ي كه پدرش ايراني و

مادرش يك امريكايي سياه است اقاي تهران بايد فارسي حرف زدن اش را ديد من دوست دارم روي اين

موضوع كار بشه براي چي زبان فارسي تو امريكا پيش ايراني هاي اين همه بي ارزشه كه فرزندانشان بلد

نيستند فارسي حرف بزنند يا با لهجه هاي غليظ اما !!!!!!؟؟؟!!

تو ايران هم وطن هاي ارمني را ببينيد در حالي كه سالها تو ايران هستند اما زبان مادري اشان را يادشون

نرفته خيلي از شما به خاطر اين برنامه ببين تي وي زبان فارسي اتان خوب و خوب تر داره ميشه اما همه

كه اين امكان شما را ندارند و به نظر من خيلي بده اگر ادعاي ايراني بودن را داريم

[… My beautiful girls, Ladan and Melissa, I have a question for you. Have you seen the videos of Mr. Tehran [on youtube]? He is half Iranian and half black American. Even he can speak Farsi beautifully. I really hope you work on this aspect more. I don't understand why Farsi language has no value among Iranian-Americans that all the second generations there speak poor Farsi and also accented. In Iran, there are so many Armenians living who have not forgotten their mother tongue. I think it's really bad to claim that we are Iranians if we can't even speak the language correctly…]

Melissa, one of Bebin's hosts, tries to explain the reason behind using 'fargilisi' to the audience in one of her *Mel Talk* episodes, but it seems that it would not answer Shima's concern.

Melissa: Would you jump out of a helicopter without your shoes on? Yea me neither! Kheylia Mesle shoma migan na.[96] Vali Jeff Corless az Malibu dar California gharare in karo bokone.[97] I have been getting a lot of complaints recently about my Persian. So I thought we bring some proper Persian into *Mel Talk*. So lets welcome the proper Persian-speaking guy, Mani.

Here Mani takes over and starts speaking Farsi but there are English subtitles added to his clip.

Mani (in Farsi): Why are you using English subtitles? The audience has been complaining about us not being able to speak in proper Persian – especially you Melissa.
Melissa (in Fingilish): We added English subtitles so people can understand what we are saying. But for those who speak Farsi the same way I do, I am gonna translate what Mani just said.

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[96] Translation: Many like yourself will say no.
[97] Transaltion: However, Jeff Coreless from Malibu, CA is planning to do this.

Melissa goes on and literally translates everything Mani says to Fargilisi. As shown in this example, there are many more discussions on language between the Bebin team and its audience.

Finally, on Febuary 14th, 2008, Ladan, a host and blogger on Bebin posted the following in pure English:

> …These last couple weeks we have been experimenting with conducting some of our programs in English, and while many of you are upset or disappointed, the truth is that speaking in English allows us to reach out to a higher number of viewers around the globe! Everyone at Bebin.tv speaks Farsi (some obviously better than others), most of us speak Swedish and a couple of us Spanish as well….but in the end, we all speak English…and this is what we have noticed with our viewers as well! While our programs will continue to be geared towards 2nd generation Iranians, this is a heads up that some of the programs will be in English. We hope you understand and respect our decision on a business level! Bebin.tv [sic]

This post sparked a controversial debate among the viewers. Shahab writes in 'Finglish' (farsi transliterated in English letters) that this business decision makes Bebin a global TV channel rather than an Iranian TV channel: "A global TV with Iranian employees," he says. The blogger Foad agrees with Shahab and adds that Bebin should first change its name, which is a Farsi term meaning "look". Bebin is the imperative form of the verb 'didan' (to look) in Farsi. But in informal conversations, it is used more casually and in a different way. Everyday, every Iranian uses this term many times and not in a literal way. Often 'Bebin' comes after 'vali' (but) in the form of 'Bebin vali,' such that the whole phrase means 'but' or 'however'. In general 'Bebin', which is used excessively in the Persian dialect, does not mean much by itself. But choosing 'Bebin' as a name for a TV station is a clever choice. On the one hand, Bebin commands you to look at what it wants to offer; on the other hand, it makes a casual and different statement by reminding you of 'vali Bebin..'(however). This is where the audience is invited to an alternative

entertainment. As if through the usage of 'vali Bebin,…' (however,…), the team wants to tell the audience that it is another kind of television, an alternative television, different from exile TV. In doing so, Bebin uses a subtle and clever language. But as you can see, Foad and Shahab find this name irrelevant for a TV channel that aims to target a global audience. Iman, another blogger, condemns adopting an English language model. He believes that because the jokes are geared toward Iranians, the non-Iranians would never figure it out. In his view, non-Iranians would rather visit websites that offer TV shows they can relate to. He adds:

> Another reason [why] you should keep [the Fargilisi style] is to help prolong your culture and language. What percentage of second or third generation Iranian-immigrants speak Farsi? Instead of trying to gain a couple of bucks with more advertising, allow users to donate money. [sic]

Foad insists that many of Bebin's programs have an Iranian structure and as Iman says would be interesting only for Iranian viewers. "You all think in an Iranian way and could not produce [an even] close program to [the] west culture even if you lived there for a long time…. As Iranian people and TV producers, you have a great responsibility to introduce your native culture, language, etc. You should not forget your main goal in light of earning money," says Foad. Foad ends his argument stating that he will not watch Bebin programs if they speak English to attract advertisers; instead he will advertise it to his American friends. "You are Iranian and your native language is Farsi (even if you know many languages)," says Foad.

In all my interviews with Bebin and other second generation Iranian-American producers, the members had an extremely defensive manner in regards to questions about language. None of them welcomed the viewer's language critiques. They claimed that knowing or not knowing Farsi did not have anything to do with understanding Iranian

culture or adopting an Iranian identity. And being Iranian is separate from the language. This perspective is against what many of the Iranian intellectuals and literary scholars believe. As an example, Jalale Al Ahmad, an Iranian writer and political activist, believes that the Persian language is one of the fundamental aspects of Iranian culture and identity.[98]

Although most of Bebin members took Farsi classes in their childhood, something discouraged them from learning it and so most of them are not able to read or write Farsi. Raha, who grew up in Sweden, shared his experience of Farsi classes with me:

> …I went for a bit but they didn't teach anything useful. They would show posters of animals and ask us to repeat the Farsi words after. The problem was that they would even use children's language and didn't use the actual words. For example in Farsi 'Goosfand' means sheep. But because of the sound that sheep produce, often children refer to them as 'baabayyie'. And that's what they would teach us to call them. [sic]

There are two things going on here. One is the defensive attitude that Bebin.TV and second generation Iranian-Americans understandably adopt, indicating an insecurity. The other is their insecurity about what they are actually doing on Bebin, which is creating an intertextual bi-cultural media form that is inclusive of anyone who wants to join and allows multiple levels and styles of language competence. They need to keep the latter fresh in order for viewers to keep coming back, and so there is perhaps a learning process on all sides between those who are learning the Persian language and references (the diaspora) and those who are learning a more irreverant relation to their culture (the Iranians inside Iran).

Indeed, I argue that Farglisi/Pinglish gives the Iranian-American second generation 'a cultural distinction' and helps them define a distinctive 'imagined community'.

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[98] Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, (1985, 2000)

Maral, a member of the Iranican Radio and Blog, said to me that what makes her Iranian is just who she is. "It's not the language. It's just who you are." But later she said: "I will definitely speak Farsi to my children and my grandchildren. To keep them connected to their roots." In one of the Iranican Radio shows, Maral accepted the fact that the language issue is a sensitive topic for her and other second generation Iranian-Americans. "We have a level defense that we put up because our Iranianness is being questioned," she said.

> Sometimes when I am speaking to [Iranian newcomers] and they say a Farsi word that I don't know, they point to me and say.. "oh you are one of the fakes!". What do you mean by that. Basically they mean someone that hangs out with Iranians and listens to Iranian music but deep down doesn't know anything about what it means to be Iranian. [sic]

Maral told me that she tries to speak Farsi to her younger brother (10 years old) to pass the knowledge and keep him connected to his roots. This shows that many Iranian-Americans are aware of the direct relation between language, identity and culture. They claim otherwise when they want to defend themselves against the critiques; but in their dreams for the future, they don't separate these entities. This denial comes from the insecurity that they feel toward the first generation Iranian-Americans. In order to elaborate on this claim, I will need to remind us of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory.

Bourdieu's "habitus" can be defined as a system of dispositions that incline individual agents to behave in certain ways. Dispositions are structured in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the individual's tastes and social condition. In Bourdeiu's view, taste is the product of a complex set of social, historical and political conditions and therefore is not an idiocyncratic and personal matter. Taste is also not separable from our economic capital, nor is it separate from our cultural capital. One of the central tenets of

Bourdieu's theory is the idea that there are different forms of capitals. Economic capital refers to an individual's material wealth, property, and so on. Cultural capital refers to an individual's knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions. And symbolic capital refers to an individual's accumulated prestige and honor. Economic capital enables the development of certain kinds of taste. Because, as Bourdieu suggests, tastes are systematic, if we share some taste with the members of a group, we are more likely than not to share other tastes. Since taste is dependent on our cultural capital, our skills and knowledge define our taste. Bourdieu assumes a fundamental link between actions and taste. By virtue of the habitus, individuals are predisposed to act in certain ways and avow certain tastes.

The fact that the second generation Iranian-Americans and Iranians in Iran (or the first generation Iranian-Americans for that matter) have different levels of Farsi literacy and different accents is a manifestation, at the level of language, of the socially structured character of the habitus. On a given linguistic market, some products are valued more highly than others, and an individual's language competency is evaluated by the way they produce expressions that are highly valued in the market.[99] Among Farsi speakers, this aspect of practical competence is not equally distributed. Iranian-Americans and Iranians in Iran each possess different quantities of "linguistic capital" – that is, the capacity to speak fluent Farsi. The distribution of linguistic capital is related to the distribution of other sorts of capital, such as economic capital or cultural capital, that define the location of an individual within the social map[100]. As a result, the differences in linguistic capital

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[99] John B. Thompson, Language and Symbolic Power, 18
[100] John B. Thompson, Language and Symbolic Power, 18

among second generation Iranian-Americans, first generation Iranian-Americans and Iranians in Iran reflect the quantities of cultural and economic capital that they possess.

This is why some double-migrant Iranian-Americans seem to have a higher quantity of linguistic capital. In my ethnographic work I met some second-generation double-migrants who could speak unaccented and fluent Farsi. (The second migration was from Europe to the US.) Ironically, the Iranian-American children have had better access to Farsi materials due to the Los Angeles media capital and exile TV, which only became accessible to the Europeans after 1997 with the launch of the NITV Satellite channel. But due to patterns of migration, the cultural capital is unequally distributed among Iranian-Europeans and Iranian-Americans. The dominant culture of the Iranian-Americans, specifically in Los Angeles, is defined by wealth (economic capital) but not necessarily by intellectuality (cultural capital). Looking back at the patterns of migration, we see that while many of the intellectual families (from the *Tudeh* party) migrated to Europe, the rich (*bazari*) as well as the entertainment industry people chose Los Angeles as their place of residence. As a result, even though the Farsi cultural materials were more accessible in the United States, the children of families who migrated to European countries had better access to the cultural capital because of the large number of intellectuals in Europe who were in some cases the parents of these children.

Someone from Bebin's audience commented on their blog about this issue. She raised this question about the language wondering why the parents of the Iranian-Americans do not focus enough in teaching their children Farsi and explained that everyone she knows in Europe could speak Farsi fluently. In my own ethnographic work, I noticed that Raha, a double- migrant from Sweden who produces various programs for

Bebin, learned Farsi all by himself in Europe through the Persian music and the Farsi lyrics in the music boxes. Not surprisingly, the music and packaging (including the written lyrics) came from Los Angeles. However, if we look at Raha's personal biography we can understand his thirst for learning Farsi much better.

Prior to 1979's revolution, Raha's parents were both members of the *Tudeh* party (chapi).[101] His mom joined the *Tudeh* party when she was only twenty-two years old and his father joined when he turned twenty-seven. Raha's father ran a magazine in Iran called *Rahayi* ("Freedom") prior to the revolution. Raha was named after this magazine. Raha's uncle (his mother's brother) and his wife were executed during the early years of the revolution. Raha's mom adopted her brother's son and raised him as her own child. Due to execution risks, the family fled to Sweden, where many other members of the *Tudeh* lived. Raha's father studied journalism in England (prior to revolution) and later in Sweden. He started a political radio station in Sweden named *Rozaneh* (meaning a tiny hole or window that lets light come in). Periodically, Raha helped his father choose songs that were relevant to the program. Thus Raha had to get involved with content creation to be able to find a relevant song.

Going through Raha's personal biography we can see that he had great access to rich cultural and ultimately linguistic capital. Even though he learned to read Farsi on his own, the motivation was planted in him by his parents' ideologies and cultural capital. By contrast, the unequal distribution of cultural capital manifests itself differently among second generation Iranian-Americans. Most of them have no motivation to learn Farsi.

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[101] They now have changed their leftish ideas toward monarchists.

There is in fact a strong resistance that can be defined through Bourdieu's taste and membership argument.

Although at first Fargilisi was adopted by second generation Iranian-Americans due to their lack of Farsi knowledge (limited access to cultural and linguistic capitals), later it became a sign of membership (first consciously and now unconsciously) in their imagined community of second generation Iranian-Americans. They then developed taste around this absence of linguistic capital (also cultural capital) and convinced each other to recognize their unofficial self-invented language. Fargilisi became a language that everyone in the community of the second generation Iranian-Americans could relate to, and so members were persuaded to speak this language. In this respect, Farsigilisi became a device to take the Iranian-Americans to the path of ethnic authenticity. It gave them a cultural distinction that separated them from the Iranians around the world as a whole and helped define their membership in their imagined community.

In Fargilisi debates, accessibility to the culture plays a significant role as well. Even though many of Bebin's and Iranican's programs try to authenticate Fargilisi, the truth of the matter is that most of the participants have little familiarity with the actual Farsi language. Most second generation Iranian-Americans have little knowledge of Farsi vocabulary, but they often deny it or pretend that it is not important at all. Thus notions of authenticity and taste come to help when explaining themselves to their audience. As mentioned earlier, the language concept is a sensitive topic among this group. To give you an example, I interviewed a second generation Iranian-American lawyer, Milad, about a report that he helped produce on 'Chaharshanbe Souri', a traditional Iranian ceremony. In this report, he interviewed second generation Iranian-Americans and asked

them about the history behind this traditional ceremony. While the report was done in a fun and informative way, it also mocked the participants who did not know the real story behind the event. I asked my interviewee why he thought the event was called 'Chaharrhsnabe Souri'. Let me first explain what it means before I get to Milad's answer. In Farsi, *Chaharrshanbe* means Wednesday. But *Chahar* by itself means number four and *Shanbe* means Saturday. (*Souri* means celebration). The reason why this ceremony is called 'Chaharshanbe Souri' is because it takes place in the last Wednesday (Tuesday night) of the year. But Milad, who was one of the reporters of this cultural festival for the Iranican web channel, thought that this annual event was called 'Chaharshanbe Souri' because it takes place 'Chahar' (four) 'Shanbe' (Saturdays) after Nouroz (the Persian New Year). As soon as I corrected him, he asked me not to include this clip (the interview was on video) in my documentary film.

It is apparent to me that the second generation Iranian-Americans are aware of the fact that Iranian culture is tied to the language due to the many cultural references to Persian poetry and literature. However, my subjects insisted that their unfamiliarity with written Farsi and their poor vocabulary did not limit their access to the 'true' Iranian culture. This debate is similar to what Alireza Doostar observed among Iranian bloggers. In his essay, "The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging," he explores the distribution of cultural hegmony between intellectuals who write Farsi elengantly in their blogs (such as Shokorollahi) and the new generation of bloggers who write in broken Farsi (or conversational, such as Sanam Dolatshahi). Doostar illustrates a similar argument by bringing an example of a blogger, Sanam Dolatshai, who wrote a piece in the online magazine *Kaapochino* ("Cappuccino") in response to Shokrollahi's (an "intellectual"

blogger) critique of vulgarity under the title *So'aalhaa-ye yek nevisande-ye mobtazal-e faarsi-e ghalat-nevis- e interneti* ("Questions of a vulgar, mistake-making, Persian writer on the Internet"). In the article, she claims that each style of writing has its own place, and that there is no right or wrong in writing. She switches to a broken, conversational style in the second half of this piece and makes deliberate spelling mistakes, "metapragmatically indexing herself as a rebel against language authority and intellectualist cultural hegemony"[102]. In a later more emotional report she writes:

> Haalam az farhikhte baazi va har chiz-e dige-i too veblaagaa be ham mikhore . . .
> beshin baa zaboon-e pedarbozor-gaat nazar bede va poz-e roshanfekri bede. Beshin
> ye jayi ro ke baraye kheylia dar hokm-e ye jaaye khodemooni va amn baraye gap
> zadane baa ye konferaans-e adabi eshtebaahi begir . . . baa keraavaat va kot
> shalvaar bia beshin va oonaayi ro ke shalvaar li pooshidan maskhare kon.

> [I'm disgusted by intellectualist pretense and everything else like it among
> weblogs . . . You should just sit down and express your opinion in the language of
> your grandfathers and brag about being an intellectual. Keep mistaking this place
> as a literary conference when others consider it to be an informal and safe place for
> chatting. Come sit down wearing a suit and tie and mock those who are wearing
> jeans]. [Dolatshahi 2003b]

As you can see, the bloggers claim that they purposely write their blog posts in broken Farsi to acquire a certain authenticity. But the truth is most of the young Iranian bloggers do not have the sophisticated knowledge of Farsi that Derakhshanian is looking for.

A central aspect of Bourdieu's project consists of mapping the configuration of tastes and charting the ways that these taste cultures relate to other demarcations of identity – primarily those having to do with economic status. In the debates on language taste, the economy can refer to the extent to which one can speak the language using proper vocabulary and grammar (linguistic capital). The taste among second generation Iranian-Americans in terms of Fargilisi or the taste among the bloggers in terms of

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[102] Alireza Doostar, *"The vulgar spirit of blogging": On language, culture, and power in Persian Weblogestan*

broken Farsi reflect the language economy (linguistic capital) among these groups. Since both groups have limited access to the full language, they define their tastes in ways that suit their economy, which in return helps them to deal with their differences and attach it to authenticity.

> The more linguistic capital that speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a profit of distinction. For the forms of expressions which receive the greatest value and secure the greatest profit are those which are most unequally distributed, both in the sense that the conditions for acquisition of the capacity to produce them are restricted and in the sense that the expressions themselves are relatively rare on the markets where they appear. [103]

A great number of Bebin's viewers (60%) are Iranians in Iran. This is where speaking Fargilisi becomes problematic. In Iran because of the 'Gharbzadegi' (Westruckness) phenomenon that I previously explained in the introduction chapter, adopting English terminology reflects a higher quantity of linguistic capital. Because English education is not equally accessible to all the social groups in Iran, English knowledge reflects individuals' higher quantity of linguistic capital, therefore their higher quantity of cultural capital, and ultimately a higher level of symbolic capital. Being able to use English terms in speech is tied to the economic capital of the individuals, because only rich people can visit foreign countries or be in direct contact with English-speaking people. And so 'Garbzadadegi' comes with a strong tie between any of these capitals and the Western world. As a result, having a higher quantity of linguistic capital in Iran equals a higher quantity of symbolic capital, which is something that most people strive to achieve.

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[103] *Language and symbolic power* by Pierre Bourdieu; edited and introduced by John B. Thompson

Although it may seem that the Iranians in Iran have a larger quantity of linguistic capital because of their fluency in Farsi, 'Gharbzadegi' has reversed this theorem. In fact in the current model, linguistic capital is defined by the amount of English words one can use in their daily speech, specifically among the younger generation. Therefore, speaking Fargilisi has a direct and positive influence on individuals' symbolic capital.

In the past only a few people were exposed to Fargilisi and not everyone had access to its symbolic and linguistic capital; so the competition to access any of these capitals was only among a small group of people. On the contrary, with the advanced technologies of communication today, the emergence of channels such as Bebin and Iranican presents an enormous threat to the Farsi language. Even though the unequal distribution of forms of expression secures the greatest profit, the linguistic capital and symbolic capital have been defined in Iran long ago and the equal distribution of Fargilisi through mass communication cannot change these definitions as quickly as the Farsi language can get damaged.

Most of the first generation Iranian-Americans recognize this problem, but so far none of Bebin's audience has provided an alternative for Bebin members to improve their Farsi skills. Most of the critiques are not positive and put the second generation Iranian-Americans in a defensive mode.

In *Office*, the audience can observe the actor's improvement in the Farsi dialect. In the early webisodes, actors often had a distinct American accent when speaking in Farsi and used a limited Farsi vocabulary. But with the numerous TV shows they have produced, their vocabulary has expanded and their accent is not as obvious. This is not invisible in the eyes of the regular viewer. One audience member blogged:

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<div dir="rtl">

… خيلي از شما به خاطر اين برنامه ببين تي وي زبان فارسي اتان خوب و خوب تر داره ميشه

</div>

… Your Farsi is getting better everyday because of your involvement in Bebin TV.

This improvement lets us see that there is in fact space for improving Farsi literacy among this community. And since they have taken on the great responsibility of repairing the fractured Iranian culture, others in the Iranian-American community (including exile TV) can potentially help them improve their Farsi. However, exile TV is worried about losing its audience to Bebin, especially now that they are going on satellite. But if the older generation realizes the important responsibility the younger generation has taken on, they can help them learn and improve their Farsi rather than giving the unconstructive critiques which can cause irreversible damage to Farsi and Iranian culture.

Chapter III

Nostalgia Without Memory

HEARKEN to the reed-flute, how it complains,
Lamenting its banishment from its home:
"Ever since they tore me from my osier bed,
My plaintive notes have moved men and women to tears.
I burst my breast, striving to give vent to sighs,
And to express the pangs of my yearning for my home.
He who abides far away from his home
Is ever longing for the day he shall return.

Masnavi, Rumi, Book I, Prologue.

During my fieldwork among second generation Iranian-Americans, I observed a distinctive nostalgia for Iran that seems to be based on no real memory. This nostalgia is particularly visible among the generation of Iranians who have never been to Iran but still feel close to their Iranian identity. My case studies (Bebin.TV and Iranican) are groups interested in their Iranian heritage, which participate in producing Iranian programs for Iranian people. The notion of nostalgia without memory is different from the nostalgia found among first generation Iranian-Americans and also different from the nostalgia developed through watching exile TV's fetishization of Iran, as previously discussed.

I argue that the nostalgia observed among the second generation Iranian-Americans is based on collective second-hand memories of Iran (not experienced by the nostalgic group) that second generation Iranian-Americans accumulated through the memories of their parents and relatives who visited them from Iran. In many cases, especially among the exile or refugee population, the parents have not lived in the post-revolutionary Iran, and so the memories they transfer to their children come from their pre-revolution Iran experiences. These memories are often far from the realities of the contemporary Iran.

In this chapter, I will first look at the literature on nostalgia to build the ground for defining a nostalgia based on no memory which in the current age of digital mechanical reproductions takes on many forms of its own. Finally I will argue that this notion plays a significant role in bridging between the second generation Iranian-Americans and the young Iranians in Iran.

ISLAMIC NOSTALGIA

I argue that Iranians inherited nostalgia without memory from Islamic culture and ideology. After Islam entered Iranian culture, much of the attention of Iranians went to worshipping the past and investing in the abstract future, which would not arrive until the afterlife. For Iranians, the human is displaced on earth. Therefore, longing and yearning for return (to heaven) exists in the unconscious of Iranians around the world and in Iran. I argue that the nostalgia that I have observed among second generation Iranian-Americans is also partially nourished and strengthened by this ideology. I also argue that Iranians' feelings of exile and displacement in diaspora (as previously discussed by Naficy in the discourse of Iranian exile TV) in fact originated in Iran and does not merely reflect the narrative of displacement among this population. In fact, this nostalgia is rooted in the ideology of Iranians glorifying their past; they are always uneasy about the present moment. The following poems perfectly articulate this ideology.

> dar heyratam az marame in mardome past
> in tayefeye zendeh koshe morde parast
> ta hast be zelat bekeshandash be jafa
> chun mord be ezat bebarandash sare
> dast

> I am amazed of these people who kill the living
> and praise the dead
> when he is living, they take him down to the lowest points
> as he dies, they take him to the highest peaks

> zendegi arseye kotahe honarmandiye mast
> har kasi naghmeye khod khanado az sahne ravad
> sahne peyvaste be jast
> khoram on naghme ke mardom beseparand be
> yad

> life is a short play for every artist
> everyone will sing his song and leaves the stage
> the stage remains still

Cherish the song that everyone remembers after

The second poem clearly promotes the idea of investing your life for the memory that you will leave behind. Iranians put a lot of investment in the past. (Past and nostalgia are tied together).

NOSTALGIA IN ERFAN

Iranian culture is so deeply intertwined with Islam that we need to understand these cultural and religious aspects in order to fully understand what it means to be Iranian. It is the Islamic '*erfan*' (also known as sufism),[104] however, which is central in the studies of Iranian Islam. *Sufism* is a sort of spirituality that uses Islam as its framework. Even the non-Muslim Iranians have fractions of Islamic '*erfan*' in their culture. And exactly for this reason we should look at the Islamic '*erfan*' to study the nostalgia in Iranian culture. [105]

I am interested in traces of the Islamic *erfan* that appear in Iranian identity and dominate the Iranian literature and arts. For this reason, I point to a few of the useful definitions of '*erfan*' in my work. [106]

'az o hastim va be o baz migardim' (Quran)

We are from him (God) and we will return to him.

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[104] Sufism is not only identified with only Iran or Shiism, There are Sufis in all Muslim countries and most sufies are therefore neither Iranian nor Shiite. Sufis have been periodically persecuted by the Islamic Republic.

[105] Khomeini was actively involved with erfan as well. But the clerics saw erfan as dangerous and and something that should be only explored by those who can handle it. Khoemeini taught erfan and wrote some erfan poetry. But the Miladtullahi order, which had among its members many teachers and bureaucats to the clerics pushed erfan further underground by the Islamic Republic.

[106] For the interested scholars, the works of leonard lewisohn and Annemarie Schimmel provide valuable information on this topic.

In *Sufism* this saying is over-used. It is so fundamentally rooted in sufic culture that spiritual fulfillment cannot be reached without human's resolution in God (God as a solvent) and ultimately reaching the "oneness." Radically, from an Iranian point of view, the human is departed from its beloved God, left alone in the darkness and pain on earth only to strive all his life to reach him again and merge into him.

The idea of the human's separation from God has been employed by almost all Iranian poets and writers and has presented itself in a unique nostalgia that is based on no real memory (no one remembers the moment of separation from God or when God blows his soul in human's body upon birth). Yet this imaginary memory produces extreme sadness, depression and ultimately a nostalgia among Iranians, which becomes a source of inspiration in all aspects of their spiritual lives.

Persian carpets, which illustrate the most beautiful flowers of the Garden of Eden, are not an exception here. The infinite gardens that run under the borders into infinity are woven on looms in the heart of the driest regions of Iran. As gardens and trees of life they evoke the Garden of Eden and the place that the human ultimately belongs to. Yet, this fantasy is formed in the dry regions of Iran where the imagery of trees and gardens are almost nonexistent.

> *We said: "O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression." --- 35 Alraf, Quran*

> *Then did Satan make them slip from the (garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: "Get ye down, all (ye people), with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time."--- 36 AlAraf, Quran*

The nostalgia that comes from '*erfan*', also reflects itself in non-religious context.

Therefore, the sense of longing for an imaginary something becomes a substance of Iranian culture and manifests itself in many ways. While for the Muslims this nostalgia is defined through longing for God and the creator of life, it is an unknown feeling felt among others. This feeling of nostalgia is so deeply immersed in the Iranian culture that even the poets and writers who have never left their homeland long for home. An example of this is Hafez, perhaps the most famous Iranian poet, who never left his hometown, Shiraz.

NOSTALGIA IN EXILE AND TELEVISUAL FETISHIZATION

Some other parts of superficial memories involved in producing nostalgia without memory among second generation Iranian-Americans come from the different pictures of pre- and post-revolution Iran that exile TV, the media produced by first generation Iranian-Americans, created in the liminality phase of becoming. As discussed earlier in the introduction chapter, Hamid Naficy analyzed the discourse of the exile TV and found them responsible for creating an imagined community of Iranians in diaspora through fetishizing Iran. He suggested that during the liminal phase, an exile genre of TV programming emerged. During this period, the idea of home dominated the discourse of the exile genre TV. Naficy suggests that "fetishism and the repeated and wide circulation of fetishes are essential in the life of today's exiles who live in the age of electronic reproduction of images and simulation"[107],Fetishization, as Naficy suggests, aided the formation and consolidation of an Iranian ethnic identity and promoted ethnic solidarity among Iranians in diaspora. In order to unpack his argument, Naficy included some definitions of fetishism in psychoanalysis. Using the psychoanalysis that Naficy

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[107] Naficy, 1993: 95

employed, I argue that first generation Iranian-Americans experienced Lacan's notion of castration for the male, where the castrated mother constitutes a threat of losing the penis. In the experiences of first generation Iranian-Americans, the Islamic Revolution castrated the motherland and threatened their symbolic penis that is their Iranian identity and honor. The hostage crisis particularly constituted this Lacanian notion of symbolic castration.

Among the second generation Iranian-Americans, a similar notion of nostalgia was inherited from the parents through imagining the memories told by them and through the exile TV programming – but with a slight difference. I compare this nostalgia among the second generation Iranian-Americanss to Lacan's castration for the female, which constitutes a nostalgia for something that they never experienced – namely, Iran, the homeland. This castration produces the nostalgia without memory that I observed among second generation Iranian-Americans.

In both of these modes of Lacanian castration, among first and second generation Iranian-Americans, the nostalgia results in fetishization. The festishization is not only limited to the exile TV genre but rather it exists (although more subtly) in the programs of the second-generation internet portal TV. I will get back to this later in this chapter.

NOSTALGIA IN THE AGE OF IPTV

As discussed earlier in the introduction chapter, Iranian exile TV provided limited programming availability with the intention of keeping the trauma going even after it was removed to maintain strict message control. William Uricchio uses the term *constraint*

for this notion of "carefully and strategically constructed" programming[108] . In exile televisual programming, constraint was deployed for a hegemonic project to promote monarchy. Exile television, purposely avoided showing any picture that would suggest a good living condition for citizens in Iran, because they did not want to accept that under the Islamic regime of Khomeini, people could enjoy life.

In contrast with exile TV (on cable), the affordances of Web 2.0 and internet portal television are providing the opportunity for second generation Iranian-Americans to receive firsthand information about Iran. Bebin.TV in particular invites users to upload their videos from around the world (including Iran), uniting the Iranians in diaspora with the rest of the community of Iranians in imagining and, as Kayvan, the founder of Bebin once told me, in producing a new Iranian culture and identity.[109] In this model, where users can upload videos of Iran, the sadistic reproduction of trauma in the discourse of exile TV quickly loses its credibility among Iranian-Americans.[110] Since 2005, when Bebin.TV was founded, Iranians in Iran have been able to share videos of the contemporary Iran with those viewers who have been caught up in the severe fetishization of Iran, mainly through first-generation exile media.

NOSTALGIA AND VPODS[111]

Shabhaye Darband [112] ("Nights of Darband") is a recent video uploaded by a viewer from Iran. He records an evening in Darband, a popular spot both before and after the

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[108] Uricchio, 2009:4
[109] Interview conducted in July 2009 in Los Angeles.
[110] Second-Generation Iranian-Americans do not watch exile TV anymore, said Eiman Zolfaghari in an interview conducted by me in July 2008.
[111] Videos uploaded on Bebin by the viewers are tagged as VPOD on Bebin's blog
[112] http://Bebin.tv/blog/2008/02/19/vpod-shabhaye-darband/#more-827

revolution at the skirts of the Alborz[113] mountains, where people can get Kabob in restaurants, enjoy the weather and the relaxing sound of the river. When interviewing my second generation Iranian-American informants, most of them listed Darband as one of their favorite places in Iran (even though none of them had been to Darband). This video has been viewed more than 56, 900 times.[114] Maryam, a viewer known as Tavakilimaryam12, says:

> my mom always told me about this, I went there when I was much younger, but last time I was in Iran, the government had regulated this and it wasn't open very often.Too much fun, so it needed to be stopped. ridiculous. people wouldn't be trying so hard to get out of Iran if they weren't controlled in every aspect of their life. It's a beautiful country with beautiful people and minds. [sic]

Although Maryam has obviously visited Iran, she still fetishizes Iran when she concludes that the government closed down Darband so that people cannot have fun in their lives – even though the video is clearly shot after the revolution and in it Iranian are having fun in post-revolutionary Iran and in Darband. But this fetishization is not stopped even with the affordances of Web 2.0. The memory of the fetishized Iran that was produced by the exile TV is so strong that even though she sees the video, she relates to it as something of the past and pre-revolution. Another viewer, introduced as Dokhtarberjandi, says: "I have never been here , but, I had a dream about this place. Che Gashangeh! (it's so beautiful)". Dreaming about a place you have never been to, suggests the existence of a strong nostalgia without memory in the dreamer. I assume that Dokhtarberjandi's dream of Darband consists of pictures she had seen of it on exile TV and/or her own visualization as her parents illustrated an image of Darband through narrating their memories. What

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[113] Alborz is a mountain range in northern Iran stretching from the borders of Armenia in the northwest to the southern end of the Caspian Sea, and ending in the east at the borders of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. The tallest mountain in the Middle East, Mount Damavand, is located in the range.
[114] YouTube count

would be interesting to know is how realistic that dream has been for Dokhtarberjandi, compared to the video uploaded on Bebin that shows the contemporary picture of Darband.

Some of the first generation Iranian-Americans and Iranians in Iran participated in the debate about Darband following the posting of this video. A total of seventy-four posts have been received so far and some clearly demonstrate the nostalgia of the first-generation exiles that rely on real memories. BaharehBakhtiari writes: "Before I left Iran I thought it would be easy. But here I even miss everything that I hated there." Shide08 writes: "vaghty iran budim tavahome injaro dashtim hala ke injaim tavahome irano darim! Lol" (when we were in Iran, we dreamed of living here, and now we are nostalgic for Iran). Or this dramatic comment from Flame3862: "*nafasam dareh band miyad yadesh bekheir...mersi*" (I can't breath anymore [from nostalgia], Good memories… Thanks.)

Following a VPOD uploaded from Iran showing the Ramsar Grand Hotel in Shomal, a popular region in north of Iran, Shahrzad06 writes: "at least, this former palace is considered as real Persian/Iranian architecture. I am happy it is empty otherwise they had ruined it and turned it to some other ugly copy of Chinese/Arabic architecture!" Shahrzad06's comment is another example of the fetishiztion of Iran among second generation Iranian-Americans, even after the new original videos of Iran have become accessible to everyone on the web. Even though the second generation Iranian-American audience sees the recent videos of people having fun, it's as they believe that when the camera is off, the beauty and fun of Ramsar and Darband cease to exist.

OTHER VPODS

Other VPODs, uploaded from within Iran, include: "Persian cooking," "Tehran in 2006," "Tehran in 2008," "Iran Army 2008," "Iran new shopping malls," "Skateboarding in Tehran," "Road trip from Chaloos to Tehran," "Bonab Kabab Restaurant," "Taxi Ride in Tehran," "Flying over Tehran," "Iran Shame Ghariban" (a shi'ite feast for the abandoned, the marytrs of Karbala), "Streets of Tehran 2007," "fruit stands in Iran," "Tajrish Bazzar," "National Car Museum of Iran," "Anzali Seaport," "Mehrabad Airport," "Caspian Sea," "Iranian Windows," "Namak Abrood," "Tehran weather," "Kish Island," "Sunset in Caspian Sea," "Milad Tower," "Tochal Telecabin complex," "hikers in Tochal," "Norouz in Iran," "Isfahan," and many more which all present an objective picture of the post-revolutionary Iran without fetishization. Most of these videos do not have voiceover and are edited as objective as video can be.[115] Some of these videos also introduce new places that became popular after 1979. Many of the first generation Iranian-Americans have no memory of some of these places. An example is Kish Island in the south of Iran, located in the Persian Gulf, which is currently the most popular vacation spot in Iran. The Iranian government tried to make it look like Dubai to attract Iranian tourists.

Here I include some of the most recent posts that I found on various different VPODs from Iran that can sharpen my argument of the rising nostalgia without memory.[116] Dorood, clearly a first generation Iranian-American, writes: "vaghti oonjam ehsas mikonam zende hastam... inja hame mordan, hame sardan... be ghole dariush[117] inja

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[115] Camera can't be objective. The minute it focuses on something it become subjective.
[116] All these comments were posted within the past year.
[117] Dariush, a popular culture singer an icon who went to exile in Los Angeles after the 1979's revolution. His songs often constitute themes of return to home and the condition of exile.

kasi ashegh nemishe" (When I am in Iran I feel alive, here everyone is dead and cold, or

to invoke Dariush, no one falls in love here). In between the sentimental posts of the

Iranian-Americans, you can also find posts of Iranians in Iran who are fed up with the

situation of their lives there. Cimaron1400 says:

> [Original: *Akhe in tehran chi dare vase del tang shodan?traffic? adamaye
> badakhlaghesh? faghresh? motadash? geroonish? dooodo damesh ???*]
>
> What does Tehran have that you guys feel nostalgic about? Traffic? The poor
> people? The bad economy? The addicts? The inflation? The smog and the
> pollution?

In response to Cimaron1400, Baran1368 said:

> [Original: *Tehran hame oon badiyaro ke goft dare, vali ye omr khateram too tak
> take khiyaboonash hast! inja hame chi khoobe, vali man 1 saniye too tehran
> boodan ro be 100 sal inja tarjih midam!
> asheghesham! :X:X*]
>
> Tehran has all those bad things you said, but I have memories in every single
> alley in there. Everything is great here, but I would prefer to be in Iran for one
> more second rather than living here for 100 more years. Tehran is my love. :X:X

Some of the debates on VPODs suggest the change in perception of the second

generation Iranian-Americans from the image that exile television previously constructed.

Calypspoetry posted a comment on one of the contemporary videos of Tehran about one

year ago:

> My mom just came back from Hajj and she stopped in Iran. She said things have
> changed since 1979. Now women just wear jeans, shirt with a scarf on the head.
> Not many women still in full chador anymore. Gucci, Versace, BMW, fancy
> brands every where. With such a large population under 30, and with the internet
> and globalization, she doesn't see how the crazy corrupt "Islamic Republic" will
> last much longer. Iran today is drastically different since after revolution. I hope
> things change InshAllah(If God Wants)!

Another interesting debate centered on a VPOD uploaded from Iran. The video was

titled, "lamborghini gallardo in IRAN for dummies." The video featured a guy cruising

on the streets of Tehran with his new Lamborghini Gallard. This video received 135, 960

hits and brought a lot of controversial debates about the culture of the young Iranians in

Iran. I found the debate between Porkesnana and Arian79 most compelling among all

others. In January 2009 Porkesnana writes: "Shame on you who have not seen cars

before!" In response to Porkesnana, Arian79 wrote:

> [Original *nemidonam shoma koja zendegi mikonid, vali toye iran vagheaan kasi lamborgini nadide aziz! man salhast toye europ zendegi kardam va hatta inja ham kheyli be nodrat peyda mishe va hame pir o javoon behesh khireh mishan! pas in javonhaye bi gonah o to hasrat monda ro nemishe sarzanesh kard* ☺]

> I don't know where you guys live, but in Iran, people haven't seen Lamborgini! I have been living in Europe for many years now and even here, you barely see one and people really stare at it when it passes you! You can't blame these innocent young people who have been living in "hasrat" (yearning)☺

And the debate continued:

> Porkesana:
> [Original: *man newyorkam, vali mashin o in harfa ke arzeshe in kara ro nadareh, adam bayad ye zareh ham ezzate nafs dashteh basheh , mageh harky mashin dareh yani hameh chi dareh,,,,,,,,,,,*]

> I live in nyc. But I believe that a car cannot be that valuable, people should have some honor and confidence in themselves. Who says that those who can afford everything have got everything?

> Arian79:
> [Original: *man daghighan bahat movafegham, vali motoasefane dar iran makhsosan salhaye akhir, hame chiz dar poole ziyad o mashine geron gheymat kholase mishe va hamontor ke khodet gofti bishtar vaghtha harki mashine anchenani ya khone zengegiye anchenani dare yaani hame chiz! darigh az kami farhang o ensaniyat.*]

> I totally agree with you, but regrettably in Iran, especially in the recent years, everything is summarized in expensive cars, and most of the time it is believed that whoever drives expensive cars, or lives in expensive houses, has got everything! There is no culture or humanity left there!

> navidm83 from Iran writes:
> [Original:*!!!! bachehaye erupa faghiran rabti be irania nadare,,khodam ye ax azash daram tu vali-asr gereftam..*]

European kids are poor, they have nothing to do with Iranians. I got a picture of it [lamborgini] myself in Vali Asr Street.

Vincemcneal600 from the US asks:

Two questions:
1) Can you get a lot of girls with this car in Iran?
2) what does "*yek-o-do*"[118] mean?

021Rap4ever from Iran responds:

1)Yes
2)That means let's race

These debates show not only the possibilities of dialogue between Iranians in diaspora and in Iran through the affordances of Web 2.0, but also suggest that the festishization that Naficy observed among the first generation Iranian-Americans and particularly in their exile TV genre exists among the IPTV generation (second generation Iranian-Americans) as well.

NOSTALGIA & BEBIN.TV MEMBERS

Aside from the bridging of Iranians in Iran and in diaspora, Bebin.TV also brought an opportunity for the viewers in all parts of the diaspora to participate in developing new superficial or fake memories of Iran through secondhand memories of people around the world. After interviewing each member of Bebin, I noticed that all of them had a collective imaginary nostalgia about various parts of Iran. Although not a conscious fact, this imagined nostalgia created an imagined community among the second generation Iranian-Americans. Because some of these accumulated secondhand memories were reiterated several times, such as traveling to Shomal (the north of Iran,

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[118] *Yek-o-do* literally means one and two. But in recent years, it's a slang that means 'lets race' used among young Iranians in Iran.

the area around Caspian Sea), they took saturated form and therefore caused a stronger nostalgia among my informants, which in turn brought them closer to one another. When I asked my informants, where they would want to visit in Iran, they responded Shomal and Shiraz. When I asked them why, they gave me interesting detailed stories and memories they heard from their parents or relatives. It seemed to me that they had a pretty good understanding about Shomal. Melissa, a popular host of Bebin, told me: "I would love to go to Shomal. Shomal is so amazing, I have heard. I want to go to Shiraz and ancient sights to learn about the history and I want to go to Tehran and see what people my age do there. It's a completely different life over there."

In my interview with Mike Kazerouni, a host and producer in Bebin.TV in July of 2008, he expressed nostalgia and longing for a life that his parents had in Iran, which he could not have because of the problems of immigration and exile:

> A lot of Iranians my age can relate to their parents saying the good old days. There would drive to Shomal with their friends and come back, and they would go to this park to do this or this chayikhone (tea house) to do that, I think those are the things that were constant for that generation; whereas my generation or at least myself, was constantly on the move, ten years in Germany, 15 years here. So there is a difference. … I don't have that experience of the good old days. I never had good old days. My relationships have always been with other people. I was in a different group and community. …Our parents had their set of group of people that they grew up with. [sic]

Raha, another producer and host on Bebin.TV, agreed with Mike:

> There is a huge generational gap between me and my parents. Comparing to our parent's generation, I think our generation is more lost than they are. I think we are more homeless than they are. My dad talks about his memories as an adult, till the age of thirty. If you have thirty years of memory with your family next to you and be able to relate to the majority of the society, which I didn't have because I was always a minority here or in Sweden, you don't feel this lost. I am always searching for something. I am more curious to learn about me. I think in general there is more curiosity among the diasporas than the parent's generation. There is always this illusion for our parents that they can go back where they belong…I can't say that about myself. Even if the situation gets better and I can go back, I

don't know if I would make that decision. Because I don't have roots in there, my parents do. [sic]

PARTICIPATORY NOSTALGIA IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

In her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym divides nostalgia into two different categories: a) Restorative Nostalgia; and b) Reflective Nostalgia. In her view these two types of nostalgia characterize one's relationship to the past or to the imagined community[119]. This taxonomy does not explain the nature of longing nor its psychological makeup; rather, it is about how we view our relationship to a collective home. Nostalgia (*nostos*, return home, and *algia*, longing) "is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed". It is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but ...also a romance with one's own fantasy[120]. In Boym's definition, restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos*, the return home, and calls for building the lost home and patching up the memory gaps, while reflective nostalgia accentuates *algia,* longing an "imperfect process of remembrance."

Drawing from Boym's theory of nostalgia, and as Naficy previously argued, Iranian's exile TV constitutes restorative nostalgia through the electronic reproduction and circulation of traumatic experiences in Iran even after the sources of trauma were removed.

After the Iran-Iraq ceasefire and the ending of the hostage crisis, which were the final phases of the trauma that previously kept the exile population together, nostalgia shifted towards an abstract memory that could have existed if not for the revolution. There was a challenge to find cultural authenticity to stay away from the stigma caused

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[119] *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym, 2002: 41
[120] Boym, 2002: Xii

by the Islamic revolution, which excluded them from the society of their host country for many years. Iranians in the US had a problem entering social circles and so they tried to come up with a collective cultural authenticity that both helped them feel better about themselves and also slowly prepared society to let them enter the social arena. [121]

Reviving memories of Cyrus the Great is a perfect example of restorative nostalgia, which brought the authenticity that the Iranian-American community needed. Ruins of Persepolis represented a fragment of the intangible past and the image of it was massively produced and distributed among Iranian-Americans (posters to hang from the walls or the pictures of Persepolis woven into a carpet as "a miniature fragment of melancholic beauty"). It allowed the Iranian-Americans to fantasize about a past that could have existed (Iran to remain a humanitarian empire in the present world). Cyrus the Great was the perfect choice that unified all Iranians in this glorification of Iranian culture and heritage because it did not reinforce or undermine any religion, race or ideology. So it was a safe place for the majority to participate in the collective nostalgia of the Persian empire. This is what Arjun Appadurai defines as "ersatz nostalgia" or armchair nostalgia, "nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory"[122]. Since, as Boym points out, any nostalgia has a utopian or atopian element, the utopian nostalgia for Iranian culture was reaching for the highest and the most just empire in the world.

Exile TV produced in exile a cultural artifact and imaginary nation, or as formulated by Anderson an "imagined community," whose characteristics are that is a)

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[121] Naficy: 1993
[122] Boym, 2002: 38

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imagined, b) inherently limited, c) secularly sovereign and d) viewed as a community.[123].

As Naficy pointed out, Iranian exile TV focused its attention on pre-Islamic iconography, which is the dominant mode in exile, to form an ideological repression of the current Islamic state. Little attention was given to the process of assimilation into American culture.

POST-ELECTION NOSTALGIA

In the aftermath of 10th presidential election, this nostalgia without memory has been observed among both second generation Iranian-Americans and young Iranians in Iran. Prior to the election of June 12th, 2009, my Iranian informants in Iran, born after the revolution of 1979, compared the presidential rallies of Mousavi supporters, who are known as the Green Party,[124] to the demonstrations of their parents' generation that brought about the Islamic Revolution. Bardia, a filmmaker in Iran, wrote the following post on my Facebook wall on June 10th, 2009, just two days prior to the presidential election:

> We are experiencing the most astonishing days of our lives. Everyone is on the streets chanting: death to the dictator, doesn't matter if it is Shah or Doctor. Doctor refers to Ahmadinejad. [125]

As I suggested in chapter one, there had been a significant gap among the 1979's revolutionaries and their children who were born after the Islamic revolution until the present moment; however, the recent events finally brought these two groups together.

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[123] Naficy, 1983: 14-16
[124] Mir Hossein Mousavi was a reformist candidate in Iran's 10th presidential election. He used the color green, a symbolic color used in the Muslim world, to represent his campaign.
[125] Original text: Talieh enja jat kheily khalie darim ajib tarin rozhaye omremon ro tajrobe mikonim. Mardom hame to khiabon shoear midan ke: Marg bar dictator che shah bashe che doctor. Hatman midoni ke manzor az dictator doctor ahmadinejade.

While the idea of the 1979 revolution, due to the extreme Islamic fundamentalism, was denigrated by the children of the revolutionaries, the urge to protest and revolt for liberty during the presidential election of 2009 helped them (the younger generation) to come to terms with the revolution of their parents.[126] This would not have occurred if not for the awakening of nostalgia for the revolution days of 1979 that the current generation experienced through only their parents' memories and due to the unfolding of the current events. Suddenly, the young generation Iranians understood their parents' revolutionary ideas, and the nostalgia without memory formed a reality of its own. All of a sudden *the same revolutionary songs of 1979's revolution* were chanted by the Iranians in Iran and in the protests around the world.

On the other hand, the increasing sensation of nostalgia without memory in the aftermath of Iran's presidential election among the second generation Iranian-Americans urged them to participate even more in Iranian events and to join the first generation Iranians in diaspora in live protests. In many different cities around the world, Iranians in diaspora protested against what was referred to as 'the stolen election'. Although, many Iranian-Americans were not even eligible to vote,[127] they held posters that said: "Where is My Vote?" They also supported the Iranians in Iran virtually through social networking sites. On Facebook and Twitter, Iranians in diaspora joined the citizens in Iran by

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[126] Taken from the context of goodbye letters that I received from friends following the post-election who would do anything to reach freedom
[127] Many Iranians-Americans do not have Iranian passports

making their profile picture green. Many changed their profile picture completely to the

slogan "where is my vote."

With the death of many Iranian protesters by Basijis[128], some changed their profile

pictures to black (as a symbol of mourning) and others added blood to their profile

pictures.

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[128] Iran's militia

In another interesting turn of events, Iranian-Americans changed their last names to "Irani" to support the young Iranians in Iran. By doing this, they tried to tell the world that they belong to the greater community of Iranians.

As the news of huge number of arrests of journalists and twitterers in Iran spread, Iranian-Americans on Twitter told others to set their Twitter location to Tehran and timezone to GMT+3.30 to confuse Iranian security forces in hunting demonstrators.

What is important in the unfolding current events is that we are observing two different kinds of nostalalgia without memory. For both young Iranians in Iran and second generation Iranian-Americans, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was lived through the memory of their parents. Most of them have no memory of it and were born after the revolution. But because of the different ideology industry between the different media channels that each of these groups grew up with, the nostalgia among them functions differently.

Many second generation Iranian-Americans feel nostalgic about 'the good old days' that their parents had in Iran. They see the present situation as a good opportunity to reverse the government and go back to what existed before. Many of them presumably mainly those from pro-shah families clearly show their interest in the Shah's son returning to Iran and taking charge. In the protests of Iranians in LA, many bring the Flags of the Shah regime to show their support for the monarchists.

However, nostalgia among a young generation in Iran is different. Iranians in

Iran are not in favor of the Shah. As the amatuer videos on YouTube show, people in various cities in Iran chant: "Death to the dictator, no matter if this is Shah or Doctor." When I talked to various informants among second generation Iranian-Americans, even prior to the recent events, they often simplified the problem of Iran to Islam. In their opinion if Islam is taken out completely, a lot of the problems will be solved. But in videos of Iranians in Iran, young people chant in Arabic: "Allaho Akbar" (God is Great), which is a powerful Islamic saying that Muslims say in their prayers and is adopted from the Quran. This immediately shows the conflicting urgencies of the two groups, even though their nostalgia stems from the same historical moment of 1979. Iranians in Iran want a secular regime; but Iranians in the US want a country with no Islam at all.

From a media standpoint, we are also witnessing the unfolding of a new form of nostalgia coming from the digital communication technologies and the digital age of reproduction. Twitter and YouTube have been the major source in informing the Iranians worldwide.

NOSTALGIA WITHOUT MEMORY IN THE AGE OF YOUTUBE

On June 20th, Khameneyi, Iran's supreme leader, announced that any protester on the streets from then on will be also protesting against him and therefore against the Islamic Republic. The next day hundereds of thousands of people went to the street but the police and undercover military, including the imported hezbollah militia, scattered people and did not allow for any protest. In that same day, many were killed, including the Neda Agha Soltan, who became the icon of Iran's unfolding revolution. Neda's picture and video was circulated on all social networking sites.

What's particularly compelling in this circulation process is that Neda became a known figure for Iranian-Americans and Iranians in Iran who probably never met her. But the memory of her last seconds of life in videos on the web, following the stories and conspiracy theories that came with it, produced a strong nostalgia among all Iranians around the globe. Within a few hours of her death, the world saw Neda dying in front of the camera on YouTube, which drew significant international attention. Conspiracy theories and personal life stories circulated through email and Facebook. It seemed as if every Iranian knew Neda before her death.

Neda was standing and observing the sporadic protests in the area with another man when she was shot in the chest. After she collapsed to the ground, the man started to scream her name, trying to keep her awake. Stories circulated about the father who saw his daughter's death in his own arm. And the dramatization continued as people emailed "happy father's day to Neda's father,"[129] whose gift was to see his daughter in his arm. Stories came out about Neda's fight for freedom all her life. Stories about her lifestyle, her pictures and various different biographies circulated around – most of which had no real evidence. In fact, the man standing beside Neda turned out to be her music teacher, not her father. The real story turned out to be about a girl who was waiting to join the protest in her car, and stepped out only to avoid the stuffiness of the car. However, it did not matter if the real story of Neda was different than what people had imagined it to be. Emails, Facebook messages and Tweets produced an enormous nostalgia, different from all others discussed in this chapter, among Iranians around the world.

I argue that this nostalgia is unique for at least three reasons. Although the

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[129] June 21st is American's Father day but has no relevance in the Iranian culture.

nostalgia was stimulated by a video of Neda dying (only seconds long), no one really knew her in person. However, the digital reproduction of her images and videos as well as the hundreds of stories told about her on Twitter, Facebook and email produced the perfect image of a person who would turn out to be the rallying point of Iran's new unfolding revolution. Although nostalgia without memory was experienced differently among Iranians around the world, Neda became a converging point for all of them.

In the case of Neda, the dramatization of her real life story and the symbolic reproduction of her amateur death video produced a powerful nostalgia that could change the destiny of a nation. The video of Neda quickly became a rallying point for the reformist opposition. It is also ironic that someone with this name died in a protest – in Farsi, 'Neda' means 'calling' or 'voice', and even prior to 1979's revolution people would use the phrase 'Nedaye Azadi', meaning the voice of freedom or the calling for liberty. In the early years after the revolution, when people believed they had succeeded in earning their freedom, many parents named their children after the words that referred to liberty: "Raha" (free), "Azadeh"(freed), "Sahar" (dawn) and "Neda" (calling). Since Neda's death, the chanting words changed to "Death to the Islamic Republic." If Mosavi and the stolen election was an excuse for people to come to the streets and protest, it is now nostalgia for Neda that keeps them on the streets.

Reflective nostalgics know that home is beyond recognition, but this unfamiliarity and distance makes them tell their own stories to connect the past, present and future. Iranian immigrants and exiles felt guilt and distance after the revolution and especially because war ruined many places in Iran. They knew that what they imagined as Iran was not the current picture.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the affordances of Internet Protocol Telelvision (IPTV), employed by second generation Iranian-Americans in creating and repairing the future of Iranian culture and identity. In contrast to media produced by first generation Iranian-Americans, who mostly migrated to the US after the Islamic Revolution, the IPTV producers avoid fetishizing Iran; rather, by blurring the line between the producers and distributors, they try to represent an objective picture of the contemporary Iran. Through real footage coming from Iran, the emerging IPTV used by second generation Iranian-Americans cracks the image of a fetishized Iran, which was previously created by first generation Iranian-Americans. At the same time, the blurring line between the producers and distrubtors has raised the standards of production among Iranians, specifically in music production. In the case of Bebin.TV, Raha started a program that rated Iranian music from around the world. Thus for the very first time, entertainers had to compete with others who were not necessarily as popular or as famous around the world. Raha also rated the music by evaluating the rhythm and the lyrics, and helped the audience learn how to rate or even enjoy the music they hear. As a result, the entertainers in LA who previously had a monopoloy over the industry had to catch up with the emerging artists who came with new standards and sounds. The music industry has improved significantly since the start of Bebin.TV. Prior to Bebin.TV, the audience listening to Iranian music in Iran was declining; but as new sounds, rhythms and more meaningful lyrics emerged, the young generation who was now interested in the Western popular music began to listen to Iranian music and was introduced to the arts and style of Iranian music.

Bebin.TV has been pivotal in reviving and reparing the fractured Iranian culture that gave its place to Islamic ideologies after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. As the technologies of communication evolve, we are now witnessing a fast-paced change among Iranians around the world and in particular in Iran, who have been dealing with a hermetic culture for thousands of years. Today, tools such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogging are changing the face of Iran and the culture among the young generation. Studying the affordances of each of these emerging technologies can help scholars understand the ways that media can shape the future of Iran on the map of the world. The global digital revolution has created significant changes among nations; however in countries such as Iran, which has been blocked by its government from other cultures, it has produced an even larger impact on our understanding of the global map. Today we can observe how a minority of Iranians (second generation Iranian-Americans), can influence the culture of the majority of Iranians in Iran even from a distance. The internet and Web 2.0 affordances are bringing together Iranians around the world and opening channels of communication and dialogue between various social categories in Iran. Everyone can now participate in the formation of a new Iranian identity. And it is important to keep an eagle eye on the emerging technologies that potentially allow people to shape and reform the destinies of nations. As the geopolitical map of the world quickly changes, nationalism takes on new meanings, which should be further explored with each new communication technology that brings people together. Whether it be IPTV or Twitter, we are certainly opening a new chapter in telling the stories of nations. And Iran of the past thirty years is a great example to examine and understand the grammar of globalization.

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