



CINEMA III. DOCUMENTARY FILMS

CINEMA

iii. Documentary Films

Private documentary cinema (1318-33/1900-15). Before World War I most Persian documentaries were sponsored and viewed only by the Qajar ruling family and the upper classes. They were apparently technically primitive and in a simple narrative format, consisting of footage of news events, topics of current interest, and spectacles, usually filmed in long shot. Although there is little reliable information on this early period, the diary that Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah Qājār (1313-24/1896-1907) kept on his first trip to Europe makes it possible to pinpoint with rare accuracy the date of the first nonfiction footage shot by a Persian. The date was 18 August 1900 (21 Rabīʿ II 1318) and the place Ostend, in Belgium; the occasion was Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah's review of a "flower parade," during which some fifty floats passed by laden with flowers and girls tossing bouquets, which he joyously returned. The cinematographer was Mīrzā Ebrāhīm Khan 'Akkās-bāšī (1291-1333/1874-1915), the official court photographer, and the camera he used was a Gaumont that he had purchased on the orders of the shah in Paris a few weeks earlier (Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah, p. 160; Omīd, p. 42).

'Akkās-bāšī, who later adopted the name Moṣawwer-e Raḥmānī, was a



member of the new generation of Persian intelligentsia who had been educated abroad; he had spent about ten years of his life in Europe with his father, Mīrzā Aḥmad Khan Ṣanīʿ-al-Salṭana, court photographer to Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (r. 1264-1313/1848-96), and had himself been trained in photography. Back in Persia, in 1319/1901, he filmed the Moḥarram religious processions in Sabza-meydan, especially the *qama-zanī* (striking oneself with sharp blades), and the following year the lions in the royal zoo at Faraḥābād (Omīd, p. 43). These films, along with imported French and Russian newsreels, were shown at the royal palace and the houses of dignitaries on such convivial occasions as celebrations of weddings, births, and circumcisions (Gaffary, p. 2). ‘Akkās-bāšī thus created the model for a private form of cinema in Persia.

Probably the first public cinema in Persia was the noncommercial Sowlī cinema, established by Roman Catholic missionaries at Tabrīz in 1318/1900 (Malekpūr, II, p. 61). But it was Ebrāhīm Khan Ṣaḥḥāf-bāšī Tehrānī, an entrepreneur, constitutionalist, and antique dealer, who created what was to be the model for public cinema, though his own activities were short-lived. He probably saw a film for the first time in London in May 1897; it consisted of panoramas of Niagara Falls, soldiers marching, and trains on the move (Ṣaḥḥāf-bāšī, p. 36). On another trip to Europe in 1318/1900 he purchased a projector and a number of newsreels and other early films, which he first showed in the courtyard behind his shop in Tehran; in Ramaẓān 1322/November-December 1904 he opened the first public commercial cinema theater in Tehran (see i, above). Ṣaḥḥāf-bāšī’s cinema remained open for less than a month, however, possibly owing to religious objections raised by Shaikh Faẓl-Allāh Nūrī (executed 13 Rajab 1327/July 1909), the leading Shiʿite figure in Tehran at that time, and/or to royal displeasure at Ṣaḥḥāf-bāšī’s involvement in the [Constitutional movement](#) (Omīd, pp. 51-52). He was deprived of his property, sold his equipment, and went into exile abroad. It seemed that commercial cinema without either religious or royal patronage was not to be tolerated.

A number of filmmakers and exhibitors in this period had been educated abroad and were well connected with the ruling elite; others were immigrants or the children of immigrants. Mehdī (Mahdī) Rūsī Khan (1254-1347 Š./1875-1968), for example, was of mixed English and Russian background and was also an ardent royalist and court photographer to Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah (1324-27/1907-09). Toward the end of 1325/1907 he began to show Pathé films from France, first to the shah and his harem and privately in the homes of the



nobles and then, in 1326/1908, on a regular basis in two public theaters in Tehran (see i, above). The films apparently consisted of newsreels, travelogues of Russia and Madagascar, and several comedies (Omīd, pp. 61, 65; Tahāmīnezād, 1975, p. 71). Rūsī Khan was the second Persian, after ‘Akkās-bāšī, to film life in Persia. One of his films documented the mourning processions during Moḥarram 1327/January-February 1909; it was never shown in Persia (Gaffary, p. 4; see i, above). Although other immigrant exhibitors were active in the second decade of this century, they apparently did not make films themselves.

Public documentary cinema (1335-49 = 1309 Š./1916-30). Khan Bābā Mo’tazedī (born 1309/1892) was educated abroad, where he studied electrical engineering and then cinematography at the Gaumont factory in Paris. After his return to Tehran in 1334/1917 he established the first public cinema for women in Persia (Sīnemā K̄voršīd), where he showed his own films, principally newsreels (Omīd, p. 88; in 1307 Š./1928 ‘Alī Wakīlī opened the Sīnemā Zardoštīān, also exclusively for women; *Eṭṭelā’āt*, 20 Ordībehešt 1307/10 May 1928). He lived through a crucial period in Persian political life, spanning both Qajar and Pahlavi rule. He filmed Crown Prince Aḥmad Mīrzā, and, after the fall of the Qajars, he also filmed Reżā Shah (1304-20 Š./1925-41) and some of the various development projects that he initiated. His works included *Reżā Shah dar Majles-e Mo’assesān* (1304 Š./1925); *Tājgozārī-e Reżā Šāh dar Kāḡ-e Golestān* (1305 Š./1926); *Eftetāḡ-e Majles-e Šūrā-ye Mellī* (1305 Š./1926; Tahāmīnezād, 1975, p. 71); *Eftetāḡ-e rāh-e ahān-e šamāl* (1306 Š./1927); *Eftetāḡ-e Bānk-e Mellī-e Īrān* (1306 Š./1927); *Marāsem-e asb-davānīhā-ye Tehrān* (1315 Š./1936); and *Eftetāḡ-e Rādīo Tehrān* (1319 Š./1940). Mo’tazedī’s films were the first Persian newsreels to be shown regularly before feature films in public theaters (and in military camps). There is also a report that a Persian newsreel by an unknown filmmaker was shown in Tabrīz in 1308 Š./1929: It consisted of scenes of daily life in the city, with old and new buildings, the Šādeqīya *bāzār*, a natural ice-storage facility, and various city squares and shops (Tahāmīnezād, 1981, p. 21).

The shift from primarily private exhibition of documentaries to an essentially public medium took many years and seems to have been accomplished largely by Mo’tazedī. As the list of his newsreels shows, however, even though he was a semi-independent commercial filmmaker and exhibitor, the bulk of his footage documented either the activities of the shah himself or the progress achieved under his rule. Ordinary people were not yet considered appropriate



subjects for documentary cinema. The private, sponsored mode of cinematic discourse continued to predominate, for at least three main reasons. First was the model set at the beginning, when the court or the government sponsored the work of filmmakers, who showed their footage privately at court or in the private homes of the upper classes. This pattern of state sponsorship of documentary films has persisted throughout the history of Persian cinema and continues under the Islamic Republic. The second reason was the fact that the economic and technical infrastructure necessary for an indigenous documentary cinema had not yet developed. For example, the first primitive laboratory for film development (for printing intertitles) in Persia was put into operation by Mo'tazedī in 1334/1917, and the first school to train actors, directors, and production personnel was established as late as 1309 Š./1930 by Āvānes Ūhānīān (Ohanian, also called Oganians). In addition, the regulatory legislation necessary to protect fledgling local production had not evolved, and restrictive customs regulations and high duties impeded the importation of film stock and equipment. The third factor was general social and cultural conditions, which militated against the growth of a local film industry. The majority of the population was illiterate and could read neither the foreign intertitles nor those prepared in Persian by Mo'tazedī. Religious taboos against attending the cinema and against acting may also have hampered audience growth and professional participation; they were especially effective in limiting the attendance and participation of women. In fact, the religious press claimed a direct cause-and-effect relationship between movies and moral corruption among young people; depictions of lust in the cinema were supposed automatically to ignite them like fire "engulfing dry thistle" (Ḥakīmzāda, p. 31). Demands for censorship (see iv, below) were not uncommon (Amīr Jāhed, pp. 164-66). Persian documentaries were thus caught in a vicious cycle: Low attendance forced film makers to seek support from the state, and support from the state limited flexibility and choice of subject matter, thus keeping potential viewers away.

The dormant decade (1310s Š./1930s). By the early 1310s Š./1930s foreign sound newsreels were playing in Persia. In fact, in 1309 Š./1930 the minister of court viewed one such newsreel in the Palace Theater in Tehran (Šo'ā'i, 1973, p. 332). Paramount, Metro, Movietone, UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), and Pathé newsreels were all imported. The first sound newsreel in the Persian language, *Safar-e ra'īs-al-wozarā'* (The prime minister's journey) was apparently filmed by a Turkish photographer; in it the Persian prime minister, Moḥammad-'Alī Forūḡī, conferred with Kemal Atatürk and delivered a brief



speech in Persian. This film was shown widely in Persia in 1311 Š./1932 and provoked great excitement among audiences unaccustomed to hearing Persian spoken in the movies (Šo‘āī, 1973, p. 63).

Ebrāhīm Morādī, one of the pioneers of feature films in Persia, also contributed a milestone in documentary films during this decade, when, in 1314 Š./1935, with the support of the Ministry of education, he began to show educational films to students at the *Dār al-Fonūn* in Tehran (Tahāmīnežād, n.d., p. 116).

On 5 Dey 1314 Š./15 January 1936 the cabinet passed a set of regulations designed to encourage production of nonfiction films. All “first-class” cinemas were to show both a newsreel and a short film of “educational, industrial, geographic, or athletic” nature before each feature film (Šo‘āī, 1975, p. 593). “Second-class” cinemas were required to show only a newsreel before the main feature. There is no evidence, however, that these regulations actually did foster growth of the local documentary-film industry.

The war years (1320s Š./1940s). With the advent of World War II the tenuous infrastructure of the Persian film industry in general and the documentary branch in particular apparently collapsed. Only a few films seem to have been made, all of them at the end of the war or after; among them were Ebrāhīm Mo‘tamedī’s film on skiing (1324 Š./1945) and Abu’l-Qāsem Reżā’ī’s films *Manāẓer-e Tehrān* (Sights of Tehran, 1326 Š./1947), *Qoşūr-e salţanatī* (Royal palaces, 1326 Š./1947), and *Qesmat-ī az zendagānī-e koşūşī-e Şāhanşāh wa ‘Olyā Hażrat Maleka* (Scenes from the private lives of H.M. the king and H.M. the queen, 1326 Š./1947).

The only new organization devoted to the production of nonfiction films emerged toward the end of the 1320s Š./1940s, when the Persian military began to use films for propaganda purposes and a Captain Golsorkī and a Lieutenant Kālīqī established *Estūdiō Artš* (Armed forces film studio). A few of the films made by this unit found their way into public theaters. In one the transfer of Reżā Shah’s body from Egypt to Tehran was shown and in another the arrival of Moḥammad Reżā Shah at Tabrīz after the defeat of the Soviet-backed communist government in Azarbaijan in 1325 Š./1946 (Tahāmīnežād, 1981, p. 22).

Beside these occasional Persian documentaries and newsreels, foreign newsreels about the war dominated theater screens in the 1320s Š./1940s,



especially those from Movietone News and one from Germany, provided free to exhibitors by the British and German embassies respectively. Both the Allied and Axis armed forces documented their wartime activities extensively, employing either official military photographers or commercial newsreel companies. Much of this material appeared in Western newsreels, sometimes spiced with scenes of native life in the war zones. The German newsreel, which was shown repeatedly until the Allies invaded Persia in 1320 Š./1941, not only contained scenes filmed in Persia but was also accompanied by a Persian-language narration, both of which made it very popular with Persian audiences (Issari, 1979, I, p. 242). The Allied newsreels also sometimes featured Persian segments, and the American *News of the Day* began to include Persian-language narration after the war (for details on newsreels about Persia, see Naficy, 1984). During this period, apparently, many Persians went to the movies just to see Persian-language newsreels showing scenes from Persia.

The USIA newsreels (1330s Š./1950s). By 1333 Š./1954 foreign newsreels had lost their appeal, at least to Persian exhibitors, chiefly because the distributors of both *Movietone News* and *News of the Day* began charging fees for the use of their films. On 17 Tīr 1333 Š./8 July 1954 a new product was put forward to fill the void: *Akbār-e Īrān* (Iran news) was produced by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and soon became a weekly release. These newsreels were in Persian, and each contained scenes filmed in Persia. The United States Information Service (USIS, the USIA arm in Persia) supplied copies free of charge to cinemas throughout Persia and showed many of them to villagers and school children in its own forty mobile cinemas. By the time production ceased in 1343 Š./1964, 402 installments had been shown in Persia. The USIA continued sporadically to produce newsreels aimed specifically at Persian and Near Eastern audiences (for the contents of USIA newsreels, see Naficy, Š./1984, pp. 204-20; Issari, 1989).

Normally an installment of *Akbār-e Īrān* consisted of four or five stories, half of them dealing with Persia. The lengthy narration generally focused on projects in Persia funded by the United States under the American program of economic and technical aid known as Point Four (*ʿaṣl-e čahār*), the shah's activities and travels, important Persian news events, important news events and foreign-policy items from the United States, and human-interest features. Because these newsreels were considered official U.S. government products, an American officer supervised the USIS unit that produced them. The main task of putting the films together was, however, carried out by Persians, who



gained a great deal of experience in the process, but this experience did lock them into an “official” style of documentary.

The official documentary style. The real contribution of the USIS to the Persian documentary film coincided with the rise of Persian nationalism and the nationalization of the oil industry in the early 1330s Š./1950s. As part of the USIA program for winning the “hearts and minds” of noncommunist nations, the USIS began in 1330 Š./1951 to make documentary films widely available by means of its mobile film units in Persia. At first American films were dubbed in Persian, but soon a contract was awarded to a team from Syracuse University to come to Persia under the auspices of the Point Four program, originally to produce twenty-two films on geography, health, nutrition, and agricultural methods (Issari, 1989, pp. 165-72).

From 1330 Š./1951 until 1338 Š./1959, when it left Persia, the Syracuse team trained a large number of Persians in documentary-film production and set up production facilities, film-processing plants, sound-recording studios, and related departments at the Edāra-ye koll-e honarhā-ye zībā (Department of fine arts, DFA) in Tehran. With the help of newly trained Persians it also produced seventy-nine documentaries, which were shown in cinemas before the feature films and distributed to outlying areas via mobile units (Naficy, 1984, p. 190).

After the departure of the Syracuse team the DFA produced an average of between fifteen and twenty-five documentaries and propaganda films a year until 1344 Š./1965; some of them were shown abroad under the auspices of Persian embassies. It also began producing, in 1338 Š./1959, a biweekly propaganda newsreel called *Akbār* (News), emulating *Akbār-e Īrān*, with stories favoring the shah. In general the collaboration of the DFA and the USIS led to the entrenchment of an official documentary style with the following attributes: a tendency to idealize the person of the shah; support for state ideology, politics, and policies; and endorsement of American involvement in Persia. In ideological terms these films were designed to glorify, not to criticize, government policies and to demonstrate a link with the greatness of the Persian past. The devices of humor, dramatization, and reenactment were used in order to enliven them and make them interesting. They were slow-paced and employed a simple, linear, narrative structure. Off-camera narrators imparted information and cued the viewer to particular aspects of each scene.



Controlled proliferation (1340s-57 Š./1960s-78). The official documentary cinema was institutionalized in two ways. First, filmmakers educated in this style under the auspices of the USIS gradually found positions throughout the blossoming Persian motion-picture industry. As their own official films were widely distributed, they were able to set the standards for the documentary form; as managers of film production in government agencies they were in a position to enforce those standards; and as teachers in film schools they served as powerful models for new filmmakers. Second, in the mid-1340s Š./1960s the production of documentaries was consolidated in two major state agencies: Wezārat-e farhang o honar (Ministry of culture and art, MCA) and Rādīo wa televīzīon-e mellī-e Īrān (National Iranian radio and television, NIRT). Other state agencies also occasionally sponsored documentaries. This institutionalization suited the government's policy of using the communications media to promote its developmental and propaganda projects. The enormous budgets at the disposal of MCA and NIRT encouraged production of a great many documentaries, as well as diversification of subject matter. The control exerted by these agencies tended to discourage diversity in style and content, however.

Documentaries of this period (other than television news programs) may be categorized thematically as follows (for details, see Naficy, 1981).

1. Institutional documentaries. Under the aegis of Anjoman-a komak be joḍāmīān (Society for assistance to lepers) the poet Forūḡ Farroḳzād directed *Kāna sīāh ast* (The house is doomed; 1340 Š./1961), a humane and poetic film on the lives of lepers in a colony near Tabrīz. The National Iranian Oil Company produced a large number of technical films on oil and petrochemical subjects and sponsored films about progress and modernization in Persia. It underwrote the work of the writer Ebrāhīm Golestān, who made a number of documentaries, including a highly acclaimed, though somewhat verbose, propaganda film for the oil industry, *Mawj o marjān o kārā* (Wave, coral, and rock, 1344 Š./1965). In 1354 Š./1975 the Pahlavi dynasty celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a full year of festivities. Many agencies were required to produce films heralding their achievements under the Pahlavis; they are included in this category because they were devoted not only to the institution of monarchy but also to the achievements of the individual sponsoring institutions. NIRT's schedule included the broadcast of such a film on an almost weekly basis, reflecting the enormity of the project, which strained the resources of the industry and caused an unprecedented inflationary rise in the



cost of all film services and equipment (personal observation).

2. Fine-arts documentaries. The MCA sponsored many documentaries about Persian history and arts and crafts. Moḥammadqolī Sattār directed *Esfahān* (1336 Š./1957), a detailed presentation of the historical monuments of the city. Moṣṭafā Farzāna directed three films, including the award-winning *Mīnīātorhā-ye īrānī* (Persian miniatures, 1337 Š./1958). Fereydūn Rahnemā, a gifted poet and writer, directed *Takt-e Jamšīd* (Persepolis, 1340 Š./1961), a poetic film in which he was able, through careful editing, to recreate the grandeur and decay of the famous palace. Throughout the 1340-50s Š./1960-70s, Manūčehr Ṭayyāb filmed a large number of highly visual and well-made documentaries on traditional crafts and architectural monuments of Persia, including *Serāmīk* (Ceramics, 1343 Š./1964), *Masjed-e jāme'* (The congregational mosque, 1349 Š./1970), and *Me'mārī-e šafawīya* (Safavid architecture, 1353 Š./1974). Golestān also directed *Tappahā-ye Mārīk* (The mounds of Mārīk, 1343 Š./1964) on archeological discoveries in northern Persia.

3. Ethnographic documentaries. There were many films about Muslim religious institutions and rituals. Abu'l-Qāsem Rezā'ī directed an intimate film on the pilgrimage to Mecca, *Kāna-ye Kodā* (The house of God, 1347 Š./1968). In *Adyān dar Īrān* (Religions in Iran, 1350 Š./1971) Ṭayyāb focused on the coexistence of many different religions in Persia. Under the sponsorship of NIRT Nāšer Taqwā'ī directed two well-assembled ethnographic films: *Bād-e jenn* (The sorcerer's wind, 1349 Š./1970), narrated by the poet Aḥmad Šāmlū, dealt with possession and exorcism rituals practiced on the Persian Gulf coast, and *Arba'īn* (Forty [days after 'Āšūrā'], 1350 Š./1971), shot in Būšeher, is a highly visual documentary on the religious procession and rituals in Būšeher on the fortieth day of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn (see [arba'īn](#)). Another noted filmmaker from NIRT, Parvīz Kīmīawī, directed *Yā zāmen-e āhū* (Oh, protector of the deer, 1349 Š./1970), an uncanny and intimate documentary of a pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Rezā in Mašhad. Anthropologist Nāder Afšār-e Nāderī and filmmaker Ġolām-Ḥosayn Ṭāherīdūst each made a film called *Balūṭ* (Acorn, 1345 Š./1966 and 1352 Š./1973 respectively) set in the Kūhgīlūya region of the Zagros mountains. Nāderī's film centers on the preparation of bread from acorns, a process that he showed in the context of the daily activities of the nomads over a period of one year. Ṭāherīdūst's film, on the other hand, shows the preparation of acorns by one family; it was filmed in only two days. Finally, 'Alī-Ašḡar Ašḡarīān made *Šabīh-e šahādat* (The



enactment of martyrdom, 1355 Š./1976), an ambitious five-camera documentary of the mourning rituals for Ḥorr b. Yazīd Rīāḥī and ‘Abbās b. ‘Alī during performances of the *ta’zīa* (Shi’ite passion play).

4. Documentaries on social problems. Beginning in the mid-1340s Š./1960s a number of socially conscious films were made, perhaps partly in response to the brief uprising of 1342 Š./1963 and the consequences of the shah’s so-called White Revolution (Enqelāb-e safīd), both of which represented attempts to deal with the deep social tensions and widespread feelings of injustice. They were subjected to censorship and limitations on public exhibition, however, so that often they followed a closed path from the laboratory to the archive. For example, Kāmrān Širdel made a number of documentaries for MCA that were rarely shown; they included *Zendān-e zanān* (The women’s prison, 1344 Š./1965) and *Qaḷ’a* (The castle, 1345 Š./1966), about prostitution in Tehran’s red-light district, Šahr-e Now. A number of critical and even cynical films about social-service institutions were never or only very rarely exhibited, for example, Ḳosrow Sīnā’ī’s *Ānsū-ye hayāhū* (Beyond the sound barrier, 1347 Š./1968), about a school for the deaf and mute; Reżā ‘Allāmazāda’s *Šab-e momtadd* (Eternal night, 1351 Š./1972), about a school for the blind; and Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Mohīnī Ḥasanābādī’s *Ordū-ye kār* (The labor camp, 1353 Š./1974), partly filmed clandestinely, about inmates in a government work camp, who express their dissatisfaction with the system eloquently. The documentaries on social problems violated some of the codes of the official style. In particular their directors shifted the mode of discourse from praise to criticism and threw off the narrative straitjacket by experimenting with different modes of address.

5. Avant-garde documentaries. Makers of avant-garde films extended the subversive tendencies of the social documentaries a step further by introducing bolder experiments with form and structure, often as a means of camouflaging content and evading censorship. Among these strategies of formal, and ultimately political, subversion was experimentation with a hybrid form combining fictional and documentary elements. Aḥmad Fārūqī’s *Ṭolū’-e fajr* (The coming of twilight, 1343 Š./1964) combined documentary footage of Isfahan with the story of a budding relationship between two children. Kīmīāwī’s short film *Pe meṭl-e pelīkān* (P as in “pelican,” 1351 Š./1972) and his feature-length *Bāḡ-e sangī* (The stone garden, 1355 Š./1976) both center on two old men who, despite living in ruins or desolate wastes, have rich imaginations that suffuse and transform their barren physical environments.



By mixing documentary and recreated scenes Kīmīāwī not only evoked the lives of these two men but managed to break free from and to “problematize” the official style.

Another strategy involved experiments with editing, in order to escape the dominance of narration, which was often verbose. Ḥajīr Dārīūs’s *Gowd-e moqaddas* (The sacred pit, 1343 Š./1964) and Ṭayyāb’s *Rītm* (Rhythm, 1350 Š./1971) are examples. There were also formal experiments of an impressionist nature, including Kayūmarṭ Derambakš’s *Sārbānān* (The camel drivers, 1353 Š./1974) and *Bāzār mīgeryad* (The *bāzār* weeps, 1355 Š./1976), made by two students, ‘Abbās Bāqerīān and Reżā Ġarawī.

Širdel’s *Ūn šab ke bārūn ūmad* (The night it rained, 1346 Š./1967) used irony and parody to call into question the notions of “documentation” and “reality,” offering multiple and often conflicting views of the heroic action of a boy who stops a train before its derailment. This film is one of the few Persian documentaries that “deconstructs” itself by placing the film-making process in the foreground. Such avant-garde films were few, however, and, like the social documentaries, they suffered from censorship and delayed exhibition. For example, *Ūn šab ke bārūn ūmad* was first shown eight years after its completion and then only at a film festival.

The institutionalization of the official documentary functioned as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it meant steady financial support, which was otherwise unavailable in Persia. On the other, it meant that, even though sometimes nontraditional and unofficial films escaped preproduction censorship, they might not be exhibited. They would be dispatched directly to the archive shelf to languish indefinitely. This situation was possible because MCA and NIRT, which sponsored the majority of Persian documentaries, were also in charge of the commercial exhibition and broadcast of these films.

Revolutionary period (1357-60 Š./1978-81). In the feverish atmosphere of revolution all official film production ceased. In its place there was a movement to document activities in opposition to the shah, in which both feature and documentary filmmakers participated. Temporarily freed from censorship and organized repression and fired by revolutionary ardor, individuals and film groups used equipment and raw stock “liberated” from government agencies to record the growing intensity of the demonstrations. After the departure of the shah and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in late 1357 Š./early 1979 much of this footage was compiled into raw sound-



and-vision pieces and broadcast by NIRT. *Āzādī* (Freedom, 1358 Š./1979) and many similar films, often shot in super 8 format, are examples. The events of the Revolution, the taking of American hostages, and the war with Iraq all contributed to development of a new documentary style: compilation. At this early stage the documentary genre had no analytical dimension; rather, cursory but powerful raw footage of contemporary sounds and sights was presented. Many compilations were shown on national television, now called *Šadā wa sīmā-ye jomhūrī-e eslāmī* (Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic, VVIR).

Many government agencies sponsored documentaries about the events of the Revolution, its roots, and its aftermath. The former Ministry of cultural affairs, now *Wezārat-e eršād-e eslāmī* (Ministry of Islamic guidance), supported Ḥosayn Torābī's *Barā-ye āzādī* (For freedom, 1358 Š./1979), Amīr Nāderī's *Jostojū* (The search, 1359 Š./1980), and Asad-Allāh Nīk-Nežād's *Dard-e hamsangar-am* (The pain of my fellow in the trenches, 1360 Š./1981). Kānūn-e parvareš-e fekrī-e kūdakān o nowjavānān (Center for the intellectual development of children and young adults) sponsored 'Abbās Kīārostamī's *Do rāh-e ḥall barā-ye yak mas'ala* (Two solutions for one problem, 1357 Š./1978), Moḥammad-Rezā Moqqadasī's *Kūrapaz-kāna* (The brick factory, 1360 Š./1981), and Moḥammad-Rezā Aslānī's *Kūdak o este'mār* (Children and colonialism, 1360 Š./1981). Independent filmmakers were also active. For example, Bārbod Ṭāherī made *Soqūṭ-e 57* (The fall of 57, 1358 Š./1979), which was widely shown and then suppressed.

A new development in this period was the emergence of nongovernmental nationwide networks for video and film exhibition, which were managed by opposition groups. The two leading groups were *Sāzmān-e mojāhedīn-e ḳalq* and *Sāzmān-e čerīkhā-ye fedā'ī-e ḳalq* (see confederation of students), which established networks for dissemination of information and political indoctrination and agitation. The *Mojāhedīn* relied on a video-distribution system, which carried their own products to supporters throughout the country. The *Fedā'īān*, on the other hand, chose a more expensive film-distribution system, in which multiple copies of films were made and exhibited in universities and colleges throughout the country; this network was a commercial enterprise.

The *Mojāhedīn* programs consisted largely of unedited footage of events and rallies or of speeches by its leaders. Examples include *Tazāhorāt-e mādarān-e mosalmān* (Demonstration of Muslim mothers, 1358 Š./1979?), *Mošāḥaba bā kānavādahā-ye K'vošdel wa Du'l-Anwār* (Interview with the K'vošdel and Du'l-



Anwār families, 1358 Š./1979), *Soḡanrānī-e Mas'ūd Rajawī* (Mas'ūd Rajawī's speech, 1358 Š./1979), and *Soḡanrānī-e barādarān Mas'ūd Rajawī wa Mūsā Kīābānī* (Speeches by the brethren Mas'ūd Rajawī and Mūsā Kīābānī, 1359 Š./1980). The Fedā'īān had a more varied repertory, including reedited documentaries from Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and eastern Europe dubbed in Persian, as well as indigenous documentaries put together by Fedā'īān members or sympathizers. *Harf bezan torkaman* (Speak up, Turkman, 1358 Š./1979), directed by 'Allāmazāda, was one such film; fifty copies were circulated. *Marg bar amperīālīzm* (Death to imperialism, 1358 Š./1979), a filmed play staged in the streets of Tehran by Sa'īd Solṭānpūr, was another example. Members of the Kurdish resistance movement also produced documentaries about various military encounters with forces of the Islamic government, most of which were shown abroad. They included *Dargīrthā-ye Mahābād* (Engagements in Mahābād, 1359 Š./1980?) and *Jang-e Sanandaj* (Battle of Sanandaj, 1359 Š./1980).

The operation of these opposition networks was gradually brought to a halt after 1359 Š./1980, when the government launched its cultural revolution (Enḡelāb-e farhangī) and closed all the universities, thus eliminating access to halls, projectors, and student audiences, especially for the Fedā'īān. By the mid-1360s Š./1980s, when the government began systematically to suppress all opposition, no oppositional film movement remained. Instead, an official Islamic documentary cinema emerged, sponsored by the television networks, the Ministry of Islamic guidance, Bonyād-e mostaž'afān (Foundation for the oppressed), Jehād-e sāzandagī (Reconstruction campaign), Setād-e basīj (Mobilization corps), and Bonyād-e sīnemā-ye Fārābī (Fārābī cinema foundation; on cinema under the Islamic Republic, see Naficy, 1987). The most novel development was the Čehel šāhed (Forty witnesses) film unit formed by the Mobilization Corps after the beginning of the war with Iraq. This unit comprised secondary-school filmmakers and sound men, who, with little training, filmed the action at the front, sustaining many casualties in the process. For security reasons, little of their footage has been assembled into completed films. One exception is *Moḡarram dar Moḡarram* (Moḡarram within Moḡarram, 1362 Š./1983), about an operation with the code name Moḡarram, which took place during that month.

Post-revolutionary documentaries in exile (1357-89 Š./1978-1990). Some of the footage shot during the Revolution and immediately afterward was compiled into documentaries by Persians living in exile, all of whom opposed the shah



and supported the Revolution. Many were made by leftist student filmmakers, and most represented attempts, with varying degrees of bombast, to report the political history of Persia in the current century, culminating in the revolution against the shah. Among these films were *Bloody Friday/Jom'a-ye kūnīn* (1358 Š./1979) by Rafīq Pūyā (Rafiq Pooya) and Marcia Goodman, *Īrān dar bohūhha-ye enqelāb* (Persia in the throes of revolution, 1358 Š./1979) by the Iranian Students Association, *Šō'lahā-ye āzādī* (Flames of freedom, 1358 Š./1979) by the [Confederation of Iranian Students](#), and *Till Revolution/Tā enqelāb* (1359 Š./1980) by Moḥammad Tehrānī. One of these films, *Iran. Inside the Islamic Republic* (1359 Š./1980), by Biḡān Sālīānī, was shown by the Public Broadcasting System in the United States. It is a feature-length film based on Sālīānī's six-month stay in Persia in 1357 Š./1978-79. It is technically the most polished of the Persian documentaries, but it is flawed by a one-sided view of the revolutionary potential of clerics in Persian history. Pūyā, in his feature-length *In Defense of People/Dar defā' az mardom* (1360 Š./1981), included footage of the trial of a group of leftists broadcast on television during the reign of the shah to frame his analysis of the rise and fall of the shah and subsequent political developments in Persia, including the failed military attempt to rescue American hostages.

Of the few documentaries made by Persians not directly related to the Revolution, but directly or indirectly focused on issues of exile and displacement, the following are notable. Sohrāb Šahīd(-e) Tāleṭ's German documentary, *Die langen Ferien der Lotte H. Eisner* (1979), in which the respected German author and critic recalls her childhood, friendship with famous German directors, departure from Germany during the rise of Nazism, and subsequent life in exile. Farzān Nawāb's *The Day They Went Hunting* (1981) is an avant-garde film, in which pictures of Germans living in Persia in the 1320s Š./1940s are interwoven with those of Persian exiles currently in the United States to create a powerful impressionistic study. In the melancholic but quietly defiant short film *Nafīr* (1982), Jahānšāh Ardalān mourns the maltreatment of classical Persian music by the Islamic government. Jamsheed Akramī's feature-length *Dreams Betrayed. A Study of Political Cinema in Iran (1969-1979)* is an exhaustive examination of Persian narrative fiction cinema through interviews with five filmmakers, extensive and judicious selections from their films, and analyses provided by American scholars. Hūšang Mošīrī's *Muhammad Ali Mahmat* (1988) focuses on the problems of an Iraqi Kurdish artist in self-exile in Sweden. In *Laḥazāt-i bā Nāder Nāderpūr* (1989), Bārbod Tāherī eulogizes the well-known Persian poet on his sixtieth birthday,



including scenes of his life in Los Angeles and interviews with him and others. Finally, Peršeng Šādeq̄wazīrī made two films in English: *Journal from Iran* (1986) is a personal account of the filmmaker's visit to post-revolutionary Persia, which documents daily life in Tehran during the Iraqi air raids, and *Far from Iran* (1990), a report on young Persians in the United States, living with and combating negative stereotypes.

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