

Review of *Khaneh Ma: These Places We Call Home* by Hamid Naficy in  
***A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4: The Globalizing Era, 1984-2010***  
**(Duke University Press, 2012)**

Another notable return-to-origin documentary is Anna Fahr's ninety-minute film *Khaneh Ma: Places We Call Home* (2006), which charts her return after ten years to Iran, the country of her cultural origin, along with other family members arriving from Europe. Fahr, a second-generation Iranian, was born in 1981 in Rolla, Missouri, and received her BFA in film production from Concordia University's School of Cinema in Montreal, which awarded her the Mel Hoppenheim Award for Outstanding Achievement in Film Production for her Super 16mm short fiction film, *Joshua's Garden* (2003). Her first feature, *Khaneh Ma* (literally, *Our Home*) creates a tender and textured "family portrait" of three generations in her family, all of them gathering in Mashhad and in the nearby hometown of Bojnurd for companionship, traveling, feasting, and dancing. Several family members receive special treatment. One is her grandfather, Mohammad Taqi Sepasi, whose name Fahr adopted for her production company, Sepasi Films. As Fahr told me in e-mails, he was the owner of the Sa'di Cinema in Bojnurd, a premier movie house specializing in foreign imports, which was seized by the government after the revolution-appropriated by the Foundation of the Dispossessed-and it has remained closed and is in a deteriorating condition (Naficy 2007a). Then there is her grandmother, to whose powerful life story Fahr attentively listens: Her parents arranged to marry her at nineteen to a strict religious man, who already had two children. She produced six children of her own, but many irreconcilable differences separated the young woman from her older husband, the most important of which was the children's education. She wanted her children to receive higher education, while he wanted them limited to elementary schooling. In a radical move, she took charge of the children's education, taking them to school, registering them, and finally supporting their going abroad for higher education-the first in her family. And finally, there is the torn subjectivity of a family member, Kurosh, planning to emigrate to Canada along with his young wife, Mandana, and a child. He is pulled between the certainty of roots and the allure of routes, a situation he explains to the camera with eloquence and tenderness (figure 86). This in-betweenness is not limited to this family member who is about to emigrate, but extends to the director, who relates in her "Director's Statement" that, "Growing up, I've always had the sense of being caught between two worlds: the one in which I lived, which I

Review of *Khaneh Ma: These Places We Call Home* by Hamid Naficy in  
***A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4: The Globalizing Era, 1984-2010***  
**(Duke University Press, 2012)**

encountered daily, and the one that existed to me in smaller samplings, in remnants, passing fragrances. Never imposing itself too heavily upon my life, the fainter of my two worlds has remained a quiet presence throughout it. It has followed me till this day." Fahr evokes these cultural and synesthetic dimensions of Iranian family life in the many family gatherings; their joys at companionship, dancing, feasting, and musical performances; and the intimacy, tender kissing, hugging, and caressing when they meet and depart at various arrivals and departures.

The festive and malleable Iranian home that she portrays is a far cry from the somber and rigid Iran that the Islamic Republic projects and that the Western mediaworktends to propagate. It is also different from the image that some Iranian exiles favor, causing controversy when *Khaneh Ma* premiered at the Rendez-Vous du Cinema Quebecois in 2006. As she notes, "some people were shocked because I didn't feed them images of religious fundamentalism, or any of the images that they were expecting to see.... I was not only shocked at reactions from non-Iranians, but also from Iranians themselves..... What I explained to them, when they asked why I didn't focus on the human rights violations, [was that] a distant, second generation perspective, I see things quite differently."<sup>41</sup> This latter point is one of the fundamental factors differentiating emigre films from ethnic films-their generational distance. Nevertheless, certain Iranian spectators advised Fahr to remove scenes that raised critical questions about Islam, fearing that they would pose a problem for family members at home and result in the film's banning there. For that reason she cut five minutes from it.