

# Exilic, Diasporic, and Ethnic Media: Hamid Naficy's Oeuvre from an International Communication Perspective

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Hamid Naficy is justly recognized as the foremost authority on Iranian cinema and its social history. A prolific scholar, he has written on various topics and areas in film studies. Among these, and beyond expository and theoretical writings on Iranian cinema and its history, he has produced scholarship on the Middle Eastern cinema, Palestinian film letters, exilic cinema, ethnographic film, Third World spectatorship and modes of address, transnational cinema, independent transnational film genre, and Iranian Émigré Cinema, among others. My contention in this paper is that although this professional identity is accurate and well deserved, it is reductive for the work he has produced. Naficy's oeuvre covers a wider range of scholarly preoccupations and theoretical and empirical domains. Although my discussion in this paper traverses these different domains, I write from a specific disciplinary location,

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that of International Communication. I argue that his work is trans/inter-disciplinary in character, operating at the intersection of three specific areas of Cultural Studies, “post-colonial” theory, and media theory. The connection between these three areas is tied to specific articulations and problematizations of borders, belonging, Otherness, (trans)national imaginary, states of liminality, and the broader question of culture’s relationship to power and geopolitics. I make my argument by indexing Naficy’s work to a range of topics, concepts and problematizations central to the field of International Communication. In this context, I hope to demonstrate that Naficy’s oeuvre is best explained beyond the confines of cinema studies precisely because it engages and inhabits borders and embodies the porosity of borders of various kind, be they intellectual, disciplinary, affective, geopolitical, or geographical.

### **In the Beginning...**

I begin with some biographical information, not as evidence but as anecdotes, to suggest how scholarships, as abstraction as they might seem, produce specific effects and become organizing elements of other contexts. Anecdotes, as Meghan Morris observes, are “primarily referential. They are oriented futuristically towards the construction of a precise, local, and *social* discursive context, of which the anecdote then functions as a *mise en abyme*. That is to say, anecdotes are not expressions of personal experience but allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working.”<sup>1</sup> Two formative encounters are revealed in the anecdotes that frame my discussion in this paper. One of these anecdotes involves my first encounter with the work of Hamid Naficy. The other is about a teacher of mine in middle school in Iran that admonished me about my cinematic heroes.

I must have been 15 or 16 years old, if not younger, when I first saw Hamid Naficy’s name in print. I believe it was in *Film* (فیلم), a Persian-language magazine devoted to cinema I used to read in Iran as a teenager. Elsewhere I had seen his writings on film translated into Persian from

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<sup>1</sup>Meghan Morris, “Banality in Cultural Studies” in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. P. Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 15.

English. I fancied myself as a film buff, and whenever I saw a text written by an author with an Iranian name that had been translated into Persian I would take interest in it. I would ask myself, what is it like to write in a language that was not one's native language? What was it like to read the same writing after it was translated into one's native language? It was fascinating to me. Moreover, I wondered, how does one write about cinema in a language that is not one's own native language? It struck me as an impossible task. After all, I thought cinema as an art form, much like poetry, resisted "translation." Could it be that it takes a particular talent to do that? At the same time, I asked myself: Could it be that there is something about cinema that makes it different, more susceptible to translation, something that is transnational in its essence? At the time, the word "international" was more meaningful to a young person in Iran than transnational.

The second anecdote is about a formative experience I had as a young person. Around the same time, I had been admonished in school by one of my teachers, a certain gentleman by the name of Mr. Attaran, for a drawing I had done in an art class. Having produced a drawing of a Hollywood star (Charles Bronson), he told me my art project reflected "cultural bankruptcy" on my part. I did not understand what that meant. I think I was only fourteen years old. Several years later, I moved to the United States to start my undergraduate education and the pursuit of higher education. I abandoned my desire to study chemistry, a subject I always enjoyed, partly because Mr. Attaran's admonition had stayed with me. I was determined to study a field in which I could explore what it means to be "culturally bankrupt." Against this background, I chose the topic of my first paper as an undergraduate student in the United States ambitiously. I had decided to write, in an International Communication class, which was now my major, a paper titled, "What is Cultural Imperialism?" Although the paper was not my best work in the eyes of my professor, it put me on a path that led me to International Communication as a professional preoccupation and a field of inquiry. At the intersection of these two contexts one could see the relationship of culture and territory, culture and place, culture and mobility (migra-

tion and exile), culture and geopolitics, all of which can be formalized as scholarly inquiries addressing the problem of border. Naficy's work goes beyond cinema studies to cut across these domains and presents itself as resources for addressing Communication and the border.

The designation of International Communication as a "field" rather than a "discipline" is intentional in this context and it foretells a conceptual complication that I wish to exploit productively. As I have argued elsewhere, the heterogeneity of scholarly pursuits and their objects of study under the banner of International Communication does not accommodate any unmuddled disciplinary identity.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, attempts at defining what constitutes the field gets us entangled in arguments over definitions and disciplinary borders, though such arguments are sometimes heuristic. However, designating international communication studies as a "field" gets us closer to viewing international communication studies as a mode of "organizing inquiry." As Peters has argued, ways of organizing knowledge is historically mutable. The impulse to organize knowledge into fields and disciplines is a vestige of a past: "Through the 19th century, the diverse inquiries thitherto done mainly by moral philosophers and historians became rationalized into the social sciences as we know them: history, economics, sociology, psychology, political science, and anthropology."<sup>3</sup> Instead of fretting over not being one of those disciplines, he argues, "we might more usefully think of it as a prime example of a newer, nascent way of organizing inquiry."<sup>4</sup> Inquiry tends to ignore the established disciplinary *boundaries*, and is driven by preoccupation with topics. As Peters observes, "We all study *topics* today; 'studies' can be attached to almost any area of inquiry."<sup>5</sup> In this sense, much of the work in Communication Studies, International Communication included, cuts across traditional disciplinary *borders*. Moreover, in

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<sup>2</sup>M. Semati, "Introduction" in *New Frontiers in International Communication Theory*, ed. M. Semati (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2004), 1-16.

<sup>3</sup>J. Peters, "Genealogical Notes on "The Field," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 132.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 132.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 133.

showing how Naficy's work addresses various topics ("areas") of interest to International Communication, I hope my presentation in this paper reveals the equally interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary character of Naficy's work. His work might be characterized as, to use a concept he deploys in his writings, "interstitial," for its basic character productively falls between the boundaries and not within them.

### **Indexing Naficy's Work to International Communication**

The range of topics in International Communication encompassed in Naficy's work is wide-ranging. Here I have limited space and will only address a few. I start with one of the most obvious connections to International Communication as a field, and that is the topic of "development," as addressed from the theoretical perspective of "modernization." His account of the social history of Iranian cinema outlines the modernization perspective while avoiding its apolitical tendencies.<sup>6</sup> Cinema in this context is not simply a cultural product that is exported. Rather, it has to be explicated as an element in a complex of transformations across Iranian society and history. In that regard, one of Naficy's goals in this social history project is to "situate Iranian cinema at the intersection of state-driven authoritarian modernization, nationalist and Islamist politics, and geopolitics during its tumultuous century, charting the manner in which local, national, regional, and international powers competed for ascendancy in Iran, affecting what Iranians saw on screens, what they produced, and the technologies they adopted."<sup>7</sup> As Naficy treats it, that complex includes "the emergence of mature capitalism, organized entrepreneurial investment, centralized and industrialized manufacturing, free market competition, and extensive import and export across national borders."<sup>8</sup>

Naficy's narrative takes account of modernization projects in rela-

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<sup>6</sup>Although he had presented elements of this social history in other works, the four volumes of *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011-2012), present the most comprehensive account.

<sup>7</sup>H. Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 3, *The Artisanal Era, 1897-1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), xxi-xxii.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

tionship to both internal factors (state formation, local cultural dispositions and norms, etc.) and external factors (Iran's integration into the neocolonial and capitalist Western economies). His discussion of "syncretic Westernization," a mixture of identification and alienation, provides nuances of the cultural dimensions of "Occidentalization" of Iranians and all the ambivalence toward modernity and modernization they display. In this narrative of "modernization," Naficy provides an expansive view of development and modernization in meticulous details.<sup>9</sup> In discussing the professional structure that came to govern the film industry, for example, he shows that the industry needed to undergo modernization and industrialization in both its production, distributional and exhibition infrastructures, and its professional structures: "Civil institutions were redesigned to recognize and protect the movie industry's various professions, to preserve the industry's products, and to promote the study, criticism, and propagation of the industry and its products."<sup>10</sup> In short, the analyses he provides in his social history of Iranian cinema offers an extensive discussion of various dimensions of modernization and developments that is at once theoretically rich and empirically grounded.

The geopolitical encounter between Iran and the West in relationship to politics of culture is addressed in Naficy's work in a manner that recalls the origins of International Communication in propaganda studies and its latter day variants of "strategic communication" and "public diplomacy." In this context, Naficy's discussion of instrumentalization of culture includes aspects of cultural imperialism arguments that have been a part of International Communication in various forms for decades.<sup>11</sup> Reflecting on the state's responses to the unrest that followed the disputed presidential election of 2009 in Iran,

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<sup>9</sup>H. Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol.3, *The Islamicate Period, 1977-1984* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>11</sup>See H. Naficy, "Faster Than a Speeding Bullet, More Powerful Than a Locomotive: Mutual Instrumentalization of Culture, Cinema, and Media by Iran and the United States," in *Media, Power and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran*, ed. Y. Kamalipour (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2010), 205-220.

Naficy “historicizes this most recent resurfacing of the cultural assault in the context of the mutual debate about political instrumentalization of culture and media in order to show its roots, variety of forms, and continual evolution.”<sup>12</sup> Here Naficy unpacks decades of Islamic Republic’s deployment of culture to vilify and intimidate its opponents and critics both internationally and domestically. Although the discourse of cultural imperialism, with its critical Marxist lineage, is usually an occasion to interrogate the presence (“dumping”) of Western (i.e., American) cultural products in the Global South, Naficy shows how it is used as a pretext in Iran to silence critics and justify repressive measures.

The instrumentalization of culture in Iran has included specific cultural productions and broader cultural policies that intended to implement ideological goals and visions of the state. Using state-run broadcasting system, for example, the state has routinely targeted intellectuals, writers, artists and other cultural forms it deems a threat to its hegemonic order. Television programs such as *Hoviyat* (“Identity”) reproduced the cultural assault thesis by claiming Iranian intellectuals, be they inside or outside Iran, were the agents of foreign powers who were the enemies of the Islamic Republic. Later on, other broadcasting programs would vilify cultural forms such as rap, rock or heavy metal music as “unIslamic,” pronouncing them as corrupting influences on the Iranian youth, going as far as claiming that such cultural activities would lead to devil-worshipping. This approach to culture was largely in line with the “cleansing” (“*paksazi*”) of cultural and intellectual life of the nation during the “cultural revolution” that had taken place immediately after the revolution of 1979. However, such policies have largely been unsuccessful in “Islamization” of popular culture. The opposition to hardline policies by political figures and entities associated with the reform movement has meant the struggle over the control of culture and cultural policies is a proxy wars between competing factions within the political system of the Islamic Republic, a struggle over what it means to be an Iranian and a citizen of the Islamic Republic.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 206.

It should be pointed out that Naficy addresses “*mutual* instrumentalization” of culture in this context, implicating both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States. The United States has long been active in “public diplomacy,” attempting to influence the public opinion of other nations, including Iran, through government-funded activities in terrestrial broadcasting (e.g., Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Voice of America) and later through satellite television. Those efforts by the United States have aggressively moved to online activities as well, targeting Iranian citizens in different venues, often in the form of attempts to “educate” them in issues related to civil society. When the United States publicly announces that it has allocated \$75 million for public diplomacy to engage Iranian citizens, and additional millions of dollars “to fund U.S. and Iranian exile media to destabilize the Islamist regime and to encourage democratic efforts within the country,”<sup>13</sup> it is clear why such efforts would be a source of constant heartburn for the Islamic Republic. As an old saying amongst the researchers in this area would put it, just because the Iranian authorities are paranoid, it does mean some are not out to get them! Their discourse of “velvet revolution” and “soft war” based on American “soft power” and their paranoia about “foreign infiltration” is grounded in their recognition that their narrative of “enemy influence” (*nofouz-e doshman*) competes with other sources of information and other narratives.

One of the main sources of frustration for the Iranian authorities has been the popular culture and media of Iranian exile and diasporic communities, especially Iranian expats in the United States with a sizable concentration in “Iranglees,” California.<sup>14</sup> Here I do not wish to conflate or reduce the vibrant culture of Iranian expats and their

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>14</sup>The term “Iranglees” was memorialized as the title of a book of essays about this community, published in 1993. See R. Kelley and J. Friedlander, eds., *Iranglees: Iranians in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). Naficy’s contribution to this volume (325-364) is a concise introduction to the “popular culture of Iranian exiles in Los Angeles,” covering a wide range of genres, artists and practices. See also H. Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).

(popular) culture around the world to the satellite television programming that is beamed to Iran, which is the source of frustration for the Islamic Republic. Naficy addresses such transmissions in the context of politics of culture directed at Iranians inside Iran.<sup>15</sup> More important, however, it is here that Naficy's work addresses one of the most fascinating and compelling topics of interest to International Communication scholars, the media of diasporic populations.<sup>16</sup>

Naficy's work here goes beyond explicating popular culture of Iranians living in exile. It is a conceptual reflection on "ethnic" and "minority media" and, more important, on the conditions of its emergence. Naficy points out the structural conditions for the emergence of "decentralized global narrowcasting" alongside the extant model of "centralized global broadcasting." This is the era of population movements, migration, displaced communities and exile, at a time when "massive worldwide political, economic and social restructurings and displacements along with rapid technological advances have ushered in a new model of television that could be termed 'decentralised global narrowcasting.'"<sup>17</sup> This model of narrowcasting, however, is not monolithic or homogeneous, even if they share a relationship to a homeland. Naficy divides this narrowcasting into three categories of ethnic, transnational and exilic. As he points out, even though these three categories are "flexible, permeable and at times simultaneous," they have different characteristics.

Ethnic television is comprised of programming produced in a host country by indigenous minorities (e.g., BET in the United States), whose audiences are addressed within an intracultural relationship to the majoritarian culture of the host country. Transnational television covers mostly media imported into the host country from abroad (e.g., Korean or Chinese television in the United States). Because they are

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<sup>15</sup>Naficy, "Faster Than a Speeding Bullet," 205-220.

<sup>16</sup>See H. Naficy, "Narrowcasting and Diaspora: Middle Eastern Television in Los Angeles," in *The Media of Diaspora* ed. K. Karim (London: Routledge, 2003), 51-62; see also H. Naficy, "Theorizing 'Third World' Film Spectatorship: The Case of Iran and Iranian Cinema," in *Rethinking Third Cinema*, ed. A. R. Guneratne and W. Dissanayake (New York: Routledge, 2003), 181-201.

<sup>17</sup>Naficy, "Narrowcasting and Diaspora," 51.

imported for audiences from their home countries, they tend to “minimize” what Naficy calls “the drama of acculturation and resistance.”<sup>18</sup> Lastly, diasporic television is produced in the host country by “liminars and exiles as a response to and in tandem with their own transitional and/or provisional status.”<sup>19</sup> Iranian, Arab or Armenian television programs produced in the United States for expats are examples of this type of television. To the extent that “ethnic” media try to and do reach mainstream audiences, as Naficy argues, they reach for “broadcasting.” In other words, it is only for transnational and diasporic media that narrowcasting is the operational logic, especially given that the content is in the foreign language of the motherland.

It is in this area of diasporic media that Naficy’s work on narrowcasting has been especially influential and engaging. As he demonstrates, diasporic media, as decentralized narrowcasting, crisscrosses time and space; it looks to the past and present concurrently, and is local and global all at once. Naficy delineates the specificity of this type of programming as a genre formation, that of exile or diasporic genre.<sup>20</sup> This is what he calls “ritual genre” because “it helps the displaced communities to negotiate between the two states of exile: the rule-bound structures of the home and host societies (*societas*) and the formlessness of exilic liminality in which many rules and structures are suspended (*communitas*).” As ritual communication, the genre provides “a sense of order in the life of its viewers by producing a series of systematic patterns of narration, signification and consumption that set up continually fulfilled or postponed expectations.”<sup>21</sup> At the same time, these programs reflect the complexity, the diversity and complex histories of Middle Eastern societies in ways that defy conventional binaries (e.g., East/West, Shi’i/Sunni, etc.).

Diasporic and exilic media add complications to our existing formula-

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>20</sup>For a comprehensive treatment of this genre, see Naficy’s book, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*. [See n. 15.]

<sup>21</sup>Naficy, “Narrowcasting and Diaspora,” 53.

tions of media in an international framework in terms of what is called media flows and “contra-flows.” An important aspect of media or cultural imperialism thesis has been the movement of cultural products, often couched in terms of a hegemonic relationship between American and Western culture to the Global South. There is no dispute that there has been an uneven distribution and movement of culture globally, as the disputes tend to be around the question of the meaning and the implications of such unevenness. The era of globalization or “the information age” is often said to involve “flow” of various kinds (capital, information, technology, images, sounds, etc.).<sup>22</sup> Although such discussions of flows have traditionally involved film, television and music of Hollywood (read “American”), the Internet and digital social media have altered or broadened the scope and understandings of “flow.” Thussu divides “flows” into three broad categories of global (e.g., Hollywood), transnational (e.g., Bollywood) and “geo-cultural” -- catering to specific cultural-linguistic audiences, such as Middle East Broadcasting Center, which provides Arabic-language programming to the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>23</sup> Flows are conceptualized as either “dominant” flows, “largely emanating from the global North, with the United States at its core,” or as contra-flows, “originating from the erstwhile peripheries of global media industries—designated ‘subaltern flows.’”<sup>24</sup> This typology is a useful tool for the way it allows considerations of media flows in broad brushstrokes, and the way it points to the need for finer distinctions.

Naficy’s work on diasporic and exilic media, and “the interstitial mode of production” in exilic cinema provides a conceptual tool that enables

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<sup>22</sup>For a discussion of flows, see M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, vol. 1 (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010). Readers might be familiar with the equally influential idea of “scapes” (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes) in A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). For a discussion of flows and contra-flows, see D. Thussu, “Mapping Global Media Flow and Contra-Flow,” in D. Thussu, ed., *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow* (London: Routledge, 2007), 10-29.

<sup>23</sup>Thussu, “Mapping Global Media Flow and Contra-Flow.”

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 10.

us to account for such finer distinctions.<sup>25</sup> Diasporic media, as is the case with Iranian popular media in Los Angeles, might travel as examples of contra-flow, from within what we could call “internal global south in the Global North,” but on a path that is nonlinear, bouncing around on the nodal points of a distributed network that connects Iranians all over the world. More important, the diasporic media content in such a context might return to homeland where it affects or is affected by the “local” cultural dynamics, if we can still find a “local” that is untouched by the global, the transnational, or the regional. The diasporic media in the age of global networks will find or constitute its networked publics. This is our present media-saturated, highly mediated, networked and hyper-connected and mobile context. My experience of reading Naficy as a teenager, reading his writing translated into Persian from English, a writing about Hollywood, a quintessential home for immigrants in diaspora, a writing he penned in his second language, now recalling that experience to reflect on his writings as they have played a somewhat formative role in my studying of International Communication, . . . all of that might have been anticipated in my experience as a youngster enamored with “foreign films” and the writings by an Iranian scholar in English translated to Persian and read in Iran. Anecdotes, as stated previously, are allegorical expositions of models that tell us how the world is working. Going to the cinema, especially to see “original language film,” and then reading about it, for an Iranian teenager, was the experience of being cosmopolitan. And, as Naficy points out, “Cinema has always and everywhere been both a deeply local and a highly global industry and set of practices.”<sup>26</sup> This is so because “religious, ethnic, and national minorities, as well as émigrés, exiles, refugees, expatriates, and diasporic and transnational subjects, have contributed greatly to the rise of cinema and film industry in many countries and in the revival and redefinition of certain genres and national cinemas.” Hollywood itself

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<sup>25</sup>H. Naficy, “Between Rocks and Hard Places: The Interstitial Mode of Production in Exilic Cinema,” in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. H. Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 125-147.

<sup>26</sup>H. Naficy, “Teaching Accented Cinema as a Global Cinema,” in *Teaching Film*, ed. L. Fischer and P. Petro (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2012), 112-118.

“was from the start both ethnic and global, and it has been renewed and revived by contributions of waves of new émigré, refugee, and ethnic filmmakers.”<sup>27</sup> Reading Naficy’s work years later explains what I instinctively understood to be the experience of a global unicity, even if it is lived unevenly.

Naficy’s work on “accented cinema,” which he has described as “global cinema of displacement,” addresses the context and conditions of proliferation of displacements – which is the very context of interest to International Communication scholars.<sup>28</sup> This “accent” Naficy speaks of “emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes.”<sup>29</sup> This is not simply *international* or global, but filmmaking and filmmakers as index of re-territorialization of culture, home and/as dislocation, of journey, and of dis/placement as structural conditions. These are “accented” films in relationship to the dominant cinema. “Accented films,” Naficy argues, “are interstitial because they are created astride and in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices. Consequently, they are simultaneously local and global, and they resonate against the prevailing cinematic production practices, at the same time that they benefit from them.”<sup>30</sup> In his analysis, “the best of the accented films signify and signify upon the conditions both of exile and diaspora and of cinema.”<sup>31</sup> These films critique “the home and host societies and cultures and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers.”<sup>32</sup> All accented filmmakers, exilic, diasporic or post-colonial ethnic, share a “liminal subjectivity and interstitial location in

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 112-118.

<sup>28</sup>See H. Naficy, “Exile Discourse and Televisual Fetishization,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 13, nos. 1-3 (1991): 85-116; H. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); H. Naficy, “Teaching Accented Cinema as a Global Cinema,” 112–118; H. Naficy, “Iranian Émigré Cinema as a Component of Iranian National Cinema,” in *Media, Culture and Society in Iran: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State*, ed. M. Semati (New York: Routledge, 2008), 167–192.

<sup>29</sup>Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 4.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 4.

society and film industry.”<sup>33</sup> Naficy’s work on “accented cinema” offers a wealth of conceptual reflections and resources that problematize various categories of International Communication.

Naficy’s examination of diasporic and exilic media has been influential because it offers a theoretical framework that is capable of addressing various operative spatial categories in International Communication: local, national, regional, transnational, and global. More important, this framework allows one to engage concepts that push these categories beyond mere scalar or spatial considerations: home, community, belonging, exile, dislocation, displacement, mobility, liminality, and interstitiality among others. Exile cultures are located in intersection of cultures. They are both local and global. They are lived experiences of displacement and belonging.<sup>34</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of those working in International Communication, the larger contexts for Naficy’s intervention in exilic discourse were the debates in post-modernism and post-structuralism, and the theoretical questions regarding “difference,” as they were addressed in the emerging literatures in Cultural Studies, and post-colonial and literary theories in the 1980s and the 1990s. The concept of “representation” was being reworked in the same context. Naficy’s writings on the “Other” (e.g. “mediating the Other” and “consuming the Other”) are a part of this context.<sup>35</sup> As Naficy and Gabriel explain, their collaboration on “media and otherness” was prompted by writings centered on questions of “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” “representation” and “postco-

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>34</sup>H. Naficy, “Identity Politics and Iranian Exile Music Videos,” *Iranian Studies* 31, no.1 (1998): 51-64.

<sup>35</sup>I highlight two major interventions here: H. Naficy, “Mediating the Other: American Pop Culture Representation of Post-revolutionary Iran”, in *The US Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*, ed. Y. Kamalipour (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), and H. Naficy and T. Gabriel, *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Press, 1993). Naficy and Gabriel edited a special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 13, nos. 1-3 (1990). The issue sold out quickly and it was revised, expanded and published as an edited volume in 1993, titled, “*Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged.*”

lonial.” These writings, argue Naficy and Gabriel, have produced much “interest not only because such issues and discourses question existing canons of criticism, theory, and cultural practice but also because they suggest a new sense of direction in theorization of difference and representation.”<sup>36</sup> The graduate school experience of many in Communication, and many others in social sciences and humanities, in the 1980s and the 1990s in seminar after seminar consisted of efforts to address the question of “difference” and how post-structuralism would help answer that question. Naficy’s work remains a valuable resource in that regard.

The aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of “authoritarian populism” (i.e., Thatcherism, Reaganism),<sup>37</sup> “culture wars” and the discourse of “diversity” in the United States, the discourse of “multiculturalism” in Europe and in the United States, and the movement of populations, peoples which Naficy and Gabriel call “othered populations – diasporic immigrants, exiles, émigrés, expatriates, evicted, homeless and the undocumented,” all have “reawakened [in]difference and enhanced dialog across cultures and geographies.”<sup>38</sup> In their view, these and formerly othered populations have opened a new cultural and discursive space “where all kinds of resistive hybridities, syncretism, and mongrelizations are possible.”<sup>39</sup> These critical discourses have made their way to the academic settings where established canons of culture and cultural theory, including the category of representation, have been challenged and renegotiated.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., ix.

<sup>37</sup>It should be pointed out that in the United States, Communication departments became the institutional home for British Cultural Studies as it crossed the Atlantic. Here Stuart Hall’s work on culture and “authoritarian populism” (among other topics) was one connection between Communication and post-structuralist theory, albeit theory as “detour.” See Stuart Hall, “Popular-democratic Versus Authoritarian Populism,” in *Marxism and Democracy*, ed. A. Hunt (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1980), 157–187 and S. Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., x.

<sup>40</sup>In his anthology titled, *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, Naficy collects into one volume important contributions from established scholars across disciplinary borders.

In his study of the representation of Iranians in the Western (news) media and popular culture, Naficy once again takes on the issue of representation of “othered” populations, offering new theoretical and methodological insights.<sup>41</sup> He questions existing approaches for their shortcomings in taxonomic classification (plot, character stereotyping and portrayal of social situations) and for insisting on “realism” (when media themselves are constructs). If media representations provide a framework in which we make decisions individually and as a nation, he argues, we need to account for that which mediates between social realities and their representations. That is his objective in this study of othered people. Following the Marxist and Freudian “depth models” of interpretations, Naficy posits “mediawork” (not unlike Freud’s “dream-work”) as a theoretical framework to explain the “combined operations” of “signifying institutions” (e.g., media) that “help obtain hegemonic consensus.”<sup>42</sup> Naficy is interested in showing how these institutions manifest in their representations the “deep structures” of ideologies and beliefs, which remain latent. Because they are infused at the level of everyday discursive practices, and are presented as “common sense,” they “cannot be bracketed off from everyday life as self-contained set of ‘political opinions’ or ‘biased views.’”<sup>43</sup> After this initial introduction to mediawork, Naficy shows how it produces consensus through a number of processes that involve not only media and popular culture but also financial, industrial, and marketing institutions and processes. To students of International Communication, Naficy productively outlines connections between sociology of news production, political economy of popular culture and media, and ideological analysis as practiced by Cultural Studies.

The central element of theorizing “Othered populations” is the self-Other relationship (be it individual or collective selves). It is this aspect of Naficy’s work that places it at the intersection of Cultural Studies, post-colonial criticism, and media theory, one that is clearly indexed to

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<sup>41</sup>Naficy, “Mediating the Other.”

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 74.

the range of problematiques central to International Communication as a field of inquiry. On the one hand, consider the following as the foci of analysis in Naficy's work: analysis of exilic and diasporic media and cultures and relationship to "host" cultures and societies and to "homelands;" analysis of "Third World Spectatorship," and "self-othering," theorized as "a postcolonial discourse on cinematic first contacts" in media theory and Cultural Studies.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, consider International Communication's focus on the problem of culture at the international level in the context of uneven structural relationships of domination and subordination between the center and the peripheries or "the West and the rest" (e.g., dependency theories, dependent-development theories, cultural and media imperialism thesis).<sup>45</sup> What unites these perspectives and theories is their critical orientation, a left-leaning politics that sees "domination" or subjugation or some form of structural asymmetry, against which it seeks to intervene. Cultural Studies, media theories informed by the assumptions of Cultural Studies, and post-colonial theory and criticism share this critical orientation with the vast majority of International Communication literature that places culture at the center of its analysis.<sup>46</sup> Even when "cultural imperialism"

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<sup>44</sup>H. Naficy, "Self-Othering: A Postcolonial Discourse on Cinematic First Contact," in *The Pre-occupation of Post-colonial Studies*, ed. F. Afzal-Khan and K. Seshadri-Crooks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 292-310; H. Naficy, "Theorizing 'Third World' Film Spectatorship: The Case of Iran and Iranian Cinema," in *Rethinking Third Cinema*, ed. A. R. Guneratne and W. Dissanayake, 181-201.

<sup>45</sup>Naficy has produced more recent scholarship in media theory that is of interest to International Communication, although limitations of space prevent me from discussing them here. Here are two examples: see H. Naficy, "From Accented Cinema to Multiplex Cinema," in *Convergence Media History* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3-13 for a discussion of "multiplex cinema", the "emergence of a new mainstream cinema in the USA and Europe in our current moment of post-diasporic, post-internet, postmodern neoliberal globalization" (3); see also H. Naficy, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 6, no. 2 (2008): 97-102 for the introduction of a theory of regional cinemas.

<sup>46</sup>Given the uneven "flow" of culture at the global level, it is inevitable that any literature addressing it will have to address this critical orientation. For an appraisal of this argument and a comprehensive treatment of the discourse of cultural imperialism, see J. Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 1991). For an alternative to media imperialism or to hybridity perspective, see M. Semati and P. Sotirin, "Hollywood's Trans-national Appeal: Hegemony and Democratic Potential?," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 26, no. 4 (1997): 176-188.

as a concept is abandoned in International Communication in favor of “hybridity” or “critical transculturalism,”<sup>47</sup> a work clearly influenced by Naficy’s writings on exilic culture, that critical orientation remains the thrust of the analysis.

At the heart of the literature in International Communication on “cultural imperialism,” and all the issues this label signifies, is the question of the encounter between cross-cultural content (e.g., Hollywood products) and audiences in foreign markets. If the cultural imperialism thesis has enjoyed such longevity, even as it has faced criticism, it is because there has always been a need for a *critical* enterprise that could address enduring structural asymmetry in international communication. Some of the critics of this thesis have tended to ignore that imbalance and the asymmetry (*production and distribution*). Instead, they have provided evidence about “active audiences” and their reading strategies, and how audiences might use such content as a “forum” to discuss local values (*reception*).<sup>48</sup> However, these accounts have tended to be largely sociological or ahistorical. Naficy’s work on cinematic spectatorship in the Third World, and his examination of “postcolonial discourse on cinematic first contacts” provide a compelling response to this cross-cultural encounter, one that is historically informed media *theory* and anchored in the “post-colonial” literature with the critical orientation of Cultural Studies.<sup>49</sup>

To state it briefly, Naficy’s approach takes into account not just production and distribution, but also reception of cross-cultural content all within a historically grounded framework. Explaining Iran’s relationship to colonial powers, Naficy argues that “Westernization was not so much imposed or injected from the outside as it became structured in

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<sup>47</sup>M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup>For two classic and influential examples of this evidence and research, see E. Katz and T. Liebes, “Mutual Aid in the Decoding of *Dallas*: Preliminary Notes from a Cross-cultural Study,” in *Television in Transition*, ed. P. Drummond and R. Paterson (London: BFI, 1986), 187-198, and I. Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>49</sup>See Naficy, “Theorizing ‘Third World’ Film Spectatorship,” and “Self-Othering.”

dominance.” In the aftermath of the constitutional revolution of Iran (1906-11), “much of the new constitution and many of the laws and legislative, judicial, and executive bodies for the parliamentary monarchy were adapted from European models.”<sup>50</sup> In his analysis, “Westernization won over the traditional systems of thought and became overdetermined, that is, dispersed throughout the emerging modern but oppressive apparatuses and ideological institutions.”<sup>51</sup> In this historical context of first contacts, Naficy proposes a self-othering theory that deploys Lacanian “alienating identification paradigm to speculate about the manner in which early Iranian audiences were hailed by and haggled with Western films.”<sup>52</sup> Naficy’s account of “hailing the spectators” and “haggling with the movie” uses Althusserian notion of hailing in the formation of the subject’s identity (the effect of viewing technology and context) in self-othering, and “haggling” to establish local appropriations of the content in different ways. As he puts it, those are strategies “by which Iranian audiences interrupted, talked back to, translated, dubbed, fetishized, objectified, and haggled with the movies and the movie stars, transformed the cinema’s ‘work’ from one of hailing to haggling.”<sup>53</sup> In short, by “thus engaging with the movies, the spectators were no longer just their consumers but also the producers of their meanings.”<sup>54</sup> In Naficy’s analysis, the notion of an “active audience,” prevalent in International Communication literature, is fully contextualized in historical, theoretical and empirical terms.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I have to admit that the task I had set myself up at the outset, that of writing a paper in which I draw connections between different writings of Hamid Naficy in order to re-present or reimagine them written from an International Communication perspective, proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. I believe there are many more

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<sup>50</sup>Naficy, “Self-Othering,” 294.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 295.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>53</sup>Naficy, “Theorizing ‘Third World’ Film Spectatorship,” 190-191.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 191.

connections to make than I have space to do in a single paper. That is largely a testament to the scholarship that is before us: his is prolific, complex, challenging, theoretically-rich, and historically-informed. He might start with culture or media of Iran as a question, but he explains Iran in the process in the most illuminating manner possible. He has produced scholarship on a wide range of topics, many of which cover the Middle Eastern and Iranian cinema. I have argued that viewing his professional identity as a “film scholar,” and even as the foremost authority on Iranian cinema, might be accurate but it is too parochial and restrictive. In order to do that, I have written from a specific disciplinary location to show how his work is interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, occupying a space at the intersection of Cultural Studies, “post-colonial” theory, and media theory, fields that have “interdisciplinary” status themselves. The connection between these areas is tied to specific articulations of borders, belonging, Otherness, (trans)national imaginary, states of liminality, movements of populations and the broader question of culture’s relationship to power and geopolitics. I made that argument by indexing Naficy’s work to a range of scholarly preoccupations (concepts, theories, topics) that have remained central to the field of International Communication in its history. That indexing works because the objects, institutions, and phenomena he writes about (e.g., cinema) are essentially and at once local and global (international). Another reason it works is that he writes about populations that are displaced, on the move or othered. Above all, Naficy’s oeuvre is best explained beyond the confines of cinema studies precisely because it engages and inhabits borders, and embodies the porosity of borders of various kind. His work, perhaps like his self, the kid from Isfahan roaming the city with his father’s Kodak Brownie box camera, is not “homeless” as much as hes at “home” everywhere.