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Capturing the Abject of the Nation in The House is Black

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FORUGH FARROKHZAD POET OF MODERN IRAN

ICONIC WOMAN AND FEMININE PIONEER
OF NEW PERSIAN POETRY

EDITED BY

DOMINIC PARVIZ BROOKSHAW
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Iran and the Persianate World

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possible to turn around this sorry state of affairs, and avoid what appears to be an inevitable, impending catastrophe.

This talk of 'reforms' is something that belongs to more recent political language. Such a discourse was not current when Farrokhzād wrote this poem (around 1965). Gadamer, in relation to the dialogue between the text and its interpreter, says that first of all, we understand the text in a contemporary fashion, and it is only after that that we understand the text within its historical context, employing a true sensitivity for the contemporaneous meaning of the language and expressions used in the text. Now when I read, 'And I think that the garden can be taken to hospital', I understand this to be an allusion to political and social reforms, but I surely would not have drawn this conclusion when the poem was first published.

Farrokhzād says she is continually thinking about the state of the garden and she repeats four times, 'I think' (*man fekr mi-konam*), but the only thought that she expresses is that the garden can be taken to hospital. With hindsight, the import of these simple words seems clear to the reader today.³² At the end of the poem, after all that thinking, the poet repeats two of the most symbolic lines from the beginning of the poem:

و ذهن باغچه دارد آرام آرام
از خاطرات سبز تهی می شود

And the garden's mind is, little by little
Being emptied of green memories

Iran for Farrokhzād was losing a period of peace, beauty and goodness. The colour green in Farrokhzād's terminology carries a wide range of positive connotations. It is perhaps interesting to note that Ebrāhīm Golestān has a short story entitled, 'Eshq-e sāl-hā-ye sabz' ('Love of the Green Years').

Chapter 9 Capturing the Abject of the Nation in *The House is Black*

Nasrin Rahimieh
University of California, Irvine

Forugh Farrokhzād's visionary documentary, *The House is Black* (1962), was commissioned by Anjoman-e Komak beh Jozāmiān (Society for Aiding Lepers) to generate support for Iran's victims of leprosy, although the Society had no input in the substance and direction of the film and its involvement was limited to providing only partial funding. Farrokhzād became involved in the project through her work at the Golestān Film Studios, where she had gained experience in cinema. The film was shot over a period of twelve days in a leper colony in northwestern Iran. The small film crew included Farrokhzād, a cameraman and a soundman. Farrokhzād completed the editing upon the team's return to Tehran and produced a unique documentary, blending images of everyday life in the colony with a poetic voice-over composed by her and delivered in her own voice.

The House is Black takes its viewers on a difficult journey into the colony, and directs their gaze on to the terrible and visible deformities caused by leprosy. There is little in the physiognomy of the inhabitants of the colony that could be aligned with normative concepts of beauty; the faces and bodies captured on the screen have been ravaged to varying degrees by the disease. The voice-overs reinforce the harshness of the visual essay. The film's relentless emphasis on the impact of the disease on its victims demands that the viewers become accustomed to the unpleasant sights and to accept them as part of the social fabric of their society and nation. The challenge Farrokhzād levels at her viewers, as she pointed out in a comment she made about the documentary, is to view the film as if they were looking at their own lives reflected in a mirror.¹ But the image reflected in the mirror does not invite

easy identification. Apart from the visible effects of leprosy there is the underlying fear of contagion associated with the disease. The images we see on the screen become the personification of the abject,² that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' and 'does not respect borders, positions, rules.'³ The abject, as theorized by Kristeva, does not merely signify but confronts us with death:

No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.⁴

This foregrounding of the abject and the accompanying unsettling of the self constitute a critique of ways of seeing and making meaning of the discarded and the stigmatized. Even more importantly, the incorporation of images of lepers into the viewers' field of vision dissolves the border separating the viewer from the victims, who despite having been relegated to a *jozām khāneh*⁵ trespass, albeit temporarily, into other spaces of interiority to which the nation has denied them access. The 'home' the victims of leprosy have been assigned is a far cry from the spectators' concept of home.

This re-evaluation of what constitutes the 'home' and by extension the nation, implicit in *The House is Black*, is part and parcel of the ethos of this particular moment in Iranian cultural history. The decades immediately following the 1953 CIA-backed coup, staged to topple the democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, and to bolster the ruling monarch, Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavi, although imbued with disillusionment, gave rise to intellectual, social, political and religious movements preoccupied with the nation's apparent total capitulation to foreign powers and the loss of national autonomy.⁶ This era inaugurated an age of introspection and a re-evaluation of how Iranian national identity was imagined and what it elided in the process of projecting an image of modernity and progress. Intellectuals, artists, writers and poets of the time were equally attuned to the contradictions and tensions that pervaded the country. The malaise haunting the nation is evident in the work of some of Farrokhzād's literary cohort.

The most prominent articulation of the concept of an ailing nation is Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad's famous 1962 treatise, *Gharbzadegi*,⁷ in which he deploys the metaphor of the disease to describe the prevailing social reality of Iran in the early 1960s. While Farrokhzād's film zeroes in on the decayed exterior, Āl-e Ahmad's treatise speaks of a seemingly whole surface covering a hollowed

shell. In the opening paragraph of *Gharbzadegi*, Āl-e Ahmad likens the disease affecting his compatriots to cholera, before opting for another analogy:

It's at least as bad as sawflies in the wheat fields. Have you ever seen how they infest wheat? From within. There is a healthy skin in place, but it's only a skin, just like the shell of a cicada on a tree.⁸

Āl-e Ahmad proceeds with an analysis of the economic, social and cultural conditions he believes have robbed the Iranian nation of its sense of 'authentic' self. In contrast, Farrokhzād holds a mirror up to her viewers and forces them to see what they have refused to see as part of themselves: the disenfranchised, deformed and disabled.

By foregrounding this underside of Iranian life, the poet-filmmaker questions the assumption that the nation's house is in order. In this sense, *The House is Black* is not different in approach from much of Farrokhzād's poetry in which, as indicated by Farzaneh Milani, she:

presents the voice of the Other in modern Persian literature. By speaking as a woman, she literally creates an-other voice . . . throughout her poetry, she puts herself as well as her vision of men into the text, and contradicts prevailing notions of the feminine and the masculine. She is neither silent nor concealed, neither chaste nor immobile. She refuses to suffer and not complain. She does not endure restrictions and prohibitions with fortitude. . . . Her poetry reveals the problems of a modern Iranian woman with all her conflicts, painful oscillations, and contradictions. . . . It explores the vulnerability of a woman who rejects unreflective conformity with the past and yet suffers from uncertainties of the future.¹⁰

This defiance of boundaries is the force that propels the camera's movements into the living spaces occupied by lepers who are otherwise closed off from the viewers' field of vision. Farrokhzād's camera pans the *jozām-khāneh* and makes this site of abjection into a space of the familial and the familiar. The film captures moments of domesticity and familial interaction. Such scenes are undercut by the dejection and the isolation of the visual and verbal narrative and, along with the film's ending, highlight the limits of the film's transgressive potential. In the final sequence of the documentary we see a group of lepers walking toward the colony's gate as it shuts on them. The inscription on the gate, *jozām-khāneh*, reminds us that they cannot cross over the physical barriers separating them from the spectators. The camera's pulling away from

the colony reasserts the boundaries, rearticulating the uncertainties Milani finds reverberating in Farrokhzād's poetry. The relegation of the lepers to the space behind the closed door of the colony forecloses the possibility of anything more than a temporary transgression. The film thus records its own limitations and captures a remarkable self-awareness on the part of the artist.

Hamid Dabashi sees a different kind of self-awareness at work in *The House is Black*. In his view, the film is an interrogation of Iranian culture as a whole:

In the ravaged faces and bodies of the lepers, Farrokhzād saw the deranged layers of Iranian culture; for her they were a mirror of a brutalized history. She looked into that mirror and reflected those faces neither in sympathy nor in empathy. She probed the distorted features of those bodies in search of the most hidden horrors and exposed them.¹¹

Dabashi conflates the figure of the leper with Farrokhzād's self-image and situates her film in her identification with the lepers she encountered in the process of making the film:

In lepers and their predicament, Farrokhzād saw her own projected image: ashamed of yet attached to a guilt falsely carried. In the face of the lepers, Farrokhzād saw her own face, and that is why and how she identified with them – other people literally marked with a shameful sign, a people moved to the dark, the grotesque, the frightful, the feared, and the despised side of humanity. When through her camera Farrokhzād looked at the lepers' physically deformed faces she saw what the patriarchal pathology she defied had cauterized on her morally defamed face – a defacement she could until then imagine but not see. The leper was Farrokhzād's vilified public persona, to which she now lent her defiant poetic vision. Farrokhzād had a culturally contracted leprous scar on her face – code-named *dagh-e nang* – long before she visited the leprosarium. That is why she could identify with the lepers so immediately.¹²

In Dabashi's argument,

A leprosarium is a transgressive space – a grotesque, forbidden space where bodies ruined by disease are locked away so as not to disturb the legislation of bodily normalcy. Opening the door on a defiant semiotics of the grotesque, Farrokhzād releases a disruption of the semantic legislation of the body.¹³

As I have argued, the film's ending, which depicts a closing gate, rules out such a complete rewriting of the 'legislation of the body'. What the film successfully disrupts is the assumption of the wholeness and wholesomeness of the nation. Not unlike Āl-e Ahmad, Farrokhzād asks her audience: 'How can a home whose foundations are in the process of disintegration serve as a foundation . . . ?'¹³ Her film shines a light on some cracks in the foundation and destabilizes the security of the home. Making room for the faces and bodies of the victims of leprosy in the nation's self-image is part of the film's objective and its attempt to allow the lepers entry into a realm of humanity from which they are otherwise barred.

I should add that, unlike Dabashi, who sees Farrokhzād's optics as falling outside the range of humanism,¹⁴ I am less preoccupied with the co-optive potential of the grand narratives of humanism¹⁵ and their much feared universalizing tendencies. I believe we can counteract such possible adverse effects by focusing on the specifics of cultural practices and attitudes foregrounded in Farrokhzād's documentary. Uncovering the human in the lepers is to unsettle cultural assumptions about the need to fear and abhor disfigured, disabled and diseased bodies.

One of the challenges Farrokhzād's film poses is to question the practice of mistreating those who have been disabled as a result of a disease, even worse, condoning such mistreatment and ostracization as culturally normative. To make the film, Farrokhzād herself had to learn a new mode of seeing and part of what she conveys to her viewers is how to inhabit a world riven by disease and deformity. In an interview Farrokhzād gave a year after the making of *The House is Black*, she spoke about her entry into the leper colony and the process by which she gained access to the scenes she filmed:

The first day that I saw the lepers I was deeply moved. . . . It was terrible. In the leper colony a number of people live who possess all the qualities and feelings of a human being minus a face. I saw a woman whose face was only a hole through which she talked! . . . [To make a film truly portraying these people] I was obliged to win their confidence. These people had not been dealt with squarely before. Whoever visited them had looked at their flaws. But I . . . sat at their tables, touched their wounds, felt their feet, the toes of which were ravaged by the disease. It was through such equal treatment that the patients came to trust me [and I was able to show them as they were]. . . . Even today, after one year from the visit, some of them still write me . . .¹⁶

What we glimpse in this statement is Farrokhzād's own ability to inhabit their space and to accept the human beneath the ravaged body. By overcoming her

distaste for the disfigured victims, she could look at her subjects not merely as diseased and disabled bodies but grant them communal and social agency.

As Benedicte Ingstad and Susan Reynolds Whyte argue in *Disability and Culture*, 'Cultural assumptions about the body and personhood must be seen in the context of ordinary social interaction.'¹⁷ By capturing daily routines in the leper colony, Farrokhzād introduces a new vision of the diseased and disabled. She creates conditions for the lepers to be imagined as persons in their own right, albeit part of a hitherto unimagined category of existence:

'Radical relativism' seeks to reveal basic assumptions about what it is to be a person, and what kinds of identities and values exist in given social contexts. How important is individual ability as a source of social identity? What is it people are trying to achieve? The strong version of relativism questions the terms of analysis and attempts to uncover the categories implicit in other worldviews. The concept of disability itself must not be taken for granted. In many cultures, one cannot be 'disabled' for the simple reason that 'disability' as a recognized category does not exist. There are blind people and lame people, and 'slow' people, but 'the disabled' as a general term does not translate easily in many languages.¹⁸

The House is Black translates for its Iranian viewers the very absence of a word for disability in Persian. Yeganeh Salehpour and Narges Adibsereshki note in their study 'Disability and Iranian Culture':

Our first finding has to do with the absence of the general word 'disability'. The equivalent chosen for the word 'disability' in academic literature is 'natavan' in Farsi. However, in Farsi literary works, 'natavan' usually refers to the elderly or the poor. . . . In Farsi folklore, . . . the writers refer to specific impairments of blindness, deafness, impairment of speech, physical impairments (usually impairments in one's legs, 'lang'), and in a few instances, intellectual and emotional impairments.¹⁹

The authors of this study further observe:

the uni-dimensional aspect of the attitudes conveyed through repeated use of the concept of 'mercy'. Iranian people, time and again, through their stories, poems, and proverbs communicated the importance of showing 'mercy', and 'patience' in dealing with people with disability. In addition, our reviewed material portrays the disabled themselves, especially the blind, requesting and pointing out their need for people's mercy.¹⁹

We find such an example of the negative construction of disability in Irān Darrudi's autobiographical reflections in *Dar fāseleh-ye do noqteh* and her memories of how her appearance was the source of constant ridicule in the family:

I, the second daughter of this family, was born with a face that was described by others as not particularly graced with beauty and eyes whose directions could not be followed. After seeing me, my father's step-mother told my mother: 'Why did you have so much pain for giving birth to this wall-eyed girl?' This harsh judgment passed on the appearance of a child who had just entered the world became entrenched in family memory.²⁰

When we consider the fear of contagion that accompanies leprosy, we can better appreciate the radical and innovative nature of Farrokhzād's gaze. While the spread of leprosy can be contained through proper hygiene and medical treatment, victims of leprosy, at least at the time the documentary was made, were nevertheless shunned as carriers of the disease. The documentary not only makes us look at the lepers and their lives in the confinement of the colony, but also intermingles the disfigured faces and bodies with moments when those very bodies are engaged in play and celebration. This juxtaposition of the abject and the playful urges the viewer to see beyond the surface of the disease. As if to underline the film's emphasis on seeing differently and clearing away preconceptions, the documentary begins with a blank screen.

Before we see the first image in the film, we hear a man's voice setting the tone for what we are about to see:

There is no shortage of ugliness in the world. If man closed his eyes to it, there would be even more. But man is a problem solver. On this screen will appear an image of ugliness, a vision of pain no human should ignore. To wipe out this ugliness and to relieve its victims is the motive of this film and the hope of its makers.²¹

Projected onto a black screen, the verbal here acquires supremacy before we are launched into the visual.

As the camera enters the interiors of *jozām-khāneh*, our eyes are immediately confronted with a sequence that dwells on the bleakness that will engulf our vision. The opening sequence is composed of a woman looking into a mirror. In a medium shot, we see what she sees in the mirror: her partially covered, disfigured face. The scarf covering the woman's head and part of her face could well be seen as indicators of her modesty and adherence to

the Muslim dress code. But the movement of the camera soon undercuts the possibility of seeing the woman's head cover as only religiously motivated. The camera guides our gaze by travelling closer to zoom in an extreme close-up. The camera then freezes, almost rendering the image into a still shot. This focus reveals disfigured aspects of the face we see partially because the scarf covers half of her face. The progression from movement to stillness and the presence of the mirror suggest that our gazes cannot be averted from the grotesque image before us. The mirror, like the camera, mediates between the observer and the observed and acts as the medium through which the gazes are exchanged. One reviewer finds this opening shot representative of Farrokhzād's empathetic embrace of the subjects she films: 'The viewer not only looks at the woman, but *shares* the woman's gaze at herself, a mark of the film's implicit empathy.'²²

This opening sequence of the film also invokes the prototypical image of a woman looking at herself in the mirror, normally associated with self-beautification. In this case, the subject gazing into the mirror finds progressive erasure and erosion of the tissue, nerves, cartilage and bone – the constituent parts of the type of face that would be gazed upon. Instead we see, at least partially, the absence of the components and our attempt to orient our gaze aesthetically is arrested. What is interesting here is that the camera insists on capturing the woman in this typical scene not merely for shock value, though shock is a byproduct of this opening shot. By pausing on this face, the camera draws us in and invites us to learn to see what we have closed our eyes to. This is a reflection of what we have heard in the voice-over in the beginning: that there would be more ugliness if humanity closed its eyes to it.

On the most immediate and obvious level, the film and the opening statement are means to incite individuals to offer help and to recruit more support for the prevention and treatment of leprosy. Not closing our eyes is the first step toward acknowledging the ravages of a disease which, as we are told in a later, more scientific or factual commentary, is curable.²³ But beyond this utilitarian message of the voice-over lies the possibility that letting our gaze roam through the house of leprosy will teach us to see reality differently, thus unsettling the normal associations of the beautiful and the ugly.

That the categories and concepts have been displaced and even inverted for the individuals living within the leper colony is poignantly delineated in the classroom exchanges between the teacher and his pupils. The teacher asks one pupil: 'Name a few beautiful things.' The pupil to whom this question is directed responds: 'The moon, the sun, flowers, and playtime.' The teacher then turns to another young boy and says: 'Now name some ugly things.' This time the answer which is followed by a round of giggles is: 'Hand, feet, head.'

This child's notion of the ugly is informed by observing the effects of leprosy on the human body. The contrast between nature, untouched by disease, and human deformity is sharply drawn out for these children, but their laughter inscribes playfulness in the answer. The young boy knows hands, feet and head are not necessarily synonymous with ugliness, hence his laughter. But his assertion also underlines the reality that for those who live in the leper colony the normal and the normative have been troubled and redefined.

An even more forceful reminder of how much life in the colony deviates from what is taken for granted by others living outside it also appears earlier in this classroom sequence. After students hear passages read aloud from a school primer reciting reasons for which a child would offer thanksgiving, the teacher asks one pupil why he should be thankful for having a father and mother. The youngster he pinpoints for an answer says without any apparent emotion: 'I don't know. I don't have either.' This factual response brings a secondary awareness that the leper colony is also an orphanage.²⁴ Yet the children entrusted to this orphanage do not have access to a language and means of understanding and expressing their reality. The school primer intended to socialize and educate young Iranians allows no room for a child deprived of parents and home.

Such moments of stark recognition are captured by Farrokhzād's own poetic voice-overs. They encapsulate a suffering and anguish beneath the daily routine, moments of joy and lightheartedness:

I speak of the bitterness of my soul
When I was silent my life was rotting
From my silent screams all day long
Remember that my life is the wind
Like the pelican of the desert
The owl of the ruins,
And like a sparrow I am sitting alone on the roof²⁵

But the visual and verbal also bring together diametric opposites. The next segment in the classroom is the one in which the young boy equating human body parts with the ugly breaks down into giggles. The two moments together make up the totality of the experience of living in the leper colony: disfigurement and deprecation, coupled with an irrepressible desire to adhere to daily rituals and forms of pleasure.

Among the most striking instances of observing rituals is the sequence shot in the prayer room. The badly disfigured hands raised in prayer stand in stark contrast to the words of thanksgiving intoned in the prayers. To echo

Dabashi's views, the scenes of prayer and expression of gratitude transcend cultural specificity:

By stretching beyond the Qur'anic and reaching for the biblical (Farrokhzād was always fascinated by the Persian translation of the Bible), Farrokhzād embraces an antiquity of diction that is no longer religious but metaphysical, no longer spatial but eternal, no longer cultural but cosmic, no longer political but mythic. Farrokhzād has let her camera loose to register the topography of a landscape she was at once privileged and condemned to see, and to show.²⁶

I would suggest that the scenes of prayer and supplication should also be seen as part and parcel of the inextricable intermingling of suffering and joy throughout the documentary. Such scenes mark the continuities between life in and beyond the leper colony.

Farrokhzād's choices, both thematically and formally, move us close to the unbearable unsightliness of the disease and bring us back to an emotional register infused with scenes of children playing. The emphasis on play and playfulness is nowhere more emphatically emphasized as in a sequence when a young boy watches a little girl straddle a shovel and drag it along joyfully. Incited by her apparent pleasure, the young boy creates his own makeshift toy out of an older man's crutch. In the same frame we have a testimonial to the crippling effects of the disease and the resilience and desire to stand above the disease. Naturally these types of moments are more common among children. But even among the adults we observe a strong will to endure and to partake of normalcy. Play, be it in the form of a game of checkers played with pebbles and walnuts on a makeshift board drawn on the ground, or a sole man singing and dancing to his own tune, gives us a counter-example to the man pacing along a brick wall and counting the days of the week. We see a woman applying mascara to her eyelashes, despite the fact that her gnarled fingers cannot hold the tube with ease. The made-up face of the bride-to-be (like the dancing and singing accompanying the wedding) speaks to an existence that defies the disease and brings the abject into the realm of the object.

In relation to one of the six dimensions Michael Fischer attributes to Iranian cinema, Farrokhzād's film could be seen belonging to a style that 'one could call post-traumatic realism, drawing on earlier Italian neorealist and Eastern European absurdist-surrealist styles, which focuses on the everyday, on the problems and repair of society, and on the problematic cultural codes inherited from the past.'²⁷ The interweaving of the ethical and the aesthetic carves out

a space in which Farrokhzād trains our gaze to see what we refused to see before, and to do so as a first step toward refocusing the nation's vision of itself and including its disfigured and disenfranchised.

The ways of seeing to which Farrokhzād introduces us resonate deeply with Sohrāb Sepehri's poetic re-envisioning of the verbal and the visual. As another member of Farrokhzād's cohort, in his long poem, 'Water's Footsteps', Sepehri also questions the aesthetic yardsticks by which beauty is encoded by culture:

I do not know

Why it is said that the horse is a noble creature, that the pigeon²⁸ is a beautiful bird.

I do not know why nobody keeps a vulture in a cage.

I do not know why clover flowers are considered inferior to red tulips.

Words should be washed

Eyes should be washed to see things in a different way.

To become the wind itself, the rain itself.²⁹

It is interesting to note that Sepehri's long poem incorporates a double movement of giving the speaker a sense of home, 'I come from Kashan',³⁰ to only later subject it to radical homelessness:

I come from Kashan

But Kashan is no longer my town.

My hometown has been lost.

With feverish effort, I have built myself a house
on the other side of the night.³¹

The journey to the 'other side of the night' depicted by Sepehri captures the ultimate displacement of home and belonging which Farrokhzād also invites her viewers to experience. Like Sepehri, Farrokhzād asks us to perform a ritual ablation of the eyes and to enter a zone of instability in which the home and the nation need not banish the bodies which do not conform to their self-image. The lepers left behind the gates of the colony, the film reminds its spectators, might be out of sight, but, as their movement toward the closing gate of the colony at the end of the documentary suggests, the barriers separating them from the rest of the nation might well prove penetrable. The moving images that Farrokhzād asks her viewers to equate with their self-reflection trouble the sense of self, home and collective identity. The phrase, which becomes the

title of the documentary, 'the house is black', composed in the schoolroom in the leper colony by one of the students who is asked to make a sentence with the word 'house', implicates not only *jozām-khāneh* but *khāneh* ('house' and 'home') in the utter darkness that envelopes both the subjects of the film and its viewers. It calls for a different house to be built 'on the other side of the night' of the soul in which the nation finds itself.

Chapter 10

The House is Black: A Timeless Visual Essay

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Perhaps this clear and long interaction of poetry with, and within, other art forms explains our implied acknowledgement that poetry exists independently of any one medium and that therefore film, too, can be poetry.¹

Focusing on the editing and visual composition of Forugh Farrokhzād's documentary *The House is Black* (*Khāneh siyāh ast*), this essay will discuss how Farrokhzād's use of images to form a visual essay is comparable to her use of words in poetry. Farrokhzād has employed a formalist editing style by juxtaposing two different styles of editing throughout the film. *The House is Black* consists of two sections: the fast-cut montage of images of daily life in the leper colony set against the factual scenes in the hospital, which are classically edited with regard to time and space continuity. Her formalist approach is not only confined to the order in which the images follow one another, it is also evident in the composition of each frame. Following the discussion of the treatment of images, this essay will look at the purpose of the film-maker in employing such methods. In doing so, I will compare *The House is Black* with Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* (*Las Hurdes*, 1933), a film with which *The House is Black* has often been compared.² For this research, I have consulted the VCD version of the film, published in Iran in 2002, under the title *The House is Black: The Original Version* (*Khāneh siyāh ast: noskheh-ye asl*).³

Farrokhzād's involvement in the art of film-making began with her joining the Golestān Film Unit (Sāzmān-e Film-e Golestān) in 1956. Ebrahim Golestān, a film-maker, writer and translator, launched the Golestān Film Unit in 1955 while he was working on six documentary shorts, under the title