

CHAPTER 21

Losing, Using and Crafting Spaces for Aging: Muslim Iranian American Seniors in California's Santa Clara Valley

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When Babi's American husband, Ron, opened the door in response to my ring, I walked from the dark cold outside into the light and warmth of their home. Babi had called to say she was having a party, and I should come. Saying hello to everyone on the way, I went to the back, a large area set up with chairs along three walls, and cushions along part of the closer wall. Several of my favorite older Iranian friends stood up from their chairs to greet me, kissing me, Iranian style, on both cheeks.

As the evening wore on, I realized that the large back room, with its smooth floor, had been arranged specifically for ballroom dancing. Babi (72) and Ron (76) performed several ballroom dances for us, giving us the artistic benefit of their years of studying and teaching ballroom dancing. Later, a bevy of belly dancers jiggled in unison, dressed in skimpy sequined tops and gauzy skirts.² For his special birthday gift, a renowned dance teacher led Ron to the middle chair at the other side of the room to sit between all of the women. Then, with his wife Babi in front, the whole troop performed this Middle Eastern origin dance while he appreciatively (and perhaps with a bit of embarrassment) looked on. Not satisfied with mastering ballroom dancing, Babi has been taking belly dance lessons and then teaching it for some time. I marveled at her stamina and memory as they all went through the fast moving steps, turns, and quiverings.

Later, many people went out on the floor to dance. Women carried out their Persian dancing routines, dancing as individuals but often dancing to another person, eying them flirtatiously, framing their head with their hands, moving their bodies seductively, turning and then looking back in the Persian dance mode. Even a couple of the older, more reticent women flattered me by acquiescing to my pleas, and getting to their feet to join the movements.³

For dinner, women set up a table in the formal living room area, close to the kitchen wall, with rice, several favorite Iranian meat and vegetable or fruit

stews, salad, and yogurt. Dessert included *sholeh zard*, a favorite saffron flavored rice pudding. Young people and teens tended to put in an appearance later on in the evening.⁴

(Notes on the birthday party for Ron at Babi and Ron's home, December 23, 2006)

An amazing example of a successful ager, in the United States, Babi Hogue has been able to transcend the Iranian cultural script prescribing what kind of behavior, comportment, and venues are appropriate for an older Iranian widow. In Iran, older widows are expected to be retiring, avoid male companionship, and remain single. Sometimes the American environment can offer opportunities for self-development not available in contemporary Iran.⁵ In America, with the loss of her husband, and thus her duties and responsibilities to him, Babi was able to construct a new life and a new identity. Mrs. Hogue developed new types of venues and activities for aging.

As a young adult living in Iran, Babi studied and worked as a midwife and even traveled to Germany for more education. As many middle-class Iranian parents did back then, in the 1970s, she began coming to the United States for a month or two to visit her children attending university here. In 1985, at age fifty-two, she moved to the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and worked here for several years. Upon retirement, and after the death of her first husband, she began constructing a new life for herself. What Babi created was rich with Iranian traditions, culture, lifestyle, close friendships, and public and private Iranian cultural events and gatherings. She has clearly also taken advantage of her local American environment, with opportunities to mix with the opposite sex, take and teach classes, develop hobbies and favored activities, meet with Americans, and enjoy less gender-restricted mobility.⁶

Babi had a good command of English, and this facilitated easy interaction with community members beyond her Iranian kin and friends. After Babi's first husband died, her son encouraged her ballroom dancing. After years of being a dutiful wife, Babi seemed to blossomed even more as she grew older. Babi and Ron met at a ballroom dance class. The couple stay in close contact with Ron's two daughters and Babi's two daughters and son who live in the area.⁷

Iranian elderly come here with received, frequently reiterated scripts for aging. As their tasks have been accomplished, often they assume older age to be a period of waiting. They typically believe elderly cannot learn and think it useless to become involved in new endeavors, as they are basically finished with their life tasks. Women especially may assume that their place is within the home and family. Transcending scripts and learned notions about appropriate spaces for themselves can be challenging for any age. Grasping new worldviews and ideas about their place and proper behavior can be even more difficult for the elderly.

GAINING AND LOSING IN A NEW CULTURAL SPACE

Babi Jun (Babi Dear) provides an outstanding example of an Iranian American senior crafting happy and fulfilling arenas for herself in which to thrive.



Babi and Ron perform some ballroom dance moves at his birthday party, while Babi's daughter Mina operates the video camera.

Although Babi has been unusually successful in creating an active and rewarding life, many other Iranian American seniors have been using, modifying, discovering, and crafting spaces for aging in America, even in the face of all they have lost. For some of them, not as well prepared for American life, adjustment has proven difficult. They battle loneliness, depression, lack of people with whom to speak Persian, and loss of a sense of community.

For their well-educated middle-aged and younger children, the Bay Area around San Francisco, and the Santa Clara Valley south of San Francisco Bay provide professional and entrepreneurial opportunities. Many had come to the United States for an education and stayed on to work. Their Iranian American children enjoy access to advancement and the rewards of successful, well-paid careers in the computer industry, engineering, medicine and health, real estate, university work, law, technology, the sciences, and other professions and businesses in this area.

To take advantage of these opportunities, though, the younger generations must work long hours and build up networks, and thus do not have the time

for leisurely socializing with family, as had been the case for the Iranian seniors when they lived in Iran. In order to become successful in the American environment, as they and their parents want them to be, they are forced into adopting American cultural patterns of less frequent interaction, and forced to give up Iranian social patterns of extensive time and care for extended family and kin, even for elderly parents.⁸

Although Iranian seniors want to be close to their children and often had religious and/or political reasons to leave Iran, the San Francisco Bay Area does not provide a user-friendly environment for them. Due to English language deficits and the less-outgoing American attitudes toward neighbors, many cannot easily find ways to engage in culturally meaningful socializing, so crucial to their well-being. Iranians in this area do not live in tight enclaves, but are scattered over dispersed residential zones. Poor public transportation prevents those who cannot drive or pass an English driver's license test from readily getting around to see friends and relatives.

The majority of Iranian American elderly have found in America the secularized, Westernized, modernized, and religiously free environment that they had lost in Iran with the Iranian Revolution of February 11, 1979, and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic. However, they have lost their beloved country and their Persian cultural and linguistic milieu as a space for aging. Politically and economically, their lives have been disrupted. They suffer from loss of close neighborhood ties, lack of an age-integrated social life, and hardest of all to bear, loss of frequent, intimate, enmeshed interaction with children and grandchildren.

While their emigration to America results in loss in many ways, their American setting also contains new opportunities for exploration, recreation, hobbies, education, outings, travel, self-development, non-Iranian associations and friends, and different kinds of relationships and interaction styles. America presents the possibility of recreating identity, self, and life, which would not be accessible in Iran. In this chapter, drawing upon examples from my Iranian American friends in the Santa Clara Valley, I discuss how Iranian senior citizens, in the face of dislocation and loss, craft new spaces and new scripts for aging in America. Their senior citizens' association, "The Iranian Parents' Club of Northern California," and an Iranian American senior citizen day activity and care center, the Grace center, provide age-segregated environments for Iranian elders to meet with their peers and develop new Iranian culture and Persian language communities with people who share their experiences and thus understand.⁹

SECULARIZED AND WESTERNIZED IRANIAN AMERICAN ELDERS: LOSING MODERN LIFE IN IRAN AND FINDING IT IN THE UNITED STATES

Part of the Modernized Iranian Upper Classes

The Iranian Americans who are now senior citizens came of age during the Pahlavi reign from the 1940s to the 1970s. Enabled by the oil economy, and

inspired by the example of the Westernizing ruler of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Reza Shah Pahlavi and his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (the last Shah, who was overthrown by the Iranian Revolution of February 11, 1979) wanted to modernize Iran and make it into a European-like country. Although they failed to bring about democratic political modernization,¹⁰ they developed infrastructure, a French-influenced educational system, modern armed forces, health and medical systems, and an extensive bureaucracy.¹¹

Mohammad Reza Shah's government made some moves to bring literacy, health care, and agricultural assistance to rural areas.¹² However, urban upper classes benefited most dramatically from his modernization efforts. By the 1960s and especially the 1970s, the elite in the armed forces, police, educational system, and engineers of various sorts had Western-style homes, clothing (perhaps straight from Paris), furniture, educations, and social lives.¹³ For the Iranian upper class, this often included a retinue of servants, big cars, and foreign travel and education for their children. Educated men and often educated women interacted with work colleagues rather than restricting their social lives to relatives and neighbors. Even middle class people, especially in urban areas, began to take on a more modern lifestyle.

Most of the Iranian American elderly who now live in the United States had been members of these emerging professional, bureaucratic, government work, police and military, service, and entrepreneurial upper and middle classes. They had already become Westernized, modernized, and secularized to a degree. Realizing that now in this more modern society education had become crucial for their children, many sent their offspring abroad for an education, especially if they could not pass the extremely difficult university entrance exam to study in Iran. Some young people even came to the United States for high school, perhaps accompanied by one or both parents.

Leaving the New Islamic Republic of Iran for America

During the 1970s, young Iranians formed the largest population of foreign students in the United States. Many stayed on to work and build their lives here. One of the main reasons for the presence of Iranian elderly in the United States was the wish for family reunification: they moved here to be with their children. The other main reason for their departure from Iran was the revolution, which resulted in the end of the Shah's modernizing, if dictatorial, government, and the institution of an Islamic government. When the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979 took place and the population voted for an Islamic republic to replace the fallen monarchy, these Westernized, secularized people fled the country if they could. Those especially well situated in the Shah's government often escaped across the border or faced execution. The seniors we studied are retired teachers, professors, principals, bureaucrats, engineers, executives, military people, and business people. Here in the United States they have regained access to a Westernized, modernized, relatively secular society.

Religious Freedom: Lost in Iran and Found in the United States

With a western-style education in the system developed by the Pahlavis or gained abroad, a modernized work environment, and an increasingly Western-like lifestyle, this emerging class of people no longer held primarily religious worldviews. For many of these people, religion was becoming compartmentalized and a matter of individual belief and practice.¹⁴ The Pahlavi shahs discouraged many religious practices and cut back on the power of the clergy. These people appreciate religious freedom in the United States, which is not now available in their own home country. As rituals and practices central to Islam can be carried out individually, the U.S. environment does not fail as a venue for Islamic religious practices.¹⁵ If they are strictly practicing Moslems, which the majority of Iranians in the United States are not, people can carry out the prescribed prayers five times a day in their homes, fast during the Arabic month of Ramadan, practice alms giving, and travel to Mecca on the *haj*. It is not necessary to have dedicated public spaces to perform their religion. It is not even necessary to have the services of a trained cleric for religious rituals, other than for burials and the wedding contract signing ceremony. Although anguishing over the negative attitudes of many Americans towards Islam and Muslims, in the United States, Iranian American elderly, if they wish, can carry out rituals according to their own interpretation of Shi'a Islam. Two Iranian Shi'a congregations meet regularly in the Santa Clara area. People can attend home-held rituals, mourning gatherings, death and birthday commemoration rituals for holy figures, and public religious gatherings.¹⁶ However, they are also free to *abstain* from practices, as the majority of the largely secularized Iranian American population do. In Iran, this could get them into trouble.

LOSSES

Lost Space for Aging: Iran

Mrs. Abdullahi was born in a small town in western Iran and is Kurdish. She married at age seventeen, and then went with her husband to Tehran. She worked as a teacher and raised her three daughters there. Although she and her husband divorced after fifteen years of marriage, through her work as a principal of private schools she was able to provide for her daughters without outside help. Her youngest daughter initiated the family's move to the United States when she wanted to come here to attend university. Mrs. Abdullahi came to visit her daughter, bought a house here, and then moved here within a year, bringing her other two daughters who had been studying in England. With the Iranian Revolution of 1979, most of her relatives also emigrated to the United States. Mrs. Abdullahi has continued to visit Iran to see family and friends, but sold all of her property there. When asked if she was happy with her choice to move here, she answered that the move was very good for her daughters: they received good educations, obtained masters degrees, and found good jobs. *Everything* here is easier for her family, she repeatedly said.¹⁷

Despite her daughters' success and the "easy" life she lives in the United States, I discovered that Mrs. Abdullahi is rather unhappy here. She repeatedly stated that it is "too late" for her to return to Iran; she has adapted to American life, enjoys the freedom she has acquired, and feels obligated to stay because of her children. She moved for them and will always stay where they are. But Mrs. Abdullahi feels like a stranger here, although she has been in California since 1997. She notices stares from white Americans and feels that she could not join other Americans in her age group for socializing. She deeply desires to associate with Americans, but feels that her difficulties with the English language would hinder her.

Because of this discomfort, and maybe even fearing rejection from white Americans, she deeply values her relationships with other Iranian elders. She visits with her Iranian friends every Friday and Saturday in different households to share a meal and converse. However, she feels very alone: "Always I am alone inside."

When I asked Mrs. Abdullahi what she does to cope with her unhappiness here, she simply said that while she was "all the time happy" when back in Iran, she knows she appreciates the easy life here. She is taken care of by the government here, and she has her family. While she loves her granddaughter and grandson and spends as much time with them as she can, she limits her involvement with their lives. She wishes she could be with them always, but she is not in good health and knows she doesn't have the patience she needs to help raise them. (Field notes from interview with Mrs. Abdullahi, Aisha Breeze Curran, December 8, 1997)¹⁸

The great majority of Iranian seniors in the San Jose-Santa Clara area ache with longing for their country. They idealize life under the Shah's government, which was actually quite good for them. At first, many Iranians living in the United States thought the prerevolution order would be regained, and life would return to the norms they were used to. One former general kept his packed suitcase next to the door for years, assuming things would change again and he would be able to return to his country. Now, most have lost hope of living again in Iran. They grieve for their country, for the loss of emersion in their own culture, society, interaction style, and language. They have lost the comfortable sense of knowing where and who they are. They have not been able to be at "home" to age.

Disrupted Aging for Iranian American Elderly in the Santa Clara Valley

In at least three ways, the American environment fails to provide a comfortable cultural space for Iranian Americans in which to age.

Political Discomfort

Politically, Iranian Americans feel the animosity of Americans toward Iran and Iranians, and do not feel comfortable in the American political milieu. Most came to the United States believing it to be a refuge from the Iranian fundamentalist Islamic Republic government that took power in 1979.

Developments after 9/11 made them feel they have also lost the United States as a replacement home. They have seen the negative American attitudes towards Iranians, Muslims, and people from the Middle East in general. They have watched the American attacks against Iraq with horror and outrage, and are distraught over the violence in that country, resulting in so many Shi'a deaths and destruction in places particularly holy to the Shi'a. They watch American support for Israel against the Palestinians, most of whom are Muslim, and American military attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq, and fear that Iran, located right between the two, will be the next Muslim nation targeted.

The elderly realize Iranians are regarded by other Americans as terrorists and wild-eyed fanatics or religious fundamentalists.¹⁹ As they listen to news and American government threats, they fear an American attack against their beloved Iran, even though now, for most elderly, an alien and illegitimate government is in power there.

Loss of Close-Knit Neighborhoods

Iranian elders often do not feel comfortable in their American neighborhoods. With language barriers, the negative attitude toward Muslims and Middle Easterners in general, and the very busy Silicon Valley lifestyle, Iranians cannot get to know their neighbors and form a close community as they had previously experienced in their home country. Iranians complain that Americans do not form connections with their neighbors, or even say hello, but rather interact with others at their place of work or friends elsewhere. They perceive Americans as giving less priority to social relations, as not being warm like Iranians. Women, especially, in Iran gained much satisfaction from the close relationships with neighbors. There, they were the center of a local verbal community, a group of people with whom they could talk in detail and which served almost as oxygen for their social selves. As they grow older, women in Iran may become a mainstay of the traditional neighborhood, closely familiar with the concerns of others in the neighborhood, a central node for advice, neighborhood and kin exchanges and connections.

Sharing in the lives of others in the neighborhood, as well as living among family and relatives, gave Iranian elderly a secure sense of self, a feeling of being grounded. As they reside among Americans here, in this social context many feel they cannot express themselves very well. Because they must take on complicated transportation challenges before meeting up with other Iranians, these elderly are bereft of an immediate neighborhood where people drop in and share in informal chatting, celebrations, mourning, gatherings, and home-based religious rituals.

Loss of Age-Integrated and Enmeshed Family Interaction

Most painfully, the emigration to America has resulted in seriously disrupting what provided most significance for Iranian elderly: family and kinship relations. Separate residences constitute an innovation for Iranian American

elderly. Their traditional cultural script about how to live as older people came from the experiences of a generation from a very different kind of society. A son may have helped his father in a merchant shop, agricultural fields, or craft endeavors. The parents found a spouse for the son, who then lived with his bride and growing family in the same home with parents, at least for a period. Even just two or three decades ago, elderly parents generally did not live on their own, but shared a residence with one of more of their children.²⁰

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Even if an elderly couple had lived in a separate home, when the husband died, the wife went to live with a son. Similar to anthropologist Suad Joseph's analysis of Lebanese family relations, Iranians were also family "enmeshed" (Joseph 1993, 1999). People took this situation for granted and assumed it to be the natural and right way of managing family connections.²¹

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In Iran, comparatively little age segregation divided family and kin ties. Typically, on Fridays, when people had the day off from work, relatives gathered in a home or an orchard or a garden owned by a kin member for a long day of eating and socializing.²² Young people were expected to spend their time with family and relatives rather than going off with their friends in age-segregated groups to pursue their own interests. Family members often lived close to each other or on different floors in a multilevel home. Typically, daily phone calls and frequent visits brought family and kin into very close association, elderly Iranian Americans remember, which provided a sense of intimately shared lives.

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In the Santa Clara Valley, the next generation works hard, putting in long hours and often time-consuming commutes. Women often work as well, and parents are busy ferrying their children around to provide them with advantages. Younger daughters-in-law, especially those who are not Iranian, like to have lives independent from in-law influence. Grandchildren have become especially Americanized in interaction with their environment. When they go to school, and other children become their peer group, they may not enjoy spending time with their old-fashioned, old-country grandparents with their strict ideas about children's behavior and their inability to speak English.

In this California context, the nuclear family comes first, no matter how much these middle-aged people love their parents. Often, though, the elderly focus their lives and selves on their children, and want to continue an enmeshed type of connection with them. Their time-stressed children try to call and drop by, and perhaps share a meal with the parents on the weekend. Yet, it is not enough for the elderly. Whether they live with their children or separately, as do most, Iranian elderly often feel neglected and lonely, deprived of close-knit relationships with their children. One man talked of how his son came to get him for a meal on a weekend. But then, he remarked dismissively, he brings me back to my own rented apartment again. As student researcher Noah Levine (2006:15) points out, "(Iranian) elderly ... have been forced to contend with not only their new marginalized roles in society, but also their new marginalized roles within the family."

ALTERNATIVE, MODIFIED, DISCOVERED, AND CONSTRUCTED SPACES FOR AGING

Many Iranian American elderly have turned to alternative arenas that are age segregated and/or nonfamilial in nature.

Mrs. Fakhri Aalami, a retired teacher and principal, stayed with her son and German American daughter-in-law and children for about six months after she came from Iran. Then she started to feel isolated in their outlying home. She wanted to be in an urban area where she could get out and see buses, traffic, and people. Her son and daughter-in-law helped set her up in a small, one-bedroom apartment across from a park, with convenient bus service, in a more-highly populated area. As she felt lonely there, she would sit on a chair on her balcony overlooking the street, and if someone who looked as if they might be Iranian walked by, she would call out to them. In this way, she found some friends. She spent her time watching Iranian television, talking on the telephone, and visiting with friends and family. She sometimes held *sofrehs*, Iranian Shi'a women's home rituals, to commemorate a holy figure and indicate thanks or request assistance. Mrs. Aalami became an important figure in the Iranian Parents' Club, calling members to remind them of upcoming meetings, serving on the board, making a monthly donation, and attending the monthly meetings and holiday events. After Grace, the Iranian American senior citizen day care and activity center, opened, Mrs. Aalami eventually became a daily participant.

Iranian Parents' Club of Northern California

Some eight years ago, Mrs. Mahin Roudsari, a retired math teacher, established a senior citizens' club for Iranian Americans, the "Iranian Parents' Club of Northern California" (Roudsari 1998). Particularly attuned to elderly issues and feelings because of observing and listening to her own mother displaced to California, Mrs. Roudsari, with a group of her own friends, organized outings and a monthly evening meeting where elderly people could be in an Iranian environment for several hours. During these meetings, people gathered to chat in their own language, exchange stories of heartache and difficulties, laugh and talk a blue streak, and enjoy social interaction comfortably following their own familiar cultural rules. At each meeting, an Iranian American expert or medical specialist gives an informative talk and answers questions. The elderly listen to Persian musical performances, watch Persian dancing, often by young people taking classes, and recite Persian poetry. They drink tea and eat pastry, fruit, and Persian food. Here Iranian elderly receive respect, attention, appreciation, and understanding. They can talk, brag, or complain about their children, feel approval from others, and gain appreciation for their Persian cultural skills and knowledge. They can even take on leadership roles or contribute to the organization in special ways, such as serving as greeter, attending planning and policy meetings, or holding office. For many, the parents' club has become a

social mainstay, providing a sense of belonging and community. Members of the club go on picnics, and together celebrate holidays such as the Iranian (March 21) and American New Years by organizing Iranian dinners and dances at a Persian restaurant.

In summer 2006, one of the founding members and a mainstay of the parents' club, Mrs. Fakhri Aalami, died. I noticed, as I attended the various death and mourning rituals, that almost all those present, other than family, were from the Iranian Parents' Club. As club members greeted each other at the rituals, we said to each other, "I offer my condolences." Such words are offered to the relatives of the deceased, but in this case, members of the club both gave and received the expressions of sympathy. At the club meeting after the death, Mrs. Roudsari arranged a memorial table with photos and flowers in honor of Mrs. Aalami. People chatting with each other at club gatherings frequently brought up her name, saying how sad they were over the loss, and how she was missed. This age-segregated group became meaningful not only as a social group, but also as a community of mourning.

Grace Adult Day Health Care

During spring 2005, students in my Anthropology of Aging class assisted me in participant observation and interviewing of Iranian American senior citizens at the day activity and care center, Grace Adult Day Health Care.²³ Student researcher Neda Behrouzi provides examples of the significance of Grace in the lives of Iranian American participants from her fieldwork there:

When I went to sit with a group of women, I asked one of them what she did outside of Grace. She said she "watches the 25 Iranian channels on my satellite TV until after midnight. I read things—books, newspapers (Persian language ones, I assume), the Qor'an. I also cook for my grandson, I walk, I shop." When I asked about America, she said, "I would rather go home. It is good we are here, but that is because our children are here. It is good to be where your children are." She told me, "Before, I had depression. I cried all the time. I was very alone. I have children, but I don't live with them. I came here (to Grace) and now I am good, happy. Before, it was hard to sleep. I never slept well."

One man with whom I spoke there told me, "Things were fine for me and my wife in the U.S. even though we lived separately from our children. But then seven years ago my wife died. I cried several times every day after that. I was desperately unhappy and lonely. Then I started coming to Grace. Now I come every day from Monday to Friday. If it were open on Saturday and Sunday I would come then too. At Grace, I go around greeting others, cheering them up, and encouraging them out of their depression. When I go home in the afternoon, maybe I cry some. At night, though, I go to sleep with the hope and comfort that the next day I will be going to Grace again." (Neda Behrouzi, field notes from participant observation at Grace, April 29, 2005.)

Entering the large Grace center, one is struck with the noise, chatter, and laughter. People may spontaneously start clapping or dancing to Persian music. Grace offers English and poetry classes, meditation, grief and psychological

groups, exercise classes, meals and snacks, a huge TV with Persian language programs, health services, and board games. The center celebrates birthdays for each month and American and Iranian holidays, inviting families for the special programs. As with the Parents' Club, it offers seniors new opportunities for leadership, contributions, and organizing.²⁴ For those elderly who go to the Iranian senior citizen center on a daily basis to sit and converse with friends, it may partially take the place of warm connections to neighborhood and kin networks.

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Cultural Contributions and Community Engagement

Although this chapter's initial example of Mrs. Babi Hogue presents a dramatic case of constructing a life as an Iranian American senior, other older Iranians have also constructed satisfying lives for themselves in their Iranian American environments. For instance, since his wife's death in 1997 when he was eighty-eight years old, Mr. Saeed has devoted his life to serving God and others. He has kept improving his English and helping others with their English, calling on and phoning shut-ins, and speaking at his Muslim congregation. At the Iranian Parents' Club, he has often served as greeter at the door, warmly welcoming other senior citizens. He has long served on the board. With his very good English, he also enjoys talking with non-Iranian Americans and gives them as well his warmth and delightful repartee. While Mr. Saeed was able to drive, he visited the ill at home, hospital, or nursing facility. He ran errands and brought other older Iranians to the doctor, and in general devoted his time to serving others, including premarital counseling for young Iranian Americans. His deep devotion to the beliefs and practices of Islam and his love for reading, reciting, and writing poetry have given him much meaning in life. Although, at age ninety-nine he is now more homebound because he cannot drive, his friends take him to the Friday evening meetings of his Muslim congregation and the Saturday morning Iranian Parents' Club English classes.²⁵ Facing several health challenges, Mr. Saeed sometimes spends time away from his small efficiency apartment in a hospital, recovery facility, or long-term nursing establishment. An unmarried daughter who lives in the area brings food to eat lunch with him once a week. His other daughters live in Iran. Recently, he has begun going to the Iranian American Grace center. A center minibus picks him up in midmorning and delivers him home again in mid afternoon.

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Avocational, Recreational, and Educational Opportunities

Education for the elderly is a strange idea for Iranians. In the United States, opportunities exist for people to seek education at any time of life. In Iran, this is rarely the case. Further, elderly are commonly perceived by Iranians to have little or no ability to learn, and thus, education for them is wasted effort. Although such an attitude cuts down on the involvement of Iranian American

elderly in educational endeavors, some do try to take classes. Because of their troubling language deficit, they see the significance of education for improving their American lives. Older Iranian Americans take other types of classes too, such as in flower arranging, computer, and line dancing. They attend Persian poetry classes, gatherings for poetry recitation, and poetry seminars. Some Iranian elderly maintain the custom of the *doreh*, a regular meeting with the same circle of friends once a week or once a month, going from home to home in turn or gathering in a public setting.

911 Ambulance, Hospitals, and Long-term Care

Inevitably, even seniors who came to this country while still in relatively good health begin to develop medical problems. As they become frailer and less self-sufficient, the clash between Iranian cultural ideals and the realities of the younger generation's success and shift to North American behavioral norms is amplified. This can result in more disappointment and perhaps bitterness among the elderly, and often shame among their children. Iranians consider caring for aging and ill parents to be a central aspect of Persian culture and identity. People with an Islamic outlook see devoted care for parents to be a religious duty. In Iran, separate senior housing has developed only recently. The great majority of Iranians express horror at the thought that they themselves or their parents would be cared for by strangers in a separate facility.²⁶ With not much room or time for care of sick parents in their children's homes, seniors' health problems present yet another challenge, the search for alternatives.

Like so many other Iranian parents, Mr. Tabrizi came with his wife to California several decades ago because their three daughters all lived in the United States, two of them in the San Jose area. The Tabrizis lived in the same apartment complex where their eldest daughter and granddaughter lived. Mrs. Tabrizi cared for her granddaughter while her daughter continued her schooling. Mr. Tabrizi loved the sun and spent most of the day out at the complex swimming pool and Jacuzzi. When Mr. Tabrizi's wife died in the late 1980s, he continued to live in the apartment and use the pool and Jacuzzi. His daughters cooked Persian food for him and brought him over to their homes. He loved nature and enjoyed hiking. Even at an advanced age, in his nineties, Mr. Tabrizi looked fit, lively, and tanned.

As Mr. Tabrizi began to have health problems and grow weaker, his daughter found a roommate for him who helped out in exchange for rent. When his oldest daughter moved more than an hour's drive away for her job, caring for her father became increasingly difficult and frustrating. She tried to monitor the care and attention that his roommate was giving him, and then later, to make sure he was well cared for in hospital and long-term nursing establishments. The daughter suffered terribly at the thought of having her father in a nursing home, which was so contrary to Iranian values. As she needed to work, there was little alternative. Exhausted and stressed out from worry, the

daughter drove back to the area at least once a week to spend time with Mr. Tabrizi, often bathing him and feeding him. When he died, this oldest daughter organized the large Iranian memorial service and gathering, and handled the other rituals and arrangements.

Through the course of the last decade, as I have been working with Iranian American elderly, some senior citizens whom I first knew in relatively good health have faced challenging medical problems. They may go into the hospital periodically. Some have learned about 911, so that in a medical emergency, an ambulance may transport them to the hospital. After a serious health incident, the aged may spend time in a longer-term recovery facility before being released to go home. Elderly usually do not recuperate at home with extensive care from adult children, but must be cared for by health service providers. When they recover enough to be alone or with a spouse at home, they may continue to receive home care from visiting health personnel. Their adult children usually do as much as possible to provide moral support and practical assistance if their parents are ill; however, there are limits on their ability to do so. Further, daughters-in-law, traditionally the appropriate caretaker of the elderly, may be working outside of the home or not be enthusiastic about attending to the needs of elderly in-laws, especially in the face of so many other demands on their time and attention. Often a senior having health difficulties may bounce between hospital, care facility, home of an offspring or other relative, and their home setting.

When older adults with failing health must spend the last period of their lives in a nursing home, such a situation is extremely traumatic for the elderly and their children alike. It goes against deeply held values of respect and care for elderly parents, even though in the American setting there may be little alternative. The children may suffer terrible guilt, and the elderly feel horrified, humiliated, and rejected.

Most Iranian elderly in the United States are secularized in that they believe mosque and state should remain separate, and that religion and spirituality should be seen as personal matters not subject to the dictates of government. The great majority of Muslim Iranian seniors living in the United States do believe in God and accept Islam. Although their levels of ritual involvement and adherence to practice vary a great deal, the majority do not regularly perform the five-times daily prayers and other rituals, or go to a mosque. However, when it comes to marriage and death, they want to follow Islamic procedures. Some modifications in preparation of the body and burial are made, due to American law and public health requirements,²⁷ but as much as possible, people want to follow the familiar, religiously enjoined mourning and burial procedures.²⁸ They wish to be buried among other Muslim dead.

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Spaceless or “A Home in the Heavens”

In a few cases, if the older people do not have resources themselves, and their children do not have extra in terms of space and resources, the

grandparents may be in a very difficult situation.²⁹ This dilemma is reflected in a short story by Iranian writer Goli Taraqqi, "A House in the Heavens." It portrays a devoted mother who no longer has a place in her children's pressured and busy lives abroad. Her children live in various countries. She stays with one until the family finds they don't have space for her, and then is put on a plane to another home, and so on. At one point, she begins to feel the only space she can legitimately occupy is her airline seat. It has been paid for and is hers for the duration of the flight. A seat in a metal capsule in the sky becomes her only home. Bereft of a residence on earth, she has only a "house in the heavens" (Taraqqi 1996).

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The story dramatizes the perception of Iranian American grandparents that their children have developed lives in which their parents are not longer accorded a central spot or perhaps even much of a place at all. Taraqqi also conveys how scattered Iranian families may be. Among the educated, Westernized minority of Iranians who staffed the Shah's modernization and development cadres, many are now spread out in Iran, Great Britain, Europe, North America, and even Australia and countries elsewhere. A mother may have children on several different continents, and thus spend time in the air traveling between her own residence and those of her children. The airplane, as well as other means of transportation, has become a common location for Iranian elderly, especially those from upper classes or whose children work in modern sectors or abroad. Some children in a family may live in Iran and others live elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Iranian American seniors often live a very different lifestyle and hold very different world views from most other Middle Eastern, Muslim immigrant elders in the United States from Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, and other countries (Ahmed, Kaufman and Naim 1996; Omidian 1996; Ajrouch 2007a).³⁰ Most others did not have the same exposure to modernity, higher standards of living, and Western culture, education, lifestyle, and careers as did most of the older Iranians in the United States. Although they may also complain about lack of adequate respect and attention from the younger generations, immigrant Muslim elders from these other countries are more likely to live with their children and, if necessary, are more often cared for at home (Omidian 1996; Sengstock 1996; Salari 2002; Ajrouch 2005a, b, 2007a, b). Such care is typically provided by younger female kin who have less access to the American alternatives enjoyed by younger Iranian women. Among less well-off, less modernized, and less secularized Muslim immigrants, extended family ties remain salient: seniors live with and share in the lives of the younger generations to a greater degree,³¹ but seldom participate in peer groups activities for the elderly. They may have only occasional access to other elderly with whom they can share their troubles and feel comfortable among those who have lived through similar experiences. The

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possibility of going to a mosque for religious gatherings and activities may provide such seniors with opportunities for socializing, engaging in familiar and valued rituals, and meaningful communication. As is common in Christian and Jewish organizations, some mosque personnel in the United States are beginning to develop activities, gatherings, and services specific to particular populations, such as senior citizens (Smith 1999:123–125).

An interesting contrast can also be drawn with Iranian elders in Sweden where political refugees are more accepted, and living arrangements for them are more readily provided than by the U.S. government. Iranians in Sweden tend more often to come for political asylum and are more likely to be from less privileged backgrounds. Although facing some of the same issues, they enjoy fewer of the opportunities for Persian cultural participation. Because of a much larger Iranian immigrant population, U.S. Iranian elderly enjoy many more ethnic cultural opportunities, such as TV stations, Persian language newspapers and magazines, and a variety of Iranian clubs and organizations. Compared with those in America, Iranian seniors in Sweden also have a greater language challenge. Iranians had been more familiar with English, and studied it as the second language if they attended high school, but Iranians had no exposure to Swedish. The higher language barrier makes it even more difficult for the Iranian elderly to socially negotiate Swedish society. However, the Swedish government provides better services for the Iranian Swedish elderly. The good public transportation system means better opportunities to get around for the Iranian seniors, and the Swedish government has funded a day activity center for them (Emami, Torres, Lipson, and Ekman 2000). Further, in Sweden, Iranian elderly do not face the negative attitudes that Iranians suffer from in the United States.³²

Much like the situation of Barbara Myerhoff's elderly Eastern European Jews in Venice, California (Myerhoff 1980), Iranian American elders' home society, the Iran that they knew, is no longer.³³ The senior Iranians in Silicon Valley, like the elderly and highly secularized Jews about which Myerhoff writes, nurtured economically successful and highly mobile children who avoided the kind of deep kin enmeshment embroidered into their parents' script for late life. Failing that, both sets of elderly sought to recreate meaningful community and relationships in ethnic, age-peer-focused organizations that serve as a replacement social circle, a home away from home, a space to age in the company of those who have similar histories, cultural values, and goals.³⁴

Moving to America has provided some freedom from restraints and new possibilities. Babi Jun (Babi Dear) has constructed a lively, warm, delightful home for herself, including an American husband, a dance floor, her roses and garden, the sometime presence of her children and grandchildren, her husband Ron's children, and friends—both American and Iranian. She shares her gracious presence with others through her comfortable forays into many types of places—dance classes, club membership, such as in Payvand, a Persian language and cultural organization, and in the Iranian Federated women's club, both run by her close younger friend Fariba Nejat. Without the inherited

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cultural scripts to do so, Babi has developed new ideas of what is possible for an older Iranian widow. Dancing hand in hand with strange males,³⁵ a suitor and then a new husband, and performances dressed in costumes other Iranian women her age would consider too skimpy, revealing, and attention grabbing—Babi has been ready for all of this. She has transgressed old boundaries and developed new scripts and spaces for herself. As one of my student researchers accurately noted, “The relative success or failure of elderly immigrants’ adaptation to life in America is largely contingent on their ability to create new social networks and roles providing them with meaning, contribution, and continuity” (Levine 2006:15).

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NOTES

This article is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Fakhri Aalami, teacher, principal, and founding member and dedicated supporter of the Iranian Parents’ Club of Northern California.

For several internal grants to fund my research about Iranian elderly both in the Santa Clara area and in Iran, I am indebted to Santa Clara University. Such financial assistance has been crucial, as for some years American government agencies have generally not been providing research funds for work in Iran. Santa Clara University also provided me with an Arrupe Scholar grant, providing funds and a course release to conduct research at the Grace senior citizen day care and activity center attended by Iranians during spring 2005. I also thank the American Institute of Iranian Studies for supporting research in Iran. I am very grateful to all of the SCU students who have been involved in this research and, of course, most of all, to the many Iranian seniors who have shared their lives with us, and to the people of “Aliabad,” Iran.

1. As this article is based on collaborative research, I must give credit to a number of co-authors. Many Iranian American seniors contributed, and three provided written materials: Babi Hogue, the late Aghdas Malek Salehi, and Mahin Roudsari. Tens of Santa Clara University students participated in the participant observation and in-depth interviewing, including SCU student authors Aisha Curran, Noah Levine, and Elgin Schaefer; SCU student research assistants Neda Behrouzi, Jenevieve Francisco, Laura Fowler, Emily Johnson, Leslie Miller, Marisa Tsukiji, and Lien Vu; and other SCU students from *Anthro. 188 Peoples, Cultures, and Change in the Middle East*—Winter 1998; *Anthro. 3 Intro. to Soc./Cul. Anthropology*—Winter 2005; and from *Anthro. 172 Anthropology of Aging*—Fall 1997, Winter 2004, Spring 2005, and Spring 2006.

2. The belly dancers for the evening included European Americans, Asian Americans, and then Babi and her daughter, Iranian Americans. Two European Americans, perhaps sisters, jiggled, flung, and thrust their well-endowed bodies as they went through the steps. In contrast, a slim Asian American looked willowy as she turned and twisted. All of them smiled continuously, exuberantly, as if they couldn’t help but grin in delight from the enjoyment of dancing and sharing their expertise with the audience. I normally don’t like belly dancing. However, in this home setting, in spite of the dance’s erotic form, friends and relatives dancing together seemed joyful, graceful, and artistic rather than lascivious.

Babi and her daughter Mina took the floor for another choreographed Middle Eastern dance. In synch, except when Babi lost a step, then with good humor took it up again, mother and daughter danced together. Mina has also been taking lessons in this Middle Eastern dancing genre. An exquisitely graceful dancer, Mina performed her dancing with smooth charm and delicate movements of her arms and hands. In her Middle Eastern dancing classes and performances, as well as in her even more active ballroom dancing participation and teaching, Babi joins with people of different ethnic groups and different ages.

3. Music and dancing are intrinsic to Iranian cultural life. Women dance at weddings, family gatherings, and even when friends visit. Iranians dance as individuals, rather than as couples. In more traditional arenas, women celebrate separately from men; thus they are free to dance with only females as an audience. In tribal/ethnic areas, women commonly danced in a circle or semicircle, generally separately from the men's line. With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the clerical authorities declared dancing un-Islamic. People either had to cease dancing—and enjoying music for a period as well—or hide it indoors. Now, however, in Iran, where unrelated men and women are legally disallowed from mixing, modern young people and adults hold mixed parties in private homes (see Moaveni 2005, for example.) During weddings and parties held in homes or public spaces, although segregated by sex as required by the government, I have seen men stray into the women's space and dance exuberantly to the women's delight.

4. Babi invited their non-Iranian friends, many of them also dancers, to Ron's birthday party. As a ballroom dance couple, they perform at various gatherings and even have served as dance instructors on cruises. Babi and Ron have business cards showing them posed in a dramatic dip. Babi seems delighted with her life—full of energy, cheer, and joy.

5. Iranian American humorous essayist Firuzeh Dumas makes a similar point about new opportunities in talking about her eighty-year-old father's life in American. To celebrate his birthday, the family went on an Alaska cruise where crowds of strangers joined in singing him happy birthday (2005:34). Such experiences would not have been possible in Iran.

6. Babi seems comfortable and warmly welcoming in different atmospheres, not only in a Iranian one. When my institution, Santa Clara University, held a women's day conference a number of years ago, Babi was one of the older Iranian women who came to deliver a paper, in English, to the audience of professors, students, and American women (Hogue 1998; see also Malek Salehi 1998 and Roudsari 1998). When a professor of an aging class at San Jose State University requested that I bring an older Iranian to speak to students, Babi was glad to help. Her discussion was articulate, gracious and informed.

7. For more information about immigrant Iranian seniors living in North America, see Gilani (1998); Hegland (1999a, 1999b, 2005b, 2006a), Hegland et al. (2006); Hegland, Behrouzi, Curran, Levine, Miller, Schaefer, et al. (2006); Hegland, Behrouzi, Johnson, Miller, Tsukiji, Vu et al. (2005a and 2005b); McConatha, Stolle and Oboudiat (2001); Salari (2002); Shemirani and O'Connor (2006).

8. Levine further explains, "The subsequent and successful adaptation of second and third generations into American culture minimizes (for the younger generation) the benefits of maintaining close family ties and creates intergenerational conflict. The acculturation of their children has created new hybrid ethnic identities that conflict with cultural ideals including traditional roles, attitudes, and behaviors" (Levine 2006:15).

9. Fieldwork for this study has been carried out during my research trips to Iran during eighteen months in 1978–1979, shorter periods from 2003–2006 in “Aliabad” (a fictive name), Shiraz, and Tehran, Iran, and by my students and myself from 1997 until the present in the Santa Clara/San Jose area of northern California. Since 1997, I have been working with Iranian American elderly in the Santa Clara Valley, south of San Francisco, also known as Silicon Valley—home to the computer industry. Unable to obtain a visa for research in Iran for some twenty-five years, I turned to Iranian Americans instead, choosing to focus on the anthropology of aging and the elderly, through participant observation at the Iranian senior citizens’ organization and the Iranian day activity and care facility, gatherings in homes, Iranian cultural events, and in-depth interviewing by myself and several Santa Clara University classes.

10. The American government supported Mohammad Reza Shah’s rule, including military training and the presence of large numbers of American armed forces in the country, as they considered him their loyal friend. American influence in Iran became a significant source of dissatisfaction, leading to the 1979 Revolution. Many Iranians saw the Shah as a “U.S. puppet,” and felt that Iran should rid itself of control by an outside country.

11. The American government encouraged Mohammad Reza Shah’s White Revolution to try to bring Iran into the twentieth century. The Pahlavi shahs discouraged women’s veiling, at one point even making veils illegal. Mohammad Reza Shah wanted females to be ready to serve in the workforce. In the 1960s and 1970s, females were not allowed to wear veils to teach, study at universities, provide health and medical assistance, or work in government offices. Female students did not wear veils, but rather school uniforms without a scarf. When I worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mahabad, Iran, during 1966–1968, I walked to school in dresses with hems just below the knee. The other female teachers of the girls’ high school also wore dresses and skirts of the same length. Only one woman, from a very traditional family, wore a veil—against regulations.

12. Young people were trained and prepared to go out to rural areas as members of the Educational Corps, Health Corps, or Agricultural Corps.

13. Nesta Ramazani, born in Iran in 1932, in her memoir *The Dance of the Rose and the Nightingale* (2002), for example, talks of living her early life in a medley of Iranian and Western cultures. She learned to jitterbug from watching films, and studied ballet in Iran. She joined the first Iranian ballet company, and, accompanied by her mother, went on tour with the troupe in Turkey and Europe. Ramazani moved to the United States with her Iranian husband, who became a well-known professor, and taught various types of dance here.

14. Often they left Iran because of alienation from the Islamic Republic of Iran government, which stood against all they had lived for as participants in the Shah’s modernization and development agenda. The great majority of Iranian American seniors do not support a government by clerics purporting to know the one and only correct interpretation of Islam, and determined to force people to live according to this perspective. Religion should be separate from government, they believe, and individuals should be free to find their own way to God. Religion should be a matter of individual choice and personal experience. They self-identify themselves as Muslims, but for most, a religious perspective colors only a small part of their lives. They believe in God, and wish to have a Muslim burial, but they compartmentalize religion, believe it has no part in politics and government, and see it as an individual matter. They appreciate freedom of religion and a secular atmosphere in the United States.

15. The two Iranian Shi'a congregations in the Santa Clara Valley operate without clerics. More knowledgeable lay people speak about moral, ethical, spiritual, and philosophical issues, recite passages from the Qor'an, and read from other religious sources. People do not do their prayers at these gatherings, but if they are practicing, conduct their prayers at home. In one of the congregations, rather than a religious service, a wide variety of speakers are invited for the education and elucidation of the audience.

16. They are free, if they wish, to form their own congregations, form groups for study and discussion about religious and spiritual matters, and raise funds for mosques. Women may gather, without possible censor and accusations of Islamically incorrect practices, in traditional home-based women's religious gatherings, providing food, companionship, and religious readings, hoping in exchange to gain intermediation from the saints and assistance in their problems and goals, or to express gratitude for wishes granted. They may pursue a more spiritual and philosophical religious path, such as Sufism, try various self-help organizations or formats, or even convert to Christianity, which many have done.

17. However, Mrs. Abdullahi had lost something in the area of half a million dollars upon moving to the United States, when a man, seeing she had a good deal of money, had approached her to open a business with him. She never "bothered with business" after that. (Field notes from interview with Mrs. Abdullahi, Aisha Breeze Curran, December 8, 1997.)

18. See also Schaefer 1997.

19. This was not the case before the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Many, if not most, of the now Iranian American elderly benefited from the Shah's regime and held favored or at least respected positions in the government services or bureaucracy or did well in business endeavors. They were most often on good or accommodating terms with the Shah's government. Further, U.S. government officials looked at the Shah as modernizing and a close friend in the Middle East.

20. A middle-aged friend told me, "My mother's mother lived with a son. My father's mother lived in Tabriz, also with a son. The parents lived with their sons back there. They didn't put parents in an old people's home." Personal communication, April 11, 2007. Living with a son epitomized the cultural ideal. Reality, of course, did not always live up to ideals.

21. It should be noted however, some Iranian American elders also talked realistically and sometimes negatively about the conflicts engendered by living at the home of their mother- and father-in-law, or bringing them into their own home.

22. In Iran, until relatively recently, the elderly did not have separate spaces designated for only that age group. Spaces for the elderly were situated in home, family, neighborhood, religious settings, and activities shared with others of different ages, rather than age segregated. Families traveled, visited, and went on excursions together. Younger people went on pilgrimages, visited shrines, took part in various calendar-year rituals, religious gatherings, and life-course rituals along with the older adults. Older people did not really exist as a separate category of people. Not long ago, life expectancy was much lower than now, so fewer older adults were around. When the elderly became sick, the family did not take them to doctors or hospitals—such were rare for everyone only a few decades ago, but cared for them at home until they died. As they did not have medical attention or drugs, those who became incapacitated did not generally live much longer after a major health trauma. The elderly were not segregated into separate groups or in settings specifically for the aged. Family, gender, neighbors, relatives, and coreligious practitioners were significant for identity and social interaction, rather than age.

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23. I am grateful to Santa Clara University for funding and a course release to conduct this research under the SCU Arrupe Scholar fellowship. My students and I have so far presented four conference papers based on our collaborative Arrupe research project. See Hegland et al. 2006, and Hegland et al. 2005a and 2005b for more information about the Grace center and its place in the lives of the Iranian senior citizens.

24. Student researcher Noah Levine reports: "The very same challenges resulting from old age and immigration which foster the need for the Grace center also create new opportunities for members to contribute. Many of the activities and roles previously regarded as a source of self-confidence are no longer available to them as a result of their immigration. Thus, finding new roles that add meaning and significance is a crucial factor in the successful adaptation of elderly immigrants. Grace accomplishes this; it provides more than a social outlet for interaction with other Iranian immigrants. Their membership in the community gives them not only a sense of continuity, but also provides them with new roles which increase their confidence, sense of purpose, and their overall satisfaction. At Grace, seniors are capable of developing a separate identity, not defined by their limitations, but rather by their service, contribution, and commitment to the other members. English class grants them the opportunity to display their abilities, reaffirming their confidence and self-esteem. It is a sign of how successfully they are adapting to American society. Yet, it also provides an opportunity to help other members who are struggling. Their ability to translate English directions into Persian is a huge help in an English class. It is also common to see more physically capable seniors helping those struggling with disabilities. The simple act of walking them to the restroom or playing a game of backgammon adds meaning to the lives of both individuals. In playing backgammon with Yusef (Joseph), Mohammad found meaning through his contribution to Yusef. His interest in Yusef helps to foster Mohammad's own sense of identity and self-esteem; he is still valued and worth helping ... My experience at Grace has led me to the conclusion that, for most seniors, the Center is invaluable in the establishment of meaningful identities, interpersonal relationships, and group continuity" (Levine 2006:12, 16).

25. The Saturday morning English classes eventually ended. The teacher felt he could not go on using three hours on Saturdays, and no one replaced him. Although a low price taxi for senior citizens is available through the country, it comes either an hour early or an hour late, Mr. Saeed reports. Once, after the monthly Wednesday evening meeting, he was left at the community center where club meetings are held long after everyone had left, waiting for the transportation service. His health problems are also now limiting his involvement.

26. Also see Clemetson (2006) and dpulliam, dan, Mertika (2006).

27. Iranian Americans in the San Jose/Santa Clara area do not have a cleric, and attempting to follow correct Muslim burial practices may present challenges. As babies are born into the world with nothing, Muslims believe, people also return to God with nothing. Bodies should be ritually washed and then wrapped with a simple white burial shroud only, when they return to the earth. When Mrs. Roudsari's elderly mother learned about American burial practices including elaborate coffins, she decided she wanted her body to be returned to Iran. Mrs. Roudsari complied with her request. When Mrs. Aalami passed away, her son turned to Mrs. Roudsari, saying he knew nothing about correct practices. Mrs. Roudsari organized the mourning gatherings, and a learned layman from Pakistan advised about burial practices and conducted prayers. Mrs. Aalami's body was wrapped in a white burial shroud (*kafan*), but to compromise with American requirements, was placed into a simple coffin before burial.

28. A useful textbook-like starting place for those service providers wishing to better understand Muslim views of death and dying is provided by Sarhill, LeGrand, Islam-bouli, Davis, and Walsh (2001). The authors present ideal practices and expectations of practicing Muslims regarding end-of-life issues. See also Moody (1990).

29. An Iranian American friend told me of talking to an elderly Iranian woman who was sitting on a park bench and weeping. Her non-Iranian daughter-in-law had put her out, she said. Surely, this happens only extremely rarely. See also Gilani (1998).

30. For materials about other Muslim elderly living in North America, see Ahmed, Kaufman and Naim (1996); Ajrouch (2005a and b, 2007a); "Changing family structures ..." (2004); Clemetson (2006); Dossa (1994, 1999, 2002); Fakhouri (1989, 2001); Omidian and Lipson (1992); Qureshi (1996); Ross-Sheriff (1994); Salari (2002); Sengstock (1996); and Smith (1999:123–125).

31. Although it may be culturally appropriate in terms of remembered expectations from the homeland, relatively exclusive reliance of elderly on adult children in current American society may lead to problems. Based on her research among Arab Americans in the Dearborn, Michigan, area, sociologist Kristine Ajrouch concluded, "(W)hile relying on a child does occur, it may not be optimal for them to be the only source of support in times of need. It is not only the availability of support that matters, but the nature of the relationship which is key to well-being" (Ajrouch 2007b:180).

32. For other articles about Iranian seniors in Sweden, see Ahmadi (1998); Ahmadi Lewin (2000, 2001); Ahmadi Lewin and Tornstam (2000); Emami, Benner and Ekman (2001); Emami, Benner, Lipson and Ekman (2000); Emami and Ekman (1998); Emami and Torres (2000); Graham and Khosravi (1997); and Karimi (2003).

33. The Eastern European villages of Myerhoff's Jewish elderly had been wiped out, as had their Eastern European culture. It was gone, and they faced the existential task of recreating meaning in the face of that void. Most Iranian elderly in the United States saw the modernized, secularized Iran of their own socioeconomic class being destroyed, to be replaced by an emerging fundamentalist, cleric-controlled government and society. Of course aspects of Iranian culture do continue in Iran. Further, some of the elderly are able to maintain connections with people in Iran, through phone calls and even visits for some. Over time, more people in Iran are becoming more secular and modern in attitude and practice, at the level of everyday lived reality, in spite of—and perhaps partly in reaction to—the government of clerics. At the informal level, signs can be seen of a society more familiar in some ways to the modernized, Westernized Iranian seniors reemerging. The elderly, usually somewhat Westernized through the former shah's infrastructural initiatives, often are not aware of these subtle modifications, and often believe nothing good can come during the Islamic Republic government. They feel alienated from their own society in its transformed state, alienated from American society, and cut off from their children and relatives and language and social networks.

34. Blaming the lack of attention from the young on the influence of American culture, Iranian American seniors often overlook the fact that in Iran now as well, extended family ties and intergenerational interaction have declined drastically. In Iran, too, seniors are facing the need to develop new scripts and spaces for aging. Now, widowed grandmothers in Iran often live in their own residence, separate from children. Brides are not willing to live with the in-laws and do housework under the direction of their mothers-in-law. Parents focus on their children and the resources they must provide for their children, for the sake of reputation and the children's future. Grandparents lived in a different world, and their knowledge and experience are of little use to their children and grandchildren. In Iran as well, grandparents are often lonely and need to construct

lives for themselves. They cannot depend only on their children for material support and their social and emotional lives. Old people's homes are beginning to open up in Iran, too, where sometimes families feel they cannot care for incapacitated elderly themselves, although the change from family to more separate lives and public systems of care has changed less quickly in Iran. There, at least they are located in a community of others sharing their language, religion, and culture. For some information about older Iranians and the changes in their circumstances, see Friedl (1991, 1994); Hegland (1999c, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004, 2005a, 2005c, 2007a, 2007b, Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b); Kaldi (2004); Loeffler (1988); Sheykhi (2004); and Teymoori, Dadkhah and Shirazikhah (2006). Researchers have paid little attention to aging and the elderly in Iran. This field of study stands at the threshold. As Iran is facing a rapidly growing number of elderly, and their social support through family and social networks is losing effectiveness, study of the elderly, their changing circumstances, and means of replacing the older system of care and social support has become a crucial task.

35. During the anniversary party to commemorate the founding of the Iranian Parents' Club of Northern California, a small incident shouted out to me the cultural dissonance inherent in Babi's learned scripts versus those of other, less acculturated Iranian American seniors. Younger DJs and musicians played music appropriate for American couple dancing as well as for Iranian individual dancing, where perhaps people may dance to each other, but no touching is involved. Babi's husband was not present, and several Iranian American males asked her to dance. As her partner took her hand and led her to the dance floor, taken-for-granted etiquette in ballroom dancing culture so much a part of Babi's life, I could not help but see this through the eyes of the other, more conservative older Iranian women: holding the hand of a man not her husband on top of the discomfiting but recognizable couple dancing proximity!