Technique and Form under the Veil:

The Aesthetics of Hijab
in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

Dissertation

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Iman Behrouzi

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My grandmother tells me that her mother wore a hijab at home during her first encounter with television because she felt the male TV presenter was looking at her. One day, she told her son that the presenter was a voyeur and was leering at her! It was her first encounter with audiovisual media, as she had not previously seen cinema or television. She felt herself exposed to the gaze of an unrelated male performer who had invaded her home by the advancement of the media technology.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1933, and the production of Iranian cinema's second film *Haji Agha*, *the Cinema Actor (Haji Agha, Actor-e Cinema, Ovanes Ohanian)*, the Iranian film industry has had to face the issue of "look" (to be looking and to be exposed to looking) and contend with the legitimacy of cinema in an Islamic country.[1] This thesis focuses on post-revolutionary Iranian cinema and the ways in which it has been developed around the gaze of unrelated (non-mahram[2]) male spectators in the cinema hall. As Negar Mottahedeh argues in *Displaced Allegories*: *Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema,* "Iranian cinema's cine-scape is emphatically anchored in the veiled figure and bound by the acknowledged presence of the projected male viewer in front of the screen" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 13). The presence of veiled women everywhere in the diegesis, even when they are alone at home, makes it clear that the film was made in post-revolutionary Iran, and turns it into an allegory of the compulsory hijab code.

To understand Iranian cinema after the Revolution—and the ways in which women have been represented in the movies—one needs to first learn about Iranian society and the political, social, and cultural situation following the Revolution. The changes in the political and social situation had a direct influence on the Iranian cinema. According to Janet Afary, "many women had worn the veil as a symbol of protest during the Revolution" (Afary, 2009, p. 277). "On the occasion of the 24th day since the triumph of the Revolution, the leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini remarked: There are no obstacles to women working in Islamic ministries, as long as they wear hijab" (Fozi, 2005, p. 37). Hearing the voice of women was declared "Haram" (against religious laws); women were subsequently banned from singing, forcing female singers to flee the country. Mixed schools were eliminated and subjected to gender segregation. The Iranian Ballet Institute was shut down. Women were also banned from sports such as swimming (and other water sports), to the extent that their presence in stadiums as spectators was not tolerated. This ban on the presence of women in sports venues became the inspiration for Jafar Panahi's *Offside (2005).* Its plot revolves around the plight of a group of young girls who try to enter a football stadium by disguising themselves in men's attire. In 1983, the Islamic dress code (Hijab) became

[1] For a closer analysis of this film, see pages 39-41.
[2] Father, son, spouse, brother, grandfather, grandson, uncle, father-in-law, and nephew are considered mahram (related) to the woman; therefore, the woman does not need to wear the hijab when she is with them. Other men, however, are non-mahram (unrelated), and the woman should therefore wear the hijab when she is with them.

mandatory,[3] despite protests by large groups of women.[4]

Figure 1: Protest against compulsory hijab. Summer 1980. Photo by Reza Deghati, https://nitter.net/hoseinrazzagh/media

As Mohsen Milani observes, "The religious fundamentalists were determined to introduce a new system of ethics and conduct" (Milani M. , 2006, p. 360). From the perspective of the revolutionaries, the liquor stores, the cinemas, and the brothels were symbols of corruption and vice during the Shah's reign, and should therefore be destroyed.

[3] See Sadr, S. (2009). *(Majmue-ye Ghavanin va Mogharrarat-e Pushesh dar Jomhuri Eslami Iran)*, Tehran: Ketabe Nili.
[4] On women's demonstrations against compulsory hijab, see Afary, J. (2009). *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran.* New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 273-275.

Figure 2: A picture of the revolutionary forces' attack on a liquor store during the Revolution. *Photo by Mohammad Sayad, 14 February 1979, https://www.seratnews.com/fa/news/430771/عکس-برخورد-انقلابی-با-انبار-مشروب-هتل-لاله*

After the victory of the Revolution, the Iranian cinema was nearly shut down. It took many years for both society and cinema to stabilize enough to establish rules for the new cinema in this new era, to define the "do's" and "don'ts." The filmmakers, after some time of perplexity, had clarity on what rules and regulations should be observed. One of the most obvious taboos was depicting women without the hijab. Therefore, movies such as *Death of Yazdgerd (Marg-e Yazdgerd, Bahram Beyzaie, 1982)*, *The Red Line (Khat-e Ghermez, Masoud Kimiai, 1982),* and others that were produced during this time of uncertainty when the hijab was not yet part of the law, were confiscated for showing women without the hijab and therefore never screened. Alireza Davoodnejad's *The Prize* (*Jayeze, 1982)* also faced this challenge: the film was to be screened just as the hijab was becoming obligatory. The filmmaker was obliged to eliminate about thirty minutes of the movie in which the new rules of hijab had not been observed. In his next movie, *The House of Spider (Khane Ankaboot, 1983)*, Davoodnejad did not even include a single female character, due to the problems he faced after *The Prize* was produced. Many of the movies of this time—stuck between the permissible and the prohibited—were not screened.

Within the first half of the 1980s, many directors who feared such issues had already begun the process of self-censorship, eliminating women from their work altogether. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, as a theoretician of Islamic art, remarks in his *Introduction to Islamic Art*: "Unfortunately, the very presence of women on the stage will attract the attention of the audience, the males in particular. Speaking on the

stage differs from a women's conversing in the society. At any rate it is better that women play smaller roles on the stage" (Makhmalbaf, 1981, p. 136). In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, the situation of Iranian women in cinema was paradoxical and complex: on the one hand, the regime's cultural policies diminished their role and presence in front of movie cameras throughout the first decade after the Revolution; on the other hand, there was a burgeoning wave of female filmmakers.[5]

After the Revolution, a slogan was written on government buildings and public places that read: "My sister, your hijab. My brother, your gaze." The slogan summarized what shaped visual modesty, the aesthetics of hijab, the veiled look, Islamic gaze, and the Islamicate filming grammar in cinema. Islam required women to have hijab in public places and the cinema screen was seen as a public place. Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, manager of the Farabi Cinema Foundation in the 1980s, says the following about hijab and modesty rules in films:

> Is it not the meaning of hijab that you cannot put the subject before the eyes of the audience who is not intimate to it? Will Mr Filmmaker agree to build the walls of his house from glass and live before the eyes of everybody? He will never do such a thing. Why? Because he respects intimacy very much. There are many dramatic situations that the audience can see only if they are intimate with, and many of such issues the audience cannot be intimate with. So naturally, it mustn't be displayed to the eyes of the public. We ask the filmmaker if the audience, in its deep sense, is intimate with this event or dramatic situation or not. If yes, show it, but if they aren't, why you insist on showing it? What do you want to provoke in them? Do you want the carnal soul of the audience to be the watcher of your film and enjoy that woman's beauty and the curl in her hair, or you have another goal? (Arzhmand & Heydari, 2015, pp. 42-43)

According to Beheshti's interpretation of hijab and modesty, the narrative in Islamicate cinema should be based on an assumption that the audience is unrelated to the characters, and therefore many of the

[5] Rakhshan Banietemad, Tahmineh Milani, and Pooran Derakhshandeh were three female directors who began their filmmaking careers in the mid-1980s; in the Iranian cinema before the Revolution, there were very few women as filmmakers. Iranian women therefore occupied the role of directors in the post-revolution era on their way to becoming some of its most prominent filmmakers. Rakhshan Banietemad's *Tales (2011)*, for example, which won the award for scriptwriting at the 2014 Venice Film Festival, or Aida Panahandeh's *Nahid (2015)*, which was the only representative of the Iranian cinema at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015. Iranian women also attained success in other cinematic roles. Hayede Safiyari is one of the most significant editors of this era, whose resume includes editing *A Separation (2011)* and *The Salesman (2016),* the only Iranian films to win an Oscar to this day. The widespread presence of Iranian women in different cinematic industries is unprecedented not only within the Iranian context, but also at the global level: Samira Makhmalbaf, whose debut *The Apple* was selected for the Cannes Film Festival, was the youngest filmmaker (17 years old) ever to enter this competition, and went on to win many awards.

scenes and dramatic situations of the world's cinema can have no place in the Islamicate cinema of Iran. What Beheshti asks filmmakers to do results in a kind of hijab in Iranian cinema, resulting in the elimination of part of the narrative in Iranian cinema—a phenomenon which I call "narrative hijab" (see also Chapter 3). Beheshti's interpretation of modesty in cinema is consistent with the concept of hijab in Islam, which prohibits leering and looking directly at unrelated women. In Islam, hijab is not only covering the hair and body. It also includes the way women look at the non-intimate (unrelated, non-mahram) men (they must not look directly at one another); a lack of bodily contact (women must refrain from any form of body contact with non-intimate men); as well as the way they are in closed spaces (they mustn't be in a room with non-intimate men and if they have no choice, the door must be open). These rules were also applied to the films' diegesis and narratives. Hijab was interpreted as the banning of any sexual pleasure the audience might experience by watching films. Accordingly, seeking pleasure was denied, and this modesty policy was employed in mise-en-scène, lighting, shot sizes and camera angles, as well as the look, movement, costume and makeup of the cast. Books and articles addressing Iranian woman's cinema, and the representation of women in the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, often take a thematic approach to the films under study. Only rarely has a form-driven perspective on cinema and its techniques—such as framing, the angle and movement of the camera, decoupage, mise-en-scène, lighting, editing, makeup and acting—been employed in studies of the cinematic representation of Iranian women. The significance of a comprehensive study of the representation of women, from the perspective of the cinematic form and language, is therefore paramount.

Iranian Cinema and Film Studies

In this chapter, I discuss how the field of film studies addressed the crisis of "looking" in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. Additionally, in my analysis of scholarly viewpoints in Iranian film studies, I examine in detail the similarities between "looking" in Iranian Islamicated cinema and feminist film theory, as well as the differences between Islamicate gaze theory and feminist gaze theory. Furthermore, I focus on the concept of averted look and categorize four types of unrelated (non-mahram) in Iranian Islamicated cinema. I explain how, by employing veiling, modesty, and averted look, Iranian filmmakers after the Revolution eliminated the concept of "man as bearer of the look, woman as image" in their films. I also consider how post-revolutionary Iranian cinema was designed on the basis of male spectatorship.

"Modesty" as Visual Regime

The specific restrictions to looking in Islamic culture have necessarily been a major topic in the scholarship dedicated to Iranian film. Hamid Naficy argues that "the cast and crew had to behave as though unrelated male spectators were present both in the profilmic scene and in the reception scene" (Naficy, 2012d, p. 116). After the Islamisation of the Constitution based on Sharia (religious law) at the beginning of the Revolution, the Sharia principles of hijab, look, and gender segregation of related and unrelated people were imposed on all aspects of society, architecture, and art. This was done to such an extent that, in the aftermath of the Revolution, single men were sent to the top floor of the cinema, or in the case of a one-storey cinema, they would seat single men in the hall corners to segregate single men and women as much as possible. In his analysis of the Iranian women's cinema, Naficy uses the term "modesty" for all strategies of separating related and unrelated men and women, stating: "Veiling is the armature of modesty" (ibid., p. 103). He continues, "Modesty involves adopting an averted or veiled look" (ibid., p. 103). In Islamic religious discourse, there is a great deal of connection between seeing and corruption.

However, the experience of gazing in cinema and the pleasure in looking (scopophilia)—most especially in psychoanalytic film theory—are strongly linked to the male pleasure of looking at the woman's body. Nasim Pak-Shiraz explains this paradox emerging in the post-revolutionary cinema committed to Islam: "According to the rules of Islam, looking at images of unknown women on screen with the intention of pleasure is Haram (forbidden). Interestingly, even though these discussions are rooted in fiqh

(Islamic law)[6], they are not too far removed from current Western theories, such as feminist film theory" (Pak-Shiraz, 2011, p. 44). Based on this notion, the post-revolutionary Islamicate cinema encountered the lustful and direct look, and replaced it with a unique look in the world of cinema; Naficy called this "the averted look." In this regard, Naficy, in his article "The Averted Gaze in Iranian Postrevolutionary Cinema," points out, "The unfocused look, the averted look, the fleeting glance, the androgenized look, the reflected look, and the long shot—all instances of the encoding of modesty in cinema—problematize the Western cinematic theories that rely on audience implication through suturing" (Naficy, 1991, p. 36).

The Iranian post-revolutionary cinema is Islamicated by veiling and modesty in the presence of four categories of unrelated persons, namely: unrelated cast on set, unrelated male spectators in front of the screen, unrelated camera and crew behind the camera, and unrelated characters in the diegesis (I will further address this unrelated square in Chapter 3). Mottahedeh considers veiling "a shield against heterosexual desire" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 9). Iranian cinema, both before and after the Revolution, was formed around the concept of "pleasure in looking." The previous cinema was created in the interest of "pleasure in looking"; in contrast, the post-revolutionary cinema was in negation of "pleasure in looking" and against heterosexual desire. Gönül Dönmez-Colin uses the term "sisterly look" to define the halal (permissible) look in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema (Dönmez-Colin, 2004, p. 99)—free of sexual desire and similar to the look of a brother at his sister.

In post-revolutionary cinema, the two principles of "the male looks and the female is looked at," which prevailed in the FilmFarsi[7] of the Shah's era, are to be fought. Essentially, Islamic theorists seemed to believe subconsciously in Laura Mulvey's famous theory about "man as bearer of the look, woman as image."[8] This was, of course, without actually knowing about the feminist film theory, which had become a trend shortly before the Iranian Revolution in 1979 with the article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema in 1975." As Mottahedeh points out, "the limits set on a masculinist visuality by modesty laws in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema dictate a different system of representation that ironically coincides with the anti-voyeurism and negative aesthetics of feminist avant-garde" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 16). The feminist movement was formed in opposition to the conventions of Hollywood cinema, and the Islamicate cinema of Iran in contrast to the pre-revolution FilmFarsi movies. They both aimed to no longer represent "man as bearer of the look, woman as image." Pak-Shiraz argues that "in both feminist

[6] Fiqh is Islamic jurisprudence.
[7] For a closer analysis of FilmFarsi, see pages 51-58. For more on FilmFarsi movies, see Naficy, H. (2012b). *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 2: The Industrializing Years, 1941–1978.* Duck University. pp. 149-154. See also Moazezinia, H. (1999). *Filmfarsi Chist?* . Tehran: Nahr-e Saghi.
[8] See Mulvey. L. (1975). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6–18.

film theory and fiqh, one of the main criticisms against including the female body in film is the fact that it is usually constructed to satisfy the male gaze and pleasure" (Pak-Shiraz, 2011, pp. 44-45). The feminist movement and the trend of Islamicated Iranian cinema differed significantly, however, despite their similarities. According to Najmeh Moradiyan Rizi, "It is the emphasis on modesty and chastity as the ideal features of a woman that has put Iranian cinema in opposition to Western feminist discourse" (Moradiyan Rizi, 2015, p. 7). Another fundamental difference is that the Islamists intended to purify the cinema with a religious point of view based on the Quran. According to Islam, "looking" is the milieu of many sins; with the help of veiling and averted look, they are trying to eliminate "man as bearer of the look, woman as image" in the Islamicate cinema.

Naficy also differentiates between Islamicate gaze theory and Western feminist gaze theory. In his opinion, the Islamic system of looking is based on four suppositions. First, the eye is an active and invasive member. Second, women are inherently exhibitionists. Third, men are entirely defenceless against the sexual appeal of women. And fourth, the power of women's sexual attraction is so great that, if there are no restrictions or veils, it corrupts the men and the whole society (Naficy, 2012d, p. 106). The fundamental difference between feminist gaze theory and Islamicate gaze theory is that feminists are working to defend women against the controlling gaze of men in films, whereas the aim of Islamists is to prevent the corruption of men and society (by means such as the averted look), because they essentially consider men defenceless against the sexual attraction of women. In other words, the goal of theorists such as Mulvey is to criticise the male gaze in classical cinema that renders women as objects and puts them in a passive position—a view that is controlling and repressive. In contrast, by controlling the gaze of men and women's hijab, the Islamists in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema are concerned with the sinning of men and society, rather than with protecting women. They impose restrictions on the processes of production, the content, and the form of the films (see Chapter 3 on hijab aesthetics), in order to stop the creation of female exhibitionist and male gaze in films, and to subsequently prevent the corruption of men and society. Michelle Langford argues that "the rules of modesty are designed to protect men as much as women" (Langford, 2019, p. 249). The difference between feminists and Islamists is that in the Iranian Islamicate cinema women themselves lack much significance; this cinema essentially intends to completely eliminate, marginalize, or passivize the woman, so that (as they believe) women will not corrupt men.[9]

According to Moradiyan Rizi, the presence of veil in the Iranian cinema has led to the formation of

[9] See Ayatollah Khomeini's speech on pages 62-63.

a new spectatorship, and the female spectatorship in post-revolutionary cinema is completely different from that of the West. "Whereas the Western female spectator encounters excess in the image of Western women on screen, the Iranian female spectator faces a lack whether on screen or in the movie theatre. The veiled female body on the screen and the lack of engaging cinematic techniques, such as close-ups and POV shots, detach the Iranian female spectator from the female image" (Moradiyan Rizi, 2015, pp. 8-9). Both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary cinemas are designed on the basis of male spectatorship. From the perspectives of the government's cultural policymakers, the filmmakers, and the narratives within the films, the subjectivity, mise-en-scène, and protagonists of the films are designed for the male spectators in the cinema halls. The Iranian female spectator lacks the chance to be in the position of, and identify with, the woman on the screen. This common rule of the Iranian cinema is defied to a great extent in the third period (1997-2005), with films such as *Red (Ghermez, Fereydoun Jeyrani, 1998)*[10], wherein the female spectators and the female image are attached to the narrative and to the film respectively. This third period of the cinema was so important because it reversed the trend of the Iranian cinema: the woman's perspective prevails in films such as *Red* and *The May Lady (Banooye Ordibehesht, Rakhshan Banietemad, 1998).* In *The May Lady*, the male protagonist has been eliminated throughout the film, his presence minimised to just a voice on the answering machine.

As cinema halls in Iran have been defined as a masculine space, women are expected to wear the hijab both on the screen and in the cinema hall. It isn't farfetched to consider the "veiled female body" the icon of post-revolutionary cinema; the cinema apparatus was inseparable from this icon. Although this icon has changed throughout time, its foundation has reigned. It is based on the notion that women on the screen are always in the public, even if the story happens inside their house, and that they are being gazed at by four unrelated male groups: the male spectators inside the cinema hall, the actor in the film with her, the man behind the camera and the unrelated characters in the diegesis. This thesis analyzes four basic perspectives of the camera's look, the unrelated male's look in the cinema hall, the unrelated male actors' look, and the male characters' look in the diegesis in post-revolutionary cinema—from pre-production to production and reception by the male audiences in the cinema hall—in three political and historical periods after the Revolution.

Negar Mottahedeh calls post-revolutionary cinema "woman's cinema" influenced by the imposed modesty rules. "Post-Revolutionary Iranian cinema found new ground not in the negation of government regulations, but in the camera's adoption of the governmentally imposed veiled, modest, and averted

[10] For a closer analysis of this film, see pages 178-184.

gaze, producing the national cinema as a woman's cinema" (Mottahedeh, 2008, pp. 4-5). It may be more complete to call post-revolutionary Iranian cinema "veiled woman's cinema" (see Chapter 3 on hijab aesthetics). The national cinema was defined by the veiled female body and they are inseparable. For the non-Iranian audience, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema is recognized for this recurring icon and, most likely, the first image of Iranian film that comes to mind is of an asexual female character on the screen. This image recalls the site where the film has been produced.

Cross-Cultural Reception

For non-Iranian spectators, the image of the veiled woman created a recurring and prefabricated reception during the past four decades, and was considered the sign of Iranian women's repression. As Lindsey Moore states in her analysis of cross-cultural politics of representation, "the non-native spectator always already has expectations" (Moore 2005, p. 26). For the Iranian audience, however, the veiled image of the female body in public was defined as part of the prevalent reality in society (not necessarily the oppression of women), and indoors as a contract between the filmmaker and audience (accepted, though unrealistic).

According to Moore, "cross-cultural spectators do not merely consume but also contribute to the production of meaning in films" (Moore, 2005, p. 26). From this perspective, she analyses the Western audience's reception of three films: *The Apple (Sib, Samira Makhmalbaf, 1998)*, *Divorce Iranian Style (Kim Longinotto & Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 1998)*, and *The Day I Became a Woman (Ruzi ke Zan Shodam, Marzieh Meshkini, 2000)*. In her essay, she looks at various non-Iranian writers dealing with these three films, who consider the representation of veiled women as a sign of the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. This issue does not seem to be significant for critics living in Iran, however non-Iranian scholars, and even Iranians such as Naficy and Mottahedeh who live in exile, attribute great significance to the veiling issue. Mottahedeh points out that "the ubiquity of the veil in all cinematic representations in Iran significantly transforms scopophilic conventions, classical film practices, and dominant habits of film viewing" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 11). Some analyses of the veiled female body as depicted in films ignores the point that there is seemingly no distinction between women wearing hijab in public and private spaces. Whereas in actuality women in Iran do not have to adhere to hijab and modesty laws in private spaces, in films they do have to wear hijab in private to adhere to the hijab code of Iranian cinema—the exposed image is thus inconsistent with the reality in the society. That said, the films' representation of the veiled female body in public is consistent with the societal requirement for

women to observe hijab. This is why filmmakers of the art cinema avoid depicting private environments as much as possible, so as not to interfere with the film's realism.

I should clarify an important point for the readers of this thesis. Iran is a multidimensional country filled with contradictions, and it is sometimes hard for the non-Iranian audience to understand the complexity of certain events and laws in Iranian society. The following few examples aim to demonstrate this contradiction and complexity. Video was banned in the 1980s, but millions of video players and videocassettes were circulated in Iranian underground life (see Chapter 2 for more details). Twitter is banned in Iran, but all Iranian officials and the supreme leader have Twitter accounts and regularly tweet. Iran is the only country in the world where hijab is compulsory, yet it also has the highest number of cosmetic surgeries in the world. Broadcasting music is allowed on television, but it is forbidden to show musical instruments.[11] In films, it is forbidden to depict touching or shaking hands between men and women, but it is okay if they slap one another. Women's cycling in public places is not constitutionally prohibited, but it is prevented in practice. Iranians are accustomed to these contradictions, but Western film analysts are sometimes confused by this in the Iranian cinema. Lindsey Moore explains this paradox about Iran very well in her article "Women in a Widening Frame: (Cross-)Cultural Projection, Spectatorship, and Iranian Cinema." In analysing Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple*—made when Makhmalbaf was just 17 and included in the Cannes Film Festival—Moore refers to Jasmin Darznik's famous comment defining this paradox in Iran: "Was Iran a country that imprisoned girls in their homes or a country that set them free to make films of international repute?" (Moore, 2005, p. 20). My thesis focuses specifically on the reception of films within Iran and by Iranian audiences, although it does also address the global reception in consideration of Kiarostami and the Iranian art cinema.

In addition, the personal taste of Iranian officials also contributes to furthering these paradoxes in some cases. A censor in one government may ban the screening of a film, where another may authorise the screening of this same film. Oftentimes, after many years of publishing a book, the new censorship department may stop reprinting it or make changes to it. Or a play is performed in one city for a month, but is not allowed to be performed in another city. An actor or actress' gaze or makeup may be considered voluptuous by one offical, but another may permit it. A film is screened in the cinema halls uncensored, but some scenes are cut from the television broadcast. Hijab is no exception. Hijab does not have a single and fixed interpretation in Iran, and has undergone changes in the past four decades following the

[11] On music in post-revolutionary Iran, see Siamdoust, N. (2017). *Soundtrack of the revolution : the politics of music in Iran.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Revolution, despite some consistencies. Women are required by law to cover their hair and body completely, but they do have certain choices: the type of headscarf or clothing they wear; the colour, looseness or tightness, shortness or length; whether to cover their hair completely or leave it partially untucked; their makeup; shoe type. All of these present different concepts of hijab, and although the oppressive concept of compulsory hijab remains in place, women challenge it somewhat with these choices. Such choices reveal women's religious or nonreligious affiliations to a large extent. Although post-revolutionary cinema has been forced to observe the hijab to this day, using these choices has somewhat diminished the power of the hijab decade by decade. And despite all the loosening of modesty rules and veiling, the basis of veiling still powerfully imposes itself on the Iranian cinema.

Another important point to clarify is the concept of "Islamicate cinema" and how it differs from the "Islamic cinema." When we refer to Islamicate cinema in Iran, we should not mistakenly assume it is similar to the Islamic cinema in Turkey, Indonesia, Pakistan, and other Islamic countries. These two cinemas are very different, especially in the production, aesthetics, and cinema apparatus. For example, "white cinema"[12] in Turkey, one of the most important trends of the Islamic cinema, was launched to promote Islam and Islamic ethics against the then secular government of Turkey. However, the goal of Iran's post-revolutionary Islamicate cinema was not only to promote Islamic concepts, but to Islamicate all parts of the cinema (from production and film diegesis to the cinema hall), which makes Iran's Islamicate cinema different from the Islamic cinema movements in other countries. Unlike the Islamicate cinema of Iran, Islamic cinema in Turkey remained limited to the story of the films, and did not include the hijab, actors' clothing, form, mise-en-scène, or Islamicating behind the scenes and the production process. Another prominent difference is that Islamic cinema in Turkey is a choice—a movement launched by a number of directors who believe in Islam—but Iran's Islamicate cinema is imposed by the government, and all filmmakers (whether they believe or not in it) are forced to observe its principles. The Islamic cinema in Turkey promotes the principles and beliefs of Islam in fictional subjects and has little to do with the mechanism of the cinematic apparatus; the Islamicate cinema of Iran is essentially concerned with the cinematic apparatus, and is based on the aesthetics of the veiled female body. The Iranian Islamicate cinema even distorts historical facts, as all women are veiled in the films, wearing hijab even in stories that occur before the Revolution. In fact, this cinema based on the principles of hijab distorts spatial and temporal realism, too.

[12] On "*White Cinema*", see Dönmez-Colin, G. (2004). *Women, Islam and Cinema.* London: Reaktion Books. pp. 88-93.

Cinematic Modesty and (Anti-)Illusionism

The post-revolutionary Iranian cinema is notable not only for its similarities with the feminist current of cinema against voyeurism, but also for its opposition to "apparatus theory," one of the most important cinematic theories of the 1970s. According to Jean-Louis Baudry's essays "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus"[13] and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema"[14], in the dominant cinema led by Hollywood, filmic instruments and the mechanism of producing films are concealed from viewers with the help of an illusion of continuity created through editing. This creates the illusion for the audience that what they see on screen is the objective reality; in fact, this illusion is created with the help of cameras, editing, the cinema projector, the dark space of the cinema hall, and the screen. The filmic apparatus conceals the fabrication of the film that was based on 24 frames per second.

The post-revolutionary Iranian cinema—essentially formed in the confrontation and rejection of the mechanism of the Pahlavi regime's voyeuristic cinema—assumed formal approaches to eliminate continuity, structural unity, and identification, without any knowledge of apparatus theory and suture theory. (Interestingly, during the 1980s and 1990s, cinema halls in Iran were not dark rooms, and the little lights on the wall were on throughout the film's entire screening, fearing that some behaviour contrary to the Islamic principles might happen in the darkness of the hall. It prevented the audience from being fully attracted to the film, reminding them that they were not alone and that they were in the cinema hall. It also made it hard for the audience to identify with the protagonist.) The disruption in continuity, unity, and identifying with the filmic apparatus, was achieved by mechanisms such as preventing women's close-ups and showing women wearing hijab indoors; refraining from showing the protagonist's POV (Point of View) shot, and interference in suture; the protagonist staring at the camera/spectator; disruption in the narrative, as seen in Panahi's *The Mirror (Ayeneh, 1997)*; reminding the audience that what they see is a film and not the real world by showing behind the scene of the film on screen; movie-within-movie; disruption of continuity editing; and informing the spectator of the filmic apparatus by breaking it (See Chapter 7). The Hollywood filmic apparatus mostly creates the illusion that what happens on screen in the cinema hall is objective reality and places the audience in the position of the protagonist, but the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema (especially in the 1980s) and Iranian art cinema

[13] See Baudry, J-L. (Winter, 1974-1975). *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus*, University of California Press. *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 39-47.
[14] See Baudry, J-L. (1975). *The apparatus: Metapsychological approaches to the impression of reality in cinema* in Philip Rosen (ed.) (1986), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Columbia University Press. pp. 299-318.

constantly remind the audience that what they see on the screen is fabricated by showing them filmic instruments and the production mechanisms.[15]

After the victory of the Revolution, and the legalisation of the hijab, the way women could be shown became the most significant challenge in Iranian cinema. This resulted in a kind of hijab aesthetics coupled with institutionalised censorship and self-censorship (which is the basis of this thesis, see Chapter 3) that shaped the formal and narrative structure of the modern Iranian cinema and was welcomed at international festivals; a cinema with children and adolescent heroes or men, without the effective presence of women, or altogether lacking women. It was the formation of an aesthetics wherein the main rules were related to women, the absence of women, and the visual codes related to the women. Post-revolutionary cinema should be called allegorical cinema. Mottahedeh cleverly used the term "displaced allegory" to define post-revolutionary cinema. Allegory goes beyond its customary function and meaning in this cinema: in addition to serving as a way to indirectly convey the filmmaker's intention, resist censorship, and as a reaction to censorship, it makes the viewer aware of the mechanisms of the cinematic apparatus and the conditions of production. As Mottahedeh argues, "many films of the post-revolutionary era function as displaced allegories of their very conditions of production" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 3). Mottahedeh talks about the restrictions that anti-voyeurism of modesty and the veiling have imposed on the Iranian cinema, and in her close reading of several films by Beyzaie and Kiarostami, she considers it displaced allegory for the impossibility of depicting heterosexual desire and voyeurism.

Mottahedeh specifically borrows from the feminist film theory of the 1970s, and semiotic and psychoanalytic theories, to carry out her interpretation of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. In her analysis, she sees censorship as an opportunity for creative solutions that have shaped the grammar of Iranian cinema after the Revolution. In reading post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, the audience constantly encounters visual codes that remind the audience of the conditions of the films' production. The absence of women in the late 1980s films indicates the impossibility of women's appearance in films and society. The elimination of sex, voyeurism, gaze, superstardom, and even alcoholic beverages, acknowledges the struggle between the Iranian cinema and the Islamic society of Iran. The excessive presence of rural women in the mid and late 1980s films reveals the impossibility of showing and dealing with urban women, and the excessive use of poetry and allegory in romantic melodramas of the 1990s

[15] See for example the analysis of *Through the Olive Trees* and the ending of *Taste of Cherry*, Chapter 7, pages 203-208.

unveils the impossibility of depicting heterosexual love in its Western form. In studying post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, Mottahedeh focuses on this issue and states that the abundant presence of child heroes in the 1980s films demonstrates the limitation in the portrayal of women in films. Showing women outdoors, especially in Kiarostami and Panahi's films, unveiled the impossibility of realistically showing women indoors.

Art vs. Popular Cinema

What has not been discussed in Mottahedeh's analysis is the Iranian popular cinema. She focuses solely on three art cinema filmmakers. I have dedicated much of the thesis to popular Iranian films due to their absence in existing film studies—this is an important part of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema that has unfortunately not been dealt with adequately, maybe due to the difficulty of accessing them by theorists living outside of Iran. These films were made for domestic screening, and have rarely found their way to foreign festivals, which is perhaps another reason for overlooking Iranian popular cinema in film studies. This is not only an oversight in Mottahedeh's book, as most of the literature in Iranian Studies has also focused primarily on Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Panahi, and other art cinema filmmakers, and less so on popular cinema. My thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature as much as possible, although I have not neglected it and will address art cinema in reference to Kiarostami (see Chapter 7).

One of the drawbacks of Mottahedeh's book—despite all the value, and innovation it provides—is in summarising and generalising post-revolutionary Iranian cinema by analysing the art cinema films of three prominent Iranian filmmakers (Kiarostami, Beyzaie, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf). Mottahedeh does not differentiate between art cinema and popular cinema. The approaches of Iranian art cinema and popular cinema towards and against censorship and hijab are, in some respects, quite different. For example, the effect of hijab in art cinema, including in the works of its pioneers Kiarostami and Panahi, is that none of these films depict women indoors—we always see them outdoors. Popular cinema, however, accepts this contract of a woman with hijab inside the house. Popular cinema cedes to wearing hijab compulsorily and tries to circumvent and diminish hijab with allegory and metaphors; art cinema utilises the mandate to serve the aesthetics of its work and maintains the practice even in films made outside Iran. Kiarostami, for example, followed the aesthetic rules of hijab in films made outside Iran—films that no longer needed to comply with the limitations of hijab aesthetics under the rules of censorship and filmmaking inside Iran. It seems that the approach and aesthetics of the restrictions on, and eliminations of, women's representation had (willingly or unwillingly) become institutionalised for him

after decades of filmmaking, and thus formed his aesthetic. In his last fiction film *Like Someone in Love (2012)*, made in Japan with a Japanese cast, there is a scene where the woman sits naked on the bed, yet Kiarostami does not show her directly throughout the entire scene of more than three minutes: the camera stays on the old man, and the audience sees only the blurry reflection of the woman's image on the blank TV screen next to the old man (see Figure 3). Yousef Eshaghpour considers this mise-en-scène to be Kiarostami's self-censorship due to the Islamic Republic's coercion, not a free choice, and due to living in the Islamic Republic: "Kiarostami, as an Iranian living in the Islamic Republic, cannot allow himself to show a naked woman on the screen." (Eshaghpour, 2019, p. 226). Eshaghpour's analysis connecting the mise-en-scène to Kiarostami's residence in the Islamic Republic is not very consistent with reality: Kiarostami's films had no screening in Iran for nearly two decades, nearly a decade had passed since he had made his last film in Iran, and he had virtually no intention of making a film inside Iran. The last film, left unfinished with his death, was supposed to be made in China where he would not be worried about observing the rules of the Islamic Republic. It should also be noted that Kiarostami had become so globally famous that the Islamic Republic would not treat him harshly. For more than two decades the investors of his films were French companies, and he was not dependent on state funds inside Iran. On the other hand, he did not care about the screening of his films inside Iran, and wasn't worried about accessing these state funds. My analysis of Kiarostami in Chapter 7 demonstrates that the aesthetics of hijab had become the aesthetics of his films—an aesthetic that the world recognised and admired in his cinema. As such, in all three films he made outside Iran, in Italy and Japan, in the last decade of his life—*Tickets (2005)*, *Certified Copy (2010)*, and *Like Someone in Love (2012)*—he did not deviate from his own aesthetics.

Figure 3: *Like Someone in Love. "screenshot by author from the film Private Life"*

Since the 1990s, when female erotic depiction was to some extent permitted in Iranian cinema, popular cinema embraced this opportunity to attract spectators, and using female beauty for the box office. Iranian art cinema, however—which was made regardless of the Iranian spectators and essentially for the foreign festivals and Western audiences—continued to deliberately ignore women's sexuality and beauty, depicting them in the background and in a desexualised manner. The popular cinema tried to approach classic Hollywood aesthetics as much as the censorship and authorities would allow, and failing this would show "hidden sex" with allegory, metaphor, and signs. Iranian art cinema, on the other hand, knew that the aesthetics of censorship in their portrayal of women had helped to preserve its cinematic language as counter cinema. Following the loosening of restrictions in the 1990s, popular cinema employed close-ups of women as far as the screening regulations allowed. Art cinema excluded from its narrative any woman with strong sexual aspects or—as in Kiarostami's *Ten (Dah, 2002)*—did not show her to the audience, and even if there were close-ups of women, their image was not the object of the male gaze within the narrative. In other words, in some ways artistic and popular cinema show different aesthetics and formal reactions to the censorship system.

Iranian Film History and International Circulation

With few exceptions, most scholarly research on Iranian cinema deals with new post-revolutionary Iranian cinema—the same Iranian cinema that has been noticed in the West. One of the most important aspects of Naficy's four-volume book *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* is to comprehensively and precisely address the pre-revolutionary cinema and the pre-revolutionary cinema industry in two of these volumes. To understand Islamicate post-revolutionary cinema, it is necessary to first know pre-revolutionary cinema and its symbol, FilmFarsi. It is essential to know the characteristics of pre-revolution cinema, as post-revolutionary cinema was formed by eradicating all its elements. Naficy's comprehensive and valuable research filled this gap.[16] Another significant aspect of Naficy's work is the interviews he has conducted with Iranian filmmakers over decades. Naficy's research is also distinguished from most studies conducted abroad in his use of Persian sources and the writings of critics in Persian that have rarely been translated into English. I also emphasize Iranian sources in my own research, by regularly visiting the library at the University of Tehran over the years, and accessing Iranian sources about the history of Iranian cinema. Naficy has contributed important and valuable achievements in "Islamic gaze theory" and rich readings of modesty, but he does not provide detailed analysis of the scenes in films and, except for a few examples, does not conduct a close reading of the films. He is, however, the pioneer of the theories of "averted look" and "Islamic gaze theory" to refer to the depiction of women in Iranian cinema. In my thesis, I aim to expand and develop what Naficy has started, and perform a closer examination of these films.

Naficy categorises the depiction of women in the post-revolutionary cinema into four phases according to the changes in modesty codes and veiling. He calls the first phase "Women's Structured Absence" which, in the early 1980s, resulted practically in the absence of women on screen. He calls the second phase, influenced by the minimal and ineffective presence of women in diegesis in the mid-1980s, "Women's Background Presence." Naficy considers the beginning of the third period in the late 1980s—with *Bashu, the Little Stranger (Bashu, Gharibeye Kuchak, Bahram Beyzaie, 1986)*—the period in which the presence of women on screen increased. Although *Bashu, the Little Stranger* was an important film, it was not very mainstream because of its three-year ban and, although the woman's close-up at the beginning of the film violated modesty rules, this approach of going against modesty laws remained an

[16] For more on pre-revolutionary cinema, see also Issari, M. A. (1989). *Cinema in Iran, 1900-1979.* Metuchen, NJ; London: Scarecrow Press.

exception in the mid-1980s, and was not followed by other films of that era. It was in fact the popular film *The Bride (Aroos, Behrouz Afkhami, 1990)*—with close-ups of a beautiful woman with heavy makeup and the exchange of lustful glances between men and women—that shook the Iranian cinema in confronting modesty codes and veiling, changing the aesthetics of hijab, and paving the way for the bold return of women to the foreground, the subject of love, and the return of male and female superstars to Iranian cinema. Displaying love was the greatest challenge in Iranian cinema because the aesthetics of hijab had eliminated any possibility of any physical contact (see Chapter 5).

In the fourth phase "Veiling and Modesty as Political Criticism" (since the mid-1990s), Naficy focuses on Iranian art cinema films that fundamentally challenge modesty with films like *The Apple* and *The Day I Became a Woman*. However, he does not address the impact of this period on the aesthetics of hijab in more commercial cinema, with lustful gaze, or the aesthetics of violence against women and women's revenge. I will address these aspects in detail and analyse the elements of their forms and cinematic language (see Chapter 6). In my opinion "women's cinema," which is no longer based as much on the averted look, can be called the cinema of Khatami's presidency era.

In my thesis, I have divided women's portrayal into three phases based on the decisive political shifts of the recent decades (until 2005). Those shifts fundamentally transformed all aspects of culture, including cinema and the portrayal of women: the Islamic Revolution in the first phase; the end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in the second phase; and, in phase three, the victory of the Reformists in the 1997 presidential election.

In contrast to Mottahedeh and Naficy, who focus on revolutionary cinema and the impact of the Revolution on the film industry, Blake Atwood focuses on "reform era cinema" in his book *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*, analysing the interactions between the Iranian film industry and the reformist movement. Atwood challenges the prevailing notion in Iranian cinema studies, which considers the Islamic Revolution to be the most important event shaping Iranian cinema, and argues that discourses of reform have affected Iranian cinema in the three past decades as much as the Islamic Revolution. Atwood calls Iranian cinema during Khatami's presidency "reform cinema" influenced by the rise of reformist politics in Iran. In this regard, he points out that "New laws regulated the oversight of video technology, looser interpretations of censorship codes prevailed, and filmmakers developed new aesthetic strategies to contribute to the discourse of political reform" (Atwood, 2016, p. 216). Iranian cinema after the Revolution was in some ways a unique cinema in the world; a national cinema with its own laws (such as hijab and the elimination of sex) did not exist in any

other cinema in the world. It was also not very reliant on the box office and global revenue like the cinema of some countries: the government provided the production budget, and financial revenue was not especially important.

In her article "Iranian Women, Iranian Cinema: Negotiating with Ideology and Tradition," Moradiyan Rizi also turns her attention to changes in women's depiction from Khatami's era onwards (I have analysed this period in Chapter 6). Assuming a sociological approach, Moradiyan Rizi states that under the influence of political changes of the time caused by the presidential election and relative freedom—as well as women's awareness due to education, gender consciousness, and the sexual revolution of a new generation alongside the generation gap—a wave of female filmmakers emerged who focused on the limitations of women in society in their films. This female filmmakers' wave caused male filmmakers such as Kiarostami, Asghar Farhadi and Panahi to follow suit and make films about women. Despite the accuracy of Moradiyan Rizi's arguments, it should not be overlooked that female-centred films had begun with the quartet films of Mehrjui about women in the previous period; they did not become a trait, however, until the following period. Moradiyan Rizi adds to Naficy and Mottahedeh's analyses by pointing to the importance of digital cameras and new media technologies in film production from the late 2000s onwards. These tools eliminate to a great extent the need for independent and underground filmmakers to observe the aesthetic principles of hijab because such films are essentially made in secret without obtaining government permissions, and by personal expense; the filmmaker knows from the outset that they are making their film for festivals and markets outside Iran, not for domestic screening.[17] In her sociological analysis, Moradiyan Rizi considers the third period cinema to be significantly influenced by society, and sees Iranian cinema as a medium reflecting the conditions of society. I agree with Moradiyan Rizi on the close connection of Iranian cinema with society—and in all three separate periods that I have categorised, I regularly point to the political and social changes of Iran, and their manifestation in cinema and the aesthetics of hijab. However, I should also add to Moradiyan Rizi's analysis that the relationship between society and cinema does not mean that all of the influential social and political events in Iran today were depicted in the films. It was practically impossible and taboo to address many issues, such as the 2009 election and the Iranian Green Movement, Iran's nuclear case and its economic impact on people's lives, gay lives, religious minorities, and many other significant issues of these years.

[17] See Moradiyan Rizi, N. (2015). Iranian Women, Iranian Cinema: Negotiating with Ideology and Tradition. *Journal of Religion & Film, 19*(1). pp. 19-20.

As Dönmez-Colin points out, "Women's place (or lack of it) in the cinemas of the Islamic countries is directly linked to social and political evolutions in which religion and religious customs play an important role" (Dönmez-Colin, 2004, p. 7). In his book *Women, Islam and Cinema*, Dönmez-Colin examines the depiction of violence against women, and particularly rape, in the cinemas of Turkey, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Malaysia. He does not, however, mention the display of violence against women in the cinema of Iran, wherein the depiction of violence against women is longstonding and quite common: prior to the Revolution, this violence regularly occurred in the form of rape (Parviz Ajlali has found 101 depictions of rape in the plots of FilmFarsi films (Ajlali, 2004, p. 217); and in Islamicated cinema after the Revolution, in the form of physical violence such as torture and humiliation (the films *Red* and *Two Women* are prominent examples in third period cinema), as well as rape (see Rape and Rape-Revenge in Chapter 6). Parviz Jahed points out that, "the producers of FilmFarsi depicted sex in its most sadistic and violent way, i.e. the rape of a woman and sexual violence" (Jahed, 2012). Iranian cinema was unable to show sexuality both before and after the Revolution, and even in its romantic films, sexuality was presented as sadism. In Chapter 6 of my thesis, I examine in detail the aesthetics of violence against women in the reformation era (1997-2005).

Dönmez-Colin argues that "Paradoxically, the most progressive films about women are made in Iran where Sharia rules every aspect of life and cinema" (Dönmez-Colin, 2004, p. 187). Dönmez-Colin is referring to the Iranian films of the third period (1997-2005) that deal with the plight of women in the patriarchal society. It is one of the paradoxes that Dönmez-Colin has accurately noticed in his encounter with Iranian cinema—a cinema based on strict Sharia rules, that struggles with unusual restrictions in comparison with other Islamic cinemas, but (from Dönmez-Colin's point of view) has also made brasher and more progressive films about women as compared to other Islamic countries. The generation of children in the 1980s films had become young adults in the late 1990s films. In this era, we see a strong presence of young people in political demands, such as the 1997 elections, the university campus turmoil of 1999, and in newspapers, cinema, and other media. They push back against restrictions and censorship as much as possible, using the relative freedoms they have attained. Cinema was male-dominated until the second half of the 1990s, and it was only later that women imposed themselves on the cinema halls, on screen, and within the society.

Dönmez-Colin's, like many researchers who work on Islamic cinema and the relationship between women and cinema in the context of the Islamic culture, limits his book to the analysis of common themes, trends, and stereotypes in the depiction and characterisation of women and the narrative of most

films in Islamic cinema, and does not deal with the conditions of production and the form, mise-en-scène, and aesthetics of women and cinema in Islamic cinema. This is a shortcoming of much of the research focused on the depiction of women in Iran's Islamicate cinema. A starting point for my thesis is to address these overlooked aspects, by using the methodology of production studies and production aesthetics.

Amir Ganjavie (in addition to Hamid Naficy, Shahla Haeri[18], and Khatereh Sheibani[19]) analyses Iranian filmmakers' methods for displaying eroticism, love, and desire in his article "Utopia and censorship: Iranian cinema at the crossroads of love, sex and tradition." He believes reciting poems is one way to depict desire and eroticism (Ganjavie, 2016, pp. 116-119), but ignores the important issue that Iranian cinema's intense attraction to poetry in the display of eroticism was due to the force of censorship as much as the cultural background or history of poetry in Iran. Simply look at the work of filmmakers who produced films both before and after the Revolution, and compare how they dealt with eroticism. For example, compare Mehrjui's approach to eroticism in *Mr. Naive (Aghaye Halu, 1971)*, which he made before the Revolution, as compared to later films *Leila (1996)* and *Pear Tree (Derakhte Golabi, 1997)*. Or Ali Hatami in *The Broken-Hearted (Suteh-delan, 1977)* with his post-revolutionary films. It can be concluded that filmmakers were forced to resort to poetry as one of the inevitable solutions to depict eroticism and love after the Revolution—an alternative allegory. In his essay, Ganjavie interprets that love does not necessarily mean a sexual relationship and, in a justifying approach, considers censorship to be a positive and constructive incidence for post-revolutionary Iranian cinema (ibid., p. 125). It is an argument that raises both questions and doubts. On the one hand, I agree that modesty rules contributed to the emergence of a new type of cinema in Iran, a cinema that chose its protagonists from among the children and became internationally renowned—a cinema that marginalised woman, and replaced them with children. But Ganjavie ignores the fact that it was the censorship mechanism that led prominent Iranian filmmakers—such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Bahram Beyzaie, Bahman Qobadi, and Abolfazl Kahani—to no longer make films in Iran, and forced them to leave.

Although one of the reasons Iranian filmmakers, including Kiarostami, turned to making films about children after the Revolution was the limitation of hijab aesthetics and modesty rules (making it virtually impossible to make films in cities with stories in which women had a strong presence), it was the good reception of these films in European film festivals that led other Iranian filmmakers to follow Kiarostami's in making films with child heroes in remote villages and places. Their films were rather

[18] See Haeri, S. (2009, February). *Sacred Canopy: Love and Sex under the Veil*. Iranian Studies , *42*(1), pp. 113 - 126.
[19] See Sheibani, K. (2011). *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity, and Film after the Revolution.* London: I.B.Tauris.

humorously called "festival films" by some Iranian critics, implying they were made solely to please, and to be awarded, at European festivals. Filmmakers were also accused of portraying an exotic, dark, and exaggerated image of Iran to please the West and be admired by festivals, the image that—they believed—the West wanted to see from Iran: a rural, traditional, and backward image of poverty, misery, restrictions, and traditions. Films of other important Iranian filmmakers such as Mehrjui, who did not follow this trend, did not find their way to festivals despite their rich and artistic aesthetics. Godfrey Cheshire believes the reason prestigious European film festivals are not interested in Mehrjui's films is that "Unlike other Iranian directors, Mehrjui, usually deals with the lives of the middle and prosperous class of Iranian society in his films, while International Iranian cinema depicts the shocking and exotic images of poverty and misery of children left behind by earthquakes and wars from Iran" (Cheshire, 2006, p. 281-282). He refers to the success of the films by Kiarostami, and followers such as Panahi, Bahman Qobadi, and Abolfazl Jalili, with child heroes in their films. It should be noted that Mehrjui's films were mostly adapted from Western plays and novels in this decade, or were influenced by important Western filmmakers, which is perhaps one reason they did not attract much attention from Western festivals. *Pari (1994)* was an adaptation of several J. D. Salinger novels and *Sara (1992)* was based on the famous play *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. *Hamoon (1989)* was inspired by Fellini's *8½ (1963)* and *The Lady (Banoo, 1991),* and by Buñuel's *Viridiana (1961)*. Cheshire's reasoning is mostly true concerning the successful films of Iranian cinema in festivals of the 1980s and 1990s, but the type of Iranian films that were successful at international festivals changed in the late 2000s, with Farhadi's films portraying the middle class and contemporary Tehran with storytelling and complex plots filled with questions and Hitchcock-style suspense.[20] He won the world's most prestigious awards, such as the Berlinale Golden Bear and the Oscars' Best Foreign Film, although he was also accused by hardliners inside Iran of portraying a dark image.

Bahram Beyzaie, a well-known Iranian filmmaker, has a highly critical view of the success of Iranian films, considering it aligned with Western interests: "Many admire destruction, death, poverty, and wailing in their works, and their aim is solely to make helplessness and poverty beautiful, logical, and acceptable. This approach also has its own fans including foreign critics who admire such works. Therefore, we give them the image of ourselves that they like" (Qukasian, 1992, p. 305). Massoud Farasati, one of the most ardent critics of Iranian international cinema, says the main reasons for the

[20] See Rugo, D. (2016). Asghar Farhadi: Acknowledging Hybrid Traditions: Iran, Hollywood and Transnational Cinema. *Tazlor and Francis, 30*(3-4), 173-187.

Western festivals' interest in Iranian cinema are "saturation, fatigue, and somewhat aversion of festivals to the violent, technologically-infested, sex-ridden, and lavish American cinema, and on the other hand, apparent simplicity, lack of sex and violence, difficult living conditions of characters, exotic, primitive, and non-urban locations, poverty of the environment and humans, neutrality and harmlessness, and low cost of Iranian films." He calls Iranian filmmakers "prostitutes" trying to succeed in the West. "Our festival-ridden cinema has no Iranian characteristic in it. With exotic characteristics, similar to the films of Qobadi and Makhmalbafs, by transforming de-identified indigenous minorities into passive onlookers and eternal victims in need of pity, it becomes only the western plaything. 'Prostitution' is required for such globalisation" (Farasati, 2018, pp. 607-609).

Majid Eslami, one of the leading Iranian critics, believes one reason for the global importance of Kiarostami's cinema is "to use the limitations of Iranian cinema in the 1980s (avoiding violence and sexual attractions, and on the other hand, optimism and a positive view of human beings)" (Eslami M. , 2016, p. 50). Eslami is correct that Kiarostami transformed restrictions into a form of aesthetics, and was able to introduce a new cinematic style to the world. Eslami additionally attributes the fame and reputation of Iranian and Kiarostami cinema to being the the result of a historic moment in the cinema world that had become devoid of important filmmakers. "Iranian cinema and Kiarostami's films captured film festivals between the decline of the art of cinema in Europe in the mid-1980s (the death of the great filmmakers of the 1960s) to the emergence of exciting filmmakers of the 1990s (Almodóvar, the Dardenne Brothers, and Lars von Trier) (ibid., p.51). In his book *Both Sides of Reality*, Eshaghpour acknowledges the extremely new look in Kiarostami's cinema, and at the same time connects his success in the West to a "negation of modernity" and his confrontation with "a world of complex submission to science and technology", as well as his contrast with modern cinema and the revolutionary cinema that "didn't follow any of the Western patterns": "In the curious minds of Western intellectuals, there were motives for Kiarostami and the Islamic Revolution that, if not similar, were at least in parallel" (Eshaghpour, 2019, pp. 55-56).

Azadeh Farahmand links the attention to Iran's new cinema to Western economic interests and efforts to improve political relations between Iran and the West. Farahmand claims that due to the extremely low cost of film production in Iran as compared to the West—the result of Iran's inflation and the low value of Iranian currency—Western film festivals and companies such as mk2 (producer of many of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf films from the 1990s onwards) invested in making Iranian films with budgets equivalent to that of a 15-minute short film in France. After qualifying for festivals, Western

producers receive the financial benefits (Farahmand, 2002, p. 94). She also links the West's special attention to "escalation of diplomatic ties and economic negotiations between Iran and other countries" (ibid., 98). The Farabi Cinema Foundation—established after the Revolution, with an international office headed by Alireza Shojanoori and the motto "hoping for the day no festival will work without an Iranian film" (Arzhmand & Heydari, 2015, p. 353)—began to correspond with festivals and their directors. There was a continued presence at festivals to introduce Iranian cinema alongside efforts to learn the mechanisms of international film distribution. The role of the government in presenting Iran's modern cinema is undeniable. A government that had anti-American and anti-Hollywood cultural policies did not allow American films to enter Iranian cinema halls, or permit American filmmaking companies to enter Iran after the Revolution. This greatly contributed to the prosperity of Iranian cinema and allowed for other types of cinema, such as that of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf. Modern Iranian cinema would not have had the power to compete if American companies and cinema had been permitted in Iran. Hamid-Reza Asefi, Iran's ambassador to France in the mid-1990s, says, "After *The White Balloon (Badkonak-e Sefid, Jafar Panahi, 1995)* won the Cannes trophy, we used its success in our negotiations. For example, we said, 'Have you seen the film from Iranian cinema that has been awarded? Or have you seen a film from Iranian cinema? We will send you some Iranian films to get acquainted with Iranian cinema!'" (ibid., p. 346). Ahmad Talebi-Nezhad states that "the successive and sometimes unexpected successes achieved by Iranian cinema are not solely due to the artistic values of the films. Iranian films in foreign circles are known as a cultural commodity from a closed traditional and hardliner religious regime, so there can be no doubt about the political nature of this movement" (Talebi-Nezhad, 1998, p. 105). It is undeniable that one of the reasons foreign festivals paid attention to post-revolutionary Iranian cinema was the society and context in which these films were made. It was astonishing to the Western spectator that such cultural goods could be produced in such a closed and radical religious regime. Films with profound humane concepts that—in the years when the Iranian regime was constantly talking about hostility and war—presented to the West another image of Iranians speaking of peace and friendship.

In the 1980s, the Farabi Cinema Foundation stopped the importation of foreign films to Iran. The lack of other forms of entertainment, along with the prohibition of foreign films, helped to revive Iranian cinema: people had no option but to watch the film that was shown. In the late 1990s, with the arrival of satellites and the internet, the presence of moviegoers faded, and art cinema lost its audience from inside Iran. In the following decades, the audience that was once so eager to watch Makhmalbaf's films, one of the most important symbols of modern Iranian cinema, and formed long queues in front of cinemas, rarely went to cinema halls to see artistic films. They went to the cinema halls to watch only the tawdry

comedies of the mainstream cinema. As a result, Iranian art cinema became dependant on the foreign festivals and screening abroad. Since the late 1990s, most of the art cinema's works have not had any screening in Iran. The list of unscreened films in Iran is a long one, which includes: *The Wind Will Carry Us (Bad Ma ra Khahad Bord, Abbas Kiarostami, 1999)*, *Ten*, *Two-Legged Horse (Asbe do Pa, Samira Makhmalbaf, 2008)*, most of the works of Panahi—such as *The Circle (Dayere, 2000)*, *Crimson Gold (Talaye Sorkh, 2003)*, *Offside (2005)*, *This is Not a Film (In Yek Film Nist, 2011)*, *Closed Curtain* (Pardeh, 2013), *Taxi (2015)*, and *3 Faces (3 Rokh, 2018)*—and all the works of Rasoulof.

Iran's festival cinema should be considered in two phases: that of the 1980s and 1990s, which was entirely sponsored by *Farabi* and the government, and that of the 2000s and 2010s. The latter was itself divided into two parts: the state-sponsored festival cinema such as Farhadi, and the opposition festival cinema headed by filmmakers such as Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof—divided by important political events in Iran associated with the 2009 elections and the Green Movement.[21]

In the 1980s to the late 1990s, filmmakers were not allowed to independently submit their works to international festivals. This further strengthens the hypothesis that the government and the regime favoured the recognition of Kiarostami and modern cinema abroad—a criticism that the Islamic Republic's opposition had against post-revolutionary art cinema, and therefore considered it not separate from the system, but dependent on the Islamic Republic.[22] Some film critics believe that the reception of Iranian films in the West took Iranian filmmakers away from their original path. Hamid Dabashi, one of the most important film critics of Iranian cinema and a university professor in the United States, furiously considers the dark stable scene in *The Wind Will Carry Us* as "betraying every principle of visual decency that Kiarostami honoured in all his previous films" and a negative result of the global celebration of his works in the West (Dabashi, 2001, pp. 253-254).

[21] On the "Green Movement", see Dabashi, H. (2011). *The Green Movement in Iran.* New York: Taylor & Francis.
[22] See the documentary *Mouth Harp in Minor Key (Zanburak dar Gam-e Minor, 2017)* made by Maryam Sepehri.

Production Studies and Production Aesthetics

When watching Iranian films, the audience is constantly noticing the conditions of film production under the shadow of the Islamic government and the rules of production under the principles of modesty and aesthetics of hijab. For this reason, this thesis pertains to the field of production aesthetics and production studies, and addresses some questions of this field. This thesis employs production aesthetics methods to consider the following questions: how and why do the filmic aesthetics—such as lighting (or mis-lighting for women), mis-en-scène, filming location, the mode of acting (like veiled look), and encoded film language— exist in a particular way in the Iranian films? Which issues and limitations concerning the representation of women, particularly those relevant to the representation of sexuality and depiction of male-female intimacy, does this aesthetics resolve? How does this filmic aesthetic answer the problems of censorship, Islamic codes of morality and the veiling code, and the unrealism of veiling?

This thesis applies production studies methods to explore the process of production, and behind the scene questions, in Iranian films. I examine Islamic cinema's codes of production and the problems at the production stage, seeking to understand how these conditions and the legislation of Islamic laws in film production, as well as the presence of government minders on the set, were extremely effective for the final results. It was not only the film—the screenplay, film crew, and the actors and actresses—that was examined by the authorities to receive the go-ahead for production and filming, but the backstage of the movies was also monitored to ensure that no immoral and non-religious act (according to their definition) could occur. The Islamists' goal was the Islamization of all aspects of the film and film production process, whether in front of the camera, behind the camera, or backstage. I explore questions concerning the relationship between the production (as well as the pre-production) of the Iranian films, and the power, policymakers and regulations they enforced for the purpose of islamizing film production.

Figure 4: Abolfazl Poorarab recounts that when *The Bride (1990)* was being filmed, with co-star Niki Karimi, all scenes filmed together in the car were accompanied by a third person lying down on the back seat. According to the Islamic law at the time that *The Bride* was filmed, a man and woman who were not legally married or blood relations could not be in a closed space place (such as a car) without the presence of another person. *(Poorarab, Ghatare Webgardi, 2021) "screenshot by author from the film The Bride"*

In the second part of this research, I discuss the representation of women in the Islamic culture, and how women should be represented in Islamic cinema according to the aesthetics of hijab. I explore the changes of women's representation in Iranian films in the different phases following the Revolution, in addition to analysing the stereotyping of women in the films. I discuss the absence of women's sexuality and female actors' relations with male actors on the screen and on the set.

This thesis focuses on the representation of Iranian women in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema from the perspective of the cinematic form and language, within the social and political context of their time. The goal is to understand the political, social and religious reasons for the changes in the representations of Iranian women in different periods after the Revolution; the effect of the Islamic Revolution's political, social and cultural policies on the representation of women; and how the policies of the Islamic regime and its imposition of Islamic regulations on the cinema—especially in relation to

the principles of removing all sexual properties of women based on the aesthetics of hijab—have resulted in the elimination of women in the early 1980s, and their desexualization in the late 1980s. This thesis analyzes the movies as visual text—in regards to decoupage, editing and the mise-en-scène—and points toward the cultural, social and political circumstances that inform the cinematic representation of Iranian women.

This thesis, consisting of seven chapters, will examine three distinct periods of the representation of women in the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema—from the Revolution in 1979 to the end of Mohammad Khatami's presidency in 2005—and how it responds to, and changes with, the social and political upheavals of its period. The first chapter is devoted to the representation of women in pre-revolution cinema, in order to better understand early efforts to depict Iranian women in cinema, and to highlight the differences between the pre-revolution through to the post-revolution. The second and third chapters explore the Islamization of the cinema and the aesthetics of hijab. The fourth addresses the depiction of women from the onset of the Revolution to the end of the war and the 1989 death of the Revolution's leader. Chapter five consists of two main parts: the first concerns the depiction of sexuality in Iranian post-revolutionary cinema, and the second examines a specific type of female masochist and the masochistic aesthetics of the 1990s. Chapter six deals with the aesthetics of violence against woman and the Islamic femme fatal. The last chapter is devoted to studying the representation of women in Iranian counter-cinema, with a focus on Kiarostami's films as the most famous exponent of Iran's counter-cinema.

This thesis focuses on the modes of production in Iranian cinema, an approach that is also informed by my own experiences. My experience living in Iran for over 30 years provides insight into Iranian society and its issues from within. Additionally, the seven-year experience of living in the West and attending Western film festivals has helped me also observe Iranian society from a distance. The combination of these two perspectives has given me a broader, more multidimensional, viewpoint. My experiences curating Iranian short films for Iranian Film Festival Cologne and Iranian documentary film festivals in Bonn, Germany—along with my presence as reporter, curator, filmmaker or spectator at Western festivals and the Q&A period following the screening of the films—provides an additional perspective to my view of Iranian cinema, which has had its impact on my approach in this thesis. In the Q&A sessions following the screening of my films at Western festivals, as well as in the festival programme and analysis of films that I had curated, many of the questions (whether relevant or irrelevant to the film screened) were directed towards the sociopolitical issues of Iranian society after the Revolution. The inclusion of politics was inevitable, whether we like it or not: Iranian cinema would be

analysed from a political viewpoint, and the situation in Iranian society seen from the Western eye. In all these years, some domestic critics—such as Massoud Farasati and hardliner media close to the regime, like the *Kayhan* newspaper—attributed the celebration of Iranian films abroad not to the artistic quality of the films, but to the political, social, and the image they represented of the Iranian society. The Iranian filmmaker was accused of selling his homeland in the West.[23]

Nearly two decades of working in Iranian cinema and theatre enabled me to grasp censorship from the closest distance. In the play I directed in Tehran in 2013, authorities granted permission to perform it only if changes were made. The play was the story of a young girl who woke up confused and disoriented in the morning and realised she was in a strange man's house. As the story progresses, we discover the man is a taxi driver: the girl lost consciousness in his taxi the previous night, and the man was terrified of taking her to the hospital or police for fear of getting into trouble, but couldn't bring himself to leave her in the street. The censors asked how an unrelated man carried the unconscious girl into the apartment, although the scene was not depicted in the play as the story began the following day. Even events outside the scene should be in accordance with Islamic principles and modesty rules. In order to obtain the permit, authorities suggested the addition of dialogue by the man to say it was not him, but the woman next door, who brought the girl into the building. It disrupted the logic of the story, but there was no other choice to obtain the permit. Their second objection was how an unrelated man and woman spent a day and night under the same roof without a third person present. To correct this, they suggested adding a third person. Although the existence of a third person upset the logic of the drama, we had to accept it to cross the barrier of censorship. To solve this problem with minimal damage to the play, we added an ailing elderly grandmother who wasn't seen or even heard. During the play, the man walked out twice, and we heard him asking his grandmother a few words about taking her medication. This was just one of my experiences of censorship. One of my latest documentaries *Love in Close-Up (Eshgh dar Namaye Nazdik, 2019)* was not licensed to be publicly screened in cinemas because of its "promotion of non-religious relationships" from the perspective of censors. In my films, I have tried to avoid restraining myself and self-censorship as much as possible. I could to some extent accept the presence of women with hijab at home in Iranian fiction films, but in documentary cinema defined by showing reality, this was unacceptable for me. That is why in my documentaries such as *A Movie for You (Filmi baraye To, 2015)* and *Love in Close-Up*, I have shown women outdoors and in the car, where wearing hijab is normal, as is done in Kiarostami's and Panahi's cinema too. In my film *Amour du Reel (2017)*, women are without

[23] On Farasati's View on Kiarostami's Cinema, see Mottahedeh's *Displaced Allegories*: *Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*. P. 95

a hijab at home, although I already knew this choice would deprive the film of any official screening inside Iran.

Figure 5: Amour du Reel. "screenshot by author from the film Amour du Reel"

In 2019, I, along with 200 other Iranian filmmakers including Jafar Panahi, Mohammad Rasoulof, Bahram Beyzaie, Rakhshan Banietemad, and Naser Taqvai, wrote and signed a statement protesting the widespread censorship and repression in Iranian cinema. Job security was an issue that we mentioned in the first paragraph of the statement: "Some filmmakers have been sentenced to prison and banned from leaving the country or faced a work ban for making a critical film. Repression and censorship have caused the unintended emigration of a number of filmmakers" (Cine-Eye (Cinema-Cheshm), 2019). In the statement, we explicitly referred to the system's ideological censorship and expressed our overt objection:

> Censorship and the process of obtaining permission to make a film have become a deathly wall. The councils of production license and screening license in the Ministry of Guidance with their whimsical and ideological view, always force filmmakers before and after production to change the shape and content of their works. These works are caught in the grip of banning and censorship for months and years. Some works are banned despite having the production license and even the screening license. We express our disgust at

> the inquisitive policies of form and content in any way and demand freedom of expression and thought (ibid.).

Due to my background as a filmmaker in Iranian cinema, and my objective experience of ideological religious censorship, my analyses of films and reception theories in this thesis are not only from the perspective of a mere spectator in the cinema hall. Rather, I use my lived experiences as an Iranian filmmaker in my analyses, as well as my knowledge of the film's production process under the shadow of systematic censorship and its undeniable impact on the final product. The meaning of Iranian films has an unbroken link with the conditions and time of their production, and to better understand post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, we have to consider the condition and process of the film's production.

CHAPTER ONE

Pre-Revolution Cinema: Conflict between Tradition and Modernity

Shahla Mirbakhtyar[24]: In the 1970s, due to the westernization of the country imposed upon the society by the Pahlavi regime, sex finally began to appear in Iranian films. Unlike violence which was presented in ways very similar to that found in Western films, sex had to be adapted and modified much more heavily in order to presentable in films. Sex was presented under the veil, or chador. This is the reason that many Iranian actresses of the 1960s and the 1970s wore sexy miniskirts, along with chadors: In most of the films of this period, the actresses waved their chadors, revealing their naked legs. In harmony with antireligious policy of the Shah's government, the censor allowed such scenes to remain in the films, and encouraged other filmmakers to use sex in their films as well (Mirbakhtyar, 2006, pp. 30-31).

[24] Shahla Mirbakhtyar is a famous Iranian actress in the 1980s.

The Qajar Period

To know better the first efforts to depict the Iranian women on the celluloid films, we must return to the time the photography camera came to Iran during Naser al-Din Shah time. Naser al-Din Shah[25] was among the first who realised the voyeuristic nature of the camera. At the time the religious society did not approve of photography from women and considered it forbidden and a sin, Naser al-Din Shah, who had learnt the techniques of taking, developing, and printing photos, took erotic photos of his wives in his harem. "The shah even trained a boy, Ghulam Husayn Khan, as his personal photography assistant to help him take private pictures of himself and his harem" (Behdad, 2001, p. 145). He didn't want any man with sexual desire to set foot in the harem and leer at his wives. Paradoxically, it is part of the ontological nature of photography that, photography it can turn a private phenomenon into a public one and present it to the public who, before seeing the photo, did not have access to that private phenomenon. In this case too, the Shah by taking photographs of his wives in the harem made it possible for other men to have access to the private world of himself, his wives, and the harem. One can observe how tradition and modernity are interlinked by this act of the Shah. The camera was so powerful that it could cross the boundaries of the Shah's harem and set foot in the forbidden private settings.[26]

[25] Naser al-Din Shah (1831- 1896) was the king of Iran from 1848 to 1896 and one of the most powerful kings of the Qajar dynasty.

[26] For more on photography during the Qajar era, see Fazeli, N. & Zeinolsalehin, H. (2020). *The Beginning of Photography in Iran (Critical Introduction on Iran Photohistory in Naseri Period)*. Honar-Haye Tajasomi Journal, Volume 25, No.1, pp. 125-134. See also Jennifer Y. Chi. (2015) *The Eye of the Shah: Qajar Court Photography and the Persian Past*. Princeton University Press.

Figure 6: Naser al-Din Shah and some of his wives together with a camera are standing in front of a large mirror while taking a selfie. This photo, which was taken by the Shah himself in 1884, is said to be one of the first selfies in the world. *Photo by: Naser al-Din Shah. From the Golestan Palace Archive. (Album Number.210, 1923-1929)*

> After the spread of photography in Qajar era, taking photos of women was done in two ways. One was taking photos by related male photographers. In this method, photographers took photos of only their related women such as their wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers. The second method that observed the religious view of taking photos of women was to take women's photos by female photographers. The dominance of the traditional and religious atmosphere in the Qajar society forced women to cover their faces from the strangers both outside and inside the house. Therefore, few women were willing to be in front of the unrelated men's camera, because women were afraid their face might be seen by the unrelated man during the shooting or after the shooting on the photography paper, or their photo might fall into the hands of an unrelated man. The only groups of women who allowed willingly their photos to be taken were instrumentalists, dancers, and prostitutes who sat in front of the camera sometimes in a normal pose, sometimes while playing or dancing, in foreign clothes or even in men's clothes (Taie, 2008, pp. 168-169).

According to Taie's research, photography of women was done in only two ways during the Qajar era,

lest their photographs fall into the hands of unrelated men during photography and after printing. It shows that the challenge of showing women's image has continued from the very beginning of the camera's arrival in Iran to the current Islamicated cinema. According to Taie's research, free photography and public display of women's photos were exclusively for the women who the society did not consider chaste. It was the same belief that decades later when filmmaking started in Iran made working difficult for actresses, because according to the popular belief, they did not consider portrayal of women as a chaste thing to do. This belief also permeated the narrative of the pre-revolutionary films, and the story of the films was filled with prostitutes, dancers, and women who were forced to repent of their sins in the end. Interestingly, the women of the Islamicated cinema after the Revolution became very similar to the same women who, a century ago, refused to be in front of an unrelated photographer, and therefore they did not stand in front of the camera for years in the post-revolutionary cinema, and after some years when they were again in front of the camera, they considered the cameraman and the audience inside the cinema hall unrelated and observed the modesty and hijab rule in front of them.

With the arrival of the first movie camera in Iran under the next Qajar Shah, Mozaffar al-Din Shah, we are again faced with the contrast between tradition and modernity. Due to the interest of Mozaffar al-Din Shah, who during his trip to Europe had familiarized himself with the cinematograph, shortly after its invention in the West, the cinematograph was brought to Iran.[27] The first cinema was open no longer than a month due to the protestation by Shaikh Fazlollah Nuri, who called cinema blasphemous.[28] This contrast become once again noticeable in the vehemence of the Islamic Revolution era. During the Revolution, which was a time of setting fire to cinemas, cinema as modern art was burned down by the religious and fanatic revolutionaries. All this shows the contrast between the cinema and a traditional society.

[27] On the issue of the arrival of the cinema in Iran, see Omid, J. (1995). *History of Iranian Cinema, 1900-1979 (Tarikh-e Cinema-ye Iran, 1279-1357)*. Tehran: Rowzaneh. pp. 21-22. See also Mottahedeh, N. (2008) *Collection and recollection: On studying the early history of motion pictures in Iran*. Early Popular Visual Culture Journal. Volume 6. No. 2. pp. 103-120.

[28] See Ajlali, P. (2004). *Degarguni Ejtemaee va Filmhaye Cinemaee dar Iran: Jameshenasi-e Filmhaye Amepasand-e Irani (1309-1357).* Tehran: Farhang va Andisheh. P. 108.

The Pahlavi Period

Reza Shah (The first Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty) believed that Iranian society should quickly be modernized. Thus, two types of the media that Reza Shah found suitable for modernization were cinema and radio. He believed that Cinema can play a role in the westernization, modernization and Europeanization of Iranian society. "Cinematic representations of a fast modernizing Iran in documentaries and fiction movies were encouraged" (Naficy, 2012c, p. xxii). "Reza Khan had also recognised the potential of radio, the first truly popular medium in Iran, as an instrument of modernization" (Sadr H. R., 2006, p. 23). The majority of Iranians in Iran at that time could neither read nor write, neither did they have the opportunity to travel to Europe. According to Ervand Abrahamian, the literacy rate was around 5 percent (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, they could see the attractions of Europe only through movies. In fact, at that time, movies were like pictorial newspapers and visual reportage for the vast majority of people who were illiterate. As Miriam Hansen argues, film was as a new "universal language"[29] (Hansen, 1999, p. 68).

Up until the year 1930, no long films had been produced in Iran and the films that were produced at that time were short films about the nobility or the court.[30] When during Reza Shah's time, the production of Iranian movies started and the movies such as *Abi and Rabi (Abi va Rabi, Ovanes Ohanian,1930)*, *Haji Agha*, *The Cinema Actor*, and *Lor Girl (Dokhtare-e Lor, Ardeshir Irani,1934)* were made, the first Pahlavi government was trying to westernize the country and attempted to create a European-like society.

[29] On film as a new "universal language", see Hansen, M. (1991). *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film.* Cambridge Mass. Harvard University Press. pp. 183-187.

[30] See Tahaminezhad, M. (2000). Mozaffar al-Din Shah va Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkasbashi. In A. Baharlu, *Tarikh-e Tahlili-e Sad Sal Cinema-ye Iran.* Tehran: Daftar-e Pazhuhesh-haye Farhangi.

Figure 7: The Second movie, *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor*, was concerned with the acceptance of the cinema by the traditional Iranian people. *Photo by Paolo Potomkin,1933, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0175699/*

Haji Agha, *The Cinema Actor* is about a director who is looking for a new subject for his movie. His assistant recounts to him that his father-in-law (Haji Agha) is very much against his and his wife's activities in the cinema and is in fact fiercely opposed to the cinema. The director and the assistant devise a secret plan in which Haji Agha's servant is to steal his watch. The subsequent scene in which Haji Agha looks for the watch in the parks and streets of Tehran and tries to find the thief is shot surreptitiously by the director. In his search for the thief of his watch, Haji Agha sets out on a journey within the modernized city of Tehran and passes by all the emblems of a modern city such as the parks, the streets, and the cars. At the end, through a series of secret arrangements, they take Haji Agha to the cinema and show him his own movie.[31] Haji Agha is influenced by the movie which is made of him.[32] He completely changes his opinion toward the phenomenon of cinema, finally makes his peace with it, and invites the traditionalists to accept the new media saying: "Cinema cures the thinking … cinema is one of the most important

[31] *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor*, by making use of the form and story-based approach of "Film within a Film" for the first time, became the pioneer of an original and new form in Iranian cinema, which was, especially after the Revolution, pursued in movies such as "*Hello Cinema (Salam Cinema, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1994)*", "*Through the Olive Trees (Zir-e Derakhtan-e Zeitoon, Abbas Kiarostami,1994)*", and "*Close-Up (Abbas Kiarostami,1990)*".

[32] On the issue of self-reflexivity in *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor*, see Sepahi, M. (2014). *Ohanian, The Real Cinema Actor (Ohanian*, Actor Vaghei-ye Cinema). Majaleh Goftegu, no. 63. pp.30-36.

media for the education and the refinement of the public behavior because I was treated in this way". And finally in showing his agreement with his daughter and son-in-law continuing to work in the cinema, Haji Agha says: "I hope God will grant you twelve sons and daughters who will all be cinema actors and actresses". The story of the movie fought against the thought which considered the cinema responsible for corruption. From this point of view, *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor* showed an admiration for the cinema as a medium and most importantly encouraged the traditional audience, like Haji Agha, to accept this as well. In the movie's final sequence, the basic incongruities and paradoxes between tradition and modernity are ignored and just as in the title of the movie, tradition and modernity finally reach a compromise. The title of the movie *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor* is ironic and equivocal. The word "Haji" refers to a devout and highly religious Muslim man and thus is a symbol of tradition and religion, whereas in the second part of the title the use of the two English words "Cinema Actor", is symbolic of the West and of cinema as a western art. The movie, starting with the title, attempted to ignore the opposition between tradition and modernity, and to put them alongside each other and establish a friendship between them. Despite the end of the movie and Haji Agha's reconciliation with the cinema, in reality the reconciliation of the religious people with the cinema was not easily achievable. The movie's view is in concordance with the view that Reza Shah employed in the society.

Apart from the establishment of University of Tehran, the construction of the Trans-Iranian Railway and also cross-country road construction projects, Reza Shah forced Iranian people to wear suits and European hats instead of wearing traditional Iranian clothing. Also, with the passage of the law of the "Compulsory Unveiling (Kashf-e Hijab)" in 1935, Iranian women were banned from wearing veil, headscarf, and burqa, and when they saw a woman with a Hijab in the streets, Reza Shah's appointed officers unveiled her by force.[33] Homa Katouzian argues that, "the effect [of the forced unveiling] on most women was as if European women had been suddenly ordered to go topless in the streets in 1936" (Katouzian, 2003, p. 34). Hence, after the passage of this law, many religious women who would not show themselves in public with their heads unveiled were by force imprisoned in their own houses.[34]

On the other hand, Reza Shah's reforms contributed greatly to Iran's progress in many fields such as education (both in schools and universities), urban development and urban planning, reform of the economic system by the establishment of banks, reform in the field of health by developing hospitals and

[33] See Sedghi, H. (2007). *Women and Politics in Iran (Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling)*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 84-90. See also Talattof, K. (2011). *Sexuality, and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of a Popular Female Artist.* New York: Syracuse University Press. pp. 81-84.

[34] On the issue of "Compulsory Unveiling (Kashf-e Hijab)", see Katouzian, H. (2003). *State and Society under Reza Shah*. In T. Atabaki, & E. J. Zurcher, *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Ataturk and Reza Shah*, London and New York: I.B.Tauris. p. 34.

sending students abroad, as well as the development of the vaccination system. In his research on the modernization of Reza Shah, Ali M. Ansari believes that one of the results of these reforms is the increase in the number of students during the Reza Shah period and consequently the lessening of children's presence in the traditional religious maktabs: "As a result of these reforms, the number of students increased dramatically, from 55,960 children in primary education in 1925 to 287,245 in 1941" (Ansari, 2007, p. 74). This reform and industrialization of Iran, however, was met with resistance by the religious people and religious scholars because it was compulsory and in conflict with the principles of Islam in some respects.

Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi in her article, expanding agendas for the 'new' Iranian woman: family law, work, and unveiling, refers to the two different interpretations that secular and religious women have from Reza Shah's era: "More secular-minded women's rights advocates celebrated this period as one in which women were emancipated and liberated from backwardness and tradition... Many religious-minded women from various classes never forgave him for prohibiting veiling in public" (Rostam-Kolayi, 2003, pp. 164-165). It is important to note that because the majority of Iranians were not urbanised during Reza Shah's reign and most of urban women had deep religious affiliation, the secular women were in the minority at that time. Rostam-Kolayi refers to the publication of the women's journal *Alam-e Nesvan* (*Women's World*, 1920-1934) in Reza Shah's time and points out that "In the 1930s and for the first time in Iranian history, women were the beneficiaries of major state reform introduced by Reza Shah Pahlavi" (ibid., p. 165). In the early 1930s, *Alam-e Nesvan* published numerous articles against veils and hijabs, paving the way for women's unveiling. Based on Rostam-Kolayi's research on the journal's approach, "Partisans of unveiling argued that the chador prevented women's progress and limited their access to education and public space... contributors to *Alam-e Nesvan* attacked veiling as an 'unnatural' restriction imposed on city women" (ibid., p.176). In the article Reza Shah Pahlavi and women: a re-evaluation, Shireen Mahdavi analyses Reza Shah's role in the development of women's rights and their opportunities, pointing out that without the efforts of Reza Shah and his government, religious leaders would have failed every attempt to expand women's rights and opportunities, and she sees the Islamic Revolution as a setback to the achievements of women during Reza Shah's reign: "In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, clerical leaders attempted to turn back the clock and revoke many of the rights for women initiated by Reza Shah" (Mahdavi, 2003, p. 190). On the contrary, Hamid Reza Sadr argues that, "what went by the name of 'modernism' in Iran, and was used as a template by Reza Khan, far from renewing society ended up simply mimicking the West. Modernism in this context meant dressing, behaving and even speaking like Europeans" (Sadr, 2006, p. 16). Mehrzad

Boroujerdi, however, concludes that despite the dual feelings about Reza's performance and modernization, he transformed Iran's economic and social system. "Despite the ambivalent feelings of Iranians towards Reza Shah's authoritarian secularism, by providing much of the appurtenances of modernity he managed to alter the shape of the country's social, political and economic formation" (Boroujerdi, 2003, p. 158). Among Reza Shah's modernization policies, none of them was opposed by ordinary people as the compulsory unveiling. This prohibition on hijab was interpreted by scholars and religious people as Reza Shah's hostility to Islam, causing Reza Shah's unpopularity among ordinary people, as H.E.Chehabi rightly points out: "The forced unveiling of Iranian women in the second half of the 1930s was, of all of Reza Shah's modernization policies, the one that contributed most to his unpopularity among ordinary Iranians" (Chehabi, 2003, p. 203).

Today, there are different opinions among researchers about the outcomes of the compulsory unveiling. In the introduction to their book, Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner have described these two dominant perspectives as follows: "Often considered a symbol of Reza Shah's brutality... In contrast, some historians highlighted the beneficial effects of this measure for the emancipation of Iranian women" (Devos & Werner , 2014, p. 3). Shireen Mahdavi is one of the scholars who has agreed with the profits of the compulsory unveiling.[35] Many scholars have raised the question why unlike the Turkish model of Ataturk in Turkey, Reza Shah's reforms were not so successful. Despite the outstanding influences of modernization of Turkey on Reza Shah's reforms, from the perspective of Afsaneh Najmabadi, the prominent Iranian researcher, there are important differences between the two states. From her point of view, the long background and longer history of modernity in comparison with the limited and short-term history of modernity in Iran is one of the most important differences (Najmabadi, 1991, p. 55). Najmabadi's comparison of the first dates regarding the women's lives in Iran and Turkey indicates the short background of Iran in comparison with Turkey. Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher, two other scholars in the field, also point out that unlike Ataturk in Turkey who renovated and developed modernization on the legacy of Turkey's reforms of the previous decades, Reza Shah had to build a modern state from zero overnight (Atabaki & Erik J. , 2003, pp. 9-10).

In her article, religious aspects in communication processes in early Pahlavi Iran, Katja Föllmer considers the Shiite establishment an obstacle to the realisation of the Shah's modernization efforts. She believes that "the government's enforcement of European dress codes, the prohibition of veiling for

[35] See Mahdavi, S. (2003). Reza Shah Pahlavi and women: a re-evaluation. In S. Cronin, *Expanding agendas for the 'new Iranian womanThe making of modern Iran: state and society under Reza Shah, 1921–1941* (pp. 190 - 202). London and New York: Routledge.

women, as well as the Shah's wife's visit to a mosque while being unveiled, were great provocations not only for the clerics but also for the religious feelings of the Shiite masses" (Föllmer, 2014, p. 295). In fact, it was the continuation of this Shia thought and its opposition to the modernization of the Shah that paved the way for the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime four decades later, and the coming of the Islamic Republic to power. The wife of the current Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi recently stated that "anti-modernity is the main characteristic of the Islamic Republic" (Alamolhoda, 2021). As Homa Katouzian points out, as a result of the compulsory modernization of Reza Shah from the top and the forced unveiling, "outside the modern middle-class women, almost all put their chadors back on after the Shah's abdication" (Katouzian, 2003, p. 34). However, despite Reza Shah's attempts, the kind of modernity that he was in favor of was never accepted completely. Naturally a culture which was this much dependent on tradition and Islam could not be changed overnight by the implementation of force, no matter how much the government tried to change its appearance. One of the driving forces of the Islamic Revolution was the attack and criticism of westernization with the cinema, theaters, and discos by the religious people and the clerics.

Shahr-e No (a red light district in Tehran before the Revolution), to state an example of the modernization process at that time, can better show the big gap between tradition and modernity in the Pahlavi Period. Shahr-e No referred to a district in the mean streets of Tehran in which there were many brothels. The name of this district, Shahr-e No, was ironic. The literal meaning of the word Shahr-e No in Persian is a new or modern city. From this name of this district, one can understand that Iranian people considered prostitution and corruption new and modern. The prostitutes who lived and prostituted themselves in this district were mainly the traditional girls, the provincials, or the girls from villages who had traveled to Tehran. Some of these girls were sold or deceived, and some had to prostitute themselves because they were poor and did not have the support of their families. This phenomenon also affected pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema in which the character of the deceived, helpless, and indebted prostitute is frequently depicted. What normally happens at the end of these movies is that the deceived female character is rescued by a chivalrous male hero, brought back on the right track, and repents all she has done. These kinds of movies were not made with the purpose of social criticism or out of sympathy toward the prostitutes, but instead were made to attract a bigger and bigger audience by arousing their sexual desire and, as a consequence, to sell more tickets. Looking at the pictures of the women in Shahr-e No and the prostitutes in the movies one could not find any similarities between them. The prostitutes in Shahr-e No were afflicted women who had suffered a lot in their lives and were unattractive and poverty-stricken, whereas the female characters in the movies who played the role of prostitutes were

beautiful, and their lives also had nothing to do with the miserable and dejected lives of the Shahr-e No. Another incongruity that existed in the system of the prostitution in Shahr-e No was that it was closed in the two religious months, meaning Muharram and Safar. This kind of fidelity to tradition and religion in the context of prostitution, which is considered one of the greatest sins in Islam, shows the cultural contradiction of a society which would not let go of its traditions and religion, even though prostitution was carried on in a systematic way. The recognition of this "association, together with contradiction" can help us to understand Iranian society, its people, its culture, and also one of its subcategories, i.e. cinema, better and more comprehensively. After the Revolution, Shahr-e No was set on fire.

Figure 8: The above photograph of a prostitute in Shahr-e No was taken by Kaveh Golestan a few years before the Revolution. We can see the prostitute on a simple bed in a small and modest room where she offers sexual services to men. The covered face of the prostitute, to avoid her identity from being known, contrasts starkly with the portrait of the woman in the picture on the wall. This shows the gap between the current identity of the prostitute and the identity she would wish to have. *Untitled (Prostitute series, 1975-1977) http://www.kavehgolestan.org/#/page/21*

According to Hossein Bashiriyeh, “as a result of social and cultural modernization in the Pahlavi era, a considerable amount of dissatisfaction concentrated among the traditional classes of society. The Revolution was in fact the crisis of Pahlavi modernity, which eventually paved the way for the society’s anti-modernity response” (Bashiriyeh, 2015, p. 122). After the Revolution, returning to the tradition and “propagating the forgotten values” was selected as one of the main goals by the political authorities in the country. From Bashiriyeh’s point of view, “traditionalism is the ideological core of the Islamic government that emerged after the victory of the Revolution.” He believes that “the three elements of traditionalist ideology, the tendency towards mass society, and the power of the clerics are the factors that created the incumbent ideological system” (ibid., p. 126). That is because modernity in Iran was considered a threat to traditional values and therefore the public religious stratum resisted it. In this regard, Massoud Farasatkhah points put:

> We had a modernization project in Iran, but we did not have a modernity process, and modernization was implemented from above and with imported patterns, and as a result, modernization failed to change the moods of Iranians in practice, although they were apparently using modern goods and products. A government was in charge of modernization that regularly became “other” for the society due to its actions (Farasatkhah, 2014, p. 184).

Thus, all these factors led to Iranian people not having a good relationship with modernity and as a result the support of tradition were gradually adopted by the post-Revolution Cinema. The defense of tradition and the family system in contrast to modernity and the culture of consumption turned to be the main subject of the films produced in the eighties. In the ending of these films the traditional norms triumphed; unlike the trend of half a century earlier, when -as explained in greater detail above- a movie like *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor* was produced which was about the admittance of modernity.

How did Iranians accept the Cinema? The Contrast between the Traditional Norms and the Cinema

Cinema was met with opposition from the traditionalist right from the start. The first Iranian movie hall, which was inaugurated in 1904[36], was shut down after just one month, as it showed the pictures of women without headscarves,[37] and Shaikh Fazlollah Nuri, a leading cleric at that time believed that cinema was blasphemous (Omid, 1995, p. 23), and banned cinema forbidding people to go to the cinema. This ban had a huge impact on how the Iranian people saw the cinema which lasted up to the Revolution of 1979. Another reason for the opposition of the religious people before the Revolution was that men and women sat next to each other in the cinema hall. An unrelated man and woman who should not in Islamic society sit beside one another according to Islamic principles. In this regard, Pak-Shiraz points out:

> Unlike at public ritual gatherings such as taziyeh and rowzeh, where men and women were segregated, in cinemas they were allowed to sit next to each other. It can be argued, therefore, that cinema was not only a new Western medium introduced into Iranian Muslim society, but also a social instrument that broke with the old order. Equally, it was not merely that the content of the films and the inappropriate role-models offered through the characters posed a threat to the religious classes and their beliefs, but also that by creating a space for mixed-sex entertainment, cinema also created a dangerous new "unIslamic" leisure ritual (Pak-Shiraz, 2011, p. 41).

After the Revolution, the Islamists solved the problem by segregating men from women in cinema halls. This separation occurred as much as possible in most places, to the extent that today the dining halls of male and female students are separated in universities.

One of the things that strongly showed the contrast between the traditional norms and the cinema was the issue of the female actors in the movies. Muslim women were not willing to act in movies and considered them as unethical and impure. In taziyeh (Persian Shiite religious passion play), it was customary for men to wear women's dress and play the female roles. One solution that was thought of at the beginning of the film industry in Iran, was to employ non-Muslim women. It was because of this that in *Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor*, the second feature film in the history of Iranian cinema, Armenian Christian women were employed. But some time later, *Lor Girl,* the first Iranian movie with a Muslim female actor called Sedighe Saminejad was made.[38] "She said that after the screening, fanatic Iranians

[36] See Ghafari, F. (1996, Summer). Cinema-ye Iran az Diruz ta Emruz. *Iran-Nameh, 14*(3).
[37] See Baharlu, A. (1992). *Cinema-ye Iran, Bardasht-e Natamam.* Tehran: Chakameh.
[38] See Milani, F. (2011). *Words Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*. Syracuse University

beat her up and threw bottles at her… Due to the troubles that she faced both during the filming and after the screening, caused by her own relatives and by the people in general, she gave up playing in any other movie" (Ajlali, 2004, p. 110).[39] Likewise, Shahla Riahi's son tells about the acting problems his mother had in the 1940s: "My grandfather was a prominent cleric. When my mother after marrying my father decides to be an actress, she is rejected by her family. My uncle even comes to Tehran with a gun to kill my parents. When my parents wanted to go back home after having performed in a theater, someone kept watching lest my uncle would come and something bad would happen" (Abasian, 2015, p. 30). The actresses had a low status in the traditional society of Iran and their profession was not regarded as respectable. From the time they entered the cinema until the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian female actors endured a difficult situation in a patriarchal and highly religious society; a society which defined a particular position for women and traversing its boundaries was a fight against tradition, almost like walking on a razor's edge. Fakhri Khorvash in *Razor's Edge: The Legacy of Iranian Actresses (Bahman Maghsoudlou, 2016)* says how after playing in her first film her parents avoided any contact with her for nine years.

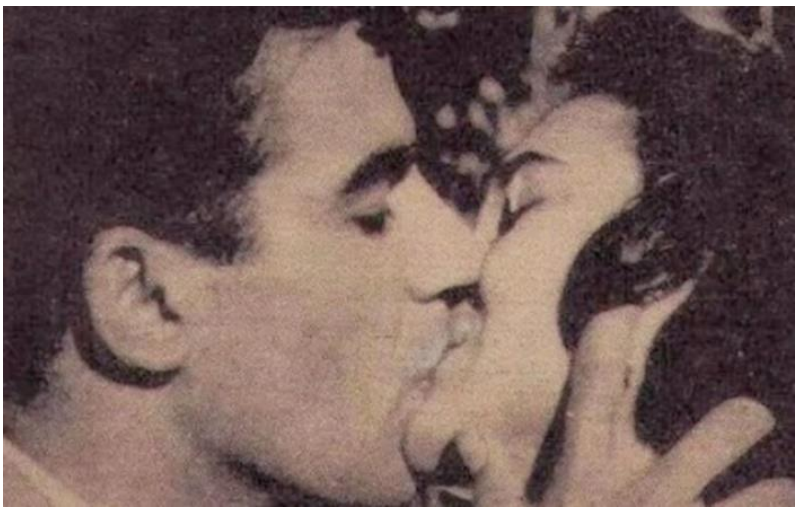

Figure 9: The first kiss in Iranian cinema history: Vida Ghahremani was not allowed to go to school because of her kiss with Naser Malek Motiee in *The Crossroad of Events (Chaharrah-e Havades, Samuel Khachikian, 1955). Photo: https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/ویدا-قهرمانی-صاحب-اولین-بوسه-سینمای-ایران-درگذشت/a-44061571. Screenshot from the film.*

Press. pp. 81-82.

[39] For more on Sedighe Saminejad, see Baharlu, A. (2022, April 29). *Sargozasht-e Ghamangiz-e Dokhtar-e Lor: Darbare-ye Sedighe Saminejad, Nokhostin Bazigar-e Zan-e Cinema-ye Iran* . Retrieved from Cahiers du feminisme: https://www.cahiersdufeminisme.com.

Later, it was easier for women to act in the movies. However, until the Revolution female actors did not enjoy a good reputation among the masses. But, after the Revolution, the situation of female actors changed significantly and gradually people's view of them changed. However, while the status of the female actors and people's opinion about them have changed, whenever an actress has transgressed the defined ethical and conventional barriers of Iranian society, she has been criticized by the traditional society of Iran.[40]

[40] An example for this is the actress Golshifteh Farahani, one of the prominent actresses in the 2000s, who emigrated from Iran in the late 2000s and played in a Ridley Scott's movie and also in other Hollywood and European productions. For the first time, Golishifteh posed half naked in front of the prominent French photographer Jean Mondino's camera and for the *Madam Figaro* Magazine. Also, a short movie of her and fifteen other actors, whose names had been put up for the candidacy of the best actor for the Cesar Award, was published which showed them while they were stripping. The news of the publication of the video clip and her naked image triggered various reactions of both support and also protest in the social media, the news websites, and Persian weblogs.

Voyeuristic Look: Sexualisation and Pleasure in Diegesis and Mise-en-scène in Pre-Revolution Cinema

The first time, which the Iranian audience were faced with voyeurism in Iranian films was in Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor in 1933. One of the scenes in the movie takes place at the dentist's surgery where there is a nude female statue. Haji Agha gravitates towards the statue to which he is sexually attracted. He looks at it and then touches it in an erotic way. It was the beginning of a special kind of representation of woman in the newly established Iranian cinema which referred to the sexual inclination of men and their long gaze at women as sexual objects. This was one of the reasons that religious people and the clerics continued to protest against the cinema for about half a century. When Haji Agha touches the nude breasts of the female statue, sexual attraction is represented in the Iranian film industry for the first time and this through a traditional religious character. In this scene, we are faced with a three-layer voyeurism:

1. Voyeurism by the main character of the movie, Haji Agha, when faced with the female statue.
2. Voyeurism by the camera crew in the movie who is surreptitiously shooting Haji Agha.
3. Voyeurism by the audience who sits in the movie hall and ogles Haji Agha.

Figure 10: Haji Agha touches the nude breasts of the female statue. "screenshot by author from the film Haji Agha, The Cinema Actor."

Hajji Agha, the Cinema Actor had a cautious and implied approach to the portrayal of eroticism, but the approach to representation of sex became more daring in the following decades.

FilmFarsi

FilmFarsi (Persian Film) was a popular genre of movie in Pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema, that was constructed with popular stars, provocative female characters, sex, violence, dance routines, singing, melodramatic plots and ridiculous narratives. Amirhushang Kavusi, the Iranian film critic coined the term "filmfarsi" humiliatingly for these type of movies. Despite its weak structure and crude techniques, bad cinematography and ugly frames, low quality of the sound and image, wrong lighting and bad rhythm of the film, superficial plots and bad and exaggerated acting, FilmFarsi cinema benefitted from sexy and exhibitionist actresses who made up for the dramatic, technical, and structural shortcomings with the erotic aspects of the films, and attracted the male audience to the cinema halls. Even the names of many movies in the seventies were openly erotic such as *A Suitcase Full of Sex (Yek Chameden Sex, Mohammad Motevaselani,1971)* or *Mehdi in Black and Hot Mini Pants (Mehdi Meshki va Shalvarak-e Dagh, Aman Manteghi, 1972)* or *The Triple Bed (Takhtekhab-e Se Nafareh, Nosrat Karimi, 1972)*. The Iranian audience remembers the women of the pre-revolution cinema with scenes of dancing and singing in bars and cafés. The woman who had been seduced and wound up singing and dancing and was called "motreb" humiliatingly. On the one hand, men satisfied their sexual desire by leering at her, and on the other hand, they accused her of unchastity and in the end, they poured water of repentance on her head[41], in order to wipe off her abjectness and indecency. In the pre-revolution films, women typically had clichéd roles which was always the transformation of a bad woman (a dancer or a prostitute) into a good woman with the help and support of a good man. Also, after the transformation, the women wore the chador. In the pre-revolution Iranian cinema women were marginalized and the main roles were given to men. The focus was mostly on their faces and bodies.

[41] The expression "pour water of repentance on someone's head" means to help a prostitute to repent.

Figure 11: Cleric pours water of repentance on woman's head in *Reputed (Badkaran, Qodratollah Ehsani, 1973) "screenshots by author from the film Reputed"*

The duality of mother, chaste woman and prostitute, unchaste woman formed the main core of the female characters in the FilmFarsi cinema. Woman was either mother, housewife, pure, and chaste, or she was unchaste and impure. In FilmFarsi cinema, the women, who were not confined to the privacy of their homes were not considered chaste. They either had jobs such as prostitutes, dancers, and singers or were among the aristocratic girls and women who in search of debauchery and lust stepped out of their homes. Cinema categorised women pure and chaste only if they were mothers and didn't leave the village to live in town. The coming of the rural women to the town was deemed synonymous with their corruption and destruction. The plot of many pre-revolution films involves the women who run away from the village, are seduced by men in town, and they end up in prostitution and corruption. Although cinema took advantage of women's beauty to attract male audience to the halls, it accepted her ethically in the finale only if she was purified from any sexual aspect, quit dancing and singing in the bars, and repented. Cinema screens showed love and hate for women simultaneously. The FilmFarsi producers had found out the weakness of the Iranian men. Men who were dependant on women's presence for their own sexual pleasure and at the same time, were too honourable (Gheirati) to allow their women to be leered at lewdly. It is no problem if the man is a voyeur himself, but if his woman is an exhibitionist and men stare at her, it is an unforgivable sin. The duality of leering and masculine honour that was present in the society

shaped the language and plot of many Iranian films. On the one hand, the male protagonists of the films, the camera, and the male audience seek sexual pleasure from women and on the other hand, they accuse her of dishonour and condemn her. They dress her in erotic clothes, but in the end, they reproach her for her attire. In this regard, Kamran Talattof points out, "to be completely redeemed, she needed to be confined in a veil and within walls… Female figures made no decisions in the process; their desire and sexuality were expressed only in response to the male's call to appropriate her body" (Talattof, 2011, pp. 112-113). Although what Talattof states about the expression of women's desire and sexuality was a common practice in pre-revolutionary cinema, exceptions such as *Baluch (1972)* by Kimiai and *Red-haired (Mu-Sorkheh, 1974)* by Alireza Davoodnejad should not be overlooked. In *Baluch*, a middle-aged woman hires a man to satisfy her sexual desires. In *Red-haired*, it is the woman's sexuality that advances the story. Her indulgence and her power against men distinguishes her from other women in FilmFarsi films.

The Filmfarsi films contained with or without reason scenes of bars in which men, far from the women in their lives, were ogling at the women dancers. The presence of long sequences of dancing and singing in the Iranian cinema was copied from the Indian cinema. In India, dancing has a long cultural history and it is a part of their culture and daily life, but the function of dancing in the Iranian cinema was to pause the narrative development in order to achieve sexual pleasure for men both on the screen and in the cinema hall. Mise-en-scène, decoupage, and camera movement all served this purpose. The decoupage structure of those sequences was arranged in this way: First, a few fetishistic close-up shots of the buttocks, breasts, and legs of the woman dancer were shown. Then the camera moved upwards from her toes, tilted up slowly, thus making the audience greedier to see every part of the woman's body. The shot was cut here to the extreme close-up of the eyes of the male protagonist who was staring at the woman in the bar. In the next shot, the dancer or a part of her body was shown again, which was in fact the POV shot of the protagonist. (In some films, the camera zooms fast to the woman's buttocks or breasts in the protagonist's POV.) This decoupage technique and the camera movement put the audience in place of the film's voyeur and together with him, holds the position of a peeping Tom in what Freud called scopophilia or pleasure in looking. In *The Story of Mahan (Gheseye Mahan, Javad Taheri, 1973)*, the male character eyes the woman from a hole on the roof of the bathroom. This is a long sequence in which all the details of the woman taking a bath are shown to the audience, so that the audience is also involved in the act of voyeurism which is accompanied by sexual pleasure (figures 12-13). The representation of this scene completely conforms to the Theory of Suture. The audience is stitched into the narrative from the P.O.V of the male character and the eye of the audience thus becomes one with the eye of the male

character and his point of view and also starts to eye the female character.


Figures 12-13:[42] *"screenshots by author from the film The Story of Mahan"*

Before the Revolution the cinema was a cheap recreation for the poor men in society whose unattainable dreams and wishes could be fulfilled in the cinema; dreams such as seeing erotic, and naked women, women who were not available to the male worker communities from poor parts of the city. The cinema provided this opportunity for them for two hours. The Iranian critic Parviz Jahed attributes the audacity of screening sex in FilmFarsi of the 1970s to the movement of society toward modernity in that decade when the audience's reception of Italian and French erotic films increased. According to Jahed, FilmFarsi producers were forced to use sex more openly in films in order to compete with those films and attract more audience.

> In the 1970s, with the society moving towards modernity and the gap between modern and traditional life in Iran increasing, the filmmakers' approach toward displaying sex on the cinema screen changed. Therefore, recklessness in showing sex increased. It was during those times that screening Italian and French movies with erotic scenes in Iranian cinemas surprised the audience. The moviegoers' praise of the Italian erotic comedies made the FilmFarsi producers change their way of thinking. To compete with these movies, the only thing the film producers could think of was to make use of sex and to show their stars' naked bodies in the FilmFarsi. The representation of sex in these movies was not based on narrative necessities, but was only there for pornographic purposes and

[42] In this thesis the images are numbered from left to right, top to bottom.

was only a response to the needs and sexual complexes of the audiences of these kinds of movies (Jahed, 2012).

Before the Revolution, cinema was a masculine industry and men constituted the majority of the audience, and women welcomed cinema less for religious reasons and the manly atmosphere of the cinema halls. Therefore, the producers and filmmakers focused on satiating men's sexual desires in their films.

The protests against the sexual representation of women in the pre-revolution cinema was not just limited to the religious people, even one of the famous actresses of the time, Azar Shiva, too, protested against this issue. The film producers of the time, who were only interested in selling the tickets, asked the female actors to show their bodies in front of the camera. Azar Shiva, however, protested against this and refused to do what the film producers asked her to do. When faced with the threat of the film producers, she started to sell chewing gum opposite the National University. By doing this, Azar Shiva meant to say that she preferred selling chewing gum to showing her body in front of the camera. This protest, however, was ignored by the artists and intellectuals of the time. Eventually, all the FilmFarsi producers of the time boycotted Azar Shiva and she said goodbye to the Iranian cinema for ever.

Figure 14: A page of a newspaper of that time whose headline is *"The famous Iranian star became a chewing gum seller yesterday!"* and a photo of Azar Shiva opposite the National University showing her protest against the FilmFarsi and its approach to the representation of women. *Photo: Keyhan Newspaper, Sunday, December 6, 1970. https://images.app.goo.gl/kPNifao43dsm7fi16*

In this regard, Kamran Talattof links FilmFarsi approach to the Shah's Westernisation policy and the growing presence of women in society:

> A segment of the traditional society was frightened when it observed women's increasing presence in public life, in offices and on campuses. Some men even felt they were being emasculated, as they viewed the Shah's Westernization as their castration. Filmfarsi movies ended up helping these men, boosting masculinity. During the 1970s, women gained power in society but lost it in the Filmfarsi movies. The more men lost control over women's bodies in real life and the more the law limited them in the courts, the more they gained control over the female body in cinema (Talattof, 2011, pp. 124-125).

The sexual portrayal of women in FilmFarsi films and the repressed female characters dominated by men, who were constantly subjected to sexual abuse by male characters in films, responded to the repressed sexual needs of men and compensated for the ever-more degraded power of men in society through cinema, because the majority of the audience of FilmFarsi was made up of men, and the plot developed in a way to attract their attention. In fact, the subconscious of the patriarchal society determined the structure of FilmFarsi, and protests like that of Azar Shiva yielded no result.

Figures 15-18: The posters of some of the cinemas which were burned during the Revolution. These foreign movies were full of erotic scenes. *"Screenshots by author from the film The Revolution of 1979 (Enghelabe 57, Arash Ashtiani, 2014)"*

With the Islamic Revolution and the religious government taking over the country, nudity in the cinema was no longer permitted and the seductive woman was replaced with a loving mother or absence of women. In this regard, Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa argues that, "Idealized women in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema have ranged from mothers (of the martyrs) and wives (of the heroes) to little girls and teenagers" (Saeed-Vafa & Rosenbaum, 2018, p. 69). Had the pre-revolution cinema not exaggerated in the sexual representation of women, the woman in the post-revolution cinema, particularly in the eighties, would probably not have been excluded from the cinema screens to that extent. The exclusion of women in the post-revolution cinema was a reaction to the pre-revolution cinema which, for the Muslim revolutionists created the image of women being sexual elements and their presence in the cinema would naturally lead to immorality.

Contrary to the pre-revolution cinema that depicted an utterly erotic image of feminine body, the post-revolution cinema downgraded women at its best to only the image of their face and censored her other organs under hijab and as a result, women were reduced to bodiless faces under the shadow of the Islamic ideology. The representation of women in Iran's cinema before and after the Revolution

(particularly the first decade after the Revolution) was rather extreme misrepresentation in two different ways. Before the Revolution, female characters in movies were mostly bar girls, cabaret singers, dancers and prostitutes, and their outlook appearance, dresses and makeup was just a tool for transforming them to sexual objects. After the Revolution, too, women were practically eliminated from the silver screens for almost a decade and they could hardly find a moderate presentation.

CHAPTER TWO

Islamization of the Cinema

Fakhrodin Anvar[43]:

> We had prepared the conditions for the cinema in a way that there was not much difference between the cinema and the mosque. It shouldn't have been that different whether a child of a family went to a mosque or to a cinema (Arzhmand & Heydari, 2015, p. 52).

[43] The deputy director of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the 1980s.

The Revolution divided everything into "pre-revolution" and "post-revolution". The history of Iranian Cinema was also divided into pre- and post-revolution. The pre-revolutionary cinema was called "Taghut[44] Cinema" and its time was over. The moment the Revolution became triumphant on the evening of 11 February of 1979, it, in fact, made use of the media, when the National Iranian TV was taken over by the revolutionaries and the revolutionary TV broadcaster announced the victory of the Revolution saying "The imperial regime has been overthrown".[45] The religious revolutionaries and Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, even though they had objections to media such as television and cinema, were nevertheless cognizant of the importance and the power of media in the mobilization of the masses and therefore made use of the media as an important foundation for the stabilization of power and propagation of their value systems. In addition, even before the victory of the Revolution, by setting fire to and burning down approximately 200 cinema halls[46] in the last months leading to the Revolution, the revolutionaries had used the cinema as a medium to help and accelerate the process of the Revolution. All these attest to the fact that the Revolution was interlinked with media and the power of media. Some researchers such as Hamid Reza Sadr[47], consider the burning down of Cinema Rex[48] in 1978, which killed about 400 spectators, as one of the events that led to the ignition of the Revolution.

[44] A word for false god. Khomeini used this term to describe the Shah and the Shah's regime.
[45] See Ruhani, H. (1997). *Khaterat va Mobarezat-e Shahid Mahalati.* Tehran: Markaz Asnad va Enghelab-e Eslami. pp. 114-115.
[46] On "*Cinema Burning*", see Baharlu, A. (2019). *Cinema Burning in Iran (Cinemasuzi in Iran)*. Tehran: Ghatreh.
[47] See Sadr, H. R. (2003). *Daramadi bar Tarikh-e cinema-ye Siasi-ye Iran (1280–1380).* Tehran: Nashr-e Nay. P. 237.
[48] On Cinema Rex Fire, see Nikoonazar, K. (2020) *Cinema Jahanam: Shesh Gozaresh Darbareye Adamsuzi dar Cinema Rex.* Tehran: Cheshmeh.

Figure 19: Capri Cinema in Tehran, which was burned by the revolutionaries.
Photo: https://newspaper.hamshahrionline.ir/id/47382/سقوط.html

Ayatollah Khomeini spoke about the cinema after his arrival in Iran in his first speech: "Our cinema is the center of prostitution. We are not against the cinema; we are against the center of prostitution... The cinema is one of the manifestations of modernity which should serve these people and their education" (Khomeini, 1999, p. 15). This reveals the significance of the cinema. He equates the pre-revolution cinema with the prostitution centers and casinos and sees no difference between them:

> It would be enough for the current generation who has not apprehended the dark days to take a look at the books, poetry, writings, plays, compositions, newspapers, magazines, and prostitution centers, casinos, liquor stores, and cinemas which are all reminders of those days or to ask those who have seen those days to understand how women, the humanitarian and educator community in the society, have been oppressed under the pretext of progressive woman (Khomeini, 1998, p. 38). Progress is not what some of our men and women have believed it to be. progress is not going to the cinema and dancing (ibid., p. 88). We are against the cinemas whose programs corrupt our youth's ethics and destroy the Islamic culture (ibid., p. 95). The cinemas in the Shah's regime served

corruption while the Islamic Republic should serve the nation's moral soundness (ibid., p. 87).

He believes the cinema is a place or an element which before the Revolution corrupted women. The utopian society created by the Islamic Revolution and by its leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, was a society which had been purged of any modes of female sexuality. This discourse depicted an ideal society in which a woman was present in the society without infecting the general public by her sexuality; a society in which the woman stays at home and raises the kids and fulfils her tasks of spouse away from the community. After the Revolution, women and the cinema in the same way were in the center of conflicts and were both considered the symbol of the corruption of the previous regime and were also believed to corrupt the youth. From the beginning of the Revolution, the fate of women and the cinema were in a way interlinked.

As one of the manifestations of the regime, the cinema was always treated badly by the revolutionaries. Nobody spoke about the *Iranian New Wave (Moj-e No)*[49] and the artistic and different Iranian cinema as they only remembered the cinema in which women mainly played the role of singers, dancers, and prostitutes in FilmFarsi. The idea of these kinds of people about the cinema was based on the movie advertisements on billboards in the cinema or the posters and pictures of movies which mainly portrayed images of naked female actors with the purpose of attracting a bigger audience. Therefore, the revolutionary Muslims thoroughly ignored the *New Wave* filmmakers before the Revolution such as Sohrab Shahid-Sales, Dariush Mehrjui, and Bahram Beyzaie in whose movies the representation of women was completely different from the representation of women in FilmFarsi. In their mind they had formed a connection between the corruption and promiscuity among the women and the youth, before the Revolution, and with the cinema.

At the beginning of the Revolution, there were two contradictory opinions about the cinema among the revolutionaries. The first group believed that an Islamic society does not need the cinema. According to Mohammad Mahdi Dadgoo, the cinema management consultant of the 1980s, many of the extremists asked for a complete closure of the cinemas and transformation into mosques: "One solution for the cinema was to ignore it. One suggestion was to transform the cinemas to mosques and send the warriors who want to defend the country to the front from these mosques" (Arzhmand & Heydari, 2015, p. 186). If it was not for Ayatollah Khomeini's speech, this opposition would have led to the complete closure of all the cinemas after the Revolution. The second group believed in making use of the cinema with the

[49] On *Iranian New Wave*, see Aghighi, S. (2012). *Iranian New Wave (1969-1979)*. In P. Jahed, *Directory of World Cinema: Iran* (pp. 84-102). Intellect: Bristol. pp. 84-102.

aim of propagating the Islamic Revolution and the regime's propaganda. Mir Hossein Mousavi, the prime minister in the eighties, expressed his view on the cinema: "The cinema is a means for delivering messages. The lack of cinema in our regime is to lose a weapon in a mighty cultural, economic, and political fight" (Talebi-Nezhad, 1998, p. 176). Mohsen Makhmalbaf was part of the young Muslim movement that believed "Whether we like or not, we have to make use of art today. If we don't use this effective weapon in pursuit of our goals, other people would use it against us" (Makhmalbaf, 1982, p. 6). He denounced the pre-revolution cinema altogether.[50] First of all, he lashed out at its actors and filmmakers. Between the years 1979-1982, there was a dearth in Iranian film industry. After the Revolution, many of the actresses of the pre-revolution times were summoned to the Revolution Court and had been banned from working.[51] Some of them fled from Iran. As many of the pre-revolutionary actresses, directors and producers were banned, there was a shortage of the human resources in the film industry and the newly formed Islamic cinema was obliged to train a new generation of revolutionary filmmakers and actresses, some of whom had not even been to the cinema up until that time. Mehdi Fakhimzadeh talks about his experience of finding an actress for the movie, *Soil and Blood (Khak va Khoon, Kamran Ghadakchian,1983)*: "Finding an actress was difficult. We had to find someone who would not be stigmatized and would not bring the movie to the danger of confiscation. We searched a lot and finally I suggested Zhila Sohrabi. She had not worked in the cinema before. Therefore, we chose her safely" (Fakhimzadeh, 2014, p. 396). Even though only a few pre-revolution actresses were allowed to act after the Revolution, even those who had not been stars and had not acted in movies that displayed a lot of nudity but whose presence had still raised some objections were not given the opportunity to become very prominent or even be seen. This was due to the fear of the protest of radical revolutionaries against the presence of pre-revolution actresses in post-revolution movies. Anvar, the cinema deputy director of the time says:

Before the Revolution many women wore no hijab and in the cinema they observed the

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[50] Mohsen Makhmalbaf: "My grandmother was very religious and believed that whoever goes to the cinema or watches movies or listens to music will be sent to hell. Whenever we went out of the house together, she covered her ears so that she will not hear the music which could be heard from the windows of people's houses or the gramophone record stores. She also said to me: Mohsen, cover yours ears" (Makhmalbaf, 1998, p. 18). One of the things that those who were responsible for making decisions about the cinema were proud of was that they said they did not go the cinema before the Revolution. As Ajlali observes, "going to the cinema until the Revolution was considered a forgivable sin but not ethical and honorable. This was because in the opinion of the people, the cinema was infected by sin for it showed scenes which should be kept private. In fact, the audacious and irreverent camera of the cinema transgressed the barrier between inside and outside and mahram and non-mahram" (Ajlali, 2014, p. 129).

[51] On purification process, see Naficy, H. (2012c). *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 3: The Islamicate Period, 1978–1984.* Duck University. pp. 32-43.

rules of the hijab even less. We allowed those who had fewer issues concerning the hijab to act in movies. In the second Fajr Film festival, the judges wanted to give the award of best actress to a woman, but I asked them not to. I told them that even though she has acted well, but if she gets the award, her pre-revolution photos might be distributed. Then both we and she might get into difficulty. This might practically cause her to be banned from the cinema (Arzhmand & Heydari, 2015, p. 48).

Figure 20: Hossein Farahbakhsh's *Private Life (Zendegi-ye Khosusi,2012)*: Pulling down film banners at cinemas was common practice among radical revolutionaries. Here, revolutionaries protesting against pre-revolution superstars tear down the advertisement and vandalize the cinema.[52] *"screenshot by author from the film Private Life"*

Makhmalbaf joined the *Islamic Thought and Art Center (Hozeh-ye Andishe va Honar-e Eslami)* and the idea of "The Islamic Cinema Model" was put up for discussion: "We unfortunately don't own a [Islamic] model, particularly about the cinema which is a young art, as a pure Islamic art. In this regard, the cinema is also an area for the realization of the features of the Islamic art. We prototype in all areas, including the cinema" (Heydari G. , 1997, pp. 24-25). Morteza Avini, one of the post-revolution cinema theorists and documentary filmmakers[53], believed that the nature of cinema as a western phenomenon basically

[52] In March 1985, the negative and positive inventories of the film broadcasting offices were confiscated. And after a while, some of those pre-revolutionary films which were regarded as immoral were burned in front of the Minister of culture of the time and also the attorney-general of the country in Damavand Road after having said prayers.

[53] The director of *The Chronicles of Victory* (*Revayat-e Fath, 1986-1993)*, a war documentary TV series about the Iran-Iraq war. On Morteza Avini's Cinema, see Karimabadi, M. (2011). *Manifesto of Martyrdom: Similarities and Differences between Avini's Ravayat-e Fath (Chronicles of Victory) and more Traditional Manifestos,* Iranian Studies, Volume 44, Number 3, May 2001, pp.381-386. See also Yousefi, H. (2021). *Between Illusion and Aspiration: Morteza Avini's Cinema and Theory of Global Revolution.* In Keshavarzian, A & Mirsepassi, A. (Ed) *Global 1979: Geographies and Histories of the Iranian Revolution*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 357-388.

cannot be islamized. The cinema, however, can be used as a tool in the pursuit of the Islamic goals (Fazlinezhad, 2000, p. 29). The truth is that the Islamists had no predefined Islamic model for the cinema. This model should have been made from scratch. Makhmalbaf wrote some articles about Islamic art, storytelling, and playwriting from an Islamic point of view. In his book "*An Introduction to the Islamic Art*", he attempts to define the Islamic art: "The Islamic art, is the art which was formed by God and devout Muslims in order to propagate the values of Islam… God himself has created the first versions of this art. The tales in the Quran are prominent examples of the pure Islamic art" (Makhmalbaf, 1982, p. 96). Makhmalbaf believed that the formation of an artistic Islamic revolution organization was the only solution for the Islamic art's dilemma:

> The solution that we think of is that an organization should take on this task and do some precise research to find criteria for Islamic art. It should create some models and in the first place, it should offer a guideline:
>
> 1) It should guide those who are new to art.
>
> 2) It should teach those who practiced an art which had possibly been trapped by the Western and Eastern art, and those who truly wanted to change, that the Islamic film is not only to wear a scarf. To make an Islamic film is to change fundamentally everything related to it. At any rate, to do this we believe that we should set up an institution which has the following five tasks:

1) Research into the identity and the form of Islamic art in different dimensions.
2) Producing Islamic art to render examples and to meet the Islamic society's needs.
3) Having a cadre of Hezbollahi people[54] as the problem would remain unless Hezbollah enter this field.
4) Universalizing the Islamic art and promoting the Islamic ideology through the effective use of art as a weapon.
5) Creating an Artistic-Islamic-Hezbollahi organization to frustrate the western and eastern plots (ibid., p. 21).[55]

Consequently, the Islamists were in charge of film industry and directly controlled all the phases of filmmaking. Shahla Mirbakhtyar describes the hard process of making film in 1980s:

> First the plot for the script was submitted and discussed and approved by Farabi Cinema Foundation; usually the scriptwriter, director, or both were summoned to discuss the script

[54] In Iran, Hezbollahi refers to radical religious people.

[55] On "Islamic Cinema", "Islamic Art", and "early Makhmalbaf's films", see Dabashi, H. (2008). *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker.* London, New York: I.B. Tauris. pp. 79-83.

and asked to make changes and corrections to meet the guidelines of foundation. This process was repeated through many drafts, until the script was given the green light for production. The changes were not just minor ones, but sometimes included changing the entire structure of a script and turning it into something that bore no resemblance to the original text. After this long process, which sometimes lasted for a few months, and after the approval of the advisors of the foundation, the script would be sent to the section in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance responsible for issuing a license for the script to be made into a film. After getting a license for the production of the script, the producer gave a list of names, including all of those who were going to participate in the production of the film, from the director, the actors, and the photographer to the various crew members. Farabi even had the power of approval over the people to work on the production, and in many cases crossed out names and replaced them with those whom the foundation wanted to work, or be seen to work, in the production. For example, Farabi foundation had a series of actors, female and male, that they wanted to appear in the films in place of the popular pre-revolution actors. Therefore, Farabi proposed that the producers (or better, ordered the producers) to use particular actors in films.[56] It was the same story with the directors of photography and even the film directors. If a film survived the process through shooting, Farabi still maintained its control and could order changes even in composition of scenes, or the way the film was being made. Usually an agent of the foundation was assigned to a film and was present during all aspects of its production.[57] All of these controls were exercised under a law that required a license to make a film. This license was a lawful means for the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, of which Farabi foundation was a part, to control the production of films from script to screen (Mirbakhtyar, 2006, pp. 110-111).

With this complicated process of licensing films, Farabi created one of the most advanced and complicated method of film censorship ever seen.[58]

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[56] There was a blacklist which meant that some artists were able to work and others not.

[57] The government representatives were present during all the phases of film-making to make sure that no immoral event takes place. Abolfazl Poorarab recounts that when *The Bride* was being shot, he played ping pong behind the scene with Niki Karimi, the female protagonist, and a day after that he was upbraided by the manager of cultural affairs in Farabi. Or in *The Victim (Ghorbani, Rasoul Sadrameli, 1991)*, the director asks Poorarab to walk and talk a little bit with the female protagonist so that they would feel comfortable with each other. He was, however, reprimanded by the authorities once again because of this (Poorarab, 2016).

[58] See Qukasian, Z. (1992). *Conversation with Bahram Beyzaie (Goftegu ba Bahram Beyzaie)*. Tehran: Agah. pp. 276-280.

Video

Underground was an inseparable part of Iranian society after the Revolution. Underground and underground activities referred to all activities that the state prohibited, but were secretly carried out by people, especially young ones, in houses and basements; from banned entertainments such as playing cards, holding mixed parties, selling and consuming alcoholic beverages, having relationships with the opposite sex without marriage, possessing and reading banned books, dance classes, underground bands, to banning of videocassettes and tape cassettes in the 1980s, and the banning of satellite dishes in the following decades. The book *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* written by Hamid Naficy in 1993 deals with the patterns of cultural developments of immigrants and the Iranian televisions of the first wave of Iranian immigrants to the United States after the Revolution in the 1980s to 1991, when the most widespread Iranian immigration to the United States occurred. The book is about Iranian communities in diaspora in Los Angeles and living in diasporic conditions. Iranian television channels in Los Angeles are chosen and analysed as an example of life in exile and the culture-making of this society in exile. Part of those TV shows were smuggled into Iran on videotapes in the 1980s and early 1990s. In his book, Naficy, who lived in the United States in that decade, deals with Iranian programmes and televisions inside the United States and the Iranians in exile in the United States, but does not deal with the other side of the coin, namely the entry of tapes of these programmes into Iran. I will deal with the other side of the coin, namely the secret handover of these tapes and videos in Iran. The tapes that connected Iranians inside Iran to Iranians in exile and the lost or distant past, and the tapes were means to represent and resist the loss of memories of the past and to keep the memories alive. Watching the Pahlavi regime's films in the cinema hall collectively during the year of its production before the Revolution and watching the same films on VCRs secretly and individually inside the house after the collapse of the Shah's regime caused a change in reception of films.

Morteza Avini linked his opposition to the videotape to the fact that video is uncontrollable: "Video is the most suitable container for breeding corruptive bacteria because it does not require a public space to be screened and it evades easily border checkpoints." Avini calls video "the rebellious medium" because he believes video cannot be contained by bounds or limits (Avini, 1992, p. 137). In the article Motives for Using Video among Young People in Tehran, Mahmood Shahabi answers the question of what reasons and motives Iranian youth have for watching films on VCR. In the end and based on his research findings, he highlights eight reasons including "dissatisfaction with the national television, cosmopolitan lifestyle and sex appeal." From his point of view, "Young video users in Iran use video to

compare their lives with that of the Iranians before the Revolution and Iranians living in the Western countries, especially the United States" (Shahabi, 2003, p. 98). The video was at odds with the government's apparatus, and it was fed by a "Filmi" [a videocassette dealer] in the underground of the community. Filmi was someone who went to his clients' homes stealthily with a Samsonite suitcase full of videocassettes and rented the films. He practically played illegally the role of distributing the films that were banned by the government's apparatus. As possessing VCR and videocassette was a felony, those who had them hid them from strangers. In its media reproduction including in cinema, the government apparatus wanted to make citizens aware of the time and place after the Revolution, and in the narrative of the films, it showed to the audience the revolutionary society and its ideals, noting that we were all in the public everywhere and reminded us of hijab and the modesty rules. On the other hand, the video provided an alternative to the Islamicate cinema. The video provided the opportunity for Iranians to be temporarily freed from the political and social tensions of the revolutionary society, creating a rupture in the homogeneous society and the modesty laws. Families, freed from the repressive government apparatus, tasted in private the temporary taste of liberation. In the midst of the public space imposed by the state system, video made it possible to create a private space separate from the state control, and therefore it was banned. It was an opportunity to forget the suffering of war and the harsh living conditions for the duration of a videocassette.

Blake Atwood has recently published in 2021 a comprehensive book on the story of "video ban" in the 1980s and the underground circulation of videocassettes in Iran. According to Atwood, "videocassettes as material objects did what media do best: they mediated the central concerns of their time and place" (Atwood, 2021, p. 8). He points out that "videocassettes provided access to everything that could not be found in the state-sponsored film and television industries at the time" (ibid., p. 2). Atwood does not consider the function of video in Iran important only because it allowed Iranians to access banned movie content but considers important how videocassettes circulated and deals with the role of the underground distribution network and the underground video dealers as well. Atwood argues that, "videocassettes engendered an infrastructure for media distribution and consumption in the 1980s and 1990s that existed outside the domain of state regulation" (ibid., p. 3). In the 1980s, everything that took place in secrecy and in private environments, and therefore could not be monitored by the authorities, was prohibited, including the parties during the night and the possession of a video cassettes recorder. A few years after the Revolution, trading video recorders and video cassettes and also having them at home was banned in Iran for more than a decade. The discourse of power preferred the people to watch the movies and TV programs that were monitored by the authorities and the video recorder

deprived them of the possibility of monitoring. Possessing a video recorder gave the Iranian viewer the opportunity to select and watch in his privacy the movies that he enjoyed. Many of these movies were incompatible with the value system of the Islamic regime and belonged to the pre-revolution cinema. It was no longer possible to watch them legally and copies of these kinds of movies circulated among people in secrecy. One of the reasons for people's attraction toward the video cassette was that the clubs, bars, and cabarets were shut down after the Revolution and the video cassette made up for the non-existence of these places. This together with the fact that these movies might create a nostalgic feeling in the audience and result in bringing up past memories caused some worries to the authorities who believed the video cassette is the continuity of the culture of the pre-revolution era and therefore these movies were rejected by the discourse of power of the Islamic Revolution. Some of these video cassettes were secretly imported from Los Angeles and their copies circulated among the population. These video cassettes included concerts, shows, and video clips that had been produced and recorded by Iranian singers living in Los Angeles, those who were obliged to leave Iran after the Revolution as there was no possibility of singing in the new Regime especially for women. Dancing had been banned but the video cassettes of the well-known dancers such as Mohammad Khordadian circulated in houses. There were no dance classes anymore, while the teenagers and the youth learned how to dance in their houses with the help of these video cassettes which were imported into Iran illegally. Likewise, the Western music had been banned, while the video cassettes of Michael Jackson and Madonna conquered the houses and the youth in a clandestine way. The video cassettes and the video recorders were secretly placed in banana cartons, in the chador or in blankets and were carried from one house to another. In the eighties, the video recorder as a medium turned into an instrument for returning to the yearned for past and the nostalgia for the period which was about to be forgotten. Despite the cinema and the television, the video recorder, in recreating the past, displayed a positive view of the past and combined, for the Iranian people, the sorrow of losing the past with a kind of regret. Therefore, it was natural that the authorities did not like the video. During the years the video recorder was banned, Behrouz Afkhami, one of the filmmakers of the revolutionary generation said in 1991: "There are about two million domestic video recorders in Iran. If we suppose that only two films are screened by these devices each week, the conclusion would be that the Iranian people watch one hundred million illegal movies each year" (Sadr, 2003, p. 258). The minister of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance expressed his worry about the video recorder too by saying: "The video, today, is a means of jeopardizing the sovereignty of the nation" (ibid, p. 258).

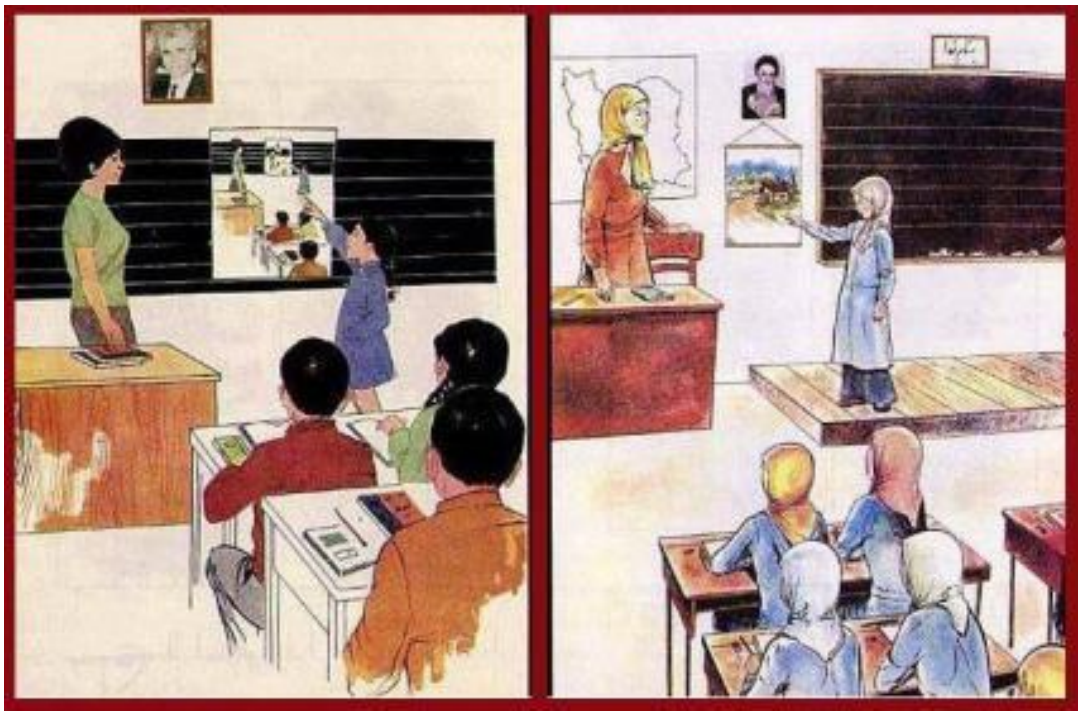
Figure 21: One scene of Babak Anvari's[59] movie *Under the Shadow (2016)*, the story of which takes place in the eighties, touches upon the issue of the prohibition of having a video recorder and the hiding of it when a stranger enters. *"screenshot by author from the film Under the Shadow"*

In contrast to the video recorder which belonged to the interior and private spheres of Iranian people, the cinema belonged to the public and was owned by the authorities of the Islamic Revolution and thus followed its precepts. The Iranian cinema screens were reserved for political, and revolutionary movies. In case the screenplays which were approved of by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance did not include revolutionary motives -many of them did- it was suggested that revolutionary motives and anti-imperial and anti-capitalism be added after a rereading and revision of the movies. This was not only limited to Iranian movies. The authorities also applied these ideas when dubbing foreign movies. Mahmoud Ghanbari, the dubbing director, changed the story of foreign movies and turned some of them into revolutionary movies. The atmosphere in the 1980s was so revolutionary and anti-West that it had been suggested to the only movie magazine of the time, the *Film Magazine*, that they should not include movies of the West. It was not, for example, possible to talk about Hitchcock, John Ford, and the American cinema at that time since they were regarded as the symbol of capitalism and colonialism.

[59] Babak Anvari is an Iranian filmmaker who lives in London.

Cultural Revolution

This purging and islamisation was not only limited to the cinema but also included other arts[60], educational sectors such as the universities. The islamisation of the educational system in Iran was also essential to the regime. Two years after the Revolution, the universities, following an order of Ayatollah Khomeini, were closed for three years for the purpose of purging and islamising them; this was called "Cultural Revolution".[61] The Cultural Revolution accelerated the act of islamising education between the years 1980-1983 and the Council of the Cultural Revolution became the main source of ideological planning. After three years when the universities opened again, they had undergone a huge change. A large number of professors had been dismissed[62], some of the students were banned from studying and women were forbidden to major in certain fields of study.



Figures 22-23: In the above picture on the left, we can see an image of a page of the schoolbooks before the Revolution in which both the teachers and the female students are not wearing the hijab and the male and female

[60] The Iranian theater also underwent a serious and fundamental transformation. One of the most significant theater directors of pre-revolution times, Hamid Samandarian was banned from working and to show his protest, he opened a restaurant together with some of his colleagues. Susan Taslimi, another significant actress of the time was also expelled from the City Theater.

[61] On the Cultural Revolution in the Iranian universities, see Razavi, R. (2009, January). The Cultural Revolution in Iran, with Close Regard to the Universities, and Its Impact on the Student Movement. *Middle Eastern Studies, 45*(1), pp. 1-17.

[62] See Nafisi, A. (2003). *Reading Lolita in Tehran.* New York: Random House.

students are sitting together. On the right, however, we can see an image of a schoolbook after the Revolution in which both the teacher and the female students are wearing the hijab and gender segregation has been enforced. *Photo: https://www.cloob.com/c/darling9.9/103576469/کتب_درسی_قبل_و_بعد_انقلاب*

The Council of the Cultural Revolution, which had also been established for the purpose of spreading the Islamic culture in society and empowering the Cultural Revolution to purge scientific and cultural institutions, issued instructions on how to represent a woman on TV and in the radio and it thus obliged the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting to follow these principles in both producing and screening its programs.

1. The promotion of feminism[63], misandry, and matriarchy is forbidden.
2. Stigmatizing housekeeping and having a husband as well as enfeebling the position of mothers is forbidden.
3. The grand position of motherhood in the religious education of the family has to be emphasized.
4. Showing a preference for economic independence or any activity or job over the holy position of motherhood is forbidden.
5. The strong position of the man at the time of the continued family disputes should not be weakened and humiliated (Abedini, 2009, p. 122).

[63] Among the Islamists, feminism is considered a process which is against the principles and basics of Islam and therefore they try to fight against it; the minister of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, for example, said that ten movies which had feminist themes had been banned from being present in the Fajr Film Festival in 2017 (BBC News Persian, 2017).

Veiled Look: Desexualisation and Un-pleasure in Diegesis and Mise-en-scène in Post-Revolution Cinema

During the years leading to the Revolution when the Shah's regime pursued westernisation of the society at a fast pace, the traditional and religious parts of the society condemned anything that had a trace of the western culture, or the phenomenon and entertainments that had been imported from the West, and the religious youths did not practice them. For example, they had evaluated billiard religiously and they didn't play it. Consequently, the billiard clubs were closed down for nearly two decades by the religious people after the victory of the Revolution. The same happened incredulously to chess and it was banned for almost one decade. After the Revolution, anything that was associated with entertainment or joy had to be banned, whether it was the beauty of women on the cinema screen or the attraction of the superstars, or enjoying a television show.[64] In cinema too, the policymakers talked about the instructiveness and the ethical and religious moral of the film as the values of a film in place of enjoying the film and being entertained by watching it, and they treated cinema hall like a mosque. In the newly formed post-revolution cinema, every narrative or structural element that gave joy to the audience had to be removed and replaced by Islamic, ethical, and instructive concepts; no matter if the element was the aggregation of the attractiveness of the actresses in close-up shots or romantic stories.

The consumeristic culture was seen as a counter-revolutionary and Western element after the Revolution that had to be fought. As a result, the commercial cinema was considered a destructive phenomenon that propagated the consumerism culture. That is why the government devised an evaluation system for the films that categorised them in four levels. According to the system, the films in the third and fourth groups received fewer days, a smaller number of cinema halls, and unsuitable seasons for screening. The films in those two groups usually comprised of the commercial films. The regime was against the notion of cinema as a means of entertainment and pastime, and it used all its means to fight that type of cinema. After the war with Iraq broke out, there was no room for consumerism, and entertainment in the crucial war period. The influence of the minimalist life ideology and avoiding

[64] Abbas Kazemi argues that, in some societies, pleasures are divided into the two groups of good and bad for ethical principles and political reasons. The same division has happened gravely in the Iranian society too. Influenced by the ascetic and hereafter-minded ethics, the pleasures associated with body have usually been deemed lowly, and the spiritual pleasures are considered lofty. Therefore, the material and corporeal pleasures have been cast aside because they have been condemned through the enforced policies, and they have continued living in an underground form. It seems there has always existed a wrong notion that happiness is accompanied by insouciance and conversely, sorrow carries spirituality. The so-called earthly and worldly pleasures, joys such as seeing and being seen, fashion in dressing, various games, and the likes of them, they were all branded inconsequential (Kazemi, 2016, pp. 184-185).

consumption displayed itself in the form and diegesis of the Iranian films too. Stories became simple and straight. For example, story of the boy who has taken his classmate's homework notebook by mistake and the whole film shows him trying to find his classmate's house to return his notebook. Or the little girl who goes out to buy fish for the new year, drops her money into a hole, and the whole story is about her trying to take out the money. One-line stories without any dramatic twists with child or adolescent protagonists, or simple and poor people in villages or in the frontlines. Consequently, the form and techniques in films became simple with motionless and long shots, mild editing, without any special effects, austere and simple decors, and using the natural spaces in the streets and villages.

CHAPTER THREE

The Aesthetics of Hijab

Mehrangiz Kar[65]:

> The day the Shah left, I was walking down the street near my home. I was wearing a long coat because it was winter and it was cold, but I didn't have a headscarf on. For the first time, somebody in the street shouted at me: 'We got rid of your bad Shah and it's your turn now, you bitches without the hijab!' At that moment I understood how it would be! (Howard, 2002, p. 27).

[65] She is an Iranian lawyer and human rights activist.

The Obligatory Hijab

Following the Revolution, the Islamists attempted to put into practice their cultural model. One of these thoughts was the issue of the mandatory hijab.

Figure 24: In the film *Killing Mad Dogs (Sagkoshi, Bahram Beyzaie,2001)* a woman returns to post-revolutionary Iran and sees the message written on the wall*:* "Death to women without the hijab" *"screenshot by author from the film Killing Mad Dogs"*

Figure 25: In Hossein Farahbakhsh's *Private Life*, revolutionaries chase women wearing only a partial hijab. They catch one and press a pin to her forehead as punishment, a common practice among a segment of the revolutionary youth in the 1980s. In this frame the tasbih[66] in the man's hand is a sign of the revolutionary people. *"screenshot by author from the film Private Life"*

[66] Tasbih is prayer beads which is used by Muslims.

The Concept of Hijab and the Looking Hijab in the Islamic Culture

The literal meaning of the word Hijab is "to cover or conceal" and it also means curtain. The Islamic law orders a woman to cover herself when socializing with unrelated men. Father, son, spouse, brother, grandfather, grandson, uncle, father-in-law, and nephews are considered mahram (related) for the woman; therefore, the woman does not need to wear the hijab when she is with them. Other men, however, are non-mahram (unrelated). It means that Muslim women should cover their hair and other parts of their body, except for the face and the palms, in front of the men who are non-mahram to them. modesty is the requirement of hijab. In fact, hijab protects women from the gaze of the non-mahram men and prevents men from gazing. Islam has also ordered men to avoid looking at non-mahram women and considers looking the main cause of sin. There are various rules and regulations that Islam has assigned both to men and women is related to looking:

> Men and women should not stare at each other, they should not ogle, they should not look at each other with lust, they shouldn't look at each other with the purpose of enjoying themselves. Another duty has been assigned to women and that is that a woman should cover her body in front of other men and should not entice other men in public; a woman should under no condition or excuse arouse non-mahram men (Motahari, 1980, p. 72).

Ayatollah Khomeini's remarks corroborate this: "By means of the eyes they [the Shah's government] corrupted our youths. They showed such and such women on television and thereby corrupted them" (Naficy, 2012d, p. 110). The cinema which in its essence is voyeuristic is contrary to these principles of Islam. The post-revolutionary cinema did its best to eliminate voyeurism from the cinema and to observe the rules of the hijab.

Figure 26: In this image advertising the hijab, the umbrella stands for the hijab in that it protects the woman from

the heavy rain of the gazes of non-mahram men.[67] *Copyright: Hijab.ir, Photo: https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/عجیبترین-پوسترهای-تبلیغاتی-حجاب-در-ایران/g-18963723*

After the Revolution mottoes such as "Oh woman! This is what Fatemeh[68] tells you: The most valuable ornament for a woman is her hijab" was written on all walls and they were also repeated by all the media. The female character of the movie, *The Shadows of Sorrow (Saye-haye Gham, Shahpour Gharib,1987)*, while wearing a hijab passes a wall on which this motto is written: "Dear sister, your hijab is stronger than my blood" (figure 27), referring to the idea that a woman's hijab is more important than martyrdom and dying for the country. After the Revolution, women were called "sister" in departments, organizations, and religious groups and they were also treated as sisters. The reason this word was used was to empty women from any sexual implications so that men's gaze would not be inspired by sexual desire but instead it would be a gaze free from any sexual desire, like a brother staring at her his sister.

Figure 27: "screenshot by author from the film The Shadows of Sorrow"

[67] 32 organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran are either directly or indirectly involved in the "issues of the hijab and chastity". One of these organizations is responsible for creating posters and billboards to advertise the hijab.
[68] In the post-Revolution society, Fatemeh (the daughter of Mohammad, the prophet in Islam) was known as a role model for the women in Islamic societies. And the woman's day changed from March 8, the international woman's day, to the birthday of Fatemeh.

Figure 28: Models with the hijab; after the Revolution, the discussions of the hijab also extended to the models and a new kind of Islamic fashion was created. *Photo taken by the author, Tehran, 2016.*

Figure 29: In the above death announcement, the photo of the dead man is on the right but on the left we can see two flowers instead of the photo of the dead man's wife. Her name is written below the picture of the flowers. While showing the image of a woman with the hijab is no problem in Islam and in religious law, but based on a tradition which has prevailed in Iran, the image of a dead woman is not shown on the death announcement. *Photo by Moradi Brothers, Printing house: Parsa, https://www.miyanali.com/chapparsa/gallery/36*

Hijab in the Islamic Iranian architecture and its impact on the Cinema after the Revolution

In the traditional Islamic Iranian architecture, the houses were built in such a way that they consisted of two separate areas called andaruni (the interior) and biruni (the exterior). The inside area was reserved particularly for women or the men in the family; no guest or stranger could enter this area. The outside area was for the men in the family when they had guests or when a stranger wanted to come to the house. Therefore, women were kept hidden from the gaze of unrelated men (non-mahrams). The area of andaruni played the role of the hijab in locations.[69] Even the knockers for men and women were different; one was like a hammer and the other one was like a ring (Figure 30). The sound produced by the hammer-like knockers which was deep were used by men and the sound produced by the ring-like knockers used by women was high. Through the sound of the knocker the householder would have known whether the person behind the door was a man or a woman. Therefore, the residents of the house, if necessary, could go to the andaruni and stay away from the gaze of non-mahram men.

Figure 30: Photo by Fatima Karimi, https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2957678/کلون-درهای-بافت-تاریخی-یزد-را-هم-به-تاراج-می-برند

This architecture has always been entwined with the principle of observing modesty and hijab.[70] Women

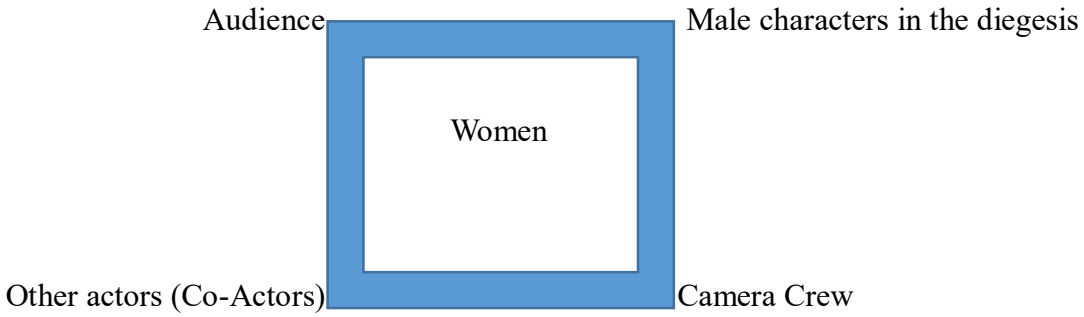
[69] For more, see Soltanzadeh, H. (1993). *Entrance Spaces in Traditional Iranian Architecture*. Tehran: Deputy of Social and Cultural Affairs of Tehran Municipality. See also Bahrami Borumand, M. (2018). *The Other in the Interior: Analysis of Gendered Space*. Tehran: Tisa publication.

[70] After the Revolution, the authorities in the Islamic Republic started to encourage the managers to make the physical and cultural work environment in the offices, banks, schools, and universities suitable, which meant to recreate the concept of 'biruni' in all social areas and to extend it to bodies in the public domain. The rules of Islamic clothing, particularly the chador as the superior hijab, is an example of this; another option was to choose dark colored clothes particularly for women whose female body would thus be less noticeable in the public spaces. These regulations, however, were not enough. Gender segregation in public locations was considered as one of the necessities of an Islamic society. Therefore, it was decided to

belonged completely to the andaruni area. All these show that the camera, too, should respect the privacy of the andaruni and should not enter that area. In case the camera decides to enter the andaruni, the women would wear the hijab and observe the rules of modesty in front of the non-mahram camera.

The Square of Non-Mahram Individuals in the Movie

To observe the hijab, four types of non-mahram individuals appeared in the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema: Women are unrelated to these four groups: male viewers inside the cinema, the male actors on set playing with them, the production crew behind the camera and the unrelated characters in the diegesis.



The Square of non-Mahram Individuals in the Movie

Source: The Author

The Aesthetics of Hijab in the Post-Revolution Iranian Cinema

Mehdi Fakhimzadeh's *My Heritage, Insanity (Miras-e Man Jonoon,1981)* and its confiscation in the middle of screening in 1981 was an end to a type of representation of women. *My Heritage, Insanity* had all the characteristics of a movie that a movie in the process of islamisation shouldn't have had. This movie was an obvious example of a movie that should not be produced in the Islamic cinema anymore:

take the culture of chastity and the hijab into account when it came to urban planning and architecture, i.e. the work environment, the type of programs and the use of facilities not lead to improper mixing of women and men (Amenpur & Zokaee, 2012, p. 178). There was an attempt to extend the culture of the hijab to all areas, including women's clothing, cinema, theater, architecture, and painting. Books on painting and photography which had images of naked or half-naked women were covered with a marker or a sticker and they were thus given the hijab.

female actors without the hijab, the issue of rape and the depiction of private spaces, the beauty of the leading actress, as well as the gazing at women from the very first shot in the movie in which the man looks at the house of a woman and at the woman herself with binoculars. We see the world from his point of view and the way of looking, the right of seeing is the prerogative of the man. In fact, this scene is decoupaged and directed and makes use of the engaging cinematic techniques in such a way that at the end the camera turns into the eye of the male hero. This approach in mise-en-scène and in the decoupage would have been subject to censoring. Based on the Islamic principles, the male gaze at women should be eliminated from the movies. As a result, this movie was confiscated in the middle of screening.[71]

Figures 31-32: Secretly looking at the woman with binoculars; the decoupage in this scene is such that the point of view belongs to the man. *"screenshot by author from the film My Heritage, Insanity"*

The confiscation of *My Heritage, Insanity* and some other movies, half of which were confiscated because of the hijab becoming compulsory showed that there was no place left for women in the post-revolution cinema and if there was, then it wouldn't be possible to represent women in the same way as before. No one, however, knew how the women should be represented in the Islamic cinema. Mohammad Ali Heydari explains this paradoxical situation of cinema in the early years after the Revolution:

> The problem was that there was no cinema jurisprudence to determine the details. The

[71] This is what Fakhimzadeh says about the screening of his movie in his book *My Life in the Cinema*: "As I saw the danger of the confiscation of the movie being imminent, I hurriedly started to screen the movie. The female characters did not have bad clothing. I just had not made use of the Islamic hijab as the hijab had not yet become compulsory in 1980, meaning the time when the film was being produced. After three months, while the movie had just been screened in a limited number of cinemas in the provinces, the screening certificate of the movie was withdrawn. If I had procrastinated even slightly, the movie would never have been screened again (Fakhimzadeh, 2014, p. 374). Fazaneh Taiedi, the actress of this movie was banned from acting after this movie and had to leave Iran forever.

> issue of the hijab, the way the actors and actresses should look at each other, the issues of mahram and non-mahram, the make-up, the lipstick and how much make-up should be worn, the clothing model, the degree of beauty of an actress, close-ups and the plot of the movies, these were all challenging and controversial issues (Heydari M. A., 2016, p. 169).

For solving these challenging issues, when Ezzatollah Zarghami was appointed as Cinema Deputy, he introduced a draconian code which prohibited:

- the wearing of tight clothes by women.
- showing more than the face or the hands beyond the wrist of women.
- the multiplicity of the costumes worn by characters in a film, which could lead to the culture of consumerism.
- using clothes which could create a new trend in wearing Western clothes.
- close-ups of women's faces.
- body contact between men and women (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010, p. 48).

At the beginning of the 1980s specific rules and aesthetics of the hijab were created that made women wear long loose dresses, the chador and dark clothes. Make-up was intended to lessen their beauty and they had to cover all of their hair.[72] According to the aesthetics of the hijab, physical contact, lustful glances and staring at each other were eliminated and replaced by indirect looking, not looking at all at each other or staring at the ground.[73] The actor and the actress weren't left alone in a place unless there were other mahram characters there. A booklet was given to directors and film producers by the Ministry of Culture that clarified the size of shots, the angle for filming women and their clothes. In addition, the director and the film producer had to deliver the list of actors and crews to the Ministry and ask for their permission to cooperate with them and in some cases the Ministry didn't approve of some of them; in that case the film producers had to replace them with others. Moreover, the film producers were asked to deliver photos of actors with make-up before filming in order to have their make-up approved. Women were rarely shown in a close-up since it emphasized their beauty and was considered a tool to abuse women's beauty in order to tempt men which was against Islamic rules. Filming women in long shots helped hide their bodies. Zarghami explains the troublesome close-ups of women in this way:

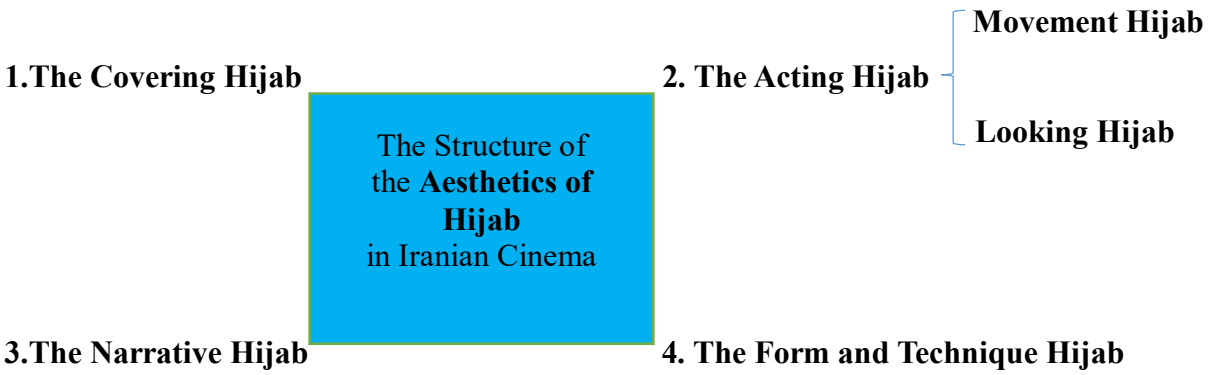
> Sometimes the filmmaker showed unreasonable close-ups of the actresses' face with a

[72] However, it didn't last long and in the next decade the rules for hair and the hijab in the cinema were loosened and they were allowed to uncover a little of the front part of their hair.

[73] See Naficy, H. (2012d). *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4: The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010.* Duck University. pp. 106-107.

> heavy makeup. We consider this wrong. It isn't religious, it is against ethics. We banned the close-ups that used women as tools. If a director tries to attract attention to his film by relying on the beauty of a woman's face instead of using attractive cinematic and artistic situations, he is surely mistaken, and he must be stopped. For example, Rahim Rahimipoor made a film about the revolution events and Fakhri Khorvash starred in it. He'd used a wig for her to show an aristocrat woman. The film was full of close-ups and the makeup and looks of Ms Khorvash seemed it was her own hair. We decided to watch the film on fast-forward because the festival was close, and we didn't have time and pause on close-ups to see if it can be screened. I was to decide if the close-up was natural or not. To focus on the details of a woman's face is not proper or artistic. At that time, an old man named Vigen oversaw the screening hall in Ministry of Guidance. He was very precise and committed. Once we had some disagreement with a filmmaker because of a few close-ups of a heavily made up woman in a film that was going to Fajr Film Festival. It was decided that I watch the film with the director as arbitrator and he removes the close-ups. The day we'd gone to Vigen's hall to watch the film, the director talked nonstop to distract me from close-ups and I would remove fewer of them, but Vigen, who was very committed and was standing in a corner, called me whenever there was a close-up so I wouldn't miss them. The filmmaker was angry with Vigen and asked why he interfered. Vigen answered, "I am responsible, and I'll do my duties well as long I work here (Zarghami, 2016).

Avoiding close-ups of women prevented them from becoming stars. Basically men and women's beauty and make-up after the Revolution were considered to be counter-revolutionary. Actresses rarely looked directly at the camera since it created direct eye contact with the male audience in cinemas. Close-ups and staring at the camera attracted the male audience's attention to a woman and her beauty which was against the principles of modesty in the hijab. In addition, that POV method was used less in editing so that the audience in the position of the male character of the story would not gaze the female character and would not stitched into the narrative. Shot and reverse shot techniques were also used less in men and women's sequences and sometimes an insert shot was used between men's and women's shots which worked like hijab editing and helped the image of men and women not to tie with each other. All of these created a kind of aesthetics which can be called the "aesthetics of the hijab" in movies. The hijab is presented in four ways in the movies:



Source: The Author

1)The Covering Hijab:

Avoiding any sexually arousing clothes which attract the male audience. The woman always and under all circumstances wears the hijab. Having the hijab despite its being unreal gradually gets accepted by the audience as a pictorial convention. Although it looked unnatural, the audience got used to seeing a woman with a headscarf in the cinema even when she was alone or with her husband and son.

Figure 33: *Shelterless (Bipanah, Alireza Davoodnejad,1987)*: After marriage the wife appears with hijab in front of her husband at home and does not look directly at her husband. In order to prevent their coming close in the frame the director puts a visual barrier, an oil lamp, between them. *"screenshot by author from the film Shelterless"*

Figure 34: Narges (Rakhshan Banietemad,1991): Taking off the chador while entering her future house, symbolizes taking off the hijab at home and in front of her husband. *"screenshot by author from the film Narges"*

Some filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami and Jafar Panahi preferred not to shoot their films in the inside areas of the house but instead on the streets and public areas so that they avoided showing an unreal image of women with the hijab. This is what Kiarostami says regarding the influence of the law of the hijab in the representation of women:

> Women's representation limits have highly influenced the film industry in Iran. The woman who gets out of the bed with hijab is unusual. No woman goes to bed with hijab in her own house. In case a woman has fever, how can we show putting ice on her forehead while she is still wearing her scarf? This is unnatural as is the serum injection while wearing clothes. There is a big gap between the reality and what we are allowed to show. Therefore, in my movies I show women only in outside areas in which hijab is a religious and social duty so that I will not be obliged to falsify the facts (Cronin, 2016, p. 74).

Figure 35: Showing women wearing hijab in some films even creates a ridiculous and grotesque situation. For example, in *Taraneh (Mehdi Sahebi ,2017)*, he shows a woman in the bathroom wearing a headscarf and a manteau taking a shower.

Attempts to Naturalize the Covering Hijab

There have always been some obstacles that have tarnished the credibility of Iranian movies. For instance, a mother is not allowed to hug her own son or her father, or a wife has to wear hijab when she is alone or with her husband at home. A woman is wearing scarf when she is asleep, and never lies down beside a man. With respect to the limits of the hijab, the Iranian directors have always tried to create credibility by some techniques in their movies. One of the techniques was the use of wigs for women.

Wig

The wig was first used in some series and historical movies such as the character of *Terken Khatun* that was acted by Afsaneh Baygan in a historical series called *Sarbedaran (Mohammad Ali Najafi, 1983)*.[74] In recent years, the use of wig in series and movies has stopped being a historical necessity since it is

[74] See Asayesh, S. (1993). Women in Bahram Beyzaie's Films (Zanan dar Filmhaye Bahram Beyzaie). Zan-e Irani (Toronto) 8, no.3, pp. 14-17. According to Asayesh, wigs were given official permission only for negative female characters, dead women, or old women.

allowed to reveal more hair reassuringly. Most part of the wig gets exposed through headscarves or even hats, the part that gives beauty to the actress and also satisfies greedy audience. Basically the genre of historical movies reveals the wig on the actress's head. In realistic movies, however, which are not historical it seems impossible for the audience to distinguish a wig from real hair. Nevertheless, the officials have dealt differently with the same problem in different areas. For instance, the last time the wig was used in *The Couch (Kanapeh, Kianoosh Ayyari, 2017)* the movie got into trouble and was banned. None of the women in this movie wears a headscarf at home or in front of their close relatives (mahram); they wear a wig instead. In this movie Kianoosh Ayyari got away with the wig to bring the fake image of women with the hijab in front of their mahram at home to fruition. However, the problem is that he lives in a society in which the power discourse does not accept realism in the real sense.

> Ayyari was asked "Is your emphasis on real life situation the cause of using the wig in this movie despite the problems?" "Definitely. I had been wondering how to implement this idea in a realistic movie since I made my first movie called *Dust Devil (Tanooreyeh Div, 1985)*. In that movie Farzaneh Kaboli was acting the role of a rural woman and I displayed her in a house in which she was living with her brother-in-law and that's why it was normal to have the hijab. And after that in *Spectre of Scorpion (Shabah-e Kazhdom, 1986)* I arranged Manijeh Aghayi's sequences outside the house so that she had to wear the hijab and she was only shown at home with Jahangir Almasi in one scene and I arranged it in a way that due to the arguments she didn't have time to take off her headscarf after she had arrived home. Also in *Beyond the Fire (Ansuyeh Atash,1990)* Atefeh Razavi is acting the role of an Arab nomad and I displayed her outside the house selling milk. I won't make any movies with female actors unless I show her either in the streets or other public places." he answered[75] (Ayyari, 2017).

He tried to find a solution for covering hijab and eradicate illogical hijabs in his films. It had brought limitations to the narrative but he preferred them to scenes with unusual headscarves.

[75] In another movie called *To Be or Not to Be (Boodan ya naboodan, 1998)* Ayyari used an Armenian woman who didn't wear the hijab at home because Christianity doesn't have religious issues regarding the hijab.

Hat

There are other innovative ways to make the hijab credible for women in the movies. One way is to use hats instead of headscarves. The main women characters of movies and series that show events before the Revolution wear hats with special stitching to make the story credible since before the Revolution most women didn't wear the hijab on the streets. Gradually such hats turned conventional to show that the narrative was set before the Revolution and women didn't wear the hijab, although hats can be a kind of hijab by themselves. In this regard Naser Taghvaie points out:

> Unfortunately, we can't show the past today for some simple reasons. We assumed we'd have a lot of topics to when the Pahlavi sovereignty came to an end while today a lot of simple limitations have caused us not to refer to most of the fundamental events in that era. The problems relating to the representations of women has led to us not making any movies about Pahlavi sovereignty (Taghvaie, 1987, p. 59).

Towels instead of Headscarves at Home

The trick of using a towel at home is to tackle the problem of the hijab in private areas. In *Hamoon (1989),* Mehrjui has tried to make the encounter of husband and wife credible with a special initiative. In the interior scenes Bita Farahi, who acts the role of Hamoon's wife, appears with a bath towel.

Figure 36: Bita Farahi in *Hamoon*.

Shaving The Hair

The images of women with shaved heads in movies show a weird and metaphoric picture of them sacrificing their hair and beauty instead of uncovering their hair. On the one hand, the image of women without hair has solved the problem of the hijab and the unrealistic aesthetics of it, on the other hand it showed an unusual and weird image of them that was far from their real characters. In some scenes of *The Bad Kids (Bachehaye bad, Alireza Davoodnejad,2000)*, Zahra Davoodnejad appears with her head shaved. Other prominent examples are Roya Nonahali in *Women's Prison (Zendan-e Zanan, Manijeh Hekmat, 2001),* Niusha Zeighami in *Quarantine (Gharantineh, Manouchehr Hadi, 2007)* and Altinay Ghelich Taghani in *Daughters of the Sun (Dokhtaran-e Khorshid, Maryam Shahriar, 1999)*. The use of women with shaved heads wasn't restricted to filmmakers with moderate or open-minded views. Mohsen Makhmalbaf was very religious and a radical revolutionary, when he made *Marriage of the Blessed (Aroosi Khooban, 1989)*. He took off the headscarf of his character to take a photo. Although his usage of woman with shaved head was to criticize women who didn't wear the hijab and the political and social situation current in a society in which the hijab was losing its importance. Makhmalbaf was trying to criticize the situation after the war.

Figure 37: Farimah Farjami in *The Lead (Sorb, Masoud Kimiai, 1988)*: an unusual and weird image for the audience in the 1980s, who was used to see actresses with headscarves. Even if the woman was beautiful, she had to lose her beauty. *"screenshot by author from the film The Lead"*

Men Acting Women's Roles

Men dressing up like women could also be seen in some movies of other countries, it was done either to add comic atmosphere to some movies such as *Some Like It Hot (1959)* by Billy Wilder or to show multiple sexual identities when the story required it. After the Revolution, the use of these actors in Iran, however, it was a technique used to tackle the religious obstacles such as physical contact and wearing a headscarf at home and it was used to make movies more realistic. In order to show an elderly woman without headscarf and to let her son touch her, Mohsen Makhmalbaf in *The Peddler (Dastforoosh, 1986)* chose a man with a lot of makeup to act this role (figure 38).

Figure 38: "screenshot by author from the film The Peddler"

Figure 39: Akbar Abdi in *Snowman (Adam Barfi, Davood Mirbagheri,1994)*: He acted in three films, such as *I Feel Sleepy (Khabam miad,2012)* by Reza Attaran and *The Sleepy Ones (Khabzade-ha,2013)* by Fereydoun Jeyrani, as female characters with female dress and makeup. *"screenshot by author from the film Snowman"*

The Use of Real Spouses Acting as Husband and Wife

One of the first directors who used this trick of showing real spouses on screen was Bahram Beyzaie in *Maybe Another Time (Shayad Vaghti Digar,1988)*. In this movie the director takes advantage of the fact that they are real spouses and displays physical contacts on the screen to the audience who is dying to see real relations in movies. In a sequence of *Absolute Rest (Esterahat-e Motlagh, Abdolreza Kahani, 2015)*, the man takes off his clothes in front of his wife in the bathroom and gives them to her (figure 41). Using real spouses enabled the director to show an intimate relationship to the audience, a possibility from which he was deprived of after the Revolution.

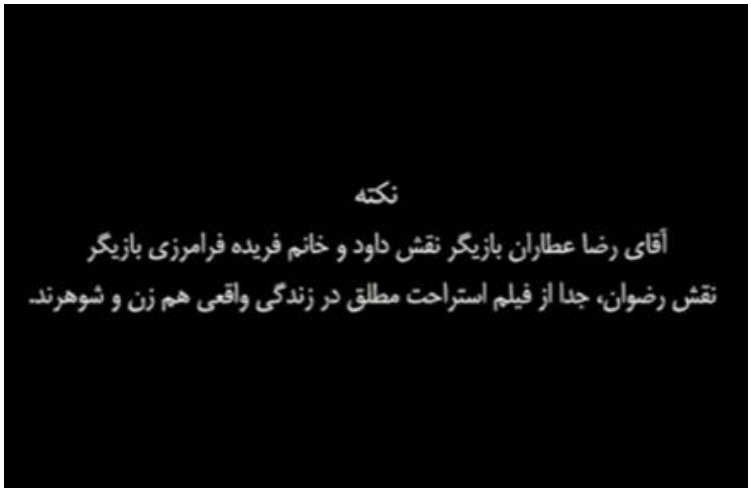


Figure 40: This is the sentence which was shown before the title in *Absolute Rest* "Mr. Reza Attaran acting as David and Mrs. Farideh Faramarzi acting as Rezvan are real husband and wife." The language of this sentence, its diction and structure were all sarcastic and were humiliating men's and women's relations in the cinemas of Iran.[76] *"screenshot by author from the film Absolute Rest"*

Figure 41: "screenshot by author from the film Absolute Rest"

[76] At the beginning of *Where Are My Shoes? (Kiumars Pourahmad,2016),* a sentence is displayed on the screen "The hands that Reza Kianian touches are his wife's hands".

2) The Looking and Movement Hijab:

Preserving chastity and modesty in front of the camera in dealing with male characters and also in the way of moving, walking, and sitting (Movement Hijab) and in the way they look at the male characters and at the camera (Looking Hijab). Without even knowing about Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory[77], the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema and the cinema authorities started to eliminate the male gaze in the movies which made out of the female character a passive erotic object. This was, however, done for the purpose of the islamisation of the cinema which first started by omitting the women completely from movies and then by bringing them back and assigning them a motherhood role deprived of all sexual characteristics; just as the revolutionary society and Ayatollah Khomeini had redefined the woman and her role in society[78], the cinema also followed this redefinition. Islam prohibits men from staring at women and believes that looking creates sin and corruption in society. Therefore, all the clerics and religious figures throughout history have thought of gazing as a demonic action which prepares the ground for corruption. The Quran in the Surah of Nur states: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them …. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be modest" (Haeri, 1989, p. 220). Naturally, the cinema, too, in its form and structure should have been such to reflect this interpretation in the movies. And the looking had various aspects; on the one hand it included the look of the female and male actors at each other and on the other hand it included the male audience who looked at the women who acted in the movie. It was due to these issues that a new way of looking was created in the post-revolution movies which was called the indirect or decent look. This look involved no sexual interest and attraction between the man and the woman in the movie; this was a look accompanied by modesty and decency.

This example could clearly describe the situation of looking in movies after the Revolution. Susan Taslimi for Ali Zhekan's *The Mare (Madian,1986)* encountered many difficulties with the censors. The authorities assigned a minder to monitor Taslimi's acting and costumes during subsequent filming. She narrated what followed:

> They told me not to look into the eyes of my male counterpart, to look down when I talked to him. I replied, "How is this possible? I can't look away from the person to whom I am speaking." They replied, "No matter, you should not look." My minder kept an eye on this situation as well as on my costumes. He even dictated that the camera angle be ugly

[77] See Mulvey. L. (1975). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6–18.
[78] In the workplace more emphasis was placed on jobs such as teaching and nursing.

and the color of my costume be dark and drab, all of which you see in the film (Naficy, 2012c, pp. 41-42).

Figure 42: "screenshot by author from the film Chrysanthemum"

One of the simplest features of romance in cinema was to show physical contact between lovers, e.g. holding each others' hands. This atmosphere was impossible to be created in the cinema after the Revolution as it was against the principles and rules that were written in legal and religious texts based on jurisprudential citations. So in order to show emotional situations between men and women (that could be sister and brother, parents and children, marital relationship or boyfriend and girlfriend) visual and situational replacements were chosen. In *Chrysanthemum (Golhaye Davoudi, Rasoul Sadrameli, 1984)* in order to avoid being banned because of the characters looking at each other, the lovers were both blind (figure 42). Direct looks were avoided in order to get permission for the film when the rules were so strict and tough at the beginning of the Revolution.[79] In the last scene of *Star and Diamond (Setereh va Almas, Siamak Shayeghi,1988)*, the boy's mother proposes to the girl and she answers yes. This is the romantic happy ending of the movie and they should normally look like lovers at each other, but in this scene a kind of Hijab in their respective looks is presented to us (figure 43). The woman looks at the floor and her beloved looks at the wall on opposite side of the scene. Their connection point in the frame is the son's mother who stands between them and by looking romantically and directly at her prospective

[79] It was a solution the director spoke about years later; "since looking at each other and saying I love you were hard in that period, we preferred the boy and girl to be both blind (Zolfaghari, 2016, p. 94).

daughter-in-law, fills the gap between the lover's looks. Indeed, the director has tried to replace the boy's romantic look by that of his mother to convey the romantic message visually. If we compare the last scene of this Iranian melodrama with final scenes of romantic Hollywood movies that usually end by kisses, hugs or direct and romantic looks of lovers that represent their love, we can have a more precise analysis of the issue of the looking and movement Hijab in Iranian movies after the Revolution.

Figure 43: "screenshot by author from the film Star and Diamond"

By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of a new period in the political and social history of Iran, we could see movies like *Bride*, *Time of Love (Nobat-e Asheghi, Mohsen Makhmalbaf,1990)* and *Narges*, in which the male gaze, although in a conservative way, came back to the cinema. In the later decades, however, the Islamic rule of looking was broken to some extent in the movies and some movies started to walk on the red-line. One of the obvious examples is Houman Seyyedi's *Sound and Fury (Khashm va Hayahoo, 2016)* which shows a direct and lusty look. (figure 44). There are three kinds of gazes in this scene. Firstly, the staring of the man and the woman in the image, secondly the gaze of the camera, as the camera is set in front of them, and thirdly the gaze of the audience that stares at them. Also, the dark outside of the car, the use of a telephoto lens and the elimination of the depth of field, which does not allow the outside to be seen, emphasize the privacy of the couple and the erotic atmosphere in the scene.

Figure 44: Direct and erotic looks between the actors together with the lustful red lighting on the face of the characters. *"screenshot by author from the film Sound and Fury"*

Movement Hijab

Women weren't in the frame and if they were, they had to sit or stand and not move in case their fast movements highlighted their body. In this context Jamshid Malekpoor's *Red Wind (Bad-e Sorkh,1988)* was banned. In a scene of this movie, the actress playing the role of a pregnant woman walks toward the sea while wearing the traditional clothes of women in the south. Because of the pressure of the wind, the dress sticks to her body and thus highlights its shape. The reason for the ban was the lustful look at women. As a result, women had stationary roles or were filmed from an angle from which their bodies weren't clearly shown or they wore the chador and long, loose darker colored clothes and had to cover all parts except the face and fingers. Taslimi explained women's movements like running in movies: "They believed that women shouldn't run since their bodies start shaking. Well, in real life we run and don't care how to do it. But I was all thinking about running so that it doesn't get cut. I thought for hours in *Bashu, the Little Stranger* to help the film get permission to be shown" (Malakuti, 2015, p. 169). What happened to the last scene of Kiumars Pourahmad's *Tatoureh (1984)* was an illuminating example which signified the kind of hijab imposed by those in the cinema on the movies of the 1980s. Pourahmad narrates the story:

> In the mourning scene, Parvaneh Masoumi expressed her grief with thumping of the chest. Like the local people she also held a green handkerchief and waved it above her head. Her

> shots consisted of an insert shot of the handkerchief in her hand, a close-up of her when she was crying and a medium-shot when she was waving handkerchief. Mohammad Aghajani, who was the deputy of the Farabi Foundation, had claimed that her body movements might make the audience imagine that the lower part of her body was moving as well. As a result, the officials deleted Parvaneh Masoumi's medium-shots (Heydari M. A., 2016, p. 39).

3) The Narrative Hijab:

This kind of hijab is presented by the screenplay and to some extent by editing. It attempts to eliminate all those parts in the narrative which might break or enter the privacy of women (particularly inside their house, their bathroom, their bedroom, and their married life). The aesthetics of the hijab eliminates the sexual attraction of woman in the cinema by eliminating the bed scenes, omitting erotic dialogues, and not showing the physical contact between the man and the woman (I have analysed this kind of hijab in Chapter 5, part Elimination Approach in Narrative: The Narrative Hijab in detail).

4) The Form and Technique Hijab:

In this kind of hijab suitable setting, filming, editing and lighting are chosen. The Iranian directors have been looking for a way with which they can show the relationship among very close relatives in a realistic way. They have arranged the camera angle and framing to help the scenes look real and to avoid problems of screening for not having observed the rules of the hijab. The Iranian cinema faces some problems at the stage of production. Imagine a boy who wants to hug and kiss his mother. Shooting these scenes faces some islamic limitations since when these scenes are shot the actors and actresses are not mahram with each other. The veteran actress Khorvash told Hamid Naficy about her experience early after the Revolution:

> In foreign movies, an actress can use her body, arms, and hands to express herself. However, here, we cannot use our bodies in any way in sensitive situations. We must express all our emotions facially. In one film, in which I had labored to concentrate my emotions in my face, I was so charged after filming that I fell on the steps and cried aloud for half an hour to release my pent- up emotions. In another film, where I acted as the

> mother of a soldier I had thought was killed in action but who turned up alive, again, I had a difficult time. Because of the regulations, I could not smell him, kiss him, or embrace him. The night before filming I had thought about it a lot and had decided that to express my surprise at my son's sudden appearance I would take on a look of consternation. I created this feeling during filming, as though I was frozen from amazement and happiness. I both cried and laughed (Naficy, 2012d, p. 120).

In *From Karkheh to Rhine (Az Karkheh ta Rhine, Ebrahim Hatamikia,1992)* the brother and sister come together after years of separation. It is natural for them to hug and kiss each other. To produce this scene, a man from the crew wears the clothes of the female character and hugs the character that plays the role of brother. The director had shot the scene from a high altitude and under the heavy rain while the light was shining into the camera lens. The director had thought of this solution in order to be able to observe the religious rule, but this also was not tolerated by the cinema authorities (Farasati M. , 1994, p. 112). Jahangir Jahangiri, the director of *The Mercenaries (Mozdooran, 1987)*, talks about the problems of displaying women in his movie: "Someone asked me why does a prisoner not hug his sister after twenty years?" (Jahangiri, 1987, p. 71) Actually in the next decades Kimiai came up with an idea in *Friday's Soldiers (Sarbaz-haye Jome, 2002)* (figures 45-46). A brother and a sister hugged each other in *Friday's Soldiers*. This scene was created by placing the source of light on the other side of the actors so that their shadows were reflected on the curtain and we could realize that the brother and sister hugged each other by seeing their shadows on the curtain.

Figures 45-46: "screenshot by author from the film Friday's Soldiers"

Figure 47: High School (Dabirestan, Akbar Sadeghi, 1986): Low key lighting at night and placing the camera far away from the actors are some techniques used for solving the problems of screening the man being touched by his mom in this scene. The shot, however, is cut immediately after the woman puts her hands on his shoulders. Therefore, we don't see her touching him. *"screenshot by author from the film High School"*

Figure 48: Lollipop (Abnabat Chubi, Hossein Farahbakhsh,2016): Kissing mom's chador instead of her face. *"screenshot by author from the film Lollipop"*

Figure 49: The Shadows of Sorrow: The little girl holds the man's and the woman's hands and kisses them. This

is like a bond between the man and the woman and fills the gap of physical contact between them. *"screenshot by author from the film The Shadows of Sorrow"*

Figure 50: Killing Mad Dogs (2001): Behind the window of the room in which Golrokh is sitting, construction workers are being shown. Although the woman is sitting in her private room, people who are working behind the window have made it a public scene. By having this background Beyzaie has justified the unreality of wearing the hijab in a private room of a hotel. Beyzaie, the director, explained the purpose of this mise-en-scène:

> It was essential to have such arrangements behind the window. Think if she hadn't been observed behind the window, I wouldn't have been able to justify the hijab in that room and I couldn't have answered the critics who would have said why Golrokh was wearing a headscarf in her own room while she was alone and resting and no stranger was there. In fact, those events behind the window could be the damages we paid in the face of the imposed regulations. I could even start world war III to make the unnecessary headscarf for Golrokh look real and logical (Qukasian, 2002, p. 110).

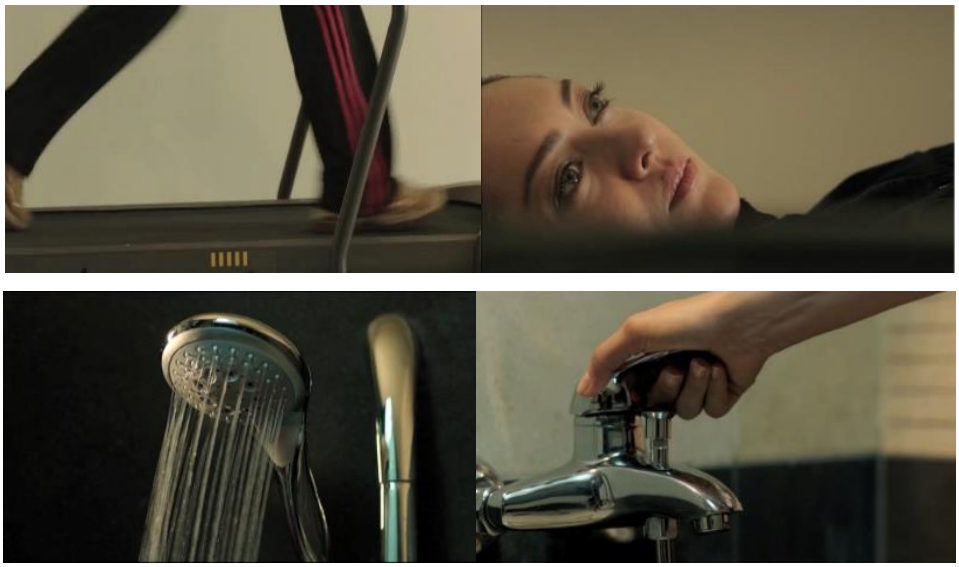
"screenshot by author from the film Killing Mad Dogs"

Figure 51: Under the Skin of the City (Zir-e Pust-e Shahr, Rakhshan Banietemad,2000): In the scene in which the woman comes in while wearing a towel on her head and dries it on an oil lamp, dark lighting and framing are arranged in such a way that we only see a part of her hair and comb while she is drying her hair. Moreover, we cannot see the woman herself in the frame but we see her husband in the background who is talking to her. This scene is trying to naturalize the woman's image at home while the rules of the hijab do not get violated. *"screenshot by author from the film Under the Skin of the City"*

In *The May Lady,* Rakhshan Banietemad thought of another arrangement for women who have to wear the headscarf in their solitude at home. In a scene, the camera displays the actress who enters her room and takes off her headscarf while she is going behind a pillar and disappears from the scene. In fact, this pillar is like a hijab for the character.

Figures 52-53: In *Havana File (Parvandeh-ye Havana, Alireza Raisian,2006)*, the director moves beyond the boundaries and with his approach in mise-en-scène implies that the woman is swimming in the pool. We first see

her while she does a work-out. Then she leaves the frame but the camera does not move but remains there instead. In the background of the window we see the water in the pool is moving while we hear someone jumping into the pool. The camera stops there and doesn't accompany the character to the pool following the aesthetics of the hijab. Here both the camera and the audience are strangers for the woman and are thus not allowed to enter the pool. Although we do not see her jumping into the pool, we can realize that she has taken off her clothes and jumped into the water since the shot extends and does not get cut. In other words, the audience visualizes the naked woman and her jumping into the pool without really seeing her on the screen. The director makes an effort to fulfill the male audience's desires and the image of a naked woman is pictured in their minds without seeing the real representation. *"screenshots by author from the film Havana File"*



Figures 54-57: In *I am His Wife (Man Hamsarash Hastam, Mostafa Shayesteh,2012)*, we see the action of the woman taking a shower without coming into any conflict with the aesthetics of the hijab. In the first shot we see her feet running on the treadmill. In the next shot, the camera shows a close-up of her face and her forehead gets displayed on the left side of the frame without showing her hair. In the third shot we see the shower but not the woman. So based on the previous shot we can figure out that she is taking a shower outside the frame. In the last image of this sequence her hand enters the frame and turns off the tap so that the audience recognizes the end of her shower. *"screenshots by author from the film I am His Wife"*

Figures 58-59: Parallel montage of the birth of a child and that of a calf in *The Peddler*; the filmmaker displayed the delivery of a cow instead of the woman's childbirth, showing which was not allowed from a religious point of view; and finally moved to the image of a new born child in the foreground and her mother in bed in the background. *"screenshots by author from the film The Peddler"*

The objectification decreases significantly through the four above methods in the Iranian cinema as by omitting the private life scenes the filmmakers do not allow a stranger(non-mahram) to be present and to gaze in these scenes. Therefore, the filmmaker does not allow the strangers, the camera and the audience, to enter places such as the bathroom and the bedroom. The women also wear a hijab at home in front of the camera, which is considered a stranger, - in contrast to reality, because Iranian women do not wear hijab at home- therefore, the women are prevented from being objectified by the gaze of men in private spaces.

CHAPTER FOUR

Women in Long Shot: Women in the Andaruni (inside):(1979-1989)

From the onset of the Revolution (1979) to the end of the Eight Year War with Iraq and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini (1989)

Alireza Davoodnejad:

> In the early years after the Revolution, they said, nobody would watch movies anymore if there is no sex and violence in them since it had been for 10-15 years that this kind of cinema had been prominent (he means the pre-revolution cinema which in the last ten to fifteen years before the Revolution made use of sex and violence to attract a bigger audience to the cinema). For instance, we thought if it is really possible for a woman and a man to be sitting in the same room while the woman is wearing a headscarf? In general, the question that was raised about the post-revolution cinema compared with the pre-revolution and the world cinema was: what would be left of the cinema if all the clichés, stars, nudity and violence were eliminated? (Heydari M. A., 2016b, pp. 116-117)

The islamisation of women began with prohibiting women without the hijab from working in governmental agencies, advertising mottoes in advancing the duties of women as mothers and wives over their other duties such as working and finally resulted in the elimination of many women from society so that many of them stayed at home in the eighties. This way of looking at the role of women affected the cinema in all its aspects directly. The cinema authorities tried to change the way women were represented from the perspective of the revolutionaries who believed that women were instruments for promoting corruption. This policy led to the gradual elimination of women from the movies in the 1980s. In 1982, many of the filmmakers started to shoot films without women based on the experience of other movies which had been confiscated for not wearing the having observed the rules of hijab.[80] The three movies, *Ambassador (Safir, Fariborz Saleh, 1982)*, *The House of Spider*, and *The Ghosts (Ashbah, Reza Mirlohi,1982)* that were produced in the same year show the fact that no woman is present, not even for a short time in the background. For instance, in the bazaar in *Ambassador*, not even a single woman walks in the background and the women were completely absent in the movie. In *The Ghosts*, in order to show the torture of the female revolutionaries, the sergeant of the imperial regime imagines a tree trunk to be a fighter woman and starts to torture the tree since it was not possible to torture a woman according to the existing modesty rules. In this way the danger of the movie being censored was avoided. Mahshid Zamani believes that under these circumstances, many directors preferred to exclude women from their films altogether. According to her statistics, "in 1983, sixty-two movies were produced. In eighteen movies out of these sixty-two, women did not even have sub-roles and the main reason for this was the issue of the hijab" (Zamani, 1995, p. 36)[81]. The aesthetics of the hijab, for the purpose of avoiding sexual aspects, resulted in not showing women on screen for many years.

The Iran-Iraq war led to a lot of movies being made about the war at the beginning of that decade. This cinema was called "*sacred defense cinema*". About seventy movies were made about the war between 1981 and 1991, only seven of which have women as leading actresses, which is roughly 10% of the total. In 42 of them no woman appears and in 18 movies women have minor roles and don't have much influence on the main subject of the story (Heydari M. A., 2016b, p. 386). This sort of presence of women cannot only be observed in the war cinema but also in other genres of this decade. But since the

[80] See Omid, J. (2003). *History of Iranian Cinema, 1979-1990 (Tarikh-e Cinema-ye Iran, 1357-1369)*. Tehran: Rowzaneh. pp. 134-144.

[81] The statistics that Masud Purmohammad compiled also pointed to the low presence of women as "heroines" in the movies made as late as 1986: of the thirty-seven movies he reviewed, the chief protagonists in twenty-five were men (70 percent), in three women were heroines (8 percent), in seven men and women shared equal billing (17 percent), and in two boys were the heroes (5 percent) (Naficy, 2012d, p. 115).

war cinema was male-centered and men had main roles in the narrative, the filmmakers had the opportunity to do without women in the movies of this decade without sounding illogical.[82] As a result of the war, women turned to be the main factor in keeping the family together. Some of her functions included supporting the male warriors and making sacrifices as a wife and being responsible for the life of the children.[83] As an individual, a woman doesn't have a special sexual attention for the opposite gender and her role is not defined on the basis of sexuality. Unlike in the 1990s, the woman is not the symbol of beauty and love.

However, little by little the filmmakers found some ways to represent women while observing the Islamic principles and the principle of the hijab. In 1984 and 1985 the mass production of rural films provided the opportunity for women to enter the cinema in an acceptable frame without trouble. Rural women's outfit without make-up facilitated their presence so they didn't have the same problems as urban and modern women had. The rural cinema of Iran saw a dramatic change in quantity (compared with movies produced in the city). One of the main mottoes of the Revolution was to pay attention to rural people in contrast to urban ones and to put poor people who lived in the countryside in the center of attention. For this reason, a focus on rural people's life after the Revolution was one of the most significant subjects in the cinema especially in the first decade. In meanwhile directors didn't have to deal with the issue of the hijab because of the life style and traditional clothes of rural women and they could easily work with them.

Unattractiveness and Representing the Masses

In pre-revolution Iranian cinema, women were objects to be looked at. Therefore, the emphasis was on their bodies and seductive faces. Soft lighting, and various filmic codes, were all used to have an erotic close-up of women. But post-revolutionary Iranian cinema was probably the only cinema in the world that took on a different approach for a decade; lighting was aimed from the angles to diminish the beauty of the actresses. One of the ways to prevent women from being superstars was to conceal their beauty. That was the system which tried to stop female star making in the cinema quite unlike Hollywood

[82] See Varzi, R. (2006). *Shooting Soldiers, Shooting Film: The Cinema of Iranian Sacred Defense* in *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*, Duke University Press, pp. 76-105.
[83] See Shahrokhi, S. (2012). *The Art of Remembering Pain*, in: Pedram Khosronejad (Ed) *Iranian Sacred Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity*, Sean Kingston Publishing. pp. 111- 126. See also Sadegh-Vaziri, P. (2012). *Images of Women in Iranian War Cinema*, in: Pedram Khosronejad (Ed) *Iranian Sacred Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity*, Sean Kingston Publishing. pp. 127-138.

conventions, where women's beauty was enhanced by lighting and make-up arrangements. In this regard, Sadr points out, "Both the male and female 'anti-stars' of the 1980s were distinguished above all by their unattractiveness. This unattractiveness was unique in the history of Iranian cinema.…the new actresses were supposed to represent the masses" (Sadr, 2006, p. 189). Ali Zhekan, the director of *The Mare*, has explained how this unattractiveness policy caused problem for his film's shooting: "we were stopped in the middle of *The Mare*. Authorities sent a message and asked us to stop filming and to come to Tehran. Their reason was Mrs Taslimi's beauty. After watching rushes, they came to the conclusion that Taslimi is attractive so they suggested replacing her with another actress" (Malakuti, 2015, p. 47). After the Revolution, especially in the first decade woman's beauty had to be either concealed or blurred, in society and media. This attitude penetrated to poems and school books as well. For instance, Sohrab Sepehri's poem was omitted from literature book of 7th grade which said "A beautiful woman has come by the river, let's not make it muddy since her beauty has been doubled" (Sepehri, 2018, p. 219).

Figure 60: Advertising the culture of the hijab on billboards in the city on which is written "The Hijab is the source of dignity and character of woman". By omitting her face in the picture and wearing black chadors, she has lost her individuality and independent identity. *Photo taken by the author, Tehran, 2016.*

The 1980s was a decade of revolutionary and unifying ideas and personal identities were lost in anti-class mottoes. Unity meant driving the same car, i.e. the Peykan, by all classes of society whether poor or the president and government officials, wearing similar one-color clothes and having the same identity

and this didn't apply only to women. Despite their individual differences, women had to disappear in the mass and all women had to be the same which meant wearing simple clothes usually a black chador, without jewelry or make-up. Religious mottoes were about diminishing social classes and eliminating capitalism. This was reflected in the cinema of the 1980s. In this period women's clothes in the movies were simple and they were completely covered with the chador even in private places like their houses. One of the goals of the system in making women all look the same was that they promoted the chador as the best hijab in society. Black chadors that looked similar eliminated women's individual characteristics and made them similar so that no single one was superior to the other ones. A black chador that covered the whole body hid women from the gaze of men and decreased the privileges of beauty and physical attraction. One of the reasons why we did not have superstars in the 1980s and why earlier superstars from before the Revolution were banned was the same revolutionary view and ideology. In the revolutionary mottoes, they talked about the mass of people in which no-one was superior to anyone else because in a country with an Islamic Revolution, no man or group should be preferred to another man or ordinary people. This thought and motto was used in the cinema against the concepts of superstars and stardom. Officials announced that they didn't need superstars and thus banned the superstars from before the Revolution and didn't allow any actor to become a superstar in the first decade. The culture of stardom was in contrast with the culture of creating masses and no one could be privileged over ordinary people, because of their beauty or any material possessions. The society praised spirituality. Every time officials got the feeling that an actor was about to become superstar or that the audience payed special attention to one actor, or a woman and man acted together in several movies, they stopped his/her progress or only allowed them to act special roles as it happened to Jamshid Hashempour. Since he played the role of drug dealer with a shaved head in several movies, he had the potential to become a superstar and officials prevented his progress in such roles and didn't let him use his artistic name, Jamshid Aria. Amin Tarokh, one of the well-known actors of this period says: "Basically no star (very famous actor) can be born in the current Iranian cinema since despite the cinema in the West, the policy of the Iranian cinema, based on the policy of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is to avoid producing stars" (Shoraka, 1990, p. 17). During this period, the cinema authorities were worried whenever a movie was successful with the public. The unexpected sale of Samuel Khachikian's *Eagles (Oghab-ha,1984)* caused him to be banned for some time since the authorities thought that he belonged to the era of tyranny and might thus revive the norms from the past. It prevented one special group, i.e. actors, from being superior to ordinary people and tried to eliminate the actor's beauty by lighting, low quality make-up and camera angle since in the thought and the value system that was propagated, no one should be praised as a role model on the

basis of their appearance. The unifying thought in the society could be seen in the representation of women as well since we were rarely able to find a woman in movies with individual characteristics and they were all the same and hardly ever had individualistic features in dressing, character or roles.

The rate of employed women between 1978 to 1986 dropped from 13.8 to 8.9 % and the rate of unemployment in women between 1976 to 1986 increased from 16.4 to 25.4 (Amiri & Shaditalab, 2002, p. 15). The employment situation is reflected in the cinema. In 1981 there was only one woman in the role of teacher and in 1982 only one woman acting as a doctor in movies. Between 1982 to 1985 no employed woman could be found in 175 movies (Hemati, 1999, p. 87).

When a woman had personal characteristics and an independent identity, policymakers of the cinema looked at the movies with mistrust, and didn't forward the license. *Bashu a Little Stranger* got banned because the actress had individual characteristics unlike the mass of women who had no special identities. The movie starts with the actress that enters from the bottom of the frame (figure 61). In contrast to the principles and regulations of that era, we saw a close-up of the woman staring at the camera (audience). According to the principles of cinema policies, looking directly at the camera was forbidden. So this movie was banned for three years as a penalty for the deconstruction and violation of rules. In regard to this shot, Naficy argues, "with this one shot, which draws attention to the alluring possibilities of unveiled vision… [Beyzaie] breaks years of entrapment of films by rules of modesty" (Naficy, 1994, p. 147). An image that was unconventional and deconstructing in relation to the principles and regulations of that era. When most Iranian actresses were like a part of the decor in the scene and were pictured as miserable and obedient women who were only noticed in doing house chores and supporting their husband and children, and thus weren't given individual stories or characters, Taslimi got the main roles in *Bashu, the Little Stranger* and *The Mare*. She retained a woman's neglected dignity at a time when women were omitted and forgotten in Iranian cinema. The movie was trying to make a difference in the world that was ideologically unified.[84]

[84] On *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, See Dabashi, H. (2007). *Masters & Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*. Mage Publisher. pp. 253. 280.

Figure 61: Staring at the camera in a close-up; white color of her headscarf pulling it from both sides, covering mouth and nose leaving the eyes uncovered in the frame, using telephoto lens which has blurred the background, all of these make her look penetrating. *"screenshot by author from the film Bashu, the Little Stranger"*

Taslimi explained the severe surveillance of officials on *The Mare* and added that one of the faults with her acting was that she was 'noticeable' on screen. It was a positive point in world cinema while it wasn't in Iran in the 1980s due to the conventions that prevented stardom and didn't allow actors to be seen prominently: "They believed that I was remarkable on screen". They pointed to the same thing about banning my acting in the theater "she has charisma on stage." Though it's one of the advantages of acting. If actors' presence on stage wasn't noticeable, why would they do it" (Malakuti, 2015, p. 157). By looking at the problems the most valuable actress of the 1980s went through, we can figure out and analyze the female actors' conditions and representations in the cinema and cultural policies against the background of preventing stardom.

The power of Soosan Taslimi's penetrating look in her close-ups was what officials were concerned about since the atmosphere after the Revolution was filled with terror and anxiety so the dominant power was afraid of any person or group to reach a position of power. Although officials tried to minimize Taslimi's beauty, presence and influence in the movies, she highlighted her presence by her penetrating look. *The Mare* was made in a period when acting well wasn't a positive point and caused anxiety. She paid for her roles by being under pressure and had to leave the country forever after she had acted in six movies, three of them banned.[85]

[85] Bahram Beyzaie who worked with Taslimi in *Ballad of Tara (Cherikeye Tara,1978)*, *Death of Yazdgerd*, *Bashu, the Little Stranger* and *Maybe Another Time* talked about her difficult situation in the 1980s and compared her with female stars of the 1990s and 2000s:

> those days were so bitter. Her first movie got banned, was never shown. She got sacked from the theater

The same defense concept against homogenizing the women was used in Beyzaie's next movie called *Maybe Another Time*. It told the story of a woman who was seeking her lost identity, an identity that was tied to the identity of all Iranian women. She thus became the symbol of all Iranian women who sought their lost and neglected identities. Beyzaie explained his reason for choosing such a female character as the heroine:

> All my stories had been rejected for having lively, strong and hard working women, but this time I tried to show a miserable woman so that it was closer to the desirable image of officials; a sad, sick and quiet woman that no one could find fault with. All of her movements are in observance of the regulations and not because of artistic requirements. If we always see her entering or leaving the house that's because only then can extra clothes be justified at home and if the actors are not on speaking terms and don't go to bed, it is more logical. We have to use the most unrealistic element, the Hijab, when they want to go to bed. If the husband wants to help his wife when she's ill, we have to pay attention and not let them get very close to each other (ibid., p. 217).

Marginalized and Unimportant Roles

Women were pictured in marginalized and unimportant roles in most of the movies of the 1980s. A woman's dialogue was shorter than a man's. The camera didn't care about them and only passed through them to show men. About the consequences of the imposition of modesty in Iranian cinema, Naficy points out, "Filming women in long shots, without a gaze, sometimes without a voice, and in static positions not only desubjectivized but also decorporealized them, as though they had no minds and no bodies— no weight, no agency. This contributed to their shadowy background presence" (Naficy, 2012d, p. 118). In *Gozal (Mohammad Ali Sajadi, 1989)* the woman is standing quietly and passively in a men's argument. She is placed far from the camera, outside the resolution of the depth of field to show her

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and her second movie was banned too. She worked in her third movie with me and it also got banned. She had three banned movies when she left Iran. She wasn't as lucky as Niki Karimi, Hedieh Tehrani and Leila Hatami whose extreme close-up pictures were on the screens of cinemas from the beginning. She worked under terrible conditions of Iranian cinema and didn't let her name be on screen. In the fourth Fajr Film Festival, a letter was read against her. When Ali Zhekan made *The Mare*, everyone believed that the award for the first actress would be given to Soosan Taslimi but the mentioned letter meant that she couldn't get the award for best actress since "the movies have ruined the image of Iranian woman" as they said. Unlike other movies in which women carried trays of tea, Soosan pictured Rezvaneh's image in the best way (ibid., p. 216).

insignificance and to emphasize that the camera won't get close to the woman and her world (figure 62). Women were shown while sitting or standing and witnessing other actions.[86]

Figure 62: "screenshot by author from the film Gozal"

We should not neglect the fact that one of the reasons why the movies after the Revolution weren't female-centered was the license for making the film. The Ministry of Culture didn't usually allow female-centered scripts to be made. According to Hojattoleslam Javad Mohadessi, "in Quranic tales, women are secondary characters and shadowy elements. They are never heroines of the stories and are not presented as inherently independent... Another characteristic is the women's subsidiary part in stories. Even in stories involving Saint Mary, this great woman is subsidiary to Jesus" (ibid., pp. 113-114). Such a structured absence of strong women in religious texts, tales, and lore must have been conducive to their absence in other cultural texts, including the movies.

Representation of The Modern and Urban Woman

Usually in that decade the modern and urban woman is displayed with mistrust and conviction. Mahshid in *Hamoon* is a modern woman who wears urban and modern clothes and smokes. Smoking seemed weird for the Iranian audience of that era since it was the first time after the Revolution they could see a woman smoking, though it's still bad manners in tradition and custom for a woman to smoke and they usually don't smoke outside, in the office or university but they do it discreetly. Mahshid's excesses, extravagance, freedom and her mother's interference cause troubles in her marital life with Hamoon and

[86] Except for the movies like *The Mare* and *Bashu, the Little Stranger.*

lead to divorce. The woman in *Maybe another Time* is accused of betrayal. The woman in *Grandfather (Pedarbozorg, Majid Gharizadeh, 1985)* is a nouveau riche who cares about luxury life and in order to reach it, she sacrifices everything like respect to traditions and family and makes her husband sell his father's house and sends the grandfather to an old people's home. According to mottoes, ideology and revolutionary values of that era, modernity is rejected and the movie ends by appreciating simple life and traditions and the female character changes her mind and comes back to the traditional atmosphere of home and family. Unlike customary obedient and supportive women who wear the hijab and chador, we find contrary ones who are seeking progress and modernity. They are displayed by selfish and negative characters and usually wear manteau and sunglasses and tie their headscarves behind their necks. In that decade women who were looking for progress and modern life and work outside the house are shown as negative and incompatible spouses. Their clothes also differ from those of traditional and obedient housewives and they function like an image code and symbol of difference. In many of the movies of the eighties, good women were shown with complete hijab and chador and bad or disloyal ones were shown having disobeyed the rules of the hijab. The woman in *Grandfather* has tied her headscarf behind her neck and part of her hair and ear is uncovered (figure 63). It was an unwritten convention between filmmakers and audience that women with this sort of hijab acted negative roles. The audience could recognize an actress's character through her clothes and hijab. In Iran different forms of the hijab can reveal ideological differences, devotion to religion and tradition and tendency to modernity.

Figure 63: "screenshot by author from the film Grandfather"

After the victory of the Revolution, the women and men's clothes assumed ideological meanings, and people were divided into the two groups revolutionary and religious, and non-revolutionary and non-

religious. Beard, long sleeve shirts, and fabric trousers became the image of a religious man, and black chador without any makeup became the image of a revolutionary and religious woman. And on the other side, shaved face, jeans, tie, T-shirt, and short sleeve shirt became the image of a non-religious man, and high heels, makeup, nail varnish, jeans, short and tight manteau became the image of a non-religious woman, in a way that people could be distinguished by the clothes they were wearing if they were religious or non-religious or revolutionary or non-revolutionary. Some clothes such as jeans and tie were deemed the symbol of Westoxification, corruption, being irreligious, and non-revolutionary. After the Revolution till now, few government officials or authorities can be seen who wears jeans or tie or shaves his face. In some government places such as television, the entrance of men in short sleeves has been forbidden till now. Women in high-ranking governmental posts must usually wear chador according to the categorisation of the dress codes. The same codes existed in 1980s cinema too, and the negative characters were usually clean shaven, and wore jeans, tie, and short sleeves, and good men were bearded, and wore fabric trousers and simple long sleeve shirts. The positive female characters wore chador without makeup, and the negative characters wore overcoats with makeup. The colours too were not spared from the religious and non-religious classification. Black, grey, and dark clothes were considered religious and revolutionary, and colour clothes, especially eye-catching ones, were considered non-religious. The clothes normally used by the actresses in films in every period followed the common clothes of the women in the society to some extent. For example, the common clothes of the women in the 1980s films was chador which gave its place to manteau in the 1990s. In 1980s films, women had been degendered and wearing makeup was not common, but wearing makeup became more prevalent in the next decades and the woman's gender was emphasised to some extent.

Differences in the Representation of Teen Girls and Boys

After the Revolution qualitative changes happened in school books based on the current value system. Teaching was the only job for women described in these books compared with a variety of jobs for men. All other jobs were related to women's responsibility as mother and wife. In addition to the change in women's roles, their names and pictures disappeared and girls, even immature ones, were shown with the hijab, loose manto and headscarf. Boys were usually shown doing sports and other activities while girls were pictured in activities which required less movement. Teen boys of the 1980s such as Babak Ahmadpoor in *Where is the Friend's Home?(Khane-ye Doost Kojast?, Abbas Kiarostam,1986)* Amiro

in *Runner (Davandeh, Amir Naderi,1985)*, and *Water Wind Soil (Ab,Bad,Khak, Amir Naderi,1986)* and Bashu in *Bashu, the Little Stranger* are all running and showing movement. On the contrary teen girls were passive, aggressive, nervous and victimized by fathers or society. Some of them like Golbahar in the movie of the same name is handicapped and mentally hurt and rejected by her family or the teen girl in *My Daughter, Sahar (Dokhtaram Sahar, Majid Gharizadeh,1989)* who is paralyzed and can't move or the little girl in *Little Bird of Happiness (Parande-ye Kuchak-e Khoshbakhti, Pooran Derakhshandeh, 1987)* is deaf and dumb and has physical disabilities. Unlike girls, boys are shown actively running and we remember them because of their permanent running scenes in movies. Teen girls were shown on wheelchairs, paralyzed, disabled sitting at home so their images were connected with physical disabilities and mental problems. They are faced with physical and mental disabilities in families which affected their life and future. The image of a man who was slapping or hitting his child with a belt is repeated in several movies and conveys the image that hitting a girl is necessary to raise her. In the same way as the girl in *The Children of Divorce (Bach-haye Talagh, Tahmineh Milani,1989)* is physically and mentally hurt by her father's violence, Golbooteh in *The Mare* is made by her uncle to marry an old man which is physical violence, for the simple reason that the old man doesn't have a child from his first marriage and hopes to have one by the teen girl.

Characters of teen boys and girls are shown like two opposite poles. Boys are healthy, strong, willful and nothing can prevent them from reaching their goals and we always see them running in and outside the frame. Compared to boys, girls are hurt and physically and mentally paralyzed. The shouts of the girl in *Little Bird of Happiness* can be seen as symbolizing all women in this era and society who are being suppressed and asked to be quiet. What's interesting in these three movies, *Golbahar*, *Children of Divorce* and *Little Bird of Happiness*, is that they were made by female directors and teen girls come back to society with the help of their teachers and psychiatrists who are women. In *Golbahar*, the psychiatrist makes a lot of effort to help Golbahar become hopeful and arrange herself with disability. At the end of the movie it is revealed that the psychiatrist is also physically disabled and has an artificial limb. In a flash back we realize that not only Golbahar and other girls of the same age are paralyzed but also the previous generation of women were paralyzed and had to fight in order to survive in society. In these movies, we find women interacting and sympathizing mentally to help each other and they encourage sick women to be tolerant and resistant. Despite all these differences in the representation of teen boys and girls, both of them had something in common. Neither of them experienced real childhood and was thrown into adulthood by skipping childhood. Girls were born deformed, physically and mentally disabled, and unable to do any activities while boys were sacrificing themselves, escaping the

war and working to make a living instead of playing in alleys. Although movies that were made about girls and women in this decade, couldn't be shown outside the country, movies with teenage boy heroes introduced a new Iranian cinema to the world because of a new cinematic language. They expanded the boundaries of Iranian cinema and thus formed a new kind of cinema. They were able to represent the new cinema of Iran after the Revolution in film festivals in Locarno, Cannes and Three continent film festivals to the point that we can't think of a festival without the presence of Iranian movies. Movies with teenage boy heroes that sent simple humane messages and showed friendship and peaceful coexistence in the period in which foreign media displayed a dark and negative image of Iran to the world because of the siege of the U.S. embassy by revolutionary students and the conflict between Iran and the West. This image was thoroughly different from that conveyed in movies made after the Revolution during the eight years of war with Iraq, movies which displayed friendship and mutual understanding. Cinema in Iran after the Revolution displayed a more humane image of Iranians for western people. One of the reasons for the success of the post-revolution Iranian cinema in international festivals was in fact precisely this separation from the common cinematic clichés such as sex and violence and its opposition to the creation of stars. This resulted in the creation of a kind of Iranian cinema that was different from the cinema of other countries. The Iranian cinema had a different flavor for the western audience.

This decade was characterized by eight years of war, and some concepts such as self-sacrifice and endurance were considered as role model behavior in the media. The 1980s was the decade of tolerance towards losing family members and children in the war, their disappearance, economic issues because of the destruction, damages and expensive costs of the war. People were surrounded by these problems and were encouraged by officials and the media to be tolerant towards problems. We can recall the 1980s because of long queues of people to get primary needs like oil to warm their houses, sugar, oil, and other staple foods, the bombing of cities, people's terror and anxiety in big cities waiting for the alarm of red siren and escaping to shelters. So it was pretty natural for women in the war-torn society in *Chrysanthemum* to be tolerant, strong and hurt. Esmat waits twenty years for her imprisoned husband but he never gets out alive. Her daughter-in-law is also willing to marry the blind man of the family and even postpones her marriage to some years later till her husband's father gets out of prison. Because of the war women had to show endurance, tackled problems and never moaned. There are two women in this movie who symbolize endurance, self-sacrifice, tolerance and generosity like the other women in

this decade.

At the end of that decade, with the political and social changes and as a result of the cultural changes, the unifying thought was blurred. For instance, the economy of the 1980s was a governmental economy while in the next decade as a result of the economic policies of the new government, the country moved toward liberalization and privatization. In the 1980s the Peykan was the most widespread car but in the 1990s various cars were manufactured or imported every day. The same event occurred in the cinema of the 1990s where women were no longer represented in the same way but portrayed instead with various characters and remarkable individual characteristics. Due to the war and the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1980s, all people talked about union and equality; and in order to defeat the enemy, the government promoted this ideology. Therefore, the unifying culture looked customary. But in 1988 at the end of the war, the necessity of unity and homogeneity was eliminated and the society moved toward considering individual characteristics and individuality.

At the end of this chapter, I analyze women's representation and the aesthetic of hijab in *Reyhaneh (Alireza Rayisian, 1989)*. The female character in the movie symbolizes the majority of women in the 1980s, who don't have an independent individuality and identity. This woman is depicted like the other women in this era that don't have any will of their own and obey their husbands under any circumstances even when they're injured, or physically and mentally suppressed. Her dialogue about her ex-husband proves this point "He doesn't expect to have a wife. He was either drunk or on a trip and every time he came back, he was like a draft horse looking for a mare. But I got along with him." When Iranians think of the representation of women in movies from that decade they remember women who cried, women who needed men's support or were destined to be homeless like Reyhaneh. In every part of the movie her passive and adaptive behavior becomes apparent. In other words, it seems that Reyhaneh has accepted that the dominant discourse in society will accept a woman's individuality and identity only if she is obedient and adapts. Another female character in *Reyhaneh* defended women in a sequence set in a holy place "we can't do anything except being obedient". She accepts Iranian women's fate in advance, which is destined to fail. The audience remembers women of the 1980s by their desperation and misery. The actress in *Reyhaneh* like the other role models of women's characterization in the 1980s had to cope with poverty, deprivation and deep emotional crises. Fatemeh Motamed-Aria in this film and other movies of that decade acted the roles of sad women for whom men made decisions.[87]

[87] In the 1990s Iranian society moved away from their cultural traditions and stone-faced women like Hedieh Tehrani entered the cinema.

Reyhaneh (1989): The Aesthetic of Hijab in *Reyhaneh*

Reyhaneh who married a lorry driver called Eskandar due to her brother Heydar's debts, gets divorced and comes back to her hometown. She wanted to marry her cousin Reza, but Heydar disagreed. He has decided to sell the house to solve his financial problems and is therefore not willing to welcome Reyhaneh back home. On the other hand, Heydar owes some money to Teymoor so Teymoor asked Heydar to let him marry Reyhaneh. Reyhaneh thus went to her sister's house in desperation but since her brother-in law was a voyeur, her sister sent her to their uncle's house. Although her uncle disagreed with her marriage, her uncle's wife is trying to make Reyhaneh marry Reza. Eventually Reyhaneh and Reza leave the city together.

Black and White Pictures

The beginning scene of the movie which shows Reyhaneh's divorce includes a series of black and white ffixed pictures and the judge's voice that reads the divorce sentence (figures 64-67). Black and white pictures that have been intensified by the woman's black chador, a scene mode which includes a series of fixed shots, have created an ancient and historical sequence, in which the tragic fate of the female character and the tragic and historical fate of Iranian women are intertwined.

Figures 64-67: "screenshots by author from the film Reyhaneh"

Extreme-Long-Shots

In the sequence after the divorce, we see her wearing a black chador and carrying a suitcase, walking in the frame and in extreme longshots (figures 68-70). This form of approach has put the emphasis on loneliness and displacement in the frame as well as in the story filmmaker is trying to highlight her loneliness in society by shots. Choosing extreme longshots intensifies her loneliness in an expanded and empty environment and her small image in the frame due to the position of the camera, emphasize her misery, weakness and neglect by society. Desert-like locations where no human can be found and only one woman who is heading nowhere carrying a suitcase and walking in the width of the frame point to her displacement. Even the direction of her movement in the frame shows her displacement since in the first shot she moves from right to left of the frame but in the next one she moves in the opposite direction and it changes again in the following shots. According to classic editing patterns, when a character enters the frame from the left and leaves on the right, the same should happen in the next shot so that the flow of the directions will be kept. If a character like Reyhaneh moves against this editing rule, not only does it cause the audience to be bewildered to know the geographical environment, but it also implies that the character is confused and isn't following a specific path or direction to reach the destination and it's implying that she is returning to the same path and is in accordance with the displacement of the character, i.e. it is an appropriate editing approach toward the characterization of Reyhaneh. In addition, in the second and third shots we get closer to her and the trees on the right side of the frames. Although they are different trees, their fixed position in all three frames and the fact that they are of the same type imply that the woman isn't making any progress and reaching her destination. The women's triangular graphic form with the black chador and the graphic form of the trees is repeated in three frames. We can see such sequences and shots in other parts of the film. When she gets homeless after her brother is imprisoned, we face the same framing, mise-en-scène and editing style (figures 71-72).

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Figures 68-70: "screenshots by author from the film Reyhaneh"

Figures 71-72: The camera moves away from her in the second shot showing her like a black stain in an unknown place. *"screenshots by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Depiction Romantic Relationship by the Use of Symbols and Mise-en-scène in *Reyhaneh*

Reyhaneh was one of the first movies in the late 1980s which shows love between a man and a woman, although under a layer of hijab. This subject was taboo for a decade in movies. This movie started a new movement that entered the main stream in the following years of cinema. Filming *Reyhaneh* happened at the same time as the end of the war and Ayatollah Khomeini's death and as a result the values and norms of society were changing so the cinema was also influenced by these changes. The director has tried to show love by decoupage and mise-en-scène, which was rarely seen before in Iranian cinema after the Islamic Revolution. Since the principles of the hijab and modesty were institutionalized in the cinema after the Revolution, they prevented men and women from expressing emotion and intimacy and led filmmakers to use romantic symbols in Iranian culture to express love between characters. Looking at love birds in the cage in several scenes and the emphasis on them show that the man in this movie has fallen in love with the woman (figure 73). The Iranian spectators after the Revolution has learned to grasp details of romantic relationship in symbols, mise-en-scène, the movement of the camera and montage. In this regard, Mottahedeh argues that "the habit of film viewing has conditioned Iranian spectators to read montage as a code of meaning-production" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 155). In other words, some visual codes were created between filmmakers and their audiences. One of these conventions for lovers was to look at love birds in the cage which was used in several movies and series and finally turned to a cliché.

Figure 73: "screenshot by author from the film Reyhaneh"

Figure 74: She's washing her lover's clothes, touching them and smiling; in fact, she is using the equipment to express her love. When they have no chance to touch each other in the movie, touching their possessions is a substitute for physical contact. *"screenshot by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Figure 75: The woman touches a photo of herself, the man and his brother in their childhood to replace physical contact in the movie. *"screenshot by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Figure 76: This is the first scene in which the two lovers meet each other. In accordance with modesty rules, she is looking down and the man is also looking down and to the other side. This type of looking is typical of movies in the 1980s. Islam forbids men and women to look directly at each other, that's why the mise-en-scène follow the

same religious principles. The mise-en-scène is designed not to let the lovers be alone. Her brother is like an obstacle standing between them. *"screenshot by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Figure 77: The filmmaker makes lover and beloved sit close to each other but puts the man's mother between them when she is saying prayers. The filmmaker tries to find a way to bypass the limitations in depicting romantic scenes. *"screenshot by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Figures 78-79: This sort of romantic looks was unusual in the 1980s films. Gradually though we can find romantic looks and a lover's point of view about the beloved in movies in short scenes. In this scene both of them are standing at the door in two different rooms and we realize the distance between their rooms in the first picture so it caused no problem when it was observed by officials. It is a sign that filmmakers cared about scene design and the position of characters in the scene in their walk on the sharp edge of the boundaries imposed on the cinema of that period. *"screenshots by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Figures 80-86: In a symbolic sequence after a romantic talk between the man and the woman, we see from the man's point of view that she takes off her chador for the first time at home. Taking it off and hanging it up mean that she is allowing him to enter her private life at home. In order to answer her, he burns his hand with the flame of an oil lamp and proves his love. These are symbolic methods in images and decoupage used by filmmakers to prove love in the late 1980s. *"screenshots by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Figures 87-88: Instead of holding each others' hands, which is impossible, they grab a pole in the bus. The pole is like a bond that joins them. *"screenshots by author from the film Reyhaneh"*

Although talking about love in the late 80s is not forbidden and comes back to the cinema after a decade as in *Reyhaneh*, it is not shown explicitly and is instead clearly depicted by mise-en-scène and symbols. These limitations in depicting romantic scenes turned to a new aesthetics after the Revolution. This

situation brought more symbols and metaphors to Iranian cinema. This poetic behavior was a feature of Iranian cinema which enabled for example Kiarostami to talk about love in *Under Olive Trees* without getting into trouble. Even though such limitations and indirect language were imposed, they were tools to bypass the obstacles that filmmakers were always facing. Movies like *Reyhaneh* paved the way for a new area for other movies such as *The Bride*, *Narges* and the female-oriented movies of Mehrjui in the next decade.

The cinema of the 1980s focuses on the discourse of the Revolution and eight years of war. By the end of the war, movies move away from the values of the beginning years of the Revolution. It seems that the social unity that had been formed at the beginning of the war was getting blurred and the gap between the social classes and different cultures became visible. Women had hidden themselves behind movies that were about the Revolution, drug dealing, rural life, children and melodramatic ones but in the second half of the decade appeared behind and in front of the camera and eventually found their places in the cinema. The one-dimensional woman of the early years who sacrificed herself tolerating misery and accompanying her husband was replaced by the one who asked for her individual identity and was seeking an acceptable definition of her femininity and identity away from the expectations and rules of society (Shoraka, 1990, p. 308). The woman in *Hamoon* which was made in 1989 is a good representation of this new kind of women, a movie in which the female protagonist leaves her husband and children and asks for a divorce in her search for her individual identity.

Figure 89: New kind of representation of woman in post-revolutionary cinema. *"screenshots by author from the film Hamoon"*

Mehdi Arjani, an official of the cinemas in the 1980s, talked about women's presence in the cinema in

the 1980s, compared with the next two decades:

> The point is that we didn't want women to become famous because of their physical attraction. If you compare the actresses' ages (first, second and third roles) in the 1980s and 2000s, you will find out that the average age was between twenty to forty in the 1980s while it was between twenty to thirty in the 2000s. This comparison shows that the focus in the representation of women in the 2000s was on their sexuality, quite in contrast to the 1980s. When a woman was in a story of the 2000s, the audience was looking for responses for three questions:
>
> 1. When will she be betrayed?
> 2. When will she have a relationship with a man?
> 3. Who will propose?
>
> All of her mission was about sexuality. Indeed, a woman's presence in the 1980s focused on her as a human being while in the 2000s she was regarded more as a sexual object (Arzhmand & Heydari, 2015, p. 249).

Lovers who appeared in late years of the 1980s looked indirectly without any sexual intentions. By the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s indirect looks decrease and in the 2000s and 2010s we can find lustful looks between men and women in the stories of movies. While talking about love was taboo in the 1980s, men's and women's relations came back to the cinema in the 1990s and we saw even love triangles, prostitution and relationships between boyfriends and girlfriends in the 2000s. When we analyze movies of the 2010s, we find stories about betrayal between couples and sexual assault.

Although the highest form of sexual expressions between men and women in the cinema of the 1980s were the above mentioned scenes of *Reyhaneh* in which they hold a pole together or in which the lover burns his hand to prove his love, in the next decades we see changes in the cultural atmosphere of society and can find hidden sexual intercourse. Empty double beds and signs of their entrance into the rooms proved sexual intercourse in several movies, which was beyond the filmmakers' imaginations in the 1980s. A scene of Reza Karimi's *The Cast Back (Enekas)* made in 2008 can be taken as proof of this new development.

Figures 90-92: The first shot starts with a close-up shot in which the man's jacket is being thrown on the sofa which implies that he is taking off his clothes. In the second shot a red drink is being poured into a glass, which might be wine. In some movies filmmakers use symbols like watering flowers, pouring water or drink into a glass to imply sexual scenes. In the third shot camera moves toward a double bed. The camera works like human eyes and their points of view because of its movement. Indeed, the audience watches a mise-en-scène that wants to show hidden sexual intercourse which is created by arranging several shots in sequence without being able to see the man and the woman. "screenshots by author from the film The Cast Back"

In the middle of movie, we find the same editing approach to imply a sexual relationship between another man and woman in movie.

Figures 93-96:

First shot*:* In this scene the woman enters the hall of a hotel to knock on his door.

Second shot: He opens the door while he is wearing bath towel.

Third shot: The woman looks coquettishly and erotically says that she is tired of sitting alone in the lobby. This shot is cut and an empty double bed appears on the screen.

Fourth shot: In this shot we find an empty bed which gives one the impression that they had sexual intercourse. The empty bed must be filled by the audience's imagination, which is another hidden sexual act (I will talk more about hidden sex in the following chapter). *"screenshots by author from the film The Cast Back"*

CHAPTER FIVE

Women in Medium-Shot: Reconstruction Era (1990-1997)[88]

Hidden Sex: Depiction of Sexuality in Iranian Post-Revolutionary Cinema

What Lies Beneath or the Hidden Erotic Charm of Hijab

[88] Hashemi' presidency.

Farzad Motamen:

> In such scenes in love story films in some other countries that have no religious (Sharia) restrictions for demonstrating human relations, the man and woman embrace and kiss. We can't do that in Iran. We just positioned them that way in the frame and just hoped that their emotions would be felt (Mihandoost, 2010, p. 126).

This chapter describes the early 1990s changes in the Iranian society and their consequent effect in the portrayal of women in the cinema, followed by a study of the methods of depicting sexual desire and sexuality in the Islmicate cinema of Iran. The last part of the chapter analyses female masochism in this era's cinema by studying *Leila* (Dariush Mehrjui, 1996), one of the most distinguished films of this period.

Iranian history, for almost the last two centuries, has been marked by the contrast between tradition and modernization. If we consider the first decade after the Revolution as a return to tradition, primarily by returning to religion, in the second and third decades after the Revolution we can see a gradual withdrawal from tradition. While we are sometimes faced with suppression and opposition to the ever-increasing speed of modernity from the conservative traditional discourse in power, the current condition of world society (which was becoming more and more industrialized every day), together with the socio-cultural changes in Iran, did not allow the ruling government stall the movement toward modernity. After the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Hashemi administration believed in a free market,[89] the opening of the economic atmosphere, and a détente policy with other countries in the world. This was pursued by the following administration under Mohammad Khatami by speaking of a "Dialogue Among Civilizations" in the United Nations, and also by opening the political and cultural atmosphere in society. The movement towards modernity was thus accelerated and cinema, as a modern technology of the twentieth century and after all the challenges with the followers of tradition, found its place and was eventually accepted by them. Despite all these years, facing the many limitations and constraining rules set by the conservatives, cinema could still stabilize its principle existence and endure.

What happened in the Iranian society in that period that impacted the depiction of women? In 1988, after eight years of a war of attrition with Iraq, Iran ended the war by agreement to the United Nations' resolution.[90] Less than a year later was the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the charismatic leader of Iran, an important event that took Iran to a new phase of its history and influenced the whole country (including the cinema). Hashemi became the president, and his government, nicknamed the "Reconstruction Government"[91], tried to distance itself from the radicalism of the 1980s by assuming moderation in all fields, and making privatisation[92] the core of its economic plans. Iranian society became removed from war and the revolutionary and ideological atmosphere of the first decade and, influenced by the economic

[89] See Shadlu, A. (2007). *Takasorgerai dar Jaryan-e Eslami*. Tehran: Vozara.
[90] See Zibakalam, S. (2011). *Hashemi bdeun-e Rotoush*. Tehran: Rowzaneh. pp. 297-313.
[91] See Hosseini, M. (2013). *Tan-Dal: Tahavol-e Farhang-e Siyasi dar Cinemaye Pormokhatab-e Iran (1357-1390)* Tehran: Rokhdad No. pp. 135-148.
[92] On privatization and economic freedom under Hashemi, see Axworthy, M. (2013). *Revolutionary Iran: a history of the Islamic republic*. Oxford University Press. pp. 309-310.

policies of the new government, moved towards materialism, lavishness, and consumerism.[93] The coffeeshops and cafés reopened and became the youths' hangouts.[94] After eight years of war and missile attacks, cities became peaceful places to enjoy life again. Clothes changed, little by little, and beauty could be seen in the outfits. Hijab laws slackened, and commercials returned to television after a decade's ban to propagate the consumerism culture. Superstars appeared on the cinema screens again, the system of raising superstars returned to Iranian cinema, and women returned to the foreground with their feminine and beauty attributes after a decade in the background. The box office hit of 1990, *The Bride*, introduced two beautiful and handsome female and male superstars to the Iranian cinema for the first time since the Revolution—they remained the most important young superstars of Iranian cinema for nearly a decade. Everything indicated a new period in politics, society and its subdivision cinema, and the depiction of women.

The billboards all over the city and the commercials on television[95], the construction of Westernized shopping malls, the import of the latest cars from Japan and South Korea, and the construction of vogueish and aristocratic houses—all indications of the return of consumerism and capitalism. This change in the ideology and the return of consumerism displayed itself in the cinema too. Cinema billboards were covered with colour images of young women. The simple clothes of 1980s characters were replaced by flashy and chic outfits. The grey atmosphere of the films gave way to locations in restaurants, beaches and villas, elegant apartments, expensive and trendy cars. Women returned to the centre of the plot, as an advertising commodity in the ideology of consumerist life in order to attract capital and audiences. The economic policies of Hashemi's government led to the appearance of a middle class, whose manifestation could be seen in the female characters of this period. In all his films of this period, Mehrjui depicted female characters as middle-class urbanites in the metropolis of Tehran; contrary to the 1980s, with characters usually belonging to the lower classes of the society, and the rural women.

Beauty, after a decade of being deemed anti-value, became valuable again. The use of cosmetics increased so much that Iran ranked first in the world in the consumption of cosmetics. Cosmetic surgeries became widespread, and rhinoplasty rates among women skyrocketed. The importance of facial beauty

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[93] See Kazemi, A. (2016). *Gozar az Jameye Enghelabi be Jameye Masrafi* in: *The Everyday in the Post-Revolutionary (Amr-e Ruzmareh dar Jame-e Pasa-Enghelabi*. Tehran: Farhang-e Javid. pp. 141-152.

[94] See Honarbin-Holliday, M. (2008). *Becoming Visible in Iran: Women in Contemporary Iranian Society.* London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies. pp. 109-112.

[95] See Payandeh, H. (2016). *Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies: A Critical Reading of Iranian Television Advertisements*: *(Naghd-e Adabi va Motaleat-e Farhangi: Gharati Naghadaneh az Agahi-haye Tejari dar Telvision-e Iran)* Tehran: Shahr Publications.

doubled in Iran: with hijab aesthetics, a woman's face is the only part that is uncovered, and she can draw attention with it. This affected the actresses, too, as many underwent facial aesthetic surgeries. In the 1980s, a beautiful appearance was considered disagreeable and an individual's superiority was attributed to the steadfastness of their faith and religious beliefs. In the 1990s, and later in the 2000s and 2010s, a reverse path was taken and it was beauty beside wealth that gave people superiority in the society; a society that moved away from its revolutionary ideals of the 1980s, day by day, until these became anti-values for the young generation that had been born and raised in the following decades. The 1980s was the decade of directors, but the 1990s saw the return of attractive stars to the cinema and became the decade in which stars and superstars gained power. Now box office sales and the popularity of the films were determined by the stars and, contrary to the starless and director-dominant decade of 1980s, the box office and return of capital was dependent on the superstars and handsome actors and actresses. In the director-dominant decade of the 1980s, people went to the cinema to watch a film by Mohsen Makhmalbaf; in the 1990s, they went to the cinema to watch a film starring Niki Karimi.

The second Fajr Film Festival (the most prominent film festival in Iran) that the new government held in 1990 was accompanied by a big surprise. For the first time, a few films had been made with the theme of love, and everything indicated the return of love to Iranian cinema after its one-decade absence.[96] It did, however, cause radical forces to pressure the government. The films included: *Shadow of Imagination (Saye Khial, Hossein Delir, 1990)*, *Time of Love*, *The Nights of Zayandeh-Rood (Shabhaye Zayandeh-Rood, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1990)*, *The Bride*, *Image of Love (Naghshe Eshgh, Shariar Parsipur*, 1990), and *Apartment No.13 (Yadollah Samadi, 1990)*. The 1980s atmosphere, the war period, and the spirituality that had engulfed all aspects of society, had not allowed worldly issues such as earthly love to be present in the cinema of Iran. Now, following the 1980s and the waning of ideological issues at the heart of society, cinema moved from the spirituality-stricken films—such as *Pomegranate and Cane (Naro Ney, Saeed Ebrahimifar, 1988),* and *Beyond the Mist (Ansuye Meh, Manuchehr Askarinasab, 1985)*—to the daily issues of the society, the middle class, and women. The wave of romantic films continued in this period: *Gabbeh (1995)* and *Bread and Flowerpot (Nuno Goldun, 1996)* by Makhmalbaf, *Green Ashes (Khakestar-e Sabz, 1994)* by Hatamikiya, *Leila* and *The Pear Tree* by Mehrjui, *Soltan (1996)* by Kimiai, as well as *Sweet Agony (Masaebe Shirin, 1998)* and *Romantic (Asheghaneh, 1995)* by Davoodnejad. In this period Rakhshan Banietemad, the most distinguished female filmmaker in Iran, made three films with love themes. She portrayed a love triangle in *Narges*, a theme that was impossible

[96] See Omid, J. (2003). *History of Iranian Cinema, 1979-1990 (Tarikh-e Cinema-ye Iran, 1357-1369)*. Tehran: Rowzaneh. pp. 935-937.

in the previous period, followed by her depiction of the love between an old man and a girl his daughter's age in *The Blue Veiled (Rusari Abi, 1994)*, and in *The May Lady* we see an intellectual female filmmaker faced with the dilemma of maternal obligation and her life for a man.[97]

Dariush Mehrjui, one of Iran's most famous filmmakers, produces four consecutive movies about women: *The Lady (1991)*, *Sara (1992)*, *Pari (1994)*, and *Leila (1996)*. Young women are central characters in all of these films (which are even titled after their names), caught between society's traditions and modernity; however, even such heroines are not shown as powerful characters, but rare rather mostly passive and receptive. For instance, the main female character in Leila accepts her husband's second marriage with an unknown woman without complaint or protest. Such passiveness was undoubtedly a mirror of a society constrained in patriarchal traditions, laws, and regulations that favored women as second class citizens. The contrast between tradition and modernity in Iranian cinema, which had started in 1934 with *Haji Agha*, *the Cinema Actor*, continued at the end of the century with women's films and films about women. Mehrjui's *Sara*, *Pari*, *Leila*, and *Bemani*, as well as *The May Lady* by Banietemad, *Two Women*, *The Fifth Reaction*[98] *(Vakonesh-e Panjom, 2003)*, and *The Hidden Half (Nimeye Penhan, 2001)* by Tahmineh Milani, depicted their female characters trapped between tradition and modernity. Even Mohsen Makhmalbaf paid special attention to relationships between man and woman, and for the first time such relations were highlighted in some of his films. Unlike in his previous films—such as *Seeking Refuge (1984)*, without female characters in the story line, or his second period movies in which women were marginalized characters mostly depicted from the traditional layers of the society—a new face of an urban, modern and up-to-date woman, without significant ties to traditional beliefs, who wished to be released from the traditional rules and restrictions that bound her life, found its way into Makhmalbaf's movies in this period. In *Time of Love*, he spoke openly of a taboo that, even upon hearing it, could rile the officials.[99] *Time of Love* is a story about a married man who falls in love with another woman, and a married woman who is in love with another man! This movie paid the price for the risk of overstepping the "red lines" by pointing at such taboo and was banned indefinitely. During these same years, in which Makhmalbaf produced *Time of Love* and presented the idea of a love triangle

[97] On women in Rakhshan Banietemad' films see Ravadrad, A. & Sedighi-Khoydaki, M. (2006). *Tasvir-e Zan dar Filmhaye Cinemaiye Rakhshan Banietemad*. Faslname Motaleat-e Farhangi va Ertebatat, No. 6. pp. 31-56. See also Dabashi, H. (2001) *Close-Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*. Lodnon, New York: Verso. pp. 223-243. See also Naficy, H. (2012d). *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4: The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010.* Duck University. pp. 157-167.

[98] On *The Fifth Reaction,* see Zeydabadi-Nejad, S. (2010). *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic.* New York: Routledge. pp. 110-125.

[99] See Nasrabadi, A. (1990). *Dar Takapuye Yek Davari-ye Monsefaneh*. Keyhan, No. 14145, 1369/12/26. See also Chitchian, H. & Ghafari, H. (1991). *Nazar-e Do Tan az Namayandegan-e Majles-e Shoraye Eslami dar Khosus-e Film-e Nobat-e Asheghi.* Keyhan, No. 14198, 1370/3/9.

as the main storyline in a post-revolutionary Iranian movie, statistics also indicated a significant decrease in people's adherence to religious values.

Table 1: Decrease in people's adherence to religious values in the 1990s

Year	**1986**	**1992**
Affection for Clerics	86.7 %	23.3 %
Respecting women with full hijab and "Chador"	81.8 %	36.8 %
Unfavorable opinion about disrespecting hijab	86.2 %	41.5 %

Source: Mohammad Reza Sharif, 2002 (Sharif, 2002, p. 154)

Depiction of Sexuality in Iranian Post-revolutionary Cinema[100]

The Bride marked the beginning of a new portrayal of women in the post-revolutionary cinema. The exchange of erotic looks between the woman and man in the car, together with her heavy makeup in close-up shots, indicated a new period in the depiction of women. Woman was not the mother or wife, covered in complete hijab in the background, and she displayed her beautiful looks to the audience. The fact that *The Bride* was the bestselling film of the year demonstrated that the audience welcomed this change in the portrayal of women, and conveyed the message that the beauty of the actresses on screen was still an important criterion in attracting the Iranian audience and a large number of male viewers, despite a decade of women's absence in film. With this film, Niki Karimi, the lead actress, became the first Iranian female superstar overnight and received huge offers from producers the following year.

[100] In studying and analysing erotic scenes in the post-revolution cinema in this section, I have not limited myself to this period's films; I have analysed their traces and visual manifestations in the films from various periods until today's cinema, because such depictions were not limited to this period, and especially after Khatami's office (third period), they were more intensified in the mainstream films.

Figures 97-98: Licking ice cream in *The Bride*. This sequence does not have any role in the narrative of the story, but it gives the audience the chance to enjoy a visual sexual pleasure implicitly by the way the actress is licking the ice cream. In the first shot, we see the woman's close-up licking the ice cream. The second shot shows the man staring at the woman. This is one of the first voyeuristic stares of a man at a woman in the post-revolution cinema. The man and woman are in the position of voyeur and exhibitionist in this scene. The exchange of their stares accompanied by their presence in a car in the darkness of the night added to the erotic and sexual content of the stares. Although such scenes in this period began with *The Bride*, they were not exclusive to this period and their occurrence intensified year after year as much as the monitoring laws permitted. *"screenshots by author from the film The Bride"*

From this period onwards, eroticism returned to Iranian films, but in a complicated form wrapped in hijab. The depiction of sexuality in the films of this period transformed into codes. In the post-revolutionary cinema, some codes and filmic significations gradually appeared to depict sexual desire and sexual contact, thereby creating a special filming grammar with arbitrary signs depicting sexuality for Iranian spectators to decode. Recurring codes in the films include the loosening of the headscarf knot, taking off earrings and a necklace, making the bed, a tracking shot towards the empty bed, the closing of the room door, turning off the light, pouring a drink into a glass, simultaneously touching animals, inserting the woman's high-heels, and walking barefoot. Iranian filmmaker employed four approaches to depict sexual desire while observing hijab aesthetics rules:

1. **Replacement and accompaniment:** through symbols and signs using decoupage and editing techniques.
2. **Mise-en-scène and framing:** the position of the woman and man's faces and bodies in relation to one another in the shot.
3. **Fetishisation**
4. **Elimination:** eliminating a part of the narrative in the screenplay or in editing.

Source: The Author

1. Replacement and Accompaniment

One method of erotic expression in post-revolution films is the use of animals, editing them in parallel with, or dissolving them with, the lovers. This replacement and accompaniment approach is to replace something as sign or metaphor in order to display sexual desire and contact: the woman and man

simultaneously touching an animal, or showing two animals touching in place of the woman and man's touching. In *Time of Love*, we see decoupage and the shot of two horses whose heads get closer and touch one another, just after the shot of the woman and man sitting next to each other in a carriage—as well as the touching and rubbing of the woman and man's scarves in the air—refer to the touching, kissing, and sexual contact between the woman and man (figures 99-102). In *Second Woman (Zane Dovom, Sirus Alvand, 2007)*, the filmmaker dissolves the shot of a woman and man running after one another (accompanied by the exchange of lustful looks) with the mating scene of two dogs, thus alluding to the undisplayable sexual contact of the couple (figures 103-108).

Figures 99-102: "screenshots by author from the film Time of Love"

Figures 103-108: "screenshots by author from the film Second Woman"

Another way to display sexual desire is the simultaneous touching of an animal by the woman and man, instead of touching each other's bodies. In *Love-stricken (Delshodegan, Ali Hatami, 1991)*, the cat is on the table between the woman and man, and the filmmaker has used this simultaneous touching of the cat in place of touching one another (figures 109-111).

Figures 109-111: "screenshots by author from the film Love-stricken"

Figure 112: Portraying sexual desire indirectly and allegorically in *Gabbeh*[101]. The man is holding the ewe's head and the woman is squeezing her teats to milk her. The ewe is the go-between. *"screenshot by author from the film Gabbeh"*

2. Mise-en-scène and Framing

The use of mise-en-scène and framing is another technique to refer to sexual desire. A primary dilemma for Iranian directors after the Revolution was to resolve limitations related to the cinematic representation of sexuality and intimacy. Iranian filmmakers devised figurative solutions for such limitations—restructuring their plans with mise-en-scène techniques, lighting and camera position—to indirectly and symbolically represent such scenes. For example, the director of *White Nights (Shabhaye Roshan, Farzad Motamen, 2002)* has found a solution for a romantic scene with the mise-en-scène arrangements and positioning of the movie's male and female characters in the frame in such a way that it could be viewed as if they were embracing and kissing each other. He positions them in the frame to block each other and

[101] On close reading of *Gabbeh*, see Mottahedeh, N. (2008). *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema.* Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 157-167.

are viewed as one.

Figures 113-115: White Nights: Beloved and lover becoming one in the frame with the help of mise-en-scène. *"screenshots by author from the film White Nights"*

Figure 116: Employing mise-en-scène in the depiction of eroticism in *Mastaneh (Hossein Farahbakhsh, 2014)*. The man stares lustfully at the woman's face and lips. The framing has been designed by the director in a way that their faces are overlapping in the shot. *"screenshot by author from the film Mastaneh"*

In *Beautiful City (Shahre Ziba, 2003)*, where the director wasn't allowed to show the girl's hair while combing, thus he shows her reflection in the water. Asghar Farhadi, the director of this film says: "We couldn't show a vivid image of her combing her hair, so I had to show its reflection on water. This is the only shot that directing tone is different from the rest of the movie. But we had no choice" (Mihandoost, 2008, p. 188).

Figure 117: In this scene in *White Nights*, lighting has been employed to refer to love symbolically, when the man's shadow falls all over the woman's body as a sign of love and unity. *"screenshot by author from the film White Nights"*

Figure 118: A camera angle has been used to emphasise the erotic connotation of the story in *Aal (Bahram Bahramian, 2010)*, when the woman looks sensually up at where the man is standing. *"screenshot by author from the film Aal"*

Figure 119: Chrysanthemum: reflection of man's face on the woman's, who is behind the window. It is a solution to express feelings and the unity between them in the image, which can be a replacement for a sexual relationship. *"screenshot by author from the film Chrysanthemum"*

Figure 120: Dissolving of the lovers' faces into each other while smiling in the final sequence to show their love. It was an editing arrangement in place of their physical contact. This kind of reflection technique was used in other Iranian romantic movies as a visual symbol of love. *"screenshot by author from the film Chrysanthemum"*

Figure 121: Ferdous Park 5 pm (Bagh-e Ferdous,5 Asr, Siamak Shayeghi, 2005): we see the unity of the characters by the reflection of the man's face on the window. *"screenshot by author from the film Ferdous Park 5 pm"*

3. Fetishization of the Iranian Films

As any form of physical or sexual contact was banned in the post-revolution cinema, a type of fetish for clothes appeared in films, with characters showing their sexual desire by touching clothes or objects that belong to the opposite sex. The object replaced the absent woman in these scenes, and the male viewers were sexually aroused through the object that belonged to the woman.

Figure 122: In the above scene in *Mastaneh*, the man picks up the woman's cup of coffee in her absence, and touches the mark of the woman's lipstick on the cup with a lustful sound, while his face is covered in perspiration with sexual desire. After this touch, the man goes into the room, and rapes the woman. Although a non-intimate (non-mahram) has invaded her privacy and violated her boundaries, the camera, obedient to the rule of hijab, remains non-intimate and is not allowed to enter the room. *"screenshot by author from the film Mastaneh"*

The fetish object acts as a sign in the Iranian films and replaces the sexual manifestations of the woman, or the sexual contact with the woman, becoming a technique for the audience to enjoy the women sexually. The pleasure of the Iranian viewers has been denied because of the rules of hijab aesthetics; this technique replaces that lack with the fetish object and compensates for this to some extent. In the absence of the exhibitionist woman, the woman's shoes acquired a displaying function. Insert shots of the woman's shoes assumed a fetishistic function in the films of this period.

Figure 123: An insert of the woman's jeans in *Boutique (Hamid Nematollah, 2003)*. Fetishistic shot. In 1980s, it wasn't common to show the fragmented parts of a woman's body. *"screenshot by author from the film Boutique"*

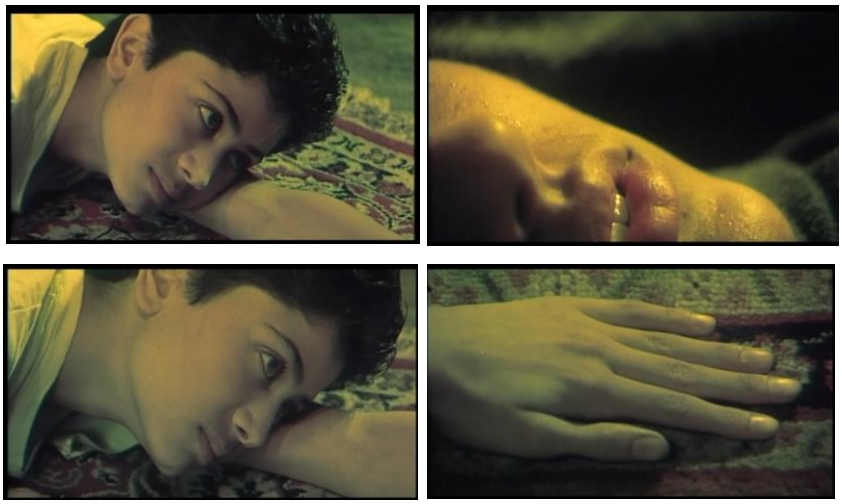
Figures 124-125: In *Nights of Zayandeh-Rood*, the Revolution and a few years after it are marked with women's shoes. The Revolution is depicted with simple black shoes and thick black socks (signs of hijab and the elimination of any sexual aspects), but a few years after the Revolution we see white high heels. This is a metaphor for people getting distance from the Revolution's principles and slogans, and the return of sexual signs and manifestation. *"screenshots by author from the film Nights of Zayandeh-Rood"*

Figure 126: Depiction of sexual desire by placing the girl's foot on the man's footprint in the earth in *Ferdous Park 5 pm*. *"screenshot by author from the film Ferdous Park 5 pm"*

Figure 127: The bride and groom's shoes behind the door in *Narges*. The way the shoes were placed beside one another referred to the sexual contact that had been hidden from the eyes of the camera and the viewers. *"screenshot by author from the film Narges"*

4. Elimination Approach in Narrative: The Narrative Hijab

In addition to using symbols and signs, another way of displaying erotic scenes is the elimination approach in narrative (the narrative hijab). This means the erotic part of the narrative is eliminated, but the viewers notice the elimination through codes, such as the sudden cut of the scene and the beginning of another shot, an editing jump, or the sudden passage of time. Such techniques tell the audience that a part of the film has been cut, and they notice the censorship. The viewers see the first part of the woman and man's sexual desire for one another, the scene is suddenly cut or faded, and the scene ends. This editing technique makes the audience notice the elimination or censorship of the story, telling them in code that something has happened but cannot be shown due to the hijab aesthetics. An example of this technique is in *The Pear Tree* when the young boy lies on the carpet beside the girl, stares at her, reaches out his hand to her, and the shot is suddenly faded.



Figures 128-131:

1. The boy lies on the floor beside the girl and stares at her with lust.
2. The camera shows the boy's POV and his stare at the girl's face. The camera, in the boy's POV, pans down on her eyes' in extreme close-up until it reaches her half-open lips. The perspiration on the girl's face and the boy's leering have given an erotic tone to the scene.
3. We see the boy's face again staring at the girl. The camera moves on the boy's hand, which moves towards the girl, and reaches his fingers.
4. The boy's hands get close to the girl's head on the floor and the shot fades.

"screenshots by author from the film The Pear Tree"

The elimination approach in narrative in post-revolution cinema forces the passive audience—accustomed to not having imagination and wanting all parts of the story to be depicted in details—to instead complete the eliminated parts with their imagination, due to this interference in the narrative. In other words, bed scenes are depicted through elimination and their visualisation in the audience's mind. One example is the dreaming of the female character in the comedy *No Entry for Men (Vorude Aghayan Mamnu, Rambod Javan, 2011)*. (The depiction of sexual desire in comedies generally faced less censorship by authorities.)

Figures 132-137: Visualisation of the woman and man kissing via mise-en-scène and playful editing. The male character enters the room, expresses love for the woman, and gets close to her. The woman steps backwards with fear until she is pressed against the wall and has no way to escape. The camera gets close to the woman's face from the POV of the man. The shot is cut to the sleeping woman and we realise the shots were her nightmare. The woman wakes, puts her hand on her mouth, hurries to the bathroom, and washes her mouth and tongue. The

washing tells the audience the man kissed the woman in her dream. *"screenshots by author from the film No Entry for Men"*

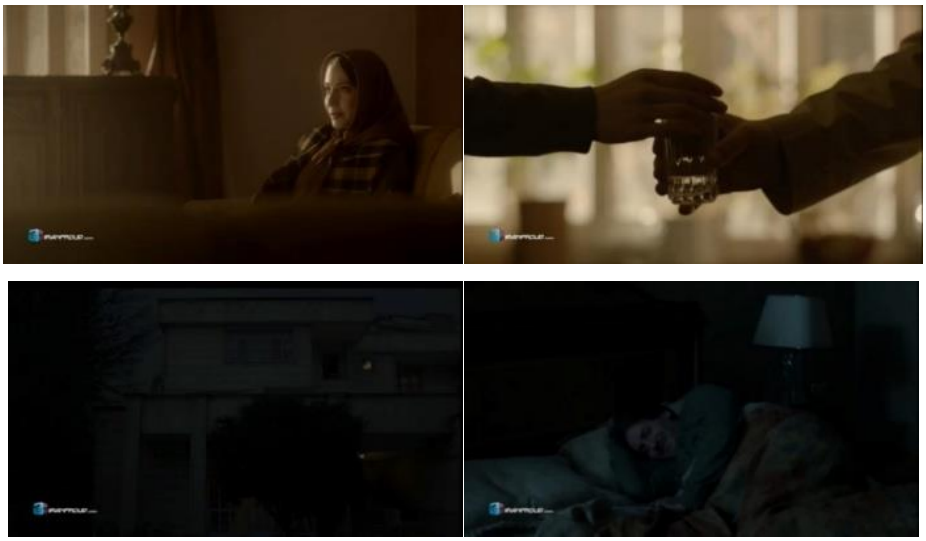

Figures 138-139: Another technique is to use vacant locations like the bedroom: the character's narration or the camera's movement towards the vacant space gives a clue to the audience about the sexuality of the space, to visualise sexual contact that has happened or is going to happen in this place. For example, the narration of the man in *Santouri (Dariush Mehrjui, 2007)* after his wife divorces him and marries another man: "You mean you can go with him where you went with me? Do the same you did with me?" Hearing these lines over the shots of the bed and bathtub helps the audience understand the meaning. *"screenshots by author from the film Santouri"*

A certain duality of absence/sexual fantasy occurs in Iranian cinema: the audience's leering and sexual desire increases, not from being in the protagonist's POV but rather by being prevented from viewing their intimacy. For example, the sex scenes in which the mise-en-scène depicts the woman and man entering the bedroom, the door closing on the camera, and the audience is left fantasizing the sex between the woman and man.

Figures 140-148: The Long Farewell (Khodafezi Tolani, Farzad Motamen, 2015): Demonstrating sex between a man and a woman by displaying them entering the bedroom and closing the door to the camera. The camera, as the eyes of non-mahrams, is not permitted in private places and has to stay behind the closed doors. *"screenshots by author from the film The Long Farewell"*

Figures 149-154: The Kid and the Angel (Kudak va Fereshteh, Masood Naghashzadeh, 2008): At the scene in which the character takes her headscarf veil off, the camera pans towards the wall and the empty space. The camera considers the audience to be non-mahrams who have no right to see her in this position. *"screenshots by author from the film The Kid and the Angel"*

Another technique is the passage of time drawing our attention to the erotic event that occurred during the time that has been eliminated from the narrative. In *Parallel Shadows (Sayehaye Movazi, Asghar Naeemi, 2014)*, we see the sudden passage of time to depict sex between the woman and man.



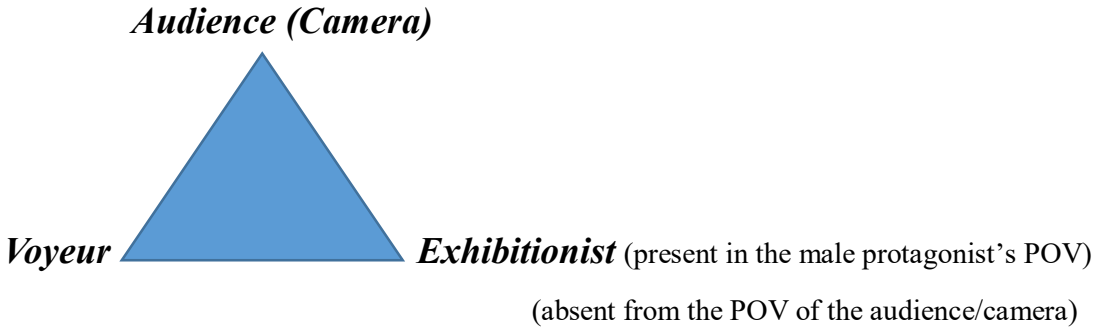
Figures 155-158:

1. The woman takes an erotic breath and tells the man outside the shot, in a sexual tone and look, "I'm thirsty." The tone and manner of the woman, and the sentence she utters, indicate her desire and suggestion to the man for sexual contact.
2. The man's hand enters the frame to give a water glass to the woman, as a symbol of the sexual contact between them, in a close-up shot. The shot then fades to darkness to show the elimination of the depiction of sexual contact.
3. In the next shot, we see their room from the yard and the passage of time by fading to darkness.
4. The camera is allowed to enter their bedroom only when it is clear some time has passed after their sexual contact, when the man is lying on the bed and the woman's place is vacant. The man talks to the woman outside the shot. The camera does not show the woman because she isn't wearing hijab, and we have only the woman's off-screen voice talking to the man. *"screenshots by author from the film Parallel Shadows"*

There is another form of voyeurism that occurs through the audience's fantasy and imagination. The male character is leering, but the audience does not see his POV: they see the man's reaction, realise he is

leering, and have to visualise what they have not seen. One of the best examples of this technique is in *When the Moon Was Full (Shabi ke Mah Kamel Shod, Narges Abyar, 2019)*. The woman goes into the fitting room to try a dress, but the camera stays outside beside the man. The man eagerly opens the door to see the woman's half-naked body. The camera and the audience are not allowed to see what the man sees, due to the rule of hijab aesthetics, which makes the audience more curious and more eager. The audience accompanies the male character in voyeurism, but has to fantasise what the man is seeing. The man's eyes and face show arousal, informing the audience of the woman's sex appeal and making them a partner to the sexual pleasure.

This triangle in the Iranian films—the presence of the voyeur, the absence of the exhibitionist from the POV of the audience (camera), and the presence of the exhibitionist in the male protagonist's POV—forms the structure of this voyeurism through fantasising.



The Structure of Voyeurism through Fantasising

Source: The Author

Female Masochist and the Masochistic Aesthetics

In this period, another common trend in the portrayal of women depicted the women's love in a masochistic manner. Contrary to the films of the Revolution's first decade, filmmakers approached the spiritual and mental characteristics of the women, displaying their masochistic behaviour with cinematic techniques. This approach is distinguishable in *Leila* and the three other Mehrjui's films with women in this period. Getting close to the women's characters is done in a few ways, the most important of which is the internal monologue technique wherein the female characters present their own thoughts and the audience follows the story from their viewpoint and inner speech. In addition, editing techniques such as colour fading and dissolve, scale of shot, lighting, and set and costume design are employed. The application and use of these techniques in the depiction of women can be further addressed in studying *Leila*, an outstanding example in this period of featuring such masochistic women in film.

Leila (1996)

Leila and Reza meet at a ceremony of the 28th Safar, and are married sometime later. It is not long before they discover that Leila cannot conceive. Reza's mother pressures Leila to let them get a second wife for Reza, who can give birth to a son for him and their continue the family generation; Leila eventually accedes after repeated requests from her overpowering mother-in-law. Reza disagrees with this scenario at first, but goes to a proposal because of his mother's pressure and Leila's consent, and finally chooses a girl upon condition that Leila sees her and agrees. Leila stays at home on the wedding day and prepares the house for the new bride, although she is suffering inside. When Reza brings home the second wife on the wedding night, Leila can no longer tolerate the situation and leaves home sobbing, going to her mother's house. After some time has passed, Reza divorces his second wife. A few years later, Reza, with the daughter from his second wife, visits Leila's house where a 28th Safar ceremony is being held in the hopes that Leila will agree to return. Leila smiles at the camera in the direction of the little girl.

This story is important because it occurs in a well-off family in a modern urban society. Although Leila is seemingly a modern woman with contemporary clothes and house, she virtually torments herself—in a masochistic way—with the traditions of a religious society, surrendering to the beliefs that a woman's identity is synonymous with her fertility. *Leila* demonstrate that, even if the society is in transition to modernity, it isn't easy to separate society from such deeply rooted traditions as the continuation of generation by having a son. The film is itself impacted by this perspective: beginning with the 28th Safar religious ceremony and ending with it again a few years later, thereby starting and

closing the film with tradition as if there is no escape and tradition has engulfed everything. From the mise-en-scène of the first shot, and by panning the camera over bowls with religious inscriptions on the rims, the filmmaker clarifies the story's geography and space: a religious atmosphere faithful to tradition (figure 159).

Figure 159: "screenshot by author from the film Leila"

Acting

Leila Hatami's sad tone and her stooping posture, together with the sorrow that is hidden in her gaze throughout the film, have strengthened her characterisation. Her innocence and suffering are conveyed to the audience by her facial expression, with dry lips, half-open mouth, and painful stare. Leila Hatami has adeptly displayed the fragility of women who are crushed by the clutches of societal traditions.

Figure 160: Leila's internal despair happens in the street a little while after she learns she is sterile and has come out of the doctor's office. The slanting graphical lines behind her—as she is stooping and crumpling herself towards the door and hiding her face from her surroundings and the camera—aggravate her mental vulnerability and hopelessness. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

Colour and Lighting

The colour and light in the internal scenes further serve to characterize the female protagonist. The tonality of red, black, and white in the film, and the feeble ambient lighting, are influenced by the masochistic behaviour of the female protagonist.

Figure 161: We hear Leila's inner dialogue in a voiceover as she looks in the mirror: "I married Reza November of the same year. I found out a few months later I couldn't have a baby." With filming grammar, Mehrjui displays Leila's hidden worry and apprehension in the most concise form. The shot of the dark space, with red light shining on her face to emphasize the worry, is accompanied by the internal monologue. The conscious choice of a close-up shot helps the audience penetrate her restive inner side. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

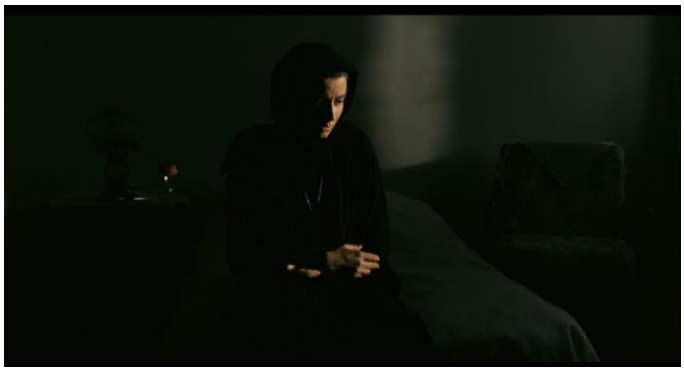


Figure 162: The darkness in the scenes inside the house, and the dark colour of the woman's clothes, are in harmony with the peculiar situation of the character. By employing low-key and localised lighting, the focus is drawn to the woman's face and her inner feelings. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

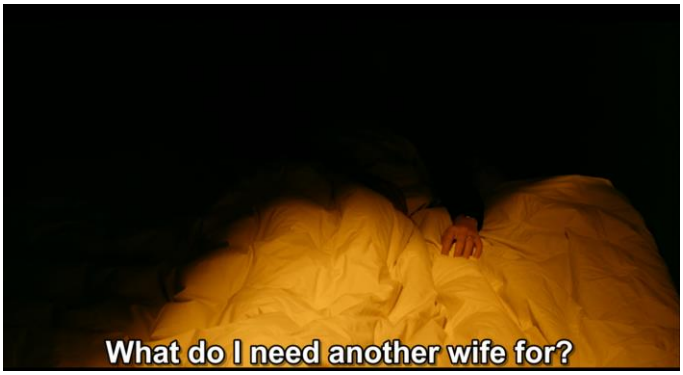


Figure 163: The lighting methods in some scenes, using a relatively darker atmosphere for interior locations such as homes, replaces hijab. Lighting is designed to show only parts of the woman's hands as her unveiled head stays in the dark. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

Colour Fading and Dissolve

The editing techniques of fading and dissolving have been used in this film to depict the woman's mental state and convey her female psyche to the audience.

Figures 164-166: Fading to red. The colour red conveys the feelings of love, anxiety, and pain at the same time, like fading in Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*.[102] *"screenshots by author from the film Leila"*

In this film, the dissolve technique assumes a psychological function and convey a certain shock and emotional blow. In the classical model of storytelling in films, dissolve is usually used where one sequence ends and another begins, or there is a passage of time. In *Leila*, however, dissolve happens within one shot, twice during a short walk; dissolve is used according to the mood and character of the female protagonist. We see such dissolves again in the scene where Leila's mother-in-law calls to ask the doctor's diagnosis: the telephone dissolves twice to its bigger image. This technique has been used to

[102] Mehrjui makes use of red, orange, and yellow fading in this period to depict the anxiety, pain, and suffering of the characters.

show the prolonged length of the discussion and its painfulness in Leila's mind. Although time has not passed from one dissolve to another (Leila's conversation continues nonstop and there is no jump in time), it is the mental time of the protagonist that has elongated and affected the filming grammar.

Figures 167-170: Using dissolve to show Leila's mental state, when the time passes slowly in her mind after returning from the doctor's office where she has learned of her infertility. *"screenshots by author from the film Leila"*

Sound

In the film, sound expresses the female character's internal feelings even more effectively than the images in some scenes. The first audio technique is using Leila's mental monologues via voiceover in the storytelling,[103] in order to express her inner feelings in different situations; this is done to such an extent that in some scenes the audience predominantly hears Leila's inner voice while others are talking to her, and the dialogues are only vaguely heard. In the film, it seems the audience is hearing the ambient sound through Leila's ears. For example, as Leila thinks deeply and sadly in the scene where the doctor tells her she is infertile, the doctor's voice becomes like an echo in her head, until the ringing office phone pulls her out of her thoughts and we hear the doctor's voice clearly again.

[103] Voiceover is a technique employed in the Mehrjui's feminine films of this period to display the women's internal pain.

Figure 171: In this scene, the sound of the bride's dress beads hitting the stairs, which has been amplified in sound editing, is tortuous for Leila. The sound has lost its realistic function and has been dramatised to convey Leila's internal feelings. It is necessary for the audience to hear the sound of the new bride's dress on the stairs—in a more distinct and even clearly exaggerated form—so they can somehow experience Leila's feelings in the scene. The sound's function in the film becomes the conveyance to the audience of the female protagonist's emotional experience. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

Masochistic Mise-en-scène

A certain pathological masochism can be traced in Leila's character and behaviour. A part of the masochism with which Leila is afflicted is rooted in religion and the concept of suffering for the redemption of sins. While praying Leila says, "What sin have I done that God didn't give me a baby?" Although she belongs to a modern class of society, the fact that she is saying prayers and wearing a chador when running away from home refers to her (and society's) religious and traditional roots.

Figure 172: Leila prepares her husband's remarriage suit, and looks on as he's getting dressed, in the darkened part of the shot. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

Leila's tendency to suffer is similar to that of the characters in some films by Ingmar Bergman, as well as Lars von Trier's characters Selma in *Dancer in the Dark* and Bess in *Breaking the Waves*. A love accompanied by pain, divine trial, and salvation. Leila does not consider her suffering to be the result of a patriarchal society's tyrannical structure, but a spiritual test sent by God. This depiction of women's love in Mehrjui's four films—as a self-destructive and masochistic act for men—is similar to that of the psychological dramas by Bergman and von Trier. Women who tolerate numerous mental and physical torments along the way to their self-sacrifice for the men they love. Women with religious tendencies, in scenes in where we see them praying and talking to God. Women who find salvation in their endless suffering and, like the saints, pass the test of patience and tolerance on their path of suffering, without complaint. All four characters of these four films inflict upon themselves bodily suffering in addition to their mental pain: the fainting of Pari and her suicide attempt; the weakening of Sara's eyes and the pricking of her finger with a needle; Banoo's hunger strike, her sickness and transfer to hospital; and Leila running her hand over the sharpness of the leaves (figure 173). Leila runs her hand over the leaves and branches of the trees, to discharge her suffering and internal anxiety, much like Juliette Binoche in *Three Colours: Blue (1993)* by Krzysztof Kieślowski when she runs her hand over the wall. It is a depiction of a certain type of corporeal masochistic behaviour reflecting her mental masochism in accepting the reality—her agreement to the remarriage of her husband. The suffering of women in the films of this period is usually a religious, saintly, and masochistic action that the women have willingly chosen. The chosen suffering of these women is different from the pain inflicted upon the women by sadistic men in the films of the next period.

Figure 173: "screenshot by author from the film Leila"

One can attribute Leila's innocent submission and passivity to her love: she is so in love with her husband

that, like Abraham, she sacrifices herself for her love.[104] Instead of opposing her mother-in-law's cruel demands, she remains silent like a saint and gives in to fate. There is only innocent silence and passivity in the numerous individual shots of Leila.

Figure 174: Leila on the day of her husband's wedding, preparing the bed for her husband and his new wife. Leila experiences masochistic joy in her predicament and continues the painful game as far as she can endure. The film sanctifies sacrifice and self-destruction. *"screenshot by author from the film Leila"*

Ending

The female protagonists of this period convey endurance and devotion to their husbands throughout the film—a trait shared with female protagonists of the first period; however, unlike earlier films, they exact revenge on their husbands by leaving them, despite their husbands' regret. Three of the protagonists in Mehrjui's films about women in this period (*Banoo*, *Sara*, *and Leila*) ultimately leave their husbands. This period from 1990 to 1997 can be called the intermediate period, as it is a bridge from the first period with passive and marginal women to the brave and strong women in the third period; a bridge between the first period following the Revolution, where women are eliminated or ignored in the background, and the third period featuring strong women in the foreground. As a result, the second period has a mixture of the characteristics of both the first and third period. Comparison of the finale of *Leila* with *Red*, a distinguished film of the next period, shows the difference in the depiction of women in the two periods: Leila smiles with satisfaction in the final shot, while Hasti in the final shot of *Red* has a spiritless, emotionless, and decisive face devoid of any pity or emotion. Compare Leila's innocent look with the demonic look of Hasti. Leila smiles at the camera despite the suffering and pain that has befallen her, but Hasti looks at the corner of the shot with a cold and vengeful gaze. Leila is a woman who forgives in the

[104] Referring to the story of Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son for God.

end; Hasti is a woman who revolts and takes revenge (figures 175-176).

Figures 175-176: "screenshots by author from the films Leila (left figure) and Red (right figure)"

The masochistic and self-sacrificing love of women in the second period, and the men's sadistic love in the third period, are indicative of a generation that defined love in a masochistic or sadistic form because their sexual desire and romantic emotions had been repressed—all of which is correspondingly depicted in the films. In addition, the censorship laws and obstacles to displaying love, accompanied the expression of love in the Iranian post-revolution films in a pathologically sadomasochistic manner. Touching between woman and man was only allowed in films when the man's hand was raised violently to beat the women, as seen in *Hamoon*, *Red,* and *Water and Fire (Abo Atash, Fereydoun Jeyrani, 2001)*. Few romantic films were made in the form of the melodramas of the genre. After the Revolution, society had learnt love in its sadomasochistic form, and depicted the expression of love as self-destruction, or as violence or rape against women. Male lovers in the films were portrayed as sicker (psychoanalytically) and more psychopathic than was commonly seen: one example of this is Mohammad Reza Forootan in *Red* and *Two Women (Do Zan, Tahmineh Milani, 1998)*. The relationship between a woman and man was depicted abnormally in the post-revolution Iranian cinema, both in the first decade and convinced men that women had been eliminated from their life, and in the second and third decades with their sadomasochistic relationships in the form of self-destruction, rape, torture, and betrayal. In this way, hijab aesthetics and censorship in the Iranian cinema replaced normal human relationships with the opposite sex with a certain sadomasochism.

CHAPTER SIX

Women in Close-up: Reformation Era (1998-2005)[105]

The Aesthetics of Violence Against Women

[105] (Mohammad Khatami' presidency and the beginning of political openness in society)

During the third period and with the victory of Mohammad Khatami in the election race for presidency,[106] who talked about the importance of women's rights, women began to slowly play a more significant role in social life.[107] Female students occupied half of the seats in university classes[108] and, moving into the foreground of society, forcefully demanded equal rights and opportunities with men. For the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, two of the female parliament members appeared in their seats with basic hijab instead of chador (the full body-covering veil). In this period, the Center for Women's Studies and Research was established at the University of Tehran and, along with Roshangaran Publications, expanded the work and publication of books about women's rights; books that could not previously be published.[109] In 2001, the discipline of women studies was launched at three universities in Iran, for the first time since the Islamic Revolution.[110] There was growing interest in feministic issues among women and intellectuals, and some became women's rights activists. Although the first changes in the status of women in society, culture, and cinema took place in the previous period, it was in this period that we see significant changes in defending women's rights. Tahmineh Milani referred to herself as a feminist filmmaker, with *Two Women* and her other films about women.[111] In Khatami's government[112], the former revolutionary values were replaced, and some that were previously considered anti-values became prevalent in society and among the public.

The powerful presence of video in the 1980s and the satellite channels and the internet in the 1990s influenced both the media and the religious society of Iran: the accessibility of foreign programmes and films, and the Western world via satellite dishes and the internet, had an unbelievable effect on the taste and social behaviour of the younger post-revolution generation. For example, it was estimated that nearly one million illegal copies of *Titanic (James Cameron, 1997)* circulated in Iranian homes in this period. The expansion of the press inside the country, together with the freedoms provided by Iran's Ministry of Culture, furthered this process and were among the period's significant changes. After two decades of war and isolation from the world, the reformist government brought Iranian society into dialogue with

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[106] On the presidential elections of 1997, see Axworthy, M. (2013). *Revolutionary Iran: a history of the Islamic republic*. Oxford University Press. pp. 324-329.

[107] See Kulai, E. & Abedi, A. (2015). *Tahavol-e Mosharekat-e Siyasi-ye Zanan*, in: Javaheri Fatemeh. (Ed) *Gozaresh Vaziyat-e Ejtemai-ye Zanan dar Iran (1380-1390)* Tehran: Ney. pp. 282-288.

[108] See Atashk, M. & Farasatkhah, M. & Maniee, R. (2015). *Zanan va Amuzesh dar Iran,* in: Javaheri Fatemeh. (Ed) *Gozaresh Vaziyat-e Ejtemai-ye Zanan dar Iran (1380-1390)*. Tehran: Ney. pp. 86-89.

[109] See Sayadi, M. (2015). *Jaygah-e Zanan dar Sanat-e Nashr,* in: Javaheri Fatemeh. (Ed) *Gozaresh Vaziyat-e Ejtemai-ye Zanan dar Iran (1380-1390)*. Tehran: Ney. pp. 343-352.

[110] In the next government, this discipline was renamed Family Studies and Women's Rights in Islam, because they believed it was "seriously in contradiction to Islam".

[111] On Tahmineh Milani's melodramas, See Langford, M. (2010). Practical melodrama: from recognition to action in Tahmineh Milani's Fereshteh trilogy. *Screen*, Volume 51, Issue 4, pp. 341–364.

[112] See Abrahamian, E (2008). *A History of Modern Iran*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 186-191.

other countries, civilisations, and people. Following Iranian president Khatami introduced his "Dialogue Among Civilizations" theory to the United Nations, in response to which the United Nations proclaimed 2001 the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.

After the reformist government came into power—with mottos defending women's rights and their activities in society—women's social activities became valuable after nearly two decades of absence[113], the manifestation of which could clearly be seen in the characterisation and presence of women in this period's films, and referred to as reformist period cinema. Nearing the 2000s, women are the theme of most films and, in comparing this period's films with the masculinist atmosphere of the 1980s Iranian cinema, the changes in the society become more noticeable. Influenced by political and social change, the films with themes were related to women were welcomed by the audience and in the box office. The three films *Red*, *Hemlock* (Shokaran, Behrouz Afkhami, 2000), and *Killing Mad Dogs*—the bestselling films in 1999, 2000, and 2001 respectively—were about women and defending women's rights. The women's presence behind and in front of the camera clearly became more vivid, and women as the films' protagonists answered the audience's suppressed need to see women, especially beautiful ones, on the silver screen. The female protagonists in this period are not as religious as in the first period, and care about their beauty and appearance. Wearing makeup provides them with self-confidence outside the house and in society; they want to be seen, contrary to the 1980s when they hid themselves in various hijabs. The importance the young generation puts on appearance and materialism shows that they no longer believe much in the Islamic regime's motto: "Superficial beauty of the face is nothing. Show a beautiful nature."

The spread of modern technologies, expansion of women's rights issues in society, the ever-increasing exit of women from the house and their entrance to the labour market, and the women overtaking men in university: all resulted in societal change that also necessitated changes in the traditional family structure. Women's issues became the focal point in many film plots, depicting the impact of new freedoms in society and cultural arenas. This freedom is also seen in the appearance, clothes, and makeup of the actresses. The government removed some of the censorship and cumbersome rules in the production of films, and this relative freedom in cultural works provided possibilities for filmmakers to depict themes—such as runaway girls, prostitutes, and rape—that could not previously be represented and screened. Additionally, in the films of this period the woman's job changed, from that of the more traditional housekeeping situation seen in the first decade, to employment outside the home.

[113] On women and change in gender politics see Tazmini, G. (2009). *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform.* London and New York: I.B.Tauris. pp. 66-71.

The scientific, cultural, and political growth of women in society had its effect on the characterisation of women in film. This difference—between the portrayal of women in films before and during this period—is clearly visible in the research of Masood Zandi.

Table 2: The difference between women in films before and during the third period

Traditional woman before 1997	**Modern woman after 1997**
Women have traditional skills, such as knitting and sewing.	Women have modern skills, such as driving, playing music, and computer literacy.
Women rarely use cultural products (media, etc.)	Women use cultural products more often.
Women usually appear in films in traditional and simple clothes.	Women usually appear in films in modern and chic clothes.
Few women have university education.	More women have university education.
The time of women's presence in films is short.	The time of women's presence in films is long.
Women spend most of their presence in films at home.	Women spend a most of their presence in films outside the home.
Women are mainly housewives.	Women mainly have jobs outside the home.
To solve their personal and family problems, women usually refer to the relatives and family.	To solve their personal and family problems, women usually refer to law.
Woman have superstitious and traditional beliefs.	Woman don't have superstitious beliefs.
Women are mostly from the lower social classes.	Women are mostly from the higher social classes.
Woman are from an older age group.	Woman are from a younger, more attractive, age group.
Women are passive in films.	Women are active in films.
Women eat most meals at home. (They cook.)	Women eat most meals in restaurants.
This is in harmony with the depiction of the traditional woman.	**This is in harmony with the depiction of the modern woman.**

(Zandi, 2003, pp. 126-127)

Source: Masoud Zandi, 2003

In this period, filmmakers tell their film's story in public places outside the home. The location of most films is the streets and public spaces, contrary to the first period films that were usually in the villages and the second period films inside the home. After two decades of an imposed stay at home, women want to work outside the house alongside men, and play their role in all economic, social, and political activities. The woman in the story does not want to play the role of the self-sacrificing and devoted mother; she believes in herself and her capabilities, and demands to be respected by society as a woman, not just as a wife or a mother. The films of this period highlight the feminine aspects of life. In *The Last Supper (Sham-e Akhar*, *Fereydoun Jeyrani, 2002)*, actress Katayoun Riahi plays a woman who frees herself from all traditional and imposed restraints of society and answers her sexual desire. This was different role from her role as a 1980s character a decade earlier, when she had displayed a cliché of the passive and self-sacrificing woman in her first film *Payizan (Rasoul Sadrameli, 1987)*. In *The Last Supper*, she plays a modern and social woman who disregards expectation and responds positively to an unconventional love that is forbidden in the eye of traditional Iranian society. She had divorced her traditional and reactionary husband and, in an iconoclastic act, she marries her 24-year-old young student, leading to a dramatic rivalry with her own daughter who loved the same boy, ignoring her maternal self-denial, and driving her daughter to insanity. Contrary to the female characters of the 1980s, family is no longer her priority and has been replaced by working and activity in society. Similarly, the female lead of *Unruled Paper (Kaghaze Bikhat, 2002)* does not confine herself to her children and husband, leaving them and going to her mother's house to pursue her dream of becoming a writer. Another woman who does not keep silent against the greed of others (unlike the female protagonist in *Leila*) is Niki Karimi's character in the hospital scene in *Two Women,* who shouts despite her husband's effort to silence her according to the traditional teachings. Female protagonists of this period are not afraid of crossing society's red lines, turning against traditions and customs, even if their rebellion and courage may result in their death. Cinematic form and language matches the iconoclasm and influence of the women's revolt and defiance, and contravenes the fixed Islamicate mise-en-scène of the 1980s that refrained from close-up shots of women. In the film *Red* we witness iconoclastic and daring decoupage and mise-en-scène—in addition to innovations in the female protagonist's characterisation and the way actress Hedieh Tehrani plays her—to the extent that the film ends with the camera's moving to an extreme close-up of the woman's face and eyes, at a scale that was rare in films before this period. In contrast to the previous period when the camera was usually stable on a tripod, here it's moved by hand to mirror the agitation, distress, and instability of women in society.

The release of such films as *The Girl in the Sneakers (Dokhtari ba Kafshhaye Katani, 1998)*, *Sweet*

Agony, *Two Women*, and *Red*—all made in 1998—was unimaginable a few years earlier. *The Girl in the Sneakers* is the story of a teenager girl who has a boyfriend (the first time in the Iranian cinema that the relationship between a girlfriend and boyfriend was depicted and discussed explicitly), and runs away from home because of her family's disapproval. The film broke many taboos, one after another. The topic of runaway girls, exposure to rape, a relationship with the opposite sex: all were red lines in Iranian cinema. Sending the girl to the Iran's Legal Medicine Organization to ascertain her virginity after she and her boyfriend were arrested in a park (because extramarital relationship is illegal in Iran), and inserting a shot of the Legal Medicine sign, were new for the Iranian audience. Such extratextual issues—the things familiar in daily life—were the main attraction of the film for the audience, but had rarely been shown on the cinema screen after the Revolution. The film's iconoclasm was in depicting things that the Iranian audience had been deprived of seeing due to the post-revolution Islamication of the cinema.

The violence imposed on women in society by the discourse of power[114] left its trace, whether directly or indirectly, in this period's films: from domestic violence to the violence imposed on them through religion, law, customs, and traditions. The following table shows some distinguished films of this period and their depiction of the violence exerted on women.

Table 3: The violence against women in the films of third period

Film Title	**Year**	**The Violence Used Against Women in the Film**
Red	1998	Physical violence, deprivation of divorce rights, locked up at home, job deprivation
Two Women	1998	Locked up at home, deprivation of continuing studies, forced marriage, deprivation of child custody, deprivation of divorce rights
The Apple	1998	Locked up at home by father
The Circle	2000	Deprivation of the right to get a room in a hotel and coach ticket, street harassment
Under the Skin of the City	2000	Domestic violence, forced prostitution
Bride of Fire	2000	Forced marriage, locked up at home
Bemani	2001	Physical violence, forced marriage, deprivation of continuing studies
Killing Mad Dogs	2001	Rape and physical violence

[114] See Azazi, S. (2001). *Khoshunat-e Khanevadegi, Zanan-e Kotakkhordeh*. Tehran: Sali.

Water and Fire	2001	Physical violence
Boutique	2003	Physical violence, rape
The Fifth Reaction	2003	Deprivation of child custody
Fireworks Wednesday	2004	Physical violence
Offside	2005	Deprivation of the right to go to the football stadium
Friday Evening	2006	Rape

Source: The Author

In *Two Women*, a woman named Fereshteh was the victim of violence by her father, husband, and a stranger. Her husband didn't allow her to continue her studies, locked her up at home, and even deprived her from having books or telephone. The two adolescent girls in *The Apple* had been jailed at home by their father for 11 years and had never seen the outside world— a father who believed, according to an old tradition, that the sunlight mustn't see the girls' faces. The girl in *Bride of Fire (Aruse Atash, Khosro Sinai, 2000)* must, against her will, marry her cousin according to the rules of her traditional tribe in the south of Iran. The woman in *Red* was beaten, and the court didn't allow her to divorce.; the man, backed by the law, forced the woman to quit her job. The nine-year-old girl in *The Day I Became a Woman* was banned by her grandmother from playing with the boys because she had reached the age of puberty. In the second episode of the same film, the man banned his wife from riding a bicycle. In *Boutique*, Golshifteh Farahani's character had run away from her father and home, but and in the end she was sexually abused by the man with whom she had taken refuge. The character Masoomeh in *Under the Skin of the City (Zir-e Pust-e Shahr, Rakhshan Banietemad, 2000)* ran away from home due to her brother's unreasonable violence, and gave in to prostitution. Mozhdeh Shamsai plays a woman who helped attain her husband's freedom, and was raped and beaten by his creditors, in *Killing Mad Dogs*. In *Bemani (Dariush Mehrjui, 2001)*, a carpet weaver named Madineh is beheaded by her brother because she had been seen with a soldier who was simply ordering a carpet from her. Another protagonist of the film, Nasim, sets herself on fire because her father does not allow her to continue studying; and the girl in the third episode is forced by her father to marry a rich man her father's age. In *The Circle (2000)*[115] new mother Solmaz Gholami is taunted by her husband's family because she had given birth to a girl; in the end, she is behind bars together with other female characters in the film.[116]

[115] On *The Circle*'s review, see Dönmez-Colin, G. (2004). *Women, Islam and Cinema.* London: Reaktion Books. pp. 158-162.
[116] *The Circle* is one of the noteworthy films of this period that, despite winning the Golden Lion trophy at theVenice Film

Fereshteh's dialogue in *Two Women* was significant in understanding the situation of the Iranian woman against the law and her husband. The court did not consider her reasons for divorce compelling, reasons that were the problem for many Iranian women: "He is suspicious. He hurts me. He teases me. He disrespects my wisdom. He locks me up. This man destroys my human identity. He wants to turn me into a woman I'm not. Your Honour! How is that you think a man who doesn't provide for me is bad, but a man who insults my understanding, who destroys my human identity, is not? I don't expect much. I just want my opinion about what I want to wear, what to eat, where to go, who talk to, to be respected as a human, as a wife, as a partner in life." The judge, as the representative of law, interrupts and tells her not to take the court's time. The films of this period challenged the patriarchal laws of the country against women.[117]

Scopophilia and Gheirat [Sexual Honour and Jealousy]

Gheirat is a concept in Islamic terminology referring to the feeling and belief in the family's men that they must keep away their *namus* (female members of a family, i.e. wife, daughter, mother, sister) from the look of other men; that they must not allow non-intimate men (non-mahram) to look at them with lust and pleasure; and they must protect their namus against the gaze, sexual attention, and leering of non-intimate men. Having this characteristic is deemed a positive ethical attribute in Iranian society. Gheirat acts like a barrier against scopophilia and confronts the male gaze.

In this period and pursuant to the changes in Iran, especially in the metropolises, women enter society

Festival, was never allowed to be screened in Iran.

[117] Samples of legal violence against women in Iran:

- According to the Constitution, the husband can prevent his wife from doing a job that is in contradiction with the familial expediency or the honour of him or the wife.
- According to the civil law, man can divorce his wife at any time, but the woman doesn't have the right to divorce unless in the exceptional cases mentioned in the law, such as the untreatable and dangerous disease of the man or proof of the man's insanity.
- According to law, after divorce the mother only has custody of the child for the two years following their birth. After this time, custody of the child is given to the father. In the case that the woman remarries, the nursing baby is taken away from her and given to the father by law.
- According to law, Iranian married women must obey their husband, as it is mandatory by law. In a general sense, obedience means the married woman must live in the house and city the husband chooses, and must not leave her residence except with the husband's permission.
- Married women cannot leave the country without their husband's permission and consent.

See Kar, M. (2008). *A Research About Violence Against Women in Iran*. Tehran: Roshangaran and Women.

and public spaces outside the home; but some traditional and Gheirati men are displeased with this and do their best to confine women to their houses. In *Red* and *Two Women*, the Gheirati men try to prevent women from going out of the house (to university or work), in order to minimise the chance of her being seen by non-intimate men. Both films are critical of the conditions imposed by men on women: the sadistic male and Gheirati characters are punished by their deaths for the hijab and restraints they want to impose on women.

The concept of gheirat does not refer only to the gaze and voyeurism, it also includes the relationship between namus and the non-intimate men. Honour killings still happen in Iranian society, especially in the more traditional ethnic groups. The murder that occurs in *Bemani*, the killing of a sister by her brother in *Bride of Fire*, the killing of a girl by her father and brother in *The Paternal House (Khane Pedari, Kianoosh Ayyari, 2012)*, and the strangulation of a sister in *Sheeple (Maghzhaye Kochake Zangzadeh, Houman Seyyedi, 2018)*: there are only a few examples of films with the destructive concept of Gheirat in the men of the family. Under such conditions, the woman pays for her exit from the rules of hijab, and the limits defined by the patriarchal laws, with her death. In this period (and after *Sara* and *Leila*), Dariush Mehrjui chose the reactionary nature of the patriarchal society and women's self-immolation as the theme of his film *Bemani*, and spoke more explicitly and directly than with his previous films about the cruelty against women. With its documentary structure, *Bemani* depicts men's gheirat, and the exploitation and self-immolation of women in Ilam.[118] Mehrjui addressed the reason for making this film and his approach in its form by stating: "I asked myself what art meant. You try hard to create beautiful and artistic scenes and pay much attention to the form of the work. I told myself to do something this time that might be useful. You made so many artistic films. What for? What happened? That's enough! Do something for the poor people" (Haghighi, 2013, p. 291). However, *Bemani* was never screened in Ilam: the first time the trailer of the film was shown on TV, the director received threatening calls that he would be killed if the film was screened in Ilam. Mehrjui further addresses the film's form and aesthetics:

> I wanted the film to be simple, natural, and documental. Therefore, I was careful not to use any professional cast in my film. If I did, the documental feeling of the film would be gone. Besides, my real goal was to testify and present proof of the pain and suffering that exists in a part of this country, but many are not aware of. I didn't care to wrap the testimony is aesthetics or art or present it in a complicated vague form with allegories. I wanted to reveal the nature of the condition and the tension there, and to depict it in an

[118] A western province in Iran with a high rate of female self-immolation.

effective way. In other words, I wanted to expose the violence there (ibid., p. 296).

This form was repeated in other important fiction films about women in this period, in which the filmmakers did not limit themselves to talking about the restraints imposed on women in a metaphorical or allegorical form. Now they explicitly and directly criticised women's condition in society, in the same way Mehrjui discusses *Bemani*. The unequivocal violence of the films' content also spread to the films' forms. Choices—such as the aesthetics of documentary, the hand-held camera, the use of non-actors, natural lighting, reportage and the distancing structure—had transferred the violence against women in society to the texture of the shots, the form, and format of the films. The atmosphere of such films is very dim and dark, affected by the violence of the stories and the hidden and brutal sexuality of the city, and many scenes happen in the darkness of night. The use of low-key lighting and the dominance of darkness over light in *Red*, *The Circle*, and *Bemani*, convey fear, suffering, hardship, poverty, suspicion, and violence to the audience. There was no room for the poetic cinema of the previous period, such as *The Pear Tree*, as film became increasingly critical with documentary realism.

Rape and Rape-Revenge

Rape

In films of the early 1990s, such as *Hamoon* and *Sara*, we see respected women of the 1980s (the devoted mother and forgiving wife) accused by their husbands of cheating and disloyalty; by the 2000s, women in film were raped and men disfigured their beauty and faces; and in the 2010s we see acid thrown on their faces. Just like the title of the book *From Reverence to Rape* by Molly Haskell[119], the women move along a path from reverence to rape. According to research by the Iranian Ministry of the Interior, between 1996 and 2002 there was an average occurrence of 43 sexual offences per 1,000 people. Of the 547 billion searches in Google and Yahoo from Iran in 2003, 247 billion of them (nearly 40%) were seeking sexual information (Farasatkhah, 2014, p. 195). Taking these statistics into account, we start to understand the reason for the depiction of sexual violence in numerous films in Iran at this time. The repressed sexual desire of Iranian society displayed itself in the form of rape and violence against women, a reality that was also shown in the films. A tendency to hide society's problems is one of the predicaments of Iranian society. In the case of rape, Iranian women usually do not go to court or complain in an effort to preserve

[119] Haskell, M. (1987) *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. University of Chicago Press; Second edition.

their dignity and for fear of others' judgement; they keep silent and don't even inform their family members and close friends, because it is usually the woman who will be accused of unchastity. The influence of such notions is discernible in Iranian cinema, too. Until the 2000s, Iranian cinema hid rape and there was no trace of it in film; in the 2000s, when the atmosphere of the society is becoming relatively open, some films begin to address the issue. Even in these films, however, the raped women usually keep silent and do not lodge a complaint, as seen in *Killing Mad Dogs*, *Hush! Girls Don't Scream (His! Dokhtarha Faryad Nemizanand, Pouran Derakhshandeh, 2013)*, and *The Salesman (Forushandeh, Asghar Farhadi, 2016)*. We see women who face various mental and spiritual crises after their rape. The bruised, wounded, and deformed faces of women who had been the victim of prejudice, rape, and violence were repeated in close-up shots in the films of this period. Society, according to its Islamic ideology, did not tolerate a woman's beauty being seen by a non-mahram man in public, and wanted it to be hidden, obscured under hijab, or deformed. There were abundant examples in Iranian cinema: the bruised face of Hedieh Tehrani in *Red*; the bloodied face of Niki Karimi in *The Bride*; the wounded eyebrow and bandaged head of Taraneh Alidoosti in *The Salesman*; the bruised lip, eye, and cheek of Mozhdeh Shamsai in *Killing Mad Dogs*; the wounded lip of Sahar Dolatshahi in *Mastaneh*; and Maryam Palizban's face following an acid attack in *Lantouri (Reza Dormishian, 2016)*. In 2014, several women in Esfahan, one of the religious cities in Iran were attacked by men throwing acid—it was said that the attacks had been done to fight improper hijab in society (Rafizadeh, 2014). A society that had refrained from showing women's beauty on the screen in the 1980s—or it would be disfigured by makeup, big and ugly glasses, and lighting—indicated that a religious and traditional Iran did not tolerate the depiction of women's beauty either in life or on the screen, and wanted it to be hidden, under hijab, or disfigured.

Mastaneh

Killing Mad Dogs

The Salesman

Figures 177-179: Islamicate filming grammar and visual conventions did not allow the depiction of the rape, and it was the blemished faces and wounded spirit of the women in the following sequence that showed what had happened to them. *"screenshots by author from the films Mastaneh, Killing Mad Dogs and The Salesman"*

In post-revolution cinema, the sexual desire of men was depicted in its most sadistic and brutal manner in the form of violence against women: by beating in *Red*, with a knife in *Two Women*, and by raping in *Killing Mad Dogs*, *The Salesman*, *Mastaneh*, and *I Am a Mother (Man Madar Hastam, Fereydoun Jeyrani,2012)*. After the beginning of the 1990s, with *The Bride* and films that followed, men fought their fear of castration with sadistic and sexual violence, and when they couldn't satiate their sexual desire with the woman they wanted, they would beat or rape her. The stalker in *Two Women* and *Lantouri* does not accept the woman's negative answer to marriage and attempts to compensate for this feeling by successfully and (in the latter film) unsuccessfully throwing acid at her.

Rape-Revenge

In this period, the superstars of the early and mid-1990s Niki Karimi and Leila Hatami do not depict the masochistic aspects of former films, and seek revenge upon men, too. Niki Karimi has a different presence in *The Ransomer (Bajkhor, Farzad Motamen, 2004)* with her familiar role. She plays a femme fatale who has an affair with a man named Tofiq and gets pregnant, but Tofiq causes her baby's miscarriage, and she can't have a baby again. She then seduces another man, Esi, to help her kill Tofiq and take his money. In the fight between the two men, the woman takes her revenge by stabbing Tofiq to death. The naivety and innocence of Karimi's face in her previous films have changed—with her makeup, long sexy fingernails, high heels, and the way she smokes—and have been replaced with seduction.

Figure 180: The Ransomer: The man's POV from the woman's entrance in high heels. A fetishistic shot from one of the few femme fatales in Iranian cinema. *"screenshot by author from the film The Ransomer"*

In contrast to the previous period, Leila Hatami —known for her role of the innocent and self-destructive woman in *Leila*—also rebels in her films of this period and seeks revenge against men in the most violent ways. She tries to take revenge on her boss for sexual exploitation, and the film begins with her shooting at the man's genitals. The subtle violence in the narrative of this period's films created its own cinematic language and mise-en-scène.

Sexuality of Space in the Films of This Period

A hidden erotism in the layers of Tehran[120] can also be seen in the films of this period: a presence in chic urban spaces such as cafés, the metro, malls, boutiques, and modern shopping centres, was enough to

[120] See Zareh, V. N. (2012) *An (Almost) All American City: The Vision and Legacy of the Tehran Comprehensive Plan*. in *Bharne, V. The Emerging Asian City: Concomitant Urbanities & Urbanisms*. London: Routledge. P. 144.

form a sexual attraction between the unfamiliar male and female characters of the film. The sexual desire between the woman and man in *Boutique*, one of the most important films of this period, was displayed by travelling around on the metro[121], in the boutiques and cafés, and on the streets of the city, in contradiction to the city's more traditional hangouts and experiences. In the absence of a location to satiate the sexual desires of two unrelated persons in a house, urban places assumed an erotic function wherein the young woman and man display their sexual desires (figures 181-183).

Figures 181-183: "screenshots by author from the film Boutique"

Sexuality and Car

Cars are a place for the young people of Iran to get a date and chat and flirt (figure 44). *The Bride* was one of the first films in which the car served an erotic function (figure 184). Additionally, as the brothels were closed down after the Revolution, cars also became tools by which men found prostitutes, usually by the streets and highways at night. In the early 2000s, the presence of prostitutes increased on the cinema screens and on Tehran's streets and highways. From 1999 to 2001, these women were seen in films such as *Water and Fire*, *Under the Moonlight (Zire Nure Mah, Reza Mirkarimi, 2000)*, *Ten*, *Hemlock*, *Under the Skin of the City*, *The Circle*, and others. Until this time, the regime had tried to hide prostitution in Iran and banned its appearance in the media. Alongside the rebellious women or protesting students, they replaced the modest female characters of the 1980s.

[121] The Tehran Metro was launched in this period in 1998.

Figure 184: "screenshot by author from the film The Bride"

Islamic Femme Fatale

Hedieh Tehrani is without a doubt the most important and key actress of the time, displaying the main features of the woman as depicted in this period. A woman with the features of the femme fatales in the film noir; the revengeful seducer woman. In contrast to the actresses of the previous decade (even Niki Karimi, the most important actress in the early 1990s), Hedieh Tehrani controlled her emotions and the audience could not see in her eyes what she was thinking. Even in the finale of *Red* when she is staring ahead after killing her husband, it is not clear if she is sad or bewildered, angry or happy, and it is this controlled manner of conveying emotions that gave her the mysterious characteristics of femme fatales. She didn't shout "Help! Help!" like the women of pre-revolution FilmFarsi films, and she wasn't desperate and pathetic, weeping and moaning, like those in the 1980s films. She didn't show her emotions, but displayed her forte, prowess, and authority. She wanted it to be her, not the male characters, who advanced the film's narrative. She was the first actress to gain the title of the most expensive star of the post-revolution cinema, and overtook the male stars. Her authority excited the new generation of young women in the Khatami era, and she represented their dreams in film; an independent, assertive, powerful woman who decides her own life, stands up to the laws against women, and not only does she not repress her sexual desires, she responds to her sex drive. She broke a cliché image of women by driving SUVs in her portrayals, lending her more authority due to both their height and because such cars were considered masculine. In *The Party (Saman Moghadam, 2001)*, when she says "I do" to her marriage vows, she didn't stare around or off-screen, or look down with shyness, like the women in the previous periods. Instead, she looked directly and firmly into the lens to give her answer. With her

performance and her penetrating look, she ridiculed the laws and traditions that considered chastity, shyness, and modesty to be the appropriate values for women. Even when she wore chador in some moments in *Hemlock* and *The Party*, she depicted herself in contradiction to the concepts associated with chador and its tight hijab. In her black chador, she looked seductive, castrating, and formidable to men. The lighting of her face in these films also added to her cinematic femme fatale nature. It is similar to the lighting at the end of *Red*, when half her face was in darkness and the spark in her eyes gave her a deadly femme castratrice look, inviting the female audience to identify with her. Her clothes in the films—the way she knotted her headscarf in the back in *Unruled Paper*, her jeans and shoes in *Red*—emphasized the difference in her attire from that of the traditional women. In most films, her image was recorded while she was smoking, an act disapproved for chaste women by the traditional society of Iran. Contrary to the women of the previous decades, when even the most intellectual such as Mahshid, Sara, and Leila, resorted to prayer when faced with problems, she didn't have religious inclinations, and the actress conducted herself in a pragmatic way. We usually saw her wearing sunglasses, which traditional women rarely used in those years, intensifying her mysteriousness and authority because they prevented her eyes from being seen. She didn't listen to Iranian or traditional music, preferring instead the music of the West. She tried to obscure the traditional borders between Iranian and western women, and to feel the taste of freedom.

Red (1998)

The female protagonist Hasti has a husband who is suspicious and beats her continually. Hasti goes to the court to request a divorce, but the court does not approve because her husband does not agree with divorce. Upon the judge's request, and in order to return calm to the household, Hasti decides to quit her job. Unfortunately, this does not solve their problems. Her husband Nasser does not even tolerate seeing her talking on the phone or shopping in the street, and beats her for this. Hasti cannot go on any longer and again requests divorce from court. Nasser and his sister thrash her to force signing a confession letter stating that she has cheated on her husband and had an affair with another man. Hasti succeeds in escaping and her husband, wanted by the police, runs away. Nasser returns on a rainy night. Hasti stabs him and throws him down the stairs. Nasser dies.

The narrative structure of the film follows the same three acts of the rape-revenge genre:

- Act I: The female character is violently tortured by her husband and left for dead.
- Act II: The character survives and rehabilitates herself.
- Act III: The character takes revenge and kills her husband.

As Barbara Creed points out, "the female spectator may feel empowerment from identifying with the castrating heroine of the rape-revenge film when the latter takes revenge on the male rapist" (Creed, 1993, p. 155). Creed adds, "identifactory processes are extremely fluid and allow the spectator to switch identification between victim and monster depending on the power of various filmic codes (subjective camera, close-up images, music) designed to encourage certain modes of identification above others" (ibid., p. 155). *Red* associates the castrating/castrated woman with the state of oppressed women in patriarchal society of Iran. A patriarchal culture, in which the modest woman is represented as the castrated character and the rebel woman is represented as a castrator who terrifies Iranian men with the fear of castration. The film represents this notion in its mise-en-scène.

Hasti's dialogues to the judge, with a face bruised and beaten by her husband, depicted the situation of many Iranian women: "Your Honour! You asked me to quit my job and I did. Then he began finding faults for no reason. Why you go out of home? Why you go shopping? Why you get changed when you go out? Why you laugh in the car? Why you talk long on the phone? Who do you talk to? Why do you go to the parties? Why? Why? Why you walk? Why you breathe?" The camera was placed in front of the woman in place of the judge, and this mise-en-scène invited the audience, now in the judge's place, to judge alongside the judge (figure 185). Her husband was representative of the viewpoint and notions of many Iranian men about women. What he told the judge in court was what is in the heart of many gheirati Iranian men: "Look Your Honour! When a man buys everything for the house, why this woman leaves house? Your Honour! I don't want my wife to go out without my permission. I'd like to buy her dress, shoes, and dishes myself. Your Honour! I am an honourable man. I don't want my wife to be chic. I don't want my wife to wear makeup and go shopping. I don't want my wife to chat with stranger men. She likes to stroll in the streets, but I don't like it. Your Honour! I say woman must be the way her man likes. I say she must wear clothes her husband likes. I'll thrash her again, Your Honour! The woman who chats away with stranger men deserves to be thrashed."

Figure 185: *"screenshot by author from the film Red"*

Reportage Approach in Mise-en-scène

Red was based on the true story of a woman in the town of Sarab. The film employs mise-en-scène that lend it the reportage style of documentaries and news footage. The film assumes a reportage and social approach to extend the problems of the female protagonist to all Iranian women. The director (who had been a journalist for a long time) presents a sequence after the wife's torture by the husband and the court's disagreement with divorce, which is like that of the news footage, showing newspapers in the printing house with headlines criticizing the current laws.

Figure 186: Newspaper headline: LAW MUST PROTECT DEFENCELESS WOMEN *"screenshot by author from the film Red"*

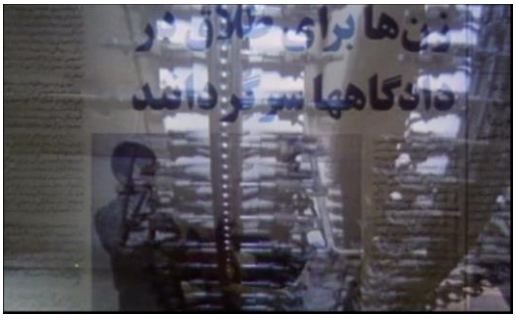

Figure 187: Newspaper headline: WOMEN IN COURT AT A LOSS FOR DIVORCE *"screenshot by author from the film Red"*

Feminine Body

In the films of the 1980s, the female characters were stationary, often either sitting down or standing still; avoiding acts such as running that could expose the outlines of their figures or sexually attract part of their bodies. It was precisely for this reason that when Tehrani climbs the barrier in the middle of the streets in *Red*, the eyes of the Iranian audience were glued to the screen, and with such simple movements her body was transformed into an objectified and sexualized figure (figure 188). For decades, they had grown accustomed to seeing women in Iranian movies in still poses; now, they could find sexual meaning in the simple movements of her body, and especially due to her attire of jeans without chador and coveralls (the customary costume of Iranian women in movies until this time). The movie's female character breaks taboos in the ruling trends of women's representation in cinema by climbing up the fences and passes, behavior that was considered "manly" in Iran's society.

Figure 188: "screenshot by author from the film Red"

The decoupage of *Red* placed emphasis on the feminine body of the female protagonist, as much as the monitoring laws permitted. Her clothing, walking barefoot in the street, climbing the fence, and showing her toes while driving—all showed another type of depiction to the eager audience. Although the woman's braking at the crossroads is an insignificant act in the story, the decoupage is done in such a way that the camera provides a fetishistic close-up of the woman's feet to the male audience. As if the braking scene has been deliberately included in the film so the audience can see her feet, toes, and toenails

(figure 189).

Figure 189: "screenshot by author from the film Red"

Lighting and Framing: Subjective Camera

The lighting on Tehrani's face, her gaze, and the size of the shots in the film gave her a deadly femme castratrice look. The lighting on her face, half in darkness and half in light, had given her a dual satanic/angelic look. This is a woman who, unlike her predecessors, thought only of revenge instead of forgiveness and devotion (figures 190-191). By the end of the film, the woman has gradually transformed from a castrated character into a castrator and killer; from a state of being completely controlled and castrated to that of a *deadly femme* castratrice. In her final encounter with her sadistic husband, the knife has simultaneously assumed both a sexual and castrating meaning in the story of the female protagonist (figures 192-195). Tehrani did not look like the submissive and obedient housewives of the 1980s; in her films during this period, she instead performed solid, strong female characters who forcefully demanded their rights in society. In *Red,* for instance, her character takes matters into her own hands when the law isn't on her side against her lunatic husband, by killing him with a kitchen knife; a device that a decade earlier would have been shown in a movie scene as the simple cooking tool of an obedient housewife. This act could be seen to symbolically demonstrate the need for justice and revenge following 20 years of patriarchy, both on the silver screen and in society.

Figures 190-191: "screenshots by author from the film Red"

Figures 192-195: "screenshots by author from the film Red"

Figure 196: The low-angle camera position in this scene and her cold look downwards —after killing her husband with a kitchen knife and throwing him down the stairs—intensifies her character's power. *"screenshot by author from the film Red"*

In her great study of the horror film, Barbara Creed points out that "a high level of replication, in terms of narrative structure and mise-en-scène is an important feature of slasher film. It is also marked by the recurrent use of the point of view or subjective shot taken from the perspective of the killer" (Creed, 1993, pp. 124-125). As Roger Ebert explains, "use of the subjective camera encourages the spectator to identify with the viewpoint of the killer" (Ebert, 1981, p. 56). The narrative structure of the final sequence of *Red* is from the point of view of the woman (figures 197-199). In this scene, the camera approaches the man (victim) from the woman's viewpoint. The spectator looks upon the castration scene from the point of the view of the woman as castrator (killer).

Figures 197-199: "screenshots by author from the film Red"

Figure 200: Tehrani, with a penetrating gaze and demonic spark in her eyes, staring at the camera lens in an extreme close-up, in the cinema that until a decade earlier had seldom shown even the close-up of women. *"screenshot by author from the film Red"*

In two decades, we see the shift from the absence of women in long-shot of the Islamicate Iranian cinema to their presence in extreme close-up. This furthered the significance of *Red* in the depiction of women in the history of the Iranian cinema. Creed argues that, "the feminine imagination is seen as essentially non-violent, peaceful, unaggressive. This is the very argument that patriarchal ideology has used for the past 2000 years to control women" (Creed, 1993, p. 156). *Red*, and other rape-revenge films that followed, have produced major progress in combat against this patriarchal notion of women.

Decrease in the Portrayal of Powerful Women, Increase in the Portrayal of Exhibitionist Women

Hedieh Tehrani's image is the epitome of the woman in this period. At the beginning of this period, she displays her authority in *Soltan*, and takes revenge on her sadistic husband in *Red*; by the end of the period, she gives in to her husband in *Fireworks Wednesday (Chaharshanbe Suri, Asghar Farhadi, 2006)*, is beaten in the street by her disloyal husband in front of passersby, sobs in a key scene in the bathroom,

and in a symbolic and metaphoric way she loses her years-long authority in the cinema of this period. The change in her character from *Red* to the woman in *Fireworks Wednesday* indicates how short-lived was this time of changes and reforms in the structure of the regime and system, and consequently in the society. Tehrani, who is introduced as a seductive and daring femme fatale in *Hemlock*, and even responding to her sexual desire by inviting a non-intimate man to her house for sex (something rare and unprecedented until this time in the post-revolution cinema), had crosses the ethical borders of a fanatical religious society and pays for her audaciousness with her death at the end of the film. The woman must die and be repressed so the society can attain calm and the masculinity of men be proven.

Tehrani's surrender in *Fireworks Wednesday*, in this last year of Khatami's office, was the end of an era in the depiction and presence of women in Iranian cinema. Khatami's government—which had come into office with promises of supporting and returning the rights of women and youth, providing social freedoms, a freedom of the press and journalists, and an open society—gradually surrendered to the overpowering radical forces. Newspapers were banned extensively, and many journalists were imprisoned. The Minister of Culture was impeached by parliament for issuing the permit to make films such as *Red*, and was forced to resign. In the end, the government was compelled to back down on many of the issues and promises made about the social freedoms of women and youth, and the women's equal rights with men remained unfulfilled. The presence of Hedieh Tehrani as the female superstar of this period gave way to the exhibitionist women of the tawdry mainstream comedies. The path for this icon of women in the reform cinema was parallel to that of the society and reforms, and both ultimately ended (to a great extent) in defeat.

Only a few traces of the daring and powerful Iranian women remained following Khatami's office. In response to the post-reformism and post-Khatami disappointment—caused by the unfulfillment of most of the Reformist promises and failure to defend the rights of repressed people such as women and youth—cinema turned to shoddy comedies larded with sexual dialogues and elements. The presence of exhibitionist women became so common again that this period can be called the era of the hidden sex pandemic! The actresses Mahnaz Afshar, Sahar Ghoreyshi, Elnaz Shakerdoost, Leila Otadi, Bahareh Rahnama represented the exhibitionist woman as the superstars of the new period, and their photos with licentious stares in close-up and extreme close-up shots dominated cinema halls all over Iran. Behnoosh Bakhtiari, as an example of the women in this period, was as busy as the FilmFarsi stars had been. She appeared in five, six, and seven films in 2008, 2009, and 2010 respectively. The mainstream films of the 2010s were indebted and heir to the FilmFarsi films from before the Revolution. Coffeeshops have replaced bars, and the erotic dance of women in bars has been replaced by verbal eroticism and the male

gaze, but they copy the same nature and narrative structure of FilmFarsi films. There are the pauses in the narrative's development to achieve sexual pleasure, where the male audience takes the place of the male protagonist, with his POV shot, to ogle at the exhibitionist woman from their own viewpoint. *The Willow Tree (Bide Majnun, Majid Majidi, 2005)* is about the voyeuristic male gaze and the exhibitionist woman, and in the finale the voyeur pays for his voyeurism according to the religious references in the film. The film is the story of an unsighted man who gains his vision after surgery, but instead of paying attention to his own wife, he continually goes in front of a music institute to leer at a beautiful young woman and to satiate his repressed sexual desire. In the end, he pays for his leering sin by becoming unsighted again (figures 201-202). In the Quran and Islam, it has been firmly recommended not to stare at women, and in some Islamic narrations it has been said that a man who looks at a woman's genitals will be unsighted.


Figures 201-202: "screenshot by author from the film The Willow Tree"

Another type of women are depicted in the films of this period, in addition to the exhibitionist women: women disappointed by society, who are intending to emigrate from Iran, and for whom the traditional values (such as prioritizing the family's preservation) is no longer of importance to them. Interestingly, Leila Hatami is the actress of the three distinguished films of this period: *A Separation (Jodai Nader az Simin, Asghar Farhadi, 2010)*[122], *Orange Suit (Naranjipush, Dariush Mehrjui, 2012)*, and *What's the Time in Your World? (Dar Donyaye to Saat Chand Ast, Safi Yazdanian, 2014)*. The same actress whose acting style had been shaped by *Leila*, as a passive woman who submitted to her conditions, has a decade later quit passiveness to think about herself and her future, and wants to decide for herself. Yet from the dominant viewpoint of the film's narrative, she is condemned as a selfish woman who cares about nothing

[122] On immigration in Farhadi's cinema see Eslami, M. (2016). *Botighaye Gosast: Cinemaye Asghar Farhadi.* Tehran: Cheshmeh.

but herself. *A Cube of Sugar (Ye Habe Ghand, Reza Mirkarimi, 2011)*; *Azar, Shahdokht*, *Parviz and Others (Behrouz Afkhami, 2014); Sperm Whale (Nahange Anbar, Saman Moghadam, 2015)*, and *Oxidan (Hamed Mohammadi, 2017)* are the key examples of this type of film. In most of these films, the women are accused of disrespecting traditional values and societal beliefs, and of prioritizing their personal needs and individual freedoms. In these films, the women's freedom and independence is in contradiction to traditional values and the family's constitution, and the filmmakers give men and families the right to admonish women for the importance they give to their personal interests. In the Iranian cinema both before and after the Revolution, immigration—both from villages and small towns to the capital, and from Iran to other countries—has always been associated with the corruption of ethics and regret; in the end, the immigrant will return to his or her town, homeland, or country, hurt and regretful.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Representation of Women in Iranian Counter-Cinema:

Representation of Women in Kiarostami's Films

In this chapter, I analyze the representation of women in Kiarostami's films, as the most important representative of Iranian art movies after the Islamic Revolution, and the most famous exponent of Counter-Cinema in Iran, and as an example of this special kind of cinema, in sharp contrast to main stream popular Iranian cinema -which I have discussed in other chapters- and have tried to survey the representation of women in Kiarostami's Cinema focusing on his two films, *Shirin* and *Thorough the Olive Trees*. I have done so with reference to Peter Wollen's theory towards Counter-Cinema and Mulvey's approaches to cinema.

Kiarostami began his career one decade before the Islamic Revolution by making short films for children and young adults in the Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kanoon). In the first decade after the Revolution, representing women was very difficult and a lot of obstacles made it basically impossible. Inherent specifications of children's films, in which there was no trace of women, and their neutral theme which didn't pay any obvious attention to socio-political issues of the day could naturally escape the censorship. So the authorities of the film industry preferred this kind of Cinema[123]. At that time Kiarostami like many other filmmakers continued to make films for children and young adults. He also directed educational films for them. In the 1990s with glasnost in Iranian Society and Cinema, Kiarostami like a few of the other filmmakers began to make romantic films and chose a romantic theme for *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). In his next film, *Taste of Cherry (Tame Gilas,1997)*, women are completely absent. Although the total absence of women in *Taste of Cherry* can be regarded as an absent presence. In *The Wind Will Carry Us (1999)*, women are present again with some indirect references to their sexuality. In his first film in the new millennium, *Ten* (2002), prominent women characters are present at the center of his film and men are absent. *Shirin* (2008) is a movie sympathizing with Iranian women and Iranian actresses.

Kiarostami took women out of their house and private spaces and showed them outside in nature or inside in cars. In his movies before *Ten*, women are a part of nature and the environment and there is no sign of their personality and female identity. They have been reduced to being a part of the male environment surrounding them. He emptied his very few female characters of any sexual aspect and gave them male mannerisms. How he dealt with censorship, aimed at the representation of women in his movies, was not merely compromise and acceptance, but he made censorship a fragment of aesthetic form, cinematic style and even ideology. Lack and absence of woman and her limited presence just in

[123] In this decade, famous Iranian Art Movie directors made films about children and the world became familiar with Iranian cinema with its youngster protagonists. *Homework* (1989) and *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987) by Kiarostami. *Bashu, the Little Stranger* by Bahram Beyzaie. *The Runner* (1984) and *Water, Wind, Dust* (1987) by Amir Naderi. *The Key* (1987) by Ebrahim Foroozesh and *The School We went to* (1980) by Mehrjui were all about children and young adults.

long-shots become a component of the aesthetics of his films, an approach which marked the main difference between Iranian and Hollywood movies. Consequently, western spectators who were tired of women's presence as sexual objects in Hollywood films were interested in Kiarostami's approach. This new kind of cinema fascinated Feminist critics such as Laura Mulvey:

> Islamic censorship reflects a social subordination of women and, particularly, an anxiety about female sexuality. But it then produces, as a result, a 'difficulty' with the representation of women on the screen which has some -unexpected- coincidence with the problems feminists have raised about the representation of women in the cinema. In the spirit of polemic, I argued in 1975 that the aesthetics of Hollywood cinema was constructed out of a way of seeing that was assumed to be 'male', the object of which, relentlessly exposed as image for male desire, was assumed to be female. Of course, this argument is simplified and rhetorical but it negatively and in opposition the code and conventions of Hollywood. It is here that feminist 'negative aesthetics' of the 1970s, a kind of 'iconoclasm below', chimes strangely with the result of censorship, a 'regulation from above' that characterizes post-Revolutionary Iranian cinema. Of course, the authors of Islamic censorship regulations had no interest in film aesthetics or the traditions of avant-garde cinema that so heavily influenced feminist film theory. Both sides, however, were wary of the overt sexualization of femininity associated with Hollywood and its world domination (Mulvey, 2002., p. 258).

Kiarostami believes that the creative methods Iranian filmmakers used in order to escape censorship is akin to Iranian women's behavior to mitigate their Hijab in the streets:

> In Iran we never talk about the constraints and regulations and rules that affect us, because we know how to escape them. The route I follow for my job is a result of these constraints. The difficulties which the filmmakers have been faced with, have changed the path of Iranian Cinema. To escape censorship, we should think and find a suitable way. The women do the same in the streets of Tehran and let a curl of hair escape their Hijab. Everything slides out even if it is a few hair strands. Any filmmaker who works in Iran, in spite of all the constraints, has found his narrative method. We could say that situation helps higher creativity to flourish (Cronin, 2016, pp. 73-74).

Women's absence or the desexualization of women in his films in the first two decades after the Revolution was not merely the result of Hijab aesthetics and the pressures of censorship. Kiarostami himself did not want to make women the object of male gaze, neither did he want to show close-ups of

women and give the chance to the spectators to stare at them flirtatiously and provide them with a fetishist image of the female. Therefore, he did not show piecemeal images of women in close-up shots, instead, he showed a full image of them in long-shots. The very few women who appear in his films in the first and second decade after the Revolution have been desexualized; women such as the script supervisor in *Through the Olive Trees* or the old innkeeper woman- Innkeepers in Iran are mostly men- in the *Wind Will Carry Us*. Maziyar Eslami in *Paris-Tehran*, his critical book on Kiarostami, comments on the desexualization of women and their lack of subjectivity in Kiarostami's films, in this way:

> This lack of subjectivity of women characters of Kiarostami's films; their reduction to creatures who don't talk or are not represented at all; or are represented without any trace of their gender; has some important effects. Firstly, it reproduces the familiar Orientalistic and mysterious and Arabian Night image of the Oriental female. I mean, the familiar mysterious, quiet and unknown women that in spite of their calm, simple and timid manners, you could have any kind of sexual feelings about them. Women, whose image could be seen in nineteenth century itineraries. Secondly, woman as the center of crisis and problem in a society is eliminated and therefore the filmmaker who always wants to represent the society in a neutral, vague and rhetoric way, always clings to this figure. Thirdly, Kiarostami by keeping to this way of representation, compromises with censorship. Why should a filmmaker who doesn't intend to challenge the censorship and value system, happens to use elements which cause this challenge. For all these reasons no woman in his films, has female subjectivity. The very few women with subjectivity have been completely desexualized (Eslami & Farhadpoor , Paris-Tehran: Cinema-ye Abbas Kiarostami, 2008, pp. 105-106).

Western audiences usually see Iran as a mythical country full of mysteries due to their orientalist view and the isolated and closed atmosphere of post-revolutionary society, and the mysteriousness leads them to have about Iran imaginations that are not much true. The ambiguity and mystery of Kiarostami's films reproduces the same orientalist view of the 'mysterious East'. In the famous scene of the milk-selling girl, the same mysterious look is reproduced in line with the imagination of the sex appeal of the Eastern woman in 19th century travelogues - the travelogues that were not necessarily written in accordance with the social and cultural realities of the East and were originally written to portray a more mysterious view of the East. Whether in women's clothing in the society or in its cultural reproductions such as the aesthetics of hijab in post-revolutionary cinema, hijab played exactly the same role of the 19th century travelogues for the Western viewer to a large extent and depicted Iran as a mysterious, unknown, obscure,

and ambiguous country, encouraging the spectator to discover the secret of this hijab. According to Eslami's analysis, in the scene of the milk-selling girl in *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Kiarostami provides the possibility of sexual imagination both for the male character in the scene who insists on seeing the woman's face and the audience inside the cinema hall by not showing the girl's face and putting her in darkness. Exactly what he does in his next film *10* by not showing the prostitute. Kiarostami keeps the atmosphere obfuscated by not showing the woman, and this ambiguity and elimination have three functions and advantages for Kiarostami's cinema, as Eslami aptly points out. First, it avoids the problem of possible censorship. Second, it shows the Iranian woman mysterious, the same look as the 19th century travelogues. Third, he makes use of such hijab aesthetics and the aesthetics of elimination in the service of the form and aesthetics of his cinema, and intelligently transforms it into a distinctive feature of his cinema form, which he follows even in films he makes outside Iran. In her article Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle, Mulvey confirms curiosity in terms of a theory of spectatorship in Kiarostami's films: "One could almost say that Kiarostami's cinema is about curiosity, directly engaging the spectator's desire to know, decipher and understand" (Mulvey, 1998, p. 25). In his films, P.O.V and subjective shots are only allocated to men and we see nature and women who are themselves a part of nature, just in long-shots. Subjective shot is allocated to women only when they have been desexualized and have male specifications. Only then do they have the chance not to be passive and have subjective shots. The face of the very few women of his movies who have sexual attractions, is hidden in the darkness or their image is not shown. The milk-selling girl rejects to bring the light higher, even when the male character asks her to do so, because he wants to see her face. Therefore, the spectators together with the male character are deprived of seeing the girl's face and her sexual attraction. Although her action in that dark space, in the presence of a man, together with her touch on the cow's udder to milk it and the romantic/erotic poem by Foroogh Farrokhzad- one of the most famous Iranian poets and one of the very first female writers who represent erotic scenes in her poems[124]- that the man is reciting for the girl, provides the sequence with an erotic mood. In Hamid Dabashi's view, "the stable sequence is one of the most violent rape scenes in all cinema" (Dabashi, 2001, p. 254).

This is the specification of hijab which in the streets of Tehran makes the man greedy and hungry to see what is hidden under it. About the inverse effect of hijab in Iran and attracting the attention in society

[124] See Milani, F. (1982*). Love and Sexuality in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad: A Reconsideration.* Iranian Studies, Volume. 15, No. 1/4, Literature and Society in Iran. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. pp. 117-128. See also
Afary, J. (2009). *The poetry of Forough Farrokhzad* in *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran.* New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 228-231.

and cinema to the sexuality of women, Kiarostami says:

> 'Cutting out' the sexual aspect of female characters has had an adverse influence on viewers. This policy -whether it is applied on the big screen or on the streets of Iran- has led society to pay even more attention to the sexuality of women. He believes that women today are looked at and look at themselves much more voyeuristically than under the Shah, where they themselves could decide how to convey their sexuality (Rahbaran, 2016, p. 70).

Figure 203: The sequence of dialogue between the man and the girl who is milking the cow in *The Wind Will Carry Us*. The sexual desire which the spectators feel when seeing the girl's face, according to the mise-en-scène and the position of the girl back to the camera and her face in darkness is not satisfied. *"screenshot by author from the film The Wind Will Carry Us"*

The other female protagonist of his films who has sexual attraction is the prostitute in *Ten* whom Kiarostami does not show throughout the sequence. This sequence happens in the darkness of night and the presence of the woman is reduced to her voice. In the very rare scenes of his films, where sexual actions are represented, we find the women in extreme-long-shots, in darkness or in the vast nature or being heard without being seen. Lovers of his films rarely join together, with no one else present. Like the women in *Ten*, whom we do not see alongside their husbands or lovers. The very few women whom we see alongside the men are desexualized or have acquired a male identity or work in male environments such as coffeehouses or the film industry, where they are represented as career women. These women are not different from the men around them and are emptied of female identity. In his films, the

atmosphere and the location separate lovers from each other, like the girl and the well-digger in *The Wind Will Carry Us*[125], whom we never see beside each other: The man is working at the bottom of the well and can thus never be close to the girl and get a chance to have an affair with her. Or Hossein and Tahereh in *Through the Olive Trees* who are always being watched by someone else -the backstage crew- and we never see them alone. Even in the final sequence when they are alone, we see them through the gaze of Keshavarz who plays the role of the film director, and also when they first meet during the shooting when they are in two different cars, with two other persons, or during the days of the shooting when the crew do not give them a chance to be alone. In the most sensational moment of the film and its concluding sequence when the audience is waiting to find out whether the couple will join forever, where any filmmaker of romantic melodramas uses close-up shots to show this happening, Kiarostami sets the camera on a hill and his camera refrains from approaching them. He does not think that the spectator should pry into the privacy of the two lovers. He leaves it to our imagination to guess what happens between them. We are supposed to guess whether the girl accepts the man. We only understand from the man's way of running around joyfully that the woman has accepted him.

Although the presence of women in Iran's blockbuster and mainstream cinemas increased in the 1990s and other government restrictions on women's presence slackened, prominent Iranian filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami still avoided the prominent presence of women in their films. Although in her dialogue with Jonathan Rosenbaum in the book they have co-written about Kiarostami, Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa says that despite the absence of women in Kiarostami's works, their presence can always be felt in his films. "Often in his films, absences strongly suggest presences" (Saeed-Vafa & Rosenbaum, 2018, p. 68). Azadeh Farahmand associates Kiarostami's avoidance of portrayal of women to his avoidance of censorable themes (Farahmand, 2002, p. 99). Although it should also be noted that at the time of writing this article in 2002, Farahmand had not yet seen *10* and *Shirin* with the strong presence of women, a period in which the presence of women in his works increased. Robert Safarian linked the strong presence of women in *10* to western feedback to his films: "Perhaps criticising the absence of women in his films have played a role too, especially with the importance the foreign intellectuals lay on the issue of women. Everyone was beginning to complain why the films of such a postmodern filmmaker are so masculine" (Safarian, 2016, p. 190)? In a 1999 interview with *Film Report* magazine, Kiarostami said he had not taken a close-up from a woman after *Report (Gozaresh, 1978)* (ibid., p. 181). Kiarostami did not approach women when Iranian films were filled with women's close-ups from the mid-1990s, but he still insisted

[125] On close reading of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, see Mottahedeh, N. (2008). *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema.* Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 126-137.

on modesty rules of 1980s cinema. So it can be concluded that Kiarostami considered hijab codes in favour of his cinema and the aesthetics of his works and did not want to give the up.

Safarian attributes Kiarostami's specific cinematic language partly to Kiarostami's technical weakness and his lack of cinematic knowledge, not a pre-thought and chosen artistic formal strategy. "Kiarostami's insistence on de-dramatization is also closely related to his unfamiliarity with the culture and history of cinema or the weakness of cinematic culture and his disinterest in cinema in general, and his accidental and unintended encounter with this medium" (ibid., p. 87). By the terms accidental and unintended, Safarian is referring to Kiarostami's entry into filmmaking. Kiarostami, who was a graduate of graphics, accidentally tries to make a promotional film and instinctively starts filmmaking without learning cinema and being familiar with the principles and techniques of cinema.

However, the criticism of Kiarostami's cinema was not limited to Iranian critics. Outside Iran, a well-known critic such as Roger Ebert has a completely critical view of his cinema, attributing Kiarostami's success and *10* to his being Iranian: "Anyone could make a movie like *Ten*. Two digital cameras, a car, and your actors, and off you go... But if this approach was used for a film shot in Europe or America, would it be accepted as an entry at Cannes? I argue that it would not. Part of Kiarostami's appeal is that he is Iranian" (Ebert, Reviews, 2003). Although I agree with Ebert that Kiarostami's success is partly but not entirely indebted to his being Iranian, I completely disagree with this section of his writing that anyone can make a film like Kiarostami, and it is easy to make films like him. Just as many of his imitators in Iran failed to get close to the elegance and perfection of his films, and it is simplistic to summarise, like Ebert, the rich cinematic language of his multilayer and minimalist films to the sole use of two digital cameras, a car, and the actors. In the last part, Ebert claims that ordinary moviegoer inside Iran and the United States does not connect with his films, which is not much wrong. Ebert argues that "the fatal flaw in his approach is that no ordinary moviegoer, whether Iranian or American, can be expected to relate to his films. They exist for film festivals, film critics, and film classes" (ibid.). Before his death, Kiarostami was not well known to ordinary people in Iran, and the limited screening of his films, such as *The Taste of Cherry (Tame Gilas, 1997)* after winning Palme d'Or in Cannes, in Tehran's *Asr-e Jadid Cinema*, was met with protests from audiences dissatisfied with the film.[126] According to Alberto Elena, "*Taste of Cherry* achieved an audience of only 75000 during its commercial run" (Elena, 2005, p. 147). *Taste of Cherry* was ranked 39th at the bottom of the sales chart for films screened in Iran

[126] See the audience's strong protest after watching *The Taste of Cherry* in the documentary *Near Kiarostami (Dar Nazdiki Kiarostami, Mahmood Behrazania, 2000).*

in 1999, while *Red*, a prominent film of the commercial cinema with a woman protagonist (unlike *Taste of Cherry* in which women are completely absent) was ranked first with more than three million viewers.[127]

Kiarostami and Counter-Cinema

In this part I am going to analyze the representation of women in Kiarostami's films basing my arguments on Peter Wollen's theory towards Counter-Cinema. According to Wollen's essay, *Godard and Counter-Cinema*, there are seven main differences between Counter-Cinema and Hollywood Cinema:

Table 4: Main differences between Counter-Cinema narrative and Hollywood Cinema narrative

Hollywood Narrative	Counter-Cinema Narrative
Narrative Transivity	Narrative Intransivity
Identification	Estrangement
Transparency	Foregrounding
Single diegesis	Multiple diegesis
Closure	Aperture
Pleasure	Un-pleasure
Fiction	Reality

Source: Peter Wollen, 1986 (Wollen, 1986, p. 120)

For each different specification of Wollen's essay I will conduct a comprehensive study on Kiarostami's works.

Narrative Transitivity V. Narrative Intransitivity: (One thing following another V. gaps and interruption, episodic construction, indigested digression.) (ibid., p. 121) In Counter-Cinema interruption to the narrative occurs. In Kiarostami's films narrative transitivity is broken in order to interrupt the sensational engagement of the audience with the movie. For example, in *Life and Nothing More*, with the appearance of the script supervisor in the midst of the film giving the water jug to the character, narrative

[127] See Fathi, Z., & Khamushi Esfahani, P. (2017). *Salname-ye Amari-ye Forush-e Film va Cinema-ye Iran Sal-e 1378.* Tehran: Moavenat-e Tosee Fanavari va Motaleat-e Cinemaee. pp. 7-8.

transitivity is broken.

Identification v. Estrangement:(Empathy, emotional involvement with a character v. direct address, multiple and divided characters, commentary) Wollen mentions these devices for the breakdown of identification and estrangement: Early devices include nonmatching of voice to characters, introduction of real people into fiction, characters addressing the audience directly (ibid., p. 121). In counter-cinema the filmmaker tries in different ways to make estrangement happen; with devices such as introducing real people into fiction, characters speaking in front of the camera and addressing the audience directly, referring to its being a film and showing the backstage of the film, using the form of "film within a film"[128] and interrupting the sound track. In Kiarostami's films these devices have been frequently used. He has used real people in a number of his films. In *Close-Up* (1990) all the characters play themselves. In *Through the Olive Trees* all the backstage crew play their real life role. In *Homework*, *Life and Nothing More*, *Through the Olive trees*, *Taste of cherry* and *Close-Up* the style of "film within a film" has been used. In the final sequence of *Close-Up*, the sound track is distorted and it is on and off in a disturbing way. In *Shirin* the sound of the images within the frame is off and we can only hear the sound of the image outside the frame. Kiarostami believes that the roots of this distancing in his films should be found in taziyeh.

> Kiarostami: I found distancing in taziyeh (the traditional folk theatre depicting the Shiite account of the murder of Imam Hossein by the tyrant Yazid, which is performed each year at the anniversary of the event). This year I went to a village near Tehran to watch a taziyeh… at the moment Yazid is supposed to chop off Imam Hossein's head, they were served tea, and Yazid signaled with a nod for his tea to be placed next to him as he continued with the decapitation. These things really helped me. I saw how nothing could affect the scene. For example, the Lion, which was played by a very old man wearing a lion skin, became tired and went to lie down in the shade of a boulder. He began to smoke a cigarette. A smoking lion. I didn't see anyone laugh at this. He could be the lion and not be the lion (Orgeron, 2008, p. 191).

Due to the fact that Iranians have been accustomed to the regularities and distancing of taziyeh for many centuries the plays in which men play the role of the women- this kind of Brechtian distancing is credible

[128] Film within a film" style has been used by other important Iranian filmmakers. Mohsen Makhmalbaf used the style in *Hello Cinema* (1994), *The Marriage of the Blessed* (1989) and *A Moment of Innocence* (1997). Jafar Panahi used it in *The Mirror* (1997).

for them, and for this reason the audience accepts the rule in post-revolution films which show the women with Hijab at home, without any physical relation with men. In Iranian post-revolution cinema, distancing was used in the films of many famous filmmakers of art-movies, including Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Beyzaie and Mehrjui. In *Leila*, in many sequences, the female characters gaze at the camera and say something. In Beyzai's *Travellers* (Mosaferan, 1991), the female protagonist who is travelling from the North of Iran to Tehran, at the beginning of the movie gazes at the camera and declares: "we won't make it to Tehran, we all will die". In Mottahedeh's view, the female protagonist's direct address to the audience "reiterates the film's intimate connection with the taziyeh" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 19). Gazing at the camera breaks the "Suture Theory" and the audience's identification with the characters and reminds the audience that they are watching a movie and the characters are just performers who play their role. This is similar to the example which Kiarostami mentioned about the Lion in the taziyeh, the spectator believes that he could be the lion and not be the lion; believes that he(she) is at the same time a character of the film and is not a character of it and is a performer who is playing a role, where the line between the fiction and reality blurs.

Similar to Mulvey's definition of counter-cinema and its formal structure, based on reflexivity and distancing in order to prevent the pleasure of narrative, Kiarostami with distancing and disrupted narrative in his films, reminds the spectator throughout the film that what he(she) is watching is just a film and representing the process of filmmaking, showing the clapperboard, allowing the sound boom into the frame, characters talking to the camera and their confession to be performers, with dialogues such as the old man's dialogue about the fake and décor house in *Life and Nothing More* always remind us that we are watching a movie.

Eliminating Shot/Reverse Shot Formation

Kaja Silverman explains the structure of shot/reverse shot in producing the illusion that what we are watching as pertaining to the gaze of the character and not the camera, as follows:

> The shot/reverse shot formation is a cinematic set in which the second shot shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken… the camera denies its own existence as much as possible, fostering the illusion that what is shown has an autonomous existence, independent of any technological interference, or any coercive gaze. However, the viewing subject, unable to sustain for long its belief in the autonomy of the cinematic image, demands to know whose gaze controls what it sees. The shot/reverse shot

> formation is calculated to answer that question in such a manner that the cinematic illusion remains intact: shot I shows a space which may or not contain a human figure (e.g. the wall of a building, a view of the ocean full of people), being careful not to violate the 180° rule. Shot 2 locates a spectator in the other 180° of the same circular field, thereby implying that the preceding shot was seen through the eyes of a figure in the cinematic narrative. As a result, the level of enunciation remains veiled from the viewing subject's scrutiny, which is entirely absorbed within the level of the fiction; the subject of the speech seems to be the speaking subject, or to state it differently, the gaze which directs our look seems to belong to a fictional character rather than to the camera (Silverman, 1983, pp. 201-202).

But in contrast to this theory of Silverman about the classical cinema which always tries to hide the existence of the camera and works hard to produce the illusion that there exists no camera and what the audience see belongs to the perspective of the character's gaze, Kiarostami not only does not want to hide the existence of the camera and the process of production, but he is even eager to show them and to emphasize that what we see is fictitious reality. He does so by showing the backstage with the form "film within a film", by eliminating shot/reverse shot formation and always referring to the presence of the camera and the fact that we are just watching a movie. He tries not to use the cinematic techniques that draw the spectators into the narrative. He does not want to let the viewers be dragged into the narrative and identify with characters through shot/reverse shot formation. He wants to emphasize that what we are watching is through the camera's eye - which is an objective shot - and not through the fictional character's eye - which is a subjective shot. -

Transparency V. Foregrounding ("Language wants to be overlooked" V. making the mechanics of the film/text visible and explicit) (Wollen, 1986, p. 122). Hollywood narrative normally tries to make the audience forget that they are watching a movie and therefore the director tries to hide the mechanics of the film in order to give the audience more pleasure and more possibilities of identification with the characters. But counter-cinema makes the mechanics of the film visible and explicit and highlights the process of production and self-reflexivity in order to reach what Brecht calls "Alienation Effect" (Verfremdungseffekt). Kiarostami, through showing the backstage of his films, showing the camera, clapperboard and shooting equipment, through distorting the sound track and showing the sound equipment, and through not using the film score (except for the ending sequences of his films) always

reminds his audience that they are watching just a movie. Long takes without cuts together with the repetition of the scenes… all these formal mechanisms are used to prevent the audience from being absorbed in the narrative and from identifying with the characters.

Figure 204: In his movies, cinematic apparatus becomes visible. The most obvious example is the ending sequence of *Taste of cherry*, in which we see Kiarostami, the cameraman, photographer and backstage crew and Kiarostami announcing through a microphone that shooting is finished. With this sequence, Kiarostami reminds us that we have watched a film, a story, a tale. Iranian tales usually end with a sentence that refers to the fact that what we have seen is just a combination of truth and lies. Kiarostami's films are the figurative description of this sentence. A kind of oscillation between fiction and reality. The worldish reality and the fictional reality. A kind of play with the essence of reality which has its roots in Iranian ancient tales and taziyeh. *"screenshot by author from the film Taste of cherry"*

Kiarostami reminds us that we should always be aware that we are watching a movie: "Even at moments when the film seems quite real, I like to have two flashers at both sides of the screen flicker so that audiences don't forget that it's just a film and not the reality" (Eshaghpour, 2019, p. 45).

Single Diegesis V. Multiple Diegesis:(A unitary homogenous world V. heterogenous worlds. Rupture between different codes and different channels) (Wollen, 1986, p. 124)

Disembodied Female Voice

One of the devices Kiarostami uses for multiple diegesis is disembodied voice. Kiarostami presents 11 characters in *The Wind Will Carry Us*, only by means of off-screen voices. He goes further with his

experience with off-screen voices in *Shirin* and tries something amazing and avant-garde and unprecedented. In *Shirin*, the protagonist and narrator of the film is Shirin, a woman who has only a disembodied female voice all through the film and we never see her face. This non-diegesis act of hiding her face means that she is not limited to just one specific person and enables her to be the symbol of all Iranian women, from past to present (The story of Shirin was written in the 12th century). She is also the voice of all 114 women in the film and the women outside in society. In the representation of women in his other films, Kiarostami frequently uses disembodied female voice technique. *Ten* begins with the image of a young boy who is talking to a disembodied female voice. Throughout the 17 minutes opening sequence we do not see the woman's face and the voice is not embodied. Despite the convention of classical cinema in which we observe disembodied male voices and synchronized female voices, Kiarostami in this scene defamiliarizes female representation and we observe a disembodied female voice and a synchronized male voice. In the night-sequence of the film the voice of the prostitute remains disembodied and we do not see her. In contrast to the convention of porn and mainstream movies in the representation of prostitutes, Kiarostami does not show her face and does not let the audience feel any sexual pleasure and defamiliarizes the prostitute's representation. On the other hand, this approach is aligned with Hijab aesthetics. Here, Kiarostami's counter-cinema's approach and defamiliarization is aligned with avant-garde experimental feminist films which Mulvey and Silverman analyze and is also in line with the politics and ideology of Hijab aesthetics.

Closure v. Aperture: (A self-contained object, harmonized within its own bounds V. open- endedness, overspill, intertextual allusion, quotation, and parody) (ibid., p. 125) In Kiarostami's films we observe the use of intertextuality. In *Life and Nothing More* he refers to *Where is the Friend's Home* and in *Through the Olive Trees* he refers to *Life and Nothing More*. *Life and Nothing More* is the story of a film director who is anxious about the destiny of his two actors who appear in *Where is the Friend's Home* and he therefore travels to Koker village which has been ruined by an earthquake. *Through the Olive Trees* is the story of shooting a sequence of *Life and Nothing More*. *Shirin* with a selection of Iranian actresses, including old and young ones, refers to the destiny of Iranian actresses.

Most of his movies finish with an open end. In *Life and Nothing More*, it is not clear whether the director has found his actors or not, and whether they are alive or dead. In *Taste of Cherry* we do not know whether the protagonist survives after his attempted suicide or not. In *Ten*, the women's problems remain unsolved. Ambiguity and leaving the story's node unsolved is one of the attributes of counter-cinema, an

attribute which is in contrast with dominant cinema, because the audience of Hollywood cinema is accustomed to denouement and closed-endings.

Pleasure V. unpleasure: (Entertainment, aiming to satisfy the spectator V. provocation, aiming to dissatisfy and hence change the spectator) (ibid., p. 126). In contrast with the conventions of Hollywood cinema which uses close-up shots of women, short takes and fast rhythm, score, pretty actresses and stars, studio locations, solving the story nodes at the end and using closed-endings for the satisfaction of the spectator, Kiarostami uses long takes, long-shots, no score, amateurs instead of professionals and stars, real location, open-endings, and mysterious endings in order to dissatisfy the spectator and force him(her) to think more and more. Even in his only romantic film in the two post-revolution decades, when the two lovers join each other just like two small dots in the vast nature, Kiarostami tries to prevent the audience's catharsis and their pleasure to watch female sexuality of the kind that exists in Hollywood films.

Fiction v. Reality: (Actors wearing make-up, acting a story V. real life, the breakdown of the representation, truth) (ibid., p. 127). In Kiarostami's films professional actors are rarely used, but instead he uses amateurs with their real names. He does his best to blur the line between fiction and reality and therefore, his films are similar to documentaries.

A Short Review of *Through the Olive Trees (1994)*

Figure 205: "screenshot by author from the film Through the Olive Trees"

In the first sequence, Mohammad Ali Keshvarz gazes at the camera and introduces himself adding that in this film he is playing the role of the director and hence the first distancing occurs and we are aware that we are watching a "film within a film" (figure 205). In the next sequence we see the image of the windscreen of the car which is driving up a rural dust-road. The car stops and picks up a man. From a disembodied female voice, we learn that the driver is a woman, but while they are talking the shot is fixed on the windscreen and we do not see the either man or the woman. Decoupage structure of the film is of a kind that does not leave room for any possible identification with the characters. The two characters talk about Kiarostami's previous film in which the man played a role. By not showing the image of the characters and their P.O.V, the spectator is deprived of any kind of identification, absorption in the narrative and male gaze, and the woman is desexualized. Only after the man gets out of the car do we see the image of the woman. Through the cracked windscreen we see a crack on the woman's face and cannot enjoy the beauty of it (figure 206). The shot cuts to the clapperboard on which the information about the film and sequence is written. The name of Kiarostami as the director is seen. This shot causes distancing and announces that the real director is Kiarostami and a self-reflexivity is happening with

Keshvarz just playing his role. The clapperboard is snapped shut, the script supervisor steps aside and the assistant director Jafar Panahi, who plays his real role in the film as the assistant, says: “Action!” (figure 207).

Figure 206: “screenshot by author from the film Through the Olive Trees”

Figure 207: “screenshot by author from the film Through the Olive Trees”

Figure 208: "screenshot by author from the film Through the Olive Trees"

In the flashback scene in the cemetery the camera captures Hossein's gaze into the camera. We feel that this image is the P.O.V of Taherh or her grandmother, but after a few seconds they come into the frame and go out of it, while the camera is still focused on the same point and we understand that the P.O.V was not theirs. In this film P.O.V rarely happens and therefore we are not stitched to the narrative (figure 208). Another technique Kiarostami uses is extreme-long-shot in order to prevent identification and absorption in the narrative. This technique distances the viewers from the narrative (figure 209).

Figure 209: "screenshot by author from the film Through the Olive Trees"

Figures 210-211: "screenshots by author from the film Through the Olive Trees"

In the sequence in the back of the truck, Keshavarz asks the girl if she would like to play in the film and the girl showing shame turns her face from him and hides it behind her mother. Keshvarz asks her name but she does not answer. Hossein tells him that in the village they do not like to mention the name of a girl or a woman, when a stranger is present. He adds that it is not customary over there. Keshvarz asks the girl to look at him, but the girl refuses. The cultural traditions of the environment and the refusal of the women to look at a man has its effect on the decoupage, the averted gaze and not using P.O.V in this film (figures 210-211).

Figure 212: "screenshot by author from the film Through the Olive Trees"

In the closing scene, we see Hossein and his beloved girl in an extreme-long-shot. The camera is not allowed to enter their privacy and it/we stay at the top of the hill and from the far distance see them like two dots. The camera itself supports the characters' modesty which is typical of the film characters and Iranians in romantic relationships. The camera remains far away and we do not hear the proposal of the man to the woman and we just can guess what is happening (figure 212). If we compare the ending sequence of this film with the ending of some of the romantic Hollywood movies which end in close-up shots of hugging, or of two lovers looking at each other intensely, or in extreme-close-up shots of kissing and bed scenes, we find out that Iranian Post-revolution cinema with its aesthetics of the hijab changed its direction in the representation of women after the Revolution and did not make room for voyeurism and sexual satisfaction. Love in Iranian cinema appears in extreme-long-shot and in this film the hijab of the camera does not allow it to move closer in the final sequence and enter the privacy of the lovers. Everything happens beyond the wall of modesty and the camera's aesthetics just like the modesty of rural women, supports this modesty. According to Mottahedeh, in this scene "Kiarostami reflects on the

impossibility of heterosexual love in post-Revolutionary cinema" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 103). If we pay attention to the time that this film is shot in long-shots (normally melodramas and romantic films are shot in close-up and only Western and war films in long-shots) we notice better the deconstruction and distancing of Kiarostami's romantic film. On the other hand, in Kiarosatmi's films, distancing in some respects is not similar to Brechtian distancing. Because Brechtian distancing allows the spectator to be critical, but in Kiarostami's films, this self-reflexivity and film within a film tries to make the spectator aware of the film's artificiality and its fictitious reality.[129]

Representation of Women in *Shirin (2008)*

During the third period (1997-2005), even Abbas Kiarostami who had focused on children for more than two decades and female characters were either totally left out in his films or had occasionally appeared only as unimportant plot elements, made his turn. In his film *Ten (2002)*, all the characters are women except for one little boy and the plot line turns around modern women's problems in a patriarchal society. In his next film, *Shirin*, Kiarostami shows 114 close-ups of Iranian female actors of the different generations after the Revolution for the whole of the 100 minutes who boldly stare at the camera/the screen, or the potential eyes of the audience. This film can be interpreted as an attempt to rectify all those years of not showing women's close-up on the silver screen, and to present one of the most romantic love stories of Persian classic literature *Khosro and Shirin*, as the main storyline of the movie is an attempt to make up for the absence of love in all the movies made after the Revolution, and an end to almost two decades of women's absence on the silver screens.

[129] See Dabashi, H. (1995). *Re-reading reality: Kiarostami's through the Olive Trees and the Cultural Politics of a Post-Revolutionary Aesthetics.* Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies, Volume 4, No. 7.

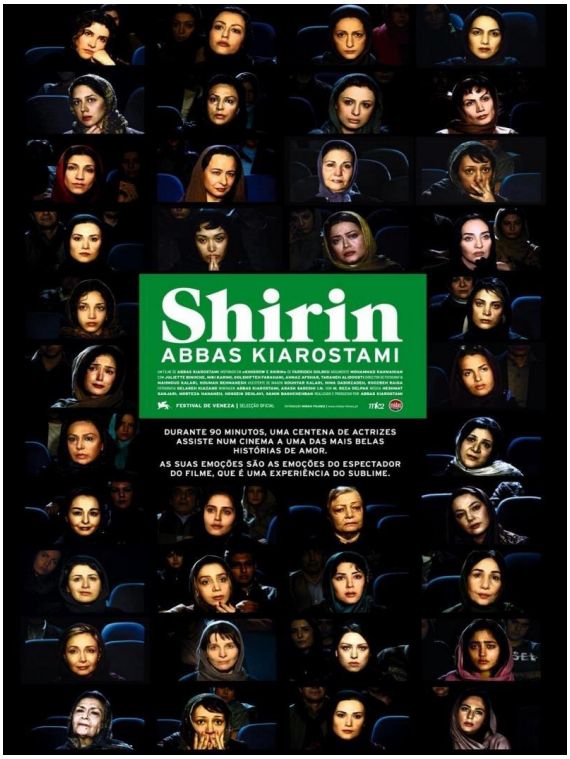

Figure 213: Poster for Kiarostami's *Shirin*: for the whole of the 100 minutes, Iranian female actors' close-ups are the only image displayed on the screen. Image: https://www.salamcinama.ir/movie/646/شیرین

Before *Shirin* and *Ten,* Kiarosatmi's camera kept a proper distance from women and their representation. In *Shirin*, in spite of close-up shots, he deconstructs Iranian actresses -to their cinematic pictures in magazines and on billboards we were accustomed- and represents them just like ordinary spectators and common people with all the imperfections of their faces, imperfections that were hidden in the mainstream films of the 1990s and 2000s. In *Ten* and *Shirin* many structural and conceptual changes in the representation of women in Kiarostami's films are obvious:

1. Close-up shot instead of long-shot.
2. Urban and modern women instead of traditional rural women.
3. More detailed reference to sexual aspects of women and their beauty.
4. In contrast to his previous films in which the women were in the margin, now men are in the margin or are completely neglected. In *Shirin*, we see men in the background, out of focus and behind the women. In *Ten*, except for the young boy, we see no male and they are only spoken of. In other words, women have moved from the background and absent presence to the foreground.

Though the Hijab Law still prevails in Iran's cinema and society, gradually in the 1990s and 2000s the

radical approach towards hijab did not prevail any longer. The effect of this change is obvious in Kiarostami's films in different decades. His cinema was affected by the social developments in Iran and the aesthetics of the hijab.

In *Shirin* we watch two films:

1.*Shirin*, by Kiarostami, who has brought the notable Iranian actresses in front of the camera and these actresses look at somewhere we think should be the screen. But we do not see the film which they must be watching. The actresses are mute spectators and we only hear the soundtrack of the movie that they are watching.

2.The film on the screen which is a romantic story of a woman whose name is Shirin. The story is about one of the love triangles in Iran's literature and the narrator, Shirin, addresses the other women. We do not see this movie and only hear its soundtrack.

In the convention of shot/reverse shot formation, it is customary that we at first see the screen and in the next shot, we see the spectators in the auditorium who are looking at somewhere and we understand that the first shot (the screen) has been their P.O.V. But Kiarostami, in an avant-garde move has completely deleted the first shot and we don't see the spectators' P.O.V and therefore we don't understand where they are looking at, and only by means of the soundtrack do we subjectively imagine the image they are looking at.

Another device that Kiarostami has used to break the typical rule of female representation is the utilization of disembodied female voices throughout the film. He has separated the voice completely from its source and we cannot see the source of the voices. Another aspect of disembodied voices has its roots in the aesthetics of the hijab in Iranian films. Firstly, because we would not be able to see the scenes which is in contrast with the aesthetics of hijab and just hear the sound. Because the voice does not fall under the regulations of hijab, - unless it is erotic-. Secondly, when we separate the voice from its source, the spectator is not given the chance to identify with the characters and religious problems do not arise. In *Shirin*, this separation of sound and image, both in the film and in the production process, is another emphasis on the distancing of Kiarostami's cinematic style. Kiarostami had placed a camera in the basement of his house and asked the actresses to sit on a chair in front of the camera and stare at a white sheet of paper which is actually the screen. They were asked to suppose that they were watching a tragic scene and were touched. But none of the actresses was aware of what the story and main idea of the film was and had no information about the film which was being made. Even the sound was separately recorded and then it was matched with the rushes.

We hear the sound of a door being opened and shut, the sound of water pouring, the sound of walking, the sound of a horse running and the ambiance and sounds of the environment, besides the dialogues. Through the sound and the actresses'/spectators' reaction, we imagine the scenes of the film without seeing them. On account of the quality of the sounds and their loudness and duration, we can imagine the scenes and the atmosphere without seeing them and even recognize the silence of the night and the clutter of the day through the sounds. Due to the light which shines on the actresses/spectators and their seats we guess what the light alternations on the screen are, and find out whether it is day or night. We find out whether the scene plays inside or outside. In this very avant-garde and unconventional experience, Kiarostami by omitting the images of the main film (the film on the screen) and only showing the actresses/spectators in the auditorium, puts the emphasis on the spectator's imagination and the off-screen voices. An innovative formative approach which is completely different from classical and mainstream cinema.

In a scene of the film, due to the sound of water similar to a river's sound we understand that Shirin has taken off her clothes and is bathing in the river and after a while due to a dialogue and fear in her voice we notice that a man has been secretly watching her naked body and her swimming in the river. In contrast with mainstream films, Kiarostami by refusing to show the swimming scene and leaving it to the imagination of the spectator, has produced a subjective voyeuristic scene for the spectator and can thus bypass the censorship limitations in Iran. Kiarostami thinks about the camera's hijab in sex scenes: "to watch what we don't need to watch is a kind of lechery and pornography. The sound of water and the song of the woman whose silhouette is reflected on the screen is enough to find out that the woman is taking a shower. The filmmaker can promote the spectator's imaginative powers, by refusing to show some scenes" (Cronin, 2016, p. 206). Instead of the image of the protagonist (Shirin) or her P.O.V, we see the image of the film's spectators and the moment of identification of the spectators who should imagine themselves to be the protagonist (Shirin) in shot/reverse shot formation to be able to see the shot 1 and identify with it. *Shirin* has no presence in the film and has been decreased just to a voice and instead of her we see the face of the actresses/spectators who identify with Shirin- they laugh, cry, fear, worry and we as the spectators ask ourselves whether that isn't any of these actresses, a Shirin, by herself? Kiarostami ironically does not allow us to watch the film on the screen which alludes to the fact that in Iran no romantic film could be made and therefore decreases it just to a voice or to actresses who dream about playing in such movies but censorship deprives them of this pleasure and they can only sadly think about an imaginary film. (Kiarostami has asked them to gaze at a white sheet of paper and no film was being shown). Deleting the actresses' voices is a historical comment and may point to the elimination

and denial of the female voice in cinema and society.

In *Shirin* we see two films and two kinds of spectators. Firstly, actresses/spectators who are sitting in the auditorium and are watching the movie. Secondly, we as the spectators look at the spectators who are watching a film. In some respect, these women are subjects who are looking at an object (spectacle) which we do not see, but since Kiarostami does not show us their P.O.V, we as the spectators cannot see as they see and therefore no identification takes place. On the other hand, these actresses/spectators are objects of our gaze, the spectators of Kiarostami's film, in which we are looking at their faces in the close-ups. But since in the film there is no shot of a man who stares at woman, as in classical Hollywood films, their objectivity is blurred and instead their subjectivity is highlighted. A Close-up of women in dominant cinema usually has a fetishistic application and is an object of male gaze. In the era in which Iranian cinema opened and lifted the obstacles to show a female close-up, the close-up shot of women was an object of male gaze, Kiarostami on the other hand defamiliarizes the close-up shot and instead of being the object of the male gaze, emphasizes on the subjectivity of women.

At the beginning of the film, we see the image of these women and expect that the director would show us their P.O.V and what they are gazing at (like the formal structure of most of the classics films based on Suture theory and shot/reverse shot formation), but instead, we see again an image - similar to the previous shot- of another woman who is watching the screen, just like the former shot. Shot 1, instead of cutting to its reverse shot, cuts to some other shots similar to shot 1, and this pattern is used throughout the film. Our expectations are never met.

In this film sound and image are completely separated and both have new identities. We do not hear the voice of the women we see. Instead, we hear the voice of the women, who we do not see throughout the film. In this regard, Kaja Silverman in her book *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* explains:

> To permit a female character to be seen without being heard would be to activate the hermeneutic and cultural codes which define woman as "enigma," inaccessible to definitive male interpretation. To allow her to be heard without being seen would be even more dangerous, since it would disrupt the specular regime upon which dominant cinema relies; it would put her beyond the reach of the male gaze (which stands in here for the cultural "camera") and release her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze enforces (Silverman, 1988, p. 164).

In *Shirin* Kiarostami displays the female characters in the auditorium without being heard and as Silverman explains, "inaccessible to definitive male interpretation" and Shirin is heard without being

seen. Therefore, it puts her beyond the reach of the male gaze. In his famous article, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Mulvey speaks about the specification of the auditorium:

> The extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world (Mulvey, 2009, p. 17).

By leaving the spectators in the darkness of the auditorium and separating them from each other by means of light and darkness and separate frames of the spectators and avoiding to show them together in one shot, in Shirin, Mulvey's theory is represented.

As Christian Metz in the famous article The Imaginary Signifier has compared the screen to a mirror, the screen in *Shirin* is like a Lacanian mirror in which the actresses/spectators see themselves. They, just like the infants in the *mirror stage* face the screen/mirror and identify with an image which is just like themselves. In *Shirin*, the camera has the function of the screen/mirror in which the spectators/actresses gaze at themselves/female protagonist of the film(Shirin) and identify themselves with the female protagonist/their own image on the screen/mirror. These spectators/actresses play the role of a mediator for us, and we who do not see the film on the screen, suppose them to be Shirin, through their identification with the female protagonist of the film(Shirin) and the reflection of Shirin's sentiments on their faces (like a mirror). Through their face sentiments, we subjectively imagine Shirin's feelings in different moments of the film. In other words, it seems that all these 114 actresses/spectators are Shirin or are playing her role. It is not accidental, that Kiarostami in spite of his normally traditional approach to use non-actors in his films, for the first time after the Revolution, uses professional actresses. The faces of the spectators/actresses play the role of a mirror in which the image of Shirin and the film they are watching, has been reflected and we see the film being screened by proxy of them and the soundtrack. Therefore, we cannot identify with the protagonist directly. By his refusal of showing the film on the screen and just allowing us to hear the soundtrack and watching the faces of the spectators/actresses and deleting their voice, Kiarostami makes us aware of the fictitiousness of the process of the cinematic apparatus and prohibits our complete identification with the film on the screen (which we do not see) and the mute image of the spectators/actresses (which we see).[130]

[130] On Reviews of *Shirin*, see Moradiyan Rizi, N (2016). *The Acoustic Screen: The Dynamics of the Female Look and Voice in Abbas Kiarostami's Shirin. Synoptique.* An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies 5.1. pp. 44-56. See also Elmeligi, W. (2018) *Narrative Fluidity: Intermedial Interpretation of the Persian Legend, Khosrow and Shirin: Abbas Kiarostami's film Shirin, Fredowsi's miniatures, and Nizami Ganjavi's 12th Century Epic, Khamsa*. Image & Narrative Journal, Volume 19, No. 2. pp. 105-123. See also Saljoughi, S. (2012). *Seeing, Iranian Style: Women and Collective Vision*

Figure 214: Kiarostami, in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (before *Shirin*) had used the camera as a mirror, in the scene in which the man gazes at the mirror/Camera/us as spectators, to shave his face. For the first time after the Revolution, erotic trends in Kiarostami's films were seen in this film in this scene, the woman's pregnancy and the male protagonist's sexual jokes with her, when the man is shaving his face in front of the mirror, about the hard work rural men have to subject themselves to in order to make the women pregnant. The mirror/camera in this scene has provided the male character with a chance for voyeurism. At the same time that he looks in the mirror to shave, he is gazing at the woman whose face could be seen in the mirror. *"screenshot by author from the film The Wind Will Carry Us"*

Another important feature of *Shirin*, in the representation of women in Iranian post-revolution cinema is based upon the fact that the post-revolution cinema that began with erasing women and their close-up shots from the films, after three decades resulted in a film entirely made up of women's close-ups. After three decades, Iranian cinema which had totally erased the female image in films such as *The Ambassador* and *The House of Spider*, resulted in a film such as *Shirin*. Although Kiarostami had done without women in his 1980s films, with his personal aesthetics and his counter-cinema he achieved a portrait of women who had subjectivity in the narrative. It can be concluded that the post-revolution cinema from ignoring women in the films of the 1980s and women being an object of male gaze in the 1990s and 2000s, has achieved female subjectivity in the narrative.

From Mottahedeh's point of view, modesty rules reinforced the male gaze, because with the compulsory hijab of women in films, it practically placed the audience in the male position. That is why

in Abbas Kiarostami's Shirin. Iranian Studies, Volume 45, Issue 4, pp. 519-535. See also Utterson, A. (2016) *On the Movie Theater as Haunted Space: Spectral Spectatorship and Existential Historiography in Abbas Kiarostami's Shirin.* Quarterly Review of Film and Video. Volume 33, No. 8. pp. 685-706.

Kiarostami's *Shirin (2008)* is an exceptional film in Iranian cinema. In *Shirin*, Kiarostami questions the mechanisms of voyeurism and modesty rules because the cinema hall is designed not for male audiences, but for female audiences. Throughout the film, Kiarostami shows women in the cinema hall watching a romantic film. The importance is doubled because the protagonist of the film and its narrator are both women. A type of woman's cinema for female audiences inside the cinema hall - a dialectical relationship between two neglected elements of the Iranian cinema: "woman film" and "female viewers". Therefore, *Shirin* is a different film in depiction of women both in Kiarostami and Iran's cinemas. Before making *10* and *Shirin*, Kiarostami was always criticised by critics such as Azadeh Farahmand for marginalising women and the limited female characters in his films.[131]

On the other hand, however, the film that we are watching is largely abiding by the modesty laws of the Iranian cinema, to the extent that even the French actress Juliette Binoche is wearing hijab in the film. But regarding the film that women inside the cinema hall are watching, we find out through voices that it does not watch the modesty laws and we even realise through sounds that the woman is bathing in a river. In *Shirin*, we practically have two films: a film that follows the modesty rules in which we see all characters are veiled, and the second film the female spectators watch but we don't see and just hear it, it does not observe modesty rules and the hijab is not imposed on it. By using Mottahedeh's model, we can consider *Shirin* a transcendent example of displaced allegory of situations of production in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, because according to my analysis, *Shirin*, with its form structure, makes the audience aware of the location and situation of the film production in this geography. The geography in which Kiarostami places hijab sarcastically even on the head of the French actress to convey the message to the Western audience that the conditions of production have even distanced the portrayal of the Western actress from her own reality. What I have tried to add to the rich reading of Mottahedeh is the analysis of the "film within film" technique as one of the measures of Iranian cinema in confronting censorship and the inability of Iranian cinema to be realistic.

Mulvey asked filmmakers to 'free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment' (Mulvey, 1989, p. 26). "At that point, she imagined a feminist cinema along the lines of radical modernist practice, with its strategies of self-reflexivity, disruption, and defamiliarization, as exemplified by Bertolt Brecht's work in theatre […]" (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 39). By applying defamiliarization, deconstruction, distancing and self-reflexivity

[131] See Farahmand, A. (2002). Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema. In R. Tapper, *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity* (pp. 86-108). London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

in the representation of women in his films, Kiarostami could manage- as Mulvey had asked the filmmakers- to 'free the look of the camera into its materiality and passionate detachment' by his formative choices in the representation of women.

Conclusion

At the end of this chapter I will briefly analyze the structure of aesthetics of the hijab in Kiarostami's films and try to show how Kiarostami managed to compromise with Hijab regulations through his cinematic style.

The covering Hijab: in Kiarostami's films we always see the female protagonists outside the house and in society where they have to wear hijab and we do not see them at home or their private spaces where they do not have to wear hijab. By choosing the location and setting of the story outside the house, he solved the problem of the hijab. Secondly, by having the stories take place in the villages, where the women, because of the inherent nature of their clothes, do not have serious hijab problems. But when he made *Ten* in an urban environment with modern women, the film did not get the permission to be released in Iran.

The looking and Movement Hijab: This Kiarostami puts into practice by refusing to use actresses and stars, and using non-actors instead of them, and by using techniques of distancing and prohibiting identification, their refusal to look at each other, and using their averted gaze[132].

Narrative Hijab: Refusal to enter into the privacy of women. His post-revolution films represent the women in public places and do not enter their houses. *Through the Olive Trees* is set in the public environment and outside in nature and villages. *Shirin* is set in the auditorium.

[132] On the *averted gaze*, see Naficy, H. (1991, Spring). The Averted Gaze in Iranian Postrevolutionary Cinema. *Public Culture, Duke University Press, 3*(2), 29-40.

Figure 215: Ten (2002) is entirely filmed in a car driving around in the streets of Tehran. The car is an intermediate place between privacy (inside the car) and public space (city/society) in Kiarostami's cinema and connects private and public spaces. *"screenshot by author from the film Ten"*

The form and Technique of Hijab: By avoiding to use shot/reverse shot and character's P.O.V, by refusing to show women's close-up (before *Ten*), by means of voice-off and disembodied voice, by using the aesthetics of documentary, by blurring the line between fact and fiction, drama and documentary, by using non-actors, by using long-shots and full-shots to prevent the excessive dramatization of events, by ignoring the film score -except in the final sequences- by avoiding short takes and quick rhythm in montage, by using an extreme-long-shot where the spectator expects to see a close-up, in order to achieve distancing with the spectator, reminding the audience that what they see is a film and not the real world, and using film within a film cinematic style- all these contributed to the fact that Kiarostami's films never had serious problems with Hijab regulations.

CONCLUSION

Female as Sidekick: Woman as Absence and Lack

Female characters in the post-revolution Iranian cinema seldom had the chance to be portrayed with an identity independent from the men around them. They were always under the heavy shadow of men and lacked the opportunities for decision-making and making a choice by themselves. Therefore, we see that it is men who advance the narration and story, and the women only observe the narrative and follow wherever the story takes them. They adapt themselves to the narrative developed by the men in the story and rarely have the power to change the narrative direction. In other words, they are the men's sidekicks. Women are depicted as components devoid of individuality and power against social forces and pressures, they have been dissolved in the group, and they lack personal characteristics. Even in the works of filmmakers such as Panahi, the women are not individuals with an independent identity. They are, rather, a continuation of one another as if they build a constant circle. Society and the systems of power do not allow for the specific individuality of women, and want them seen instead in masses.

Both before and after the Revolution, the woman in Iranian cinema was defined by absence and lack: their absolute absence in the early 1980s films, or their lack of identity and individualism in most films in periods before and after the Revolution. The lack of an independent identity that prevents her from being the element of the narrative's development, as she is defined and characterised in relation to the men around her (husband, father, brother, and son). Even in avant-garde films like *Ten,* wherein all characters are women except for a little boy, the dialogues are about the men in their lives despite the physical absence of men. The female protagonist who criticises others all the time—"Why you women are so much obedient to and dependent on the men in your life?"—has no choice but to surrender in the end. It can be concluded that, despite the women's abundant efforts to regain their lost identity and individuality, the masculinist traditions and systems deprive them of achieving it. The third period (1997-2005), which gave the glad tiding of a new era in the emergence of powerful women such as Hedieh Tehrani, remained an exception. The presence of such powerful and active women did not continue after the defeat of the reformism project.

In order to categorise the characterisation of women in the four decades after the Revolution, I identify five groups:

1. **Absent women:** absolutely absent, or entirely in the background, as in Kiarostami's films of the 1980s.
2. **Passive women:** repressed and under the control of others, having accepted the conditions of a patriarchal society and in utter passivity. A certain masochistic tendency to suffer is noticeable in most of the women in the late 1980s films.
3. **Independent women:** of the modern and progressive class, trying to find their identity as a woman. These women are constantly in a dilemma of duality between the traditions of the society that defines her as only a mother and wife, and with herself as she tries to confront such traditions and value herself as a woman with sexual and psychological needs, and not only a mother and wife. In fact, a duality of femininity and maternity is formed. *The May Lady*, *Ten*, *Two Women*, *As Simple As That (Be Hamin Sadegi, Reza Mirkarimi, 2008)*, and *Soheila No. 17 (Soheila Shmoreye 17, Mahmoud Ghafari, 2017)* are outstanding examples of such feminine characters.
4. **Femme fatales and castrating women:** repressed by men, but the law, society, or family do not protect them in the least, and they themselves take action revenge on men. Like Sara Khoiniha in *Mask (Neghab, Kazem Rastgoftar, 2007)*.
5. **Exhibitionist women:** with allusion to sexual appeal, such as Behnoosh Bakhtiari in most of her films.

The representation of women in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema reflects the political, social and cultural conditions that dominated society at the time. The changes particular to the circumstances affected the contexts, themes and even titles of the films, as well as the approaches to cinematic form and grammar. The cinematic representation of Iranian women in each period therefore bears witness to the social circumstances ruling the Iranian society at the time, particularly in relationship to the situation of women in these decades.

In the following table, the types of women depicted in these periods have been compared. (Naturally, these characteristics do not include all films in each period.)

Table 5: Types of women depicted in all periods

	First Period (1979-1989)	**Second Period (1) (1990-1997)**	**Second Period (2) (1990-Now) (Hidden Sex)**	**Third Period (1997-2005)**
Women's Presence	Women are absent or have a brief presence.	Women and men have equal presence.	Women are the sidekick.	Women play the main role.
Characterisation and her role in the drama	Woman is traditional and devoid of identity or individuality.	Woman is between tradition and modernity. Woman has masochistic tendencies.	Woman is exhibitionist.	Modern woman. She is sometimes femme fatale, castrating, and rebellious.
Woman's typical action	Woman tolerates problems. She is a victim of the patriarchal society.	Woman is afflicted by pain and suffering and tolerates as far as her threshold. All the same, she revolts in the end.	Woman is passive.	Woman is active and takes revenge on man.
Location of the story and women's class	Villages and the deprived women in society	Tehran: urban women from middle and well-off classes	Tehran: well-off women of society	Tehran: urban women from middle class
Typical clothing and appearance	Chador and complete hijab, without makeup	Manteau and light makeup	Manteau, jeans, heavy makeup, improper hijab	Manteau, jeans, makeup
Framing specifications	Elimination of man's POV shot and male gaze, lack of women's close-up shot, placement of women in the corner or background of the frame, lacking direct staring between woman and man, bad lighting of women's faces to destroy their beauty and sexuality.	Using the colours of the décor and colour fades to highlight the feeling of the scene, close-up shots of women. Lighting to pinpoint women's inner feelings. Voiceover technique of the female heroes to narrate the story.	Presence of POV shot and male gaze, fetishistic and iconic shots of women, pause in the narrative for a lustful interlude.	Hard lighting, hand-held camera to pinpoint the documental aspect of the film, outdoor location, women's close-up and extreme close-up shots. Placement of women in the centre and foreground of the frame.

Source: The Author

The issue of the hijab was raised by Ayatollah Khomeini after the victory of the Revolution: the hijab finally became part of the law, all women were obliged to wear the hijab, and it also became compulsory in the cinema. The hijab, however, was not only about the clothes that actresses had to wear—it also imposed a kind of Islamic culture and extensive guidelines upon movies and filmmakers, which changed

the form and cinematic grammar including the type of lighting, the type of camera angle, montage, mise-en-scène and the details of cinematic narrative. As a result, Iranian filmmakers tried not to attract the attention of the audience (non-mahram) in their representation of women by using cinematic methods, mise-en-scène and shot size. Controlling looks, avoiding tempting words, following the rules of the hijab, and showing the modesty and chastity that are of great importance in Islamic law: these are the principles that entered the cinema after the Revolution. After the Revolution, these Islamic concepts resulted in the development of a distinct kind of cinema in comparison to the West, especially with regard to women and their representations—what I have called "the aesthetics of hijab in film" and "the camera, form and technique of the hijab."

The term "aesthetics of the hijab" does not refer only to the cover for women. It is rather a type of ideology of the power discourse that came to power in the Iranian society, art, and cinema after the Revolution. The hijab that played the roles of censorship, absence, elimination, hiding, and covering—a concept much broader than just the cover for women. A cultural hijab that has had profound cultural roots, with manifestations in architecture and the concept of the interior and exterior parts, and mahram and non-mahram. In this thesis, the aesthetics of the hijab in cinema refer to a type of hijab in the form, mise-en-scène, narration, size of the shot, camera angle, camera movement, lighting, the cast's acting and movements, the clothes of the female actors, the structure and technique in Iranian films. It is, in short, a kind of Islamicate mise-en-scène. Effort has been made in this thesis to analyse the impact of Islamicate filming grammar in the creation of overt, implicit, and covert concepts in the women's character and depiction in the post-revolution films, and to focus on the concept of the aesthetics of the hijab in the portrayal of women.

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