

Feminist Perspectives on Iranian Films: Analyzing Oppression and Violence Against Woman

Mozhgan Sadat Marandi

Submitted to the
Institute of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art
in
Communication and Media Studies

Eastern Mediterranean University
January 2011
Gazimağusa, North Cyprus

Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

Prof. Dr. Elvan Yılmaz
Director (a)

I certify that this thesis satisfies the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Art in Communication and Media Studies.

Prof. Dr. Süleyman İrvan
Dean, Faculty of Communication and Media

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Art in Communication and Media Studies.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Mashoed Bailie
Supervisor

Examining Committee

1. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hanife Aliefendioğlu
2. Asst. Prof. Dr. Mashoed Bailie
3. Asst. Prof. Dr. Melek Atabey

ABSTRACT

This thesis concentrates on Iranian films produced between the years 1996-2005 which raise a feminist position and take up a critical toward the situation of women in Iranian society. This study examines the oppressive situation and violence against women in the filmic text. The feminist film analysis provides a framework for analyzing and interpreting the three selected films: *Café Transit* (2004), *Leila* (1997) and *The Last Supper* (2001).

In traditional and patriarchal societies like Iran, gender equality and a demand for the expression of women's subjectivity is often expressed through feminist-motivated film production – spaces where film makers have opportunities to question, however subtly, the roles and relations of women in society. This is similarly what is understood from selected films of this study. Reyhan, Leila and Mihaan are the three female protagonists in these films: all suffer under the traditions of a society that see women as secondary citizens and where the voices of women are often subdued and subsumed under that of males. The protagonists of these films suffer under the violence of patriarchy and all three protagonists demand, in their own unique way, the expression of their subjectivity.

Key words: Iranian films, Feminist film analysis, Oppression.

ÖZ

Bu tez 1996-2005 yılları arasında İran'da yapılmış olan İran toplumunda kadının imajına eleştirel bir perspektif getiren filmleri feminist bir konumdan incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışma film metinleri içinde kadınlara yönelik yapılan baskıcı tutumları ve kadına yönelik şiddeti incelemektedir. Feminist film analizi seçtiğim üç filmi analiz etmek ve yorumlamak için genel bir çerçeve sunar: *Café Transit* (2004), *Leila* (1997) ve *The Last Supper* (2001).

İran gibi, gelenekçi ve ataerkil toplumlarda, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ve kadın öznelliğinin ifadesine ilişkin talepler genellikle feminist bakış açılı film yapımları ile dile getirilmekte; bu ifade biçimi film yapımcılarına kadının toplumdaki ilişkilerini ve rollerini üstü kapalı ve zarif bir biçimde sorgulama alanı yaratmaktadır. Bu çalışma için seçilmiş olan filmlerde dile getirilen şey budur. Reyhan, Leila ve Mihaan analiz edilen filmlerdeki ana karakterlerdir: Her biri kadını ikincil vatandaş gören toplumların gelenekleri altında ezilmekte ve erkeklerin uzantısı gibi görülmektedir. Filmin başrolünü oynayan kadınlar ataerkil düzenin baskısı altında ezilmekte ve kendi özgül biçimleriyle kendi öznelliklerini dile getirebilmeyi istemektedirler.

Anahtar kelimeler: İran filmleri, Feminist film analizi, Baskı.

To All Oppressed Women,

Know there is victory

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals to the development of my thesis.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Asst. Prof. Dr. Mashoed Bailie for the continuous support of my Master's studies and research and for his patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me during the research and writing of this thesis.

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Süleyman İrvan Dean of Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hanife Aliefendioğlu and Asst. Prof. Dr. Melek Atabey for their continuous support and their helpful comments.

I would like to dedicate this study to my family and my lovely husband Omid, as an indication of their significance in this study as well as in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZ	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Challenging the Status of Women.....	1
1.2 Brief History of Women in Iranian Cinema.....	2
1.2.1 The Early Years of Iranian Film Industry.....	2
1.2.2 The Post-Revolution Era.....	4
1.2.3 The Reformation Period of the Islamic Government.....	5
1.3 Purpose of Study	6
2 METHODOLOGY.....	9
2.1 Feminist Film Analysis	9
2.2 Explanation of Textual Analysis.....	10
2.3 Sample and Procedure.....	11
2.4 Research Questions	15
2.5 Limitation of Study	16
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW	17
3.1 Definition of Oppression and Violence.....	17

3.2 Feminist Theory and Film Criticism	19
3.3 Classic Theory of Gaze	20
3.4 Feminism and Subjectivity.....	22
3.5 Previous Studies	23
3.5.1 Iranian Scholars and Representation of Women.....	24
3.5.2 Violence against Women in the Eastern Cinema.....	25
3.5.3 Violence against Women in Hollywood Cinema.....	27
4 SCREENING WOMEN IN A WORLD OF MEN	30
4.1 <i>Café Transit</i> (2004)	30
4.1.1 Story Line.....	31
4.1.2 The First Leading Role Woman.....	31
4.1.3 The Second Leading Role Woman	36
4.1.4 Cinematic Devices	38
4.1.5 Context of Film	39
4.1.6 Research Discussion.....	40
4.2 <i>Leila</i> (1996).....	41
4.2.1 Story Line.....	41
4.2.2 First Leading Role Woman.....	42
4.2.3 First Leading Role Man	44
4.2.4 Cinematic Devices	45
4.2.5 Context of Film	48
4.2.6 Research Discussion.....	48
4.3 <i>The Last Supper</i> (2001).....	51

4.3.1 Story Line.....	51
4.3.2 The First Leading Role Woman.....	51
4.3.3 The First Leading Role Man	54
4.3.4 Cinematic Devices	55
4.3.5 Context of Film	56
4.3.6 Research Discussion.....	56
4.4 Comparative Discussion on Selected Films	58
5 CONCLUSION	62
REFERENCES.....	65
APPENDIX.....	69
FILMOGRAPHY	70

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Women Centered Films between the Years 1996 - 2005.....	13
------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Reyhan at scene of rejecting Nasser	32
Figure 2: Reyhan: “This is my home”	33
Figure 3: The scene of communication between Reyhan and Stevita.....	35
Figure 4: the first shot of Zoleykha	36
Figure 5: Leila	42
Figure 6: Leila’s mother in law	43
Figure 7: The establishing shot of LEILA.....	46
Figure 8: Reza and his daughter	48
Figure 9: Mihan Mashreghi	52
Figure 10: Mohsen interrupts Mihan’s class	53
Figure 11: Mihan injured by Mohsen.....	53
Figure 12: Mohsen while is interrupting Mihan’s speech.....	54
Figure 13: Setareh in last minutes of the film	56
Figure 14: Afagh, the old oppressed woman.....	57
Figure 15: Mihan is intimidated to stoning	58

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Challenging the Status of Women

Contemporary Iranian scholarship has taken up the issue of gender and the place of women in Iranian society. Art, literature and cinema have also taken up the question of gender struggle and gender equality. It is with cinema – as a mass medium that reaches the largest of audiences after television and radio – that has had a major impact on the consciousness of the Iranian general citizenry.

In the 17th Fajr Film Festival in 1999, most of the films shown were about the struggle over gender definitions and societal roles and there was considerable attention paid to women. As Lahiji (2006) claims:

Such an extreme attitude to sex based conflicts, expressed in a feminist idiom, indicated the filmmakers urge to follow the wishes of society and dictates of the box office. The comment reveals a grain of truth which may, indeed, push the Iranian film industry of the coming decade into a kind of exaggeration of the life of women, because one of the current criteria for evaluating a cinematographic piece of work is the filmmakers' attitude to women (p.215).

Feminist approaches to the construction of women in Iranian films in the post-revolution era provide important frameworks within which scholars in the field of Iranian film studies have conducted research. While great attention has been paid to the Iranian films that were screened at international film festivals, little attention has

been paid to the Iranian films that received only national distribution. Additionally, none of the previous studies have specifically engaged the role of the oppressed women in Iranian cinema. The majority of Iranian media scholars investigate the portrayal of women in the Iranian film industry. In this thesis I identify Iranian films that, while having been embraced enthusiastically by the national audience and recognized and awarded at national film festivals, have not been taken up by film scholars as a source of cultural knowledge concerning the oppression of women both psychologically and physically. The thesis employs a comparative perspective to post revolution films in the Iranian film industry with a view to analyze filmic texts in terms of violence against women and how women were portrayed in the films produced in post revolution era.

Thus, this thesis takes on an analysis of the representation of oppressed women in Iranian cinema in the reformation period of Islamic government between the years 1995-2005.

1.2 Brief History of Women in Iranian Cinema

This study concentrates on the representation of women in Iranian cinema, especially in terms of violence and oppression. In the history of Iranian cinema, it is important to consider the traditional and religious restrictions of Iranian society, on how women are presented in cinema, either as actors or spectators. The following sections introduce the history of Iranian cinema and the presence of women from the beginning of this industry and after the Islamic revolution.

1.2.1 The Early Years of Iranian Film Industry

According to Tapper (2006), while Iranian cinema began from the middle of 19th century with *Lor Girl* (1933) by Ardeshir Irani which was the first talking movie in

Iranian film industry, there was no 'national cinema' prior to second world war, because most films were highly motivated by foreign film industries including Hollywood, Indian and Egyptian: The films of that type are commonly called "Film Farsi".

Mirbakhtiar (2006) argues that Iranian popular cinema during the Film Farsi period was not rooted in Iranian culture but on the idea of "entertainment for profit" – lacking in any real creativity. The cinema industry was monopolized by producers whose primary goal was box office sales and the profit motive. The reforms of Reza shah played a significant role in the increased visibility of women in cinema: the reforms were aimed at modernizing Iran and moving the society toward a more European frame. One of the reforms included increased freedoms for women including the right to appear in public, the right to study and the right to work. Before then, women were not allowed to attend functions in the public sphere such as markets and movie theaters unless accompanied by men. Thus through the process of modernization it became increasingly possible for women to attend events in public spaces and this included the right to work as actors in cinematic productions.

In the pre-revolution period, two forms of representation of Iranian women can be identified in the Iranian cinema: the "cabaret women" depicted in dance scenes or as sex objects and prostitutes -- what Lahiji (2006) calls "unchaste dolls", and the "good housewife" and virgin – or the "chaste dolls":

Good women obeyed their men without question, because men were after all wiser than women. And why not? Good women would never venture from the sanctuary of the home to be stained by the villainies

of a world which only men were qualified to face
(Lahiji, 2006, p.221).

Lahiji claims that in the first decade, the Iranian film industry explored an unsophisticated form of romanticism which mostly portrayed women as ‘victims of male immorality’. Indeed the victimization of women’s chastity in many films was part of the narrative of films. Frequently, women with normal lives had no place in Iranian movies. In fact the Iranian film industry was without real image of women and men. For example, educated women, teachers and nurses who worked outside the home have no place in Iranian films of that duration. Lahiji (2006) focuses on the unrealistic portrayals of Iranian women as depicted during this historical period of Iranian cinema and argues that Iranian cinema, more than any other medium, has treated women unfairly and that it has an obligation to reverse this trend and to create an alternative and more “real” picture of Iranian women (p.216).

1.2.2 The Post-Revolution Era

The Islamic revolution of 1978 in Iran changed every aspects of cultural and society. Whereas in earlier times, the Iranian film industry marginalized women and relegated them to the domestic sphere as “chaste dolls”, women gradually progressed through their protest and activities in the film industry. Subsequently, after the Iran-Iraq war, the production of films with the subject of women who had suffered the pressure of war and had lost their husband and families increased. At that time, women held protests through the academic literature and cultural activities against their improbable depictions in cinema and demanded more realistic films. Lahiji states that gradually, male directors created narratives where women played pivotal roles.

The post-revolutionary Islamic government attempted to establish a frame of modesty for Iranian women including the veiling of the female body. In line with this, the Iranian film industry aimed to purify cinema of western styles and to confront dominant codes of voyeurism in media which were introduced in pre-revolution era of the Iranian film industry. Mottahedeh (2008) explains the relation between voyeurism and the modesty system and states:

In an effort to produce a national cinema against the voyeuristic gaze of dominant cinema, the post-revolutionary film industry was charged with reeducating the national sensorium and inscribing a new national subject-spectator severed from dominant cinema's formal system of looking. The industry was asked not only to produce a new national body unhampered by the conventions and codes that habitually render time and space continuous and hence realistic in dominant cinema's scopophilic and voyeuristic procedures (p.2).

Indeed the veiling of women was intended to purify the film industry of the western dominant codes of fetishism and voyeurism. Both filmmakers and audience were to adjust themselves to a new grammar of cinema provided by the Islamic government. Consequently, self-censorship among filmmakers was necessary in order to conform to the requirements of the new Islamic government's rules.

1.2.3 The Reformation Period of the Islamic Government

In 1997 Dr Mohammad Khatami was nominated as president of Iran with the promise of great social and cultural change. The strategy of president Khatami was to use cultural activities in order to increase Iran's positive visibility in the world. The suggestion of "dialogue between civilizations" was one such activity. Filmmakers and filmmaking visibly improved during this period both internally and internationally, Sadr (2006) explains:

Films by Jalili, Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Panahi, Bani-Etemad and Mehrjui were not only successful abroad but also touched the hearts and minds of Iranian audiences. To differing degrees, they were all based on a quality of calculated allusion, making their critique of contemporary Iranian society through a variety of metaphoric techniques. Sometimes these films seemed enigmatic to western audience, but their disguised references to internal problems had a tremendous impact on Iranian viewers (Sadr, 2006, p.240).

Thus, in this era the Iranian film industry took a new direction and experienced increased freedom to represent women and their difficulties in a patriarchal religious context. This kind of critical filmmaking about women issues had been unthinkable a few years earlier. The majority of films challenging the difficult situation for women in Iranian society were produced during this time. These reformation years of 1995-2005 provided a fertile ground for the recent enlightenment movement of Iranian society. Consequently, most of the feminist movements of Iranian society in recent years have their roots in the reformation period – a period that is the focus of this present study.

1.3 Purpose of Study

Violence is endemic throughout the world. There are different forms of violence including violence between groups, other societies, and against individuals including violence against women, children and old people.

Definitions of violence differ in different societies. Societies have unique cultures, customs, traditions and ways of life. This being so, we have to consider the cultural context within which we study violence in order to understand and highlight the ways in which violence can sometimes be legitimized, sanctioned, and even legalized in cultural contexts – including in the context of filmic texts.

Examining violence in Iranian cultural texts provides an avenue into the prevalence of violence in the traditions and attitudes towards women in Iranian society. Thus, we can explore the theme of violence against women through the ways that Iranian film narratives work to situate women: whether filmic texts act as a form of resistance to violence against women or, to the contrary, as a way to legitimate, sanction, and approve violence against women in Iranian society. The aim of the study is to examine this phenomenon in specific filmic texts and to juxtapose representations of violence against women generally in Iranian society with the ways in which Iranian cinema construct stories about women and their legitimate roles in Iran.

There has been a striking change in Iranian cinema since the revolution in 1978. Political, economic and cultural transformations in Iranian society have had a profound influence on the Iranian film industry. Thus, it is useful to include a comparative analysis of films produced in this period of film production.

This study concentrates on those films which are both feminist in their approach and critical in their engagement with the role of women in Iranian society. The selected films are: *Leila* by Dariush Mehrjuei (1996), *The Last Supper* by Fereydoun Jayrani (2001) and *Café Transit* by Kambouzia Partovi (2004). The common theme running through these films is that women play leading “filmic roles” while the texts explore the “social role” of women in the broader society.

To achieve the aim of this study the following research questions have been addressed in research discussion:

RQ1. How are women in each of the selected films oppressed by the social system?

In other word, how do the characteristics of patriarchal society oppress women?

RQ2. What kinds of oppression and violence are represented in each film? Are women oppressed by structural, physical, psychological and/or emotional?

RQ3. How do women in each film challenge their oppressive situation to change it?

Do women struggle to achieve subjectivity?

This opening chapter briefly introduced the goal of this thesis. The following chapters will provide details concerning the methodology, theoretical framework and previous studies. The next chapter will explain more about the methodology of study and instruction of analyzing the selected films.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

The methodology which has been used in this study is feminist film analysis, with an emphasis on qualitative textual analysis. This chapter provides an explanation of method, sample, procedure and limitation of this study.

2.1 Feminist Film Analysis

According to Wales (1999) the “feminist film analysis is used to look at texts the same way textual analysis is used, but from a feminist perspective” (15). Gever (1991) states that:

Feminists have waged a two-pronged attack on the repressive and oppressive mechanisms at work within realist films (both documentary and fiction), undertaking detailed, sometimes exhilarating theoretical analyses of popular film culture as well as radically reworking cinematic conventions in iconoclastic, rigorous avant-garde films (p.170).

The aim of this thesis is in the same vein: to analyze the oppressed women of fiction films of post-revolution Iranian cinema.

According to Smelik (1998) critical feminist film theorists often apply a semiotic framework to the examination of sexual difference in the cinematic text and the examination of narrative structures of female subjectivity. This thesis similarly applies feminist film analysis to uncover the forms of filmic representations of oppressed women in the three selected films.

Smelik (1999) claims that female subjectivity has been investigated not only in relation to spectatorship, but also with respect to the narrative structure of film. Also she points out that according to De Lauretis who studied the structural representations of 'woman' in cinema, subjectivity is not a rigid entity rather a process of self-production. Smelik suggests that narrative is one of the techniques of reproducing subjectivity. Therefore the depth analysis of the narrative structure of film provides the understanding of the process of female subjectivity in each film (p.359).

2.2 Explanation of Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a useful method for studying the content of media. This method examines how media create meanings and communicate. Silverman (2005) states that textual analysis is best fitted in research investigations that are qualitative and concerned with large amounts of information that are organized and categorized. Furthermore, Silverman argues that those investigations using textual analysis as a method must look within the texts for the juxtapositioning of content that helps the investigators to create generalizations about a society, group or culture. In this thesis, organized information is collected from the films and this information has been used to create generalizations concerning the relation between the women portrayal in the selected films and women in Iranian society.

Additionally, textual analysis is a powerful method of research that makes possible interpretations about a group. McKee (2003) argues that as film analysts, we use texts to extract meaning. He argues that in textual analysis the investigator must have the ability to view the overall contextual frame and make note of characteristics, like motifs, that run through film texts. McKee (2003) argues that researchers have the

opportunity to indicate these texts as a whole picture of work or as specific works within the larger group. Nevertheless, there should be themes that are present and perceivable across the narrative structure of the texts. Moreover, Jankowski and Jensen (1991) suggest that textual analysis is a useful tool of investigation used to extract the meaning during the interpretation of one or more texts, this can be include film which is used in this thesis as well.

Textual analysis considers texts, in this case filmic text, to enumerate the meaning through description of texts. As Wales (1999) quoted, according to Laurie Sharge, contextual criticism should “aim to describe features of the context of reception of a piece of art.... The context of reception might indulge audiences’ habits”. In addition, Matteo states that “descriptive analysis is often the first step in determining where there are gender inequalities about an issue” (p.15).

Textual analysis is able to make information appear regarding a group or cultures for instance women that are represented in special ways. Therefore, it is useful in current thesis to apply textual analysis in order to understanding the representation of women in selected film of Iranian film industry.

2.3 Sample and Procedure

This thesis explores violence against women and oppressive condition of women within the context of Iranian films. Indeed in this research the text, the object under examination, is defined as Iranian films with critical perspective to women issue. According to Smelik (1998), feminist film signifies a film which stands for sexual difference from woman's point of view, presenting a critical understanding of the unbalanced power relation between women and men. This definition of feminist film

does not mean that every film directed by women can be labeled feminist film rather, this category includes certain films made by men. Just as all random sample films of this thesis which all are made by male directors. Explaining feminist film, Ann Kaplan suggests:

Feminist film which in the wake of the women's movement, either attempt to discover for women a voice and a subjectivity, a place from which to speak, or try to define what the feminine might be in a system that has done everything to define femininity for women (Kaplan, 1983, p.8).

Consequently, this study concentrates on those films which raise a feminist position and critical to women situation in Iranian society. In order to find sample, at first step, the full listing of all films produced during the period 1996-2005 which is the reformism duration and there was remarkable attention to women issue, was obtained from "SoureCinema" the informational bank about Iranian film industry published by the Ministry of Culture of Iranian government. These films were subjected to have English subtitle, in order to watch and understand by non-Iranian people (supervisor and jury members). Then in second step, the full list excluded to films with women centered theme. Table 1 shows all the films with women centered theme during the years 1996-2005.

Table 1: Women Centered Films between the Years 1996 - 2005

Year	Women Centered Films	Director	Leading Woman Actor
1996	Leila	Dariush Mehrjuei	Leila Hatami
1997	The May Lady	Rakhshan Banietemad	Minoo Farshchi
1998	Two Women	Tahmineh Milani	Niki Karimi
1999	Bride of Fire	Khosrow Sinaei	Ghazal Sarami
2000	Killing Dog	Bahram Bayzaei	Mozhdeh Shamsai
2001	The Last Supper	Fereydoun Jayrani	Katayoun Riahi
2002	The Fifth Action	Tahmineh Milani	Niki Karimi
2003	Mum's Guest	Dariush Mehrjuei	Golab Adineh
2004	Café Transit	Kambouzia Partovi	Fereshteh Sadr Orfaei
2005	It's Winter	Rafi Pitz	Mitra Hajar

All these films have been watched and in the last step, from the ten full length films, three were selected for the sample of this study according to specific criteria:

- Public success (hitting box office).

- Nomination in Fajr Film Festival (the most important national Iranian film festivals).

- Attitude of filmmakers to represent oppressed women.

The selected films includes: *Leila* by Dariush Mehrjuei (1996), *The Last Supper* by Fereydoun Jayrani (2001) and *Café Transit* by Kambouzia Partovi (2004). All selected films are with women leads them and all discussed the women issue in Iranian society and somehow criticize the problems and situation of women in their context.

The theoretical framework of this thesis provides the feminist perspective to interpret the selected films. As Knight (1993) points out that “film theory has been an enabling device for a research program of interpretation and criticism” (p.324). In this line, all three films have been watched and the important elements of the story such as themes in the plot, characters, first leading role woman and man, general form of violence and oppression, and if there are any form of physical or psychological violence among women and men have been recorded.

Then the attention has been paid to cultural and traditional norms and values in the Iranian society in relation with films and specific context of films. Additionally,

remarkable techniques and cinematic devices are mentioned to extract the meaning during the interpretation of three films. Beside, the narrative of selected films as one of the techniques of reproducing subjectivity has been studied. Interpretations efforts with applying the feminist film theory as main theoretical framework, comprehend the pain of women over and above their oppression. In final step, the comparative review on selected films provides the main discussion and argument of this thesis.

2.4 Research Questions

The main argument of this thesis formed around the essential research questions. To review, to achieve the aim of this study the following research questions have been addressed in research discussion:

RQ1. How do women of selected films oppressed by social system? In other word, how the characteristics of patriarchal society oppress women?

RQ2. What kinds of oppression and violence are represented in selected films? Are women oppressed by the structural violence, physical or psychological and emotional?

RQ3. How do women of selected films challenge their oppressive situation to change it? Are women resist to achieve the female subjectivity?

All interpretations of selected films consider the research questions. In final part, the comparative review on selected films juxtaposes the interpretation of selected films and generalizes the representation of women in these texts.

2.5 Limitation of Study

The most important obstacle during the process of this thesis was collecting films with English subtitle. At the very beginning, this study was aimed to compare the representation of oppressive women in both pre-revolution and post-revolution period of Iranian film industry. In pre-revolution period, no film with English subtitle was available (except those ones that were shown in international festivals). Therefore, the area of study limits to post-revolution period. However, in post-revolution era, finding produced films provide the English subtitle was difficult. Briefly, the sample was affected by market availability.

Chapter 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that outlines the theoretical foundation for current thesis includes three sections: in first section, a definition of oppressive circumstance and violent act will be provided. Second section explains the feminist theory and also feminist film theory in contributing to film analysis. The third section provides the information about previous studies of this research consists of three parts: previous studies about Iranian cinema, Asian cinema and Hollywood cinema.

3.1 Definition of Oppression and Violence

Definitions of violence and violent behavior often depend upon culture and norms.

As Pilcher and Whelehan (2005) explain:

Violence may be narrowly defined, as in the legal sense of it being unlawful use of physical force by an individual against others. A broader approach defines violence as behavior which harms others, either physically or emotionally (p.173).

In other words, in order to define violence, it can be considered as a tool for dominates the other who does not have power. bell hook (2000) explains:

While I agree with Schechter that male violence against women in the family is an expression of male domination, I believe that violence is inextricably linked to all acts of violence in this society that occur between powerful and powerless, the dominant and dominated. While male supremacy encourages the use of abusive force to maintain male domination of

women, it is the western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated. It is this belief system that is the foundation on which sexist ideology and other ideologies of group oppression are based; they can be eliminated only when this foundation is eliminated (p.118).

Therefore violence and oppression, as explained above, related to power relationship. Consequently, the patriarchal system decrease women to the low level of society. In hierarchy of power, women are situated as subordinated and under the domination of society and men.

The concept of oppression as a key term in this thesis refers to the situations that reduce and stop the progress of marginalized individuals and groups. Young (1990) identifies five faces of oppression: violence, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and marginalization. Marginalization takes place when groups of individual are excluded from contributing as social beings. The concept “exploitation” is understood as working to the advantage of others which could include working for low wages with the minimum of autonomy and independence. Violence is one of the forms of oppression that many groups experience, they live with the facts that they must suffer in person and their belongings where the goal is to harm or demolish them. The sense of powerlessness refers to the condition that one group experiences when they lack the independence, status, knowledge, authority and ability to make decision as active agents in their own lives.

Cultural imperialism refers to the dominant meanings circulating in society and how they frame perceptions. Indeed the cultural expressions of dominant groups are

widely distributed; often gain wide acceptance and thus these perspective often become the 'norm' against which all other ideas are measured (Young, 1990, pp.48-60).

3.2 Feminist Theory and Film Criticism

Feminist film criticism has discussed the misogynistic tradition of dominant cinema. Feminist scholars criticize the objectification, marginalization and colonization of women in the mass media and popular culture. Feminist scholars have shown through sustained research and critique that mass media do not represents progressive image of women but, in stereotypical roles as dependent, weak and otherwise clichéd. Van Zoonen (1991) in a content analysis of American TV programs argues that the mass media habitually represent women in stereotypical one-dimensional roles such as mother and wife and in traditional feminine jobs like secretary and nurse with low level of education.

Feminist film scholars argue the misogynistic of the mainstream media which frequently classified women as objects. Filmmakers produced films which conducted under a social system which regulate the sexuality of women, only keeping virginity of women for men to use them for domination and pleasure. They existed to have no real sexual needs of their own but they only existed to serve the male needs. According to De Lauretis, the dominant conventions of media construct women and men as binary opposition; give power to men as agent and disempower women as outsider. Nevertheless, researchers argue that the female roles in today film have stretched beyond their stereotypic roles that created several years ago.

Feminist film theory comes out from an attempt to criticize place of women in films. Indeed, feminist scholars demand the film which criticizes sexual inequality and represents equal power relation between women and men. Freeland (1996) states that feminist film theory is established upon "the feminist assert that men and women are differentially positioned by cinema: men as subjects identifying with agents who drive the film's narrative forward, women as objects for masculine desire and fetishistic gazing"(p.5).

Feminist film theory tries to find out the explanation that, how in a world full of social stigmas and stereotypes women can get their own power. Knight (1995) states that, in nature feminist film theory is extremely political. It attempts to expose the patriarchal practices and indicates fighting for women as a separate social group and their equal rights which have to be equal to men in all aspects. Due to the movement of women's rights, feminists argue that portrayals of female in the media must change (p. 39).

3.3 Classic Theory of Gaze

The way that camera shots women on screen, as sexual object, recognized by feminist film researchers as a concept which is known as "male gaze." Regarding to this issue, Laura Mulvey in her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"(1975) claims that cinema creates kind of visual sexual pleasure and voyeurism. Explaining 'visual pleasure' Patricia Erens states:

For Mulvey, visual pleasure as constructed in cinema is made pleasure. In line with patriarchal culture, pleasure in looking is split between active male and passive female: women as image and men as the bearer the look both on screen and in the audience (Erens, 1990, p.4).

This theory is not applicable about Iranian cinema after the revolution because of mandatory hijab¹ which prevents showing women without cover. Moreover, many constraints such as lack of close-ups of women beauty face and avoid physical contacts between women and men prevent of representation of women as sex object.

Regarding to the theory of “gaze” raised by psychoanalytic feminists, it should be mentioned that in Iranian cinema, because of covering guidelines, audience are not allowed to see private family contacts in the film and thus private scenes of movies are converted to public space. Due to dominant decency principles, sometimes Iranian cinema suffers from this kind of paradox. Mottahedeh (2008) refers to voyeurism and the modesty system and states:

In an effort to produce a national cinema against the voyeuristic gaze of dominant cinema, the post-revolutionary film industry was charged with reeducating the national sensorium and inscribing a new national subject- spectator severed from dominant cinema’s formal system of looking. The industry was asked not only to produce a new national body unhampered by the conventions and codes that habitually render time and space continuous and hence realistic in dominant cinema’s scopophilic and voyeuristic procedures (Mottahedeh, 2008, p.2).

Indeed the veiling of women stands to purify film industry of the western dominant codes of fetishism and voyeurism. Therefore, both filmmakers and audience should adjust themselves with new grammar of Islamic government about Iranian film industry. Consequently, the self censorship by filmmakers in order to conform the requirements of new Islamic government’s rules is inevitable.

¹ Hijab refers to principles of covering as an Islamic instruction for women in Iran.

3.4 Feminism and Subjectivity

The current study borrows the phrase 'female subjectivity' from Smelike (1998) in order to concentrate on a critical view of the structuring of female subjectivity and sexual difference within those films which are produced in patriarchal culture. Smelike studies the feminist films by analyzing subjectivity in films by using Foucault's terminology of subjectivity and points out that it is a process of becoming and not being. Subjectivity as dynamic process is essential and potential for changing and transformation.

We are not only subjected to power; we also have the potential and the power to become a subject different from the one we were socially programmed to become if only we want to, and if the social circumstances are favorable. The process of becoming-subject is taken up in a network of power relations of which sexual difference is a major constitutive factor along others like race, class, sexual preference, age (Smelike, 1998, p.2).

Smelike states that subjectivity both composes and is composed by a set of agencies and knowledge in addition to exterior conditions. Women need to be conscious about the sexual difference to change their conditions as female subjects. Indeed this consciousness is precondition of all activities to change oppressive and unequal situation.

Smelike quotes from Lauretis who states that feminist theory is constructed on the challenge between the image of woman as subject of pleasure and women who recognize themselves as subjects. She points out that:

According to de Lauretis, psychoanalysis is not able to address the complex and contradictory relation between 'Woman' and

'women'. In order to understand the process of female subjectivity, she suggests theorizing experience semiotically. It is through experience that women learn to be female. Experience is not only personal, it is also social: to know you are a woman is to know you belong to a group or class, that is to a gender (Smelike, 1998, p.17).

Furthermore, the certain experience of sexuality affected on the female subject, either inside herself or on the outside world. In order to change the female subject, women need to change experience and habit. In this line, Smelike declares that feminism is engaged in the process of changing via the development of new strategies, new signs and new narratives; it has formed the new social subject of women.

Since, as one of the essential research questions, as referred before, this study will focus on the challenges of women to change their experiences and representations of female subjectivity in films and moreover in society.

3.5 Previous Studies

While this thesis attempts to analyze the representation of women in Iranian films, it is going to explain the identified gap between the previous studies. Regarding to this issue, at the beginning this section explain about Iranian scholars who work on construction of women's image in Iranian films. Besides, the film industry of other countries such as Hollywood, Bollywood and also Egypt will be discussed in order to get better understanding of violence against women in these film industries. Moreover, according to Tapper (2006) most of the productions in beginning of Iranian film industry were stimulations of the foreign film industries such as Hollywood, India, Egypt, Turkey and Syria. Due to this claim, the previous studies of these film industries would be useful in understanding of representation of women in Iranian films.

3.5.1 Iranian Scholars and Representation of Women

The area of study of Iranian scholars, most of them investigate the portrayal of women in Iranian film industry. Due to this issue, the literature of this thesis about Iranian scholars, mentions the representation of women in Iranian films.

In field of film study, Ziba Mir Hosseini (2006) in her article ‘Negotiating the Political of Gender in Iran’, explained about the portrayal of Iranian woman in earlier years of revolution in cinema with focus on her documentary film, ‘Divorce Iranian Style’ (1998). She emphasized religious tradition in her critic of the representation of women and stated that, the image portrayed in many Iranian movies is untouchable for people in their everyday life:

We tried to show that there are different voices in Iran. The one most often heard is the legal voice: authoritarian, patriarchal and increasingly out of touch with people’s aspirations and experiences. But there is also an egalitarian voice in everyday life, seldom heard by outsiders. This is the voice of women, and we wanted it to be heard. We wanted to show the anachronistic nature of law, and how social change is daily chipping away at its monolithic authority. This is not the reality the Iranian authorities wanted to be shown (Mir Hosseini, 2006, p.196).

Indeed Mir Hosseini explains the intentions of all reformist filmmakers of reformation period of Islamic government who effort to represent the more realistic and touchable depiction of Iranian women in their films.

Additionally, in this line, Hamid Reza Sadr (2006) in his book ‘Iranian cinema, a political history’ point outs the negative representation of women before the Islamic

revolution which decrease them as victim. It led to empty position of realistic image of women in Iranian cinema.

3.5.2 Violence against Women in the Eastern Cinema

As it is referred before, many of Iranian films were simulated of Bollywood cinema. Also cultural similarities between these two societies lead this study to mention about the representation of women in Bollywood cinema.

Schaefer (2009) in his article about the depiction of violence, crime, sexuality and vice in Bollywood cinema points out that the image of sexuality and violence exemplified by raping women. Schaefer discusses many issues about violence against women in Bollywood cinema, including: violence used by male characters in order to gain the consent of females; the portrayal of women as sex object, presenting the outside world as dangerous for women and implying that women should remain inside and at home and “Eve Teasing” which is the unwanted harassment of women by males in Indian culture (pp.5-8).

Religious norms are the important factors which could affect on every aspects of cinematic space in Iranian society. Regarding to this issue, investigating about Islam and cinema is very important to conduct in this thesis. Due to the religious similarities between Iranian society and Arab societies such as Egypt and Syria and also Turkey could be a reason to juxtapose the studies of Egyptian and Syrian film scholars to this thesis.

Nawal Ammar (2007) in her article examines the eighteen women-centered films in the years 1999–2003. Ammar argues that Egyptian media serve a dual function: they provide definitions of cultural and socially acceptable norms and increase knowledge

about the abuse of women in Egyptian society. Ammar identifies physical and psychological forms of violence in selected films, for example polygamy which is encouraged by cultural and religious values, taboo of pre-marital sex for women and consequences of it , the issue of ‘Muhailil’ which is specially for Muslim women:

A *Muhailil* – in Islam—is an interim marriage between a man and a woman whose first husband has divorced her three times, but wants to re-marry her for the fourth time (prior to the third divorce the husband can automatically nullify the divorce by returning to her (if she agrees) within a certain period of time or if the period has elapsed he can re-marry her). Once there is a marriage and a divorce from a *Muhailil*, then the woman is permitted (it is *halal*) to remarry the man who divorced her three times (Ammar, 2007, p.3).

Ammar argues that such a marriage institution is both physical and psychological forms of abuse for wives; also it reflects how easily husbands can divorce their wives in some Muslim families. Another form of abuse that Ammar identifies in Egyptian films is ‘loss of man to war’ which reflects the abusive conditions of many women in the Middle East. It is similar to many Iranian films during the eight years of war with Iraq that depicts the image of mothers or wives who suffer because the loss of husbands and sons in the war.

In the case of Syrian cinema there are many studies about representation of women in the Syrian films. According to Kawach (2010) in many Syrian films women are depicted as slaves of their husbands, fathers and brothers. Kawach states that portrayal of women in many of the Syrian popular films is humiliating. Women are at risk of being beaten and divorced by their husbands and films represent shame and end of life for divorced women. He points out the representation of women in ‘Bab Al Hara’ a TV series and states that “series has shown us women as a very weak,

repressed creature lacking any authority...the woman in Bab Al Hara must not argue with the man but to obey him”(p.6).

Gunul Donmez (2004) examines the violence against women in Turkish cinema. He states that violence against women implies the importance of men socially and politically in the hierarchy of power, the violence against women is a response from men to the treatment of the state towards men, meaning men behave to women what the state behaves to them. However Donmez claims that, this is not solely the reason for showing violence against women in cinema, sometimes women are not used just as symbols but, they themselves are also victims.

3.5.3 Violence against Women in Hollywood Cinema

This section is going to discuss violence against women in Hollywood cinema and consider the similarities and differences with Iranian films.

Neuendorf et al (2009) in a research about portrayal of women in James Bond films identify a linking between violent behavior and sexuality. Neuendorf's study examines the film portrayals of female roles and its potential for media effects and also analyzes the negative representation of women in James Bond series of film. Neuendorf et al in this research focus on Western patriarchal society which is demonstrated in Bond series of film. The lead male character promote stereotypical attitude toward female roles, he saves the world by his power and with and through violence. Ultimately Neuendorf et al conclude that the positive outcomes for James Bond, connected to aggressive behavior towards stereotyped women and with persistence on linkage between sex and violence, could promote the likelihood of similar attitude and behavior by audience.

Lorene Wales (1999) in her research about violence against women in Hollywood cinema between the years 1990-1995 analyzes the leading women film roles while she uses Mulvey's theory about the male gaze. She argues that even women in leading roles who are in position of power, suffered from male violence in various forms. However these women by the end of films are victorious and they overcome the violence but, the situation of struggle with male violence still remained. She concludes that, this violent portrayal of women is the aware production of male dominated film industry.

The most important point in these studies which connected them to Iranian films and this thesis is the oppression of women in patriarchal society. In such society women are suffered because of gender inequality and power relationship. In spite of all efforts to show independent women, still they are dominated by masculine values.

Jeanne Thomas Allen (1985) in his article about violence against women in Hitchcock's films examines the essential elements of misogynistic violence, both physical and psychological, in Hitchcock films – especially in "Frenzy". Allen argues that in Hitchcock films women are not only subjugated and colonized but also damaged by discrediting and disconfirming their experience and emotions. He focuses on misogynistic manner in these films which is replaced by misanthropy; it means that the victimization of women is a metaphor for the victimization of human beings. According to Allen the fantasy of rape and sexual violence – representing the male desire to dominate and control the female – is promoted by Hitchcock films. Additionally Allen states that the films present the image of women as victims without male parent or male patronage in patriarchal society.

Similarly, another research analyzed the matter of violence and rape in Hollywood cinema, from 1915 to 2003. Deveryle (2008) examines the victimization of women and rape by applying feminism film theory. Deveryle emphasizes that women are shown as instigators of their victimization; also in many scenes of rape in films, Deveryle identifies the power relationship of class, race and gender oppressions. Furthermore, Deveryle suggests that the victimization of women is rooted in the social structure of power in their society. Deveryle also considers societal pressures on men in society and explains how these pressures can cause violence and oppression of women. In other words men try to overcome their obsessions and social pressure by harming women.

This chapter built the theoretical framework of current thesis to clarify the research as feminist film study and in dealing with the object under examination from feminist position. Also the literatures provide the understanding of oppression and violence against women in produced films in different context and in addition, juxtapose the Hollywood, Indian and Egyptian, Syrian and Turkish cinema with Iranian cinema in terms of how structural violence against women portrayed in these films.

Chapter 4

SCREENING WOMEN IN A WORLD OF MEN

The current study concentrates on those films which both raise a feminist position within the narrative and lend themselves to a critical feminist analysis of the women in Iranian society. In this chapter three selected films, *Leila* by Dariush Mehrjuei (1996), *The Last Supper* by Fereydoun Jayrani (2001) and *Café Transit* by Kambouzia Partovi (2004) are analyzed in the context of a feminist approach that highlights the relationship between film as a social storytelling device and the socialization of men and women in society. In this context, this thesis explores the narrative, the main woman character and various cinematic devices used in the film. Following an analysis of each film, there will be a comparative review of all three films.

4.1 *Café Transit* (2004)

From a dominant reading, the film is about a widow confronted with the unexpected and sudden loss of her husband. The question appears to be how she will survive without “her man”. In brief, her dead husband’s brother expects to be the new husband and the father of his brother’s children whereas the widow wants to continue to grief for the loss of her husband and continue to work as the owner of “their” café. In the end she loses her battle to keep the café but refuses to re-marry. The ending is left open-ended as to whether she will succeed in opening another café or succumb to the pressure of the society. However, when considered from a feminist media studies

perspective, the essential theme of this film, (directed by Kambozia Partovi² in 2004), concerns the relation between “women and patriarchy” in Iranian society. The film constructs a story about a widow who is determined to be independent regardless the social cost – and thus confronts many obstacles that the traditional society puts in her way.

4.1.1 Story Line

The lead protagonist, ‘Reyhan’(acted by Fereshteh Sadr Erfani) is a young widow who, following the death of her husband, insists on supporting both herself and her two children by continuing to work at her deceased husband’s café. Reyhan refuses her brother-in-law’s (Nasser) proposal of marriage to become his second wife and his promise for economic support and father to her children. According to the local tradition of the village, Reyhan is expected to move into her brother-in-law’s house and become his second wife. Reyhan refuses despite all of Nasser’s efforts to convince her to follow the village customs. Reyhan has decided to reopen the café and ignore the threats from deceased husband’s family who think she will harm the honor of their family.

4.1.2 The First Leading Role Woman

Reyhan is an independent woman who struggles for social justice in her life. She wants to support herself and her children through work that she enjoys doing. In the first shot of the film, Reyhan is mourning her husband’s death while sitting outside with her two small daughters. She is also thinking about her brother-in-law, Nasser’s, speech where he insists on being the caretaker for both Reyhan and her children. Nasser is actually insisting that Reyhan marry him and become his second wife.

²Kambozia Partovi was born in the province of Gilan, Iran; he studied dramatic arts at Tehran University. He has written a number of films such as Jafar Panahi’s Circle, and Atiq Rahimi’s Earth and Ashes. Kambozia has also directed several feature films including Fish, Two Sisters, Naneh lala, and Border Café, which won the best screenplay and best actress awards at the Fajr International Film Festival in Iran’. (<http://www.cinemawithoutborders.com>)

The script provides Reyhan with an opportunity to refuse Nasser' family who have asked Reyhan to marry Nasser: "No. I am still in mourning. I will not marry Nasser". She repeats this verbal motif seven times throughout the film in different ways, but all the times calmly: "My answer is No I won't get re-married", "No Nasser, I talked to your cousin. Didn't she tell you?"

In Iranian culture, the black color recognized as symbol of mourning and mourner wears black for a while. However, Reyhan exceeds this time and she does not want to change her black scarf until she loves somebody else.



Figure 1: Reyhan at scene of rejecting Nasser

Reyhan's character is representative of a strong woman who has rarely met with disappointment in her life. There are scenes, however, where we do see her facing unexpected challenges – for example, the scene where she learns that her older daughter smokes when she is not around – her surprised disappointment caught her off guard as she cries and strikes her daughter angrily.

Nevertheless, in the very next scene, she is a strong and hopeful woman again: One who is capable of dealing with the repairs needed in the home – and she is so happy (a joyful song with name of ‘Reyhan’).

The walls that she builds with her own hands may be seen as a symbol of the border between her private world and the people outside who bother her, limit her freedom and force her to do things against her will. She insists: “This is my home”.



Figure 2: Reyhan: “This is my home”

Reyhan is a very patient woman and her behavior toward Nasser and his family is always respectful. Reyhan’s character is thoughtful rather than reactive and she does not display aggressiveness toward those who attempt to persuade her against her Will.

A major problem for Reyhan is that being visible as a coffee shop owner in an establishment frequented mostly by men is against the village tradition: women should be in-the-kitchen; out-of-sight, and inaccessible to the male customers. Consequently, Reyhan suffers the consequences when she struggles to continue in her deceased husband’s business. Indeed, she faces multiple obstacles because she resists the village traditions. Director of Café Transit, Partovi in an interview with

CWB (cinema without border) argues that Reyhan's position symbolized the women who resist the unfair and inhumane force of convention in the struggle for freedom and independence.

A pivotal issue in this movie is financial independence for women – especially women who live in traditional societies. Reyhan struggles for financial independence and she knows that to achieve social independence she has to pay her living cost, otherwise she will be a dependent women.

One of the highlights of the film is when Reyhan is talking about her past difficulties with Stevita, a nineteen-year-old Russian girl, who was raped by a truck driver on the road. Stevita lost everyone in her family (except her sister) during war and now she wanders the roads homeless – her only desire is to go to Italy and find her sister. The underlying story of Stevita is that of abuse against woman and the oppressive conditions under which Stevita lives continue unabated throughout the remainder of the film. Indeed the film juxtaposes Stevita's life with Reyhan's life to represent the same oppressive condition of war time. However, both Reyhan and Stevita suffer the patriarchal system but end of the film depicts them in different way. While Stevita still remains wandered in roads and asks drivers “Do you really get me Italy?”, but Reyhan represents a strong women who can take over the dominant traditions.

Reyhan finds similarities between Stevita's life and her own life and so she decides to keep her at the café. Reyhan cried when she heard Stevita's story and said: “I was sad when you talked about your sister; I never thought two people from two far corners can have suffered the same events”. Then Stevita cried and told her the story of being raped by a diver on the road.



Figure 3: The scene of communication between Reyhan and Stevita

Communication between the two women is non-verbal because they do not share the same cultural language. They do, however, have a strong emotional connection and Reyhan understands through Stevita's story her own sadness about her sister. She lost her family in Iran-Iraq war. She asks her: "Do you miss your sister?"

Reyhan is an example of many women who are oppressed by war and her heaviness of feeling is a mark of the abusive conditions confronted by women during the eight years of war with Iraq.

Another notable point in this film is the subtext of love story between Reyhan and the Greek lorry driver Zakario who discovers that he feels at home in Reyhan's café. This secret relationship parallels the main action throughout the film but at the end, Reyhan refuses to be with Zakario. Reyhan's reaction to refuse Zakario may raise the question of why does she refuse Zakario despite of her love? According to interpretations, the answer is Reyhan's willing to be independent woman. In many scenes Reyhan emphasizes on her independency and her willing to take care of her children by herself. Therefore, accompanying Zakario means losing her job and her independency, which Reyhan is fighting for, and it is in contrast with her ideology.

In the scene of court, Reyhan tries to convince them that her working in the café is not morally wrong. Beside, just voices of the uncertain men had been heard who notice Reyhan to follow the conventions. These oral notices may refer to culture and oral traditional conventions that imprisoned Reyhan in a circle. In other scene of Reyhan's house, a number of men stand near the house and laugh while looking at the house. Also in one scene, Karim (Nasser's brother) fights with them because they are standing there. The meaning of these scenes is clear to all Iranian who are familiar with traditions. Indeed these scenes imply the chronic pessimism of Iranian traditional society toward the widow women. In traditional small towns like the one Reyhan is from, living in a house without a man is not normal or acceptable.

4.1.3 The Second Leading Role Woman

Zoleykha is a woman oppressed by custom. She has to accept Reyhan as her husband's second wife – essentially, her rival – and live with her under the same roof. We first see Zoleykha with her husband's mother on their way to see Reyhan. Zoleykha is holding in her hands a gift for Reyhan and she cries as she walks because they intend to ask Reyhan to marry her husband (and become his second wife).



Figure 4: the first shot of Zoleykha

Polygamy, the practice of men having more than one wife, is a form of violence against women and encourages violent situations for both first and subsequent wives. However, both men and women in this film act as though polygamy is an acceptable and normal tradition – and even encourage its practice. David Ghanim (2009) in his book ‘Gender and Violence in the Middle East’ about the act of polygamy in Islamic rules explains the structure of polygamy:

Religion delegates the position of family leadership to the husband. The obedience of women is strongly reinforced by the ease of repudiating wives and the right to polygamy, which are accorded to men only. The structure of polygamy is, in fact, a small-scale authoritarian order. Like any absolute ruler, one man is the center of attention and is the sole decision maker while several women compete for the favors and largesse of the husband who is the sole master in this petite authoritarian arrangement (Ghanim, 2009, p.175).

Indeed as in above quote explained by Ghanim, the structure of polygamy completely ignore the women rights and their victimization in both family and society.

Additionally, not only does Nasser insist that Reyhan comply with the custom and marry him as his second wife, all of the members of the family, all of the women and even Zoleykha (Nasser’s first wife) despite her secret fear, ask Reyhan to marry Nasser and come in their house to live under the same roof. Zoleykha tells Reyhan, “every place has its own custom Reyhan, don’t ruin my life, he had always treated me with respect, why do you set him against me?”

Nasser’s mother also insists on following the orders of customs and says, “There is nothing we can do here, only the men decide”. In fact, Nasser’s mother as

representative of deterministic tradition encourages oppressive customs. It should be underlined that the socially accepted norm is actually a form of structural violence. In such society, having more than one wife is unquestioned. Indeed, the film only shows us her choice but does not question whether it is right or wrong or does not explain why it would be better than being married as a second wife.

The following quote by Ghanim (2009) may help to understand the role of women in sustainable abusive condition in Islamic patriarchal context:

While it is true that women are victims of gender relations, their victimhood is not an absolute or constant state. Not only are they victims but they are also abusers who contribute to, sustain, and even increase the intensity of violence in society (Ghanim, 2009, P.115).

It is reasonable that in victimization of women not only men and cultural restriction but also women are influential. Passive women can facilitate the oppressive situations. Zoleykha is an example of passive victims who obey the abusive tradition in her life without any complain. Under the pressure of Nasser and his family, Zoleykha many times went to Reyhan and wanted her to live with them, as Nasser's second wife. This passiveness facilitates the process of victimization and encourages the abusive situation against women.

4.1.4 Cinematic Devices

Café Transit with dramatic genre applies the certain cinematic devices. Establishing shot of film depicts the descriptions of Zakario and Stevita about Reyhan. This establishing shot may provide a short hand learned about the main character of film. The black title roles page with white written after reading goes to opposite direction vaguely, it draws the image of road and the space of film.

In the scenes of mourning in the café, camera in near space engage with the black shirts of mourner and the walls that fully cover with mourning paper. The black shot of mourning leads to the white bundle in hands of Zoleykha and then it stops on close up of unsatisfied face of Zoleykha. In all scenes of Zoleykha, the close up shot of worried and sad face of her, the anxiety and depressive feeling is understandable. Additionally, Zoleykha's daughter shots with worried gaze and silence. Her looking behind the window to her mother tells her anxiety of destroying her mother life. In all scenes of her presence, she is carpet weaving and silent.

Nasser's mother as a symbol of tradition is hardly shouldered; she has presence everywhere, but her voice is not that much impressive as Reyhan's. The sound of Reyhan is more audible than others are.

In all scenes of film, Reyhan wears the black color clothes as a symbol of mourning. It is a tradition to wear black as mourner until 40 days (the duration depends on relationship between mourner and dead). Reyhan does not change her black clothes until Zakario (Greek driver) explains his feeling about Reyhan, he fell in love for Reyhan and exactly in next shot, Reyhan changes her black clothes with light color clothes.

Reyhan watches everything behind the windows of café. Her looking far behind the window tells her hope in spite of her anxiety face.

4.1.5 Context of Film

The essential different between a café and restaurant, in addition to applicable use of it, is more implied the cultural differences of them. Therefore, café transit can assumed as a bridge among different cultural speeches with different norms and

values. This film tries to depict this theme in line of common products in recent years of Iranian film industry that efforts to open the atmosphere of interaction and discover the possible capacities to encounter between various kinds of believes, cultures in face with Iranian situation.

4.1.6 Research Discussion

Café Transit reminded the chronic pessimism of Iranian traditional society toward the widow women. According to interpretations of this film, all relationships between Reyhan and people who surround her and force her to obey custom can identify as an oppressed relationships.

According to interpretations, all women around Reyhan encourage and normalize the oppressive traditional power and conditions over Reyhan. All women and family members insist on following the tradition and custom. In fact, Nasser's mother as representative of deterministic tradition encourages oppressive customs. Analysis of this thesis establishes that there is the subtext that women are reproducing their own marginal place in society and that the protagonist is struggling against this narrow gender frame. As Crowder (2007) states "women are keeper of tradition and oppression and the women perpetuate tradition and oppression" (p.11).

Interpretations shows that there is no kind of physical violence in the film and all recording violence and oppression are psychological. However, behind the all of psychological violence there is fear of ultimate physical abuse. Moreover, in society, that physical violence is not forbidden and there is no punishment or strict rules to prevent the physical violence, possibility of beating or suffering physically is not far.

Indeed the structural violence endemic in the social system is the main reason of all kinds of oppression and violence against women of the film. Regarding to structural violence:

Through structural forms of violence persons are socially and culturally marginalized in ways that deny them the opportunity for emotional and physical well-being, or expose them to assault or rape, or subject them to hazards that can cause sickness and death (Anglin, 2010, p.145).

Despite of all oppressive situations for Reyhan, end of story gives to her hands. She does not submit herself to circumstances; Representation of oppressive women in this time is different, Reyhan is not an oppressed woman who gives up her rights, moreover she restarts her work in a café opposite the Nasser's.

4.2 *Leila* (1996)

From a dominant reading, the film is melodrama directed by Dariush Mehrjui³ (1996) about the life story of new married woman, Leila, who understands that she is infertile. As it comes in following part, the tragedy theme of film depicts the tensions of a young loving upper-middle-class couple.

4.2.1 Story Line

Leila is a young woman who understands that she cannot bear baby. Therefore, after a year of testing and getting medical consultancy her desperation increased. Leila is forced by her mother in law to convince her husband Reza to remarry another wife

³ The director of the *Leila* movie is "Dariush Mehrjui" who represents a part of 20th Iranian film journey. His films have been festival favorites frequently, gathering huge international approval. While it can be said about most Iranian directors that they make what pleases them, and hopes it will pass muster with the regime, "Dariush Mehrjui" expedition as a filmmaker is a personal one, he undertakes topics that matter to him and the prickly issues of women in Iran (<http://www.cinemawithoutborders.com>).

after she understands she is infertile. After many objections by Reza, finally he accepts to remarry.

Leila approves it but in wedding night, she cannot tolerate and she flees to her parental house. The next day Reza comes to Leila and asks her to return but she does not accept. For Leila their lovely relationship is finished.

4.2.2 First Leading Role Woman

In spite of the fact that the film is about the relationship between Leila (acted by Leila Hatami) and Reza (acted by Ali Mosaffa), but the film focuses on Leila with her voice over, she is the narrator of film. Leila's discouragement is the dominant feeling of the film. Leila not only have to deal with the reality that she cannot get pregnant, but also she should be engaged with the fact that Reza's family thinks she has to be put aside.



Figure 5: Leila

In the scene that they are in a picnic, Reza's mother takes her aside and talks to her "it is the time that you should start thinking about Reza's second wife" and Leila told her, "If Reza could not have had children, would you have wanted same thing?"

However she would not take over Leila's position; in addition, she has to pension off Reza that this is the right way.

It seems that Leila does not count off and her ache is not taken seriously. The only thing that is considered is Reza's procreates. They constantly repeating to Leila: "The problem is not related to Reza, he is fine and in our family never we had not such a problem, something must be wrong with you". At this time, Leila listens to these things and displays surprising tolerance. Leila attempts to tell her mother-in-law, "for Reza children doesn't very important" and Reza's mother said: "obviously he does, he is saying these things just to make you happy". Leila starts thinking about Reza in a new way while she wanders "does he really wants to just make me happy? Will he regret continuing his life with me? Will he regret to have not any child?" Reza's mother assures Leila that Reza will hate her without having any children and this will be her unfortunate future. Leila faces with passive supporting from Reza and therefore, in such a terrible situation thinks that whatever Reza's mother says to her about her fortune is true and the second wife and having a baby would make Reza happy.



Figure 6: Leila's mother in law

Reza thinks that taking Leila away from his family and their whispering can help them to survive their relationship and make Leila satisfy without any children.

Sometimes Leila is horrified by thinking about second wife who will come into her household, although she sees the whole process as tool, which can test their love. She has this idea that she must make all the things possible for Reza thus he can achieve his true happiness.

4.2.3 First Leading Role Man

The analysis of this thesis highlights that Reza is an educated modern man, who attempts to assure Leila that he did not marry her just to have babies. Reza's feeling about this matter is complicated because in one hand he is match with Leila their love is true and for him Leila is the only woman, but on the other hand, he cannot ignore his family. Reza's major aim is to be a good husband and make his wife (Leila) happy and in order to have a happy life again; he is willing to give up his desire to have children. However, this one goal ends up in opposition to his mother's goals for him.

There are many scenes when Reza and Leila discuss and Reza says with anger, "why nobody asks my idea about this matter? Why nobody does not care who am I going on?"

They think, "Must we run away to somewhere which no one knows us? Where we can live without the pressure of our families to be a certain way?" When Leila and Reza return from the infertility doctor with the bad news they don't know what to say and where to look, we have previously seen them, making fun of things, talking and laughing and etc. The audience can feel the loss of their prior companionship.

Therefore, their silence is meaningful. Reza never shows enough force in his statements to tell Leila that it does not matter that she cannot bear children. As Leila doubts about if he really means it or just wants to make her happy. Furthermore, he is not able to be proof against the pressures of his mother.

He says to Leila “I wish you have stand up to me and scream at me telling me you do not want me to take another wife instead of pushing me like this” Reza’s mother represents a traditional woman who thinks strictly about marriage and her sole son. Reza represent the passive operate who does not any willing to polygamous acts, however, he never stands up against it. Reza accept to attend in interview with second wife candidate if Leila agrees and confirms the woman. Reza wants Leila to go along with him to the fiancé interview appointment, although Leila has to be dropped off close to the interview place and must suffers a debasing and stressful time waiting. With her voice over she thinks “nobody can guess why I am here, who would believe that I am waiting here for my husband to return from making a marriage proposal to some girl?”

4.2.4 Cinematic Devices

In establishing shot of the film, Leila narrates the first time that met Reza in the family's gathering cooking of a shol-e-zard, a kind of Persian Porridge which Shiite Moslem cook to commemorate of Imam Hussein. This opening scene can remind us the traditional family and important role of religious belief in both main characters family.



Figure 7: The establishing shot of *Leila*

In many scenes Leila and Reza driving the highways and we can see out the front windshield, sometimes we can see the mountains in the north of Tehran and the crowded streets of city around them. The difference between houses is remarkable. “Mehrjui” chose a house to place Reza’s family in; he wants to pinpoint a bigger point that they are the ultimate in socially advantaged. They have great social power and wealth that any girl would desire to be as a “second wife” in such a family. This tradition of polygamy can originate from such Reza’s family, not Leila’s family who are more traditional and undoubtedly not as wealthy. Just the audiences must look at Reza’s parent house and compare it to Leila’s parent house the difference is obvious.

At Leila’s birthday party, Reza’s mother with her big glasses and pretending smile comes up to the camera and whispers that Reza desires to have a son soon. The older sister of Reza also comes up to the camera and whispers that Leila must take care that Reza does not get too fat and she has to give food to him such and such. At first, the convention of actors talking right to the camera is meaningful, as it used repeatedly, it is obvious that always the women are talking directly to Leila and their ideas and comments, which are somehow orders starts to bringing up the sense that

she cannot make decision for herself. Often there is an echo on those voices; maybe Mehrjui puts it to demonstrate that there is a reverberation.

There is a voiceover her quiet voice sometimes saying that, “why God you are take disciplinary action against? Am I guilty?” sometimes, silence is dominant, and from distance echoing of the muezzins is coming and calling public to pray.

There are many close up shots of Leila’s face which are employed to express the anxiety, affection, and her psychological stress. Additionally, there are many red color shots and many shots that vanished into red color in order to express the dominant stressful emotional of the film.

In the scene, that doctor reads the result of testing and informs Leila and Reza about infertility of Leila, the camera circles Leila and her voice changes to echo. These techniques serve the sympathy feeling to audience.

In the scene, that mother in law is informed that the born baby is girl, her close up shot of her nervous face represent her failure wishes for Reza’s son.

The analysis highlights another remarkable subtext, the scene that Leila and Reza are watching The scene of Dr Zhivago (1965), when Omar Sharif runs from side to side of house to watch passengers. Then, Leila looks at Reza and then Reza looks at her in silence. Their expressions of film exchange with their looking at each other. This lovely scene of Dr Zhivago is juxtaposed with the lovely relationship of Reza and Leila within their crisis of lacking children. The close up shot of Leila represents her feeling and empathy with the film to scarify her love in the name of love.

In final scene, Reza and his girl come in the family's gathering cooking of a shol-e-zard (as same as establishing shot of the film) to convince Leila to return to Reza.



Figure 8: Reza and his daughter

4.2.5 Context of Film

Contextual atmosphere of the film brings back to intellectual flows of recent years of Iranian society, which encouraged under the direction of President Dr. Mohammad Khatami, and the discussion of civilization talk. In this duration, the feminist thoughts were the canon of intellectual discussion and consideration of women issue in cinematic piece of work indicate attention of filmmaker to demanding of audience.

4.2.6 Research Discussion

The traditional and religious approach considers women as servants to their husbands. For example in the film, Reza is the only lovely son, Leila is the only one to protect his seeds, and it is her job.

The main problem that they are faced with is the clash between modernity that they believe and the tradition that limit their freedom. Leila and Reza are attempt to come to terms with both Western modern liberal thinking and Iranian traditional cultural

practice that are often in opposite. Obviously, they do not want to put away their traditional culture completely, but instead they are looking for some kind of middle way but they cannot run away from their family and culture that force them to polygamy as a tradition that destroy a family. Regarding to polygamous act, Fatima Mernissi mentions:

Polygamy has a psychological impact on self-esteem of men and women. It enhances men's perception of themselves as primarily sexual being and emphasizes the sexual nature of the conjugal unit. Moreover, polygamy is a way for the man to humiliate the women as a sexual being; it expresses her inability to satisfy him (Mernissi, 1987, p.48).

Indeed the polygamous act is the only way that the custom put on their way without any attention to Leila's feeling. This radical custom does not count Leila even as a human being, she is guilty because of her barrenness and tolerating polygamy is her punishment.

The analysis highlights that indeed the mother in law is trying to reserves the cultural history and traditions with her insistence on Reza's son to keep on the family name. In this line, Crowder (2007) claims that "women frequently act as agents of their own or other's oppression"(p.11).

According to interpretations of this film, all relationships between Leila and her mother in law who force her to tolerate the second wife identify as oppressive relationships. In fact, the mother in law represents the religious traditional belief of Iranian society. Additionally there is another remarkable note about the matter of 'mother in law' in traditional societies especially in the Middle East Muslim

countries. Fatima Mernissi (1987) points out the power of mother in law in traditional Islamic societies and states that such societies have anti privacy structure that facilitate the intervention of mother in law in her son's relationship with his wife.

According to interpretations, indeed Leila is oppressed by structural violence of social system. In the filmic text, there is no physical violence recorded. All recording violence and oppression are psychological. Story of Leila reminded the chronic pessimism of Iranian traditional society toward the infertile women. As Pilcher and Whelehan (2005) explain:

Violence may be narrowly defined, as in the legal sense of it being unlawful use of physical force by an individual against others. A broader approach defines violence as behavior which harms others, either physically or emotionally (p. 173).

Therefore, all acts of ignorance and marginalization of Leila in the film that harm her emotionally identify as oppression and violence.

Despite of all oppressive situations for Leila, end of story gives to her hands. She does not submit herself to circumstances, she cannot tolerate the second wife in her home and she runs away from her passiveness role. Representation of this oppressed woman in end of film is different; Leila is not a passive woman who has acted throughout the film.

The film may serve thinking about rationality of some traditional beliefs and customs in Iranian and Muslim societies for people who are conservative and believe in them strictly.

4.3 *The Last Supper* (2001)

Fereydoun Jayrani's *Last supper* (2001) is the last film of the three selected films in this thesis. Love and crime are two matched wings of this film. However, with all of this, the *Last supper* has not been nor a love story and neither a criminal story. The film demonstrates Mihan Mashreghi's difficulties and her ominous fate after divorce. "Mihan", "Setareh" and "Afagh" are three important women characterizes in "*Last Supper*", each represents one of the three recent generations of Iranian women. Each of them involved uncommon love adventures during their life and the same issue has changed their path of life.

4.3.1 Story Line

Mihan Mashreghi (acted by Katayoun Riyahi), university professor, with insistence of her 24 years old daughter Setareh (acted by Hanieh Tavassoli) divorces her husband. She tries to start happy life with her daughter and her nanny (acted by Soraya Ghasemi), but when one of her student Mani (acted by Mohammad Reza Golzar) falls in love with Mihan everything change and Setareh blames her mother and quit her. Mihan and Mani after getting married went to north of Iran and Setareh who is under effect of her father behavior and thoughts, decides to go to her mother place and at night when Mihan with her new husband are going to their room at villa she kills them by a hunter gun. While she is sitting beside their corpse until morning and then she inform the police.

4.3.2 The First Leading Role Woman

Mihan is a prominent professor of architecture represents an educated modern woman. She has an unsatisfied life with her husband Mohsen who represents a strict traditional man. Mihan so afraid of her husband who even count her minutes of entering to their home and when she sees her angry husband who appear during her

speech suddenly she loses her course of word and remain silent and in return Mohsen start telling profanity to her and destroy his character in front of her students in university.



Figure 9: Mihaan Mashreghi

With all negative characteristics of Mohsen, Mihaan still is agreed to suffer his husband behavior until her end of life. She told Setareh: “I live for 26 years with a man who I do not love. I bear all his teasing and annoying for you, not to be a daughter of divorced woman, I can still bear him”

Finally, because of Setareh’s strange insistent they got divorce. Among this still Setareh cannot find out who is faulty for this incident, she thinks that their grandparents are guilty for this incident because they force the cousins to get married together.

Mihaan has written her own memorial of common life with Mohsen in a notebook and she wrote on it about his husband and considered him as a mythic militancy who accepted to be a father just to escape from his childhood, but Mihaan has been blown and experience the real joy of motherhood with the birth of Setareh. Mihaan is a

woman who never lived in the presence of love, because everyone wanted her without the need of love, but they did not know without love she will fill out with hatred. She had a life without love with his husband.



Figure 10: Mohsen interrupts Mihan's class

Mihan who without willing caught in this game, in one of scene in university face with Mohsen who wants to take her out of lecture class and force her to repent of her past actions and telling her after this I will forgive you and we will marry again. When Mihan claim that she did not committed any fault so for what she should ask for forgiveness, they start a serious fight and Mohsen hit Mihan, Mani who is as a wittiness of this fact cannot suffer it and start fighting with Mohsen.



Figure 11: Mihan injured by Mohsen

Mihan is faced with university security menace. They are going to be fired both Mani and Mihan from university. Ultimately she writes a confession letter by the force of university security and by this, accepts her accusations. After that Mihan has lost her job and position her reputation and the only thing left is Mani. Mihan makes a sudden decision and tells Mani if he is still willing to marry her, while she knows in this way her daughter's future will be destroyed. She writes a letter to Setareh and explains the situation, telling her that whenever she becomes a woman she will feel and understand this and she will distinguish the difference between love and debauch.

4.3.3 The First Leading Role Man

Mohsen Mashreghi, who is not an ideal husband, assumes himself as an ordinary man who can put a barrier on her wife's social activities religiously, but he is patient and did not do so. However, Mihan reserved such behavior to the past and believes that her husband cannot adopt himself with her social and cultural activities.

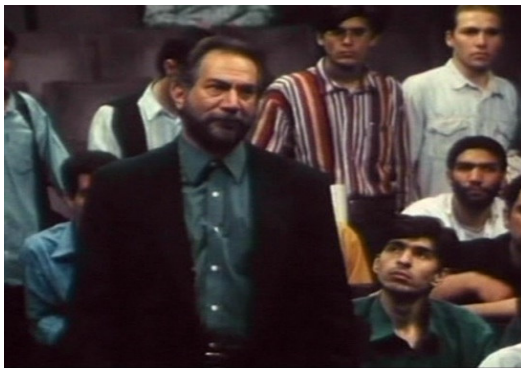


Figure 12: Mohsen while is interrupting Mihan's speech

Mohsen although loves his wife, but at the same time he is pessimistic and skeptic about her. He never expresses his love and he likes her wife to be submissive as same as his mother and other traditional women. He is an unbalanced man who has a rash behavior. He shows his power and domination to her because he cannot suffer

Mihan's position and he thinks her success in society and her work will make him humiliated.

Without knowing that Mani is interested to Mihan and even before that, Mohsen merely wants to impose her emotional abuse. Consequently, Mohsen wrote a letter to university security telling that Mihan as a university instructor have immoral relationship with her male students.

4.3.4 Cinematic Devices

Establishing shot of the film screens the scene of killing Mihan and Mani at villa. The film is the flashback by Afagh (Mihan's nanny); she is telling the story to interrogator in prison after the killing of Mihan and Mani by Setareh.

In most scenes of confronting Mihan with all people who oppress her, the camera direction depicts Mihan from up to down. It represents the victimization of Mihan by all dominant masculine thought and people.

Director apparently plans to refer to native land, Mother country roots and authenticity by selecting the name of Mihan. Director juxtaposes the architectural debates about modern and tradition with the conflict between modern and traditional thought throughout the film. The last scene of film is close up of Setareh who is subject to being madness. The camera zooms on her face in dark prison while she is telling mom, mom.



Figure 13: Setareh in last minutes of the film

4.3.5 Context of Film

The film reminded the intellectual movements of recent years of Iranian society, which encouraged under the direction of President Khatami, and the discussion of civilization talk. In this duration, the feminist thoughts and women's rights were the principle of intellectual discussion.

4.3.6 Research Discussion

From a dominant reading, the film represents how traditions and customs scarify people. Indeed the film depicts the story of three women from three generation who are oppressed by deterministic tradition of society. Afagh is the nursemaid of Mihan and all the film story is on the whole of memories and flashbacks which Afagh telling to interrogator after Mihan's death in jail. This old woman got married with a 50 years old man at the age of 14 and because she was suspected to be infertile, the divorce ruling had been issued. After that she could remarried because of suspicion of infertility.



Figure 14: Afagh, the old oppressed woman

She said: “My mother told me if you have problem (infertility), he will also make you divorced. It is in your destiny that you should bear everything.” Mihan just mentions to all sexual abuses and emotional violence which has been tolerated.

Analysis of this study highlights that Mihan is suffered by her conventional marriage with her cousin. It was the old custom in Iran which forced cousin to get married to each other. She tolerates her husband for 26 years to avoid being a divorced woman. Traditionally, divorce is a taboo in Iran especially for women. It refers to pessimistic attitude to divorced women in Iranian society. In fact, divorced women are exposed to losing their children, social respect, and financial supports.

Setareh is also trapped between two conflict cultures: Traditional strict father and intellectual modern mother, and by end of story she is also one of the victims of this conflict.

The analysis of the film mentions to another important point, taboo of intergenerational marriage for women. It is unacceptable for women to marry very

younger men. In addition, film has a subtext of stoning⁴ in the scene of Setareh's dream about stoning her mother.

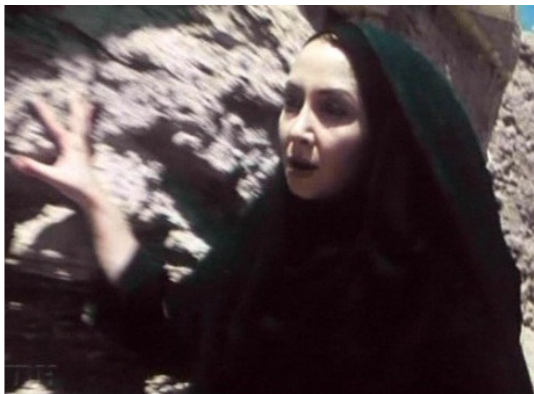


Figure 15: Mihan is intimidated to stoning

Indeed Setareh and her father incriminate Mihan to have illegal relationship with Mani. The film represents the horrified notion of stoning. In Islamic rules the punishment of Zena⁵ for women is stoning. It is the fashionable agenda of protest against Islamic rules and governments in nowadays. Obviously, stoning is a feral form of violence against women even as intimidation.

4.4 Comparative Discussion on Selected Films

This study with applying feminist perspective analyzed the violence and oppressive situation of women in selected films. Director of each films try to depict the fashionable matter of women in Iranian society by using unique narrative and techniques.

According to interpretation of the texts, three main characters of selected films demand better position for themselves in social system. They are looking for their subjectivity in a dominant patriarchal society. Reyhan demands her independency in

⁴ Stoning is a Islamic punishment for women who have illegal sexual relationships.

⁵ Zena refers to illegal intercourse between unmarried woman and man.

very masculine atmosphere of her village as a café running widower. Leila even in modern city and family faces with the traditional conventions that subject her to accept the second wife of her husband but finally she quit this traditional prison and run away from conventions. Similarly, Mihan after 26 years of tolerating her violent husband, get divorced and in spite of all pessimistic attitude of Iranian social system to divorced women and taboo of intergeneration marriage, remarry to a young boy who loves him.

All three films meet the certain requirements of an intellectual and feminist film which stand for equality. The filmic texts act as a structure of resistance to oppressive situation of women in Iranian society.

As mentioned in theoretical framework, the prior need of achieving equality and being subject for all oppressed group is self consciousness. In the line of feminist film criticism, the selected films more and less, provide the initial understanding of oppressive traditions against women as dominated group.

Similarly, three protagonists point out their importance in confront with oppressive social condition; *Café transit* seeks to represent the particular experience of a woman being caught in gendered power relations. Leila escapes from the violence of conventions which decrease her to silent object and Mihan fight with all traditional people who blame her.

Occasionally the oppression of women in selected films was in attendance in the filmic text and at times, it was part of their past and they memorize it.

In spite of feminist position of films, but at the end of the Last Supper Mihan represents a sacrifice of powerful tradition. Mihan killed by her daughter who thinks like all traditionalists of her society. In Café Transit, the narrator of film is a man who fell in love for Reyhan and despite of many scenes which he did not attend (weakness of film); he narrates the story of film. Therefore, film positioned Reyhan as object. This kind of conservative feminist filmmaking may have root in demands and circumstances of society. The case of Leila is almost different; as pointed out earlier, Leila is narrator of film. The film is told from Leila's point of view visually and mentally; audiences see what Leila sees and learn the idea and her feeling. Therefore, the film generates the subjective point of view of Leila which as stated by Smelike, is one of the strongest cinematic devices to create the subjectivity of female character.

According to the theoretical framework, to access female subjectivity there are two essential requirements; having knowledge and being agent. According to selected films, it can be interpreted that more and less, provide the awareness of women difficulties in Iranian society. It may lead to consciousness which may persuade women to change and to achieve the required knowledge of female subjectivity to act as agent.

The final successfulness of protagonists in their path to achieve their demands is portrayed in different way. While in Café Transit and Leila end of stories give to protagonists' hands, but in The Last Supper, Mihan represents the sacrifice of the incriminating by her daughter and ex-husband.

However, three protagonists of films did not achieve what they wish and somehow they lost many things in their path but, the important note is that they are negotiating the patriarchal values of their society. They are trying to challenge the dominant misogynistic customs and this challenge is worth their final success. Regarding this issue Denis Kandiyoti (1988) points out to the bargaining with patriarchy. She states that women organize within a set of concrete restrictions, which she identifies as patriarchal bargains. Different types of patriarchy present women with different rules of the game and call for different strategies to make the most of security and optimize life alternatives with varying possibility for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression (p.274).

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

As conclusion, in the line of aims of this study and following the three main research questions, the finding of this thesis divided to three parts. Firstly, the interpretations of selected films show that how women are oppressed by the social system and how the characteristics of patriarchal society oppressed women. The social, cultural and religious restrictions such as polygamous act, mandatory reproduction (have a son to reserve family name), pessimistic attitude to widow and divorced women, arranged marriage and taboo of intergeneration marriage exemplified the characteristics of patriarchal society of Iran which are represented in selected films. Additionally, the radical traditional attitudes marginalized women and victimized them by pushing them to the private sphere by keeping them at home and decreasing them as secondary.

Secondly, different forms of oppression and violence against women are represented in the selected films. The structural violence of patriarchal society is the dominant form of violence and oppression against women. Women are victimized by inequality between women and men. As Wales (1999) quoted, Wilson suggests that “basically, violence, whatever it’s outward from, has its roots in the inequality between men and women” (81). This inequality sets men in a dominant position over women and consequently men can use this domination to oppress women. In fact, the oppression of women is sanctioned by patriarchal society. Therefore, all forms of

violence and oppression are result of structural violence of misogynistic patriarchal society. Frequently, women of selected films are suffered from psychological and emotional violence. In contrast, the physical and verbal violence are recorded rarely. However, behind the all of psychological violence there is fear of ultimate physical abuse. Moreover, in society, that physical violence is not forbidden and there is no punishment or strict rules to prevent the physical violence, possibility of beaten or suffering physically is not so far, therefore always there is an intimidation of oppressing physically.

Thirdly, the current study explored that how women challenge their oppressive situation and how they effort to achieve their female subjectivity. According to theoretical framework, women need to be conscious about the sexual difference to change their condition as female subjects. Indeed this consciousness is precondition of all activities to change oppressive and unequal situation. The interpretations offer that all three selected films, more and less provide the awareness of the oppressive situation of Iranian women. Therefore, selected films are fairly successful to provide the consciousness for Iranian women.

We are not only subjected to power; we also have the potential and the power to become a subject different from the one we were socially programmed to become if only we want to (Smelik, 1998, p.2).

The crucial quote above highlights the most important conclusion of this thesis which is being aware of our oppressiveness, standing to resist against it and to demand our subjectivity as 'Women Agents'.

In the context of Iranian film industry, there are many crucial researchable topics. For further studies, this thesis suggests the concentration on women filmmakers of Iranian cinema to analyze the representation of women in their piece of works. In addition, the analysis of the oppressed women in other medium of communication would be interesting area of study.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. (1985). "The Representation of Violence to Women: Hitchcock's Frenzy".
Film Quarterly, 3(7): 30-38.
- Ammar, N. H. (2007). "Wife-Abuse and Gender-Base Violence in Egyptian Films".
Justice and Policy Studies , 8(12): 2-5.
- Anglin, M. (2010). "Feminist Perspectives on Structural Violence". *Identities* , 4(7):
145-151.
- Crowder, M. A (2007). *All of My Words: Creating Islamic Female Identity through
Iranian Literature and Film*, Raleigh: North Carolina State University, 9-24.
- Deveryle, J. (2008). *Interrogating Sexual Violence against Women in Film*. New
York: ProQuest.
- Donmez, G. (2004). *Women, Islam and Cinema*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Erens, P. (1990). *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana
University.
- Freeland, C. A. (1996). *Feminist Film Theory*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved
June 15, 2010, from: <http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/aesth/femfilm.html>.

- Gever, M. (1991). "Invisibility made visible", *Art in America*. 7(9): 57-66.
- Ghanim, D. (2009). *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*. California: Preager Frederick.
- James, D. (2008). *Interrogating Sexual Violence against Women in Film*. New York: ProQuest.
- Jensen, K.B & Jankowski, N.W. (1991). *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies*. New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group.
- Pilcher, J & Whelehan, I. (2005). *50 Key Conceptions in Gender Study*. London: Sage Publication.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). "Bargaining with Patriarchy". *Gender and Society*, 3(2): 274-290.
- Kaplan, E. A. (1983). *Women and Film*. New York: Methuen and Co.
- Knight, D. (1993). "Reconsidering film theory and method". *New literary History* , 25(4): 321-338.
- Knight, D. (1995). "Women, Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Humanism in Feminist Film Theory". *New Literary History*, 26(1): 39-56.
- Lahiji, S. (2006). "Chaste and Unchaste Dolls". In R. Tapper, *The New Iranian Cinema*. New York: Martin.

- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual Analysis: A Beginners Guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- McNay, L. (1992). *Foucault and Feminism*. Boston: Northeastern University.
- Mernissi, F. (1987). *Beyond the Veil: Male- Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Massachusetts: Indiana University.
- Mirbakhtyar, S. (2006). *Iranian Cinema and the Islamic Revolution*. London: McFaraland.
- Mirhosseini, Z. (2006). "Negotiating the Political of Gender in Iran". In R. Tapper, *The New Iranian Cinema*. New York: Martin.
- Mitullah, W. V. (1997). Violence against Women. *GHA Conference on Conflict Resolution* (32-35). Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Mottahedeh, N (2008). *Displaced Allegories*. Durham and London: Duke University.
- Neuendorf, K. (2009). *Shaken and Stirred: A Content Analysis of Women's Portrayals in James Bond Films*. Cleveland, OH.
- Sadr, H. R. (2006). *Iranian Cinema a Political History*. New York: Prince Claus Fund Library.
- Schaefer, D. (2009). "The Impact of Globalization on Bollywood Cinema's Depictions of Violence, Sexuality". Chicago: Franciscan University of Steubenville. 5-8.

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage Publications.

Smelike, A. (1999). "Feminist Film Theory". Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, (eds), *The Cinema Book*, (second edition). London: British Film Institute, 353-365.

Smelike, A. (2001). *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*. London: Palgrave Press.

Strinati, D. (2004). *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Van Zoonen L. (1991). "Feminist Perspectives on the Media". in Curran, J. edition. *Mass media and Society*.

Wales, L. M. (1999). *Progression or Oppression?* Regret: Regret University.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University.

<http://www.cinemawithoutborders.com>

<http://www.sourecinema.com>

APPENDIX

FILMOGRAPHY

English Title

- Bride of Fire, Khosrow Sinaei, 1999
- Café Transit, Kambouzia Partovi, 2004
- Dr Zhivago, David Lean, 1965
- The Fifth Action, Tahmineh Milani, 2002
- It's Winter, Rafi Pitz, 2005
- Killing Dog, Bahram Bayzaei, 2000
- The Last Supper, Fereydoun Jayrani, 2001
- Leila, Darush Mehrjui, 1996
- The Lur Girl, Ardeshir Irani, 1933
- The May Lady, Rakhshan Banietemad, 1997
- Mum's Gust, Dariush Mehrjuei, 2003
- Two Women, Tahmine Milani, 1998

Persian Title

- Aroose Atash, Khosrow Sinaei, 1999
- Banooye Ordibehesht, Rakhshan Banietemad, 1376
- Café Transit, Kambouzia Partovi, 1383
- Dokhtare Lor, Ardeshir Irani, 1312
- Do Zan, Tahmine Milani, 1377
- Dr Zhivago, David Lean, 1965
- Leila, Darush Mehrjui, 1375
- Mehmane Maman, Dariush Mehrjuei, 1382

Shame Akhar, Fereydoun Jayrani, 1380

Sag Koshi, Bahram Bayzaei, 1379

Vakoneshe Panjom, Tahmineh Milani, 1381

Zemestan Ast, Rafi Pitz, 1384