The Representation of Women in Iranian Popular Cinema after the Revolution (1979)

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ABSTRACT

The present research looks at the representation of women in Iranian cinema after the Islamic Revolution (1979). The aim of the study is to analyze how women are represented in Iranian popular cinema and whether women have been successful in transgression from the private to the public in the last three decades in Iranian society.

The theoretical framework of the research is the feminist film theory. Therefore, the research method is a combination of psychoanalysis and semiotics as the textual analysis. The post-revolutionary era in Iran has been divided into four periods, in terms of political changes: the post-revolutionary and war era (1979-1988), the Reconstruction era (1989-1996), the Reform era (1997-2004) and post-Reform era (2005-2009). Within these four eras, six films have been chosen based on the box office hit.

The research shows the changes of representation of womenon the screen has been in synced with Iranian women's successes in transgression from the private to the public. Images of women on the screen has been partially a reflection of what women do or they are trying to do in reality. At the same time their images empower contribution of women to the society. On the other hand, the research marks that although Iranian cinema represents woman characters in veil, it encourages a kind of female objectification which has increased after the reform era.

Key Words: The Representation of Women, Popular Cinema, Feminist Film Theory

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, 1979 İran İslam devriminden sonra İran filmlerinde kadınların temsilini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, İran popüler sinemasında kadınların temsil biçimlerini ve son 30 yılda İran sosyal hayatında, kadınların, kendi özel hayatlarından kamusal hayata geçişte ne ölçüde başarılı olduklarını incelemektir.

Teorik olarak Feminist film teorisine dayanan bu çalışma, birkaç araştırma metodunu birlikte kullanmaktadır; bunlar, psikanaliz ve metinsel analizdir. Bu araştırma, İran'ın devrim sonrası siyasal değişim dönemini, devrim sonrası ve savaş dönemi (1979-1988), yeniden yapılanma dönemi (1989-1996), reform dönemi (1997-2004) ve reform sonrası dönem (2005-2009) olmak üzere 4 dönemde incelemektedir. Analiz kapsamında ise, bu dört dönem içinde, en yüksek hasılata ulaşmış olan 6 film seçilmiştir.

Bu çalışma, kadınların ekranlardaki temsil biçimlerindeki değişimin, İran'lı kadınların kendi özel hayatlarından kamusal alana geçişlerindeki başarılarıyla eş zamana denk gediğini göstermektedir. Kadınların ekranlardaki imajı, bir ölçüde onların ne yaptıklarının ve gerçekte ne yapmak istediklerinin birer göstergesi olup, güçlenen bu imaj, aynı zamanda kadınların sosyal hayata girişlerini desteklemektedir. Diğer taraftan bu araştırma, İran sinemasının, kadını çarşaf içerisinde bir karakter olarak resmetse de, reform sonrası artış gösteren kadınların nesnelleşmesine katkıda bulunduğuna işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadınların temsili, Popüler sinema, Feminist film teorisi.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief History of Iranian Cinema

Iranian cinema has a history of over 100 years. Like any art work has always been a reflection to socio-political occurrences on the world, Iranian cinema also has been influenced by socio-political changes in Iran throughout its history. It seems to be necessary to have a glance on Iranian history in the last 100 years to understand the impact of social and political changes on Iranian cinema. In fact cinema came to Iran with Western influences that became more effective during the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925), the last traditional era before the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) came into power.

According to Hamid Reza Sadr (2006) in the late 1800s Iran's government was weak and the country was dependent on both Britain that had long presence in the Persian Gulf in the southern Iran due to its oilfields and Russia, Iran's powerful northern neighbor. Indeed, Iran's government was dependent on both Britain and Russia financially, arms and military training and in the process of modernization for certain technologies to be brought to the country.

AS Sadr (2006) mentions Nasser el-Din Shah as a greater admirer of British telegraphs technology, ordered a line to be established between his Golestan Palace

and Laleh-Zar Garden, both in Tehran. By the 1880s Iran was well equipped with telegraph lines. The telegraph also aided the establishment of newspapers in Iran. The first daily was founded in 1898. Nasser el-Din Shah was introduced to the telephone by his crown prince Kamran Khan, who in 1888 set up a line between the Shah's palaces.

As Sadr (2006) notes Nasser al-Din Shah learned how to take picture and became an avid collector of photographs after his three visits to Europe in 1871, 1873 and 1889. Nasser al-Din Shah was assassinated by a man called Mirza Reza Kermani in 1896, two years after the birth of cinema. Mozzafar al-Din Shah's journeys, successor of Naser al-Din Shah, were instrumental in introducing cinema to Iran. By order of the Shah, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkasbasi[1] purchased a camera to shoot the official visit of Shah's journey. It could be claimed Akkasbashi was the first Iranian cinematographer. The first films were screened at the royal court in front of a gender-partitioned audience. The visual arts in Iran at that time were confined to the palaces and kept out of the reach of the common people. Like photography, the history of Iranian cinema began with an audience drawn entirely from the court and the aristocracy.

Sadr (2006) puts it that in 1904, with the permission of Mozzafar al-Din Shah, Mirza Ebrahim-Khan Sahafbashi, another courtier opened the first public commercial cinema in Tehran, specially in short films. The Constitutional Revolution of (1905-1911) established a constitutional monarchy and a limited form of parliamentary democracy. In 1910 the 12-years-old Ahmad Shah came to the throne and by 1911 he

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[1]. Aakkas-bashi literally means 'cameraman'

was increasingly wasting his time in Europe, while his country moved into chaos. As the protest of the people raised and the Qajar dynasty neared its demise. With the beginning of the First World War, cinema was functioned as a spreader of news. By 1921 Iran was bankrupt; its economic institutions were still primitive and it was a intensely agricultural society. Iran was still at a pre-industrial stage, but the number of filmgoers was increasing. Around 1924 a successful merchant named Ali Vakili opened the Grand Cinema in Tehran, the distinguishing feature of which was designed in a special space for female audiences.

With extinguishing of Qajar dynasty in 1925, Reza Khan established Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Khan's political perspective was secular and his program focused on the establishment of a strong modern state in Iran. Film industry was influenced by Reza Shah's policies of modernization. As Mirbakhtyar (2006) notes Ali Vakili after establishment of Grand Cinema, opened a new cinema called Cinema Sepah in 1925. The first important silent Iranian news footage was produced by Khan Baba Motazedi, between 1925 and 1931. He brought a film projection system and all the other equipment required to screen films when he came back Iran from France. He produced several pieces of news footage during this period (1925-1931), the most important of them capturing the establishment of the Constitutional Parliament in which the monarchy was passed from the Qajar dynasty to the Pahlavi dynasty. In early 1928, he established the San'ati Cinema for female audiences. At the time most cinemas in Tehran screened films starring Richard Talmadge, the American actor who was famous for his cruel actions.

According to Sadr (2006) the first Iranian feature; Abi va Rabi[2] was made in 1930. This sixty-minute silent slapstick comedy hit the screens amid a great deal of publicity. Nine feature films were made between 1930 and 1937. They were made mostly for entertainment purposes, and in so far as they dealt with historical events. Haji Agha, Actor-e Cinema[3] a silent film made by Avanes Ohanian is about a deeply religious man, Haji Agha, whose son-in-law is a filmmaker, reflecting the antagonistic societal forces that came into play over the issues of cinema. It also mirrored wider social concerns, with the clash between past and present, tradition and progress, giving the film a dynamic relevance. The first-ever Iranian talkie, Dokhtar-e Lor[4] by Abdul-Hossein Sepanta, represents a seminal moment in the evolution of the country's cinema. The plot of the film is the love of Golnar who is a dancer at a teahouse and Jafar, a government official. The important point of the film is that for the first time, an Iranian woman (Rouhangiz Kermani) allowed herself to be filmed without a veil. The other films which were made in this period (1930-1937) are including: Shirin va Farhad (Shirin and Farhad, 1934), Ferdowsi (1934), Bolhavas (Fickle, 1934), Cheshmhay-e Siah (Dark Eyes, 1936) and Leili va Majnuon, 1937). However no films were made between 1936 and 1948 because of Second World War between 1939-1945 and economical difficulties in Iran.

Another huge socio-political change in Iran is Islamic Revolution in 1979 by which history of Iranian cinema has been affected. History of Iranian cinema can be easily divided into two eras: 'Iranian cinema before the revolution' and 'Iranian cinema after the revolution'. Since the present study aims to analyze the portrayal of women

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[2]. Abi and Rabi
[3]. Haji Agha, Cinema Actor, 1932
[4]. Lor Girl, 1933

in popular cinema after the revolution, it would be useful to mention the situation of the cinema before the 1979 revolution.

1.1.1 Before the Revolution

According to Shahla Mirbakhtyar in her book '*Iranian Cinema and the Islamic Revolution*' the exposure of cinema to the Iranian society occurred during the travels of the King Mosafaredin Shah to France in 1900, where he was exposed to the cinematograph, by ordering the purchase of this invention the monarch began the evolution of events through which the cinema has brought international recognition to the Iranian cinema (Mirbakhtyar, 2006, p. 1).

During the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) in spite of the most important events in world, cinema -golden years of American cinema, masterpieces of Italian cinema and the new wave of French cinema- Iranian cinema did not progress globally due to the domination of the Pahlavi regime over all aspects of the culture and economy and the harsh censorship of films. On the other hand, influences of American and Indian film industry and producers' attempts in order to make more money created a type of cinema, labeled the "Film Farsi". As Mirbakhtyar (2006) puts Film Farsi operated as a "dream factory" for the majority of the audiences. During the Film Farsi period (1934-1978) Iranian popular cinema had no aim other than copying the commercial elements of the American and Indian cinema and the result was low-quality movies and lack of an artistic creativity both in form and context

In Iran, like in most countries, alternative cinema emerged as reactions against mainstream commercial cinema. The new wave cinema in Iran, which began in 1960s, was a reaction to the Film Farsi. Iranian new wave started with Farrokh

Ghaffari and Ferydoon Rahnema who studied in France and Abraham Golestan who studied in Iran had the education about the Italian neo realist cinema. These pioneers of Iranian new wave cinema worked against commercial cinematic forms and created films that expressed new ideas, the values and traditions of the society.

According to Mirbakhtyar (2006) the year 1969 is considered a landmark year for the New Iranian Cinema. The Cow (Dariush Mehrjui) was the first film to point towards an important new direction in Iranian cinema. Audiences were introduced to a type of movie divergent from the commercial Film Farsi through Dariush Mehrjui's Gav[5], Masoud Kimiai's Qasar and Naser Taqvai's Aramesh dar Hozor-e Digaran[6]. Though they shared the desire to create a different, more artistic form of cinema in Iran, the filmmakers and the films were ideologically and artistically different.

The Cow (Dariush Mehrjui, 1969) based on a famous novel entitled Azadaran-e Bayal[7] by Gholam Hossein Saedi, a well-known writer, is about a peasant's treasure which is his cow, to the point of an obsession and is the village's sole source of wealth. When he makes a short visit to the city, the cow dies of a disease. On his return to the village, he is told that the cow has escaped. The man experiences a nervous breakdown and gradually transforms in both body and spirit into his beloved cow. The conservative village in the story is a small model of Iranian society. The similarity to an economy that was over-dependent on only one saleable commodity could not be clearer than this. The fear of a future without oil resembles the fear of losing the cow determined the faith of the village. As Sadr (2006) mentions that, The

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[5]. The Cow
[6]. Peace in the Presence of Others
[7]. Bayal's Mourners, 1964

Cow was entered for film competitions abroad, winning the prestigious critics' award at the Venice Film Festival in 1969. The film's central character, played by Ezatollah Entezami, also won the Best Actor prize at the Chicago Film Festival and Dariush Mehrjui became one of the most important directors of the new Iranian cinema after the revolution.

Qasar (Masoud Kimiai) is considered to be between the new wave and Iran's commercial film industry. The appearance of Iranian film noir started in 1969 with Kimiai's Qasar. Qasar improved popular commercial cinema and for the first time, Iranian audiences accepted more artistic and intellectual films. Although Qasar was made in the traditional Film Farsi, the difference was Kimiai's point of view. The technique of presentation in the film, made Qasar superior to the standard Film Farsi genre. Qasar created a new type of hero in Iranian cinema which was a kind of anti-hero. The Iranian anti-hero had a nihilistic attitude towards life and acted like an anarchist who wanted to stand alone against power, force, law and tradition. It was a notable film because for the first time, the Iranian audience could see and feel something, traditionally close to them. Although it could be claimed that the film had modeled itself on the Western film standards in terms of production and technique.

According to Sadr (2006) Peace in the Presence of Others[8] was banned immediately afterwards, and not shown to the public until 1972. When it was released to the public, it had been so heavily censored that the main structure of the film was lost. Consequently, this film did not have the same impact of The Cow and Qasar on the new movement. However, it has been effective on those who saw the film during its

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[8]. Naser Taqvaei, 1969

original screening. As K. Pour-Ahmad (director) wrote, Peace in the Presence of Others is an extraordinary work, even a masterpiece. Taqvai means to show the corrupted and boring life of a group people from our society and to leach out the corruption and ugliness.

As Sadr mentions (2006), the cinema of the 1970s tried to identify a true Iranian 'essence'. Ali Hatami was a pioneer in the art of adapting Persian folklore to the Iranian cinema in order to capture that 'true essence'. He attempted to narrate the history of his land through popular culture. A reason of the creation of such a cinema was the social, cultural and economic formations that resulted from rapid westernization and modernization of Iran in the 1960s and 1970s. The government's actions for modernization had no connection with traditional values of the people and threatened Iran's national identity. The other reason could be the internationalization of the cinema. As Mirbakhtyar (2006) states Internationalization in Iran, and the Iranian cinema, was often synonymous with Americanization and this had a harmful effect on Iranian society. American films opened Iranian popular entertainment to depictions of actions and behavior that, before, would have conflicted with the people's traditional values.

In fact, modernization and westernization had an immense influence on Iranian commercial cinema or 'Film Farsi'. But the elements of American commercial cinema had to be adopted to Iranian culture. Because these elements such as sex, alcohol, bars and gangs were alien to Iranians and their traditional values. So, the familiar elements found in American films were adapted to Iranian films to suit the prospective audiences' taste. As I mentioned, during the Film Farsi period (1934-

1978), Iranian popular cinema had no aim other than coping the commercial elements of the American and the Indian film industries which screened in Iran. "In 1941, 250 films were shown in Iranian cinemas; of these films, 60 percent were from America, 20 percent from Germany, 5 percent from France and 5 percent from Soviet Union. By 1950, the American share of the Iranian film market was more than 80 percent and its influence upon Iranian films was strong." (Mirbakhtyar, 2006, p.27)The representation of the women's body was the most important element in American commercial films. To adapt this element to a religious and traditional society like Iran, there had been only two choices; women had to be represented as either the coquette or victims.

According to Mirbakhtyar (2006) many Iranian actresses wore miniskirts along with Chadoors (veil) in films. These limitations in representation of womenduring the Film Farsi Period (1934-1978) had led to a creation in certain type of representations not only of women but also love. Filmmakers represented love making or kissing scenes in the form of rape of women by the bad guys to satisfy the audience who most probably wanted to see eroticism on the screen. Women were most often represented as the prostitutes or cabaret entertainers and remained like that for the next two decades.

Although the number of Indian films shown in Iran was less than the number of American films, Indian films' influence was greater because of closeness of the two cultures. So, song and dance entered Iranian cinema through influence of Indian films. In fact song and dance became the other way of the representation of women in Iranian cinema. Dance was also used as a device to present sex to the audiences.

As Mirbakhtiar mentions (2006) there were a couple of dance scenes in Film Farsi which usually took place in cabarets or Cafes. The dances were represented either as an Arabic belly dance or as Iranian Baba-Karam dance. In both dances, uncovered body parts of the dancers and their shaking breasts and hips were the central focus of the camera.

Using women bodies and objectifying women to attract male audiences were the only way of the representation of women in Iranian cinema. As Sadr (2006) mentions however the filmmakers of the new wave cinema in Iran, which started in 1960s tried to fight the 'anti-artistic' taste of Iranian audiences. "In 1971 Nosrat Karimi had made both Carriage Driver, at its core an analysis of chastity and women's lack of freedom and self-determination in a predominantly patriarchal society, and Mohallel, about divorce and remarriage, which, due to its concern with gender issues, turned into a sex-comedy of sorts" (Sadr, 2006, p. 153).

1.1.2 After the Revolution

During the upheavals of the revolution in 1978-1979 many movie theaters were burnt in Iran. According to Devictor (2006) cinema theatres were burned down in the name of morality and cultural independence. "In June 1982 Etella'at (newspaper) claimed that out of a total of 524 cinemas in Iran, only 313 remained intact". (Sadr, 2006, p. 169) In this period (1979-1982), neither the government nor the filmmakers knew what they should or could do to regenerate the film industry. Because the government didn't still have a clear idea about Iranian cinema. As Ayatollah Khomeini (1979) announced:

> We are not opposed to cinema, to radio or to television. The cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating the people but as you know, it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is misuse of

cinema that we are opposed to, a misuse caused by the treacherous policies of our rules. (Naficy, 2006, p. 29)

So, in the earlier years after the revolution, the leaders tried to adopt cinema as an ideological tool to combat Pahlavi culture and usher in an Islamic culture. According to Sadr (2006) in June 1981 the politician, Mohammad Ali Rajai stated that: "People's slogans must be reflected in films, films should express the people's demands and aspirations and they must also create a sense of hope and spirit of defiance. The pressing issues of the deprived and the Islamic Revolution must be presented in films". That is why the early films of the 1980s were often full of propaganda with revolutionary values, anti-Pahlavi, anti-Americanism and pro-Islamic values. As Sadr (2006) mentions the films were simple-minded and aimed in terms of audience, at the lowest common denominator. They were badly shot, written and acted and incoherently edited. During the war period (1980-1988) most of the films focused on fighting and military operations.

According to post-revolutionary and war circumstances of society and government policy, women were excluded in films. The films like: The Senator (1983), The Eagles (1984), Boycott (1985), The Passage-way (1986), Kanimanga (1987) and The Horizon (1988) that the story of all of them is about revolutionary values and war (selected based on box office). "Statistics point to the very low presence of women as heroes in films made in 1987: of the 37 films, the chief protagonists in 25 films were men, in three films they were women, and in seven films, men and women shared equal billing". (Naficy, 2006, p. 46)

Only from 1985 the New Wave filmmaker, Beyza'I, made '*Bashu, The Little Stranger*' about influences of war and human relationship and after that in 1989 that Mohsen Makhmalbaf made '*Wedding of the Blessed*', which used the war to critique government and society, the presence of women increased and Iranian cinema entered to a new stage.

1.2 History of Women Images in Iranian Cinema

Iranian society encountered the women movement over a century ago. "Tahereh Qorrat-al-Eyn, a poet and an intellectual figure of the Construction Revolution is the first woman to drop the veil in public and was executed in 1852 in her 36 in Qajar era" (Alavi, 2007). In Pahlavi era one of the policies of modernization was creation of new dress code and unveiling of women. "Reza Shah Pahlavi gave Iranian women the right to come out of their houses and go to school and work. Because before this Iranian women were not able even to go to the markets unless they were accompanied by a male member of the family. Reza Shah Pahlavi passed a law in 1937, granting women freedom to unveil in public and to be admitted to Tehran University" (Mirbakhtyar, 2006, p. 23). Nevertheless, the rush to westernization and modernity excluded Muslim women from the public sphere who refused to appear unveiled in the public. According to Shahla Lahiji (2002) the film industry arrived in Iran in the end of Qajar dynasty (before 1925), at a time when Iranian women after a period of inactive or ignorance, were about to start a slow journey toward awareness of the world in order to receive an equal social status with their male partners in the Iranian society.

It is argued that cinema could have helped women to reach the goal of equality both in the private and public sphere in Iranian society. Instead, it has been charged by scholars such as Mahani (2006) that the industry represented women as second-class citizens whose main duty was to reproduce the human race and to be kept at home for the domestic sphere for the family. If they appeared outside, they would have brought misery to society and fallen into an unchaste life.

As I discussed above, after the revolution, cinema was adapted to revolutionary values and became an ideological tool. Cultural policies of the state took place based on Islamic culture. So far, Muslim women in an Islamic cinema must be shown to be virtuous and taking care of the children and not to be treated like commodities or be used to arouse sexual desire. So, in this period filmmakers encountered governmental censorship, self-censorship and avoided the stories which involved women. But during the three decades after the revolution with changes in cultural policies, the representation of women has clearly been transformed.

"The post-revolutionary era in Iran is classifiable into three periods: the post-revolution and war (1979-1988), the post-war period of reconstruction (1988-1996), and the reform years during Khatami's presidency (1997-2005)" (Khalili Mahani, 2006, p.2). Since this study has emphasized on post revolution era, I have deemed it necessary to divide this era into four which is an improvement to the similar study conducted by Mahani. As a further clarification on this study, I would like to add the last five years of Ahmadi Nejad's Presidency and to classify the post-revolutionary era in Iran into four periods:

- The Post-revolution and War Era (1979-1988)

- The Reconstruction Era (1988-1996)

 - Reform Era (1996-2005)

 - After the Reform years and during Ahmadi Nejad's Presidency (2005- 2009).

1.3 Aim and Objective of the Study

 The research concentrates on the portrayal of the representation of women in Iranian cinema that will be evaluated only in terms of women in front of the camera. The aim of the study is to analyze how woman is represented in Iranian popular films and whether women have been successful in transgression from the private to the public sphere in the late three decades in Iran as a social reality.

The theoretical framework of the research will be the feminist film theory. According to Smelik (1998) in a sociological view cinema is assumed to be reflecting reality. Smelik (1998) refers to Molly Haskell (1987) and Marjorie Rosen (1973) who analyzed the historical position of women in Hollywood productions and resulted in the objection to the 'dream factory' of Hollywood that produces false consciousness. Those films do not show 'real' women. They represent only the stereotypical images of an ideologically laden 'femininity'. As my research is based on popular cinema, I will use the feminist film theories to find out how women are portrayed in Iranian popular cinema.

The research method would be a qualitative method. In fact as a qualitative method, the methodology of this research would be textual analysis. According to my theoretical framework which is feminist film study I will also employ the methodology of feminist film study. Feminist film theory has employed a

combination of psychoanalysis method and semiotics as textual analysis. So, as a semiotics review I will concentrate on film form and structure: narrative, images, characters, photography and so on to analyze the growth of woman representation in the Iranian cinema in a given era and a comparison between each period in the post-revolutionary Iran. Psychoanalysis will also help to analyze the hidden messages in any symbol and to decipher the signs of the representation of women.

I have chosen six popular films based on the box office hits for each period. The films I have chosen for each period are as below:

The post-revolution and war era (1979-1988)

    1- The Tenants (1987); Director: Daryoosh Mehrjuie; Genre: Comedy; Duration: 130 mins.

Reconstruction era (1989-1996)

    2- The spouse (1994); Director: Mehdi Fakhimzadeh; Genre: Drama; Duration: 90 mins.

    3- The Bride (1991); Director: Behrooz Afkhami; Genre: Drama; Duration: 75 mins.

Reform era (1997-2004)

    4- The red (1998); Director: Feraydoon Jairani; Genre: horror; Duration: 90 mins.

    5- The Hemlock Director (2000); Behrooz Afkhami; Genre: Drama; Duration: 90 mins.

After Reformation and Ahmadinejad presidency (2005-2009)

    6- Forced success (2007), Director: Mohammad Hossein Latifi; Genre: Drama; Duration: 90 mins.

The selected films will address the following research question:

- The ways in which the females are represented in Iranian popular cinema and whether women have been successful in transgression from the private to the public sphere in the late three decades in Iran as a social reality.

It is believed that through a critical and objective analysis of the films, this research question can flourish a novel idea about the Iranian cinema. In my research I will analyze the popular films. According to Hamid Naficy (1995), the popular cinema inscribes post-revolutionary values more fully at the level of plot, theme, characterization, human relationship, portrayal of women and mise-en-scene. I will concentrate on content and form of films in terms of how the films represent Iranian women. The next chapter will discuss the literature of the study and other similar studies which sheds light on the nature of this research. I will also clarify the theoretical framework of this study in chapter two.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation of the present study is that there are no films of popular cinema of Iran with English subtitle or there is a limited number of them.The differences between the Iranian and western calendars causes problems. The Iranian New Year starts on March 21th. In order to know exactly in which year of the western calendar an Iranian film was produced, the month of the screening must be known too. However only the year of the production of the film is normally given according to the Persian calendar

Since no English resources have been found about the title of the most of the films I used my own translation.

The plots are based on my own translation. Because no published English translations have been found.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Feminism and Film Studies

Feminism has had many scholarly definitions according to theoretical or ideological

point of view. According to Chris Barker, a cultural studies scholar, feminism can be

defined as

> a field or theory and politics that contains competing perspectives and
> prescriptions for action . . . In general terms, we may locate as asserting that
> sex is a fundamental and irreducible axis of social organization which, to
> date, has subordinated women to men. Thus feminism is centrally concerned
> with sex as an organizing principle of social life where gender relations are
> thoroughly saturated with power ` (Barker, 2008, p. 24)

The quote above by Barker explains feminism as phenomena associated with

oppression and power relations between women and men in society. This standpoint

is the one that is shared almost by all feminists, they all agree that all women are

oppressed. The areas feminists argue where/how oppression takes place differs from

scholar to scholar; Lois Mcnay (1992) who uses the Foucauldian analysis to argue

that oppression cuts across sexuality, self and other relationships.

While Mcnay offers rich insight on her argument on Foucault writing about

feminism, it is generally believed that the wave of feminist's consciousness began to

establish a global acceptance in the 1980's. This was out of the belief that human

beings, male or female, man or woman should be equally represented in any sphere

of society. It is the feminist desire to get rid of the injustices towards women in the societies that are subject to globalization.

In her analysis of Foucault's 'power body and experience', Lois Mcnay discusses the issue of feminism and the body by attributing the female body to power relations. "It is Foucault's notion of the body as the point where power relations are manifested in their most concrete form which, in the last few years has made a significant contribution to feminist thinking on the body" (Mcnay, 1992, p. 16). This notion according to Mcnay makes Foucault different from other theorists such as Derrida who believes that the body is a metaphor. A critical review of Mcnay's work introduces the reader to her arguments and views based on Foucault's writing. One interesting point of view is the following;

"One of the most important contributions of Foucault's theory of the body has made to feminist thought is a way of conceiving of the body as a concrete phenomenon without eliding its materiality with a fixed biological or prediscursive essence. The problem of sexual difference is one that has preoccupied female theorists" (Mcnay, 1992, p. 17). The main argument discusses that on a fundamental level, a notion of the body is central to feminist analysis in general. She adds that the legitimized gender inequality is directly attached to the structure of the female body.

> The idea that women are inferior to men is naturalized and thus legitimized by reference to biology, this is achieved through a twofold movement in which, firstly, women bodies are marked as inferior by being compared with men's bodies according to male standards (home manqué) and secondly, biological functions are conflated with social characteristics. In many respects, masculine characteristics can be seen as to be related to dominant perceptions of the male body i.e. firmness, aggression, strength. (Mcnay, 1992, p. 17)

The argument by Mcnay comes in apparent reference of the way things exist in the patriarchal society. Feminists argue that women rights have been regarded as the

property of Man, and her body is seen as a reflection of this ideology. The arguments Mcnay makes are enshrouded in her discussions on Feminism and the Body, Essentialism and ideology. (Mcnay, 1992, p.11-35)

In Allwood and Wadia's "Increasing Women's representation in France and India"; they argue that the comparison of the two countries gives an insight how women are portrayed in cinema in developed and third world countries (Wadia&Allwood, 2004). According to them; "The study shows that some argument used to oppose women's representation are common to both countries. Analyzing these arguments enables us to understand the obstacles to better representation and devise strategies to overcome them" (Wadia&Allwood, 2004, p.390).

The study above showed that there are still much under -representations of women in the area of media and film in countries regardless of whether they are developed or under-developed. I also would like to claim that oppression of women is more prevalent in under-developed and densely populated countries like India as compared to France in the study by Wadia and Allwood.

Laura Mulvey (1975) in her article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' states that a 'Woman' shown in a film is most of the time functions as a signifier of sexuality; the way she is dressed or the way she is screened, framed portrays the woman as a sex object especially in mainstream cinema. With the help of psychoanalysis, she attempts to explore a theory of the 'male gaze' that is one of the main paradigms in feminist film theory. Mulvey through the notion of 'scopophilia'

and 'voyeurism' in psychoanalysis, tied to understand how Hollywood cinema objectifies women on the screen.

Because the aim of this thesis is to analyze and investigate the representation of women in Iranian cinema after the Islamic revolution, it would not be possible to discuss cinema without discussing the role of psychoanalysis and the cinema especially as it is related to film theory.

2.2 Psychoanalysis and Film Theory

In film research the use of psychoanalysis has become an established order because of its relationship with the identity analysis in cinema. Sandy Flitterman -Lewis attributed the post modern era critic of Anthony Gidden's active construction. As Giddens states "One of the prime features of the postmodern experience is fragmentation, where inherited self-identity of history is no longer a stable, secure fact but requires active construction. A 'self-identity' has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions" (as cited in Flitterman-Lewis, 2008).

According to Freud "Psychoanalysis, as a theory of human psychology, describes the ways in which the small human being comes to develop a specific personality and sexual identity within the larger network of social relations called culture. It takes as its object the mechanisms of the unconscious---- resistance, repression, sexuality, and the Oedipus complex--- and seeks to analyze the fundamental structures of desire that underlie all human activity." (as citef in Flitterman-Lewis, 2008). While my

21

agreement on Flitterman-Lewis is due to the relationship of the representation of women and the sexual identity which had been amassed over the past and modern era. This thesis will try to adopt psychoanalysis and film theory and their relations in the representation of women in Iranian cinema.

Flitterman-Lewis defined Psychoanalysis as follows; "Psychoanalytic film theory emphasizes the notion of production in its description, considering the viewer as a kind of desiring producer of the cinematic fiction. According to this idea, then, when we watch a film it is as if we were somehow dreaming it as well; our unconscious desires work in tandem with those that generated the film-dream." (Flitterman-Lewis, 2008) Psychoanalytic criticism suggests that works of art send messages, in hidden and rather mysterious ways, from the unconscious of creative artists to the unconscious of people who are the audience for their works. Psychoanalytic criticism rests on the assumption that we are not always aware of all the thoughts that are in our minds and that we are often governed by forces and motivations beyond our consciousness.

Laura Mulvey, in her article, "*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*" (1975) argues that classical cinema stimulates the desire to look by integrating structures of voyeurism and narcissism into the story and the image voyeuristic visual pleasure is produced by looking at another (character, figure, situation) as our subject, whereas narcissistic visual pleasure can be driven from identification with the (figure in the) image. Mulvey explains the function of scopophilia as the structure of a binary opposition on the axis of activity and passivity. She believes that the narrative structure of traditional cinema establishes the male character as active and powerful.

Within the narrative of the film, male characters direct their gaze towards female characters and the spectator is often unconsciously identify himself/herself with that male look. Mulvey states there are three levels of the cinematic gaze, camera, character and spectator that objectify the woman character. "There are three different looks associated with camera, that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion". (Mulvey, 1990, p.30)

In *Afterthoughts on; "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989)*; Mulvey's criticism on the western narrative and visual pleasure lends a voice to the present study's attempt to investigate the representations of women in Iranian cinema. She analyses the role of women as an audience and as a role in the western movies using psychoanalysis methodology.

According to Mulvey "For Freud, femininity is complicated by the fact that it emerges out of a crucial period of parallel development between the sexes; a period where he sees the masculine, or phallic, for both boys and girls" (Mulvey, 1989, p. 25). While femininity is generally referred as qualities and behaviors judged by a particular culture to be ideally associated with or especially appropriate to women and girls, it does not however absolve it from the theory that it is a by product of a patriarchal system. Personally after reading through Laura Mulvey's critic on Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, I could not help be see the link in Fliliz Cicek (2010)'s article titled "Gender Representation on Turkish Melodramas".

The similarity lies on' both authors' identification of femininity in both Turkish cinema and western cinema. Both authors agree that the role of the woman is largely dependent on the flow of the hero as the plot is fashioned. This is evident in the following statements.

> The correct road, femininity, leads to increasing repression of "the active". In this sense Hollywood genre films structured around masculine pleasure, offering identification with an active point of view, allow woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bedrock of feminine neurosis. (Mulvey, 1989, p. 26)

This statement credits the Male as the bedrock of a woman character portrayed in a movie or generally in Hollywood terms. This portrayal is not too far from the European concept as Cicek also tries to depict in her article;

> As I mentioned above, there are times when she has to leave the safety of her patriarchal family and take care of herself. Sometimes she becomes the sole breadwinner, which underlines the absence of and/or incompetence of men in her life. This is why at the end of the films the patriarchal family unit is always restored, father or husband is returned, lovers are united, and she doesn't have to work anymore. While the women in these films were presented as responsible for successfully turning love affairs into marriages, at the same time their world was limited to a male lover which ensured the integrity the patriarchy. (Cicek, 2010, p. 5)

The similarity of woman characters in the plots and their destiny in patriarchal domination of real life is structured into cinema depictions. So even in films, women are portrayed as dependent on the male.

However Melanie Williams "A Girl Alone in a man's World" gives an insight how women are represented in the British Cinema. Her critic of the 1958 ' Ice Cold in Alex' and the place of women generally in the 1950's British war film cycle gives an insight on how women were portrayed by the British cinema in the early 1950s. It

draws a link between argument on femininity and the relationship of the female

body's masculine definition as argued by Cicek and Mulvey.

Williams argues that the British cinema in the 1950's were wholly masculine

especially the war films that preceded the Second World War.

> By comparisons in the 1950's war narratives, there is little attempt to
> understand what the huge social upheaval of war might have meant
> specifically for women. A useful parallel can be drawn with Rattigan's
> comments on the change in emphasis from the second world war being
> conceptualized as a "people's war" during wartime British cinema, working-
> class characters depicted as heroes rather than comic relief, to the
> reinstatement of the middle-class hegemony during post war years, with
> British films suggesting that the war has been won by an officer class on
> behalf of the populace. (Williams, 2009, p. 96)

The extract above from Melanie William's article discusses the role coverage of the

war and how British films capture the events of the Second World War. One of the

most successful films of that era *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958) which enjoy reviews from

most of British successful press reviewers. The majority of the critical commentary

concentrates on the film's representation of masculinity, centered on the struggle for

supremacy between the strong confident South African Van der Poel (Anthony

Quayle), who later discovered to be a German spy, and the emotional exhausted,

borderline alcoholic British officer Anson (John Mills). (Williams, 2009, p. 96)

What strikes my line of thought is that in the British cinema and western cinema the

definition of the woman character and her role in society is defined by what the role

is ascribed to the cinema industry. For example in *Ice Cold Alex*, the main woman

character Diana who was portrayed in contrast with another woman character. As

two nurses, the portrayals were evident and significant. The two characters Diana

and Denise portrayals were as follows; "for Diana her lines were delivered short and

clear brisk tone of voice while Denise was portrayed as a slightly muddled speech and tensed about loosing her nerve on the bomb raid and her glazed vacant expressions foretell her later panic attack". (Williams, 2009, p. 100) The deliberate portrayals of the woman characters are justified by roles ascribed to female in society in that era. Women in that period were generally portrayed to be weak and feminine by nature, subject to the dominant male who always at the end of the day gets the girl either with a kiss or marries her as popular Hollywood movies end and they live happily ever after as the wife of the hero or prince. Although not all movies ends with the hero taking the day, typical Bond Movies sometimes go in this manner but lately in Quantum of Solace series we see that the dominant Male, Bond, become obsessed with revenge when his lady was murdered. Here the woman becomes a catalyst for revenge mingled with her sexuality.

In a feminist review of Hollywood movies in a High school classroom in 2000, Barile explains her feminist opinion of the bond movies;

> An exercise I use with high school students in the classroom provides them with the tools of analysis that can help them readily spot gender stereotypes and the negative or positive portrayals of gender. It also encourages them to reject or accept these gender messages and urges them to work for change. I have found this particular assignment actually causes an "awakening" to gender issues that carries over to the student's critical analysis of other forms of literature, media, and rhetoric. In my Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class, seniors are required to do a rhetorical criticism as an introduction to the art of rhetoric and how it influences thought and action. One of the choices for this assignment is a feminist criticism of a film. (Barile, 2000, p. 31)

She further explains that in her research she discovered that;

> The male perspective … is dominant even before the plot begins. Once "the plot thickens," each character is seen as good or bad; there are no neutral characters… James is in competition with the major male characters throughout the movie. They are the "bad guys," and James is looking to defeat them--a classic plot. The female characters, however, are portrayed as sexual conquests to James; objects of his elusive affection … The main

female characters wear clothes that emphasize their unquestionably attractive bodies, making them naturally attractive to the male viewer. The main role opposite James Bond is an older man. Though distinguished, he is far from physically appealing. In this way, the movie is presented from a male perspective…. (Barile, 2000, p. 32)

She explains that the male hero is often projected in a Hollywood perfect way while the villain is always seen as the opposite in look appeal and charisma. While the study provided insight on how the Hollywood movies series is dominated by essences, as Barlie (2000) notes that the teenagers concluded that *Star Wars* is based on a fairy tale and the princess is not desire object of the heroes. *Tomorrow Never Dies* can be treated as a feminist critique by defining the problem. *Clueless* also can teach women self-esteem and self-empowerment.

The students were able to see pass this through the use of feminist criticism involves three steps: (1) Analysis of the conception of gender presented in the rhetorical artifact; (2) discovery of the effects of the artifact's conception of gender on audience; and (3) discussion of how the artifact may be used to improve women's lives. (Foss, 1989, p. 155)

In the later part of this section, an attempt will be made to discover how popular cinema works and how Iranian cinema has now embraced the concept of portraying women in a peculiar or rather subjective manner.

2.3 Feminism and Popular Cinema

Popular Cinema attributes its coinage to the notion of popular culture. While popular cinema can be defined as a type of cinema that appeals to pop culture and the representation is pop society. Popular Culture actually was first coined in an address in Birmingham town hall. (Chapman, 1853) He defined it as is the totality

of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, memes, images and other phenomena that are deemed preferred per an informal consensus within the mainstream of a given culture, especially Western culture of the early to mid 20th century and the emerging global mainstream of the late 20th and early 21st century. Heavily influenced by mass media, this collection of ideas permeates the everyday lives of the society. (Chapman, 1853) The term began to assume the meaning of a culture of the lower classes separate from and opposed to "true education" towards the end of the century.

Therefore the term 'popular cinema' can be related to the movies that are common and appeals to the majority of the population in a country or particular audience. The diversity of popular cinema is dynamic in nature like its founder pop culture; it adapts itself to the particular rave of societies. Popular Cinema itself has not been able to evade the debates brought by feminists on the biased representation. It is even argued that modern popular cinema represents women more subjectively than former eras or other types of cinema.

According to Tasker, the modern audiences' gives standing ovations to actresses such as Whoopi Goldberg and Sharon Stone despite the fact that the roles that actually made them famous were actually oppressive roles they perfectly displayed to the audiences of popular cinema.

> While hosting the 1996 Academy Awards Ceremony Whoopi Goldberg cracked jokes about the roles women in the films produced the preceding year: Paul Verhoeven's critically berated Showgirls (I haven't seen that many poles since world war II), Sharon Stone as a gangster wife (and former prostitute) in Martin Scorsese's Casino (nominated), Elisabeth Shue as a prostitute in Mike Figgis' Leaving Las Vegas (nominated) and Mira Sorvino who won Best supporting actress for her role as a prostitute in Woody Allen's Mighty Aphrodite. (Tasker, 1998, p. 3)

It was considered ironic by Tasker as one of Goldberg's biggest hits in Hollywood was as Deloris Van Cartier the Las Vegas lounge singer who masquerades as a nun

to escape from a mafia boss/boyfriend in Sister Act (1992) (Tasker, 1998, p. 3). However, analyzing Goldberg's words one is brought to the proportions of the status of women in contemporary American films. In popular cinema sexuality remains central in representation of women. In popular cinema today it doesn't matter how she –the woman- is portrayed. Most of the roles are liken or related to the status of a prostitute. Moreover Tasker in discussing the representation of the prostitute she argues that the figure of a prostitute is seen by popular cinema as one of an archetypal fashion as both symbol and symptom of a gendered, classed and raced hierarchy. It (meaning the term prostitute) is associated with sex in exchange for cash and according to her argument the notion of sex is tied to an over determined space in Hollywood representations, such as "tart with a heart', streetwalker, flapper, stripper and so on. The prostitute's work she says involves the sale of sex for cash. I agree with her analogy that in Hollywood (or in my argument and popular cinema) the stereotype of the prostitute encompasses the continuum which extends across a literal sexual/economic exchange. "Thus the caricatured stereotype of the prostitute is embodied on any role a women is associated through the careful portrayal of exchanges of physical labor bounded up with sex, which signifies only one point of continuum which extends across legal thrillers and crime movies into the paranoid scenarios of office politics not to mention the new craze for series such as desperate house wives and sex in the city". (Tasker, 1998, pp. 3-4)

While drawing a significant amount of input from Yvonne Tasker criticism, I have to mention that this thesis is aimed to expose the feminine critiques in popular cinema and popular cultures. The study is concentrated on the Middle East, where the popular culture is a bit different from the typical western climate of the Hollywood

cinema. It would be interesting to note that how this spectacle of popular culture operates and influences much of Iranian society in the cinema. However, even while the study is conducted in Iran the equation in which popular cinema/ popular culture has forged between women's work and sexual display of performance functions here as a starting point for a broader analysis of gender, class and race in the contemporary cinema.

Images of women span across magazines, billboards and films show across the world according to Edward Bernay, they (women) connote the power of persuasion and desire and these are vital in advertising. Sexuality as a subject has been an issue of intense debates among feminists. Arguments drawn from Foucault's critics on the body or Mulley's "visual pleasure and narrative cinema" exposes the perceptions attributed to the body of a woman.

"In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between the active/male and the passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly". (Screen, 1992, p. 27) Mulvey argues that the image of women as subject to male erotic gaze as they have the ideology that a woman body defines the word sexy, a view dominantly projected on screen and for consumption by mass media, images and popular cinema is most parts of the world. It was apparently in a similar motive to answer such a question that Mary A. Doanne conducted a semiotic project on the "The Desire to Desire"

> One question insists: why does the women's picture still exist? There is no such thing as "the men's picture," specifically addressed to men; there is only one "cinema" and "the women's picture," a sub-group or a category especially for women, excluding men; a separate, private space designed for more than half the population, relegating them to the margins of cinema proper. The existence of the women's picture both recognises the importance

of women, and marginalizes them. By constructing this different space for women (Haskell's "wet, wasted afternoons") it performs a vital function in society's ordering sexual difference. (Doane, 1987, p. 3)

The excerpt from Doanne defines that spectacle of the cinema in respect to the image of women as one where the spectators see a structure of in the generic of the 'He" language meaning an environment when masculine norm is dominant and the sexual defined seeing is relegated to the woman images while that of the male is asexual.

However, in the western cinema, the issue of sexuality is displayed more in western and European cinema; but this is not possible in the Iranian cinema as they are not allowed by society to act their roles in the same way. The next section will try to explain how the Iranian movies selected for the study will be analyzed without much emphasis on the sexuality of the body. Also it will be tried to explain the relation between women's representation on the screen and their presence in the society.

2.4 The Representation of Women and Reality

According to Oliver and Armestrang (1998) "if you wanted to learn about the position of ethnic minorities in society, rather than oral hygiene you might watch television shows and see how minority groups are portrayed" (As cited in Alexander, 2003, p.21). According to them the outcome of these steps is the ability for study, it is applied in a different light. The society of Iran which is built on a foundation of strict Islamic rules and norms thus also affects the cinema and the films that allowed to be viewed by the public. "Art contains information about society. The reflection approach to the sociology of art encompasses a wide variety of research sharing in common the belief that art mirrors society. Research in this tradition looks at art works in order to learn more about society" (Alexander, 2003, p. 22)

As previously explained in chapter one the aim of the present study is to consider the changes of representation of women on the screen and in the society. In the other word, I would like to demonstrate that on the one hand representation of women in Iranian cinema, specifically popular cinema, is a reflection of real women's life after the revolution and women images on the screen reinforce their presence in the society on the other hand.

Christine Gledhill (1997) in her article 'Genre and Gender: The case of soap opera' explains that the notion of 'stories are only stories: they are not real life' leads to the dismissal of popular fictions as 'only' entertainment or time-wasting and made by the profit-driven entertainment industries. Gledhill has done a study about the relation of soap operas as a popular fiction and real life. She has examined if popular fictions are entertainment and have to be profitable without any relation to lived experience and significance. She tries to demonstrate the process involved in interchange between fiction and the social world it references. "There is a circulation between the events we learn about from one media form –the news- into another –soap opera- and back again. Public debates about child abuse, domestic violence, the administration of the law, become material, signifiers and signs for the construction of an imaginary world which works over the social and gender contradictions of such events and returns them to public discourse" (Gledhill, 1997, p. 341)

In the analysis of the different eras after the Revolution in Iran, that I mentioned in chapter one, we will see how women are portrayed and if there are any changes during the different periods. The findings will reveal to which extend women

appearance, behavior, voice and so on has been a reflection of what happens in society and if this representation has affected on raise of women's role in the public.

2.5 Gendering the Middle East

According to Kandiyoti (1996) focus on gender has opened up new perspective on institutions such as the state, science, and the military and formal organizations from which women are typically excluded and in the Middle East feminism has developed in response to historical events. "Nelson, for instance identifies the 1967 defeat of the Arabs in the Six Days War against Israel. The advent of the Islamic Republic in Iran provided another turning point for renewed debate and self-reflection." (Kandiyoti, 1996, p.8)

In the period between the nineteenth and early decades of twentieth centuries, social reform and modernization and nationalism caused women's position to be articulated in the society. As Kandiyoti mentions "on the one hand nationalist movement invited women to participate in collective life as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers and even fighters. On the other hand they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms set by nationalist discourse." (Kandiyoti, 1996, p.11) Modernization theory was supposed to be a movement from tradition to modernity which was going to affect on all aspects of social life. In this transition some culturally forms of women's subordination were neglected in favor of industrialization, urbanization and education.

> In dialogues with Western academic feminism into Middle East scholarship, some western concepts such as the public/private dichotomy as the basis for subordination of women appeared in the Middle East that sometimes they seemed paradoxical. Nevertheless,

the vocabularies and terms of refrences of feminist scholarship, it may constitute a productive development if it ensures the diffusion of gender-aware perspectives throughout the humanities and social sciences in the Middle East. (Kandiyoti, 1996, pp.18-19)

In the next chapter I will try to explore the methodology of this research. I will start with film analysis and feminist film analysis and then I will discuss about the textual analysis and two methods that are employed in feminist film analysis: semiotics and psychoanalysis method as the method of my study. At the end I will explain my method of selection of the films for analysis.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

In this section of the study I will elaborate on how the research will be carried out and which method will be used for the study. The techniques to be used for analysis will be explained as well as the procedure of the sampling method.

3.1 Film Analysis and Feminist Film Analysis

This study will be conducted like other film studies that mainly seek details to establish truth and to survey the other's findings attributed to human society. This view has been expressed by Epidemiologist Nick Black; "Researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper truth. They aim to "study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, and phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, and they use "a holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human behavior". (Black, 1997, p. 1) This study will focus on the portrayals of the representation of the role, and attributes ascribed to women and relating them to reflective theory in feminist film studies.

Qualitative methods are very useful in answering the questions about communication contexts that are difficult to replicate in the lab or other controlled environments. According to Lindlof (1995) qualitative researchers seek to preserve the form and the content of human behavior and to analyze its qualities rather than subject it to

mathematical or other formal transformations. Actual talk, gesture, and other social actions are the raw materials of analysis.

Film analysis discovers the connotations of the images and signifiers carry connotations. A film as a 'text', is a set of meanings and relations which take place in a signifying system. Signifying system takes place in a film where it organizes the representations to make a specific sense.

3.1.1 Textual Analysis

According to the current research, the films are going to be examined as 'texts'. So textual analysis, as qualitative method, will be employed. Textual analysis is often used for any study of text. "Textual analysis methodology follows that the text is the means to the study in textual analysis, not the end, of interest is not the text itself but what the text signifies." (Curtin, 1995, p.12) Textual analysis of film, as a text, requires observing and questioning all the elements that create meaning within acting, directing, lightening, cinematography, etc. besides noticing the individual elements that create a film's meaning. Textual analysis also involves understanding of how the film fits into a larger context of its social, historical, cultural and political environment.

3.1.2 Semiotics

To understand how semiotics helps to analysis film's structure, we need to go back to the basic principles. Of course, film is not a language but it implies the meanings through systems which make it work like a language. According to Roland Barthes (1973) "language includes all these systems from which we can select and combine elements in order to communicate" (as cited in Turner, 1999, p.52). So we communicate through the language to become a member of our culture. It means that language is a meaningful system of signs in each specific culture.

As Turner (1999) puts, language constructs meanings in two ways. The denotative meaning of a word is attached by usage and the connotative meaning refers to social meaning. Images, like language have these two dimensions of meaning too. An image have a denotative dimension when it refers to the mental meaning and a connotative dimension in the case of referring to the camera angle, the frame, lightening and so on that would carry social meaning. "All representations are systems of signs: they signify rather than 'represent', and they do so with primary reference to codes rather than to 'reality". (Chandler, 2002, p.161)

According to Taylor et al (2000) semiotics or the science of signs is primarily the study of how signs communicate. It is also the study of the rules which regulate the operation of each system of signs. Semiotics enables us to realize that all media texts are mediated using the codes and conventions of the sign systems in which they communicate. They can therefore never be simply transparent mediums through which we have access to a 'truth'.

3.1.3 Psychoanalytical Film Analysis

As it is mentioned in chapter 2 (see p.17) the theoretical framework of the research is based on feminist film theory. Feminist film theory uses the textual analysis including psychoanalytical film theory method and semiotics. "From semiotics, feminist film critics learned to analyze the crucial role of cinematic techniques in the representation of sexual difference. From psychoanalysis, they learned to analyze structures of desire and subjectivity." (Smelik, 1998, p. 9) feminist film theory has employed psychoanalysis to analyze film structure. According to Berger (2000)

Freud puts all of our experiences are stored in the unconscious and have an effect on our minds and behavior.

Psychoanalytical film analysis refers to the relations of representation and audience. "The cinema image is only an image, but we react to it as if it were more than that". (Turner, 1999, p.128) cinema-goers experience the blurred boundaries between the imaginary and the real so representation appears as perception. Metz (1982) has called the filmed image 'the imaginary signifier', referring to the fact that the reality which the filmed images call up is always absent, 'present' only in our imaginations. (cited by Turner, 1999, p.129) It has led researchers to find a similar condition between viewing a film and dreaming. Like films, dreams do not really happen but they can be expressed through the images.

According to Freudian point of view about the gap between the real and imaginary, film is located in the gap. The audiences identify with what they see on the screen through the processes which is seen to be similar to the way in which the audiences identify within society.

"Symbols enable us to mask or disguise unconscious aggressive or sexual desires and thus avoid the feeling of guilt that would be generated by superego if it recognized what we are doing". (Berger, 2000, p. 102) Freud's theory of symbolization actually is close in many respects to semiotic theory.

In this research, semiotic aspects do not mean to examine every image in the film according to its possible signs. It means that the films will be analyzed according to

categories by interpreting certain aspects. This involves semiotics. All of the categories will be observed in order to reveal how they help create subtle and unconscious gender differences for the viewer, After giving an overview of the general methodological basis, focusing on the following categories, this research is trying to assess the gender role. I will try to answer the questions below under each category.

1. <u>Plot and the main character</u>: Which gender performs the main character in the film? What is the function of woman/women character in the plot? Do they influence the plot directly or indirectly? How big is this influence? What are the consequences of her acts or decisions for the plot? How active are men and women in the film? Which gender do decision makers have? What kind of jobs do they have? Which values are conveyed in their actions and talks? Are their actions and talks equally valued? How much restraint does women character have? Do women give up under pressure or danger? Are they persistent and do they get what they want in the end? Does woman character have dependent or independent character? How are women dressed? How is the dress connected to the character of the woman?

2. <u>Voice</u>: How much does woman/man talk during the whole film? How important is what they have to say for the plot? How often do women scream, cry or make other involuntary noises which are not considered a real language? Does any man in the film do similar things?

3. <u>Gaze</u>: Which kind of spectator is implied in the film? Is it a male gaze which identifies with the male character and objectifies the female on the screen as mere sex object or are there other possibilities of spectatorship? How?

3.2 Sampling

This research is based on the analysis of six different films. As I have mentioned in chapter one, after the Revolution, cinema was adapted to revolutionary/Islamic values and as a result women images have dramatically changed in the period between 1979-2009. In terms of socio-political changes which are occurred in Iran, this 30 years could be divided into four:

In order to compare the influence of socio-political transformations on representation of womenin Iranian cinema, the films have been chosen within these four eras. The films have been selected based on box office hits in each era. The Reconstruction era is coincided on eight years Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency and The Reform era also is coincided on eight years Mohammad Khatami's presidency. So I have selected two films for each era only based on box office hits.

In the earlier years after the Revolution (1979-1983) there is no record of film production in Iranian film industry or in the few films which have been produced in the earlier years there are no woman characters. So, to make a balance between each era I have chosen only one film for the Post-Revolutionary era. The Post-Reform era that is coincided with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency has started from 2004 still goes on. So, I have selected only one film for the five years.

The list of the films:

- The Post-Revolutionary and War (1979-1988)

1. The Tenants (Ejareh-Neshinha) Daryoosh Mehrjoui (1986)

- **The Post-War and Reconstruction (1988-1996)**

2. The Bride (Aroos) Behrooz Afkhami (1990)

3. The Spouse (Hamsar) Mehdi Fakhimzadeh (1993)

- The Reform era (1996-2004)

4. The Red (Ghermez) Feraydoon Jayrani (1998)

5. The Hemlock (Shokaran) Behrooz Afkhami (2000)

- The Post-Reform (2004-2009)

6. The Forced Success (Tofigh-e Ejbari) Mohammad Hossein Latifi (2007)

In the next chapter I will try to provide the characteristics of each era afterwards the selected film/films of each era will be analyzed. In the following chapter the transformations of representation of women will be compared according to socio-political changes.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

4.1 Post-revolutionary and War Era (1979-1988)

In 1979 the Revolution became victorious against Shah and the Islamic Republic was declared under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. During the first year of the Revolution, the new government faced serious difficulties in policy making for the establishment of the new state. "Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini delegated Mehdi Bazargan to establish a transitional government in Iran following the Islamic Revolution of 1979. He resigned, however, after the student attack on the U.S. embassy on November 4, 1979. The first presidency election was held on February 1980 and Iranians voted for Abulhassan Bani Sadr for the presidency; but, he was soon dismissed by Khomeini. At the same time Iraq attacked on Iran and the War started and continued for eight years. The next president, Mohammed Ali Rejaee, was elected in the second presidency election in 1981 but the opposition Mojahedeen-I Khalq organization, assassinated him. The third election presidency was immediately held and Ayatollah Khamenei was elected on November, 1981." (Milani, 2000, p. 42)

This period was characterized by an attempt to repress all adverse opinions and to assert all oppositions to be "anti-revolutionary" and "agents of imperialism." According to Milani (2000) Islam was seen as the only legitimate source of political

thought and it completely dominated the public sphere; revolutionary elites accepted the politico-religious doctrines of neither East nor West and sought to struggle against what they saw as "global imperialism," especially as represented by the United States. As a result, virtually all forms of foreign investment were discouraged. Similar to country situation, Iranian cinema was faced difficulties in film production. The new government claimed that it did not oppose to cinema but it prevaricated its position regarding to cinema while there was not an agreement about the cultural policies of the government.

Due to all social, political and financial problems and confusions in policy making about cinema after the Revolution, "only a few films were produced in earlier years right after the revolution and there is no report of film production in Iranian film industry between 1979-1983". (Film Museum of Iran, 2008) The story of these films included political issues and with the beginning of the war in 1980 filmmakers showed a tendency towards war cinema. Among 21 films, produced in 1983, there is only one film (Kamalolmolk, Ali Hatami) that is not related to the politics, military and war. It is important to note that the top five films hitting the box office of the year in question were all about Pahlavi regime, revolutionary values and Islamic ideology. It is also necessary to note that women are either completely excluded or represented as the third character in those films.

In 1984 and 1985 the first few box office hits were also about the revolution and war between Iran and Iraq and also it is seen in the film industry productions that Iranian cinema was going to start to make films for children or to represent children as the main characters. The second box office hit in 1984 is a film of children *The City of*

Mice, (Shahr-e Mooshha, Mohammad-Ali Talebi) and the box office hit in 1985 is a film with a little boy as the main character *Finish Line* (Khat-e Payan, Mohammad-Ali Talebi) which is also a film of children. As Sadr puts it, "Children have been cast in Iranian films as majestic statues of men and women, and sometimes as everyone's alter egos. They have almost been parodies of reports about Iran in the world's media during the last two decades." (2006, p. 228) One can argue that it has been an answer to the boundries of representation of women.

In the 1980s, representation of women had become one of the most problematic issues in Iranian cinema, when Iranian women went under the veil after the Revolution. "The main strategies adopted to deal with this situation in cinema were either to avoid stories involving women altogether, or adherence to rigid code requiring that Muslim women be shown as chaste and maternal, never sexualised." (Sadr, 2006, p. 188) *The Tenants* could be helpful to show the representation of women in this era as a secondary and non-sexualised character.

4.1.1 The Tenants[9] (Ejareh-Neshinha) (1986, Daryoosh Mehrjuei)

The Tenants (1986) became a best-seller film in the history of Iranian cinema for many years. The film is a social satire concerning ownership, class differences and the general life of the middle class in the 1980s.

4.1.1.1 *Plot*

A building comprises four apartments and does not have any known heir and is being run by the supervisor (Abbas-Agha) of the owner who has passed away. The supervisor with the real estate agent's cooperation intends to take possession of the

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[9] The Tenants (1986) Director and Writer: Daryoosh Mehrjuoei; Producer: Mohammad Ali Soltanzadeh; Starring: Ezatollah entezami, Akbar Abdi, Hamide Khairabadi, Reza Rooygari; Music: Naser Cheshmazar; Cinematography: Hassan Gholizadeh; Film Editing: Hassan Hassandoost

building and to sell it. The building needs to be mended but Abbas-Agha denies doing so. The tenants realize what Abbas-Agha tends to do; they hire some construction labors to mend their apartments. But Abbas-Agha stops maintenance. In a rainy night the water tank on the roof falls down and the building is ruined. The day after, municipality's agent informs the tenants that their apartments will be conceded to them by mortgage.

4.1.1.2 The main characters

- *Abbas-Agh*a: The main character in the film is the superintendent of the owner. He is a widower living with his mother, son, brother and sister-in-law in the first floor of the building. He has been taking care of the building for many years and now he believes that since the landlord has passed away he has the right to take the possession of the building - *Abbas-Agha's mother*: The secondary character is a housewife. She is an old woman with traditional values. Her role as a mother is plausible for the other characters as well as the audiences.

- *Mrs. Tavasoli*: Another secondary character is Mr. Tavasoli's wife. She and her husband live in the second floor of the building as tenants. She works outside of home.

Mr. Tavasoli, Mr.Ghandi and his brother and Mr. Sabri as the secondary characters are the tenants. The plot is completely male centered as it can be seen with an instant look at the characterization of the film. The main character in the film is Abbas-Agha as it is mentioned above –who is a man-. There are only three women characters who 'speak' throughout the film while there are more than six men who could speak.

4.1.1.3 Women as the 'secondary'

As I have mentioned before, during the earlier years after the revolution, women were excluded from the screen or were represented only as the secondary characters. There are two women characters in this film and both of them are the secondary characters.

4.1.1.3.1 The mother with 'no name'

The most important woman character in the film is Abbas-Agha's mother and she influences the plot indirectly. Her husband passed away many years ago and she has never got married again as a value in the patriarchal and traditional society, which implies that she is a 'good woman'. She speaks in such a way that makes peace between her sons and the neighbors as a typical mediator. All she does during the film is cleaning, cooking and taking care of family members. Although she is not a decision maker but she tries to advise Abbas-Agha to solve the problem which plot is about and it means that she affects the plot indirectly. During the film everybody calls her 'Mother' and audience never knows her name. It influences her role as a mother.

Abbas-Agha's mother portrays a typical mother in her appearance and acts. She is always covered in a traditional veil (Chador) doing housework, trying to make peace

Figure 1: Abbas-Agha's mother in a long shot

between family members and the tenants. She is a housewife and traditional values are conveyed in her acts and words. She is living with her two sons, her daughter-in-law and her two grandsons in an extended family, and she is proud of her old son (a sign of traditional thought). In most of the scenes she is seen in the kitchen or advising her sons. Everybody respects her as a mother and old woman.

4.1.1.3.2 Woman as 'the wife'

The other woman character is Mrs. Tavasoli as Mr. Tavasoli's wife who is one of the tenants. She also does not have a role with 'voice'. She is a middle-class woman who both works outside and is a wife with her responsibilities at home at the same time.

Figure 2: Mrs. Tavasoli

She is covered in Mantua (a long dress that Iranian women wear in public) out of home and in long skirt and top at home. Her hair is well-covered by scarf and there is no makeup on her face. Her husband and she wear glasses and there are shelves of books at their home as a sign of being educated. Her family consists of her husband and her with no children to signify nuclear family as a symbol of modernity. In the

driving sequence she drives the car only for 2 minutes and 13 seconds while her husband's feet was hurt. She follows the workers truck like the other male tenants. In line with the genre of the film, comedy, her driving means an action to make the audience laugh. Because in those years it was not expected for the women to be seen driving on the screen. During the film she is shown at home or with the tenants and audience never see her in her work place but in two sequences she is seen while she has come back from the work.

4.1.1.4 Whose voice is heard?

During the film that took 130 minutes, the mother talks 40 minutes and Mrs.Tavasoli talks only 20 minutes compare to Abbas-Agha who talks 102 minutes. Nevertheless, what women say is not as important as what men say and it is not sufficient to solve the tenants' problem about the ownership of the building and the maintenance of it.

Figure 3: Abbas-Agha's mother is advising him

'Mother' cries in the scene where Abbas-agha fights with Mr. Ghandi as the stereotype of women and especially mothers. Mr. Ghandi's brother also, cries when he learns the candlesticks, which were his mother's souvenir, has been broken. In

48

fact the function of the representation of a typical female act performed by a man is to make audience laugh.

4.1.1.5 Women gaze

As I have mentioned before, after the revolution women were excluded from the screen as they were excluded from other public areas in society. In most of the films, in the earlier years of 1980s, no woman characters are represented unless they were presented as secondary characters.

Therefore, it is not easy to say that *The Tenants* does imply a specific kind of spectator in terms of sex. The woman characters are not represented as sexual objects and the male gaze that surrounded the whole film is not willing to open the female sexuality to the public on the screen.

All women characters were shown with the middle shots or long shots. It means the plot avoids providing visual pleasure that might be interpreted as sexual objectification of women by their body or beauty and so on. It can be said that in terms of women characters in the film, the plot dictates to the woman spectators to take up their identities under patriarchy limits as 'mother' or 'wife'. It means that the film makes audience accept women's role in the society as mother or wife and of course not as a sexual objectification in western's sense.

4.2 Reconstruction Era (1988-1996)

This period began with the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. "The end of the war, however, along with Khomeini's death, laid the foundation for a political restructuring of society. The fourth election presidency was held with Ayatollah

Khamanei in a position of religious authority and Hashemi Rafsanjani who was the head of the Parliament was elected as the President in 1989. He was also elected for the second presidency period in 1992. Rafsanjani's tenacious personality and his progressive ideas concerning economic development were central factors that led to an eventual restructuring of the economy which later became the central goal of this era. By March 1989, Iran had moved into a period of a planned economy that initiated widespread economic changes throughout the country. The resistance of the religious leadership restricted progressive development to economic considerations. The attainments during this period, therefore, were very limited. Conservative attitudes remained dominant, especially in the cultural sphere and success in economic reconstruction was limited as well." (Milani, 2000, pp. 123-124)

Meanwhile there were changes in cultural policies of the state that influenced Iranian cinema and the most infliential person on these changes was Mohammad Khatami as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. As Naficy states:

> Since the early 1990s, Iran politics, economy and culture have undergone a number of significant developments affecting the film industry and cinema. Mohammad Khatami, who as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance had been one of the most enduring public leaders in the country, presiding over the flourishing of the arts and cinema since the Revolution, resigned in mid-1992. Soon after, Mohammad Beheshti, who as director of the Farabi Cinema Foundation had built it into a formidable film institution, was also removed. These changes followed the earlier dismissal of prime minister Mir Hoseyn Musavi; during whose reign these and other officials had created the nucleus of 'Islamically committed' cinema, culture and broadcasting. With their removal a new, post-Khomeini era began." (Naficy, 2006, p. 51)

After the Iran-Iraq war, men returned from battlefield to home. So, camera began to look at daily life and cinema rediscovered the pleasures of family life, and also the

social problems after the war. Although in this era the filmmakers still made films about war but most of them depicted the social consequences of war.

The box office hits of this era were in genre of children's films; *Golnar* (1989, Kampozia Partovi), *Thief Dolls* (1990, Mohammad Reza Honarmand), *Apple Halfs* (1992, Kianoosh Ayari), *Kolah Ghermezi and Pesarkhale* (1994, Iraj Tahmasb) and *Strang Sisters* (1996, Kiomars Poor-Ahmad) or in comedy genre; *Proposal* (1990, Mehdi Fakhim-Zadeh), *Magical Journey* (1991, Abolhassan Davoodi), *What Else Is New* (1992, Tahmineh Milani), *The Spouse* (1994, Mehdi Fakhim-Zadeh) and *Laili Is With Me* (1996, Kamal Tabrizi). (Film Museum of Iran, 2008)

In this era female filmmakers gradually emerged in Iranian cinema more than the former era. Two of the box office hits of reconstruction era are *What Else Is New* (1992, Tahmineh Milani) and *Blue Scarf* (1995, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad) which both have been directed by female directors.

4.2.1 The Bride[10] (Aroos) (1990, Behrooz Afkhami)

The Bride (1991, Behrooz Afkhami) was the box office hit of the 1991 and it is considerable because of the woman character presence (Niki Karimi) who is represented as a beautiful woman on the screen with the full make up for the first time after the revolution. The other reason that makes '*The Bride*' considerable is, that the policy makers of Iranian cinema were against creating superstars similar to what Iranian cinema was experienced before the Revolution or even Hollywood. It stemmed from the state policy for creating an 'anti-western', 'anti-Hollywood-style'

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[10] The Bride (1990): Director: Behrooz Afkhami; Writer: Alireza Davood-Nejad; Producer: Seyed Zia Hashemi; Starring: Abolfazl Poorarab, Niki Karimi, Abbas Amiri, Ali Sajadi, Roghieh Chehreh-Azad; Music: Babak Bayat; Cinematography: Nemat Haghighi; Film Editing: Mohammadreza Mooeini

and 'revolutionary' cinema. But '*The Bride*' was the first film that paid attention to the stereotyps of superstars in cinema.

4.2.1.1 Plot

Hamid who is from a middle-class family wants to get married to Mahin but her father is opposed to their marriage. Father puts forward a condition for their marriage: Hamid has to become rich in two years. It is war time in Iran and Hamid makes a lot of money by drug trafficking. Hamid and Mahin get married.On the way to their honeymoon, they crash into a woman. Hamid leaves the injured woman and escapes. Eventually Mahin returns to scene of the accident and helps the wounded woman with the help of Hamid's cousin.

4.2.1.2 The main characters

- *Hamid:* As the main character is who has been graduated in theater and he is from a middle class family. He would like to get married to his sister's friend, Mahin.

- *Mahin:* She is *The Bride* and the main woman character. She is living with her father while her mother is dead. She is from an upper class family and she is in love with Hamid.

Although, both man and woman are the main characters, male character is stronger than woman character and it could be said that the plot is male centered. The male character is more talkative, active and he is the one who is the decision maker. The male character is presented in 75 minutes of the film while the woman character is seen only 49 minutes of the film's duration. There is only one woman (Mahin) who has a speaking role compared to three men (Hamid, Mahin's father and Hamid's cousin).

4.2.1.3 Woman as the main character

During the film, the woman character is often seen in a sitting position inside the car or at home. She does not have mobility. According to the plot, Mahin hasn't worked outside of home before the marriage and it seems she is going to be a housewife after the marriage. In the most of the film she is sitting quiet and passive. She represents a dependent character to her father before the marriage and her husband after the marriage. She is a woman portrayal who is a decision maker neither before the marriage nor after that. She is shown in public (hospital) only in the last sequence and in the rest of the film she is seen at home or in the wedding car. Before the marriage, her father disagrees with her marriage or her friendship with Hamid's sister and she is seen passive in all those scenes. After the car accident when she asks Hamid to stop the car and to help the wounded woman, she gives up when Hamid slaps her. She represents a passive role in the most of the film duration until she decides to help the woman who had a car accident with their car. However, it seems that she is not able to succeed without the help of Hamid's cousin. She decides to leave Hamid but eventually she changes her mind because it is expected from her not to leave her husband in a difficult situation as a 'good woman'.

From the first sequence, the woman character who portrays '*The Bride*' has dressed up in wedding gown but she is well-covered. In the most of the film she is in white as a symbol to remind audience that she is a Bride. But after the car accident when she changes her clothes, she wears a black dress and scarf and she is still well-covered.

Figure 4: Mahin: a well-covered bride

According to the film's name 'The Bride's audiences expect to watch a film about the woman character but in fact the plot is about Hamid. The plot shows how Hamid makes money by drug trafficking during the war period in Iran because of Mahin's father's condition for their marriage. From the earlier sequences in the wedding car and after that when Hamid leaves the wounded woman, he blames Mahin and says all he has done was only for her sake. Hamid portrays a more persistent and determined character and he shows that he is able to get whatever he wants as he got married to Mahin in spite of her father's opposition.

4.2.1.4 Whose voice is heard?

Mahin talks 22 minutes out of 49 minutes of her presence on the screen and Hamid talks 63 minutes out of 80 minutes of his presence in the film. Mahin in the most of the scenes is silent or speaks very quietly but Hamid is more aggressive and ready to attack or fight with the others. He seems very determined to get what he wants and according to the plot his goal was getting married to Mahin and he finally succeeds.

54

Figure 5: A stereotypical female act

Mahin is represented in the crying act which is a very stereotypical female act, when her father is opposed to her marriage or after the car accident instead of showing her objection. Hamid also cries after the car accident and at the end of the film, when he finds out that he has been in a wrong way to capture the happiness. However crying is recognized as a stereotypical female act but the director doesn't avoid presenting Hamid in such a typical female act which will cause the audience to sympathize with Hamid.

4.2.1.5 Gaze

Figure 6: Mahin in a close shot

The woman character is completely covered even in wedding scenes but she is represented with full make up during the film. Although it is difficult to say that the film is operating around the male gaze in terms of fragmenting the female body and exposing it, it still implies the specific spectatorship (male) by using of woman character beauty. In the all scenes inside the wedding car, the woman character is shot in close up or semi-close up. It could be a kind of 'voyeurism' to make woman character as a sex object. According to Laura Mulvey (1975) the woman image is aligned with visual pleasures associated with the dominance of 'voyeuristic visual pleasure' and the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure. The woman character is functioned both as erotic object for the characters within the plot and as erotic object for the audience. As I mentioned above *The Bride* could imply a different kind of male gaze because of the covered woman character but the image of a beautiful woman who is well-covered can be a fetishistic representation of woman image and will imply the gaze of male spectator.

4.2.2 The spouse[11] (Hamsar) (1993, Mehdi Fakhimzadeh)

As I discussed before, in the reconstruction era, the most of the box office hits were in comedy genre. Directors tried to present the issues of daily life and family which Iranian society was struggled with. *The Spouse* gained a hit of box office because of the genre and the subject.

4.2.2.1 Plot

Ahmad and Shirin work in a medical company. Ahmad is the vice president of the company. Shirin and her friend discover that the president is embezzling. They ask Ahmad to cooperate with them to prove their claim. The president is fired by the

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[11] The Spouse (1993): Director&Writer: Mehdi Fakhimzadeh; Producer: Sina Institute; Starring: Mehdi Hashemi, Fatemeh Moe'tamed Aria, Nasrin Moghanloo, Parastoo Golestani, Siroos Ebrahim-Zadeh; Music: Kambiz Roshan-Ravan; Cinematography: Mahmood Kelari; Film Editing: Iraj Golafshan

board of directors and Ahmad is sure that he will be chosen as the president. But the board of directors opt Shirin as the new president. Ahmad who can't tolerate his wife to be his boss, starts to make problems at home and at work.

4.2.2.2 The main characters

- *Shirin*: She is Ahmad's wife. She's been working in a medical company for nine years and she is selected as the new president of the company.

- *Ahmad*: He is the vice president of the same company whose wife is working for.

Ahmad and Shirin, both of them are main characters and also both of them are protagonist. The woman character is talkative and active as much as the male character is. The male character is shown on the screen for 69 minutes and woman character is seen for 78 minutes. But according to the plot, most of the film duration takes place in the work place. Shirin is seen 15 minutes out of 78 minutes at home and Ahmad is shown 22 minutes out of 69 minues at home. Because Ahmad resigned after he learns that Shirin would be his boss. There are three speaking woman characters; Shirin, her friend, the police officer and four speaking male character; Ahmad and three friends of him. *The Spouse* could be seen as a unique film in this era and even after the revolution that the woman character is represented as the main character on the plot. In addition, Shirin and the other woman characters are very influential for the storyline. In fact this film is almost the first film that the woman character stereotypes change on the screen.

Figure 7: Shirin and her friend at the work place

4.2.2.3 Woman as the main character

The woman character is very influential for the plot. Film starts with her attempts to prove that the president of the company is stealing the company properties and sells them in the black market. She is appointed as the new president of the company and the plot actually is about her problems with her husband as his boss. Her decision making position and power at the work place influence her relationship with her husband and their family life. The plot directly takes shape of the consequences of what she says or does.

According to the genre of the film, which is a comedy, the most important element is a woman who becomes the president of a company, while her husband works there as the vice president. In a patriarchal society, being at the top of the pyramid, power of a woman in a company is unusual with power hierarchy. It seems that the director intends to criticize the power relations between man and woman in the society. Although the women characters are qualified, educated and intelligent as the men are, they don't have power at work and at home. When Shirin gains a higher position at work compared to her husband, their relationship in the public (work place)

influences their relationship in the private (home). As MacKinnon argues, "this is why feminism has seen personal as the political. The private is public for those for whom the personal is political. In this sense, for women there is no private, either normatively or empirically. Feminism confronts the fact that women have no privacy to lose or to guarantee." (1989, p. 191)

Figure 8: A woman in a male-dominant sphere

Ahmad who has lost his power in the public tries to show his power at home. For instance, he breaks the plates and glasses and says to Shirin: "This is my house and I can do whatever I want, you are not the boss here, are you?" Alternatively, by an abrupt planning to move to their new apartment he tries to deprive his wife, Shirin, of going to the work. Eventually he asks her to resign from her work and says: "I don't like my wife to work out, you should stay at home and take care of me and the children" and he confesses clearly "I don't like my wife to be my boss".

All woman characters are active in the film. Shirin is seen running or driving car or even more in the sequence where she drives the car and helps the police officer to arrest the drug dealer. Driving is an element to show empowerment of woman character. Or in a sequence she says to Ahmad: "You took the car and made me take

a taxi" it means she is used to driving. It portrays her ability and empowerment as an independent woman. In the film women are seen in the work place more than at home. They have the kind of jobs that women usually don't do at least in those years in Iran. Shirin is the president of the company that is traditionally a male job or police officer is a woman that is strange even for male characters in the film and obviously also for audiences because they are not used to seeing woman as a police officer.

Figure 9: Woman police officer

Shirin is a decision maker as the president of the company at the work place but she is a spouse at home and she is expected to be obedient to her husband. That is why when Ahmad asks her to resign, she accepts. She portrays a typical housewife at home. In the all home sequences, she is in the kitchen while she is cooking or cleaning the house. Nevertheless, at the end of the film Ahmad admits that she is qualified for the position of the company presidency. In fact the title of the film could have a dual meaning. At the beginning of the film 'the spouse' refers to being a 'wife' but at the end it refers to being a 'spouse' both for Shirin and Ahmad.

Figure 10: Shirin as a housewife

4.2.2.4 Whose voice is heard?

The language is not gendered and both characters, man and woman, talk as much as they are presented on the screen. The women's sounds are not stereotypical; they don't scream, cry or beg. What they say is important for the plot; especially what Shirin does. Shirin as the president of the company constitutes the new rules that make Ahmad angry. Even what her friend (as a secondary character) says is important for the storyline where she talks to Shirin about her suspicion towards the president of the company which helps them discover that he steals the medicine and sells them in the black market.

4.2.2.4 Gaze

The plot does not imply male spectators in terms of representation of woman characters. Woman characters cover their bodies both at work and home. Their hair is well-covered by headscarf and they are represented without any make up. In fact the plot avoids providing visual pleasure in terms of sexual objectification of women by their body or beauty and so on. All the woman characters are represented in a different type and in the opposition with woman stereotypes in those years as only housewife or mother.

61

Figure 11: Shirin in a close shot

4.3 Reformation Era (1997- 2004)

Mohammad Khatami, former Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, was elected

as the president in 1997, massively supported by youths and women.

> He introduced new secularist values of transparency, civil
> society, rule of law and pluralism. In terms of foreign relations,
> he replaced the previous 'neither East nor West' doctrine with
> the 'Dialogue of Civilizations'. These values were a marked
> departure from and modification of the previously articulated
> Islamic values. Economically, he promoted privatization and
> heightened relations of exchange with other national economies.
> He appointed two women to cabinet positions and nurtured a
> lively independent press, even though it was heavily persecuted
> by a legal system under the authority of Supreme Leader Ali
> Khamene'i. (Naficy, 2006, p. 55)

At least in theory, there was a shift from a system based on a charismatic leader to a

system inspired by the will of the people. This opened up new horizons and provided

greater opportunity for the representation of popular demands in the administration.

It also meant that, for the first time, the Iranian people would be able to challenge the

dominant minority seriously, which had heretofore ruled the country with an iron

fist.

For the first time after the revolution, Khatami started a process of moving to conciliation in foreign policy in Iran:

> Most of the basic premises of the revolution came to be seen as outmoded and a new social contract became both a necessity and a reality. Khatami gave priority to civil society, the rule of law, greater political freedom, respect for pluralism and a more open dialogue with the West. While he did not describe freedom as anti-religious, he emphasized that institutions that did not appreciate the importance of freedom were destined to fail and disappear. Khatami sought to establish an institutionalized freedom in the public sphere and attempted to draw boundaries that would allow for necessary constitutional amendments. (Milani, 2000, p. 211)

Khatami's cultural policy especially about cinema, was different from the former state, a new political atmosphere emerged that was unimaginable a few years before. As a result of this atmosphere two banned films in the previous years were screened. One of them was *Lady* (Banu, Daryoosh Mehrjui, 1992) which was a black comedy on post-revolutionary debates about the values of the rich and the poor, and the other one was *The Snowman* (Adambarfi, Davood Mirbaqeri, 1994) that the story of which was about an Iranian man who dreams about going to America.

According to the poitical and social changes in this era, there are many films that were either about women or have been made by women and sometimes they were box office hits: *Laila* (Daryoosh Mehrjuei, 1998), *The Red* (Feraydoon Jayrani, 1999), *Two women* (Tahmineh Milani, 1999), *The Hemlock* (Behrooz Afkhami, 2000), *Dog Killing* (Bahram Baizae, 2001), *Party* (Saman Moghadam, 2001), *Tokyo, Non-stop* (Saeid Alamzadeh, 2003).

Most of the films were in social-drama in terms of the genre. At least in the first four years of presidancy period of Mohmmad Khatami ,the most of the directors' concerns were social issues. But according to the sales chart, in his second presidancy term, cinema industry showed a tendency to comedy genre. *Kolah Ghermezi and Pesarkhaleh* (Iraj Tahmasb, 2002), *Bread, Love and Motorbike 1000* (Abolhasan Davoodi, 2002), *Tokyo, Non-stop* (Saeid Alamzadeh, 2003), *The Lucky Bride* (Kazem Rastgoftar, 2003), *The Lizard* (Kamal Tabrizi, 2004) they all fit the comedy genre .

4.3.1 The Red[12] (Ghermez) (1998, Feraydoon Jayrani)

The Red is significant in reformation era because it was for the first time after the revolution that the woman character was represented in a more normal way in terms of her appearance and wearing. In addition, it could be seen as a start point for Iranian cinema to create superstars like *Hedyeh Tehrani* and *Mohammad Reza Forotan* who became stars in Iranian popular cinema.

4.3.1.1 Plot

Hasti Mashreghi who is a widow and has a daughter is working in a hospital as a nurse. She has got married with a rich man, Naser. Naser seems to have personality disorder and beats Hasti because of his suspicions. Hasti wishes to get a divorce but in the court Naser promises that he will never beat her again and Hasti goes back to his house. The next time Naser beats Hasti and she files for divorce against him. In the court, the judge decides to send Naser to get visited by a psychologist. Naser kidnaps Hasti's daughter and makes her have dinner with him in his mother's house for the last time. When Hasti goes to Naser for dinner, he and his sister imprison her

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[12] The Red (1998): Director and Writer: Feraydoon Jairani; Producer: Habib Esmaeili; Starring: Hedye Tehrani, Mohammad Reza Forotan, Kamand Amirsolaimani, Saeed Pirdoost, Shohreh Soltani; Music: Babak Bayat; Cinematography: Mahmood Kelari; Film Editing: Rohollah Emami

in the basement and try to make her sign a confession against herself. While Naser is beating Hasti to make her sign the confession, she gets unconscious. Naser thinks that she is dead. He blames his sister and kills her. Hasti escapes from Naser's house and Naser runs away from Iran. At the end of the film Naser comes back to kill Hasti but Hasti kills him as self-defense.

4.3.1.2 The main characters

- *Hasti*: She is a widow who has a daughter and works as a nurse in a hospital. She has got married to Naser for one year but she tries to leave him because of his psychological disorder.

- *Naser*: He is a rich man who owns a restaurant and has the psychological disorder.

The plot is female centered, as Hasti is in the focus of attention. She has direct influence on the plot. From the first shot we see her leaving Naser because of his being violent. She is the one who files a divorce against her husband twice. According to the court sequence where the reporter asks Naser why you are going to get a divorce, he puts emphasis 'I am defendant, my wife is plaintiff'.

Figure 12: Hasti at her work place

4.3.1.3 Woman as the main character

Hasti is an active woman who works in a hospital as a nurse. She drives car as she is seen in the sequence where she leaves Naser; she gets into the car, and drives on the road in the night. In fact driving car is an important element to show Hasti as a powerful woman who is able to drive on the roads from North of Iran to Tehran in the night. She has mobility in the plot; she runs and locks the door on Naser or she jumps over the bars on the street. She portrays an independent woman who doesn't want to be a victim. She is the main character that the audience is supposed to sympathize with. She represents a woman who can be a decision maker for her life and for her daughter's life. She is the one who decides to leave Naser after their quarrel in the first sequence and she files the divorce against Naser while the divorce is men's right in Iran. "Islam considers divorce the absolute right of the man - he can at any time repudiate his wife and by a simple pronouncement of 'I divorce you' at once terminates the marriage. The woman, on the other hand, can divorce her husband only under specific conditions, such as insanity, impotency or castration". (Shahidian, 2002, p.56)

Figure 13: Hasti is jumping over the bars

When Naser and her sister imprison her in the basement and make her sign a confession against her, she resists and hits Naser and escapes. At the end of the film Hasti is the one who survives not the male character. In fact Hasti fights against the patriarchal society not to be a victim.

Naser portrays the dominant patriarchal thought of the society as Hasti's uncle represents the same thought. It means that the husband expects his wife to stay at home and take care of him. In the court sequence, Naser says to the judge 'I don't like my wife to go to the work. I provide her with all her needs and she has to obey me.' This is also what Hasti's uncle says when she complains about Naser's harassment and he says 'Every couple fight and beating is not unusual. He provides you with all you need and he has adopted your daughter. You should be grateful and stay with him. All women wish to be in your situation.' In fact it is what exists in a patriarchal society which means domestic violence is acceptable.

4.3.1.4 Whose voice is heard?

The language is not gendered in the film. Both characters are seen while they're talking. In fact Hasti is the protagonist in the plot. She hasn't been represented on the screen just for 2 minutes and 28 seconds out of 90 minutes of film duration. She is seen only for 30 minutes out of 87 minutes at home, in the most of duration of the film she is represented at the work place or court and public. While Naser is represented for 74 minutes and he is shown 22 minutes out of 74 minutes at home. What Hasti says is important for the plot as much as Naser's sayings. When Hasti speaks she portrays a self-confident woman. The screaming or crying of her or other typical involuntary female sounds does not appear. However Naser is seen crying in two sequences: first in the court where he begs the judge not to let his wife (Hasti)

leave him and second at his mother's home where he has invited Hasti to have the
last dinner with him.

Figure 14: Hasti and Naser in the court

4.3.1.5 Gaze

The Red is not supposing completely a male gaze but it can be considered as a film
leaning to imply male spectators. The woman body is not displayed to be looked at.
Woman character's body and hair are so much well-covered that can't be seen as an
object of the male gaze. However *The Red* is one of the earlier films after the
revolution that women appeared in the shorter dresses or were portrayed at home
with a long shirt and trousers which is more normal. For instance the way Hasti
appears at home sequences. It is still not a 'male gaze film' but Iranian cinema
started to portray women in a more normal way. Moreover, it can be interpreted as a
sign that Iranian cinema started to produce the films including female stereotypes
especially in popular cinema in order to gain higher profit.

Figure 15: Hasti in a close shot

4.3.2 The Hemlock[13] (Shokaran) (2000, Behrooz Afkhami)

The Hemlock was a huge box office hit when it was released in Iran because of the subject of the film. It was the first time, at least after the revolution, that a relationship, out of marriage was screened in cinema. The other reason was the casting of *Hedyeh Tehrani* as the main woman character who became a star in Iranian popular cinema.

4.3.2.1 Plot

Mr. Khakpour, the president of a factory who has a car accident is admitted to the hospital. The vice president, Mahmoud Basirat goes to the hospital to visit him. During the time that Mr. Khakpour is in the hospital, Mahmoud meets a nurse, Sima. After a while Mahmoud requests her to have a temporary marriage (a marriage which is contracted for a fixed period) because he is currently married and has two children. When Mr. Khakpour realizes their relationship, Mahmoud pays "Mehryeh" (the money which is agreed between man and woman for a marriage contract that must be

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[13] The Hemlock (2000) Dirctor: Behrooz Afkhami; Writer: Behrooz Afkhami, Minoo Farshchi; Producer: Ali Moalem; Staring: Hedye Tehrani, Fariborz Arabnia, Rozita Ghafari, Hamid Reza Afshar; Music: Mohammad Reza Mirzamani; Cinematography: Nemat Haghighi; Film Editing: Mehrzad Minooe

paid to the woman) to Sima and leaves her because Mahmoud presumes that his wife will also learn about his secret relationship. Sima meets Mahmoud and tells him that she is pregnant and she just wants a birth certificate for her baby. But Mahmoud refuses and asks her to have an abortion. Sima goes to Mahmoud's house and pretends that she is going to say to Mahmoud's wife about their relationship but she never does that. Mahmoud who has got angry goes to Sima's father and tells him about Sima and her baby. Sima decides to take revenge and goes back to Mahmoud's house but But she changes her mind and leaves the home. She dies in a car accident on way back.

4.3.2.2 The main characters

- *Sima Riahi*: she is a widow who works in a hospital as a matron. She lives alone in her own house but time to time, she goes to her father's place and takes care of him.

- *Mahmoud Basirat*: He works in a factory as the vice president. He is married and has two children. He is religious and he has been the supporter of revolutionary values.

- *Taraneh*: She is Mahmoud's wife and she is a housewife.

Sima portrays a modern woman in her appearance: she is covered in Mantua and headscarf but not well-covered, she works in a hospital as a nurse, she smokes even in public because women's smoking in public was not usual in Iran in those years, she drives a car and she is financially independent, but she is still a victim of the patriarchal society.

4.3.2.3 Woman as the main character

Sima is a widow. But in the middle of the film, the audience finds out that she has been in a relationship with her colleague who has left her but her father doesn't know

70

anything about it. Because in Sima's father thoughts a good woman is the one who gets married and gives birth to children and he doesn't believe in any relationship out of marriage. That is why she hides her temporary marriage. However temporary marriage is legal in Iran but it is unacceptable for the most Iranians and it could be treated as the prostitution. In the sequence that Sima's father says to her 'get out of my house or I will kill you' is because of her relationship with Mahmoud.

Sima is also victimized in her relationship with Mahmoud. Mahmoud who has been the supporter of the Revolutionary values is going to change his mind about his beliefs. The opening sequence takes place in spring 1995which is a sign of the Reconstruction era. The country is going toward the economic, social and political changes and as Mahmoud says to his wife 'he doesn't want to lose the opportunities of taking advantage of these changes. In the beginning scene in Mahmoud's house, his son says: 'the teacher said carrying a backpack is forbidden because it is not an Iranian style'. In fact it is a sign of 'anti-western' thought in the earlier years after the Revolution that Mahmoud also believed in. Now his reaction is: 'Tell your teacher any wise man uses what is easier to carry. In his transformation, he changes his Iranian car with a Korean. In the sequence where he is driving to show the maximum speed of the car, indeed, it is a sign of his rush toward the changes. the yellow light was shown in two scenes at the beginning of the film as a symbol of warning and danger. After Mahmoud and Sima's agreement for temporary marriage, the camera shows a road in a long shot that Mahmoud passes the red light as a sign of passing the red line of his moral limits. When he proposes Sima to have a temporary marriage he says: 'we can have temporary marriage with specific conditions'. So when he decides to break up with Sima, he just leaves the money that they had

agreed on and a message on her phone saying 'I'm sorry but I'm in love with my wife'. He even denies to be responsible to Sima's situation when she tells him that she is pregnant he says to her that she has to abort. When she rejects his recommend and says 'I want to be a mother' he says 'why me? Why it has to happened to me?' it shows that he considers Sima as a prostitute not his wife. Sima's driving is a sign of her abilities and being independent and at the end; she is killed in the car accident. According to the film genre, drama, driving signifies women's empowerment for a woman who works outside and lives alone.

Figure 16: Sima and Mahmoud at restaurant

4.3.2.4 "Good woman" versus "bad woman"

The film portrays very well a "good woman" versus a "bad woman" in a patriarchal society. Mahmoud's wife, Taraneh, represents a good woman, who is married, a mother sitting at home, taking care of her children. She is covered in the traditional cover (Chador) in the public. She is quiet and passive even when she learns her husband's betrayal. Because she knows that in a patriarchal society it is expected that a woman must be patient and never ask any question.

72

Figure 17: Taraneh as a housewife

4.3.2.5 Whose voice is heard?

The plot is not male centered. Although Sima is presented for 43 minutes on the screen and she is seen only 10 minutes out of 43 minutes at home, while Mahmoud was presented 82 minutes she has a direct influence on the plot and he is shown 26 minutes out of 82 minutes at home. So genders, man and woman talk as much as they are presented on the screen. There is also another woman character who is Mahmoud's wife. She is represented for 11 minutes on the plot and has a secondary woman character who has an indirect influence on the plot.

Mahmoud as the main male character is represented 83 minutes on the plot. In fact the plot is about him who starts the relationship with Sima and after a while he decides to end it.

4.3.2.6 Gaze

The film doesn't imply woman character as a sex object similar to the mainstream cinema in general but it can still be said that it has a significant male gaze. So, in terms of the gaze the plot is male centered. Sima is displayed within the narrative

73

both the gaze of the spectator and the gaze of the male character. The gaze of the spectator derives from both 'voyeuristic' pleasure and 'narcissistic' visual pleasure. 'Voyeuristic visual pleasure' is produced by looking at woman character as a sex object on the screen. In the film although Sima is well-covered, visual pleasure is produced because of her beauty and many close-ups which she has been shot. On the other hand the narcissistic visual pleasure derives from identification of the image. The male spectator identifies himself with Mahmoud from the first sequence that Mahmoud and Sima meet each other.

Figure 18: Sima in a close shot

From the first meeting in the hospital, Sima is a sex object for Mahmoud. Her objectification is clear in Mahmoud's gaze and his acts in the hospital, in the shopping center and in Sima's house. Although there are no erotic scenes in the film there are symbolic shots to bring them on audience's mind. For example after Mahmoud's request for having a temporary marriage they entered to Sima's apartment and Mahmoud closes the door over the camera (audience).

74

4.4 Post-reformation era (2005 -2009)

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the incumbent president of Iran, was elected in 2005 supported by the 'Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran'. "He who was a 'principalist' acting politically based on Islamic and revolutionary principles and the main leader of the 'Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran' party was an engineer . Tehran's council elected him as mayor in 2003. He has been criticized domestically for his economic lapses and disregard for human rights. In his economic policy, he cut the interest rates private and public banking facilities. He supports Iran's nuclear energy program. His election to a second term in 2009 was widely disputed and caused widespread protests domestically and drew significant international criticism." (Maleki, 2008)

Iranian cinema sales chart shows that the majority of Iranian cinema productions has been produced in the comedy genre in these years. The films such as *Max* (Saman Moghadam, 2005), *Ceasefire* (Tahmineh Milani, 2006), *The Outcasts (1)* (Masood Dehnamaki, 2007), *The Forced Success* (Mohammad Hossein Latifi, 2007), *Dayere-zangi* (Parisa Bakhtavar, 2008), *Women are Angles* (Shahram Shah-hosseini, 2008), *The Outcasts (2)* (Masood Dehnamaki, 2009) are some of them.

4.4.1 Forced Success[14] (Tofigh-e Ejbari) (2007, Mohammad Hossein Latifi)

Forced Success had a huge box office because of the comedy genre and the presence of *Mohammad Reza Golzar* who is a superstar in the Iranian cinema. He has been displayed as himself carrying his real name.

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[14] Forced Success (2005) Director: Mohammad Hossein Latifi; Writer: Paiman Abbasi; Producer: Kamal Tabatabae; Starring: Mohammad Reza Golzar, Baran Kosari, Reza Attaran, Niosha Zaighami, Bahareh Rahnama, Lida abbasi; Music:Karen homayonfar; Cinematography: Mohammad Reza Sokot; Film editing: Kaveh Imani

4.4.1.1 Plot

Reza Golzar is a superstar who has got a divorce recently. His ex brother-in-law keeps coming to his house as a friend and also he gives information about Reza to his sister. A young girl, Simsim who is a relative of Reza's neighbor enters to Reza's life. Simin, Reza's ex-wife who is still in love with him is jealous of Simsim. Simin and her friends try to know if there is any relationship between Reza and Simsim. When Simsim realizes that Simin still loves Reza, she helps Simin make up with him

4.4.1.2 The main characters

Reza Golzar: He is a superstar of the cinema and he has got a divorce but he is still in love with his ex-wife.

Simin: She is Reza's ex-wife and she is a lawyer. She is influenced by her friends and she is also in love with her ex-husband.

Simsim: She is the relative of Reza's neighbor and she has been living abroad for along time.

Simin as the main woman character portrays a modern woman who is educated, working as a lawyer, driving a car, etc. She has got a divorce but the audience never knows her reason clearly and she shows that she is still in love with her ex-husband during the film.

4.4.1.3 Woman as the main character

Simin portrays a stubborn woman who is under the influence of her friend, Lida. Lida is also a lawyer; a single woman and represents a woman character who is the supporter of women rights and 'woman-against-men'. She treats men as enemy.

In the sequence where Simin and her friends are celebrating her divorce, Lida says: "Tonight is a killing-man night!!" It could be a symbol that shows all women's rights

supporters are women as men-hater. On the other hand, the other friend of Simin is Maryam, who wishes to get married but she pretends to hate men in Lida's presence. Two other friends of Simin who are in her divorce celebration, portray the same character similar to Maryam.

Figure 19: Simin and her friends in the man-killing celebration

Simsim is represented as a woman who has been abroad for a long time but she speaks Persian very well. She also is very well in housework, cleaning, and cooking. She is afraid of darkness and cockroach as a symbol of stereotyped/stereotypical femininity.

Figure 20: Simsim in a close shot

Reza is a superstar but he lives like ordinary people as shown in the sequence that he is talking to his uncle on the phone: "You know I'm always at home, at work or gym." He is still in love with his ex-wife. He portrays a wise, loyal and patient man during the whole film.

4.4.1.4 Whose voice is heard?

Although Simin has been represented for 31 minutes out of 90 and Reza has been seen for 70 minutes, the plot is not completely male centered. There are five woman characters who speak in the plot and what they say is influential on the plot directly and indirectly. The second woman character, Simsim is influential directly for the plot and Sima's friends whose voices are important indirectly.

There are female stereotypical acts such as screaming and crying by the woman characters. In the sequence where Simsim is scared of cockroach and screams (woman's stereotype) or in the sequence where Simin thinks that Reza is going to get married with Simsim and cries.

4.4.1.5 Gaze

The film is male gaze centered and implies male spectator. There are five woman characters in full make-up and colorful dresses. However Simin is covered by headscarf a part of her hair is always visible. Women are displayed in the gaze of the male spectator and the gaze drives from voyeuristic visual pleasure. Camera (audience) looks at the woman characters, especially Simin and Simsim as sex objects with close-shots on their face and their fitness as the stereotypes of women on the screen.

Figure 21: Simin in the close shots

4.5 Comparison

The analysis shows that there are tangible changes in the representation of women on the screen from the earlier years after the Revolution until 2009. In terms of their appearance, in the Post-revolutionary and War era women were displayed in traditional veil (Chador) or in long mantua. Women's dresses usually were in dark or light plain color but not colorful. They were represented without any make up and filmmakers avoided using Hollywood stereotypes of women characters such as beauty and fitness.

In terms of the representation of women on the screen, it can be said that there is a tremendous change within these four eras. In the first era women were excluded from the screen because of two reasons: The state's policies about the representation of women that a Muslim woman must be chaste and not to be treated like a commodity or be used to arouse sexual desires. Therefore, the filmmakers either avoided the stories involving women or dealt with self-censorship.

The representation of women's policies including; sitting roles, covering or even excluding women from the screen were derived from state's Islamic values to establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran after the Revolution.

> The first move to make the groundwork for the establishment of an Islamic Republic was to condition the presence of women in the public sphere. Ayatollah Khomeini demanded the abolition of implementation Sharia laws in the country and issued a decree demanding women dress 'properly' i.e. 'forced veil'. Male and female students were separated in higher education classes, female students were barred from 69 different fields of study, women were barred from some professions such as judiciary and singing groups, and female students were barred from certain disciplines in the universities. Women were banned to participate in some sports and not allowed to watch men in sports field. (Mahdi, 2004, p. 434)

After the revolution, as women were marginalized in the society, they were excluded from the screen. In fact, it could be said that what is seen on the screen is partially a reflection of the society. According to Alexander (2003) the reflection approach rests on the idea that art tells us something about society. The theory relies on the belief that art mirrors (or is conditioned by or determined by) society. Portrayal of women in veil could be seen as the forced veil for women in the real life in the post-revolutionary and war era, or women were represented as housewife, mother, wife, which were the gender roles that the new government attached for women. "Popular cultural representations which marginalize or stereotype women, the relative absence

of women involved in cultural production and the relative neglect of women as audiences for popular culture." (Strinati, 2004, p. 166) It can be said that in those years the concept of 'gaze' was different to the western definition. According to the socio-cultural context of Iran, women's representation in Iranian cinema implied female spectator to identify herself as 'mother', 'wife' and 'a good woman'.

According to the Post-revolutionary and War era, it is seen that in the most of the film industry productions, there is no woman character.The films such as *The Senator* (Mehdi Sabagh-zadeh, 1983), *Dadshah* (Habib Kavosh, 1983), *The Eagles* (Samuel Khachikian, 1984), *The Bells* (Mohammad Reza Honarmand, 1985), *Kanimanga* (Saifollah Dad, 1987) and *Horizon* (Rasoul Molagholi-pour, 1988) or the films that women were presented as the secondary or third character, as mother or spouse such as *Boycott* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1985), *The Tenants* (Daryoosh Mehrjuie, 1986), *The Little Bird of Happiness* (Pouran Derakhshandeh, 1987), *Golnar* (Kampozia Partovi, 1988). According to the sample of this research, only in *The tenants*, women are represented as the secondary character and as mother or wife.

According to Mahdi (2004) during the first decade of the revolution (1980-1988) all oppositional and secular organizations, including women's, were banned. Many activists opposed to the state, both men and women, were arrested, imprisoned, and executed. The majority of activists concluded that organized activity was dangerous and they generated individualistic defiance to state rules impinging on women's personal lives. With the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the death of Ayatollah

Khomeini in 1989, new alliances emerged and groups forced the state for initiating changes in social and legal policies affecting women.

The Reconstruction era of the Iranian Cinema was influenced on socio-political changes and these changes are apparent in the content of the films and the changes of the women's role and their appearances on the screen. The filmmakers started to pay attention to the social issues and difficulties after the war and women were displayed as the main character more than the former era. According to economical policy of the state and privatization, the producers paid more attention to the financial aspect of cinema. It could be a main reason that in this era, there are many film productions in comedy genre. The other reason is the social conditions after the war and Iranian people demanding to have more fun after war difficulties.

In the Reform era, despite of cultural and interactional domains, women pushed the imposed boundaries further and penetrated into various professions in the public sphere, especially in the film industry, literary works and mass media. According to Mahdi (2004) in 2001, there were 500,000 employed women who either managed their own businesses or supervised other employers. Women's achievements in education surpassed men's on many levels and in many positions. In 1998, 51 percent, and in 1999, 57 percent of students entering universities were woman. The literacy rate among women was up to 80 percent. In the political sphere women opened more space for themselves. In local council election in 1998, 297 women were elected to city council and 484 to rural council. In the public sphere, women had the biggest gains by becoming active in the entertainment industry, journalism and literary fields.

As a reflection of what happened in the society, the representation of women changed dramatically on the screen in the reform era in terms of both the number of films that was produced about women issues and the role of the woman characters. Many of the production of the film industry were about women's issues, not only difficulties of the middle-class and upper-class women but also the issues of lower-class women, in the films such as *Under the City's Skin* (Rakhshan Bani-etemad, 2000), *Women's Prison* (Manijeh Hekmat, 2002), *Maral* (Mehdi, Sabaghzadeh, 2001), *Bemani* (Daryoosh Mehrjuie, 2002), *I am Taraneh, 15 Years Old* (Rasool Sadre-Ameli, 2002), *Mama's Guest* (Daryoosh Mehrhuie, 2004) and *Boutique* (Hamid Nematollah, 2004). In the films produced in this era, women appeared as the protagonist and active character in many cases not as a victim and a passive one.

One of the significant changes in the representation of women in Iranian cinema in the reform era was the changes of women appearance. Women were presented with their perfect face, full- make up, colorful clothes and so on to be sex object on the screen. So within the limits of Islamic objectifications, women images are gradually portrayed to 'male gaze' as I mentioned in my analysis.

Moreover, the changes in economic policies of the state based on privatization made the producers tended to produce the films with more financial benefits in the film industry. Therefore, women characters became an element for the sale of the film as the sex object. As Claire Johnston (1972) puts it; "the very fact of the iconic representation of the cinematic image guarantees that women will be reduced to objects of an iconic male gaze. Johnston concluded that 'woman as woman' can not

be represented at all within the dominant representation economy" (Williams, 1990, p.140). In fact in this manner Iranian cinema uses women's images as the sex object and cinema implies 'male gaze' in its western concept.

In the post-Khatami era, the state changed the cultural policies and announced that the country needs to go back to the revolutionary values of the earlier years after the Revolution in all respects including cinema. However, after the all successes that women reached during the 25 years after the revolution especially within the Reform era, they couldn't be excluded from the screen similar to the earlier years after the Revolution. Therefore, government started to tried to change the role of woman characters in the cinema in two ways. First by giving permission to the stories which support the government ideology and second by exclusion the directors who have critical thoughts like Daryoosh Mehrjue, Bahram Baizae, Behrooz Afkhami who are known to have feminist views.

> "…. Work on women and popular culture concentrated upon what Tuchman has called the 'symbolic annihilation of women'. This refers to the way cultural production and media representations ignore, exclude, marginalize or trivialize women and their interests. Women are either absent, or represented by stereotypes based upon sexual attractiveness and the performance of domestic labour." (Strinati, 2004, p. 167)

As I mentioned before many of the cinema industry productions in the recent years are in comedy genre and the plot is often about marriage (temporary or permanently), polygamy such as *The Runaway Bride* (Bahram Kazemi, 2005), *The Looser* (Ghasem Jafari, 2005), *Salvation at 8:20* (Siroos Alvand, 2005), *Havoo* (Alireza Davoodnejad, 2006), *Unfaithful* (Asghar Naeimi, 2006), *Reflection* (Reza Karimi, 2007), *The Second Woman* (Siroos Alvand, 2007), *Always There is Woman* (Kamal Tabrizi,

2008), *Marriage at the Overtime* (Saeid Soheili, 2009). All these examples were big

box office hits with a main woman character.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Iranian cinema, similar to any art, has been a reflection to socio-political occurrences in the society and also has been influenced by the socio-political changes. Cinema came to Iran with western influences during the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925). The history of Iranian cinema began with an audience arisen exclusively from the judiciary and the aristocracy. With extinction of Qajar dynasty in 1925, Reza Khan established Pahlavi dynasty. Film industry was encouraged and influenced by Reza Khan's policies of modernization.

Another huge socio-political change in Iran has been Islamic Revolution in 1979 by which history of Iranian cinema has been affected. History of Iranian cinema can be easily separated into two eras: 'Iranian cinema before the revolution' and 'Iranian cinema after the revolution'.

The aim of this study is to examine the changes of the representation of women in popular cinema after the revolution. According to socio-political changes, the post-revolutionary era in Iran is classifiable into four periods: the post-revolution and war (1979-1988), reconstruction (1988-1997), reformation (1997-2005), post-reformation (2005-2009). The purpose of the study was to analyze how women are represented in

Iranian popular films and whether they have been successful in transgression from the private to the public sphere as a social reality in the last three decades in Iran

The analysis of the six films within four eras shows that the changes of the representation of women on the screen have been synchronized with Iranian women successes in transgression from the private to the public. In fact images of women on the screen is a reflection of what women do or they try to do in the real social life and at the same time the images that empower women's contribution to the society.

In the earlier years after the revolution it is seen that as women were excluded from the social life by forced veil, by banning them from high education, professions and disciplines, they were excluded from the screen. During the first decade (1979-88) the state banned all oppositional and secular organizations, including women's. On the screen, women were represented as housewife, mother, spouse and the common gender stereotypes for women. In the reform era, as women pushed the imposed boundaries and penetrated into the public sphere, the representation of women changed positively. Women were no longer just a passive agent on the screen. Filmmakers paid attention to the women's issues and made films about women and the difficulties they face in the society.

In the post-reform era, the new state which believes in the values of the earlier years after the revolution, in its opposition to women's organizations and women's right activists, arrested them and their activities have been prohibited. However women's presence on the screen is not banned or they are not excluded but the state uses the popular cinema as a ideological apparatus. In the most of the productions of the film industry, women movement's activists are represented as anti-man, anti-marriage and

anti family. In the films women are classified into "good woman" who is at home as a housewife or a mother, and "bad woman" who is working outside and probably single. It can be a policy to restore women to the private sphere.

On the other hand, at the first sight, Iranian cinema doesn't seem to imply male spectator because of the specific way of women dressing. But in a deep analysis it is revealed that during these three decades, there is a kind of women objectification which is different from western's type. In fact, the representation of women in a veil, encourages a voyeuristic interest in seeing the uncovered identity. Although women are covered by headscarf and long dresses but it creates a kind of 'male gaze' that tries to discover the hidden. This kind of female objectification has increased after the first half of the reform era when there was a more open space that women could be represented easier. Veiling itself can not be seen as oppression. As it is seen in my analysis of Iranian cinema what makes women less visible in society is the gender policy of the state including gender representation in the cinema.

I would like to mention that it would be useful to understand the influences of socio-political changes on transgression from the private to the public in Iranian cinema if a study is to be done about Iranian women directors or generally the women who are behind the camera in Iranian cinema. Consideration of their concerns and difficulties will help to reach a better understanding of Iranian women situation after the Islamic Revolution.

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