



COPYRIGHT AND USE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis must be used in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Reproduction of material protected by copyright may be an infringement of copyright and copyright owners may be entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.

Section 51 (2) of the Copyright Act permits an authorized officer of a university library or archives to provide a copy (by communication or otherwise) of an unpublished thesis kept in the library or archives, to a person who satisfies the authorized officer that he or she requires the reproduction for the purposes of research or study.

The Copyright Act grants the creator of a work a number of moral rights, specifically the right of attribution, the right against false attribution and the right of integrity.

You may infringe the author's moral rights if you:

- fail to acknowledge the author of this thesis if you quote sections from the work
- attribute this thesis to another author
- subject this thesis to derogatory treatment which may prejudice the author's reputation

For further information contact the University's Director of Copyright Services

sydney.edu.au/copyright

Sydney College of the Arts
The University of Sydney

MASTER OF FINE ARTS
2013
RESEARCH PAPER

(A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.)

AN INVESTIGATION INTO REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN IRANIAN
NEW WAVE CINEMA

by

Masoud Sheikhi Shoushtari

August 2013



STATEMENT

This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
List of Illustrations	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
An Early Image on the Screen	4
Chapter Two	
The Convergence of Female Poetic and Iranian New Wave’s Filmic Narrative.....	9
Women’s poetry	10
The role of gender in the formation of an artwork.....	11
Farrokhzad’s poetry and women’s issues	12
Women’s poetic as a filmic narrative.....	16
The emerging female voice in Iranian New Wave cinema	17
Chapter Three	
Iranian Post-Revolutionary Reproduction of National Cinema.....	20
Early days	20
Cinema in doubt.....	21
Reproduction of a new national culture.....	23
The emergence of a new aesthetic.....	25
The allegorical function of women’s image	27
The mainspring of censorship aesthetic	29
Return of the veil	31
Chapter Four	
My Studio Practice.....	37
The act of viewing	38
Conclusion	43
Bibliography	45
Endnotes	47

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the help given to me in this project by my supervisor Mr Geoffrey Weary and my proof-reader Dr Jennifer M. Gamble.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. <i>Bashu, the little stranger</i> directed by Bahram Beyzai, 1989	3
Figure 2. <i>Lor Girl</i> , Directed by Ardeshir Irani and Abdolhossein Sepanta, 1932.....	5
Figure 3. <i>The House is Black</i> directed by Forugh Farrokhzad, 1963	18
Figure 4. <i>The Ballad of Tara</i> directed by Bahram Beyzai, 1980	29
Figure 5. <i>The Ballad of Tara</i> directed by Bahram Beyzai, 1980	30
Figure 6. <i>Pari</i> directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 1995.....	34
Figure 7. <i>Pari</i> directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 199	36
Figure 8. <i>Letters Of Memory</i> directed by Masoud Sheikhi, 2013.....	37
Figure 9. <i>Through the Olive Trees</i> directed by Abbas Kiarostami, 1995.....	40
Figure 10. <i>Letters Of Memory</i> directed by Masoud Sheikhi, 2013.....	41
Figure 11. <i>Letters Of Memory</i> directed by Masoud Sheikhi, 2013.....	43
Figure 12. <i>Letters Of Memory</i> directed by Masoud Sheikhi, 2013.....	44

ABSTRACT

In an analytical look into the history of the formation of Iranian New Wave cinema, this research explores the key elements that constitute integration between the women representation and the evolution of New Wave visual narrative. The paper will preliminarily examine the public's response to the early representation of women in classic Iranian cinema and discusses the impact of the socio-political modifications, imposed by the process of modernisation, on the reception of the early representation by the Iranian public. The paper then discuss aspects of the philosophical framework in relation to the role of gender in the conception of artwork. The artistic growth of Forugh Farrokhzad, a prominent figure in modern Persian poetry and the New Wave Iranian cinema will be explored. Through the example of Farrokhzad, the intention is to identify the key elements regarding the influence of Persian poetry on the formation of New Wave visual narrative. This brings the paper to the third chapter where the implications of the Islamic revolutionary regime's regulatory frameworks on the image of women in cinema will be discussed. Also the paper examines the role that the representation of women plays as an instrument of the Islamic republic to generate a process of reproduction of new national culture. In contrast, the alternative response of independent filmmakers to the mainstream representation of women will be explored by the means of re-examination of the structure of the film star system, the aesthetic of censorship and the act of viewing approach in relation to images of women. In the final chapter, the connection between my film practice and the characteristics of Iranian New Wave visual narrative is established through analysis of the key elements associated with the representation of gender in the works of New Wave filmmakers such as Forugh Farrokhzad, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Bahram Beyzai, and Abbas Kiarostami.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, of all the paradoxes cultivated in Iranian society that give a perplexing image of the country to those outside its cultural and geographical borders, none is more complex than gender issues and their representation. A range of aesthetic languages, construct semantic representations as the paradigm for cultural, political and social studies. Cinema as one of the most significant of these languages has reflected and continues to reflect on the Iranian population's encounter with modernity. In this paper, I explore a number of those complexities in relation to the representation of women in the realm of filmic aesthetics of New Wave Iranian cinema.

In the context of cross-cultural viewing, Iranian filmmakers have developed a non-confrontational narrative form with unique innovative neo-realism, to express their voice, while circumventing the censorship imposed by the Iranian Ministry of Culture. As examples of this innovative filmic narrative, works of Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf alongside other Iranian New Wave film makers have achieved an internationally acclaimed artistic position for the Iranian Cinema. The degree to which Iranian cinema has established a frequent presence in the International film festival circuit substantiates its emergence as one of the important national cinemas.

The Western mainstream media representation of Iranian women in the post revolutionary era is often associated with obscurity or to an extent over-simplified as utterly oppressed with the violation of their rights, body and sexuality by the Islamic regime. In contrast, an Iranian woman received the Nobel peace prize; a girl became the national car-racing champion competing against both men and women contestants; women occupy over 60% of the capacity of higher education institutions, the feminist non-governmental organisations, grew by over 400% and last but not least, the number of female film makers emerged in two decades after the Revolution is by far greater than the preceding eight decades of the pre-revolutionary history of Iranian cinema.

However, it has not always been like this, in fact, in the early years after the 1979 Revolution, as part of the process of Islamisation of Iranian society, the appearance of unveiled women on screen was eliminated, and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance rigidly regulated the representation of women with a set of a comprehensive codes of conduct for the film industry. Specifically, this resulted in the banning of several works by Bahram Beyzai and Dariush Mehrjui, the two prominent New Wave filmmakers, whose works were predominantly concerned with women's issues and often led by a strong female protagonist.

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between the representation of women in the post revolutionary context and the development of Iranian New Wave cinema. It is the intention of this essay to investigate the concept of gender representation by cinematic analysis of some of the important films and filmmakers of Iranian New Wave cinema. I will also explore the interplay between the issue of gender representation in the Iranian film industry and the emergence of the new filmic aesthetic in the context of Iranian New Wave visual narrative.

The first chapter begins with the establishment of a framework for the analysis of representation of women in Iranian visual culture by a brief historical survey of the early presence of a female protagonist in classic Iranian cinema. By examining the spectatorial reception of this representation by the public, this chapter investigates key historical landmarks in relation to the early development of Iranian cult movies and pop culture.

In the next chapter, the paper will discuss some aspects of the philosophical framework regarding the interplay between gender specificity and the conception of artwork. This chapter also highlights the impalpable but inherent relationship between Iranian women's poetic literature and the progress of New Wave Iranian cinema. With the intention of discovering the historical landmarks that are significant in identifying the convergence of women's aesthetics and emerging cinematic narrative of Iranian New Wave cinema, I will investigate the artistic growth of Forugh Farrokhzad, a prominent figure in modern Persian poetry who also incorporated her poetic vision into filmic narrative.

In the following part of the paper, the restrictive regulatory frameworks imposed by the Islamic post-revolutionary regime on Iranian national cinema and the implications of those constraints on the formation of independent New Wave filmmaking will be discussed. In relation to the Cultural Revolution that took place in the first decade after the Islamic revolution, I argue that bringing cinema under control was one of the main targets for Islamists to establish their hegemony over mass culture. Therefore, the question of how the representation of women has played a significant role in post revolutionary regime's political agenda – as an instrument of regenerating the process of nation building with application of Islamic values – will be investigated.

Further, the ending component of the paper establishes a connection between my film practice and the aesthetics and visual elements of Iranian New Wave filmic narrative that have been discussed in the course of this research study. To do this, I will discuss some of the core elements associated with the visual flair of New Wave film makers and their treatment of the cinematic notion of the act of viewing in relation to representations of gender.



Figure 1. *Bashu, the little stranger* directed by Bahram Beyzai, 1989¹

CHAPTER ONE

An Early Image on the Screen

For the purpose of establishing a more comprehensive understanding of the process by which the image of Iranian women on screens has emerged, progressed and modified over different phases of Iranian contemporary history, it is useful to flash back to the very first female protagonist or metaphorically to one of the earliest women's voice in Iranian cinema, that of the Lor girl. Interestingly, her appearance on the silver screen coincided with the arrival of sound in Iranian cinema shortly after the first ever talkie feature-length American musical *The Jazz Singer* (1927).

In October 1932, Ardeshir Irani and Abdolhossein Sepanta premiered their feature-length debut, titled *Lor Girl* in Tehran. The movie was a commercial success in spite of speculation and controversy over its portrayal of a young woman, who strives to lead an independent life in the highly volatile social environment of the time. The moving picture even with taboo subjects inherent in the gender representation of *Lor Girl*, was well received by the Iranian public.

Lor Girl tells the story of a young teahouse girl of 'Lor' ethnicity who was kidnapped by a gang of thieves in her early childhood. The leader of the thieves, Gholi Khan, begins to develop an interest in Golnar (the Lor girl) with her coming of age. At the teahouse, she meets an ambitious young man named Jafar. Soon they fall in love, and plan an escape together. Jafar and Golnar, flee from Iran's society, which was in a chaotic state, to Bombay India in search of peace and security. They return to Iran when the political turbulence seems to be settled.

The story of *Lor Girl* may appear as an archetypal romance that can be found in many so called oriental tales such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, however, the portrayal of a teahouse girl on the screens of Tehran in 1932 becomes particularly interesting when viewed through the lens of the interplay between socio-political forces of the emerging society of Iran, and the developing entertainment sector.

Despite the controversy amplified by the Iranian press that a Muslim girl - for the first time - was cast for a film in Iranian cinema, the public seemed indifferent to her appearance on screen as a rebellious, self-motivated woman freed from female traditional roles. Shahla Lahiji, in her article 'Chaste dolls and unchaste dolls' discusses how portrayal of a young woman, who strives to lead an independent life is comfortably received by the public.



Figure 2. Image taken from *Lor Girl* Directed by Ardeshir Irani and Abdolhossein Sepanta²

It is important to note that the social changes and government effort to restrain the clergy's dominance that had been taking place at the time had a major impact on the public's good reception of the moving picture. Lahiji writes:

To the filmgoers of the time, the imperfect *hejab* of the heroine was not that important. The story, emphasizing a kind of feminine power and self-reliance, challenged the traditional perceptions of women's role as properly confined to the home and a life of social seclusion, but even so reports of the public reception of the film do not speak of an outcry.³

Despite the patriarchal structure of the society, *Lor Girl* achieved a successful public reception, however, it did not seem to initiate a long-term trend in local movie production. That is in the sense that it would utilise the new medium to

reflect on the issues that were generated by the Iranian population's encounter with modernisation of the country by Reza Shah the first Pahlavi dynasty's Shah of Iran. Rather *Lor Girl* was employed by the propagandist media of the Reza Shah regime to pave the way for his socio-economical objectives.

Reza Shah introduced a centralised nation-state power and a modern civil society over a period of nearly sixteen years ruling of Iran's constitutional monarchy (1925-41). Also as part of his institutionalisation and the educational system reforms, he substituted religious judges by academically educated lawyers in order to establish a secular judicial system. "By April 1927 Iran had 600 newly-appointed judges in Tehran" Davar Ardalan stated in her memoir *My Name is Iran*.⁴ Minister of Judicial Affairs Ali-Akbar Davar made a subsequent effort to apply and implement the new system to other cities by introducing a training scheme for judges. These reforms had a major impact on the clergy's influence in the public sphere, however, their influence in relation to marriage, divorce and child custody remained strong. The initial civil code provisions, which were mostly drawn from Sharia Law, was ratified in 1928. The new law required marriages to be registered and the minimum marriageable age for women was set at fifteen. Although, women became entitled to the right to divorce, included in the marriage contract, the new law was not able to challenge the traditional cultural beliefs encompassing marriage, nor the treatment of women in the social sphere and their public life. As Monique Girgis describes:

Reza Shah's policies had little effect on women's roles as most of his reforms were a compromise between the ulama and modernization. The Shah was not ready to risk the anger of the ulama and other religious factions of Iran by totally departing from Islamic law.⁵

The other important element that affected the reception of such a relatively contentious representation of a female protagonist in the *Lor Girl* was the Shah's political campaign, inspired by his Turkish counterpart Atta Turk and the Western influence, to eliminate the Islamic veiling culture by initiating a project named *the Women's Awakening* (1936-41). The women's awaking project, based on replicating the portrayal of European, Ottoman, Japanese and American women, aimed to encourage the participation of women in the social discourse, to provide them with more employment opportunities and to enhance the value of a fairer

and more egalitarian society, all in return for removal of the Islamic hijab. As part of State propaganda the depiction of men and women in the Iranian press was charged with the task of redefining the image of Iranian women as modern, educated, unveiled and liberal.⁶

To many historians the Shah's attempt to unveil the women of Iran was his most significant achievement in the *Women's Awakening Project*, however, its impact on the representation of women in arts and the media led to a complete replacement of perceived 'real' Iranian women with an imported image that had little association with the basic framework of society. The Shah ratified new legislation that enforced Western clothing in urban areas. In 1935, women were required to substitute their Islamic or traditional headwear with European hats and shortly after the law was augmented with regulations that imposed a ban on women wearing the hijab – the Islamic dress code. These fast-paced reforms escalated discontent amongst more conservative people and in many ways resulted in the formation of social class divisions. In contrast to the neighbouring country, Ataturk also implemented a similar project for Turkey, however, his methods of encouragement and his policy to impose subtle reforms in moderation made greater achievements in bringing the communities into an agreement on women's public participation.

Considering that Iranian society was in a state of rapid change, the local film industry struggled to retain public interest in the new medium. The movies of a similar genre to *Lor Girl* that were produced in the next decades failed to attract public. This was partially due to the increase in the number of imported movies mainly from Egypt and India that were better suited to the patriarchal structure of Iranian society. Also on the economic and political sides it was more affordable to import movies that were technologically more advanced. They had a fixed genre with subject matter with little reflection of Iran's diverse communities that were experiencing political crises and social dissatisfaction caused by Reza Shah's dictatorial style of ruling the country.

As a result of the torrent of imported films, the Iranian film industry teetered on the edge of bankruptcy and the situation became even worse when the new

dubbing system technology allowed Italian movies to be screened in Persian at Iran's theatres.

To avoid the total demolition of the local film industry, a number of producers, seeing the box office success of Egyptian and Indian movies, pursued a semi-musical movie genre so-called 'Film Farsi.' Those movies were normally centred on 'lumpen-cabaret' life spiced with sex appeal of dancing women to attract the filmgoers who were mainly "men, suffering sexual deprivation" due to traditional structure of society.⁷ The films would usually included few insignificant and small young female roles representing the type of beauty that appealed to their target audience, usually "sexually-deprived young men."⁸ On the other hand a handsome male protagonist was central to most the stories, with no specific referent to the society or social classes, he would feed the fantasy of young proletariat men oppressed by class divisions and the regime's incompetency to tackle state corruption and the economic crisis.⁹

CHAPTER TWO

The Convergence of Female Poetic and Iranian New Wave's Filmic Narrative

In a culture where poetry, regardless of its literary or artistic values, is communicated regularly by all sectors and parts of society, it is not surprising that it has become an effective agency of expression and influence used by almost every member of the élite including politician, academics, scholars and artists. However, a closer look at the contemporary history of poetry in Iran in line with its social movements and artistic progress, it is evident that there is a bilateral effect between the socio-political changes and changes in perceiving poetry and its forms. For instance, Nima Yushij who is considered by many the father of modern Persian poetry released poetry from its ritual and honorific bounds and tailored it in a way that it can be accessed by the masses. His unprecedented application of the natural speech of people or colloquial language format constructed in his manipulated rhythm and dramatised symbolism was crucial to his success in reaching the masses. Yushiji's poetic innovations arguably coincided with the formation of the 'Tudeh Party,' which was the first and only Communist party of Iran and perhaps the most influential at the time. This is not to attribute a political inclination to him or to his poetry; rather it is to give an example of how poetry is often linked to the mass culture and the daily life of Iranians. On the same note, Abbas Kiarostami, one of the most prominent filmmakers of the New Wave, in an interview speaks about the role of poetry in Iranian's daily life:

In Iran, in conversation, the use of poetry is not limited to intellectuals, or poets, or even poetry lovers....illiterate people who, during the day, recite a couple of verses in order to relate to one another and express their viewpoints. Poetry in Iran pours down on us, like falling rain, and everyone takes part in it. Your grandmother, when she wanted to complain about the world—she complained with poetry. Or if she wanted to express her love for your grandfather, she expressed it with poetry.¹⁰

The aim of this chapter however, is not to explore how poetic literature is placed and perceived in Iranian mass culture but it is indispensable to find the underlying connections between women, poetry and the image of women in contemporary Iranian cinema. To gain a better understanding of the role of poetic codes in relation to a feminine aesthetic, and more relevant to this paper, the representation of women, it is helpful to draw attention to the three significant words associated with this argument and to examine the semantics of the phrases made by putting them into pairs. Poetry, women and cinema are the three keywords and the composition of two of them at a time can guide the establishment of a line of enquiry for better perceiving the connection between them.

Women's poetry

The combination of the words 'women' and 'poetry' can be defined in various ways and contexts. One obvious way to explain the connotation of these two words next to one another is to refer its meaning to the poems that are written about women. This definition includes a wide range of poetic literature written by both men and women in differing forms and genres. Although, it would be difficult to include all romance poetry where, in most cases of classical Persian verses, women are hyperbolically described as an eagerly desired, or an unrequited beloved or symbolically the notion of love itself. It is worth exploring the ways in which femininity is fantasised, symbolised and perceived. The first that comes to-mind is an example of women's representation in Iranian literary history is 'Gazal' - the form of poetry that includes the expression of pain of separation or loss, and represents the value and beauty of love. Also, in a Sufi mystical approach to Gazal, the women's excess perfection is the signifier of divine love and ecstatic mysticism. The latter approach, however, is disputed among modern scholars. It is also important to note that Gazal's portrayal of women is not a representational one, rather it functions as a fantasised, utopian image of desire or, in mystical interpretation, divine wisdom that was mainly produced by men. Gazal renders a portrait of women as inaccessible ethereal creatures who, apart from few metaphoric references to her physical appearance, it has very few perceptible similarities with women from the time of its creation.

Another way for scholars to understand the relationship between women and poetry has been to categorise a chain of poetic literatures, which puts women's issues including social, political or gender identity, at the core of their thematic structure and describes them by the term 'women's poetry.' The term immediately raises the question: Is there a women's aesthetic that distinguishes itself significantly by means of gender? Although, it would be very hard to find a convincing claim that provides an adequate answer to this question, it certainly generates discussions about how to identify a women's aesthetic and in this case, women's poetry. Many feminist scholars and artists especially those who tackle the issue of feminine aesthetics conclude that in spite of seemingly neutral means of expression, the formation of art and aesthetic values is influenced by gender at the basic level of their conceptual frameworks.¹¹

The role of gender in the formation of an artwork

Closely related to the idea of gender influence and its significance in shaping a conception for an artwork, in this case a poem, is the idea of the creative genius of the creator. In other words, creative genius is the unique vision that distinguishes artistic expression, and it contains a profound manifestation of the artist's gender. While the concept of genius is a compelling standpoint from which to discover the gender influence on aesthetics, it has also been used against the argument for a feminine aesthetic by philosophers such as Plato and Kant¹² and even more recently Rousseau and Nietzsche played their part by declaring that women are too weak in personality, character and mentality to produce genius.¹³

Carolyn Korsmeyer argues in her paper 'Feminist aesthetics' that these prejudices are historical examples of a general masculine attitude that tends to attribute all the strong and valuable qualities of mind to men. She rebukes philosophers of the kind by these words:

At least since Aristotle, rationality and strong intellect have been regarded as "masculine" traits that women possess in lesser degrees than males.

ⁱ For instance, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in his *Genesis 2* predicated woman's political subordination to man as way of 'natural' social order and he said, "man had the 'right' and duty to protect the 'weaker sex,' and woman had the "right" to man's protection."

Females are standardly considered less intellectual but more sensitive and emotional.¹⁴

Also, she adds:

According to some theories of creativity, emotionality and sensitivity can be inspirational virtues, and so the field of aesthetics has been more responsive to the positive uses to which these traits might be put than are some other areas of philosophy. When it comes to genius, however, male artists get the best of both worlds: the great artistic genius is more than intellectually brilliant; he is also emotionally sensitive and fine-tuned, thus possessing characteristics that are traditionally labeled both “masculine” and “feminine.”¹⁵

Although, it is clear that the idea of genius, which has generated many vigorous discussions amongst philosophers and feminists in aesthetic disciplines, does not necessarily lead to a fixed conclusion, it is important for establishing the proposition that the basic framework of aesthetic is closely integrated with gender significance.

This integration does not imply that all the art works created by a female artist would/must, in all cases, manifest feminine aesthetic qualities. As Ruth Felski argues, many other factors involved in the process.¹⁶ Aspects such as social position, history, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation et cetera play a significant role in segregating women from each other, therefore, makes it almost impossible to identify a ‘feminine common denominator’ present in all artworks made by women.¹⁷ In contrast, there are other scholars who argue that female artists and writers, in many cases produce a counter-voice within their artistic traditions, and that can be discerned as their aesthetic.¹⁸

Farrokhzad’s poetry and women’s issues

This inevitability of gender association in artwork, however, becomes even more explicit in the form of poetry when poets challenge traditional aesthetic values regarding the representation of women by delving into the somewhat obscure depth of interior emotions and feelings that have been kept hidden for centuries.

Having a strong feminine voice, expressed in sophisticated and profound diction, Forugh Farrokhzad disclosed unprecedented discovery of her growth of consciousness and gender identity through her poetry and later in her life by a distinctive cinematic language. Forugh Farrokhzad is arguably a most influential modernist poet in contemporary Iranian literature, and I will also discuss her influence on the cinematic narrative of New Wave Iranian cinema.

Farrokhzad was born to a family of a military officer Mohammad Bagher Farrokhzad and his wife Touran Vaziri-Tabar in 1935 Tehran. This was in the same year that Reza Shah commanded the office of foreign affairs to announce the country's name as 'Iran' instead of previously known name 'Persia'.¹⁹ This decision was made to create a sense of nationalism and a nation-state amongst all ethnic groups. The name Persia bore the name of only one ethnicity whereas the name Iran widely refers to all inhabitants within the geographical borders of the country.

Farrokhzad attended school up to the ninth grade before she began painting and sewing training at the 'Kamal-ol-Molk Art School' of fine art and crafts. Shortly after her graduation, she met a renowned satirist Parviz Shapour and despite her family's objection, mainly over age differences, Farrokhzad decided to marry Shapour at the age of sixteen. In 1951, they moved to the southern city of Ahvaz, a few hundred kilometres away from the country's most important oil fields region and refineries run by Anglo-Iranian oil companies. Interestingly, about the same time the sentiment of oil nationalisation, led by prominent Iranian politician Mohamad Mosadegh, started to grow and the country experienced significant domestic political turmoil caused by multiple economic and political issues including conflict with British oil companies over nationalisation of oil, and Iran's inclination to retain its neutral position in the Cold War atmosphere.

Farrokhzad's married life ended less than two years after her only son was born in 1952. Shapour was awarded child custody, and Farrokhzad left to pursue her calling in poetry, and the arts as well as leading an independent life. In the mid 1950s, she published her first collection of poems titled *The Captive* in which she explicitly articulated her feelings and emotions in relation to conventional marriage enhanced by reflections on her own experiences and observations as a wife and a mother.

From her very early work, Farrokhzad has been the subject of much controversy and debate amongst literature critics regarding her approach to sexuality, literary values of her poems and most importantly her attempt to, deliberately, conflate religion with Eros. The interpretations of her early work can be represented two divisions: one sees her work, as uni-dimensional and having a sexual bias, and as a shallow, sentimental and sensuous. This is construed as and represents a young woman's search for sexual adventure. Of that opinion, Shoj'oddin Shafa, an Iranian librarian and scholar in his introduction for *The Captives* describes Farrokhzad's early works with these words:

...the theme of these poems is nothing new per se, and should not be the subject of confusion. It is a tale as old as man himself and shall remain with him till his very end and let's face it who among us can deny having felt these unspeakable desires in our heart? Or in the words of Jesus 'let he who has no sin cast the first stone at the sinner.'²⁰

Others perceived Farrokhzad's work as ardent love poems sourced from the pain and disillusion caused by holding an unrealistic expectation of love, relationship and marital satisfaction. The latter view might have been applicable only in the sense that, a poet's work is often predominantly derived and influenced by the circumstances in which the work is written and perceived by the poet. As discussed earlier, individual experiences and social circumstances can impose distinctive qualities on an artist's works. A similar consideration is applicable to Farrokhzad's work. Although, it is hard to detach her early poems from her personal encounters with conventional gender roles in the marriage and relationship, this should not result in disregarding the subversive essence of her early works which later led to greater realisation of her autonomy and growth of consciousness. Farzaneh Milani describes:

Lack of reciprocity on intellectual, psychological, and emotional levels resulting from the lack of common interests, commitments, and expectations in love flaw the relationships depicted in the early work. In the later poems, however, the poet no longer needs to shape an imaginative world to resemble her dreams more closely she is building a real world she can live in.²¹

Yet, while searching for an autonomous life as a woman in a highly patriarchal surrounding social structure, she was well aware that social being and interaction

with others are integral to leading an autonomous life as the process involves self-understanding, self-criticism and envisioning alternatives²².

Marilyn Friedman in the book *Feminism in Philosophy* discusses feminist ethics in relation to the interpersonal, social and philosophical development of feminist theory and more precisely, the conception of autonomy amongst contemporary thinkers.²³ She builds her argument by proposing a comparative analysis between mainstream philosophers', mainly male, approach to the conception of morality and that of female thinkers like Carol Gilligan. ²⁴ According to Fricke and Gilligan, mainstream male philosophers' works characteristically rely upon abstract moral matters such as justice, rights, autonomy and individuation, whereas women are often more attentive to moral matters of care, personal relationship, contextual details and focusing on interpersonal and emotional responsiveness.²⁵

The concern over moral matters of care and relationship also notably appears in Farrokhzad's perception of selfhood and personal identity. It seems that her attempt to represent a candid portrayal of Iranian women is inseparable from the central theme of her poetry that is the relationship with men. Milani explains:

Forugh's approach to love in her later poems is multi-dimensional, the product of undergoing and observing the changes and growth within herself. In the early collections, she voices bitterly and courageously her discontent and dissatisfaction with her failure to reconcile the demands of relationships with her desire for independence and autonomy. The outcome is a keen portrayal of the psychological and social trap in which she finds herself and the poisonous effects of rigid social codes on human relationships.²⁶

It is worth noting that the manner in which Farrokhzad's centralise love and relationship as the focal theme of her poetry bears the marks of the history of Iranian women's struggle against her predetermined social role. Sexuality becomes the inherent element of her development and growth of consciousness and it plays a significant role in her progressive recreation of self, however, it remains, as Milani puts it "Bricks in the building of the poet's character, not the building itself."²⁷

Women's poetic as a filmic narrative

Shifting back to the keywords set at the beginning of this chapter, for the purpose of enquiry that will establish a guideline for seeking a correlation between women, poetry and cinema. Thus far discussed are some of the possible interrelations between woman aesthetics and poetry. In the context of direct relevance to this paper, Iranian cinema and its representations, I will reflect on the words women and cinema.

Clearly the phrase "women's cinema" shares many characteristics with the connotation of the phrase "women's poetry." Similar to the earlier discussion of women's poetry, women's cinema is normally associated with films that are made by women and/or are centred on women's issues and matters. In the Western context, the discussion of feminist film theory takes a central part in identifying the signified elements of sexual differences and gendered specificities. Also closely related to this theory is the complex concept of spectatorship in which the architecture of the 'gaze' determines the psychological position of the spectator that is constructed by the machinery of cinema. The writing of Christian Metz and Lura Mulvey in the 1970s and 1980s closely examined and theorised the concept of the cinematic institution as an ideological apparatus that has dynamic interrelations with the mechanism of pleasure and gender. However, later theorists in response have scrutinised feminist film theory by introducing the possibility of theorising a female gaze and establishing a series of perspectives in order to explore ways in which the institution of pleasure is perceived to be accessible by women.²⁸

A recognisable feminine aesthetic and women's cinematic representation is emerging in connection with a series of works produced by Iranian New Wave filmmakers. This different form of emergence needs to be approached by understanding historical, social and political circumstances involved in the process in which the New Wave Iranian cinema itself formed.

In 1956, a few years after Farrokhzad's 'nervous breakdown' following the publication of her first book, she travelled to Italy for nine-months where she managed to support herself financially by working for a dubbing company that translated and dubbed Italian movies to be screened in Iran. Amongst those

movies, were several works from Italian Neo-realist filmmakers. Shortly after her return she had the opportunity to publish two further poetry collections. In 1958 on another trip to Europe, she met with the controversial Iranian author and filmmaker Ebrahim Golestan with whom Farrokhzad maintained an important relationship until the last day of her life. Her acquaintance with Golestan had a significant influence on her life in many ways and he is said to be the single but effective support in encouraging her to express herself and to pursue her autonomy. In addition to his emotional support, he took a significant part in laying the foundations for Farrokhzad's association with filmmaking. Golestan owned a film production company where Farrokhzad discovered her enthusiasm for the moving image and film narrative. She participated in production of several documentaries made by so-called progressive filmmakers. In 1961, Farrokhzad wrote narrations for a number of documentaries and edited a Golestan film on the ravages of fire in an oil well in Khuzestan, a southwestern province of Iran. The film narrative and the juxtaposition of images are characterised in a way that emphasises the strangeness of the terrain where a 'gigantic' fire destructively raging out of oil pipes while farmers are harvesting the very same land in the distance. The film documented the 1958 oil well fire in Ahvaz, which lasted for nearly two months. Moreover, from an environmental perspective, images of catastrophic blazes contrast with shots of villagers harvesting, of a flock of sheep, and of a fire fighters' crew. The editing style in particular makes a notable effort to depict the endless battle of men versus man-made destructive forces.

The emerging female voice in Iranian New Wave cinema

In 1962, Farrokhzad directed her first and most important film. It had a profound impact on the filmic narrative of emerging New Wave Iranian cinema. *The House is Black* was shot in an isolated leprosy colony on the outskirts of the north western city of Tabriz in Iran. The documentary film observes the life of patients afflicted by leprosy.

Described as one of the greatest examples of all Iranian cinema; *The House is Black* depicts the decomposed faces of human suffering in a manner that challenges our perception of the beauty of creation. The movie juxtaposes images from daily life of

inflicted people in the leprosy house with occasionally decontextualised narration that is communicated directly by the voice of filmmaker herself.

The narration consists of a prologue of quotations from the Old Testament, the Koran and Farrokhzad's own poetry in ways in which it momentarily distances the viewers from the sorrowful images of suffering and extending its frame to a scope that as Michael Hillmann describes, embodies Iranian contemporary society:

The house is black depicts a leprous society in which the people trust in God and see a cure for their condition through prayer, whereas only science and surgery can effect a cure. Without such treatment, the society leprosy will remain and increase.²⁹



Figure 2. Image taken from *The House is Black* directed by Forugh Farrokhzad³⁰

In addition, the film metaphorically reflects on the structure of Iranian society in relation to religion, marginalisation and women's conditions. The image of a leprous woman trying to apply kohl to her eyes or in another sequence a leprous girl drawing a comb through the hair of a younger not infected girl accompanied by Farrokhzad's voiceover of quotations from the Koran and the old testament, implicitly makes reference to the filmmaker, as a woman, and her personal

encounters within an Iranian social framework. Farrokhzad in an interview with Bernardo Bertolochi in 1962 in Europe states:

Naturally if I wanted to make a film merely on the subject of leprosy or a film that only focuses on the issue of the disease it would have become a medical documentary, however, this place [the leprosy colony] was a sample for me, a paradigm or a miniature version of a larger world with all the diseases, discomforts and troubles that are inherent in it. When I attempted to make this film I was trying to look at the place with this view in my mind.³¹

As has been discussed so far, it is difficult to gain a thorough understanding of the evolution of female voice within Iranian New Wave cinema without investigating Farrokhzad's literary and cinematic works in the context of the works of later New Wave filmmakers. In the following chapters, I will explore and discuss the influence of her poetic and cinematic narrative on the development of Iranian neorealism and the concept of the open image in conjunction with the impact of the Islamic revolution on the film industry and representation of women.

CHAPTER THREE

Iranian Post-Revolutionary Reproduction of National Cinema

In this chapter, I will investigate and analyse the modifications imposed by the Islamic post-revolutionary regime on Iranian national cinema and the implications of those changes on the formation of independent New Wave filmmaking. In connection with the Cultural Revolution, which took place in the infancy of the Islamic republic, cinema was one of the main targets for Islamists to enforce their hegemony over mass culture by imposing a set of regulations and restrictions on the film industry. I will explore, how the representation of women has played a significant role in the post revolutionary regime's political agenda as an instrument of regenerating the process of nation building through the application of Islamic values. To do this, films from the first decade following the revolution will be investigated and the manner in which the marginalised New Wave filmmakers took their initial steps in developing a narrative that revived their autonomy within the context of a totalitarian regime will also be explored.

Early days

As part of the preliminary outbreak of the Islamic revolution in the mid-1970s, a considerable number of movie theatres in Tehran and other major cities were burnt to ashes in the flaming fire of the destabilizing struggle that took place between Islamist anti-monarchists and the Intelligence service of the regime. A popular movie theatre in the southern city of Abadan named Cinema Rex was set on fire on the afternoon of 19 August 1978. The blaze of Cinema Rex took the lives of about 400 people who went to see a controversial movie produced by one of the prominent and progressive Iranian filmmakers of the time Masoud Kimiai. The regime accused the Islamist militants of setting the fire as a destabilising attack on the government. However, on the other side of conflict, the anti-monarchy protestors held the intelligence service, known as SAVAK, responsible. Ever since the Rex Cinema fire, there have been disputed statements from both sides

speculating on who should be held accountable for perpetrating the incident. Dillip Hiro argues that the popularity of the movie theatre amongst the working class and its location in the low-income suburb of the city makes it hard to believe that anti-monarchy protestors caused the blaze.³² In addition, Hiro states “the movie theatre was screening Kimiaie’s ‘*Gavaznha*’ (*The Deer*) and in many ways the film is a sharp criticism to the government by depicting social realities of Iran under the monarchy.”³³ It is said that the movie scarcely passed the censorship of the Ministry of Culture and Art prior to its exhibition permit. According to Hamidreza Sadr, *The Deer* addresses several social and political issues associated with the 1970s in Iran, including political conflicts, armed struggle, police brutality, class division and drug addiction.³⁴ He adds “the spatial coding of the film uses populist theatres and crowded poorhouses to portray a society on the verge of explosion.”³⁵

Some authors, such as Daniel L. Byman argue that the fundamental doctrine of the conservative Islamists saw the cinema as an “affront to God, encouraging vice and Western-style decadence.”³⁶ Goli M. Rezai-Rashit also discusses Ayatollah Khomeini’s view on the cinema as the symbol of colonisation and objectification of women. In an interview, in Paris days before the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini describes cinema as an instrument for spreading corruption and immorality by the Shah’s regime:

It is the Shah who in order to corrupt our youth has filled cinemas with colonial programmes. . . . The Shah’s regime is nothing but the centre of corruptionThe Islamic nation considers these centres are against the interests of the country.³⁷

Years later *Sobhe Emroze*, a daily newspaper in Tehran allegedly apportions the blame to radical Islamists for setting light to the Rex Cinema as a means to provoke anger and hostility in the general public to rebel against the monarchy and the government. This allegation caused the newspaper to be shut down by the Islamic republic government.³⁸

Cinema in doubt

Evidence suggests that an Islamist anti-monarchy students, who were being chased by SAVAK agents, ran to the cinema to hide in the crowd and later in a

struggle with the intelligence service agents, set the cinema on fire. Due to the blockage of the cinema's exits, all of the audience, about 400 people including religiously inclined students and the SAVAK agents, burnt to death.³⁹ *Etella'at* one of the most circulated daily newspapers in 1982, claimed that over 210 movie theatres were destroyed, and by 1983 only 400 cinemas were running in the entire country.

With ambiguous attitude of the Islamic revolution towards the film industry and visual art in general, Iranian filmmakers and artists suffered from a lack of orientation in their responses to the fast changing society and political system, that making a dramatic transition from 2500 years of monarchy to a newly invented Islamic republic. Ayatollah Khomeini, the charismatic leader of the revolution in his famous speech in Behesht-Zahra cemetery, after his return from exile in France in 1979, announced that the revolution did not oppose cinema per se but that the Shah's regime had obscured Iran's culture through the film industry, television and radio. The Ayatollah remarked:

“...when modernity made its way to the east especially Iran, the essence of what should be used for civilising purposes it has pushed us back to primitivism.”⁴⁰

Perhaps his remark on Cinema and cultural activity on his arrival days before the revolution would take place, has made clear a historical end to an era in Iranian cinema, however, it did not indicate what direction cinema and visual art should take now. Apart from his somewhat ambiguous signal “cinema as a symbol of modernity must be at the people's service,”⁴¹ there was no indication of a path in which the art and communication sector of the society should take.

The confusion over what new Iranian cinema would be remained unresolved for a number of years following the revolution. When the transitional government of Mehdi Bazargan under the instructions of Ayatollah Khomeini was proclaimed, the post of Minister of Culture was given to a university lecturer and archaeologist Parvis Varjavand. While, as a result of determination of the office for Film Exhibition there was no departmental and official control over film productions and exhibitions, the President of the Actors and Film Practitioner's Association called for selection of representatives from all branches of the film industry to

form a representative committee. The committee included some of the renewed working actors, directors and cinematographers. In addition, Varjavand the Minister of Culture established a council to regulate the political orientation of national culture. The council comprised twenty committees each allocated to one aspect of national culture such as cinema, TV, radio, theatre, fine art and so on. Three representatives for the film industry were included - Kamran Shirdle a renowned documentary filmmaker; Hoshang Baharlu, a cinematographer and film critic and writer Reza Allamehdadeh. However, a few months later Varjavand resigned from the ministry position in support of Prime Minister Bazargan's opposition to the US embassy hostage taking. Subsequently, the Prime Minister resigned due to his liberal democratic inclinations and conflicts with the radical religious leaders including the Ayatollah Khomeini on the way in which the revolution was headed. The council was also dismissed, and the political climate changed drastically following the US embassy hostage crisis and the Iran-Iraq war.

Reproduction of a new national culture

With Ayatollah Khomeini as a religious clergyman leading the country, clearly a new chapter in the history of Iranian politics was unfolding. Although the social and in some instances, economic power of the religious clergy named Ulama in Islamic terminology can be traced back to the seventeenth century; the political authority of the Ulama had never been embedded as a form of a state ruled by the theocratic government. The Islamist supporters of Khomeini extracted a doctrine of Guardianship of the Jurist (Welayate-e-Faghih) from the Shiite Islamic theories and laws. This doctrine confirms absolute power of the Jurist over people. This resulted in reserving superior social status for the religious clergy and the Ulama over the rest of population who are considered laity. Pak-Shiraz describes:

Named as Leader for Life in the constitution, 'Ayatollah Khomeini' now combined supreme temporal and religious authority. This transition from charismatic leader of the Revolution to head of state seemed natural. Khomeini, however, was initially irresolute when it came to entrusting the reins of the country to the clerics.⁴²

Despite attempts to re-establish a new direction and identity for Iranian post-revolutionary cinema, the first three years after the revolution from 1978 to

1982 were considered by many as the most blurred period in the history of Iranian cinema says Ahmidreza Sader.⁴³ Most film produced during this period failed to make a meaningful connection to the social and political unrest, and were often shallow and superficial.

Perhaps part of the issue rests in the anxiety to find ways to shape a relationship between Islamic values as a paradigm of the newly restructured society and cinema as a twentieth century art form. Although, what has been classified as Islamic art had a considerably long history with substantial pre-existing artwork, Islamist scholars and artists seem to widely disregard Cinema. For instance, except for a few analyses by Ali Shariati, an influential sociologist and Islamic scholar whose work centred on the relationship between religion and sociology, it was very hard to find solid scholarly research works on Islamic art in Iran or elsewhere and in relation to cinema there was almost none.

Mohsem Makhmalbaff, an internationally renowned Iranian filmmaker, who established his career in post-revolutionary Iran, describes the uncertainty of artistic expression during the early years of revolutionary Iran with these words:

Frankly, our search in the history of Islamic art has not been as productive as we had hoped....Orientalist scholars have ascertained various principle of Islamic architecture... but Muslim themselves have not made an impressive contribution to this field. In fact, there has been little scholarly work on Islamic art in general. Some of the reasons are clear; the Islamic boycott of sculpture and music, as well as antipathy towards painting.⁴⁴

On 18 April 1980 Ayatollah Khomeini made another controversial speech in strong criticism of universities' educational curricula which were, in his view, and many of his disciples, accused of inclination to either the Western system of education, promoting liberal democracy and capitalism or the Eastern system of communism. His speech triggered several violent attacks targeting universities, students and academics' associations by Khomeini's radical supporters.

As the Islamic republic regime was seeking to establish and firm its sovereignty over Iranian society, Khomeini introduced a committee responsible for the purification of universities and academia from Western and Eastern influence. In the following months, all universities and educational institutions throughout the

country ceased their activities in order to institutionalise a new educational curriculum that complied with national interests and Islamic values.

The committee was comprised of seven pro-regime elites who were directly appointed by Khomeini to carry out the task of purification and Islamisation. The committee's objective was set to purge the educational system of students and academic staff who had associations with the previous regime or whose loyalty to Islam and the Islamic Republic was in doubt. The committee was also accountable for introducing a new curriculum that would emphasise Islamic values and teachings in rejection of the Western model of education and/or Communist system. It is important to note that subjects in humanities, social sciences and art were under scrutiny due to the widespread belief within the regime that humanities, social sciences and art could easily be susceptible to the influence of Western thinking and Western value judgments. This process of purification and Islamisation was later called the 'Cultural Revolution'.⁴⁵

Four years later in 1984, when universities and some educational institutions were re opened with a new set of regulations and a different atmosphere, the committee expanded from seven members to seventeen members and a new council was established under the name of the High Council for Cultural Revolution. The council was the highest body responsible for compiling policies, regulations and instructions in relation to education, research and cultural activities according to the ideological framework of the political system of the regime. Interestingly some of the core members of the council, which was to thirty six members in 1996, have become a main active opposition to the regime in recent years.

The emergence of a new aesthetic

Censorship was not new to Iranian artists and filmmakers whether imposed by cultural norms and society's biases or to state control on freedom of speech in the previous regime, however, what was fairly new was the method of censoring that was institutionalised by an official regulatory body which would prescribe social and cultural values for the nation and would enforce it through restricting and

deciding what should be visible to the nation and what was considered inappropriate for the public eye.

At the same time and despite the mass emigration of intellectuals and film artists abroad some made a conscious decision to remain in Iran. A number of progressive filmmakers such as Bahram Beyzai, Amir Naderi and Abbas Kiarostami attempted to produce new works perhaps to some extent in order to examine the new situation. Among those figures was Bahram Beyzai whose work mostly centred on Persian mythology with an analytical reference to contemporary issues of Iranian society and culture. Over his long career as an author, theatre director and filmmaker, it has become customary in his films and narrative structure to be revolving around a female protagonist. *The Death of Yazdgerd* was one of his early attempts after the revolution. Filmed in a theatrical space with Beyzai's distinguishable mise-en-scène and poetic monologues, *The Death of Yazdgerd* is based on the final chapter of the epic poem of Shahname by Ferdosie who is regarded as the preeminent epic poet of Persian classical literature. The piece was originally written as a play and tells the story of Yazdgerd the King of the Sasanid dynasty whose death was the end of the dynasty and subsequently led to the Islamic conquest that dates back to 651 AD.

Beyzai's visual coding in this film incorporates elements of Persian ritual conventions and the traditional dramatic performance named Ta'ziyeh. In the contemporary context, by means of operatic elements, music and singing in particular, Ta'ziyeh is a performative ritual mainly based on tragedies associated with Islamic Shiite history, however, its roots can be traced back to the pre-Islamic era oral tradition of dramatic art in Persia. The primary example of pre-Islamic Ta'ziyeh is the tragedy of Syavash and the heroic character in Shahnameh. Ta'ziyeh is often performed in an open space or under a large tent in the centre of town or village. The primary characteristic of this form of drama is the way in which it engages the spectators in a participatory triangular interaction between the actors, the epic characters and the spectators. Through a set of disciplined acting techniques, performers move in and out of the historical moment and their characters to the present time and their role as actors. In a circular-shaped stage in which the spectators sit or stand around, the performance also merges in and out of the physical stage while the generically hybridised function of the enactment

traces through time and space. This renegotiation of time, space, history and myth provides an opportunity for Ta'ziyeh to seek for relevance to the time and the socio-political context in which it is performed. Negar Mottahadeh in her book *Displaced Allegory* describes the performing structure of Ta'ziyeh in relation to spectator's participatory function:

The staging of the ta'ziyeh emphasizes, in this way, the temporal conjunction between the present and the past by situating the audience in the present as mourners lamenting the historical battle and the death of the Shiite heroes while role-carriers for the heroic figures resurrect history in their performance. Interwoven into the action by the movement and address of the role-carriers, ta'ziyeh audience members are also placed in the past, as participant-witnesses to the tragedy suffered by the family of the Prophet in the seventh-century's battle of Karbala.⁴⁶

Similar to some other traditional dramas like Japanese yarō-kabuki, historically women were prohibited to take part in Ta'ziyeh as performers; therefore, all female characters are performed by men, however, in the case of Ta'ziyeh, women had a significant spectator role as their place was normally situated in the front row of the audience circuit, and they often took part with their performative mourning ceremony.

The allegorical function of women's image

What is most notable and perhaps relevant to this paper was Beyzai's collaboration with Sussan Taslimi, an acclaimed stage actress who was known for her skilfully stylistic acting method developed in Bertolt Brecht's theory and practice of epic theatre, which interestingly shares fundamental principles with Persian Ta'ziyeh.

In their first cinematic collaboration Beyzai situates her in the centres of his mythological narrative that implicitly examines the ontology of women in relation to Persian culture and history via revisiting it through myths and the historical present. The ballad of Tara (Tcherikeh Tara) features the story of middle aged somewhat seductive and wilful peasant widow who encounters a wounded soldier who emerged from a distant ancient time to the surface of the present in order to

reclaim his lost ancestral sword, what Tara has not long ago inherited from her grandfather.

Tara, who perhaps not coincidentally shares name similarity with Terra the Greek mythological character that personifies the earth as the sustainer of life, appears riding on a horse-drawn cart on the road returning from the country to her village. She is riding through the forest with her two children at her side, an image of a strong willed, joyful and self-reliant woman and a protective mother. On her way, she receives the message of her grandfather's death by the villagers. She reaches the sandy beach of the Caspian Sea, exhilarated by the view of the sea; she jumps off the cart and runs into the water. In the next scene she arrives at her cottage and donates all her grandfather's belongings to the villagers except for a sword that no one takes. She then tries to find a practical use for the sword. She ties it to a stick to be used as a sickle, and uses it to hold her cottage door closed on a stormy night, to chop leaves or to cut firewood. None of these seem to work until she discovers a use for the sword while protecting her children from a wild dog attack on the coast. In view of the mythical context of the film narrative, symbolic and allegorical structure is materialised in Beyzai's costume design, and use of accessories. The sword can be interpreted as a historical object of violence in a way that Tara, who is arguably represented as a source of fertility, land and mother of culture, is confronted with her violent history in which she is drawn to rebel against an act of savagery in protection of herself and her children. Despite that, she returns the sword to the soldier from history, or as titled in the credit of the film to the 'historical man', yet he resists leaving to return to his pre-historical time as he has fallen in love with Tara.



Figure 4. Image taken from *The ballad of Tara* by Bahram Beyzai 1980.⁴⁷

'Tcherikeh' commonly translated in English as ballad, is originally a Kurdish word, which according to the Persian dictionary of Dekhoda, literally means a sparrow-song in the distance. However, in oral tradition it refers to an epic tale of individual love that resonates in a collective destiny.⁴⁸

The mainspring of censorship aesthetic

Hamid Dabash in his essay 'Body-less Faces' makes an interesting analogy between Beyzai's mythological narrative structure or as he puts it the "veiled mode of story telling" and the censorship implications for the alternative creativity of Iranian filmmakers in subsequent years after the *Ballad of Tara* when the Ministry of Culture and Guidance was established and regulated censorship was in place. Dabash states, "In this film the mythological narrative, or the 'veiled' mode of telling a prehistoric moment, is fully employed to undo the historically narrated ideal of 'Truth-as-Veiled-Woman'."⁴⁹

What is clearly visible in *The Ballad of Tara* is Beyzai's effort to make references to cultural frameworks from mythical history to the present time by way of re-evaluating them at the point of their early historic genesis. Although, the *Ballad of Tara* along with the next three films of Beyzai *The Death of Yazdgerd*, *Bashu the*

Little Stranger and *Maybe Some Other Time* never received permission for public screening, the influence of Beyzai's narrative on the next generation of filmmakers such as Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Mohsen Makhmalbaff, Bahman Ghobadi and Samira Makhmalbaf, can be detected in the way in which they developed their filmic narrative and visual codes. They not only circumvent the restricted censorship regulations but also act in subversion to the visual and representational codes produced and proliferated by the Islamic regime. Dabashi elaborates:

The post-revolutionary Iranian cinema censors, try as they might, cannot stamp out all resistance. As a perfect example of how the very practice of veiling, embedded in a mythological narrative in pre-history, can be used effectively in subverting a culture of absolutist assumptions and/or a "hermeneutics of hidden meaning," one can look at Beyzai's cinema in general, and 'The Ballad of Tara' (Beyzai 1977) or 'Bashu; The Little Stranger' (Beyzai 1986) in particular.⁵⁰



Figure 5. Image taken from *The Ballad of Tara* directed by Mahram Beyzai.⁵¹

The systematic control over the media - particularly the film sector - in order to encode the regime's favourable image of the nation in the general visible culture was not limited to law and regulations on 'what not to show,' but also related to

what was needed to be seen. Utilising a centralised media system, the Islamic regime tried to expand its hegemonic control over all media platforms as ideological vehicles to reproduce and propagate a new sense of national identity for the nation. Radio and television served as channels for advocating religious supremacy as well as venues for the circulation of power ideologies to establish and sustain the regime's dominant codes of nation. These values included Islamic values and state patriarchy and a utopian image of the Islamic state as opposed to nationalism and pre-Islamic history that was promoted by the previous monarchical regime. As part of this process, cinema, as a popular medium amongst the Iranian public, was recognized by the regime to play an integral role in reconstructing a national imaginary and to establish an insidiously distinct line between virtuality and the 'real' image of society.

Return of the veil

In a reversal to the act of the monarchy's unveiling enforcement that prohibited religious that is, Islamic veiling (hijab) in working society and public organisations, the Islamic republic imposed compulsory veiling and segregation of genders. The new law required all females over the age of puberty, regardless of religious faith and nationality, to observe the Islamic dress code, that is covering their hair and neck, wearing a loose long coat, trousers and socks to cover feet and to avoid physical contact with unrelated men in public space and consequently in the public media sphere. Also dark coloured clothing was recommended and wearing cosmetics and makeup was highly discouraged. The Ministry of Culture and Guidance meticulously observed these laws in film and visual art productions, and this resulted in banning several films and filmmakers every year. This also applied to paintings, books, illustrations and sculptures.

At the same time, the Islamic regime tried to establish its own representation of the nation and to build a film industry by introducing film practitioners who would be more likely to comply with its values and political agenda. As an inceptive step in the formation of this new film industry, the government established an art foundation named 'Hozeh Honari' with a substantial endowment to finance Islamic art research, art works and artists. An institution for film was established within the foundation, which was set to compete with its older rival 'Kanon' the Institute

for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults where filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami, Bahram Beyzai, Forugh Farrokhzad, Ebrahim Golestan, Amir Naderi, Sohrab Shahid Sales and most other prominent New Wave film makers have emerged.⁵²

It is self-evident that the application of an Islamic dress code with the intention of social homogenisation has significantly politicised the presence and, therefore, the representation of women in visual productions, most importantly in cinema. In the first decade after the revolution as Lahiji discusses “The Iranian cinema had granted recognition only to ‘the chaste and unchaste dolls’.”⁵³ Filmgoers who were disappointed by the lack of improvement in pre-revolutionary film content and a number of theatre actors who rejected Iranian cinema because of its mediocre artistic value were hoping that the removal of vulgarity from Iranian cinema as a result of revolution would create a receptive environment to true artistic approaches as well as the candid portrayal of Iranian women. However it soon appears that the image of a *chaste doll*, which was very well established in the essence of mainstream Iranian cinema, is favourable to the new authorities⁵⁴. Lahiji states:

thus, in the film sector, as well as other areas, all the sins committed by the fallen regime, as well as output of vulgar filmmakers, were put on women’s shoulders, ignoring the fact that women themselves had been the main victims. Women were now to pay the penalty by being banished altogether to the kitchen.⁵⁵

Moreover, during the Iran–Iraq war between 1980- and 1988, as Lahiji designates, two types of women were represented on Iranian screens; ‘goodies’ and the ‘baddies’. The goodies normally appear wearing a *chador* (veil), in restricted Islamic dress code fashion, while the ‘baddies’ were attired in more casual and normal dress referring to the middle class section of society, wearing overcoats and headscarfs. The ‘good women’ were submissive, long-suffering and kitchen-bound and ready to sacrifice everything for their men. Lahiji also notes that those figures of women were used as a publicity weapon targeting the women who opposed to such images and expressed their wish for freedom to choose their own clothing without violating Islamic dress code.⁵⁶

Much to the Islamic republic's surprise, the number of women entering universities and higher educational institutions increased dramatically in the following years after the re-opening of universities and the end of the Iran-Iraq War. Several factors may have contributed to this increasing women's tendency for higher education. Factors include the general rise in the female population after the war, and population policy shifts from the early 1980s that resulted in a high level of total fertility rate and also a reverse shift in the late 1990s, which declined to a total fertility rate by 2.7 per cent.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, it seems that the clash of oppressive forces of patriarchal society with the grass root social development of women, mainly made in the decades before the revolution, is a better explanation for this impulsive strive for autonomy. This movement also manifests itself in the growth of female filmmakers and film practitioners emerging in Iranian cinema in the face of all of the restrictions on their appearance both behind and in front of the camera. The number of female filmmakers in only two decades after the revolution is by far greater than six decades history of cinema in pre-revolutionary Iran. This process influenced the re-emergence of female stars within the recovering star system of Iranian cinema. Dariush Mehrjui who, prior to the revolution had directed *The Cow*, one of the most influential films widely regarded as the prelude of the Iranian New Wave, recommenced his film career by a series of films with leading roles by female protagonists. The first of this series was *Sarah*, a film inspired by the Henrik Ibsen play *The Doll House*, illustrating the struggle of a supposedly submissive housewife in her attempt to operate a secret home sewing business to fund her husband's surgical operation. The complication is that no one including the husband is aware of her underground business enterprise. When the truth is revealed, the reality of their marriage also comes to light. With no hesitation, she decides to leave the unhappy marriage, but unlike Ibsen's protagonist Nora, she does not seek employment or education and refuge to her father's house.

Julie Holledge in her book *Women's Intercultural Performance* discusses the main differences between Ibsen's Nora and Mehrjui's contextualisation of Ibsen's protagonist in Iranian society. She highlights the issue of custody of Sarah's daughter that she insists on. Sarah's determination to take her daughter with her when she leaves her dollhouse turns the spotlight on another cultural theme that is

Iranian women's tie to the fate of their children as well as the reflection of family law. Holledge states "the significant shift in the narrative can be interpreted as a challenge to Iranian child custody law."⁵⁸

Furthermore, what is perhaps most significant in *Sarah* is the way in which Mehrjui's visual structure distorts the presence of women whose physical performance is restricted to what Dabashi called bodiless faces.⁵⁹ Mehrjui opens the film with a close shot of Sarah's hand holding a lit cigarette, smoking secretly in a quite solitary moment - an unconventional image of a housewife in post-revolution screen. In the next sequence, Sarah appears in a ceremonial-like dressing scene, prepares herself to go out of her house. However, the scene is arranged in the same way as if an actor or an opera singer was putting on her costume before heading onto stage. Dabashi describes the image of women after application of the dress code regulation of Islamic cinema with these words:

Abstracted from realities that materially inform and animate them, they never speak from their bodily memories. The task of an "Islamic Cinema" is thus to empty these faces of those bodily memories, forcing them back not just behind veils, but into abstractions, into a memory-less self-forgetfulness.⁶⁰

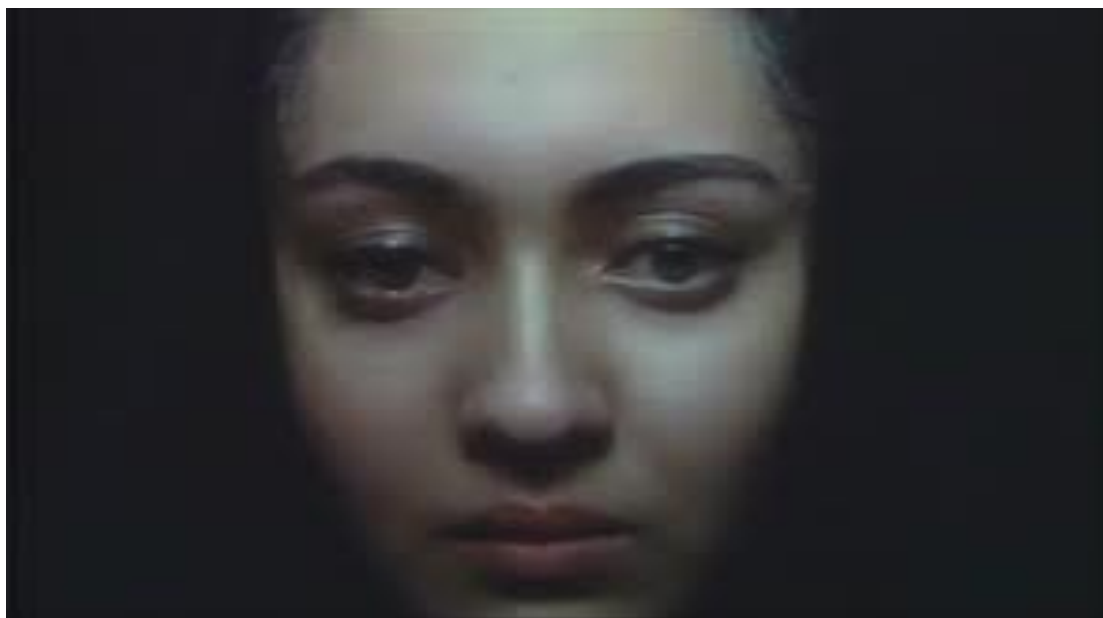


Figure 6. Image taken from *Pari* Directed by Dariush Mehrjui.⁶¹

Newly emerged female star Niki Karimi who played the role of Sarah also appears in Mehjuie's next film. Once more centred on a strong female protagonist. *Pari* in a more enhanced visual style, demonstrates Mehjui's ability to liberate highly oppressed images of abstracted women from their veiled bodily memory. This constitutes a form of visualisation that by the aid of mysticism integrates the spectacle of beauty, glamour and seduction, which are often associated with super star presentation, with deformation of the Islamic dress code.

Pari made in 1995 less than a decade after the bloody Iran-Iraq War, by virtue of Mehjuies's unique adaptation of Bergmanian visual techniques, paints an abstract portrait of Iranian men and women encountering their own internal chaos that was cultivated through three decades of traumatic experience of revolution, war and cultural confusion. But *Pari*, the leading female character who has a recurring mystical hallucination of a strikingly beautiful man resembling Christ in appearance, impulsively writes poetry with chalk on a classroom blackboard, harshly criticises a pretentious Persian literature professor, has constant quarrels with her older brother Dadashi on the subject of life as an enactment of social role or the mystical quest for the truth, and last but not least, she is disgusted by her fiancé's confused materialistic approach to poetry.

The narrative cutaway to the older generation and perhaps the role model for *Pari* and Dadashi is worth attention for a better understanding of the continuous ontological discussion of enactment versus the truth, which inherently exists throughout the film. The frequent reference to two authors, referred to as older twin brothers, Safa and Assad, who had an intellectual voyage that led one to a ceremonial suicide, and the other to self-accusatory isolation, is an implicit reflection on the theatricality of the society in which citizens need to make a decisive choice. The choice is between performing their role in a prescribed mise-en-scène or abandoning the stage altogether into, as wildly common in post-revolution history, isolation, immigration or apathetic passiveness. Dabashi adds:

The ultimate test of this film is whether Dadashi's turn from mysticism to acting can match *Pari*'s reverse turn from acting to mysticism. One can read the penultimate sequence as a reconciliation of the two, but there still remain many problematic areas.⁶²

Mehjui's effort to ask what the possibilities of cinematic representation in an impossible context of Iranian cinema are, can be considered as one of the important moves in pushing the boundaries of creativity beyond the game of censorship and opening the new era of representation in Iranian cinema.

Pari ends with a 'film set' scene where Dadashi performs a wounded soldier lying at the bottom of a hill and he recites a quote from Safa one of the older brothers:

Dadashi: Safa once told me something, he said if one is fallen on a hill with a wounded throat, slowly bleeding to death, and a group of peasant women walks up the hill carrying jugs of water over their head, the wounded person must be able to sit up and turn his head to see how the women safely bear the jugs to the tip of the hill.



Figure 7. Image taken from *Pari* Directed by Dariush Mehrjui⁶³

CHAPTER FOUR

My studio practice

One of the objectives that was firmly set in my mind as I began this research is to stimulate rethinking of the process by which the New Wave Iranian Cinema has formed its unique visual flair. Given that It is important to note the degree of complexities involved in creating such narrative that over years has reached an established level of maturity in utilizing an allegorical and non-confrontational but subversive visual language. While, I have investigated some of those complexities in this paper, it is also my intention to further explore the specific elements of this Visual language in a form of an artwork to be accompanied with the written component of my research.



Figure 8. Image taken from *Letters of Memory* directed by Masoud Sheikhi

The concept of my Studio project was initially taking forms as a fiction film centred on an Iranian female protagonist in diaspora. The concept was engendered from my interest in exploring the transitional process of migration parallel to the larger

transitional process that I believe is currently occurring in the Iranian society per se. As I highlighted early in the paper by drawing on the historical analysis of Iranian post revolutionary cinema, this transitional process in parts is influenced by migration of artists and intellectuals in different phases of Iranian contemporary history. Although, It is evident that these migrations have a significant impact on Iran's arts inside and outside of the country, my focus is to explore the similar elements of the transitional process of migration with that of changing Iranian society. This task partly encompasses reflexive approach in relation to my personal experience as an Iranian artist in diaspora.

However, the fictional construction of the project gradually transformed into a documentary narrative, owing to a number of factors. The transformation most importantly was caused by the way in which, my character-driven script had progressed as an observational narrative in the absent of a conventional plot. This observational structure indicates the link between my work and the Iranian New Wave filmic practice. To contextualise this link, it is helpful to mention Laura Mulvey's discussion about the construction of viewing in relation to Iranian cinema. She argues that one of the remarkable aspects of Iranian New Wave cinema is the way in which it negotiates the ontological framework of cinema itself, and that is "cinema is 'about' seeing and the construction of the visible by filmic convention."⁶⁴ This observational feature inherent in visual language of Iranian New Wave has subconsciously emerged during my filming process that was intended to capture the everyday life of the characters. The example of this can be seen in the opening scene that illustrates a morning setting where one of the characters prepares breakfast and dress herself to work. How to film this scene was of particular importance when is put in the context of representation of Iranian women in post revolutionary era, which is discussed on subsequence scenes in the documentary. For instance, the scene where the character put on her make up in the bathroom was design to depict a normalized image of Iranian women, of course, in the context of western society that means showing uncovered Muslim women in a type of setting that is restricted in the Iranian media by codes of practice and unavailable in the mainstream western media by market-oriented representational policies.

The other factor that contributed to the transformation of fiction to documentary

in this project was perhaps my auditioning process. As my search for an actress or rather a character to take the leading role progressed, I came across a number of inspiring individuals whom I found more intriguing than the existing character in my script. Thus, the idea of a documentary begun to form with the preliminary interviews, which were also conducted as an investigative device to conceptualise the character in the plotless script. I discovered many compelling stories within the interviews, and as the consequence of these discoveries, it became evident to me that, with their agreement, I will be able to take the documentary path. The project aimed at illustrating parts from their life that reveal a correlation between their past life in Iran and their encounter with the transitional process I discussed earlier.

One of the fundamental aspects that distinguishes Iranian New Wave cinema and perhaps a number of other national cinemas such as Italian neorealism and French New Waveⁱⁱ from Hollywood and the mainstream Cinema is the poetic quality inherent in the imagery and the visual coding of their narrative, as opposed to prose narrative of image sign⁶⁵ ⁱⁱⁱ. Closely related to Pasolini's theory of free indirect subjectivity and the poetic realism⁶⁶, Iranian New Wave filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami, Forugh Farrokhzad and Bahram Beyzai have developed a narrative that provide limitless possibilities for the emergence of multiple perspectives. There are a number of identifiable technical characteristics associated with these somewhat ambiguous multilayered images. Chaudhuri and Finn⁶⁷ in their paper have chosen to call it 'Open Image'.

The concept of the open image in the context of Iranian Cinema encompasses several key characteristics comparable to those of Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave. Chaudhuri and Finn identify those characteristics by making reference to ideas from Pasolini's theory of poetic realism, Paul Schrader's transcendental cinematic style and Gilles Deleuze's theory of time image. Amongst these theoretical concepts, there are key characteristics identifiable across a large number of Iranian New Waves films. The illustration of everyday life by utilising

ⁱⁱ It is important to note that the Influence of Italian neorealism and French New Wave on Iranian Cinema is commonly asserted amongst film scholars; however, for some it has remained a question.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pasolini in his articulation of the 'cinema of poetry' distinguishes the Hollywood mode of image sign structure as 'cinema of prose'.

long static shot as an aesthetic form that according to Schrader transcend the everyday life. Also, the de-dramatization of open image creates a particular optical/aural experience in which its analysis can be drawn on Deleuze's notion of time image and the way he describes this type of process as "the open-ended politicisation of the image."⁶⁸



Figure 9. Image taken from *Letters of Memory* directed by Masoud Sheikhi

In my documentary project, I attempted to incorporate the concept of open image and the poetic approach by utilising visual codes that associate with the women representation in Iran and the west. Although, the utilisation of visual codes and somewhat semiotic indications has been implemented throughout the work, I will elaborate exclusively on one of the scenes in the documentary. In the course of an interview with one of the leading characters in the film, the discussion took a direction towards the subject of modesty codes and Hijab in the Iranian society and its implications on the representation of women in Iranian media and the west. As I discussed earlier in the paper, particularly in chapter three, the veiling mechanism in the Iranian society has a profound impact on the visual coding in relation to sexuality and female appearance on the screen.

Undoubtedly this impact would pervade my work for two particular reasons. Firstly, the project was centred on Iranian women and was produced outside the

context of Iranian media frameworks and the code of modesty. Also, on the personal level, the project is my first time casting Iranian females outside of Iran. Despite, the lengthy process of building trust with the female participant to appear in 'the documentary' about segments of their personal life, the challenge was to best use this freedom without generating unnecessary controversies or misrepresentations. With reference to the non-confronting but subversive characteristic of Iranian New wave cinema discussed earlier, I aimed to employ a poetic visual language as the underpinning structure of the narrative.

The scene where the character puts on and takes off various headscarfs in front of a large mirror was designed to explore the correlation between hijab, appearance, representation and the choices.



Figure 10. Image taken from *Letters of Memory* directed by Masoud Sheikhi

In the post revolution Iran, the practice of Islamic modesty must be applied to all modes of social interaction including dress, voice and gaze, and it intensifies the effect of every minimal gesture, glance or silence and gives a new extension to the means of communication between sexes. The way in which, the veil is worn and strategically covers or uncovers the face and the body during the social interaction,

the choice of silent response and a momentary look, have all developed localised meanings and hermeneutics within Iranian society.

In my documentary, the woman wears several scarfs that each, for a spectator who is familiar with Iran's cultural diversities, indicates a geographic part or an ethnicity within Iran. Their pattern, colours, design and wearing style that she demonstrates in a series of static long shot, all metaphorically indicate the degree and variation to which hijab is practiced. In addition to the optical aspect of the scene, her voice over tells the story of her first encountering experience of gender segregation in Iran during her adolescence. The deliberate coexistence of these multiple elements, audio and visual codes from a single angle create a polyphonic view that enables the spectator to explore the complex and somewhat paradoxical nature of modesty codes, as well as filmic representation. The view creates an optical and aural experience that in the Deleuz word it processes a politically open-ended image.⁶⁹

The act of viewing

For the purpose of elucidating the link between my documentary film, or broadly my film practice, and the visual language of Iranian new wave filmmakers, it is helpful to redraw attention to one of the prominent filmmakers of contemporary Iranian cinema. In *Through the olive trees* (1994) Abbas Kiarostami opens the film with an introductory comment made directly to the spectators by the renowned Iranian actor Mohammad Ali Keshavarz. He introduces himself and his role as the director in the film that we are going to watch. While, he speaks facing the camera, in the background a large group of young female students is waiting for auditioning for his film's female protagonist. The next scene is a series of panning and close-ups on the girl's faces as the director ask their names and contact details. *Through the olives tree* is the third part of Kiarostami's *Koker* trilogy based thematically on the 1991 devastating earthquake in a northern city of Roudbar in Iran. The plot revolves around the production of the second episode, "*Life, and Nothing More...*", which itself was a revisiting of the first film, "*Where Is the Friend's House?*".

Through the olive trees similar to most other Kiarostami's films is presenting, in a filmic terminology, 'multiple focal points' that is a plurality of perspectives in the narrative structure. This quality is clearly evident in the way he treats fictional components of his film in relation to that of documentary and his constant effort to establish a connection between shot and 'view'. Moors elaborates:

A blurring of the line between fictional events and characters and those "drawn from life," and the reflexive framing of films within films, all in order to sustain a resistant perspective on the process of filmmaking.⁷⁰



Figure 11. Image taken from *Through the olives trees* directed by Abbas Kiarostami⁷¹

Although, the Kiarostami's film falls into the category of fiction film narrative contrasting the core structure of my studio work as an observational documentary, the plurality of perspectives was predominantly sought in the process of production and post-production comparable to the Kiarostami's filmic methodology.

Similar to many New wave filmmakers, my documentary tend to explore its subject matter, in this case Iranian women's life in the diaspora, from differing point of views. This plurality of views is primarily appeared in the disparity between the two characters regarding their personalities, careers, social stances and even ethnicities. These differences are placed side by side as a narrative strategy to allow the emergence of multiple perspectives, which can also have a subversive

function by abstracting the mainstream, often unidimensional representation of Iranian women.

The new wave filmmakers demonstrate a high degree of sensitivity regarding gendered codes and calls for reassessing the strategies drawn from the implications of the act of viewing. This reassessment of strategies appears in works of several filmmakers such as Jafar Panahi's *Circle* and Rakhshan Bani-Etemad *The May Lady* which reinforced this aesthetic renegotiation. The aesthetic not only seeks for an alternative in the problematised relationship between political repression and artistic creativity; it also challenges the spectators' relationship with the act of viewing.

As I mentioned earlier, the project in parts has impulsively involved the filmmaker's personal presence, mainly because of experience and circumstances that are shared between the filmmaker and the characters being filmed. Of those similarities, perhaps being censored and oppressed as an artist and the experience of migration are the significant ones. My self presence in the film was initially included as a physical appearance along with a number of pieces to camera, however, with consultation of my supervisor those scenes were removed to only leave a subtle presence. The self-appearance of filmmaker in this film is mainly existed to remind the spectator that they are watching a 'representation' of Iranian women that is open to interpretations.



Figure 12. Image taken from *Letters of Memory* directed by Masoud Sheikhi

Above all, in my documentary film project, I examine some of the key issues in relation to the representation of gender in contemporary Iranian visual culture aided by explorations of personal experiences of two women in Iran and the exile. Utilising the medium of film itself to investigate filmic aesthetics of gender and sexuality representation within a specific culture enables an in-depth examination of the complexity of cinematic narrative.

The documentary film illustrates parts of two Iranian women's life in diaspora whose careers are closely associated with the cultural, social and political environment in which they have lived most of their life and in which they have pursued their careers. This documentary film project also focuses on identifying allegorical use of gendered tropes through an investigation of visual codes in relation to social and representational life of Iranian women.

CONCLUSION

The historical analysis of the evolution of Iranian New Wave aesthetic suggests the degree of significance of women's representation in the formation of its visual narrative. Cinema, as a measure of cultural, social and political context, has established a close relationship with the process in which the Iranian population encounters modernity. As discussed in this paper, post revolutionary Iranian New Wave cinema has developed a non-confrontational but subversive visual narrative that reflects this encounter in the context of the demanding Iranian cultural, social and political settings.

For artists, film practitioners or other creative illusionists who conduct their practice in a stifling atmosphere under the control of a totalitarian regime that makes every effort to intrude into public and private life of its citizens. The challenge is not to identify who and what is the adversary but to discover a language that cannot be easily abolished. This search is often a subtle and gradual practice that changes modes of reflecting the complications of the socio-political preoccupation at any specific historical point. To respond to this challenge, an artist develops an often striking internal complexity that is externalized onto the aesthetics of great simplicity that paradoxically not only reaches its affirmative audience, also the recognised adversary.

In the different phases of the contemporary history of Iran, the issue of gender and its representation has played a significant role in the development of the unique visual narrative of Iranian New Wave cinema. In the early stages, the way in which the public responded to the representation of women by *Lor Girl* in the infancy of the modernisation process, signalled the interrelation between socio-political forces, cultural sensitivities, the influence of the clergy and gender representation in the Iranian public sphere. The historical survey of the early image of women on screen in Iranian classic cinema enabled an investigation into the diverse and multiple social structure of Iran in relation to gender issues.

It is self-evident that analysis of historical landmarks and elements, which have shaped the gender specific aesthetics in various art forms, has long operated as a

significant first step for those seeking a deeper understanding of ways in which gender may influence the creation of artists and their art. The investigation into the artistic growth of Forugh Farrokhzad revealed the impalpable but inherent quality of Iranian poetic literature in the formation of New Wave visual narrative. The poetic visualisation of Farrokhzad's *The House is Black* can be considered as a turning point in the development of New Wave cinema. Arguably this led to allegorical approaches to gender representation in the post revolutionary films of prominent film makers such as Beyzai, Kiarostami and Mehrjui whose works have been discussed in this paper. Beyzai's mythological approach to the visual narrative and the image of women, Mehrjui's development of new visual forms that characterised the aesthetic of censorship, and the high sensitivity of Kiarostami's skilful treatment of the act of viewing, are examples of the poetic approach constituted of a complex internal structure, yet represented through an external simplicity.

In addition, the question of how the representation of women has influenced the formation of New Wave Iranian cinema can be further explored in the context of cross-cultural viewing of Iranian cinema. Considering the current representations in the media, it is worthwhile investigating whether and to what degree Iranian cinema has contributed to the stereotyping of the Middle East specifically in relation to gender issues and how this has challenged the concept of Orientalism and the preconceptions of Iranian culture and society. Perhaps too, it is worth asking how the dialogue begun with the representation of women in Iranian New Wave cinema can continue to develop to reveal the rich complexity of Iranian visual culture and paradoxical gender representation.

End

Bibliography

- Abbasi, Mohammad Jalal, Amir Mehryar, Gavin Jones, and Peter McDonald. "Revolution, war and modernization: Population policy and fertility change in Iran." *Journal of Population Research* 19, no. 1 (2002): 25-46.
- Afkhami, Gholam R. *The life and times of the shah*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009.
- Amin, Camron Michael. "Propaganda and remembrance: Gender, education, and "the women's awakening" of 1936." *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999): 351-86.
- Ardalan, Davar. *My name is Iran: A memoir*. 1st ed. New York: H. Holt, 2007.
- Bainbridge, Caroline. *A feminine cinematics, luce irigaray, women and film*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
doi:10.1057/9780230583689.
- Beyzai, Bahram. "Ballad of tara." 110 minutes 1979.
- . "Bashu, the little stranger ", 120 minutes. Tehran, 1989.
- Byman, Daniel L. 'The rise of low-tech terrorism.' *Research Articles*. [Newspaper article from the Washington Post on 6 May 2007]. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, (2012) Retrieved: 1 October 2012, from:
<http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2007/05/06terrorism-byman>.
- Chaudhuri, Shohini, and Howard Finn. "The open image: Poetic realism and the new iranian cinema." *Screen* 44, no. 1 (March 20, 2003 2003): 38-57.
- Dabashi, Hamid. "Body-less faces: Mutilating modernity and abstracting women in an "islamic cinema"." *Visual Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (01/01 1998): 361-80.
- Dehkhoda, Ali akbar. *Dehkhoda dictionary*. Tehran: Moasseseye Loghat Name, 1955.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2 : The time image*. London: Continuum, 2005.

- Devereaux, Mary. "Feminist aesthetics." In *The oxford handbook of aesthetics*, edited by Jerrold Levinson. 647-66. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Farrokhzad, Forugh. "The house is black." 22 minutes, 1962.
- Felski, Rita. *Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist literature and social change*. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989.
- Friedman, Marilyn *The cambridge companion to feminism in philosophy*. Cambridge companions to philosophy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Ghasemi, Shapour. 'Pahlavi dynasty.' *History of Iran*. Edited by Mike Denino. Iran Chamber Society, (2010) Retrieved: 1 October 2011, from: <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/pahlavi/pahlavi.php>.
- Girgis, Monique. 'Women in pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran.' *History of Iran*. Edited by Mike Denino. Iran Chamber Society, (2010) Retrieved: 1 October 2011, from: http://www.iranchamber.com/society/articles/women_prepost_revolutionary_iran1.php.
- Hillmann, Michael Craig, and Furåugh Farrukhzåad. *A lonely woman: Forugh farrokhzad and her poetry*. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1987.
- Hiro, Dilip. *Iran under the ayatollahs*. San Jose, CA: ToExcel, 2000.
- Holledge, Julie, and Joanne Tompkins. *Women's intercultural performance*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Irani, Ardeshir. Sepenta, Abdolhossein. "Lor girl." 1933.
- IranKnowledge. "Ayatollah khomeini speech at beheshte zahra." YouTube, 2009.
- Kiarostami, Abbas. "Through the olives trees." 103 minutes. Tehran, 1995.
- Kiarostami, Abbas, and Lila Azam Zanganeh. "A conversation with abbas kiarostami." In *My sister, guard your veil; my brother, guard your eyes: Uncensored iranian voices*, edited by Lila Azam Zanganeh. 81-95. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.
- Kitch, Sally. *The specter of sex: Gendered foundations of racial formation in the united states*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.

- Korsmeyer, Carolyn. 'Feminist aesthetics.' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, (2004) Retrieved: 27 April 2011, from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/>.
- Lahiji, S. "Chaste dolls and unchaste dolls: Women in iranian cinema since 1979." In *The new iranian cinema: Politics, representation and identity*, edited by Richard Tapper. 215-26. London: I.B.Tauris, 2002.
- Mehrjui, Dariush. "Pari." 115 minutes. Tehran, 1995.
- Metz, Christian. *Psychoanalysis and cinema: The imaginary signifier*. Language, discourse, society. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Milani, Farzaneh. "Love and sexuality in the poetry of forugh farrokhzad: A reconsideration." *Iranian Studies* 15, no. 1/4: Literature and Society in Iran (1982): 117-28.
- Moore, Lindsey. "Women in a widening frame: (cross-)cultural projection, spectatorship, and iranian cinema." *Camera Obscura* 20, no. 2 (2005): 1-33.
- Mottahedeh, Negar. *Displaced allegories: Post-revolutionary iranian cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Mulvey, Laura "Afterword." In *The new iranian cinema: Politics, representation and identity*, edited by Richard Tapper. xv, 282 p. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.
- Nichols, Bill. *Movies and methods : An anthology*. 2 vols Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Nyrop, Richard F., and Harvey Henry Smith, eds. *Iran: A country study*. 3rd ed, Area handbook series, vol. 550-68. Washington, DC: The American University, Foreign Area Studies, 1978.
- Pak-Shiraz, Nacim. "Filmic discourses on the role of clergy in Iran." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): 331-49.
- Poudeh, Reza J., and Reza M. Shirvani. "Issues and paradoxes in the development of iranian national cinema: An overview." *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): 323-41.
- Rezai-Rashti, Goli M. "Transcending the limitations: Women and the post-revolutionary iranian cinema." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 191-206.

Sadr, Hamid Riza. *Iranian cinema: A political history*. International library of iranian studies. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

Saffarian, Naser. 'Summit of the wave (موج اوج)'. Translated by Masoud Sheikhi, (2004) Retrieved: 22 June 2012, from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx65Mn-lgdY&feature=relmfu>.

Sobhe, Khosrow. "Education in revolution: Is Iran duplicating the chinese cultural revolution?". *Comparative Education* 18, no. 3 (1982): 271-80.

Tapper, Richard. *The new iranian cinema: Politics, representation and identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

Umapathy, S. K. "Iranian children and young adults: Intellectual development furthered by libraries." *UNESCO Journal of Information Science, Librarianship and Archives Administration* 1, no. 1 (1979): 51-55.

Endnotes

¹ Bahram Beyzai, "Bashu, the little stranger " (Tehran1989).

² Ardeshir. Sepenta Irani, Abdolhossein, "Lor Girl," (1933).

³ S. Lahiji, "Chaste Dolls and Unchaste Dolls: Women in Iranian Cinema since 1979," in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002), p. 217.

⁴ Davar Ardalan, *My name is Iran: A memoir*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 2007).

⁵ Monique Girgis, "Women in pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran," Iran Chamber Society,

http://www.iranchamber.com/society/articles/women_prepost_revolutionary_iran1.php.

⁶ Camron Michael Amin, "Propaganda and Remembrance: Gender, Education, and "The Women's Awakening" of 1936," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999): 351.

⁷ Lahiji, "Chaste Dolls and Unchaste Dolls: Women in Iranian Cinema since 1979," p. 218.

⁸ Ibid., p. 219.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Abbas Kiarostami and Lila Azam Zanganeh, "A Conversation with Abbas Kiarostami," in *My sister, guard your veil; my brother, guard your eyes: Uncensored Iranian voices*, ed. Lila Azam Zanganeh (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 86.

¹¹ Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics," Stanford University, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/>.

¹² Sally Kitch, *The specter of sex: gendered foundations of racial formation in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009). pp24-25.

¹³ Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics" p. 6.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Rita Felski, *Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist literature and social change* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989). pp. 151-71.

¹⁷ Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics".

¹⁸ Mary Devereaux, "Feminist Aesthetics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 653-58.

¹⁹ Shapour Ghasemi, "Pahlavi Dynasty," Iran Chamber Society, <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/pahlavi/pahlavi.php>.

- ²⁰ Farzaneh Milani, "Love and Sexuality in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad: A Reconsideration," *Iranian Studies* 15, no. 1/4: Literature and Society in Iran (1982).
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ²² Korsmeyer, "Feminist Aesthetics".
- ²³ Marilyn Friedman, *The Cambridge companion to feminism in philosophy*, Cambridge companions to philosophy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). pp. 205-20.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Milani, "Love and Sexuality in the Poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad: A Reconsideration," p. 123.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- ²⁸ Caroline Bainbridge, *A feminine cinematics*, Luce Irigaray, *Women and Film* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). pp. 32-33; Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and cinema: The imaginary signifier*, Language, discourse, society (London: Macmillan, 1982).
- ²⁹ Michael Craig Hillmann and Furūgh Farrukhẓāād, *A lonely woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and her poetry* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1987). p. 44.
- ³⁰ Forugh Farrokhzad, "The house is Black," (1962).
- ³¹ Naser Saffarian, "Summit of the Wave (موج اجاج)," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx65Mn-lgDY&feature=relmfu>. My own translation.
- ³² Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the ayatollahs* (San Jose, CA: ToExcel, 2000).
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Hamid Riza Sadr, *Iranian cinema: A political history*, International Library of Iranian studies (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). p. 142.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Daniel L. Byman, "The Rise of Low-Tech Terrorism," The Brookings Institution, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2007/05/06terrorism-byman>.
- ³⁷ Goli M Rezai-Rashti, "Transcending the Limitations: Women and the Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): p. 197.
- ³⁸ Hiro, *Iran under the ayatollahs*: p. 148.
- ³⁹ Gholam R. Afkhami, *The life and times of the Shah* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Richard F. Nyrop and Harvey Henry Smith, eds., *Iran: A country study*, 3rd ed., Area handbook series (Washington, DC: The American University, Foreign Area Studies, 1978).
- ⁴⁰ IranKnowledge, "Ayatollah Khomeini Speech at Beheshte Zahra," (YouTube, 2009).
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² Nacim Pak-Shiraz, "Filmic discourses on the role of clergy in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2007): p. 334.
- ⁴³ Sadr, *Iranian cinema: A political history*: p. 169.
- ⁴⁴ Mohsen Makhmalbaf March 1981 from Ettela'at Haftegi as cited in *ibid.*, p. 170.
- ⁴⁵ Khosrow Sobhe, "Education in Revolution: Is Iran duplicating the Chinese cultural revolution?," *Comparative Education* 18, no. 3 (1982): p. 271.
- ⁴⁶ Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced allegories: Post-revolutionary Iranian cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). p. 18.
- ⁴⁷ Bahram Beyzai, "Ballad of Tara," (1979).
- ⁴⁸ Ali akbar Dehkhoda, *Dehkhoda Dictionary* (Tehran: Moasseseye Loghat Name, 1955).
- ⁴⁹ Hamid Dabashi, "Body-less faces: Mutilating modernity and abstracting women in an "Islamic cinema"," *Visual Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (1998): pp.361-80.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Beyzai, "Ballad of Tara."
- ⁵² Reza J. Poudeh and Reza M. Shirvani, "Issues and Paradoxes in the Development of Iranian National Cinema: An Overview," *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): pp. 323-41; S. K. Umapathy, "Iranian Children and Young Adults: Intellectual Development Furthered by Libraries," *UNESCO Journal of Information Science, Librarianship and Archives Administration* 1, no. 1 (1979): pp. 51-55.
- ⁵³ Richard Tapper, *The new Iranian cinema: Politics, representation and identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002). pp. 215- 26.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- ⁵⁷ Mohammad Jalal Abbasi et al., "Revolution, War and Modernization: Population Policy and Fertility Change in Iran," *Journal of Population Research* 19, no. 1 (2002).

-
- ⁵⁸ Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins, *Women's intercultural performance* (London: Routledge, 2000). p. 40.
- ⁵⁹ Dabashi, "Body-less faces: Mutilating modernity and abstracting women in an "Islamic cinema"," pp. 361-80.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 366.
- ⁶¹ Dariush Mehrjui, "Pari," (Tehran1995).
- ⁶² Dabashi, "Body-less faces: Mutilating modernity and abstracting women in an "Islamic cinema"," p. 366.
- ⁶³ Mehrjui, "Pari."
- ⁶⁴ Laura Mulvey, "Afterword," in *The new Iranian cinema: Politics, representation and identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p257.
- ⁶⁵ Bill Nichols, *Movies and methods : an anthology*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn, "The open image: poetic realism and the New Iranian Cinema," *Screen* 44, no. 1 (2003).
- ⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 : the time image* (London: Continuum, 2005). p19.
- ⁶⁹
- ⁷⁰ Lindsey Moore, "Women in a widening frame: (Cross-)cultural projection, spectatorship, and Iranian cinema," *Camera Obscura* 20, no. 2 (2005): p. 3.
- ⁷¹ Abbas Kiarostami, "Through the olives trees," (Tehran1995).