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Marriage in Iranian Cinema

A Metaphorical Platform for the Discussion of Women's Rights in Post-Revolutionary Iran

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by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated first to my parents who have always encouraged and inspired me to aim high and to never give up through their words of encouragement, but most importantly, through their actions.

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Abstract

Marriage in Iranian Cinema

A Metaphorical Platform for the Discussion of Women's Rights in Post-Revolutionary Iran

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This thesis exams the use of marriage as a metaphorical platform in Iranian cinema for the discussion women's rights issues outside of films classified as *fīlmhā-ye zanān* ('women's films). Drawing on theoretical frameworks of 'consciousness raising' and 'cofabulation,' analysis of these films focuses on the relationship between society and law as it is represented through marriage in film. Through a combination of content and contextual analysis, this thesis discusses the political, social and religious changes that took place in Iran between the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1941) and the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) in order to establish the situation of women during these periods and women's organization movements. In doing so, we can see that the discussion of women's rights issues in Iran, although subdued in society, was able to emerge in film and break away from the generic boundaries of *fīlmhā-ye zanān* (women's films) via the metaphorical platform of marriage into other film genres. By using

marriage as the site for discussion in film, representations of women's rights in these films raised the consciousness of Iranian society and brought more open discussion of these issues to the public sphere.

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Introduction

The current Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs in Iran, Mahmoud Golzari, has claimed that 40,000 divorces occur every year, [1] adding to the already overwhelming number of singles in Iranian society. In the last seven years, the number of divorces occurring annually has increased by 1.1%, while the number of marriages occurring annually has decreased by 50%.[2] These changing trends in divorce and marriage over recent years have exposed that Iranians may prioritize other affairs – continued education, for example – over marriage. Without these marriages, the ideal of the nuclear family risks degradation, according to Iranian officials.[3] Similar to other countries whose governments implement changes in the marriage system due to social problems, the Iranian government sees divorce as a crisis in Iranian society and actively

[1] "40,000 Divorcees Added to Iranian Society Every Year," *The Iran Project,* accessed November 8, 2016, http://theiranproject.com/blog/2015/01/05/40000-divorcees-added-to-iranian-society-every-year/.
[2] *"Bohrān* talāq dar Iran/Voqu' 17 talāq dar har sā'at [The Divorce Crisis in Iran/17 Occurrences of Divorce Every Hour]*" PersianPersia.com,* Accessed March 17, 2016. http://www.persianpersia.com/social/sdetails.php?articleid=25673&parentid=132&catid=143.
[3] "Ayatollah Khamenei Promulgates Irans 'Family' Policies," official website for the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; data collected by the Social Affairs office of the Interior Ministry and the Center of Women's Participation in "Why Divorce? Let us Reform Ourselves," in *Mehr News;* a statement from the former chair of Parliament, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel in " Haddad-Adel: Cultural Issues Will Be My Second Priority," in *Mehr News;* a statement from the Organization for Civil Registration, "Rate of Population Decrease in Iran is Faster than Other Countries," and "Iran Experience Population Decline, Growing Old," in *Mehr News;* "Iran May Establish Marriage and Divorce Ministry," in *Trend News Agency;* "Proposed 'Ministry of Marriage and Divorce' Sparks Controversy," in *Almonitor: The Pulse of the Middle East.*

works to create solutions for what the Islamic Republic of Iran deems as a social ill.[4] Promoting marriage, specifically proper Islamic marriage, is key to solving this crisis. Not only has Iran participated in government supported mass marriage ceremonies,[5] it has even launched a state-sponsored dating website in 2015, *Find your Equal*, to help connect single men and women in order to facilitate these marriages and avert this "family crisis."[6]

The importance of marriage in Iran has been highlighted in history through *Qur'anic* verses, *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, and Islamic clergy; through women's organizations fighting for women's equal rights in society who found shelter and solidarity in the High Council of Women (est. 1953) headed by Ashraf Pahlavi, twin sister to Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran; and through pronouncements by religious leaders like Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Cinema also has played a role in marital discourse as a popular tool of state propaganda used by the Pahlavi Dynasty and Islamic Revolutionaries alike.[7] But when you take away the state-sponsored ideology of marriage propaganda in film, what remains? Authors, such as Nasrin Rahimieh who has critically analyzed Iranian films that deal with the subjects of marriage and divorce, have argued that cultural representations,

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[4] "Ayatollah Khamenei Promulgates Irans 'Family' Policies," official website for the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; "Haddad-Adel: Cultural Issues Will Be My Second Priority," in *Mehr News*.

[5] "Iranian Regime Promotes Mass Marriage," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting,* Accessed November 8, 2016, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/iranian-regime-promotes-mass-marriage.

[6] "Iran Launches State-Sponsored Dating Site to Help its 11 Million Singletons get Married and Solve Country's 'Family Crisis,'" *How Africa: The Rise of Africa*, accessed November 8, 2016, http://howafrica.com/iran-launches-state-sponsored-dating-site-to-help-its-11million-singletons-get-married-and-solve-countrys-family-crisis/.

[7] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Volumes 1-4, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

particularly cinematic representations, have created spaces for self-expression and resistance.[8] Many authors have also suggested that the reformist policies of former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (1997– 2005) – especially with relation to his involvement in cinema reform even before his presidency – have been critical in allowing for more open discussion and critique of Iranian society.[9]

However, analyses such as these have relied heavily on content analysis to support their arguments and have excluded the context within in which these films have been created. This paper aims to fill this gap by placing Iranian films that explore matrimonial issues in the context of the current societal discourse in Iran around marriage in order to argue three things. First, while the reformist policies of Khatami have allowed more freedom in the overt discussion of marital issues in film, Iranian filmmakers have a long tradition of placing marriage and marital issues at the centers of their films, albeit more subtly in some instances. Second, the representation of marriage and divorce issues in Post-Revolutionary Iranian film represents continued conversation of marital issues amongst Islamic clergy, the Iranian government, and the citizens of Iran that can be traced to women's movements that began in the Pahlavi Era. And third, marriage and

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[8] Nasrin Rahimieh, "Divorce Seen Through Women's Cinematic Lens," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 42.1 (2009): 97–112; Iclal Cetin, "Middle Eastern Women Filmmakers of This Century," *Review of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 44.1 (2010): 54–59; Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006); Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane, "Media and the Social Construct of Reality: Toward an Integration of Theory and Research," *Communication Research,* Vol. 11.3 (1984): 323–340;

[9] Minoo Derayeh, "Depiction of Women in Iranian Cinema, 1970s to Present," *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 33 (2010): 151–158; Sayeed Zedabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*; Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*; Shahab Esfandiary, *Iranian Cinema & Globalization*.

divorce manifest in Iranian cinema due in combination to their deeply embedded roots in Iranian society and the often political nature of Iranian cinema.

Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, marriage has been a central concern for those who practice the Islamic faith. According to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, there are few things more important for Muslims than marriage – for all single men and women, including those who have been divorced. The benefits of marriage are twofold: marriage not only comprises part of a Muslims religious duty, it also serves to remove temptation in the form of illicit sexual relationships that may occur in the absence of a permanent spouse.

For Muslims, marriage is governed by religious precepts set down by the Prophet that have been absorbed into the modern practice of Islamic law which has two components: the sacred and the temporal. Islamic law is sacred in the sense that it is divinely inspired and thus absolute and unchallengeable. Yet in the approximately 1,400 years since the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the laws governing marriage have gained a distinct temporal aspect in that they are now a product of centuries of Islamic jurisprudential interpretations which have led to a wide and well-developed body of legal theory. In practice:

> Each disputed case is [. . .] a microcosm of forces that shape the reality of Muslim life: the force of the sacred element in law; the modern legal system that embodies and enforces it; and the way that individuals, be they judges or litigants, perceive and relate to both.[10]

[10] Ziba Mir-Hossieni, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family law, Iran and Morocco Compared*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 1993), 1-2.

In other words, progression of society will necessarily elicit unprecedented cases that require a re-interpretation of Islamic law (temporal) in order to follow the ideal of Islamic law (sacred) through a process of individual reasoning in accordance with Islam, called *itjihad*.[11]

Afsaneh Najmabadi, for example, shows how the discourse around distinguishing between "the (acceptable)trans and the (deviant)homosexual"[12] that emerged in Iran between the 1940s and 1970s enabled the government to define marriage as heteronormative by sanctioning gender reassignment surgeries for those we were deemed truly transsexual individuals.[13] In this instance, sex reassignment surgery was seen a legal solution to keep marriages and relationships between a man and a woman, as the *Qur'an* defines it. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also sanctioned sex reassignment surgery in 1964 as permissible in Islam. According to many scholars, this same process of *itjihad* is most widespread in family law where the prevalence of divine revelations has blurred the lines between the sacred and temporal.[14] Scholars such as Ziba Mir-Hosseni, Azar Tabari, Nahid Yeganeh, Fatima Mernissi, and Janet Afary, among others, have looked particularly at the how situation of women has been impacted through the evolution of these family laws, specifically with

[11] *Itjihad* is an Islamic legal term that refers to a jurist's use of reasoning in finding a religious solution to a legal problem, and is only used when Qur'anic verses and *Sunnah* are ambiguous on the issue.
[12] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran,*(London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.
[13] More information about the process of determining "true" transsexuality can be found in Afsaneh Najmabadi's book, *Professing Selves.*
[14] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial.*

regards to marriage, divorce and child custody laws.[15] Like a mirror, cinema has often reflected cultural and social issues such as these. In Iran, cinema is particularly helpful in showing societal attitudes towards marriage and divorce, a theme that can be seen in many Iranian films. The award-winning film *Jodāi-ye Nāder az Sīmīn / A Separation* powerfully brought the centrality of marriage and divorce in Iranian cinema to international attention in 2011.

Directed by Asghar Farhadi and starring Leila Hatami (Sīmīn) and Peyman Maadi (Nāder), *A Separation* follows a brief time in the lives of a married Iranian couple that struggles through the conflicts of familial responsibilities, love and sacrifice. Sīmīn wishes to leave Iran and live abroad in order to create a better life for their young daughter; however, Nāder refuses to leave because of his ailing father, for whom he cares. Despite the responsibility Nāder feels towards his father who suffers from Alzheimer's, Sīmīn believes that he is prioritizing his responsibility as a son over his responsibility as a husband and a father and sues for a divorce, in part to be able to leave Iran. Several events occur that further challenge the strength of this family and they ultimately separate leaving some room for audience imagination in the final scene.

International reception of this film was overwhelming. *A Separation* became the first Iranian film to receive an Academy Award for best foreign film in 2012, as well as winning the award for Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globe Awards. In 2011, it received a Golden Bear for Best Film at the 61st Berlin International Film

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[15] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage On Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law, Iran and Morocco Compared*; Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran*; Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*: Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*

Festival, where Leila Hatami and Peyman Maadi also won Silver Bears for Best Actress and Best Actor, respectively.[16] At the Fajr International Film Festival in 2011, *A Separation* won six Crystal Simorghs, including Best Director, Best Cinematography and Best Screenplay, in addition to the Audience Award for Best Film. *A Separation* was also nominated for an Academy Award for the Best Original Screenplay, the first foreign language film to be nominated for this award in five years. By 2012, *A Separation* had grossed over 12 million dollars internationally, domestic ticket sales in Iran accounting for over half of that total, at seven million.[17]

National and international critics alike hailed *A Separation* as a "gripping moral and social drama,"[18] "tense and narratively complex, formally dense and morally challenging,"[19] and praised it for its actors who had an "unusual depth of characterization."[20] Lee Marshal of *Screen Daily* wrote that "Farhadi has hit upon a story that is not only about men and women, children and parents, justice and religion in today's Iran, but that raises complex and globally relevant questions of responsibility."[21] In Iran, the journal *Fīlm* has published over 19 articles and dossiers about *A Separation* in just less than two years. Film publications continue to praise A *Separation* continues as

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[16] Silver Bears for Best Actress and Actor were also given to several of the other male and female actors: Sareh Bayat, Sarina Farhadi and Kimia Hosseini (Best Actress); Shahab Hosseini, Ali-Asghar Shahbazi and Babak Karimi (Best Actor).
[17] "A Separation (2011)," *Box Office Mojo.* http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=aseperation.htm, accessed February 24, 2016.
[18] "Nadar and Simin – A Separation," *Screen Daily*, accessed November 15, 2016, http://www.screendaily.com/reviews/latest-reviews/nader-and-simin-a-separation/5023837.article.
[19] "Review: 'Nader and Simin, A Separation,'" *Variety*, accessed November 15, 2016, http://variety.com/2011/film/markets-festivals/nader-and-simin-a-separation-1117944617/.
[20] "A Separation: Film Review," *The Hollywood Reporter,* accessed November 15, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/a-separation-film-review-99930.
[21] Lee Marshall, "Nadar and Simin – A Separation," *Screen Daily*, accessed November 15, 2016, http://www.screendaily.com/reviews/latest-reviews/nader-and-simin-a-separation/5023837.article.

one of the most far-reaching and impactful films in the history of Iranian film due in part to its international reception.

Out of so many Iranian films to be shown internationally over the last several decades, why was this particular film so successful? Was it the dissolution of marriage that was so relatable across cultures? The moral questions raised that challenged audiences for an answer? Or was it the idea of a movie like this, one that raises moral issues whose solutions are not necessary Islamic and whose message is not inherently political, coming out of Iran – a country widely perceived as enforcing strict censorship regulations on film – that made it so successful?

Some scholars have speculated that the changing politics surrounding film censorship during the Presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) paved the way for issues such as these to be brought to light for the first time since the relative creative freedom during the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925– 1978).[22] While it is true that Khatami's reforms to the Iranian film industry did lessen some restrictions on acceptable content allowing for more overt critique of Iranian society, looking at the history of Iranian cinema, one can see that the preoccupation with marriage in Iranian film is not a new phenomenon. Although issues change along with politics, economics and society, directors have often firmly planted marriage and divorce at the center of many Iranian films.

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[22] Minoo Derayeh, "Depiction of Women in Iranian Cinema, 1970s to Present," *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 33 (2010): 151–158; Sayeed Zedabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*; Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic*; Shahab Esfandiary, *Iranian Cinema & Globalization*.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In contrast to the idea that cinema production operates as a top-bottom system,[23] Iranian cinema can be characterized by audience participation in the creation of film content due in part to Iranian literary traditions as well as the evolution of the film industry in Iran. Hamid Naficy, author of a four-volume book series titled *A Social History of Iranian Cinema,* states that like literature, cinema has a long tradition in Iranian history yet it errs more on the political side rather than philosophical, as it has long been used as a medium to convey modernity, both metaphorically and in actuality.[24] He attributes this emergence of modernity largely to two formations, the "Iranian state" and the "Hollywood cinema machine,"[25] which tended to act hegemonically, together setting the terms of the struggle to convey this modernity. These two formations were not the only factors in this discursive project, but were joined by Iranian society through active consumption of these 'hegemonic' messages conveyed through film.

Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad uses the term "cofabulation" to describe the role of the audience in making meanings of narrative.[26] Rather than passively receiving a narrative, cofabulation is the process by which the narrative invokes active audience participation in

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[23] Douglas Gomery, "Hollywood as Industry," in *Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 19–28; Thoedor Adorno and Max Horkeimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Media and Culture Studies*, Eds. Meenaskshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2001), 94–136.

[24] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1: The Artisanal Era, 1897–1941* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

[25] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 1, 2.

[26] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, "Introduction" in *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic* (NewYork: Routledge, 2010), 11.

negotiating meaning and invites them to agree, disagree or change any of the parts presented. Zeydabadi-Nejad discusses how Iranian audiences are particularly active in this cofabulation process when it comes to political messages in social films.[27] Aware of the censorship guidelines that pertain to cinema, Iranians are extra-vigilant when viewing social films and are predisposed to consider them as political, thus leading them to attempt to ascertain which aspects of the film may have been censored.[28] In doing so, Iranian audiences also 'edit' these films for themselves, rejecting some parts and reinterpreting others. In addition to audience participation, Naficy also uses the stew-pot, tough-guy and war film genres in Iranian cinema to show that individual filmmakers and the film industry have been able to create moments of partial hegemony above and beyond these two formations. In these ways, "Iranians resisted, rejected, accommodated, and selectively adapted and celebrated modernity and its features" actively rather than projects imposing it on them from the outside[29] and examining audience participation in meaning making can be key to understanding how modern cultures are formed.

Mark Duez, in his article "Media Industries," argues that "contemporary citizen-consumers [. . .] demand the right to participate – to be an part of the production, circulation, and interpretation of their culture and to exert a shaping role over the content of the popular culture"[30] that is part of their lives. In addition to this desire of citizen-consumers to participate in content production, audience plays a more important role in

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[27] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of* Iranian *Cinema*, 1–29.
[28] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of* Iranian *Cinema*, 1–29.
[29] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 1, 2.
[30] Mark Duez, *Media* Industries, 150.

shaping content – contrary to what many producers wish to believe. In the case of Iranian cinema, the commercial film industry thrived despite harsh criticism by film critics who claimed that social films – especially *filmfarsi* movies – were technically inferior to films from other world cinemas, among other reasons. Yet despite this, these movies thrived in Iranian society due to their popularity in a predominantly middle class, male audience.[31] Many film producers often used an "imagined audience" in creating television shows and films in order to justify, and indeed predict the success of, proposed films.[32] In order to analyze these "imagined audiences" and to fully understand the ways in which audiences interpret film, it is critical to understand their political context. The impact of liminality in Iran due to social change has had great impact on the cofabulation process of Iranian audiences.

Zeydabadi-Nejad borrows the term "liminality" from Victor Turner's *Liminality and the Performance of Genre* and applies it to the Iranian context to describe the times of destabilization that occur from rapid social change, such as the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Such moments cause Iranians to find themselves between what is and what will be.[33] In these phases, opportunities arise to step back and reflect on everyday routines from a detached position with these reflections often taking shape in cultural performances, such as film. These films then, according to Zeydabadi-Nejad act as

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[31] Hamid Naficy, "Commercial Cinema's Evolution: From Artisinal Mode to Hybrid Production," 147–196.
[32] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television (*Duke: Duke University Press, 2009), 223.
[33] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of* Iranian *Cinema*, 1–29.

"metacommentary"[34] of social contexts – such as wars, revolutions, institutional changes – and that this metacommentary can be "implicit or explicit, witting or unwitting."[35] In combination with cofabulation, Iranian cinema presents a symbiotic relationship between viewer and producer that is much like a game of hide and seek, with viewers trying to find where the government has influenced aspects if representation and content. With these frameworks in mind, we can begin to analyze the role that marriage has played in the discussion of women's rights in Post-Revolutionary Iran through its presentation in film.

In order discuss the function that marriage plays in Iranian cinema, I will use the first chapter to discuss cinema in Iran during the Qajar and Pahlavi Dynasties in order to show its continued political nature pre- and post-Revolution. Next, I will discuss the political and economic situation of Iran leading up to the Revolution paying special attention to the status of women's rights and the advancements of these rights by women's movements that found traction in the political landscape of the Pahlavi Dynasty. Discussion of these movements in necessary in order to show how these issues transgressed from social activity to discussion in film. Important to this analysis embedded nature of marriage in Iranian society due to its role in Islam and how marriage is used to socially construct many aspects of society through its inclusion in films during the reign of the Pahlavis.

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[34] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of* Iranian *Cinema*, 12.
[35] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of* Iranian *Cinema*, 12.

Chapter two will then draw upon two films, *Hāmoun* (Dariush Mehrju'i, 1990) and *Āsheghāneh/Romantic*, (Dir. Ali-Reza Davoudnejad, 1995), that exemplify several of the current issues in Iranian society, namely divorce and social status. In order to connect these films to women's issues, this chapter will include the Iranian periodical *Fīlm* that will show how these films were discussed by film critics and society in a publication that is not inherently political like other periodicals in Iran such as *Zanān* that have a distinctly feminist tone. In addition, the production context surrounding these films, such as censorship laws, will be a critical part of this chapter, as it will show why marriage was able to facilitate the discussion of women's issues after women's movements halted after the Revolution.

Finally, chapter three will look at a new political context after the Revolution when Mohammad Khatami was president of Iran from 1997 to 2005 and will discuss the cinematic and political reforms that took place under his leadership. Two films from this period, *Leilā* (Dir. Dariush Mehrju'i, 1997) and *Ātash bas/Ceasefire* (Dir. Tahmineh Milani, 2006), will show how discussion of societal issues in film are more overt due in part to the reforms that Khatami implemented. This will be particularly apparently in the analysis between *Leilā* and *Hāmoun,* as Dariush Mehrju'i directs them both. This chapter will also include information from *Fīlm* in order to connect these films to discussions in society.

The films selected for this thesis act as evidence of how women's issues break generic conventions and can be found in many Iranian films not included in the genre *fīlmhā-ye zanān.* Discussion of the plots of these films will serve to show how frequently Iranian law with regards to marriage is used to not only discuss the legalistic side of women's issues, but also the emotional and social impacts as well. In transforming for entertainment to consciousness-raising, articles from *Fīlm,* a non-political Iranian Journal, will highlight the political nature that many articles took when discussing aspects of these films showing that women's issues in this film are recognizable and resonate with Iranian society. In doing so, these films constitute a sort of subconscious activist films that highlight the inequality women face in Iranian society.

Chapter 1: Cinema, Marriage and Women's Rights 1900–1978

While *Jodāi-ye Nāder az Sīmīn/A Separation* may have brought international attention to the subjects of divorce and marriage in Iran, it is by no means the only Iranian film that deals with this subject and Iran is not the only country to use these themes in film. So why is the use of marriage and divorce as theme in Iranian films worth study? Why do Iranian films often center on marriage and divorce, and how do they use these themes to discuss social issues? How do these films bring awareness of these issues to the public? Why do they perpetuate women's rights discourse in Iran? Iranian cinema remains intertwined with politics since its first use in Iran until the present day as different political regimes have used cinema to promote new ways of thinking about nationality and national values, and film producers have often used film to push back on these ideals and critique Iranian society. Because of this, Iranian cinema acts as an important window into different political and cultural contexts throughout Iranian history.

Scholars such as Amy Motlagh have analyzed the role that marriage has played in shaping modernity in Iran. In *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, and Reform in Modern Iran,* she argues that marriage is not only a metaphor for social and legal reforms, but the actual site in which these reforms take shape. Motlagh's analysis focus on Iranian literature and discusses how the Pahlavi's modernization dismembered the idea of ambiguous love seen in classical poetry in order to fit into "a vision of heterosexual love and heterosocial public sphere."[36] Dismemberment of ambiguous love

[36] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism, and Reform in Modern Iran,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 3.

and the metaphor of marriage were oppositional and yet complimentary key structuring features through which the Pahlavi's legal and political instruments, primarily the Iranian Civil Code (ICC), allowed modernity to transcend the past.[37] Motlagh writes:

> The celebration of marriage and the ideal of the companionate wife in legal discourse and in fiction depend on the burial of this ambiguity in and of the past. In order to become consonant with modernity, the beloved of classical poetry would have to be translated into the wide of modern fiction realism.[38]

Thus, marriage became a platform for discussing reform and a site through which the state could exert its influence.

Film has often used feminized spaces to promote political ideologies, most predominantly using women who "as a group are particularly vulnerable to [. . .] ideological packaging, [where they are] constructed as visual imagery" meant to represent their culture "rather than [to be] sources of information" themselves.[39] As a gendered space, marriage appears similarly in film and has two predominant functions, as Motlagh argues: marriage first acts as a site to discuss and promote political ideologies and second, as a physical site through which these ideologies can be put into practice.

Motlagh writes that historians have largely focused on the role that marriage has played in modernizing Iran through cultural documents but have left out much of Iranian literature,[40] a gap that she fills by examining several pieces of literary texts. Motlagh's analysis of literary texts calls on scholars to do similar work in analyzing the role that

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[37] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved*, 4.
[38] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the* Beloved, 3.
[39] Karin Gwinn Wilkins, "Middle Eastern Women in Western Eyes: A Study of U.S. Press Photographs of Middle Eastern Women," in *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*. Ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Greenwood Press, 1995), 50.
[40] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the* Beloved, 5.

marriage plays in cinema, which serves as a different form of literary text. This chapter aims to add to this body of research by setting the social and political history of cinema in and women's movements in Iran necessary to ground analysis of how marriage in post-Revolutionary cinema acts as a metaphorical platform that continued pre-Revolutionary feminist discourse and raised consciousness about women's rights issues when physical movements were regulated after the Islamic Revolution. In continuing these discussions on film, marriage enables women's issues to cross generic boundaries in film allowing for the discourse to continue outside of the genre *fīlmhā-ye zanān.*

CINEMA AND IRANIAN POLITICS

Since the time that cinema first entered Iran during the Qajar Dynasty (1785–1925) in the early 19th century, it has often taken on a political nature that highlighted aspects of Iranian society such as class differences as well as societal factions. On a trip to Europe in 1900, Mozaffar al-Din Shah (1853–1906) experienced cinema for the first time along with his court photographer, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkas Bashi, at the Exposition in France.[41] In his diary Mozaffar al-Din Shah wrote that at "[. . .] 9:00 P.M. we went to the Exposition and the Festival Hall where they were showing cinematographe, which consists of still and motion pictures. [. . .] We Instructed Akkas Bashi to purchase all kinds of [cinematographic equipment] and bring to Tehran so God willing he can make some there and show them to our servants."[42] In saying this,

[41] In 1900 Paris, France, hosted the world's fair *Exposition Universelle* that commemorated acheivments of the past century as well as looked forward to advancements and developments expected in the future.
[42] Translations from Mozaffar al-Din Shah's travelogue quoted in, Mohammad Ali Issari, *Cinema in Iran, 1900–1979* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 58–59.

Mozaffar al-Din Shah designated cinema as a royal, or at least upper class activity. Arguably the first Iranian footage was of Mozaffar al-Din Shah's trip to Belgium where he attended the Festival of Flowers, and this was shown in his court upon his return.[43] Cinema after that circulated amongst the royal family and nobility until the first public screening four years later.

In 1904, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Sahaf Bashi arranged the first public screening in the back of an antique shop. The emergence of a public cinema in Iran in revealed deeper political tensions around cinema, as religious conservatives denounced it while secular modernists – including Mozaffar al-Din Shah – supported it.[44] One year later in 1905 Sahaf Bashi opened the first Iranian cinema on Cheragh-Gaz Avenue in Tehran but it shut down operations just one month after opening in the face of fierce religious opposition[45] as well as Sahaf Bashi's involvement in political activities as a nationalist who lobbied for a constitutional monarchy.[46] Naficy writes that artisanal cinema – prominent during the Qajar Dynasty and through the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–1941) – depended on many factors including political agency, and that the exhibitor's preference in showing certain films over others often reflected their factional social

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[43] Shahin Parhami, "Iranian Cinema: Before the Revolution," (1999), *Iran Chamber Society*. http://www.iranchamber.com/cinema/articles/iranian_cinema_before_revolution1.php. Accessed January 27, 2017.
[44] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 38.
[45] Nacim Pak-Shiraz, "Contemporary Iranian Discourse on Religion and Spirituality in Cinema," in *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema: Religion and Spirituality in Film* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2011), 35–66.
[46] Parhami, "Iranian Cinema: Before the Revolution," 1.

alliances.[47] Despite its contentions start, cinema gained traction in Iran as a form of popular entertainment although heated debates continued to follow its development.

The death of Mozaffar al-Din Shah in 1907 gave rise to the public and commercial cinema houses, likely due to the loss of court sponsorship, and became immersed in sociopolitical debates over its value in Iranian society. Other cinema houses rose and fell in the next several years, partially due to their political connections. Russi Khan was one of the most successful figures among them because of his connections to the Royal court but his cinema house was closed in 1909 with the success of the constitutionalists and fall of Mohammad Ali Shah (1907–1909). Religion also had a stake in the debate over cinema's value in society. While religious traditionalists opposed it as a corrupting influence on religious tradition because it went against Islamic doctrines that objected to visual representation,[48] secular modernists viewed it as a tool of education and modernity. This binary debate of cinema as a tool of corruption or education would haunt Iranian cinema throughout its existence, especially re-emerging after the Islamic Revolution[49] due to the Pahlavi's use of cinema during their reign as a tool of modernization and the Ayatollah's use of cinema for educational purposes.

The fall of the Qajar Dynasty began in 1909 with the beginnings of the Constitutional Revolution and continued through a period of destabilization in Iran during World War I (1914–1918) with the occupation of Russian, British and U.S. The Constitutional Revolution in Iran (1905–1911) emphasized the desire of Iranians for

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[47] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 37–38.
[48] Nacim Pak-Shiraz *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema, 41.*
[49] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 51.

freedom and nationhood. Revolutionaries demanded the creation of a Parliament on order to remove some control from the Royal family and place it into the hands of the public. Although a constitution forming a parliament (*majles*) was signed in 1906 by Mozaffar al-Din Shah, he died only a few days later and his son Mohammad Ali Shah – only 11 years old at the time – faced many challenges maintaining the new parliament in the face of the oncoming World War. Although the Constitutional Revolution did not fully realize the ideals of the revolutionaries, it paved the way for Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–1941) to create a nationalist state in the wake of the dissolution of the Qajar Dynasty, which was seen as week and susceptible to western manipulation.[50] Taking advantage of the weakened state of the Qajar Dynasty after the end of World War I, Reza Khan instituted a coup d'état in 1923 deposing Ahmad Shah Qajar and becoming the effective ruler, a decision that was not solidified until 1925.

In 1927, two years after he came to power, Reza Shah Pahlavi aimed to create a modern Iran, particularly wishing to emulate the nationalist projects of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey (1923–1938).[51] The Shah's modernization project formed its basis on a particular interpretation of modernity that included certain aspects of Western societies predominantly, and in its realization called for a redefinition of the role of the state within Iranian society – a new definition that placed the state as the central focus. During his modernization projects, Reza Shah Pahlavi established the use of one language and religion, secularized society and national sovereignty, and improved economic

[50] Parvin Paidar, "Women in the Era of Nation Building," in *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78–117.
[51] Sima Bahar, "A Historical Background to the Women's Movement in Iran," *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam* ed. Farah Azari (London: Ithica Press, 1983), 170-189.

participation and emancipation of women.[52] The formation of a national army cemented the central authority of the state, and it soon became the most powerful authority and institution in Iran.[53] Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign between 1925 and 1941 was characterized by modernization projects, and cinema during this time manifested that ideological project in two different ways. First, movies acted as agents of modernity not only for the scenes of modern life that they showed, but also for the specific way that they showed them. And second, the production of the films themselves embodied modernization though their production, distribution, exhibition and consumption practices made possible by industrialization, individualism, and consumerism.[54]

Already part of the neocolonial and capitalist Western economies,[55] it was important for the Shah to maintain and improve Iran's image as modern, and he used film to do that with its emphasis on visuality, constructing a particular vision of a modern Iran that would be visible to the rest of the Western world. As the Majlis passed legislation regulating culture, fashion, language, gender relation and mass media to fit into this modern image of Iran, Iranian society found some favorable while rejecting others, creating a hybridized culture both in society and in cinema.[56] In this, cinema became a powerful medium of negations of change that were taking place in Iran, and in doing so, captured many of the 'in-between' stages of liminality, as Iranians found themselves caught between the 'what was' and 'what will be' of these projects.

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[52] Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 81-82.
[53] Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 81.
[54] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 71–72.
[55] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 28.
[56] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 142.

In 1933, Ovanes Ohanian directed the film *Hājī Aqā, Aktor-e Sīnemā/Mr. Haji, the Movie Actor,* which reflected the secularization of Iranian dress regulated by the Majlis. This regulation banned traditionally ethnic clothing and headgear in favor of Western fashions of trousers, coats and jackets.[57] In the film the protagonist, Mr. Haji, wears the prescribed Pahlavi dress in favor of traditional garb even though he is religious. Similarly, in keeping with the nationalization of Persian as the official language of Iran, the movie *Ferdowsī* (Dir. Abdolhossein Sepanta, 1934) celebrates the Iranian poet Abolqasem Ferdowsi creator of the Persian epic *Shāhnāmeh*. The *Shahnameh* is widely credited for maintaining Iranian national identity for its extensive use of the Persian language during a time of Muslim Arab conquest and language domination. Sepanta capitalized on the state's revival of Ferdowsi in making his film,[58] and in doing so, reinforced the Shah's nationalization of identity premised on one national language. Next, Reza Shah aimed to reform religious practices in Iran.

In 1932, Reza Shah banned performances of *tā'zīyeh*[59] as part of his modernization project causing the abandonment of major religious gatherings on the one hand, and on the other, encouraging engagement in secular activities for entertainment, such as cinema.[60] Reza Pahlavi's son, Mohammad Reza Shah, continued this project of modernization when he came into power in 1941. His reign represented a new dynamic era in Iran, as the highly centralized state was able to control society through extensive

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[57] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 145.
[58] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 146.
[59] *Ta'ziyeh* is the theatrical re-enactment of the battle of Karbala, and was widely practiced during the Qajar Dynasty.
[60] Nacim Pak-Shiraz *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema, 41*.

instruments[61] through which he aimed to continue his father's work and construct one coherent national identity including on religion, one culture and one political power. Not least of these instruments is cinema, which he used to craft and present a certain national image both within Iran to reinforce state power and ideology and outside of Iran to promote a particular modern nationalistic image.[62] The Shah used films to promote many of his modernistic goals by way of censorship, and marriage became a particularly malleable tool both within and outside of cinema to regulate these changes and enforce conformity. In order to promote a more modern Iran, the Shah first changed the institution of marriage dramatically.

MARRIAGE: CHANGING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN IRANIAN SOCIETY

In redefining the role of the state, Reza Pahlavi Shah modified the legal system by implementing a secular judicial system – one that deviated from the complete control that had previously resided within the Islamic clergy. Heavily influenced by European systems, family law – including marriage law – was codified as part of the Iranian Civil Code (est. 1928–1935). Although the Civil Code was essentially a simplified continuation of the traditional Ithna 'Ashari law practiced by Shi'a Muslims for decades before,[63] during this codification and up until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, several laws and reforms were put into effect that impacted the rights of women, particularly

[61] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 141.
[62] Babak Rahimi, "Censorship and the Islamic Republic: Two Modes of Regulatory Measure for Media in Iran," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 69.3 (2015): 362.
[63] Ziba Mir-Hossieni, *Marriage on Trial*, 23-52.

with regards to marriage. Many of these legal revisions occurred alongside growing activism from women's rights groups that aided in supporting these changes.

The state-sponsored "women's awakening"[64] movements began in 1926 when Reza Shah banned the veiling of women as part of his modernization and secularization projects. According to Prime Minister Mahmud Jam, "An ignorant woman who lives under the hijab is incapable of preserving her own prestige and honor and is always subject to men. [. . .] If women are educated and enter society they can better manage their family affairs and their own affairs, as well as provide real support for their men."[65] In an address given to the students at the first women's college, the Shah himself said that "[t]he women of this country, because of their being aloof from society, could not show their abilities and personal qualities. They could not play their role in the building of their beloved country and as a result they could not perform their duties towards their country."[66] This ban on the veil not only changed women's visual presentation in society; it changed the physical spaces that they could occupy. Previously segregated cinema houses, for example, now created a space for same-sex entertainment as well as socially coercing adherence to this ban by preventing veiled women from entering.[67]

These women's movements, however, were still heavily reliant on men and the state for their progression, and their inclusion into society was linked to their idealized

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[64] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 147.
[65] Iranian Prime Minister Mahmud Jam, quoted in Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 147.
[66] K. Jayavardhane, "Women Participation in Political Struggles," in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement (Middle-East Asia), Volume 1: Iran,* eds. Abida Samiuddin and R. Khanam (Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2002), 193.
[67] Nacim Pak-Shiraz *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema, 41*.

roles as mothers of the nation. While the state promoted women's entry into the society and education, they were only encouraged to do so when it did not affect their primary responsibilities of maintaining a home, rearing their children and taking care of their husbands.[68] In the face of this inequality, many women's organizations found firm ground for the advancement of women's rights through absorption into the Shah's modernistic agenda with which they could identify on many levels. The modernization agenda of the Pahlavi's also helped women's organizations as it aimed to strictly control religious institutions, thus aligning the state on the side of these organizations. While in the previous period women had to fight Parliament and government, they were now ideologically on the same side.[69] The most dramatic legal reforms that changed how women were able to participate in society came via changes to marriage laws.

First, reforms to the legal age of marriage in 1928 prohibited females under the age of 13 from marrying and required permission for females under the age of 15. The 1931 Marriage Law (*qānun-i izdivāj)* required registration of all marriages and divorces and in doing so, gave women legal standing to file for divorce provided the reason was justifiable. These laws were precursors for articles in the Family Protection Law (*qānun-i himayat-i khānivada)* (est. 1967) that limited the husband's rights to divorce by requiring all proceedings to be carried out in civil courts rather than extrajudicially.[70] In addition, the Family Protection Law rose the marriage age of females to 15, as well as restricted

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[68] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 149.
[69] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, "Women's Struggles in the Islamic Republic," in *In the Shadow of Islam*, 26–74.
[70] The civil courts established during this time to handle family law carried a similar name to the law that they were intended to uphold: Family Protection Courts.

polygamy and gave women more rights to divorce.[71] Revisions to this law in 1975 rose the marriage age of females to 18, modified laws regarding child custody and financial compensation for divorced wives.[72] During the time of these initial revisions to the marriage laws, Reza Shah also promoted women's social clubs.

In 1935 an initiative of Reza Shah formed the "ladies center" as a way to encourage women's participation in society. This center organized lectures, sports clubs, adult classes and exhibitions specifically for women. In 1958, various women's organizations grouped together to form the *High Council of Women* that was headed by the Shah's twin sister, Ashraf Pahlavi. *High Council of Women* changed its name to the *Women's Organization of Iran* in 1966. The 'White Revolution' (1963) gave women the right to vote and incorporated them into several national corps in charge of health and literacy. Although the gender policies at that time may not have penetrated Iranian society deeply enough, the state of Iran created legal and social positions for women that challenged patriarchal and religious authority over women. Changes in the economy, especially under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941– 1978), further challenged patriarchy by reimagining the binary of men and women's roles in the family.

In the 1960s, land reform decreased the amount of acreage held by landlords and in turn decreased the size of "peasant family plots"[73] further emphasized the growing divide of gendered roles. This impacted peasant families negatively in many ways, as the heads of households often left for the city, seeking compensation in the form of industrial

[71] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 32.
[72] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on* Trial, 23-52.
[73] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran* (London: Zed Press, 1982), 7.

jobs in place of income lost when their plot sizes decreased. As the men left for the cities, their wives were left to tend the remaining land along with their children. This need for extra labor in the absence of the men increased the exploitation of women and child labor, as well as solidifying women's positions as 'producers' of that labor. This had a twofold effect on the situation of rural women in Iran. First, it increased the rates of early marriage dramatically. According to official figures in 1976, 38% of Iranian women between the ages of 15 – the earliest marital age that the Family Protection Law would allow at the time – and 19 were married.[74] Secondly, these early marriages contributed to the already high rates of illiteracy in women, which was reported as 83% in the same year, according to the general census.[75]

Yet, however bleak the situation for rural women seemed at this time, women in urban centers were able to capitalize on the Shah's industrialization agenda and were able to seek employment, often for the first time. The rate of economically active women increased by 53% between 1966–1977, with a 314% increase in social service jobs and a 1.4% increase in industrial jobs held by women between the same years.[76] Literacy rates increased as well, jumping from 30% in 1966 to 65% in 1977[77] as part of the Shah's national project, which included women's education. The increase of women's education and employment opportunities, in conjunction with the raised legal age of marriage, delayed the time of marrying for women, as many preferred to wait to marry until they

[74] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 7.
[75] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 7.
[76] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of* Islam, 8.
[77] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegneneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 8.

were older.[78] While reforms to the institution of marriage changed women's participation in society including increasing women's presence in the workplace and educational institutions, marriage in cinema played a very different role, encompassing all of society into its reformative nature.

MARRIAGE AS CINEMATIC TOOL OF REFORM

Because the nature of the Pahlavi regime allowed for easy and visible organization of women's rights movements and women's participation in Iran, films during this time that overtly portray women's issues are sparse. We can, however, see that marriage still lends itself as a platform for discussion social issues and to promote social reform in society. Interestingly enough, the cinematic reforms usually focus on men, which could indicate the patriarchal nature of Iranian law and that more nuanced methods were needed to control men.

The popular movie genre "Dandies" is a product of dandyism in Iran – a formation of liminal subjects from the middle class, who did not hold positions of power and were not necessarily intellectual, but who occupied the in-between spaces of Iranian satiety at enough distance to critique Iranian values and norms.[79] Despite their criticism of society, they aspired for upward social mobility instilled in them through Western education and exposure to Europe, as well as the disruptive social changes due to the

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[78] Soraya Tremayne, "Modernity and Early Marriage in Iran: A View from Within," in *The Journal of Middle East Women's Studies,* Vol. 2:1 (2006): 65–94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326888. Accessed October 22, 2016.
[79] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 291.

Shah's modernistic agenda. Going to the cinema was seen as a leisure activity, and as such, drew many of the aspiring dandies.

In nature, dandies were mainly "conformist rebels" [80] who followed the Shah's reforms while at the same time questioning the top-down authoritarian Westernization. While dandies imitated Western styles of dress, many desired individuality. [81] Not only did they consume Western style, they mimicked its consumer lifestyle as well, and were scorned "for debasing the authenticity of native Iranian traditions and for copying unwanted Western fashions."[82] On the one hand, dandies embodied the modernization goals of the Shah by adopting many aspects of western dress and culture, and on the other, represented a falling away from traditional Iranian society. "Dandie" films showcased the social liminality of Iranians in negotiating a new Iranian identity while caught between the pull of tradition and modernity.

This genre creates room for the conflict and struggle for authenticity, in that it guides viewers to reject one sense of Iranian-ness for another. In these films, dandies were set up as directly opposing *lutis* who represented true Iranian identity and nativism, and who usually emerged victorious in these films.[83] That the *lutis* ultimately win shows the possible societal pushback to the Shah's modernization of Iran as being predominately Western while rejecting tradition Iranian values and cultural practices. In order to characterize the 'outsider-ness' of dandies and the need for their reform, dandies

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[80] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 293.
[81] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 293.
[82] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 296.
[83] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 297.

often faced many social problems getting a suitable wife. In this way, proper love and marriage was one way that the dandies were turned into appropriate citizen in these films, but this process is not always cut and dry. The reforming aspect of marriage in preferring Iranian-ness over western-ness is possibly most predominant in the film *Mamel-e Emrikai/The American Mamal* (Dir. Shapur Qarib, 1974).

Staring Googoosh and Behrouz Vossoughi, *Mamel-e Emrikai/The American Mamal* embodies the struggle of what constitutes true happiness, social status and wealth or happiness in marriage, and whether either comes from Iranian culture, western culture or a combination of both. Mamel (Vossoughi) plays a dandy who fixates on the United States, embodying its style of dress and speech and always pretending to have just returned from or to be going there. When Mamel meets and falls in love with Nasrin (Googooh) – who also lives her life pretending to be from a different social class – and marriage is proposed, they are forced to confront their imagined identities and decide what will make them truly happy. According to Naficy, both Mamel and Nasrin think that this impersonation will elevate their social status but in reality only creates a false sense of happiness. It is only when they admit to each other that they have been pretending, revealing their true identities to each other, and that they do not wish to go to the United States anymore, do they genuinely fall in love and prove their Iranian authenticity.[84] Marriage in this film acts as the metaphorical site where this conversation of authenticity begins to take place, and ultimately reforms these characters into citizens of Iran who realize that their happiness lies in their decision to reject western culture as superior.

[84] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 299.

Marriage acts in a similarly in *Jahelha va Zhigoloha/Tough Guys and Gigolos* (Dir. Hosain Madani, 1965), but rather than the clash between western and Iranian identity, this film uses marriage to enforce proper citizenship in Iran. In this film, a group of dandies are in constant conflict with a group of toughs (*lutis*), and this conflict creates room for the audience to decide how to challenge authority. While tough-guy characters often embodied chivalry, they also stood for vigilante justice that was premised on one's own sense of morality as it has been shaped by Iranian society. On the other hand, dandies challenged authority in a systematic way by recognizing that the authoritative nature of the legal system must be changed to incorporate the people. Because the conflict creates room for negotiation, so does the conclusion of the film. In the end, one of the toughs marries a dandy's sister and one of the dandies marries a sister of one of the toughs and in doing so, the dandies are transformed into moral characters. The moralistic transformation occurs in this film through marriage,[85] as it was only through love and marriage that dandies were made appropriate citizens of Iran.[86] While the emphasis is placed on the moralistic transformation of the dandies, the combination of these groups by both marriages implies that there is a way to take characteristics from each group and to transform them in to an acceptable form of citizenship. Unlike the more clear-cut ending in *Mamel-e Emrikai/The American Mamal, Jahelha va Zhigoloha/Tough Guys and Gigolos* allows more interpretation from the audience. While these two films more or

[85] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 300.
[86] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 1*, 301.

less focus on creating a certain image of Iranian identity, marriage in film also acted as a site to discuss class differences in Iranian society.

In many films, such as *Ganj-e Qarun/Qarun's Treasure* (Dir. Siamak Yasemi 1965), marriage acts as a space where moral virtues and class differences can be discussed. *Ganj-e Qarun/Qarun's Treasure* tells a tale of class differences, where the happiness and values of the lower-class are presented as better than that of the upper-class who has money, but lead empty and purposeless lives. Marriage is the driving force of the plot as these classes are brought together haphazardly when Shirin (Foruzan), an upper-class socialite, tries to escape an arranged marriage with a man who is only after her family's money. In doing so, she meets and falls in love with 'Care-free' Ali (Mohammad Ali Fardin) who, until a dramatic plot-twist at the conclusion of the film, appears to be from lower-class society. While this film is not focused on marriage per-se, it is the major driving plot force that allows for these discussions of class values to take place, a discussion that was important in the changing economic climate in Iran. At the conclusion of the film, when all is revealed, Shirin as well as Qarun (Arman) – the wealthy, but previously unknown, father of Ali – both voice they would choose to give up their possessions and adopt a lower-class, and presumably better, lifestyle to be with the ones they love. Whether the message is that life in the lower-class strata is *actually* better or whether this film was meant to be a control mechanism to quite the unrest of the lower-class is unclear.

In these three films, marriage acts as a tool of social reform either in cementing a true Iranian national identity, creating proper citizenship, or in creating contentment

amongst the lower-class in Iranian society. Marriage is either a metaphorical site, as in the case of *Mamel-e Emrikai/The American Mamal* and *Ganj-e Qarun/Qarun's Treasure* where the discourse of these films occurs around marriage, or a the physical site as in *Jahelha va Zhigoloha/Tough Guys and Gigolos* where marriage is the act that reforms society. In these films, men are often the focus of these reforms with the women following their lead or acting upon them to choose. Where marriage in these films can be seen as a form of self-reflexive as audiences still must interpret these films and make the choice for themselves, marriage in society legally enforced reform and women were often the recipients of these reforms, good or bad. In the beginning, these legal reforms greatly improved women's ability to participate in society, but in the later years of Mohammad Pahlavi Shah's reign, opposition to his regime began to arise in some of these women's organizations as reforms began to slowly stagnate.

Opposition to the Shah came in three ways: feminist critique, Marxism, and Islamic revivalism. In the first, organizations criticized the dominant practices of Iranian society. The *Organization of Iranian Women* published pamphlets entitled "Women's Image in Iranian T.V. Commercials' and "The Social Consequences of the Prejudice against Women" and investigated the extent to which the Shah was creating positions for women in line with the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (1949).[87] Although the Shah had created much room for women in society, they were still not seen as equal according to this declaration. Secondly, groups such as *Our Awakening* were so heavily immersed in Marxist ideology that they believed armed struggle was the only wait to fight against

[87] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 33.

the Shah's regime; and thirdly, Islamic revivalism saw a resurgence of religious gatherings and support for the re-veiling of women.[88] Divisions amongst women's organizations themselves in the form of secularist and religious splits paved the way for many of them to support Ayatollah Khomeini on his return to Iran in 1979 in the hopes of more equal participation in society, but as we will see, legal changes after the establishment of the Islamic Republic relegated women to more restricted participation in society.[89]

CONCLUSION

Many changes occurred during the reign of the Pahlavi regime (1925–1978) that greatly impacted the situation of women economically, politically and socially. First, the shared ideology between the Shah's modernization projects and women's rights for equality created a climate that allowed organizations to form and fight for these rights. During this time, women granted the right to vote, the right to education and the right to divorce, among other things. While many of the reforms on the surface had to do with women's political engagement, ability to work and right to education, the subtext of these reforms is closely linked to their prescribed Islamic roles as mothers and wives. Islamic fundamentalist argued that allowing women to leave the domestic sphere and enter into society as more active participants would cause the home and the nuclear family to deteriorate. Marriage – as a term that ideologically encompasses motherhood – then, has

[88] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 33.
[89] H. Afshar, " Feminism, State and Ideology," in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement (Middle-East Asia), Volume 1: Iran,* eds. Abida Samiuddin and R. Khanam (Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2002), 148.

been a significant site of legal reform and representation with regards to women's participation in society.

Women's organizations that took shape during this period were invaluable in progressing the rights of women along with the state, but this development of women's rights caused tensions to increase between modernist and religious fundamentalist parties. Cinema, as a medium, also furthered these tensions as modernists saw it as valuable tool for education and sign of modernity while religious fundamentalist only saw it as corrupting Iranian society. Cinema did, however, become an invaluable medium for portraying liminality and negations of these social changes (*Mr. Haji, Ferdowsi)*, as well as being a tool for social commentary *(The American Mamal, The Tough Guys and the Gigolos, Qarun's Treasure)*, particularly with its use of marriage as a rhetorical device.

These tensions between modernist and religious fundamentalist ultimately paved the way for the return of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The next chapter will discuss the deterioration of women's movements in the face of the Islamic Republic of Iran and how the discourse of women's rights has been picked up and represented in cinema via the platform of marriage when open organization was restricted. In demonstrating the political nature of films in the Pahlavi era, as well as the ways in which marriage has been used to re-structure society, we can begin to see how film and marriage are vehicles through which these women's issues are voiced after the Islamic Revolution.

Chapter 2: Women and Marital Rights in Post-Revolutionary Cinema

Iranian films that fall into the genre of *fīlmhā-ye zanān*[90] are Iranian 'social' films that deal with women's issues that stem from patriarchal domination in society. These films often portray issues of divorce, polygamy, co-wives, and child custody rights and are political in nature because they challenge patriarchal values and institutions in society.[91] Traditionally, women's films are defined as films that reflect women's experiences and are produced by female directors.[92] Originally coined by the Women's Liberation movement in the U.S., Feminist consciousness raising asks women to draw on their own life experiences in order to come to a collective definition of what constitutes injustice.[93] Kathie Sarachild, in 1978, said that consciousness raising was one of the most effective tools because it often involved women who were not politically minded to begin with.[94]

Consciousness raising is particularly relevant to the Iranian context as women's organizations that the government deemed as politically sensitive were hard to form, and that women, relatively new to participation in society had to be eased into political engagement.[95] Several of the women's organizations that can trace their roots to organization that supported Khomeini found it difficult to survive in post-Revolutionary Iran, and discontinued their activities by the early 1980's. As Amy Motlagh has argued, the metaphorical platform of marriage in literature allows for the discussion of current societal issues, and while marriage allows acts in a similar way in film by carrying social

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[90] Translated as 'women's films.'
[91] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema,* 104.
[92] Minoo Derayeh, "Depiction of Women in Iranian Cinema, 1970's to Present," *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 33 (2010), 155.
[93] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema,* 105.
[94] Kathie Sarachild, quoted in Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema,* 105.
[95] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema,* 105.

discourse in film, it also allows women's rights discourse to transgress the generic boundaries of *fīlmhā-ye zanān.* In doing so, women's rights issues appear in many films that are not classified as women's films breaking generic limitations and allowing them to raise social consciousness in a greater way.

This chapter, then, aims to explore how two Iranian films that are not formally defined as *fīlmhā-ye zanān – Hāmoun* (Dir. Dariush Mehrju'i, 1990) and *Āsheghāneh*/*Romantic* (Dir. Alireza Davoudnejad, 1995) – reflect the legal systems in place during this time with relations to women's rights in marriage and for obtaining divorce. While the stories are not solely focused on marriage or divorce per say, they rely heavily on the current legal system to advance their plots. Through this progression, we are better able to understand the nuances of this legal system, its implication on men and women, and some of the ways these laws are able to manifest in reality.[96] Through contextualization and analysis of these films, I argue that marriage in these films creates a platform for the continuation of the women's fight for equality in marriage and divorce that began in early 1900's but whose movements were brought to a halt after the Islamic Revolution. I also argue that these films still present conflicts that remain restricted by censorship laws and conform to the dominant Islamic narrative despite Khatami's reforms.

WOMEN AND THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

As discussed in the previous chapter, Reza Shah Pahlavi greatly improved women's ability to participate in society due to legal reforms of his own, as well as

[96] During the years directly following the Revolution Iran was engaged in an eight year-long war with Iraq (1980–1988) resulting in many films and documentaries that focused on stories that would inspire Iranians to join the war of Sacred Defense. Because of this focus on promoting participation in and support of the war in Iranian society, films dealing with marital issues are sparse. For this reason, although the Iran-Iraq war had a significant impact on Iran in terms of economy and society in part because of the significant number of causalities, I have chosen to discuss films made outside of this eight year time period.

continuing projects of his father, Mohammad Reza Shah. However, society still viewed women as inferior to men. One of the most notable differences between men and women's ability to participate equally in society, and ultimately what lead to a vast majority of support for Khomeini from women, came from participation in education.[97] As the women's education progressed, many young women became more politically and socially aware, as well as less satisfied in the repressive society and inequality of their citizenship under the Pahlavis. In order to gain support, however, Iranian women had to learn how to couch their demands in a way that appealed to the traditional sensibilities of Iranian society, support that was necessary to grow and maintain if women wished to face clerical opposition and solidify recognition as citizens in their own rights, not only as mothers to the Iranian nation.[98] In the almost 20 years preceding the Islamic Revolution (1979) women were able, through the provisions of the Family Protection Law, to

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[97] In the early 1900s and until Reza Shah came into power in 1925, women's education was seen as a social distraction, one that lead them away form their responsibilities of the home and into the public sphere – a situation that seemed treacherous, one that may lead to temptation and ruin their chastity However, women's roles as mothers and educators of the nation, although an already recognized position in society, became a site through which the government sought to promote their ideals. When Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power just one year later in 1925, women's education was taken on as a national project through which he sought to solidify Iranian nationalism and patriotism, a project that was continued by his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941– 978) during his tenure in power. The school of patriotic "housewifery" consisted of the science of housekeeping, defined as organizing the household, managing that household finances, preparation of good food, and all general activities that facilitated the prosperity of the family. A well-managed home was the perfect environment to teach children how to be good citizens, and thus the nuclear family became a symbol for the national family. Because of the state emphasis on women as the primary caretakers of the patriotic Iranian society, their participation in the public sphere also increased as necessary actors in national culture. The number of women entering into the University of Tehran increased and jobs in Civil service also opened to women, although not judicially. Yet despite the fact that the progress and welfare of Iran in terms of the "courage, patriotism and sacrifice" of it's citizens rested almost solely in the hands of mothers, women's presence in society was implicit but deliberately unacknowledged. For more, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 182.

[98] Mahnaz Afkhami, "Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran: A Feminist Perspective," in *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, eds. Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 10.

achieve the right to actively participate in political aspects of society,[99] and the continued to exercise this right throughout the Revolution.

During the Revolution, it was these politically engaged women who made up many of the women's organizations that supported the overthrow of the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.[100] Many of these women were instrumental in bringing attention to women's issues, such as child-care for working mothers and being allowed to have a 5-day workweek. Against these women, however, was a religious movement that encouraged Muslim women to seek "emancipation through Islam" rather than equality of rights, as Islam still presumed women inferior to men and thus undeserving of equal rights.[101]

Islam quickly became the "solution" that would rid Iran of Pahlavi rule and was supported by the Islamic clergy as Iran's salvation. Iran's integration into the world's capitalist system along with policies of the Pahlavi regime had seemed to create a dearth of social problems and an inefficient political system. Failures in the Iranian political system had left a trail of disenfranchisement and disillusion that spread far and wide in Iran. "The calamities of 'Communism' and the collapse of nationalism were skillfully used by Islamic ideologues as evidence of the inevitability of the rise of Islam."[102] The massive involvement of women in revolutionary movements against the Shah signaled a new shift in women's politics, and they believed that this involvement would be repaid

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[99] Mahnaz Afkhami, *In the Eye of the* Storm, 11.
[100] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 9.
[101] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 14.
[102] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 11.

with an expansion of women's rights.[103] However, women under the new Islamic Republic of Iran were forced back into traditional roles.

The establishment and reforms of the Family Protection Law were highly regarded as un-Islamic, as they removed power over family matters from the religious judges and placed them entirely in the realm of the civil courts. In the case of marriage especially, as a divine duty in Islam, this was unacceptable and one of the many driving forces behind the Islamic Revolution of 1979. During the Islamic Revolution, the Family Protection Law was attacked heavily and after seven months the Special Civil Court Act placed family law back in the sphere of Shi'a law under religious judges.[104] This short act containing only 19 articles erased much of the pre-revolutionary legal reforms, including some of the advancements achieved for women's rights during the reign of the Pahlavis. Women did not just participate in the Revolution as 'women,' but as member of Iranian society representing different political and social forces. "The massive participation of women in the Revolution and their active presence in post-Revolutionary society situated within such ideological conditions, then, gave rise to the 'question of women'."[105] When asked about the role of women in the new society of the Islamic Republic of Iran on January 23, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini replied that"[t]he Islamic government will decide on these issues. Now is not the time to give my views on this matter. Women, like men, will participate in building the future Islamic society."[106]

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[103] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 5.
[104] Ziba Mir-Hossieni, *Marriage on* Trial, 23-52.
[105] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 37.
[106] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 98.

In another speech given at the Feyzieh School of Theology in Qom on March 4, 1979, Khomeini again addressed the role and rights of women, giving special attention to their rights in marriage:

> God's blessings be upon you lion-hearted women whose great effort saved Islam from the captivity of foreigners. It was you dear and brave sisters who alongside men secured the victory of Islam.[. . .]The *Qur'an* is a human-maker and women too are human-makers. If nations are deprived of brave and human-making women they will be defeated and ruined. [. . .] Women must have a say in their fate. [. . .] Men and women must reconstruct this ruin together. The question we must consider is that when women want to marry they can ask for certain powers for themselves that will be neither against *Shar'ia* [religious law] nor against their own honours. For example, they can lay down a condition that if the husband is corrupt or ill-treats the woman she can be the proxy for divorce. Islam has recognized rights for women [. . .].[107]

This speech highlights three important elements of women's roles in Iranian society and the inequality of their citizenship in relation to men created by the Islamic Republic.[108] First, it shows that they are highly valued as the mothers of the nation, both in producing offspring but also in educating and bringing up proper citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[109] Secondly, it highlights the inequality of divorce rights between men and women. According to this speech, men posses the sole rights to divorce unless women make provisions prior to the marriage contract. This can also be seen in the actual Persian words used to talk about divorce. When talking about women, the word for divorce is *talāq gereftan* (get divorce) but one uses *talāq dādan* (give divorce) when

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[107] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of* Islam, 99.
[108] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved: Marriage, Realism and Reform in Modern Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 121.
[109] For more information on the roles of women as mothers, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet (1999 & 2011), and Ashgar Fathi (1985).

referring to men. Some scholars see the exclusivity of divorce rights for men as offsetting the rights to propose marriage, an offer traditionally carried out by women or their families.[110] Third, this speech also signified to the rest of the world that women's involvement in revolutionary movements did not go against their traditional Islamic roles as wives and mothers,[111] contrary to what many western feminists believed.

The backwards slide of the ability of women to participate in their own marriages and divorces after the Islamic Revolution is reflected not only in these speeches and revisions to the law, it can also bee seen in the decline of women's movements during this time.[112] Compared to the previous political era where women's organizations could embody many political stances, women's organizations from this moment had to be situated in 'total' ideology, meaning that they were either seen as completely for or against Islam. Even when women's movements changed their ideology to match that of Khomeini's, they still found it difficult to survive.

The *Democratic Association of Iranian Women* (*Tashkilat-e Democratic-e Zanān-e Iran*)[113] is a women's organization that was originally a part of the pro-Soviet Communist Tudeh Party that first appeared in Iran in 1941 and was active and popular

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[110] Arzoo Osanloo, "Courting Rights: Rights Talks in Islamico-Civil Family Court," in *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 108-137.
[111] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 14.
[112] Women's organizations to fall during the first years of the Islamic Republic included *Women's Solidarity Committee (Komiteh-e Hambastegi-e Zanān, Society for Militant Women (Jam'iat-e Zanān -e Mobārez), Revolutionary Union of Militant Women (Etehad-e Enghelābi-e Zanān -e Mobārez), Society of Militant Women of Saqqez (Jame'a-e Zanān -e Mobārez-e Saqqez), Women's Society of Islamic Revolution (Jame'a-e Zanān -e Enghelāb-e Elsāmi), Women Adherents of Freedom Movement of Iran (Zanān -e Tarafdār-e Nehzāt-e Azādi-e Iran), Women's Organization of National Front (Sāzemān-e Zanān -e Jebheh-e Melli),* as well as many others. For more information on these women's groups and their activities, see Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran* (London: Zed Press, 1982).
[113] Previously known as *Our Awakening* before the Shah banned this group in 1953.

until it was banned by Mohammad Reza Shah in 1953,[114] re-emerging as Pro-Khomeini years later. This group called for the quality of women in all areas of life, not only in the home. They demanded to be included in elections, unions and parliament; they called for free education for women who, although mostly uneducated, were responsible for raising and educating children; and because society placed so much of domestic responsibilities on the shoulders of women, this organization argued that industry in any country could not fully develop without women and called for equal wages for employment. This organization, working mainly as a propaganda agent for the Tudeh party among women, actually aimed to deny their communist identity and to align itself with Muslim women. In doing so, it went much farther than most organizations and had little opposition to its movements outside of government. Although this group ideologically located itself in the mainstream of government-initiated projects, it was never allowed to be present as an organization.[115]

Many women's organizations implanted other tactics that aligned themselves with Khomeini without explicitly saying so, and they, too, met with opposition and died out quickly. The *National Union of Women (Etehad-e Melli-e Zanān)* formed in March 1979 on the basis Iranian nationalism and of women's necessary participation in society for its advancement and protection. According to their founding announcement, society is not divided by gender lines, but by exploiter and exploited, and because of this, they vowed

[114] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 219.
[115] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 219.

not to support any political force that was dependent on America or any foreign power.[116] The division amongst women's organization is again made clear by their second principle:

> In relation to *women's organizations*, we will not co-operate with any of those who have not stated their political positions clearly, or those who situate women in opposition to revolutionary forces or with reactionary groups who attempt to mobilize women along deviationary and secondary issues at this sensitive time.[117]

This women's organization published a fortnightly paper, *Barabari* (*Equality)*, followed by the women's magazine *Zan Dar Mobarezeh* (*Woman in Struggle)*, which was eventually banned. During the autumn of 1980, the NUW underwent a change into pro- or anti-government factions. After the split, many opportunities for uniting with other women's organizations were lost and the activities of the NUW eventually halted,[118] along with the activities of many of the originations they could have partnered with.[119]

The restrictive nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran made it virtually impossible for women's rights movements to continue by relegating women back into subservient

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[116] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 204.
[117] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 204.
[118] Azar Tabari and Nahid Yegeneh, *In the Shadow of Islam*, 206.
[119] 1. *Emancipation of Women (Anjoman-e Rahai-e Zan)*, a women's organization primarily concerned with women's participation in the workforce, published *Rahai-e Zan (Emancipation of Women)* monthly. And although the publication was widely read, this organization remained mostly un-influential due to its vocal and open criticism of the government, its support for open confrontation with the state, and its unwillingness to engage in any dialogue with the government on women's issues. 2. *Society for the Awakening of Women (Jam'iat-e Bidari-e Zanān)* published *Bidari-e Zan (Women's Awakening)* weekly and discussed issues in the binary of pro- or anti-government. This publication only lasted for six issues, as its content was highly critical of the state. The organization also took a bold step and organized a demonstration against the abolishment of the Family Protection Law by Khomeini. Because this group was not formally recognized and supported by the National Union of Women, only a few hundred showed up to the demonstration and were quickly disbursed by government-backed mobs of men. From this point on, the government highly scrutinized the activities of this organization, making it difficult to affect change.

positions and limiting their participation in society to non-political activities. In doing so women's rights discourse found it's way into societal discussion through other platforms that were harder to restrict to physically, such as cinema. The continuation of this discourse in film can be seen through the representation of in marriage laws in the films themselves, but also in the reviews of these films in Iranian periodicals that often include a discussion of the legal implications of the film and how those affect women.

MARRIAGE IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

Popular cinema in Iran remains a leisure activity that survived the regime change from the Pahlavis to Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic, although it did change in nature. At the conclusion of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini began the purification process of Iran, and because cinema was considered a tool used by the Pahlavis to bring corruption into Iran, this process included a purification of cinema. Women – seen by Khomeini as corruptors of society through their often promiscuous and anti-Islamic representations in Pahlavi era cinema – quickly became one of the visible symbols of this purification process, and their appearance on film was highly regulated so as to fit into the appropriate Islamicate model of womanhood. Scenes from previously popular Pahlavi era films, now considered "un-Islamic," were sometimes edited with a magic marker to cover exposed body parts of women, making these films acceptable to show once again.[120]

[120] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 3: The Islamicate Period, 1978-1984* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 27.

Had Ayatollah Khomeini not viewed cinema as a tool of education, when used properly, Iranian cinema could have ceased to exist at this time.[121] However, financially suffering from the Islamic Revolution and entering into the Iran-Iraq (1980–1988) just one year after the revolution meant that the government had to take measures to ensure the financial stability of the film industry. Fortunately for filmmakers and moviegoers alike, Ayatollah Khomeini personally requested that Mohammad Khatami return to Iran from Germany in order to take part in the administration of the new Islamic Republic of Iran. Of the many notable positions that he held before and after his presidency (1997–2005), his tenures as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance (1982–1986 and 1989–1992) had the most impact on Iranian cinema.

During his first term as minister, the government created the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (est. 1982) [122] and the Farabi Cinema Foundation (est. 1983)[123] in order to control films through a system of censorship regulations while at the same time providing funding for approved film projects. This three-pronged system included support (*hemayat*), supervision (*nezarat*), and guidance (*hedayat*).[124] In this way, the government consolidated power and reinforced its revolutionary ideals through the financial encouragement and international exportation of films that met the criteria for their political agenda. The process for screening films at the MCIG included reviewing screenplays, issuing film production licenses, previewing rough cuts, final review and

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[121] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 3*, 7.
[122] Previously named the Ministry of Culture and Art (MCA).
[123] The goal of the Farabi Cinema Foundation is to export Iranian films in order to support Iran both economically and ideologically.
[124] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 3*, 128.

issuance of exhibition licenses.[125] Complaints against early Islamic cinema included poor quality of films and low entertainment value imposed by the moralistic criteria that must be met.[126] Khatami in his first term sought to encourage quality filmmaking, a project that was carried out in collaboration with Fakhreddin Anvar, deputy of cinematic affairs, and Mohammad Beheshti, head of the Farabi Cinema Foundation.[127] Their efforts were supported by Hashemi Rafsanjani – chairman of the Iranian Parliament (1980–1989) and fourth president of Iran (1989–1997) – who, in 1985, authorized entertainment and joy in film. Previously to this, and since the success of the revolution, films had primarily been judged based on their political and instructional values. In conjunction with Rafsanjani's support, Khatami declared:

> I believe that cinema is not the mosque…. If we remove cinema from its natural place, we will no longer have cinema….If we transform cinema to such an extent that when one enters a movie house one feels imposed upon or senses that leisure time has changed to become homework time, then we have deformed society.[128]

In addition to revitalizing the film industry by lowering taxes on cinema tickets, subsidizing the importation of equipment and funding film productions with low interest loans,[129] Khatami, Beheshti and Anvar also aimed to create a rating system to inspire more creativity and better quality of cinematic techniques.

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[125] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 3, 150-153.
[126] IHamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 3,* 169.
[127] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in* Iran, 16.
[128] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 3, 186.
[129] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 37.

The rating system used by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) had initially been created to encourage technical improvements in film, but was often used to identify and support films that had an overt Islamic agenda. Films were rated on a letter scale ranging from 'A' to 'D' that was based on three criteria: technical aspects, aesthetics and content. While technical aspects included improvements in filming equipment and new, innovative aesthetics were encouraged, better content was often determined by closeness the Islamic Republics ideals.[130] Because higher ratings often meant more funding from the MCIG, filmmakers often pandered to this last criterion, stymieing many improvements in the overall qualify of films. However, the political landscape changed dramatically during his second term at the MCIG and enabled the creation of a new post-revolutionary reform cinema.

With the death of Khomeini in 1989 and entry into his second term at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Khatami encouraged a looser interpretation of supervision in terms of the film production process.[131] In this chapter, it is films from this period but before his presidency that will be analyzed in combination with the cinematic reforms that affected their production, the marital laws they represent, and the societal discussion that they aroused in order discover what they say about marriage in Iranian society at this time as well as to discover if films at this time really were more free to break away from the "mosque"-like feeling that Khomeini tried to break away from. One

[130] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema,* 38.
[131] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*, 17.

of the most creative films to come out of this early reform that pushes cinematic boundaries is *Hāmoun* directed by Dariush Mehrju'i.[132]

An early pioneer of Iranian cinema, Dariush Mehrju'i continues to be counted as one of the most influential filmmakers in Iranian cinema.[133] Many authors such as Hamid Naficy, Blake Atwood, Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, Himid Reza Sadr, Shahab Esfandiary and Shahla Mirbakhtyar, have included Dariush Mehrju'i and a number of his films in their historiographies and analyses of Iranian Cinema, but never in terms of marriage as this chapter aims to. In terms of genre, all of his films can't be said to fall into one, but according to the Iranian publication *Film,* a number of Mehrju'i's films received the most votes by critics as qualifying as 'national' films in the post-Revolutionary context,[134] and many of his films are considered political in nature.

His early film *Gā*v/*The Cow* (1969) written in collaboration with dissident writer Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi, "legitimized cinema as an intellectual medium rather than being the property of commercial forces or government institutions."[135] Immediately the film was banned for its negative portrayal of the rural countryside in Iran, something that the Shah wished to keep out of film. The ban on this film in Iran can be seen as an embodiment of the difficult and complicated relationship between filmmakers and the

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[132] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*, 29.
[133] Shahab Esfandiary, "Dariush Mehrju'i's 'National' Cinema and Globalization," in *Iranian Cinema and Globalization: National, Transnational and Islamic Dimensions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), 115.
[134] "Behterīn Āsār-e Cīnemā-ye Mellī-e Seh Daheh/ The Best Works of the Last Three Decades of National Cinema," *Fīlm* Vol. 383 (2008), 26–31.
[135] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 2*, 345.

state, with sponsorship and censorship of film both being carried out by the predecessor to the MCIG, the Ministry of Cultural and Art (MCA).

New Wave cinema was essentially considered a dissident cinema that criticized the current social conditions of Iran. Because of this, filmgoers were almost programed to find the political message in films of certain directors who were considered committed to politics.[136] As Mehrju'i states, 'Artistic works were then only studied from a political point of view to see to what extent they spoke of people's grievances and the tough existing conditions.'"[137] And that is exactly what we see in his film *Hāmoun* (1990).

WHAT IS 'EVIDENCE' ENOUGH?

Dariush Mehrju'i's *Hāmoun* tells the story of a man, Hamīd (Khosro Shakibai) recently returned from the Iran-Iraq war who now works at an import-export firm while also pursuing his Ph.D. His wife, Mashīd (Bita Farahi), is an abstract artist from a substantially more wealthy family. Despite her family's protestation, Mashīd married Hamīd, initially attracted by his intellectualism. Seven years after they are married, however, Mashīd feels that Hamīd is holding her back from accomplishing something truly meaningful in life and seeks divorce.[138] While this alone is not an acceptable reason for

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[136] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema, 11-12*.
[137] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 2, 348.
[138] While it does not seem that Hamīd is un-willing to let her work outside of the home, Article 1117 of the Iranian Civil Code does give the husband the right to control his wife's activities outside of the home, including preventing her from taking work. In this way, it does represent a realistic possibility for women in Iranian society should their husbands choose to enforce this law. For more information, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini's *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law, Iran and Morocco Compared*.

divorce, it is also insinuated that Hamīd often takes his work and academic frustrations out on her, and may have physically beaten her.

The first few minutes of the film show Hamīd working on his dissertation, "Abraham's Love and Faith," in which he tries to ascertain the real reasons that Abraham was willing to kill his son Isaac. Was it out of obedience or love? Hamīd narrates the first lines of his dissertation, "Mankind divorces himself from what he loves because he doesn't want to want," and after penciling in a correction, continues, "He loves but wishes to hate. He hopes, but hopes to hope not. He remembers, but wishes to forget." A brisk wind suddenly blows his loose dissertation pages away, foreshadowing the impeding dissolution of his marriage by visually representing the idea of divorce on paper, but also in the preoccupation of his thoughts. At that moment, his divorce lawyer comes in to get him ready for court confirming that divorce lies on the horizon. In a conversation they have together, he tells Hamīd that it is time to let Mashīd go, something Hamīd claims to have done. We get a sense for the character, and possible selfishness, of Hamīd when his lawyer responds, "No. You want everybody to love you, but you don't do anything," implying that he hasn't done anything to deserve this love.

Mashīd claims that she is filing for divorce because Hamīd has ignored his responsibilities as a husband, namely, providing for them financially. This

provision is stipulated in the Iranian Civil code (ICC)[139] and violation of this stipulation grants women permissible grounds for divorce, if provable. She also claims that he beats her and is psychotic. The rest of the film sees Hamīd emotionally unable to deal with the fact that his wife does not love him anymore, eventually leading him attempt suicide in the ocean. Somewhat traditional to Iranian films, the conclusion of *Hāmoun* is left ambiguous and up for interpretation. As Hamīd floats face down in the ocean, a few men suddenly pull him out of the water and into their fishing boat and as Hamīd slowly opens his eyes and gains consciousness, the credits roll leaving the ending to be determined by the audience.

While this film was created after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) and during the reforms instituted by Mohammad Khatami during his tenures (1982–1986 and 1989–1992) as the minister at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a time of relative creative freedom in cinema, this film still draws heavily upon Islamic ideology when creating this dilemma. By situating the issue of the divorce in a religious context, that of Abraham, audiences are asked to determine which solution is more religious: reconciliation or divorce? Audiences are also forced to question whether or not Mashīd is living up to the ideological Islamic wife.

[139] Article 1129 in the Iranian Civil Code, cited in Mir-Hosseini, 56.

The problems between the two, although handled poorly by Hamīd, seem to stem from Mashīd's desire to have an impact on society outside of the home; a desire that is antithetical to the patriarchal confinement of women to a role whose primary significance remains inside the obligations of wife and mother, and whose arena in life should first and foremost be the home. If Mashīd did not have this desire for an outside role in society, would she still have felt that Hamīd was holding her back, and filed for divorce? Also absent are her interactions with her child. How can a mother with her focus outside of the home raise good Iranian citizens? In her pursuit of creating something meaningful, she seems to ignore her Islamic obligations as a wife and a mother, and as a patriotic mother for the nation. In addition Mashīd's seemingly improper outward focus with relation to an ideological Islamic society that promotes inward focus on the household, what legal implications for women are presented in this film? As mentioned previously, Mashīd sues for divorce on the grounds that Hamīd is not providing for her financially. Several statutes of the Iranian Civil Code work together and must be considered in order to contextualize the validity of Mashīd's case against Hamīd.

First, according to Article 1105 of the Iranian Civil Code, the wife must agree in a permanent marriage to let the husband exercise control as the head of the household, and in return for her submission, the wife is entitled to

financial support.[140] These obligations include payment for living expenses such as housing, clothing, and food. Interestingly, this law requires that the husband pay this financial support commensurate to the wife's social status, including hiring a maid if she is accustomed to having one.[141] In order to maintain this financial support, the wife must also fulfill her nuptial obligations regularly, unless she has justifiable reason not to do so. For example, Article 1127 allows a wife to refuse to engage in sexual relations with her husband if he has contracted a venereal disease after their marriage.[142] However, if a wife meets this marital conditions and her husband refuses financial support, she may file a complaint with the Special Civil Tribunal, which will result in the compulsory renewal of the financial support or give her legal grounds to obtain divorce.

As we see in *Hāmoun*, Mashīd attempts to gain divorce by claiming that Hamīd no longer gives her the required financial support. She goes so far as to say that this lack of financial support also extends to their child who, by law, is entitled to financial support and education.[143] Both parents, not only the father, share this obligation. While Mashīd's claims seem legally viable, Hamīd denies ever keeping financial support from her. What then is Mashīd to

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[140] Sima Pakzad, "The Legal Status of Women in the Family in Iran," in *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, eds. Mahanz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 172.
[141] Sima Pakzad, in *In the Eye of the* Storm, 172.
[142] Sima Pakzad, *In the Eye of the* Storm, 172.
[143] Article 1168 of the Civil Code.

do in order to obtain this divorce? In the film, she claims that Hamīd also hits her, which he does indeed do once in the film during an argument, and that he is insane. But is this enough for the judge to grant divorce?

Although Ayatollah Khomeini reversed many of the 1967 amendments to the Family Protection Law (FPL) when he came into power after the Revolution, some of these amendments carried through into post-Revolutionary Iranian law, specifically laws with regards to divorce. [144] Marriage contracts for women still contained two stipulations that protected certain rights on marriage, one of which gives women the right to seek divorce under certain conditions, if they can prove them. In *Hāmoun*, Mashīd draws on two conditions to seek divorce: one seeks the right to divorce on the grounds of his mistreatment – physically – of her, and the other seeks divorce on the grounds of his insanity.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini recorded a similar case in her documentary *Divorce Iranian Style: Family Courtrooms in Iran* (1998), in which the wife claims that her husband has beat her and her son. Through interviews, we learn that she actually does not wish to obtain a divorce, only to force her husband to sign a contract legally requiring him to find a new job and resume the financial support of their family. So while Mashīd may indeed have legal grounds on

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[144] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on* Trial, 54-57.

which to obtain a divorce from Hamīd, we don't see her presenting any real evidence of his mistreatment or insanity.

The dissolution of their marriage is another aspect left to the imagination of the audience as Hamīd is pulled out of the sea without a resolution, perhaps Mashīd does not supply the court with anything of evidentiary value proving Hamīd's insanity or mistreatment of her. While *Hāmoun* draws on many elements of the Iranian Civil Code in setting up the conflict between this couple, Mehrju'i does not offer a concrete solution, but it is not hard to image that this marriage does not end in divorce as Mashīd desires. What does this film say, then, about women's marriage rights at this time?

Censorship regulations by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance at this time prohibited any film that insulted "directly or indirectly the prophets, imams, the supreme jurisprudent, the leadership council or the qualified jurisprudents."[145] In other words, films criticizing or going against Iranian law found it hard to gain exhibition permits. As we have seen, *Hāmoun* directly engages with Iranian marriage laws in effect at this time, but never openly presents a critique of them. Although the marriage between the two is anything but wonderful, Mashīd's characterization of a woman seeking divorce on grounds that are somewhat shaky and hard to prove on an

[145] Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 40.

evidentiary level in court seems to overshadow Hamīd's irrational and, at times, psychotic and suicidal personality.

Many of the cinematic regulations at this time concerned themselves with women's representations in films, particularly their sexuality, and aimed to restrict any film that highlighted improper behavior that could be emulated in society. In the early years of the Islamic Republic of Iran, filmmakers even cautioned each other on using women at all in their films in order to avoid moral dilemmas.[146] Women in film were supposed to appear as they would in society: as proper models of womanhood in appearance and manner. In this film, Mashīd does embody the aspects of an ideal Islamic wife or mother, and perhaps this is why she is not granted divorce, even if Hamīd's poor treatment of her is true. Granting divorce to a possibly less-than moral character would be going against both of these cinematic guidelines. Mehrju'i's plot, however, cleverly plays with the nuances of marriage laws in Iran at this time in a way that raised discussion about the inequality of these laws.

A recent article in *Fīlm* magazines published in 2010 calls Hamīd Hāmoun's character "deep" as well as satirical as it critics Iranian intellectuals view of how daily love is wrongly imagined in society.[147] At the time that *Hāmoun* was released, however, *film* presented a different view. In an article that translates to "Misunderstanding," Shahram Jafari Nejad writes that

[146] Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 45.
[147] "Hāmoun: Ta'bīr Nāmerādī-hā'/Hamoun: Unhappy Interpretations," *Fīlm* Vol. 383 (2010), 36.

Hāmoun's character is insensitive and doesn't embody true Iranian cultural values or present a good view of nationality in the way that he treats his wife.[148] While both of these articles take opposing stances on Hamīd's, they both agree that his character critiques some aspect of marriage and love in Iranian society in its unrealistic, or possibly less than idyllic, portrayal. In combination, both unconsciously remark on the creative nature of the film industry at this time as well as the continued state censorship that lead to unnatural portrayals of marriage by taking these opposite stances. This narrative of unrealistic or ambiguous solutions to marital problems does not solely exist in *Hāmoun* but can be found in many Iranian films.

Despite the lack of attention in academia so far, possibly due in part to the unavailability of this film with English subtitles or because it was made outside of Iranian cinema's "golden period,"[149] *Āsheghāneh/Romantic* (1995) has much to contribute to the discourse of Iranian cinema and its portrayal of marriage. Similarly to *Hāmoun* in method, marriage acts to discuss social issues acts in this film, namely the familiar conflict between tradition and modernity in Iranian society and what that means for women.

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[148] "Su'eh-ye Ta'bīr/Misinterpretations," *Fīlm* Vol. 94 (1991), 53–54.

[149] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*, 17.

WEALTH AND DIVORCE

In contrast to *Hāmoun*, not much has been written about *Āsheghāneh/Romantic,* either in English or Persian, despite the prestige of its director, Ali-Reza Davoudnejad. In fact, only three articles can be found in *film* and they primarily discuss the production crew rather than the content of the film. During his career, Davoudnejad directed and produced at least 19 films starting in the early 1970's, completing his latest film in 2011. Davoudnejad was also one of three Iranian film directors – including Dariush Mehrju'i – who, together with Iranian actress Karimi, made up the group of Iranian film practitioners who met on an online website in 1999 with a group of American film practitioners and discussed the dialogue between their two cinemas.[150]

Surprisingly, *Āsheghāneh/Romantic* has rarely, if ever, been discussed, although Davoudnejad is well known as a director. Despite the lack of attention in academia so far, possibly due in part to the unavailability of this film with English subtitles, *Āsheghāneh/Romantic* acts similarly to *Hāmoun* in it's use of marriage to discuss social issues, namely the familiar conflict between tradition and modernity in Iranian society and what that means for women. The most apparent similarity between these two films, however, is that they both share the actor Khosro Shakibai as a principle protagonist.

[150] Hamid Reza Sadr, "The 1990's," in *Iranian Cinema: A Political History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2006), 239.

Starkly contrasting the role he plays in *Hāmoun,* where he seems to be more concerned with education than wealth, in *Āsheghāneh/Romantic* Shakibai plays the role of a rapacious man (Nāder) who finds himself the intended victim of a murderous scheme all the while perusing a woman (Ghāzāl) who is already engaged. Independently wealthy wives also feature prominent roles in both films – Mashid in *Hāmoun* and Nāder's wife, Āfaq, in *Āsheghāneh/Romantic.* Both films also feature the idea of separation – specifically divorce in the case of *Hāmoun* – and how men, despite the financial status of their wives in these cases, still hold more power in the marital relationship. Different in each film is who seeks the separation, the reason for the separation and what Iranian laws are highlighted in each film.

Āsheghāneh/Romantic opens with a group of unseen people singing joyfully as the camera pans down from the treetops to a peaceful scene in a park where family and friends are gathered to celebrate the engagement of Ghāzāl and her fiancé Ārash. After a brief speech by Ghāzāl's mother, the music takes on an eerie and dramatic tone and through the help of the camera lens, we see a mysterious pair of men behind the seated guests. Ghāzāl's father proceeds to walk through the throng and approaches the man, who we learn to be a friend of the family, Nāder, who expresses doubts about Ārash as suitable partner for Ghāzāl. In a later scene, Nāder generously offers to find Ghāzāl a proper suitor, one with financial stability that can care for her fully. Shortly after, we learn that Nāder's

interest in finding Ghāzāl a suitor is not as altruistic as he presents it to be, and that he actually desires her for himself.

Necessarily, there are several complex dynamics between the characters that complicate this plot. First and foremost, Nāder already has a wife – Āfaq. The relationship between Nāder and his wife is tumultuous at best. Through the film we discover that he primarily married her for her money, and does not truly love her and causes many bitter fights between the two. After their marriage, Āfaq also discovers that she is unable to bear children. In combination, this allows Nāder to easily fall in love with the beautiful Ghāzāl and to devise a plan that he hopes will sever the engagement between her and Ārash. Several questions arise from this particular scenario.

If Nāder's character is morally questionable, and his intentions for marrying Āfaq had been primarily tied to her financial assets, why is he eventually considered a wealthy suitor for Ghāzāl when the money is actually his wife's? Why does Nāder never seek divorce from Āfaq even though he hopes to marry Ghāzāl? How does Āfaq's infertility affect their marriage? And finally, which laws from the Iranian Civil Code are highlighted in this film and how are they presented? In order to answer these questions and gain a more meaningful understand of this film, laws with regards to inheritance, infertility and permissibility of multiple wives, will be discussed in relation to this plot.

"Inheritance" is generally understood as property left behind by the deceased, and unless specified otherwise in a legal document, is usually left to a

family member(s). While the Iranian Civil Code also operates with this definition of inheritance, it divides inheritance for women in two ways: first, inheritance from parents to child; and second, inheritance from child to parents. Because only the first is present in *Āsheghāneh/Romantic*, discussion will be limited to a child's inheritance from his/her parents.

Article 907 of the Iranian Civil Code states that a daughter can be the sole beneficiary of familial property if she is the only child.[151] In the case of two daughters, the inheritance is split equally; however, in the case of multiple children of different genders, a daughter's inheritance will only be half of the son's inheritance. This rule applies regardless of whether the deceased is the mother or father. What we see in *Āsheghāneh/Romantic* is mostly implied rather than stated. Āfaq's father has already passed when we enter this story, and has left all of his finances to his daughter – with the exception of some of his property, a decision that will be discussed later. Upon signing the marriage contract, or *aqd*, Āfaq's possessions, including her money, immediately became Nāder's. With this transfer of assets, Nāder finds himself in a position to offer himself as a wealthy suitor to Ghāzāl. In the film, Ghāzāl's parents are highly influential in her decision making process, and almost push her to make decisions she does not wish to make. Both parents seem happy with Ghāzāl's fiancé Ārash in the beginning of the film, but later urge her to consider Nāder. This change occurs due to some tricky maneuvering by Nāder.

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[151] Sima Pakzad, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 171.

As mentioned earlier, not all of Āfaq's property was left to her, why? For reasons mad unclear in the film, Āfaq's father did not fully trust her with his property, so he left his house, car and the like to Ghāzāl's father had – who had worked for Āfaq's father most of Ghāzāl's childhood – in order to ensure its proper maintenance. Nāder's interest in Ghāzāl is a direct result of this family connection, and also how he manipulates Ghāzāl's parents. In return for Āhad signing over the remaining property to Nāder, Nāder promises to find Ghāzāl a worthy suitor, someone who is financially stable and can offer her the life she deserves. At first Āhad is tentative, but finally consents to the agreement in light of Ārash's lower economic standing. Āhad is also unaware that Nāder has himself in mind. With his plan in place, how does Nāder legally intend to marry a Ghāzāl when he is still married to Āfaq?

While Nāder seems to love Ghāzāl purely on her own merit – as she has nothing to offer financially – Āfaq's infertility provides Nāder the legal grounds to obtain a second wife.[152] According to the Iranian Civil Code, it is permissible for a man to have up to four wives[153] under certain conditions. Although no specific guidelines for polygamy are set for men in Iranian legal codes, infertility of the wife is a legal reason for obtaining a co-wife, as producing offspring is desired in Islam. The husband must first obtain permission from his first wife in

[152] The plot remains very unclear regarding the issue of divorce. It is never made apparent whether Nader intends to have two wives or if he intends to divorce Āfaq if he can secure Ghāzāl.
[153] Fatameh E. Moghadam, "Commoditization of Sexuality of Female Labor Participation in Islam: Implications for Iran, 1960-90," in *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, eds. Mahanz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 85.

order to obtain a co-wife. He also must be able to provide for both – or all – wives equally, an aspect that will be discussed at length in the subsequent chapter. This law does not, however, extend to women whose husbands are infertile. With these laws in mind, it is easy to see how Nāder could marry Ghāzāl without changing his marital status to Āfaq, assuming that she were to give permission, a topic that is never actually broached in this film.

At the conclusion of the film, Nāder concedes to Ārash after Ārash saves his life in a dramatic plot twist. So all ends happily for Ghāzāl and Ārash. Nāder also seems to be more content with his situation in life, but it is never made clear what becomes of his relationship with his wife. What are we to do with this ambiguous ending?

Both *Hāmoun* and *Āsheghāneh/Romantic* take a stance on marriage and divorce that fits the dominant societal narrative: that marriage should be preserved despite unfavorable conditions in the marriage and that women's agency in obtaining a divorce is comparatively unequal to men as seen. Not only do these films embody the actual Persian words *talāq gereftan* (get divorce – women) and *talāq dādan* (give divorce – men), they take advantage of the creative freedom in displaying less than idyllic aspects of Iranian society, such as Hāmoun's abusive and psychotic nature and Nāder's obsessive, greedy, and murderous nature, they also present solutions to marital issues that fit the dominant Islamic narrative, that divorce is not an acceptable solution.

CONCLUSION

Without knowing the intentions of the directors for including these subjects into their films, what then are we to learn about Iranian society through these films? When we place these films into their proper historical and political context, we can begin to draw out some potential significance.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979) halted, and indeed reversed, many of the advancements that women's movements had achieved in terms of equal rights and participation in Iranian society during the Pahlavi era. In addition, Iran's conflict with Iraq in the Iran-Iraq (1980-1988) resulted in many Iranian films concerned with nationalism and patriotism that aimed to entice Iranians to join the battle on the front lines. After this period of time, movies whose plots revolve around marriage increase significantly, as will also be discussed in the next chapter.

In the films included in this chapter, one glaring similarity stands out: Both wives have significantly higher social standing and financial status before marriage to either Hamīd or Nāder. One would think that this would give her more power in the marriage, but as we can see, both are at the mercy of their husbands – Mashīd in respects to Hamīd who won't grant her a divorce, and Āfaq in her passive role as her husband actively pursues another wife. In Āfaq's case, she screams at Nāder to leave "her" house when she is angry. While Nāder does leave, according to the marriage contract the house is legally his. Perhaps this is why Āfaq never pushes for divorce despite the fact that she is unhappy as well,

because if she does divorce, she has no right to the property she owned before marriage.

In addition, the inability of either woman to control their marriages is apparent and reflects the current Iranian marital laws that place the majority of control into the hands of the man. Mashīd, while seeming to have the proper reasons for divorce, never produces the evidence. Metaphorically, this could signify that despite the 'real' evidence, it is still an uphill batter for women to gain divorce from their husbands. In fact, Ziba Mir-Hosseini writes that of the 1735 divorce cases filed in 1987, 76% named women were the petitioners of divorce. Of those 1314 cases filed by women, the courts only accepted 524. The rest were either "dismissed" and "rejected" by the courts, or "withdrawn" and "abandoned" by the women.[154] In both cases, women's inequality in marriage is apparent.

These films then, reflect the inequality women face codified in Iranian law even though neither film is classified as *fīlmhā-ye zanān.* Outside of this genre and in the realm of popular cinema, these films reached a broader audience and as evidenced by the Iranian periodical *film*, sparked public discourse about these issues in similar fashion to the women's movements in the Pahlavi period. Whether or not it was the director's intent to showcase this aspect of Iranian law, it is subconsciously in each film, driving much of each respective plot through the metaphorical platform of marriage that enables this discourse of women's rights to continue

[154] Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial,* 48.

Chapter 3: Marriage in Cinema After Reform

Many scholars have argued that Khatami's tenure as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and subsequent presidency signified the height of political reform in Iran in allowing for more creative freedom and agency.[155] As discussed in the previous chapter, these reforms did affect the extent to which directors could use their creative freedom and yet it is clear to see the dominant narrative discourse that remains prevalent throughout them as exemplified by the acceptable conclusions that the films reach that sparked discussion in non-political periodicals about the ways these films handled the reality of marriage. This chapter then, aims to discover the ways that films after Khatami's resignation from the Culture of Islamic Guidance and election as president used marriage in film to spark societal discussions with regards to the social issues at this time that impacted women in their marriages. In doing so, I argue that films during Khatami's presidency were able to more openly discuss these issues as well as present solutions and outcomes that went against the dominant cultural Islamic narrative than were films during his more radical reforms as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance due to the solidification of support for these reforms in society and the contributions of Cinema Deputy Seyfollah Dad.

CINEMA DURING KHATAMI'S PRESIDENCY

Although Khatami's tenure as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance saw an explosion in creative freedom on film with the less strict production regulations, it also

[155] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*; Sayeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*; Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History*; Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*.

saw Khatami's resignation due to this same freedom that Iranian society did not fully accept. When Makhmalbaf's *Nāobt-e Āsheqī/Time of Love* (1990) made it through the screening process of the MCIG and on the screen, Khatami was forced to defend the MCIG's decisions and his as the minister.[156] *Time of Love* was not only seen as transgressing rules of modesty, it goes against Islamic morality. In this film, the story a woman's affair repeats itself three times but with a different ending each time. While the first two end in complete tragedy with deaths of the woman and either her lover or husband, the third ends happily as the husband plans the lovers wedding after recognizing their true love in and doing so, she escapes judgment for her sins.[157] The release of this film caused uproar in Iranian society due to its affront to Islamic values and made the continuation of his term as minster nearly impossible, and he resigned the same year. Although not disappearing entirely, he moved to a position further from the public eye as head of the National Library.[158] Scholars argue that the reformist ideals that Khatami's had begun to articulate during his second tenure as minister at the MCIG continued to formulate and solidify for almost 15 years before they resurfaced again when he entered as a candidate for the presidency of Iran.[159]

When Khatami ran for president in 1997, he had the support of the majority of filmmakers who had seen him fight for more favorable regulations and practices in the film industry. Some of these filmmakers are reported to have made campaign videos

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[156] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*, 23.
[157] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*, 31.
[158] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in* Iran, 17.
[159] Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran,* 18.

supporting Khatami without taking credit as the producers.[160] As a proponent Civil Society (j*ām'eh-ye madanī*), Khatami aimed to reconcile western and modernist formulas with the official Islamicate values and governance in Iran.[161] These secular concepts of civil society included pluralism and transparency of politics, women's public presence in society, individual rights, and acceptance of opposing views.[162] In an interview with the prominent women's magazine *Zanān* before the elections took place, Khatami was asked to define his position on women's rights. In contrast to his leading rival, 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, who declined to answer, Khatami's frank but pleasant answers further solidified him as the only candidate to respect women.[163] The addition of women to his already overwhelming support lead Khatami to a landslide victory, winning the election in 1997 by 70% majority vote and solidifying the changes Khatami had made to the film industry in earlier years. Without Khatami's cinematic guidance, however, the aesthetics of cinema changed.

When Seyfollah Dad became the Cinema Deputy following Khatami, he abolished the previous rating system in favor of statistics. In using statistics he aimed to asses what types of narratives were popular with Iranian audiences for allocating resources rather than favoring films that followed the dominant cultural practices or films

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[160] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 4, 41; Blake Atwood, *Reform Cinema in Iran*, 18; 61 – 63.
[161] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved*, 113.
[162] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume* 3, 13–14.
[163] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved*, 113–114.

who's creativity pushed boundaries, as had the systems before this.[164] In an interview with Sayeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, Dad said:

> We would give the filmmakers statistical information regarding the number of the educated, the youth, etc. I was explaining to them that the Iranian cinema means the middle class. [. . .] At the moment we have two million university students. I told them that these students read books, watch Iranian and foreign films. They are interested in politics and follow the social ills. I was saying, "these are your customers."[165]

Along with the changing the rating system, Dad also continued Khatami's work of easing censorship regulations. Dad also aimed to create legal guidelines that would prevent filmmakers from having to rely on the current Cinema Deputy; however, filmmakers opposed this claiming they would rather negotiate with ministers than the judiciary that could lead to jail if negotiations went south.[166]

It is interesting that at this time the Ministry of Culture of Islamic introduced a new film category, *sīnemā-ye moslehāneh* ('cinema of reform'), rather than creating this category under Khatami.[167] Films in this category are considered reformative in nature through the way they portray social, cultural and political problems in society. The emphasis on women's inclusion at this time gave rise to many films that criticized current legal practices that more often unequally affected women such as *Killing Rabids* (Dir. Bahram Beyzai, 2001), *The Fifth Reaction* (Dir. Tahmine Milani, 2004), *The Day I Became a* Woman (Dir. Marzieh Makhmalbalf, 2000), and *The Circle* (Dir. Jafar Panahi, 2000). Here, Dariush Mehrju'i again makes an appearance and true to form, his film

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[164] Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 49–50.
[165] Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 50.
[166] Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 50–51.
[167] Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*, 50.

Leilā (1997) critically analyzes the current situation of marriage in Iran, in particular, the practice of taking a co-wife due to infertility.

INFERTILITY: WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Leilā tells the tale of infertility and its effect on each partner as well as the marriage relationship as a whole in a way that reveals the emotional destruction that taking a co-wife can cause. While this film critiques practices such as these, the conclusion approves of actions that fall outside of the dominant Islamic narrative.

The story begins retroactively, as *Leilā* (Leila Hatami, who also starred in *A Separation*) narrates the beginning of her relationship with Rezā (Ali Mossafa). Preparing for a celebration, Leilā and her family are shown cooking a pot of sholeh zard[168] when Rezā, a friend of Leilā's brother, arrives at her house. After a few furtive glances from the two in the backyard, Leilā narrates that this is the first time that she has met him. The scene then cuts to a still shot of a somber Leilā facing the camera, half obscured by shadow, caste in red, unmoving. In a sad and monotonous tone, she continues to narrate, "I married Rezā in the same year. A couple of months later on my birthday, I realized I couldn't get pregnant."[169]

The visual elements of the scene in combination with Leilā's delivery suggest to the audience the seriousness of this film. The red hue carries into the next scene in the form of a red tablecloth that fills the entire frame until the camera pans out and brings us into the dining room of a married Rezā and Leilā,

[168] Sholeh zard, or saffron rice pudding, is a Persian dessert traditionally cooked for the celebration of Persian New Year or Ramadan.

and into the present. From here, Leilā's narration becomes less retroactive but rather describes her feelings during impactful moments throughout the film in the present tense, as if talking to the audience as they watch these events in her life unfold. Through several thoughtful scenes, Mehrju'i emphasizes the fondness of the couple for each other during the first few months of their marriage, despite the lack of physical touch between the two. In these first few months, two interactions take place that present the importance of fertility, one overt and one subtle.

On her birthday, Leilā and Rezā first visit his family where they hold a small birthday celebration. After Rezā's father gives Leilā a small ring, his mother also gives her a gift and after the normal pleasantries are exchanged between the two, Rezā's mother (Jamileh Sheikhi) is the first to hint at the importance of a male heir to the family. She says, "Hopefully next year at the same time we'll have a huge party right hear with your beautiful little boy. We'll invite your mother and your brothers as well; we'll see each other here."

This scene acts in two very important ways. First, it firmly plants the significance of lineage at the center of this family, as the second instance that childbearing has been directly addressed in the first ten minutes of the film. Secondly, this scene opens up involvement between the audience and other characters in the film, suggesting that the audience acts as more of a participant in these events rather than an objective spectator or as merely receiving Leilā's perspective of events. After Rezā's mother says the above lines to Leilā, she turns to the audience via direct view into the camera and says, "I can't tell you how

much I want to see Rezā's boy." Rezā's sister also addresses the camera directly after she gives Leilā a teapot, commenting that Rezā really loves his tea.

The next scene, which occurs in the home of Leilā's family, produces the same message but requires more interpretation. After several of Leilā's family members have given her gifts, Leilā's uncle gives her a birdcage with two lovebirds after which her brother gives her a bird's egg, "from all the pigeons and canaries." The camera zooms in on Leilā's hand as her brother, Hussein, gently places the egg in her upturned palm. The camera lingers for a moment on her hand, before she tenderly closes her fingers around the egg, and draws it to herself. This symbolic gesture reinforces Leilā's desire to have a child.

However, despite the strong desire for a child, a visit to the doctor confirms that there a problem exists although at this time it is not made clear if the problem lies with Rezā or Leilā. During the car ride home, Leilā and Rezā express to the other that they are both happy with their lives how they are, with or without a child, and regardless of which of them is infertile, no love will be lost between them. This scene shows the beginning of one issue that Mehrju'i raises: that is, what does it mean to truly love someone?

At the second doctor visit, Leilā finds that she is unable to conceive due to low hormone levels, something that the doctor suggests seeking medical treatment for. But after several months of trying without success, Rezā's mother finally steps in. She explains to Leilā that although Rezā has emphatically stated that he doesn't care about having children, that he only says it for her sake and that as the

only male in the family, it would be selfish of Leilā to expect Rezā to not have children for the sake of their marriage. Out of love for Rezā, his mother asks Leilā to agree to this arrangement. Although unpalatable judging by look on Leilā's face, she agrees to let Rezā's mother find him a second wife, one that can bear him a son. Rezā refuses this idea, as we hear through a conversation between Leilā and a friend on the phone, and the couple's happiness once again resumes. A visit from Rezā's mother is enough to dampen her spirits, and after much weeping and begging by her mother-in-law, Leilā agrees to talk to Rezā once again about taking another wife. Rezā eventually submits to his wife's wishes, although not happy about it, and the hunt for a second wife begins.

One technique that Mehrju'i uses the telephone whose jarring ring often signals interference from other family members, particularly Rezā's mother or Aunt *Shamsī,* that work to threaten the happiness of the couple. A phone call from Rezā's mother interrupts the couple as they come home from the initial doctor visit. Already upset by the news, Leilā's devastation doubles as her mother-in-law emphatically suggests that the problem must lie with Leilā, as Rezā's family has no history of infertility. While this phone call places the blame on Leilā, it also puts her in a situation where she is seemingly the only one who can offer a solution: allowing a second wife. During the search for a second wife, the rings of the telephone often interrupt the only happy moments that Leilā and Rezā are able to make for themselves in their situation.

The duration of the film shows Leilā slowly falling apart, torn between her love for Rezā, and what she feels are the familial and societal expectations of her mother-in-law. Rezā doesn't fare much better himself, feeling the closeness fading between himself and his wife while at the same time forced into a second marriage, supposedly one that will save the first. Eventually Rezā's mother and aunt find a second wife. Although Leilā had believed she was emotionally strong enough and that her love for Rezā was strong enough to welcome another woman into her home, she cannot bear it and leaves the same night Rezā brings his second wife home from their wedding ceremony. Despite Rezā's pleading the next day, and insistence that nothing has happened – meaning that the consummation of the marriage didn't occur – and that he will gladly divorce his second wife, Leilā is heartbroken and remains silent, choosing to stay at her family's house rather than return with Rezā.

At this point, the story flashes forward and we learn that Rezā's second wife does become pregnant, but with a girl, Bārān. The next scene cuts to Rezā's mother who weeps over the fact that there is still no son, and the problem has not been solved. Eventually, due to lack of love in the marriage, Rezā agrees to divorce his second wife who quickly remarries. The end of the film finds Leilā and Rezā still separated, but comes full circle when Rezā shows up to Leilā's family house as they once again make sholeh zard, hoping to rekindle their flame the same way it had started. He has Bārān in tow, who appears to be three or four years old. Leilā watches from the window and smiles. She narrates that maybe

one day she will tell Rezā's daughter this story, and maybe even laugh to tell that but for her mother-in-laws interference, Bārān would not have been born.

The ending leaves much to be imagined by the audience, especially her reference to Bārān as "Rezā's" daughter, and not their own. Earlier in the sequence, Leilā had also narrated that Rezā would not give her a divorce, despite the fact that she would not come home. For the more optimistic viewers, Leilā's smile and hint of future interaction with Bārān suggests that some happy ending is in store for them.

The issues that Mehrju'i raises in this film speak to the effects of infertility on marriage, and his technique of including the audience invites them to take part in assessing this situation. Namely, who chooses how a couple is happy in their marriage? The couple? Their families? Society? If the couple decided to not have children, they may be faced with constant pressure from family members to seek other avenues, especially if the problem lies with the wife. According to Islam, the primary reason for marriage is the gratification of sexual needs and procreation. The Iranian civil code allows the husband to have four marriages simultaneously,[170] so in the case of infertility of the woman, as with Leilā, the husband is within his legal rights to seek another wife, one that will be able to produce offspring. In the case of a co-wife, the first wife has a right to be treated equitably. While we see the completely legal and accepted practice of taking a co-wife in *Leilā*, we also see the emotionally devastating toll that it can take on both

[170] Ziba Mir-Hossieni, *Marriage on Trial*, 23-52.

partners in the marriage. In this way, *Leilā* is a critique of this practice, or at least of the outside pressure, either of familial or societal, on infertile couples, pressure that can ruin an otherwise happy marriage.

What is interesting about the dossier published on *Leilā* in 1998 in *Fīlm* is that the author, Jahanbaksh Nouraei, places a lot of blame for the couples demise on the mother in law.[171] According to Fatima Mernissi, the mother in law is one of the "strongest obstacles to conjugal intimacy" in traditional Iranian marriages specifically because of the strong relationship between mother and son.[172] She writes that psychoanalytic theory suggests that men form their ability to handle heterosexual relationships by their relationship with their mothers, who then continue to be a strong presence in the son's marriage. However, it seems to be Leilā who is imposed upon by her mother-in-law although it is true that Rezā does not entirely stand up to her in the film even though he tells Leilā that he doesn't care what they think. The article continues to say that had it not been for the intervention by his mother, and after her sister (his maternal aunt), the Leilā and Rezā would likely not have pursued a co-wife. Yet with the instigation of the mother-in-law and continued persistence – or begging, in some cases – the couple eventually approves of a co-wife and slowly the marriage deteriorates.

That the article places the blame on the mother-in-law instead of Rezā as the husband of the family indicates that the women in this film have the

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[171] Jahanbaksh Nouraei, "Khāmoushī Daryā/Silent Ocean," *Fīlm* Vol. 211 (1998), 53–55.
[172] Fatima Mernissi, "The Mother-in-Law," *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Schnekman Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), 69.

responsibility for controlling the marriage. First, when Leilā 'disrupts' the family by her infertility and second, when the mother-in-law 'fixes' this problem. While this may place some control within the hands of women, it also goes against the dominant cultural narrative when Leilā, leaves her husband and returns to live with her family. That the co-wife also seeks divorce is significant because the film does not provide a legal reason as with Mashīd in *Hāmoun.* The ending of the film, in failing to show if the Leilā and Rezā reconcile, also enforces the idea that this film goes against the dominant narrative.

As seen in *Hāmoun, Āsheghāneh*/*Romantic and Leilā,* marriage has often been imbued with a special significance in Iran, frequently representing the feminized relationship between Iran and her citizens. As such, marriage has often been a sight in which the state is able to exert much of its influence. This is also the case in literature, including film, where marriage can be defined by state ideology and yet it also works as a platform for Iranian citizens to discuss social reform.[173] The Pahlavi era (1925–1978) is known as a period of modernization while the Islamic Revolution (1979) brought traditional Islamic values back to Iran. The Reformist era of Khatami (1997–2005) represents a clash of these ideals. The film *Ātash Bas/Ceasefire*, directed by Tahmineh Milani in 2006, draws attention to this clashing and reconciliation of tradition and modernity in Iranian society and is embodied through the marriage of modern Sāyeh (Mahnaz Afshar) and her traditional suitor, Yousef (Mohammad Reza Golzar).

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[173] Amy Motlagh, *Burying the Beloved*, 5.

TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN MARRIAGE

We enter into this film with an already married Sāyeh and Yousef. However not all is well with their marriage. After mistakenly walking into a psychiatrist's office rather than the office of a divorce lawyer, the therapist convinces Sāyeh that he may be able to help her with her marital problems. This begins a series of flashback narratives describing how the couple met and fell in love, as well as the problems they faced in married life.

A very modern and spunky Sāyeh, working as an overseer, catches the eye of Youssef, an engineer. They meet frequently on job sites were they always seem to be playing mischievous pranks on each other, such as Sāyeh dumping what looks like un-mixed concrete powder on an unsuspected Yousef on the floor below. Two weeks later and on another site, Yousef retaliates by scooping Sāyeh in a wheelbarrow and dumping her into a pile of dirt. Several months later, the couple go to on a date where Yousef teasingly asks her about what she desires in a marriage partner. She responds that she would like someone like herself, an intellectual, stylish, generous, kind and beautiful. After Yousef jokingly leaves the table after saying that he does not fit those qualities, he turns back and says that he only has one thing to add, that he doesn't like her clothes. She says he'll get used to it. They are married in the next scene. From this point audiences can see the clash of modernity and tradition in the form of childish games between the two as they take every opportunity to settle the score with each other.

Although Yousef had seemed to fall in love with Sāyeh as she was, when they are married he demands that she not wear the same clothes as she had before – that is, semi-forming fitting clothes and pants. When she refuses he challenges her, saying that he will count to five and give her time to change her mind. He begins to count, "1…2…3…4…4 ½…4 ¾…" when Sāyeh interrupts him with "5." After calling a "ceasefire" on their glass breaking fight in the living room, Sāyeh walks into the closet to see Yousef on the floor cutting up all of her clothes that he thinks are inappropriate. The next scene shows Sāyeh cutting the lock on Yousef's closet – something he had undoubtedly secured there to prevent retaliation – and after, giving away all of Yousef's suits to random men gathered in their front yard.

In another scene, Youssef announces that he'd rather have Sāyeh not work, and be like his mother, a stay at home wife who cooks for him. When Yousef invited his family over for dinner, Sāyeh goes to great lengths to prepare a wonderful feast for them. Oddly enough, despite the fact that Yousef would prefer Sāyeh to play in this role, he decides to sabotage her food, sprinkling copious amounts of salt all over everything when no one is looking. However, Sāyeh has anticipated this move and before she brings the food out of the kitchen, she replaces it all with identical dishes she has hidden in various locations around the kitchen. Yousef is shocked when his family praises her for her cooking. In retaliation, Sāyeh

has painted fake bruises on herself to convince her mother-in-law that Yousef has hit her, causing him to be reprimanded publicly at the dinner table by his mother.

After many similar flashback scenes, in between which Sāyeh and the therapist discuss these events, Yousef finally finds Sāyeh in the psychiatrist's office. The therapist once again convinces the couple to let him help them, saying that he feels that they only have a communication problem. He recommends that they live apart for a week in order to decide if they would really like to work on their relationship. In one week they both decide to forgo the divorce and try to fix their marriage. From here, the therapist works with both Sāyeh and Yousef on their communication skills.

He believes that emotional health begins with embracing your inner-child, not being controlled by it, which speaks to the new forms of spirituality flourishing in Iran during this time.[174] During these sessions, elements of Iranian society begin to emerge. Yousef admits that while he is drawn to an educated and financially independent woman, he does not desire these qualities in his own wife, and that Sāyeh embodies the opposite of what he desires in an ideal wife. Sāyeh also admits to inner issues that affect her marriage, namely that she always knew her father desired a son. Because of this, she takes some joy in humiliating Yousef publicly. Sāyeh retreats to the Caspian see for vacation as Yousef dutifully spends ten days trying to reach his inner-child. After this period of time, the couple is able to come together and reconcile their differences, suggesting that modernity

[174] Nasrin Rahimieh, "Divorce Seen Through Women's Cinematic Lens."

and tradition can exist side by harmoniously if the people of Iranian are willing to communicate and understand the needs of each other.

Milani's emphasis on tradition and modernity, shown through the unmet needs of both Sāyeh and Yousef, speaks to one important solution: communication. By focusing on listening to the inner-child, and learning to understand what is needed for one to be happy also lends itself to learning when and how to make sacrifices for the needs of others. Authors who have analyzed this film claim that the focus on the inner child speaks to issues concerning the segregation of sexes at an early age, and how that can manifest into problems of communication later on in marriage.[175] Whether or not this is the intended message of Milani, one can guess that she believes that the onus for change lays with the men in Iranian society.

According to *Fīlm* magazine, *Ātash Bas* uses humor and jokes to criticize women's rights in Iranian's patriarchal society.[176] While this could be seen, then, as a women's film, it's important to not that none of her previous films are classified as such, and neither is this. Why then this sudden interest with women's issues? Journalists attribute this to the death of her husband, who previously had much control over the content of her films and prevented her from giving attention to specific societal issues in her film. While not formally classified as a women's film, it is important to note that *Fīlm* attributes the production of this

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[175] Nasrin Rahimieh, "Divorce Seen Through Women's Cinematic Lens."
[176] "Ātash Bas/Ceasefire" *Fīlm: Vīzheh-ye bīsto chāhāromīn jeshnehvarī-ye film fejār/Features of the 24th Fajar Film Festival, Fīlm* Vol. 342 (2006), 51.

film with the transformation of Milani as a director who crossed generic boundaries from purely comedic films. "With such ability and history of success, Milani escapes humor in creating a satirical film."[177] to satirical films.[178] Whether the change in genre helped Milani to reach new audiences that may have shied way form purely comedic films or not, critics have called *Ātash Bas* Milani's most successful film. Ticket sales for *Ātash Bas* climbed to almost 175 thousand U.S. dollars in its first month in the box office,[179] and critics expected it to be the one of the most successful Iranian films of the year.[180] Indeed, many women specifically wanted to see this movie again and again, sometimes up to five times in theaters.[181] The volume of ticket sales and discussion in *Fīlm* shows that the themes in this film resonated especially with women in Iranian society and that *Ātash Bas* was able to discuss women's issues although it is not classified as a *fīlmhā-ye zanān.*

CONCLUSION

As has been demonstrated, marriage in Iran is a particularly contentious topic, one that has made its way into various forms of societal discourse, from a religious duty presented in the *Qur'an* to sites of contestation in Iranian film. The reformist policies of Khatami have not solely allowed for films to become these

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[177] "Ātash Bas/Ceasefire" *Fīlm: Vīzheh-ye bīsto chāhāromīn jeshnehvarī-ye film fejār/Features of the 24th Fajar Film Festival, Fīlm* Vol. 342 (2006), 51.
[178] "Ātash Bas/Ceasefire" *Fīlm: Vīzheh-ye bīsto chāhāromīn jeshnehvarī-ye film fejār/Features of the 24th Fajar Film Festival, Fīlm* Vol. 342 (2006), 51.
[179] "Feroush-eh Fīlm-ha beh Riāl/Film Sales in Rial" *Fīlm,* Vol. 348 (2006), 106.
[180] "Ātash Bas/Ceasefire" *Fīlm: Vīzheh-ye bīsto chāhāromīn jeshnehvarī-ye film fejār/Features of the 24th Fajar Film Festival, Fīlm* Vol. 342 (2006), 51.
[181] "Dīgeh Che Khabar Khānum Mīlanī?/What Other News, Mrs. Milani?" *Fīlm,* Vol. 348 (2006), 86.

sites of contestation although they have undoubtedly allowed more freedom in the discussion of marital issues in film in combination with reforms made by Seyfollah Dad who became Cinema Deputy following Khatami. Analyzing media, like literature, is key to understanding how these negotiations take place in society.

Citizen consumers "also demand the right to participate – to be an part of the production, circulation, and interpretation of their culture and to exert a shaping role over the content of the popular culture that is such a formative influence and vital resource within their lives."[182] Due to the literary history in Iran that often plays with layers of meaning in a single text has a certain effect on Iranians, one that makes them uniquely predisposed to interpret literature and look for hidden meanings.[183] Looking at the popularity of films among Iranians sheds light on the issues that these citizen consumers consider important, ones that they are willing to engage with on the cinematic screen.

These films are different than the films in the previous chapter as women are seen to take a more active role in their marriage. In the previous films, Mashīd and Āfaq should have more control in their marriages due to their financial and social status before marriage and yet they are unable to obtain divorce – in Mashīd's case – or exist in a happy marriage – as in the case of Āfaq. However

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[182] Natin Govil, "Thinking Nationally: Domicile, Distinction, and Dysfunction in Global Media Exchange," *Media Industries: History, Theory and Method*. Edited by Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 135.
[183] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema*.

Leilā and Sāyeh are shown to be able to make more decisions with regards to their marriage, although the ending is not always happy as we see in *Leilā.* That women's agency increases between these two periods of reform indicates that the public responded better to these types of films because of the instillation of the statistics rating system. Also, that films focus on these prevalent societal issues and that the articles places the problem and solution in the hands of women Is indicative of a continued women's rights discourse in films that are not classified as *fīlmhā-ye zanān*

Conclusion

Many governments have often used cinema as a political tool, and this is no different in Iran. But while cinema may reflect political values and messages via government censorship laws and guidelines for films, filmmakers, producers, actors and many others in the cinema industry have used cinema as a sight of contestation, negotiation and resistance towards the dominant ideologies.

Women's issues that began during the Constitutional Revolution found fertile breeding ground under the Pahlavi regime due to its modernistic political and cultural agenda that often times directly aligned with the aims of these movements. During this time and up until the Revolution, the Qajar and Pahlavi Dynasties granted women the right to vote, the right to participate in the workforce and politics, and the right to receive an education. In addition, women benefited greatly from many changes to the Iranian Civil Code that improved their positions in society dramatically. As an important aspect of Islamic society, marriage acted as a physical site in which many of these legal changes took place, such as raising the marital age for women, granting women the right to divorce her husband under appropriate circumstances, taking the extra-judicial right from divorce away from men, and giving women rights in child custody. In addition to legal changes, marriage also played an important role in film in Pahlavi cinema in structuring Iranian society.

In film, marriage acted as a platform through with political values and ideologies were and communicated. In many of the films discussed in chapter one, marriage erased less than desirable qualities in men – read: Iranian society – such as vigilantism and

changed the men into respectable members of society because of their abilities to get and maintain wives. In this way, marriage acted as a physical site in film for the metaphorical reform of Iranian society. The political nature of film at this time due to the government censorship created a forum for women's issues to be discussed via the same metaphorical platform after the Islamic Revolution when women's movements were halted.

During the Revolution, women believed that the new government would reward their participation in ant-Shah demonstrations and movements with more open inclusion in society, but this was not the case. Although women symbolically occupied a very important role in nationalization projects, the government heavily regulated their participation in society, and their arena outside of domesticity decreased significantly from their previous situation in the Pahlavi Dynasty. During this time, regulations of film intensified as well, making it increasingly difficult to criticize or raise issues that the new Islamic Republic of Iran disapproved of, such as women's rights. Still, these issues found a way into Iranian cinema due to the imbedded nature of marriage in Iran, the inability of women's movements to mobilize on the ground, and the space that cinema created for discussion and resistance via the metaphorical platform of marriage.

While a content analysis of each film, *Āsheghāneh* and *Hāmoun,* can easily be linked to specific Iranian laws that could influence the story, it is the discussions found the in Iranian periodical *Fīlm* that ground each film in societal discourse related to women's issues especially because *Fīlm* is not commonly thought of as a political periodical. That each article, in both their analyses and criticisms, connects each film to a particular societal issue indicates that Iranians, similar to what Zeydabadi-Nejad

proposes, have a proclivity to decipher hidden messages in film. In this way, films that are outside of the *fīlmhā-ye zanān* genre, and are not generally classified as activist films, take an active role in enabling discussing of these issues. As this chapter has discussed, ignoring films outside of these genres would be to ignore films that have been successful in raising consciousness around these debates when women's movements were less open and active, and until regulations changed under President Mohammad Khatami.

The reform policies of Khatami in society and in the film industry allowed for more open discussion of social problems. While films projects had previously received government funding based on their educational and political values, Khatami along with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and the Farabi Cinema Foundation established a new rating system that promoted creativity. However it was the reforms of Seyfollah Dad that contributed to the genre *sīnemā-ye moslehāneh* that saw more open discussion of social, political and cultural problems. The films discussed from this period, *Ātash Bas* and *Leilā*, discuss issues more clearly, like the practice of having a second wife in cases of infertility in *Leilā*. However, these issues take on a more balanced view of how these issues affect wives as well as husbands, in comparison to the films discussed in the previous chapter that situate the protagonist as male as the victor while presenting more acceptable endings in the dominant Islamic narrative.

Placing each film in its historical context with relation to changes in the film industry, such as cinema regulations from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, show how these films were able to use marriage as a metaphorical platform for discussing issues related to women's rights. The articles found in *Fīlm* first demonstrates that

Iranians actively participated in making meaning of these films and second, that these films raised social consciousness when the government regulated activism. As a political tool, then, cinema in Iran has found a way to transgress government control in order to reflect the real concerns of Iranian society through the metaphorical site of marriage because it is embedded in Iranian society.

This thesis has attempted to place these films dealing with marital issues in the context of the film industry as well as the discussions and laws with relation to marriage. Without conducting interviews with the filmmakers themselves, it is impossible to determine exactly what their intentions were when creating their films, but it is possible to see the hints pointing that critique contemporary Iranian society and legal and social issues pertaining to women. There are many avenues not explored in this paper, one of those being the emphasis placed on motherhood in women's roles in Iranian society and how that manifests in Iranian cinema. Exploring this issue further would add to understanding women's roles in Iranian society, both past and present.

Most importantly, however, this thesis has demonstrated that we should conceive of films outside of their prescribed generic form in order to gain valuable insight into societies from films whose aims may not be to give these critiques and praises. What might be we learn about serious issue in society, say, from a film classified as comedy? When we begin to do open generic conventions, at least for the purposes of film analysis, we open up our understanding to the nuanced, subtle and often subconscious comments that these films make about particular practices and aspects of life.

Translation

Many of the spellings of Persian words used in this paper have come directly from other authors and sources, and those spellings have remained intact. For the spelling of the other Persian words included in this thesis, I have used the *Iranian Studies* translation scheme to the best of my abilities.

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