

Exploring Iranian Daily Life by Analysing Iranian Cinema

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September 2020

A thesis submitted to fulfil requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources has been acknowledged.

signature

Habib Allah Moghimi

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge that, though this is my own work, I have benefitted from copy editorial support from my supervision team and from a professional editor.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my primary supervisor, Prof. Catriona Elder, for her continuous support of my PhD study, for her patience, motivation, positive energy and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me throughout the research and writing of this thesis. Without her I would have never had the opportunity to continue and complete my education in Australia. I want to sincerely thank my principal supervisor, Dr. Ihab Shalbak, for his priceless guidance over the last two years. He had the initial idea for this research and provided great advice in shaping my theoretical framework. Also, I would like to thank my auxiliary supervisors, Dr. Bronwen Dyson and Dr. Susan Potter, for their insightful comments and encouragement at several stages of my PhD journey. Without their valued support, it would not have been possible to conduct this interdisciplinary research. Finally, this study would not have been possible without support from my family. My sincerest thanks go to my loving partner, Giulia, my caring parents, Amir and Ziba, and my encouraging cousin, Navideh. I dedicate this dissertation to my family and my city, Tehran.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have investigated Iranian films, including those from the Islamic Republic. They have considered different aspects of Iranian films, such as their artistic forms and their various sociological features including gender representation, and they have made connections between sociology and film studies. Despite the extensive sociological research on Iranian films and cinema, there is little focus in this scholarly oeuvre on the sociological concept of everyday life and its use to better understand daily life in Iran in relation to its films and cinema industry. The existing literature does include works on different aspects of daily life, but it does not analyse Iranian films through the sociological lens of everyday life. I believe this *gap* exists for three reasons: first, non-Farsi speaking scholars dominate in this field and they may have limited understanding of Iranian everyday life; second, Iranian Cultural Studies is very young. It was shaped less than a decade ago and usually the focus of Iranian cultural studies is more on interdisciplinary projects than sociology; third, film studies scholars exploring everyday life have tended to base their interests/framework focus more on texts and film studies theories rather than the sociological concepts. This thesis seeks to fill this gap and uses (1) a set of Iranian films as the mediating materials (2) the sociological concept of everyday life and (3) an innovative methodology involving the development of a cinematic Typology in order to explore daily life itself and not just its cinematic representation. Working with the concept of everyday life is important because it enables an analysis of film that moves beyond cinematic representation. It draws our attention to the politics of the present and helps us to explore the hidden social forces that shape our lives. For example, as it will be demonstrated in this thesis, it tells us why a specific film was produced, how and why it represents daily life, and what the relationship is between that film and Iranian society. Sociologically everyday life is valuable as a site of experience that mediates between nature and culture. Everyday life impels filmmakers to represent it even if they do not want to. Given the focus on the sociology of everyday life this thesis uses a creative methodology to steer clear of the traditional object–subject perspective; that is, here films are not the object of study. Rather, I explore everyday life in the context of power relations and I analyse Iranian cinema and the process of meaning construction discursively and in addition I describe Iranian daily life as a problematic (The notion of a problematic is explained below).

I have been watching Iranian cinema all my life and am very familiar with the field. For this PhD project I sifted through my memories and the extensive archive of Iranian film, I chose just over 100 Iranian films as my database. However, my analysis of the films will seem

different from what a film studies scholar/reader might expect. I cannot analyse all of these films in detail so I instead take a case study approach (This will be explained in more detail in my methodology). For me, films are, first, the gates to the Iranian everyday life to re-experience it, and second, the examples to support my arguments. For this reason, I wanted a large sample. That said, across this thesis I work with a handful of Iranian films or cases and explain the different social and political aspects of these films in their discursive context. As a result, of the large database and close readings I make detailed observations on film, cinema, and policy over a long period of time. This then enabled me to generate an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of the complex experience of daily life in Iran. This understanding is the first scholarly contribution of this thesis and appears as a typology model where I set out what I see as the key filmic signifiers. Then using this Typology Model, I analyse Iranian urban daily life by focusing on cinema as a representation of the social and cinema as a culture industry.

Based on this set of resources, this thesis aims to do two things:

1. The first is theoretical/methodological: to design a new theoretical framework for my analyses.
 - a. The new theory is based on exploring, problematising and reworking some existing theories of everyday life and linking them in their modified form to my methodology. By problematising schemas of everyday life as it appears in a set of relevant theories, I was able make a connection between micro sociology/sociology of film and macro sociology/sociology of cinema.
 - b. the new methodology (see Figure 4.1) is designed for interdisciplinary research and has broad application in exploring different aspects of everyday life through cinema and films.

The second aim of this research is to fill a gap in scholarship on urban Iranian daily life. There is a lack of comprehensive work in this sphere. By narrating the stories of everyday men and women in a discursive context, this research adds significantly to understanding of the Iranian quotidian. Drawing on the concept of everyday life as well as the role of individuals in the social and also 'Me' – the Author – this project takes a creative approach to the field of visual analysis in order to explore new questions for further research in academia. It grapples with new problems and finds answers to them in a new context, and as a result it produces new knowledge about Iranian everyday life.

2. As noted there is a significant body of scholarly work on everyday life. This thesis explores two different usages of the notion of everyday life and considers how it is distinct from 'daily life'. In this research, 'everyday life' understood as first, everyday actions and practices, second, as a signifier in discourse analysis, but third also as 'daily life'; that is, as descriptive and conceptual, as a mode which describes and combines the micro everyday routines and the macro role of discourses. Hence, in this thesis everyday life, like any other concept, does not have a singular meaning, but my theoretical and methodological understanding of the complex concept is articulated through the following formulations: the problematics of 'right to the city', 'terrorist society', 'money economy', 'boredom', and the 'representation' of everyday life. Given these aims, this research has three objectives:

1. First, to design an interpretive theoretical framework for Iranian everyday life studies and to apply this to produce a comprehensive understanding of Iranian urban daily life.
2. Second, to create a methodological approach in order to connect sociology of film and sociology of cinema, and to produce a more effective framework to explore the representation of everyday life in films. This is underpinned by an understanding that the sociology of film involves the sociological analysis of film as a text. I believe it has a micro perspective and it is used to analyse representations of the social in films. And that the sociology of cinema considers the structures of cinema as a social institution or as a culture industry.
3. Third, to apply this theory and methodology, (see Chapters Five and Six), in order to increase knowledge about the practice/representations of Iranian urban daily life, I use a range of films as case studies, in each chapter to explore a different aspect of the way these texts problematise everyday life.
 - a. In Chapter Five, The Representation of the Social, I explore various forms of censorship in Iranian cinema in terms of violence in everyday life. Here I focus on the censored films. By problematising censorship in Iranian films (what they do not show), I demonstrate that both what the films do not show and what they do show are important.

In the second part of Chapter Five, by focusing on Tehran (what the films do show), I discuss modernity and urban life in Iran. Here I focus on the most recent film genres in my list of fourteen key signifiers/nodal

points (see Table 4.1): (5) New Wave Cinema, (6) Social Films, (7) Children's Films, (8) Entertaining Movies, (9) Festival Cinema, (10) Poetic Cinema, (11) Underground Cinema, (12) Accented Cinema, (13) Independent Cinema and (14) Art and Experimental Films.

- b. In Chapter Six, I explore the culture industry before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. By considering the role of the bourgeoisie and tradition in Iran, I demonstrate the importance of the culture industry in shaping different genres such as (1) Filmfarsi, (2) Sacred Defence Cinema, (3) Value-based Cinema, and (4) Big Production Films (see Table 4.1). Further, by critically reviewing cinema as a culture industry, I uncover crucial factors, such as the conflict between honour and dignity, which have shaped the traumatic core of Iranian cultural identity.

To achieve my first objective (set out above), to design an original theory for my analysis, I problematise the concept of everyday life, which is about daily practices and daily decisions, in the context of the critical theories of everyday life of Henri Lefebvre and George Simmel. This problematisation includes exploring power and resistance in everyday life and shows the domain of meaning of subjects in critical theories of everyday life. This process of problematisation leads to the use of first, Simmel's description of the subject as two groups of individuals – the bored and the individualistic, and second, Lefebvre's idea of the subject and his description of subjects as social actors.

The second objective is achieved by my database and case studies to critically review cinema as the culture industry in order to analyse the representation of Iranian urban everyday life. In order to undertake this critical review, I use the Typology Model I created and map the mixed or complex discourse of Iranian cinema. Traditionally, writers have focused on only a small set of film types. One contribution of this thesis is that I have broadened the range of cultural products or types of film and demonstrated how to analyse them to better understand everyday life. This enables me to see the connections within and between different genres. Then, by drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis, I linguistically analysed the signifier of everyday life in this discourse of Iranian cinema.

To achieve my third objective (set out above) I connected the everyday life practices/decisions/realities and the signifier of everyday life through discourse analysis to

describe daily life. Daily life, as a descriptive concept, includes everyday realities and the representation of everyday life which highlights the role of discourses, including power and resistance, in the process of meaning making. That is, I simultaneously analyse the fourteen signifiers (the representation of everyday life in films) and the other signifiers (the realities of everyday life; see Table 4.1) to explain urban Iranian daily life. My findings, set out in Chapters Five to Seven, are that Iranian urban daily life is best understood in terms of five key themes: (1) traumatisation, (2) uncertainty, (3) victimhood culture, (4) dissatisfaction, and (5) boredom. These themes work in two ways. First, I see them as shaping the discourse of the Islamic regime and the Iranian cinema space; second, they also shape Iranian urban daily life. These themes are mostly rooted in the law of the Islamic regime and in modern life. By articulating how these themes work together I am able to show how they variously create a series of repressive forces in daily life.

However, where there is power – and here repressive forces - there is also resistance. This thesis also demonstrates the resistance of the subject and shows that their everyday practices (of resistance) also exist in the themes of traumatisation, uncertainty, victimhood culture, dissatisfaction, and boredom. I demonstrate that a second way these themes work is that the experience of living in this articulation makes everyday life a problematic rather than a banal concept. As a result, what emerges from this research is a second typology, this one is a typology of subjects. This typology is created in relation to two groups, (1) the precariat, and (2) the ‘poor middle classes’. It further classifies subject positions as (1) the democratic subject, (2) the bored subject, (3) the opportunistic subject, and (4) the marginalised subject. And, as I argue in greater detail in Chapter Seven, it is these subjects who reform the society through their daily life.

Bringing together the two aims and three objectives of this research, this thesis answers the following questions:

1. What are the main subject positions in representations of Iranian urban daily life?
2. What does Iranian cinema tell us about what is problematic about Iranian daily life?

Finding the answers to the above questions is important and necessary for the following four reasons. First, answering *What are the main subject positions in representations of Iranian urban daily life?* Will enable me to uncover some of the main problematics in relation to the concepts of modernity for a developing country like Iran. These problematics appear as the themes of the films, in their storylines and also in the genre that each filmmaker uses the most.

By focusing on this understanding of modernity, we reach the deeper realities of censorship and its effects on daily life. In this sense, this thesis is able to demonstrate that censorship is not just the rules enforced by a set of codes that seek to control the content of the films; but it also shapes a new aesthetic of everyday life if and when it becomes an element of violence in daily life. This thesis enables the reader to understand censorship as a moral decision, as a framing device and as such that in daily life citizen exists under the shadow of censorship and propaganda. Thus, by analysing the material role of the culture industry and also by focusing on the representation of the social, I can demonstrate a series of subject positions in representations of everyday life which can be applied and enable us to better understand what is happening in urban Iranian daily life.

Second, by posing and answering the question *What does Iranian cinema tell us about what is problematic about Iranian daily life?* It is possible to problematise the experience of modernity in one of the oldest, biggest, and most politically important countries in the Middle East. Through my reflexive narration and by paying attention to daily routines and the structures of society in a discursive context, I add to our knowledge about the process whereby daily life is shaped in history. That is, by drawing on specific process of Iranian modernity, the notion of urban life, the process of viewing cinema, and the development of Iranian films, I am able to demonstrate the specific circumstances that shape everyday life in urban Iran and so extend scholarly understanding of living within as Islamic Republic.

Third, and methodologically speaking, these questions are important as they draw attention to the importance of the technique of problematisation and reworking existing theories. These questions enable me to modify theories of everyday life in order to deconstruct representations of daily life in films and then use these conclusions to link to data and the material experiences of urban life. Bring these together the thesis illustrates the construction of daily life in contemporary Iran.

And fourth, from these questions I reach conclusions on how and to what extent Iranian everyday life is challenging. I demonstrate the role of a series of dominant discourses and ideologies in shaping daily life. In this regard, I am able to explain how uncertainty and precariousness of life in Iran shape this experience of modernity, and how this modernity acts as the basis by which the state shapes the modes of trauma that frame daily life. Henceforth, the problematics of everyday life are tied to subject positions and the decisions of individuals

in this situation; a situation filled with fear of the risks of modern society which can lead individuals to critically understand their everyday life reflexively.

Organisation of the Thesis

In undertaking my writing, I have ordered the thesis in the following way. Chapter Two is the Literature Review and also provides a background history of Iranian cinema. Chapter Three presents my Theoretical Framework. In this chapter, by problematising the various use of the concept of everyday life as set out in a series of key critical theories of everyday life, I design a modified theory for my analysis. Chapter Four is the Methodology. In this chapter, I explain my innovative Typology of key filmic signifiers of everyday life and link this to what I call the discourse of Iranian cinema and the articulation of everyday life. Chapter Five is titled 'Representation of the Social' and use my theory of everyday life to analyse the representation of daily life in film. Using a modified understanding of modernity specific to Iran it then expands our understanding of the meaning and practice of censorship in Iranian cinema. Chapter Six, 'The Culture Industry', explores two key signifiers from the Typology – Filmfarsi and Sacred Defence Cinema – in order to study the conflict between two key modes of - honour and dignity - in Iranian society. Chapter Seven, 'A Portrait of Iranian Urban Daily Life', again uses my modified theory of everyday life to describe daily life in Iran in relation to the five key themes of (1) traumatisation, (2) uncertainty, (3) victimhood culture, (4) dissatisfaction, and (5) boredom. The last chapter, Chapter Eight, presents conclusions on the findings of this research.

CHAPTER TWO: IRANIAN CINEMA AND EVERYDAY LIFE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Many works have been published on Iranian cinema in Farsi and in English. However, there is a methodological gap in the existing interdisciplinary research. Also, there is not a large body of sociological research on Iranian everyday life studies as this is a new area in the field of cultural studies in Iran. In this chapter, I discuss the existing literature on cinema and everyday life and explain how my thesis will contribute and build knowledge in both cinema studies and sociology of everyday life.

In the broad field of Iranian cinema studies, the most recent publication is *Iranian National Cinema: The Interaction of Policy, Genre, Funding and Reception* (2020) by Anne Demy-Geroe. This book examines thirteen years in Iranian film history, focusing on the years between 2000 and 2013, and like most of the existing literature uses the presidential terms¹ to explore cinema in different periods. This book concentrates on the policies and economics of Iranian cinema and accepts well-known films such as Jafar Panahi's *The Circle* (2000) and Asghar Farhadi's *About Elly* (2009) as the key signifiers films worth analysing in Iranian cinema. As noted, one of the aims of this thesis is to expand on the body of films used in studies of Iranian film in order to rework the classification of signifiers and open up the understanding of what is 'accepted' as key Iranian film. Demy-Geroe has been a juror at the Fajr International Film Festival since 2002, and she has used interviews and experiences in her book. However, as the author of this thesis and a person who also worked at the Fajr Film Festival, and who has met Demy-Geroe there, in this thesis I try to explain some of the main ideas or types of film and experience that her book and similar research did not cover. The main gap I expand on is daily life. A good way to explain the difference between my approach and that of Demy-Geroe is the Fajr Film Festival itself. All processes, including the choice of films and their stories, the process of filmmaking and the hiring of festival staff, are under the control of the regime. Further, during phases of the planning, and during the festival itself, there are unknown agents who observe the festival and the interactions between staff and international guests. This is part of the daily life of Iran and the Iranian cinema industry. There is a post-revolutionary Farsi expression in public culture which says, 'If you are in pairs and someone joins you, one of you is from the Ministry of Intelligence'. I am sharing my own experiences to show how a

¹ How cinema get shaped under presidency of a reformist or a fundamentalist president. further explanation is on pp. 28-32

totalitarian regime works. Even if there is no secret agent, you feel there is one. A totalitarian regime feeds on daily violence; it does not apply violence to gain something, violence is its essence. It is like the time that Anne Demy-Geroe and I were in the lobby of the Parsian Azadi Hotel where the Fajr Festival guests were staying. She asked me where she could buy some Iranian caviar. We were talking about the quality of Iranian caviar and as a joke I told her a conspiracy theory about the leader of Iran and caviar. ‘People believe that he everyday eats good quality caviar and this is why he has a long life.’ Meanwhile, I noticed a middle-aged man move closer and closer to us. It was obvious he was listening to us. Over the week of the festival, you get to know not only the festival guests but also the hotel staff and other hotel residents. You observe where people go, how they move. You read many stories at the hotel, from the way hotel staff steal little things (bottles of water, snack foods, etc.) to the way white guests practice the role of Big Other and enjoy the ‘hospitality’ of Iranians and the Taarof culture. When I noticed this man to us, I panicked and wrapped up my story quickly and left.

This moment showed me how a totalitarian regime works and how people who live this life can see something that others cannot. Anne Demy-Geroe never noticed about the middle age man who was behind her. And I was thinking how a joke can become a big problem; even if the middle age man was just no one. This is similar to what Atwood (2012) understands as a collective trauma – when complexities of censorship become a lived experience. In this research I try to uncover the not-so-obvious ways the state controls culture in Iran. I argue that exploring these types of micro practices helps us to gain a better understanding of macro structures. By taking a macro, top-down perspective, Demy-Geroe’s research can explore rules and structures, but it does not consider micro practices and is trapped in a dualism of freedom/unfreedom.

Demy-Geroe’s book (2020), along with similar research, also explores the law, practices of restriction and censorship, alongside the efforts of filmmakers who in their films try to challenge these boundaries. As a result, researchers tend to divide cinema into high-culture and low-culture films where high culture is represented by ‘avant-garde’ filmmakers (who are trying to challenge the regime’s rules) and international award winners, and low culture represents the rest (and by definition are not challenging the status quo). Further, researchers tend to focus on films in the first group. For example, as a film critic, if you talk about Abbas Kiarostami who won many international awards, you have first, writing a good piece of text because his films are intellectually rich, and second your article has more chance to be published in international journals and read by Academics and intellectuals. But if you write

about an unknown filmmaker and a bad commercial movie, you miss both of these chances. As a result, the choice of film has an impact on the production of academic articles. Further, as the film scholars and their methods are dominant in this field, this intensifies the importance of a certain group of films, their text and the textual analysis undertaken by the scholar. As a result, this approach does not examine the nature of the relationship between the representation of everyday life and the realities of everyday life in Iran. Most of this type of scholarship focuses on presidential terms — since these authors believe that a reformist president will bring more freedom to cinema. Researchers such as Mottahedeh (2008) and Naficy (2011a) clearly demonstrate how the films and filmmakers negotiate state control and how the state negotiates with foreign film festivals to construct its own political meaning. I would suggest that the logic of this type of analysis is that, those films which are produced under a reformist agenda have a better chance to raise the possibility of some type of negotiation about the concrete social demands of members of society. In response, in this thesis I try to demonstrate that using their approach at the end of the day there is no fundamental difference between a reformist and a fundamentalist president in the current Islamic regime.

Hamid Naficy (2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b) wrote a monumental, four-volume social history of Iranian cinema. According to Joyce (2010), social history is one of the convenient methods used in historiography in the United States, Canada and Britain. Social history has similarities to the *Annales* school in France. Social history's openness to ideas was evident in, for example, the reception and influence of European Marxism, the *Annales* history and American social science. Indeed, social history, in attempting to move beyond the narrowness of established political and economic historical understandings, was challenging and innovative. It had significant political energy because it took up big theoretical and political questions of its time in a particularly urgent way (Joyce, 2010, p. 215). I would argue, in keeping with Marco Ferro (2003), that what Naficy did was transform 'History' into 'history'. Naficy places Iranian films in the context of their hybrid cultural setting; that is, at the junction of Western and regional influences. In Naficy's work he divides his history of cinema into four eras and narrates this history from 1897 to 2010. The division of Naficy's book is inspired by *Annales* school historiography: Volume 1: The Artisanal Era, 1897–1941; Volume 2: The Industrializing Years, 1941–1978; Volume 3: The Islamicate Period, 1978–1984; Volume 4: The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010. In essence, this work is about Iran, cinema and modernity. Naficy analyses cinema in Iran in terms of social structure, focusing on cinema as a social institution and a symbol of modernity in a traditional society. He also analyses what he sees as

the dialectical connection between these two. Further, by investigating the network of relations between his experiences and sociopolitical events, he narrates the history of film in the context of the micro level as well. Naficy emphasises the role of the ordinary individual in the structure of society and demonstrates the accidental aspects of history. He maintains this idea of the accidental – which is one of the components of everyday life studies – in many aspects of this work.

Naficy also uses a reflexive style in his writing. In the preface of the first volume, he explains how it all began:

History is written by individuals who have their own personal intellectual histories and perspectives. This preface is a history of my engagement with the subject of Iranian cinema and its place in the world. It is not my autobiography or my family's history, but a cultural autobiography about my contentious love affair – and that of other Iranians – with cinema, Iran, and the West. (Naficy 2011a)

In this regard, this volume starts with the author's cultural biography, childhood, drawings, interests and even a photo (illustration 14) beside this comment: 'In a dandy move, the author wearing a "Duglasi mustache" and coiffed hair strikes a movie-star pose.' (Naficy 2011a). In all four volumes, the author maintains this self-reflexivity. Naficy is one of many Iranian intellectuals in the extensive diaspora. I suggest this means that self and otherness are two important concepts in his works. He not only focuses on 'self' (i.e., himself), he puts it at the core of his research and looks to the cinema as a conjunction point between the West (other) and Iran (self). He reviews and narrates the history of cinema from his position as an intellectual living in a diaspora. Due to this reflexive positioning, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* is an innovative piece of research.

Naficy says his publication is the outcome of his thirty years of work on Iranian cinema. He writes about his role as the narrator of this history and records many stories of Iranian filmmakers, writers, actors and many others who have been involved in film production. This is one of the brightest aspects of his study. However, this research is in the field of history. The book also narrates the history of Iranian films and some aspects of Iranian everyday life. My perspective and the structure of my work and its aims are similar to those that frame Naficy's work. But as a sociologist I use critical theories of everyday life and discourse analysis to explore questions such as the importance of genre in Iranian cinema and the creation of subject positions by dominant discourses. Basing my work on the core of his project, but in addition

by problematising everyday life in Iranian cinema I believe that we can get closer to the meaning of the Iranian urban daily life.

Another key book is Shiva Rahbaran's *Iranian Cinema Uncensored: Contemporary Film-makers since the Islamic Revolution* (2015). It focuses more on cinema as a global phenomenon. Rahbaran's book is made up of interviews with selected filmmakers who are known in the field as being international filmmakers or reformist filmmakers. Based on the situation that I have explained, the majority of English literature, particularly in film-director studies, consider Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Farhadi, Panahi and Ghobadi to be the prominent international directors, and overlook most of Iranian directors. Rahbaran argues that Iranian films became a global phenomenon despite censorship, sanctions and political isolation. She explains that censorship could not ban the filmmakers and in fact had a positive role in Iranian cinema in shaping it as a globally unique cinema. This is a common understanding of Iranian cinema; for example, Bahman Farmanara, observed, 'Well, I think the censorship codes have forced everybody to look at new ways of presenting their ideas' (cited in Dabashi, 2001, p. 134). Moreover, Negar Mottahedeh (2008) argues that censorship forces Iranian post-revolutionary filmmakers to create a new visual language. She insists that visual language is not necessarily universal and instead that sometimes it is informed by national culture and politics. Overall, her argument is that post-revolutionary Iranian cinema has become part of an ideological process. This perspective is based on the idea that the process of censorship can play a positive role in filmmaking. As a result, scholars such as Mottahedeh believe that filmmakers use cinematic language to convey their message in cinematic codes that bypass censorship. In this thesis I take the idea further and try to explain how a code might work in some contexts but not others and that not all codes are desirable.

The idea of a culture industry is a key term that emerges in scholarship on Iranian cinema and in theories of everyday life. The idea of a culture industry can be summarised as the production of similar and standard culture through modern instruments such as media to enable the ruling class to control and orient people towards acceptable behaviour and beliefs (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). In this regard, in Iran, hegemonic discourses have infiltrated all parts of the cinematic institution since the 1979 revolution. An example of research that focuses on the culture industry and helps my research is that of Ehsan Aghababaei (2016/1395), who studies the representation of family in Iranian films and compares it with the dominant sociopolitical discourses. He concludes that the discourse of the films he explores overlaps with the sociopolitical discourse of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. He uses Laclau and Mouffe's

critical theory as well as interaction theory. He focuses on twenty-four films, and by coding events and actions in these films analyses the representation of the family. By using discourse analysis, he is able to illustrate the discursive context of each decade. His research seeks to make a connection between the sociology of film and the sociology of cinema. For example, in order to link the sociology of film to the sociology of cinema, Aghababaei needed to link cinematic rules and policies, as the structure of cinema, to the cinematic representation of family in the sociopolitical context of those decades. I would suggest that because he uses discourse analysis, Aghababaei's research suffers from lack of reflexivity and critical perspective. Aghababaei is trapped in a methodology that does not let him uncover his role as an author. Moreover, this research does not demonstrate how the selected films as various signifiers are articulated in the discourses. In other words, what is happening is the authorities shape the meanings in everyday life, the films represent those meanings using cinematic language and Aghababaei then represents those meanings again in academia but this time using sociological language. In my analysis I take on the aspects of Aghababaei's work that draw on Laclau and Mouffe but adopt a different methodology, so I am able to take on the more reflexive aspect of analysis.

In the same vein, Azam Ravadrad (2010a/1389) focuses on the policies of Iranian cinema in the 1990s and 2000s. She clarifies that the governmental executives, cultural policymakers and filmmakers make policies according to their political attitude – be that reformist or fundamentalist – and all tend to ignore people's needs and instead consider their own political interests. However, she does not explore the process of 'making the people', nor does she explicitly explain who those 'people' she is talking about are and what their needs are. By way of contrast, Narges Bajoghli (2019, p.98) perfectly demonstrates this point and explains how the Islamic regime imagines the audiences and their needs. According to Bajoghli (2019), one of the reasons the regime imagines the people in a particular way is because Iranian cinema does not rely on audience measurement systems to assess the success of a film. Thus, their process of imagining a community constructs 'the people' in particular ways which I demonstrate this process in this research.

Hamid Reza Sadr (2006) illustrates the political history of Iranian cinema and the way that censorship has formed Iranian films. His book, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History* (2006), which is a political, social, and economic history of Iranian cinema, focuses on cinema as an industry and I use these ideas in my section of culture industry Sadr links the rise of Muhammad Reza Shah with a new genre of the pseudo-historical epic in the 1950s, and

attributes the emergence of ‘rags to riches’ stories and the prominence of characters from the professional classes to the importation of Western bourgeois values (Losensky, 2009, p. 522). He also provides different examples of the application of censorship codes which I also adapt to shape my section on censorship. By focusing on different eras and various films, he shows how socioeconomic issues affect the cinematic form as well. Sadr illustrates the cinematic developments through the lens of rapid urbanisation and the growing economic disparity between poor and rich. The relationship between urban life and films is explicit in his work. By focusing on different eras and various films, he demonstrates how the socioeconomic issues affect the cinematic form as well. He analyses the relationship between politics, nationality and cinema, but he overlooks important names such as poet and film director Forough Farrokhzad whose *The House Is Black*² (1962) is one of the most significant films in Iranian cinema. Also, he pays little attention to important organisations such as Kanun³ and its role in shaping Iranian cinema. Moreover, little attention is paid to the Iranian documentary films which played a significant role in the 1960s in Iran. It must be acknowledged, however, that as Sadr focused on cinema and nationalism, other approaches were closed to him.

Most of the Farsi and English research on Iranian cinema pay attention to historical events, cinematic policies, and political and social contexts. Further, the 1979 revolution is taken as the most crucial point for setting up most of this research. Scholars tend to divide the history of cinema into ‘before the revolution’ and ‘after the revolution’. For example, *The History of Iranian Cinema – From the Beginning up to 1976 (Tarikhe Sinamaye Iran Az Aghaz ta Sale 1357)* by Masoud Mehrabi (1992/1371), *The History of Iranian Cinema 1279–1357 (Tarikhe Sinamaye Iran 1279–1357)* by Jamal Omid (1995/1374), *Cinema in Iran 1900–1979* by M. Ali Issari (1989), and *Iran Cinema (Sinamaye Iran)* by Mohammad Tahami-Nejad (2001/1380) are all historiographies of Iranian cinema. By paying attention to this crucial historical moment, I try to illustrate a coherent story of Iranian cinema and Iranian society and also keep my distance from the binary of ‘before the revolution’ and ‘after the revolution’.

I believe that the regime of the Islamic Revolution tried to ignore the culture and history of the Pahlavi dynasty and any Persianate cultural elements. However, I also believe that by framing cinema in terms of the pre- and post- revolution traps us in an ideological binary. My idea is that by using a Foucauldian approach to writing the history of the present, I would argue

² *Khane Siah Ast* (1342).

³ Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults; founded in 1961.

we have to start from the present and move back to the past, and then when returning back to the present we need to interpellate the past to create the future. According to Garland (2014, p. 379), ‘Foucault’s writing of “histories of the present” demonstrate how historical research can be brought to bear on contemporary institutions in ways that are powerfully critical and revealing’. As a result, by following the mainstream understanding of history, scholars can end up ignoring daily life and the capacity of everyday life to create a change.

Compared to Farsi literature, English scholarship pay more attention to modern Iranian cinema. Further, by using a more critical approach, they consider the structural changes that took place in cinema and the society as well. For example, *Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic* (2016) by Blake Atwood considers the social contexts of cinema in Iran especially after the Islamic Revolution. In addition, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (2008) by Negar Mottahedeh analyses Iranian cinema after the revolution. Mottahedeh argues that there is a new language in Iranian films which is the result of the cinematic structures and societal rules that emerged after the revolution. However, as with the Farsi literature, these projects focus on films and cinematic policies and explore the way their chosen filmmakers try to convey meaning to their audiences. The focus of this body of research is on filmmakers and films that try to resist the strict rules and censorship in Iranian cinema.

There is an important monologue in *Under the Skin of the City* (2001),⁴ a film by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad. The vulnerable character in this film says: ‘Someone should come and film what’s going on right here. Right here! Who do you show these films to, anyway?’ As Blake Atwood (2016, p. 72) explains, this question evokes Bani-Etemad’s 1992 documentary, *Who Do You Show These Films To?*⁵ This monologue was based on a question from a vulnerable woman in Bani-Etemad’s documentary. Directly to camera, this everyday woman asked the filmmaker, ‘Who do you show these films to?’

Bani-Etemad’s film asked this question Atwood emphasised it, I expand this question and ask it again. While the existing literature on Iranian cinema is still trying to discover the relationship between fictional forms of cinema and the restrictions of documentary, by way of contrast, this research problematises daily life and asks who the marginalised people of these films are and how filmmakers represent them. It asks: what do these films have to say to their

⁴ *Zire Pooste Shahr* (1379).

⁵ *In Filmha ro be Ki Neshoon Midin?* (1370)

audience? Who benefits from the representations that appear in these films? Is it the authorities or marginalised groups of people? In this respect, by focusing on films I make a connection between the problematics of daily life and their representation in order to ask Iranian filmmakers, who do you show these films to?

It is also important to mention works such as *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema Aesthetics, Modernity and Film After the Revolution* (2001) by Khatereh Sheibani, which is underpinned by a combination of literary studies and film theory, *Abbas Kiarostami and Film-Philosophy* (2017) by Mathew Abbott which works in the discipline of film-philosophy, complemented by film theory, and *Zendegie Roozmare dar Irane Modern: Ba Taamoli bar Sinamaye Iran*⁶ (2009/1388) by Haleh Lajevardi. These books aim to delve into the films/text and for me these works are best classified under sociology of film. For example, Haleh Lajevardi who inspired me to write this research, in her book *Zendegie Roozmare dar Irane Modern* (2009/1388) uses the critical theories of everyday life. She chooses six films from the 1990s onwards to explore Iranian everyday life using the theories of Lefebvre and Heller alongside Habermas's ideas of the public sphere. She aims to read cinema as a text and seeks to use it to analyse Iranian everyday life. This approach, in contrast to Simmel's perspective in the *Conflict in Modern Culture* (1968), suggests that conflicts in modern life are not a naturally occurring phenomenon of modernity but are artificial and constructed. Critical theorists of everyday life such as Lefebvre believe that we have to resolve these conflicts. Given the approach they chose, Lajevardi, as she explains, seeks to reveal the hidden social realities and their roots which the ideology of capitalism tries to cover. She considers resistance at the same level as power in her framework, and by focusing on the public sphere tries to illuminate more spaces for resistance and the civil society. She believes that by using the critical theories of everyday life and analysing the role of the actors she can evaluate the role of the structures as well. Further, she claims that her study aims to frame an applicable theory of everyday life to Iranian society.

⁶ *Everyday Life in Modern Iran: Considering Iranian Cinema. (1388)*

The films Lajevardi selected for her study – *Unruled Paper*⁷ (2002), *Sara*⁸ (1992), *Two Women*⁹ (1999), *An Umbrella for Two*¹⁰ (1999), *Leila*¹¹ (1996), and *Under the Skin of the City*¹² (2001) – are all drama or melodrama. This fact drew my attention to these genres in Iranian cinema in relation to everyday life. However, she does not explain how she chose the six films, which were released between 1992 and 2002. It is hard to see the logic of this selection. Lajevardi states that she wants to explore Iranian cinema and the representation of everyday life in this cinema but limiting her case studies to six drama/melodrama films that though this work makes a valuable contribution this aim is not complete. By problematising the concept of everyday life, she tries to link the real life and its cinematic representation. However, she restricts herself to the selected films. Consequently, she aims to provide an explanation of modernity in Iranian society and explain how modernity is mixed with the ideological system of Iran. My research is shaped by her aims in this book, and I try to continue her unfinished project on Iranian everyday life.

As mentioned earlier, everyday life studies is a new area in the field of cultural studies of Iran. Scholars who could be described as using Everyday Studies include Hassan Naraghi, Maghsoud Farasatkah and Abbas Kazemi. And their books are *Jameshenasi Khodemani*¹³ (2001/1380) by Naraghi, *Ma Iraniaan*¹⁴ (2015) by Farasatkah, and *Parseh Zani va Zendegie Rozmareye Irani*¹⁵ (2016/1394) and *Amre Roozmareh dar Jameye Pasa Enghelabi*¹⁶ (2017/1395) by Kazemi. However, in the work they have produced there is an observable methodological gap. I would suggest that most of this research suffers from an invalid methodology. The main problem with Maghsoud Farasatkah's and Hassan Naraghi's work is their use of the idea of national identity. In their books they try to explain Iranian identity. To do so, they explore daily practices and provide historical evidence/stories. Their perspective on identity is that it is a predetermined concept, with a fixed meaning. It is an inherent part of

⁷ *Kaghaze Bikhat* (1380).

⁸ *Sara* (1371).

⁹ *Do Zan* (1377).

¹⁰ *Chatri Baraye Do Nafar* (1379).

¹¹ *Leila* (1375).

¹² *Zire Pooste Shahr* (1379).

¹³ *Intimacy Sociology*.

¹⁴ *We Iranian*.

¹⁵ *Wandering and Iranian Everyday Life*.

¹⁶ *Daily Life in Post-revolutionary Society*.

nationhood. However, for my research, I argue that discourses construct identities by providing individuals/communities with subject positions. Identities get shaped in the process of identification and in political articulations. That is, there is no fixed meaning for identities that we can call a singular national identity. Abbas Kazemi tries to discover Iranian everyday life by focusing on daily practices and daily objects. However, because he only uses a micro perspective, he cannot make connections between daily life and the political articulations which shape everyday life. In this regard, these researchers represent subject positions and the taken for granted as the real.

In conclusion, this section aims to help the reader understand different aspects posed by the research on everyday life and its relationship with Iranian cinema. It has demonstrated that scholars use various approaches to this matter, but still there is a gap in research problematising everyday life in order to frame it in relation to Iranian society and Iranian cinema. There has been much research and discussion on the different aspects of Iranian everyday life, Iranian films and modernity in Iran, but overall, there is a lack of scholarship that is about the problematising of daily life. This research, by problematising everyday life, using critical theories of everyday life, critical discourse analysis and a semiotic approach, makes a connection between the sociology of film and the sociology of cinema. Further, by considering the representation of everyday life in Iranian films, this research is able to explain the form of daily life in Iran.

Periodising Iranian Cinema

Amir Naderi's award for his film *The Runner*¹⁷ (1984) from Three Continents Festival (*Festival des trois continents*) at Nantes in 1985 was a turning point in the history of Iranian cinema. Since Iranian cinema gained world attention in the mid-1980s, Iran has been producing sixty to seventy films each year, and in the 1990s it was ranked tenth in the world in terms of quantity of production (Mottahedeh, 2008, p. 141). Consequently, film scholars generally consider the advent of modern Iranian cinema to have begun in the 1990s (Lajevardi 2009/1388). This section on the periodising of Iranian cinema is included in the literature review chapter in order to enable me to further explain how I will frame Iranian cinema and the representation of everyday life. This section also provides the background needed to understand the original

¹⁷ *Davandeh* (1363).

framing of films that I develop in my typology (This is explained in detail on pp.66-76). In the sections below, I follow the most commonly accepted periodisation of Iranian cinema and describe briefly the significant developments across each. This section also describes Iranian cinema in a social context in order to provide an overview of the context of this research and show how I have read the current meaning of the current periodization and the current understanding of genre. in the existing literature.

Construction Period: The Message (1989–1997)

President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, president of Iran 1989–1997, was the first post Iran–Iraq war president. He came to power a decade after the Islamic Revolution. At the time, he was the best-known economic thinker in the field of Iranian politics. Perhaps because of this, his presidency is today renowned as a period of construction; a period in which an economic infrastructure was formed that moved society away from the revolutionary ‘living simple’ slogans. Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, one of the founders and policymakers of the Farabi Cinema Foundation, explained that based on such thinking, culture and art were added as upcoming priorities under his direction (2016).¹⁸

During this period there were many conflicts about the representation of everyday life in films. The post-revolutionary society was broadly divided into two groups. One group was exhausted by revolution and war, so they were looking for a bright future, prosperity and happiness in society. The other group, which was attached to the revolutionary perspective, was trying to maintain and expand their Islamic values. One outcome of cinema production in this period was the release of more entertaining movies and romance movies. These movies introduced male and female stars into post-revolutionary Iranian cinema for the first time. At the same time, Sacred Defence Cinema, which had been aimed at persuading society to support the war in the 1980s, changed its theme and this ‘national’ genre began to illustrate the social effects of the war on society. Moreover, in this decade for the first time two fiction films were accepted by the Cannes Film Festival; *Zinat*¹⁹ (1996) by Ebrahim Mokhtari and *Through the Olive Trees*²⁰ (1994) by Abbas Kiarostami. Also, after sixteen years in which time Iran had not

¹⁸shorturl.at/wCMW6

¹⁹ *Zinat* (1374).

²⁰ *Zire Derakhtane Zeytoon* (1372).

sent any films to the Academy Awards (Oscars), *Through the Olive Trees* was sent to the Academy in 1995. However, it was not accepted as a nominee.

All in all, during the Hashemi Rafsanjani presidency, a consumerist discourse emerged that tended to influence the dominant revolutionary discourses. In the case of Iranian films, they began to represent and assist in the production of a consumer lifestyle. Moreover, through the increased production of romance and fantasy movies, cinema tried to expand its remit to include an entertainment function and to signal leisure and assign it a place in society.

Reform Period: 2nd of Khordad Cinema (1997–2005)

As a result of the seventh presidential election, Seyyed Mohammad Khatami became the fifth Iranian president with 69 percent of the total vote. Thus, an eight-year period called the Reform Period began. Most reformists believed that Khatami's victory was a victory for democracy and political development. When Mohammad Khatami was elected president in 1997, more Western and modernist formulations found their way into the official Islamicate values.²¹ This included such secular and modernist concepts as civil society, political transparency, pluralism, tolerance of opposing views, individual rights, women's public presence, equality before the law, and rule of law (Naficy, 2012a, p. 13). Khatami emphasised civil society and adhering to the constitution.

The historic event of the 2nd of Khordad (the date on which Khatami became president) changed many political–cultural relations of society, including cinema. The theoretical feature of this period, which is also known as 'After 2nd of Khordad Cinema', is the emergence of discussions about tradition and modernity in civil society (Tahaminejad, 2001/1380, p. 94). Many of the themes explored in these movies, which had not been seen before, were now allowed. Significant numbers of artists who had not had the opportunity to work in earlier years became famous in this period. Among the films that emerged in the '2nd of Khordad' period were *Red*²² (1998) by Fereydoun Jeyrani, *Two Women*²³ (1999) by Tahmineh Milani,

²¹ Hodgson (1974) used the term to describe cultural manifestations arising out of an Arabic and Persian literate tradition, which does not refer directly to the Islamic religion but to the 'social and culturally complex history associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims' (p. 59).

²² *Ghermez* (1377).

²³ *Do Zan* (1378).

*Hemlock*²⁴ (1999) by Behrooz Afkhami, and *Under the City's Skin*²⁵ (2000) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad. These films screened “sensitive” social issues such as divorce and women in higher education.

As noted, the main theme of the films in this period was confronting tradition and modernity. The confronting of modernity was done specifically through the lens of tradition. In this regard, these films represented everyday life issues in relation to this duality. The 2nd of Khordad Cinema problematised the role of women and youth in society, and many films in this period had a female protagonist. Also, some films subtly included political issues, for example *Protest*²⁶ (2000) by Masoud Kimiai. *Protest* narrates the story of Amir who is freed from jail after twelve years. It explores how he faces a new society which has been affected by the Khatami presidency. All in all, cinema in this period represents urban everyday life.

Social Justice Period: The Dark Times of Cinema (2005–2013)

One of the priorities of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the sixth presidency was eliminating the reformists who were in power. His government restructured many of the governmental institutions, and also restricted the activities of the media, political parties, and student reformist organisations. Ahmadinejad had the full support of the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei. In this period, after all the years of ‘dual rule’ in Iran, the president and the leader displayed a significant convergence of ideology. Moreover, Ahmadinejad had the support of the religious conservative groups, who were critics of cultural liberalism and Westernism during Khatami’s presidency. As a result, Iranian cinema was held captive by politics more so than in the previous period, and Iranian films encountered censorship.

The policy of the regime in regards to Iranian cinema during this period was to try to marginalise independent cinema and social films. As a result, in this period most of the films released were comedies and big production films such as *Deportees 1* (2007), *Deportees 2* (2009) and *Deportees 3* (2011) by Masoud Dehnamaki, *Saint Mary* (1997) and *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) by Shahriar Bahrani.

²⁴ *Shokaran* (1378).

²⁵ *Zire Pooste Shahr* (1379).

²⁶ *Eteraz* (1380).

Moderation Period: Variation Cinema (2013–now)

After Ahmadinejad's era, Hassan Rouhani became president. A moderate diplomatic Sheykh, Hassan Rouhani has been a key player in Iran's political scene since the revolution in 1979. His campaign slogan 'moderation and prudence' resonated with many Iranians who had seen their living standards, and their country's reputation, plummet under the previous government. He ordered The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to reopen The House of Cinema, which had been shut down under Ahmadinejad's presidency. Javad NorouzBeigi, the Iranian film producer, said in an interview: 'with the presidency of Mr. Rouhani we do not have previous problems between producers and filmmakers, also re-opening of The House of Cinema has created a kind of hope among artists and filmmakers and also minimised the cinematic disagreements.'²⁷ Most artists were happy with the new cinematic system. Many movies which had been banned now received permission to be screened. These included *Do Not Get a Reward from the President*²⁸ (2008) by Kamal Tabrizi, which screened with fifteen minutes still censored seven years after it was made, and *Tales*²⁹ (2011) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad.

Overall, in this period Iranian films provide various kinds of representation of everyday life. Despite this being a period of moderation, however, filmmakers are not permitted to speak directly against reformist ideas or fundamentalist thoughts. Consequently, audiences are confronted with more nuanced representations of everyday life in comparison to previous periods. Representations more and more focus on the precariousness of everyday life. Moreover, in this period there is more diversity in the film industry, which means the industry is producing more films, and this has introduced more actors, producers and directors and led to the building of more cinema halls.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the existing literature on Iranian cinema and everyday life and explored how it influences the argument in this thesis but also illustrating some of the gaps in this field, some of which this thesis will attend to. The chapter argued that many scholars tend to choose avant-garde filmmakers and the international award-winning films as the signifiers that best

²⁷shorturl.at/ahLU

²⁸ *Padash* (1394). The original name of this film was *Reward*.

²⁹ *Gheseha* (1391).

describe Iranian cinema; however, I suggest that not enough attention is paid to the non-award-winning films and the culture industry before and after the revolution in Iranian cinema studies. This research fills these gaps, particularly in Chapter Six. I set out the work on censorship and in Chapter Five, I expand our collective understanding of censorship in Iranian cinema and show its relationship to daily terror. I also demonstrated how the Islamic Revolution is a crucial historical event for many researchers, which I argue can lead their work towards a dualist approach (before/after revolution cinema). I believe this restricts the researchers' ability to narrate the history of the present and to problematise the notion of everyday life. I critiqued this perspective and explained its limitations through the accepted periodisation of Iranian cinema as the background of this research. I have concluded that at the moment the new field of Iranian everyday life studies lack a coherent methodological approach in pursuing its interdisciplinary projects. This research, by demonstrating an innovative approach in the Theoretical Framework and Methodology chapters applies this perspective in Chapters Five to Seven.

CHAPTER THREE: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter extends on the previous one and describes the theoretical framework I created that is applicable to Iranian urban everyday life. I created this framework by bringing together and extending the critical theories of the following theorists: Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe, Simmel, and Lefebvre. I used these theorists because by connecting their theories of the everyday to those of discourse analysis I was able to develop a framework that enabled me to productively explore everyday life and its representation, otherwise was hard to see various power relations of urban daily life in Iran.

This chapter has three main sections and within these sections I will introduce five main concepts. The first section is *Prefiguring a Framework*, where I set out two key concepts that make up my framework and methodology: (1) the idea of the *Problematic*, which demonstrates the importance of the process of *Problematization* in reading a theory and shaping a theoretical framework. The second section is *Discourse Structure*, where I demonstrate my approach that supposes everything exists in discourse and is constructed in/by it: (2) Notion of Discourse (3) In this second section I also explain my use of the idea of *Articulation*, an action which makes a connection between diverse elements such as concepts, signs, and behaviours; The last section of this chapter is *The Everyday Subject*. Here, I link the concept of the subject, as it appears in the critical theories of everyday life that I am drawing on, to a discursive understanding of subject. I do this in order to explain (4) *Notion of the Subject* in the process of subjectification. Finally, (5) the idea of *Making the People* can be used to explain, how populism in the process of subjectification and othering comes to represent ‘the people’.

Prefiguring a Framework

(1) The Importance of the Problematic and Problematization in the Sociology of Everyday Life

Critical theorists of everyday life, such as Lefebvre (1991), believe that by problematising everyday life we can enhance our understanding of the whole social life in order to reach a state of critical perception (Lefebvre and Goonewardena, 2008). By problematising everyday life, we create the problematics in everyday life. According to Kelly (2018), problematisation

is the process of reading a theory in order to create the problematics. These problematics³⁰ help us to uncover the ideological patterns which block us from developing critical thinking (Maniglier, 2012). Moreover, from my point of view, to maintain a balance between contextuality and sociological theory we need to use problematisation in our research. That is, we need to create the problematics of everyday life in a specific society and connect them to the problematics that are made visible in general theories of everyday life. Hence, the main point of problematisation is to actively consider how we, according to our social contexts,³¹ read a theory and conceptualise a theory focused on problems in order to outline what I call “daily life”. This section, by discussing the notion of the problematic and the process of problematisation, extracts from the range of theories of everyday life I have selected in order to adequately design a framework that enables me to conceptualise a productive theory of Iranian everyday life.

According to Maniglier (2012), the concept of the ‘problematic’ was created by Gaston Bachelard³² in his book *Le Rationalisme Appliqué* (1949).³³ This concept affected Althusser’s (1970) reading of the notion of capital and it is observable in the core of Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘episteme’. Also, it is clearly recognisable in Foucault’s use of ‘problematisation’. According to Garland (2014, p. 365), one can begin to write the history of the present by paying particular attention to Foucault’s method of problematisation. (Drawing on this idea of problematisation I will narrate the critical history of the present in Iran in Chapter Six.)

I believe the concept of problematic is aligned with many of the main approaches to the sociology of everyday life. It critiques the macro–micro dualism and highlights contextuality, as Maniglier (2012) explains:

‘Problematic’ as a concept initiates a critique of the subject–object relation in the explanation of thought in general and in science in

³⁰ According to contextuality, problematics can be unique or common in different societies.

³¹ Contextuality.

³² Bachelard’s *Grand Larousse de la langue française* locates the origin of *probématique* with Albert Camus. One indeed does find the term – once – in Camus’ 1951 book, *L’Homme révolté*. But Bachelard had used the term as early as 1949. I can find no trace of the term in Bachelard’s works before that date, nor indeed in Camus’ (though in neither case can I claim to have conducted an exhaustive search of their writings). Peden (p.297) reports that Balibar suggests Heidegger is the origin of Martin’s concept – though neither Peden nor Balibar specify any connection to a specific concept in Heidegger. Maniglier is at pains, however, to distinguish the concept from Heidegger. Yet there is at least one user of the word in French philosophy approximately as early as Bachelard, namely Paul Ricoeur (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to me Ricoeur’s early usage of the term *probématique*) (Kelly, 2018, p. 167).

³³ This book has never been translated into English, which shows how little the Anglophone world is acquainted with some key aspects of this corpus (Maniglier, 2012).

particular. To think is not to try to tell the truth about any particular given objects (be these living organisms, things in motion or brains), as if there was a world out there waiting for us to lay our eyes on it; to think is to try to solve specific, singular problems ... Neither objects nor subjects, neither things nor minds, exist primarily; there are only problems, which institute the very possibility of the correlation. (p. 22)

In keeping with a common approach of critiquing the traditional macro/micro dualism in sociology, the problematic helps me design a theoretical framework where everyday life is understood as a problem not an object. Moreover, in developing my framework I use the idea of the problematic to extend my analysis in order to demonstrate the problematics of everyday life in a discursive context.

Another idea that informs my theory is that the process of recognition constructs the meaning of everyday life (Foucault, cited in Rabinow, 1984). That is, there is no predetermined truth waiting for us to find it and recognise it (Kelly, 2018). I argue this is the definition of problematic. When I say everyday life is problematic, it means everyday life does not have any predetermined meaning that we need to grasp; rather, it means we - both scholars and actors in daily life actually construct its meaning. To construct this meaning, first, I choose the problematics in the critical theories of everyday life to construct the concept of everyday life for this research and second by analyzing the cinematic representation of everyday life and realities of everyday life explore the meaning of Iranian urban daily life. So, in developing my framework that is designed to analyse meaning making I use the idea of problematics (from the critical theories) to enable me to construct a framework/theory that will enable me to assess or explore how meaning is being made in daily life in urban Iran. Thus, when I write about a problematic, I do not mean that a truth exists out there and if we carefully explore a 'problem' we will reach the truth of this event. That approach is based on an understanding of a problem in an epistemological context. Rather, my framework is influenced by philosophers such as Foucault. Thus, in my theorizing a problem is not epistemological, though it does have an ontological dimension. Ontology relates to *being*, to what *is*, to what *exists*, to the constituent units of reality (Colin, 2011, p. 462). So, a problem gets a/or multiple meaning(s) through a/the process of becoming and construction. From this perspective no analysis is ever ontologically neutral because of the role of the author.³⁴ Based on this approach, the films that I chose, the

³⁴ Discussed further in Chapter four, Reflexivity section.

typology of fourteen signifiers I have developed, and the theory of everyday life I adopted make up the problematic(s) that I articulate in order to demonstrate the main problematics of urban daily life in Iran. It is important to recognize that, everyday life in different societies, different historical periods, and based on various discourses, and different theories will have diverse meanings. And to understand the meaning of the everyday life, we have to construct its meanings. My analysis of Iran is specific, accordingly, this process of meaning production is about the process of recognition as well. The process of meaning production needs to include consideration of a specific context, that is contextuality, sociological theories, and the sociological approach.³⁵ I believe that in order to maintain the balance between contextuality and sociological theories, we need to use a notion of problematic and the process of problematisation.

Discourse Structure

(2) Laclau and Mouffe's Perception of the Notion of Discourse

Another important concept that underpins my theoretical framework is that of discourse structure. Placing the idea of discourse beside that of social structure(s) may seem controversial and raise questions for the reader. One may ask if in the theoretical framework I am developing I have been equivocal about the main concepts of structure, discourse, subject, actor, and individual that I am using. To clarify my approach, I must mention some points. Firstly, when I engage with critical theories of everyday life I understand that according to their theoretical logic and in terms of consistency, I could use the notion of social 'structures' to theories aspects of everyday life. However, as explained in the earlier section on problematics my framework is based on an assumption that everything exists in discourse. Describing the approach of the set of critical theories of everyday life I am working with from the in terms of linguistics, these thinkers consider social structure as having a fixed meaning. For these scholars, social structures shape individuals, their subjectivity, and their everyday life. In this regard, in order to give meaning to individuals and their subjectivity, these theorists use a different conceptual approach to the one I am developing. So, in terms of the problematics of everyday life each of these theorists and their theories provide different understandings of individuals, subjectivity, and everyday life. For example, as will be explained in more detail later in this chapter, Simmel writes about the bored individual. That is, he believes that the money economy and social

³⁵ This refers to reflexivity, which is discussed in the next chapter.

structures destroy individuality and thus shape individuals as bored. In terms of the approach, I take in this research, the relationship described by Simmel is understandable in relation to concept of a subject position. Extending on Simmel and by using different understandings of the subject (actor, individual), and by focusing on structures within discourses, I have developed additional and different subject positions, that is I am arguing by including an analysis of discourse we can see a range of different subject positions are visible. The problematics of everyday life according to the selected critical theories of everyday life help me to uncover these subject positions and support me to understand the decisions of the subjects as well as the forms of the subjectivity. To make this clearer, I will now discuss the notion of discourse.

Focusing now on the concept of discourse in Foucauldian terms the first point that needs to be made is that at the heart of the idea of discourse is the presumption that any meaning is not available in advance but is produced in a process and by language. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) discuss, we use the notion of discourse to show that every social configuration is meaningful:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence. (p. 108)

Discourse is concept to assist scholars to understand social relations, culture, government, and politics. Nothing can exist without discourse. Discourse is talk, language in use (such as in a newspaper or book), and human meaning-making activities (such as art and films). So, discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) development of the idea of discourse includes a notion of articulation which makes up another important part of this framework, they start their section on articulation and discourse in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* as follows:

... we will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we

will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated. (p. 105)

Drawing on the concept explained above and building the description of my framework I would note that in this thesis: I use the idea of problematics of everyday life in order to show how I define the concept of everyday life. I use Laclau and Mouffe to explain, first, articulation as a practice that produces change and second, the accumulated articulations create a structured totality they call discourse I also set out in a typology the key signifiers that I understand as shaping the Iranian cinematic space. Then drawing on a set of films as examples that illustrate these signifiers and which can be analysed to represent how everyday life is represented across film. In this section I have begun to demonstrate how the problematization discussed earlier happens in a discursive context. Like Laclau and Mouffe I use the concept of discourse to demonstrate the ways that discursive practices produce meaning.

Laclau and Mouffe's perception of discourse links micro and macro practices through their argument that the meaning of everything is discursively constructed. By definition this means there is no non-discursive construction of meaning, including meaning that is transmitted from the top down. Discourse can be produced by individuals and in institutional settings. Discourse is not a closed system where meaning is already ordained. Therefore, it gains new meanings and constructs new meanings and identities. In this theoretical framework everyday life is understood as a set of practices in the discourse where new meanings about life in post-revolution urban Iran can be constructed. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), changes in discourses cause changes in the social world.

They argue through their use of Saussurean linguistics, that discourses create a social world by, and through, language. In this respect, they suggest language does not just represent the world but creates it as well. Based on this idea they argue that to explore reality we have to explore discourses. In their philosophy the relationship between reality and discourse is constitutive. For Laclau and Mouffe historical, social, political, and desires all are constructed in or through, discourses. Changes in discourses, which happen as a result of different articulatory practices, cause changes in the meaning of particular historical, social, political, and desires. Further, discourses, according to their relationship with one another, change their articulations and system of representation in order to produce or reconstruct meanings.

(3) Articulation and the Signs

The next important part of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory I use is their idea of a set of linked concepts that form a systematic and also flexible structure in cultural analysis. This section reviews how a discourse operates to maintain its coherency and become hegemonic. One of the most important concepts in discourse analysis is articulation.³⁶ Articulation was defined in the previous section and now I set out in more detail the ways in which articulation shapes discourses. I also explain how discourse shapes the operation of dominance and power in the social world.

Laclau and Mouffe (cited in Jørgensen & Louise, 2011) explain:

Specific articulations reproduce or challenge the existing discourses by fixing meaning in particular ways. And because of the perpetual potential polysemy, every verbal or written expression (even every social action, as we will see later on) is also, to some extent, an articulation or innovation; although the expression draws on earlier fixations of meaning – that is, it draws on discourses in which the signs have become moments – the expression is never merely a repetition of something already established (p. 29).

What Laclau and Mouffe are suggesting is that articulation can change the prior meaning of elements within a discourse and lead to the production of a new identity. This means that meanings that exist within a discourse are attained from the relationship between various elements within the discourse. In other words, through a set of articulatory practices discourses contain a coherent set of concepts and represent individuals in a way, where they are collected around a nodal point. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) nodal point is a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered (p.113). Other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to a nodal point.

Frederic Jameson (1993) also discusses the idea of 'articulation'. For him the idea of articulation stands as the name of the central theoretical problem or conceptual core of cultural studies. Jameson (1993) argues that an articulation is a punctual and sometimes even ephemeral totalisation in which the planes of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality intersect to form an operative structure (p. 32). For Jameson this articulation is always a complex structure. In his world articulation signifies the relationship between different signs, concepts, and individuals that [together] construct the [dominant] meanings of a discourse and that shape its

³⁶ This is expanded on in the next chapter.

structure in relationship to other discourses. That is, for Jameson the logic of a discourse is shaped by its articulation, that is by the relationship between the various signs in the discourse. In other words, discourses are the articulation of a coherent set of signs, concepts, and individuals that are gathered around a central/dominant signifier (Dabirmehr and Fatmi, 2014).

A 'signifier' is an abstract or real entity, concept, statement, or sign which in a specific discourse has a specific meaning. The referred meaning is understood as the 'signified' (Saussure, 1983). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) contend that all signs gain their meaning in relation to other signs. They (1985, p. 112) call the central signifier a 'nodal point'. From here all other signs gain their meanings according to their relationship with the nodal point. They call the signs that are articulated in relation to the nodal point and gain their preferred fixed meaning within a discourse as 'moments'. They make a case that the signs in a specific discourse that have no fixed meaning and that can have a number of meanings are called 'elements'. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 111), the articulatory practices that take place within a discourse are praxes that seek to transform all the elements to moments. They describe this attempt as a process of 'exclusion'.

In this regard, we can understand Laclau and Mouffe as arguing that discourses try to fix the meanings of its signs through the process of articulation. They do this in order to construct a singular identity and to maintain the coherency of the discourse. To do so, a discourse has to exclude all other possible meanings and only select the meanings it understands as imaginable. All the possibilities that the discourse excludes in order to transform all the elements to moments and to fix meaning within it are called 'the field of discursivity' by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 111). Therefore, the field of discursivity is a collection of meanings removed in the process of articulation. However, these meanings still exist and be taken up in the discourse in the future in a different articulation.

The transition from the elements to the moments is never completed (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p. 110). Discourse is not a closed unchangeable system with a singular meaning, although it does establish a type of 'closure', a temporary stop to the fluctuations through the stable meaning of the signs (Jørgensen & Louise, 2011). In this closure, the concept of a 'floating signifier' emerges. A floating signifier is a signifier without a referent. With a floating signifier what happens is that it attaches to a temporary or multiple signified(s) and other signifiers try to make sense of it. (Laclau, 1990, p. 28). Different discourses try to attach their own preferred meanings to floating signifiers. This means that each discourse works to marginalise the meanings of the competing discourses and try to fix its own desired meaning.

Essentially, a floating signifier is an element which can be perched in a range of different discourses but with different – even opposite - articulations across the discourses (Critchley & Marchart, 2004).

The main goal of a discourse is to fix the meanings of the signifiers and become hegemonic. So, a hegemonic discourse is a discourse that has transformed its elements to “moments” and also temporarily fixed the meanings of its floating signifiers. It is the process of articulation that produces the preferred meanings to the signifiers within a discourse, and by making all the signifiers hegemonic, the discourse becomes hegemonic. signifiers and discourses are not simply textual and the fixing of signifiers takes place through structures of power – for example the police, law, censorship bodies, the creation of regimes based on fear – and this enables the fixing of meaning and hegemony. Therefore, discourse is a result of hegemonic articulations.

The Everyday Subject

(4) Laclau and Mouffe’s Perception of the Notion of Subject

Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser theorised the subject as a social construction. Foucault argued that subjects are created in and through discourses. That is, he refuted the creation of a theory of the subject in phenomenology and existentialism. This refutation, in contrast to the dualism approach to understanding the subject, theorises the concept of the decentered subject. So, in Foucauldian terms a form of power applies itself to everyday life and constructs individuals and their identities. For Foucault this form of power is not ideology. He suggested bio-power and explained identity as a way of exercising power in everyday life. However, Laclau and Mouffe found ideology helpful in explaining social identities. When exploring the notion of the subject Laclau and Mouffe argue the main function of ideology is actually subjectification. Therefore, a question that arises is how does ideology create the subjects? The central thesis of Althusser’s theory answers this question. Ideology interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects. Ideologies, through the process of interpellation, place the individuals in specific positions in order to give them an identity and construct desires for them, and so transform them from individuals to subjects. Thus, ideology in the process of interpellation subjectifies the individuals and subjugates them without repression or violence.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) have explored the idea of interpellation in relation to discourse analysis and argue that ‘interpellation’ means ‘subjects become positions in

discourses. Laclau and Mouffe also argue that subjects are subject to interpellation by discourses.³⁷ As a result, they explore ‘subject positions’ and suggest that subject positions are decentred and in need of political articulation. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), explaining how they use the notion of subject positions Laclau and Mouffe note they use the category of ‘subject’ in the sense of ‘subject positions’ within a discursive structure and understand that

all ‘experience’ depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility. (p. 15)

The discursive characteristic of a subject position does not determine the type of relationship it may have with another. Each subject position is shaped by discursive conditions that are not sufficiently determined, since various discourses locate subjects in different positions. Therefore, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985) a subject is ‘the subject before identification’. That is, the identities of subjects are determined by discourses based on the subject positions that, in turn, have been determined by various discourses and not by subjects themselves. Based on this argument it can be stated that, discourse interpellates³⁸ subjects through the representation³⁹ of the available positions within discourse and subjects identify themselves according to the subject positions and the meanings constructed within that discourse. Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of subject positions shows that there is no agency for subjects since their positions, identities, values, and meanings are constructed within a discourse and the subjects are in these positions as a result of their positioning within a discourse.⁴⁰

³⁷ The difference between Laclau and Mouffe’s perspective and Althusser’s perspective is rooted in their different approaches. Althusser understands ideology from the structural Marxist approach, but Laclau and Mouffe perceive it from a post-structural point of view.

³⁸ Many theorists, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1979), David Gauntlett (2002), Judith Butler (1993), Laura Mulvey (1975), and Fiske (1987), have taken Althusser’s notion of ideology and interpellation and applied it to various kinds of media texts.

³⁹ According to the principles of discourse analysis, Hall (1997) demonstrates that meanings, signs, and concepts are constructed for signifiers in representation systems. By creating the concept of ‘systems of representation’, he demonstrates that representation is part of the cultural circulation which comprises the elements of production, consumption identity, and rules. In this regard, using a Foucauldian approach he considers the relationship between power and knowledge and proves that institutions and constructions are sites for supporting the dominant discourses. In fact, he demonstrates that the function of representation is the same as the function of interpellation: representing the subject positions. For example, dominant discourses of the Islamic Republic of Iran use the site of Iranian cinema to represent the available subject positions in the discourse. At the next level, for example, a genre such as melodrama is a social position in the discourse of cinema as well.

⁴⁰ This understanding is similar to Althusser’s notion of ideology.

Laclau and Zac (1994, p. 31) expand on the Foucauldian⁴¹ concept of subject positions. Referring to Lacan's psychoanalysis, especially the concept of subject as lacking,⁴² they argue that subjects are essentially fragmented and decentered. Their concept of subject is understood as not totally inside a structure nor out of it, but as in an existing gap⁴³ in the structure. In this regard, the subject in Laclau and Mouffe's philosophy is defined as the distance between 'the undecidable structure and the decision' (1985, p.xii). This idea is influenced by the notion of a 'Lacanian subject'.⁴⁴ They are suggesting that a subject tries to achieve a sense of meaning/identity that produces a sense of being "full" and permanent, but this fails.⁴⁵ That is, a subject⁴⁶ needs to be understood as a signifier that has not been signified. This is where Laclau locates the subject, at the moment of decision beyond structure (1994). As a result of antagonisms⁴⁷ and dislocations,⁴⁸ Laclau and Mouffe argue the subject goes through an identity crisis and has no choice but to reidentify.⁴⁹ This means for them a subject is understood as 'the distance from undecidability to decision' (Laclau, 1990, p. 76). So, it is structural forces that create subject positions, and the decision is the cause of the subject. A subject can be understood in terms of the political, the ontological and as constituted through an individual. But a social subject position is best understood as objective and constituted through hegemonic

⁴¹ In archaeology (Foucault, 1972), there is a strong emphasis on the positioning of subjects in discursive formations. Individuals should not be regarded as the source of the statements; rather, they were positioned by them, as is the case with the other 'levels': the objects, the concepts, and the strategies (Hansen, 2015, p. 6).

⁴² In the Lacanian sense, 'the subject' is the name for this internal limit, this internal impossibility of the Other, of 'substance'. The subject is a paradoxical entity which is, so to speak, its own negative, i.e., which persists only insofar as its full realisation is blocked – the fully realised subject would be no longer subject but substance. In this precise sense, subject is beyond or before subjectivation: subjectivation designates the movement through which the subject integrates what is given to him/her into the universe of meaning – this integration always ultimately fails; there is a certain remnant that cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe, an object which resists subjectivation, and the subject is precisely correlative to this object. In other words, the subject is correlative to its own limit, to the element which cannot be subjectivised. It is the name of the void which cannot be filled with subjectivation: the subject is the point of failure of subjectivation (that is why the Lacanian mark for it is S) (Žižek, 1990, cited in Laclau, 1990, p. 254).

⁴³ The structural gap is considered to be a source of freedom.

⁴⁴ A failed subject that has experienced trauma.

⁴⁵ subjectivity is precisely based on this constitutive experience of 'not-being', of something which is missing (Hansen, 2015, p. 4).

⁴⁶ At this stage, Laclau abandons the Foucauldian notion of subject positions explained in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and reaches a more precise distinction between the notions of subject, identity, and identification.

⁴⁷ Antagonism is defined in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* as 'the limit of all objectivity', a fundamental moment of negativity: the task of hegemonic struggles is to 'suture' or fill in this constitutive emptiness (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp. 88, 125); dislocation is presented as the failure of a structure to achieve closure.

⁴⁸ In *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990) Laclau tried to develop the notion of negativity based on deepening the moment of dislocation prior to all forms of discursive organisation or overcoming.

⁴⁹ 'The subject can only build an identity through acts of identification' (Laclau, 1990, p. 76).

ideologies. A subject does not have a predetermined identity; rather, it gains content/meaning in the process of identification.

(5) Making the People: Popular Subject and Democratic Subject

In *On Populist Reason* (2005), Laclau explores the political aberration of populism to better theorise the concept of the ‘popular subject’. He demonstrates that populism has always been a vague concept in social analysis and suggests that instead of asking, ‘what is populism?’, we need to ask, ‘to what social and ideological reality does populism apply?’ He criticises the functionalist or structuralist paradigm’s perspectives which consider the social aspects of a group but not its political construction, as the basic unit of social analysis. Laclau also criticises sociological perspectives that assign a meaning for the individual, given that, as he has demonstrated, the individual is an empty signifier divisible into social subject positions.

Another idea that is important in this discussion is the one Laclau (2005) makes about populism. He demonstrates that populism is ontological, and that its specific meanings are constructed in the process of becoming. Therefore, populism is best understood as the result of an articulation of social practices. To explain these social practices, Laclau focuses on the concept of demand in two senses, ‘request’ and ‘claim’. He explains that the difference is in their articulations. In a process of demand qua request, all demands are satisfied one by one through a democratic process. That is, the source of power tries to maintain coherency and reduce the effects of social antagonism. But in demand qua claim, those with power cannot or do not want to satisfy claims. In this case, people’s demands transform into social movements and protests in an antagonistic way (Laclau, 2006, p.654). As a result, different social groups which may have different demands get together, temporarily in a response shaped as ‘us’ against ‘them’. This creates what Laclau refers to as an “equivalence chain” that is shaped by all the unanswered demands of a community (Laclau, 2005, pp. 110, 146 cited in Krips, 2012). Laclau then adds to idea of naming as an important step in populism:

Populism turns ... around the following theses: (1) the emergence of the ‘people’ requires the passage – via equivalences – from isolated, heterogeneous demands to a ‘global’ demand; (2) since, however, this passage does not follow from a mere analysis of the heterogeneous demands themselves ... something qualitatively new has to intervene. This is why ‘naming’ [that is, the introduction of collective signifier] can have [a] retroactive effect If social forces are the aggregation of a series of heterogeneous elements brought

together through political articulation, it is evident that the latter is constitutive and grounding, not the expression of any deeper underlying movement [nor, we might add, a mere appearance]. (p. 252)

I would suggest that in Laclau's framing there are two different subjects that emerge: the democratic subject, which appears as a deferential subject; and the popular subject, which appears through solidarity of the demands in the chain of equivalence. This means the notion of "the people" is constructed through an antagonistic condition in populism. Specifically, they are constructed when "the people", that is the collective subject, appears on a line dividing society into 'us' and 'them'. So, to defend the subject and the agency, that appears when political subjects draw on are subject to different articulations, we must discuss how the concept of "the people" is represented in various articulations.

Having set up my approach to the idea of subjects, now I will link my philosophical notion of the subject to the critical theories of everyday life that I am engaging with. To do so, based on the context and reflexivity of my research, first, I will illustrate how these theories explain everyday life through the of problematics. Second, I will draw on Simmel and Lefebvre's understanding of the individual in order to demonstrate some limitations of their ideas in my aim of describing Iranian everyday life. In problematizing their theories, I explore how they define everyday life and what are the main problematics they use to explain everyday life and the subject. To reiterate the ideas that underpin this research I note again that my understanding of everyday life is based on what Laclau and Mouffe demonstrated as 'the gap in a structure', and what Lefebvre explains as the role of the individual in constructing the city, that is individualistic subjectivities, and emotions such as boredom.

What I problematise in Simmel's work are his ideas of boredom and the money economy. For Simmel, the problematic of money economy colonises our everyday life and reduces qualitative values to quantitative ones. This problematic leads him to create his main approach to modernity. He believes that through the growth of modern culture, the "objective spirit" eliminates the "subjective spirit" (Simmel, 1903 cited in Sennett, 1969):

The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life. (p. 46)

Based on this problematic, Simmel argues that in this condition we encounter two kinds of people: bored individuals with a blasé attitude who perceive themselves as a worthless object; and, in contrast, individuals who strive for uniqueness, an attitude that moves them towards extreme individualism (Simmel, 1903). I call the first one the bored subject and second one the opportunistic subject.

Using, but modifying Simmel's perspective, to explain the problematics of Iranian daily life I use his idea that a money economy contains values, money, and individuality. In this regard, as daily life in Iran, is under the influence of the money economy I apply the notion of social interactions to explore hidden aspects of urban Iran. Further, to Simmel's approach I also identify signs of modernity in family relations, different lifestyles, homewares, and the effects of gentrification, that is, modes of micro sociology. Through this process I contextualise "daily life" in Iran. For instance, famous actors/actresses and celebrities in cinema changed audiences' perspectives on cinema; cinematic magazines and newspapers and online independent cinematic websites produced new groups of cinephiles in Iran. The heyday of *Filmfarsi* is a good example of this process (and I develop it in Chapter Six). Another example is the fictional puppet protagonist, *Kolah Ghermezi*,⁵⁰ which created a new experience of movie-going for Iranians after the war. It also created a wave of diverse goods featuring *Kolah Ghermezi*'s picture. This fictional puppet has been tied to the history of Iranian cinema and everyday life for a long period. In terms of consumption, the other example that I develop in Chapter Five is the process of converting the traditional Bazars to the modern shopping malls in Iran. Finding everyday phenomena, such as having a puppet of *Kolah Ghermezi* in one's car, as well as making a connection between its [the puppet's] past and present, is an example of how this research will illustrate the tangible space of everyday life in urban Iran.

Therefore, I use Simmel's theory to draw attention to the process through which daily interactions, the money economy create society and vice versa. Moreover, to create the typology of the subjects that emerge in this research I deploy Simmel's assertion that in the modern era two types of individuals have been created, the bored ones and the individualist/opportunistic ones.

Henri Lefebvre is the main theoretical inspiration for this research. This French Marxist philosopher and sociologist is well known for his pioneering project on everyday life. Lefebvre believes that social agents can change everyday life. He argues that even within ordinary

⁵⁰ Red Hat in English.

alienated life an individual has some capacity for changing society. Michel Trebitsch, in the preface to *Critique of Everyday Life*, translated into English by John Moore (Lefebvre, 1991) writes, [B]y making alienation the key concept in the analysis of human situations since Marx, Lefebvre was opening philosophy to action: taken in its Kantian sense, critique was not simply knowledge of everyday life, but knowledge of the means to transform it.' Lefebvre states: 'Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life.' In terms of agency, by relying on Laclau and Mouffe's theory, I have argued that "structural gaps" are the source of freedom for subjects to make decisions. In Laclau and Mouffe's theory this means a subject has agency. Lefebvre believes that we have to change daily life if we want to change the world. Lefebvre argues that the macro structures of society force, control, and encircle social agents (position them in limited subject positions) but that social agents can also demonstrate resistance in this relationship (that is a capacity for decision-making). This connection occurs in the realm of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991). Therefore, using Lefebvre's ideas I argue that we have to use any means (democratic/popular) at our disposal to revive civil society and everyday life. He emphasises changing everyday life, believing in the key role of subjectivity and the function of art in this process.

Thinking about Lefebvre's ideas the problematic that I choose from Lefebvre's theory to shape my theoretical framework is that of, 'the right to the city'. I do this because of how he imagines the social role of social actors. That said, I problematize his concept of a 'terrorist society' modifying it so it better explains censorship in Iranian cinema and terror in everyday Iranian life, which is one of the main social forces that represses "daily life". By concentrating on cities, which are the most commonly used contexts in Iranian films, this research argues there is something that might be called "the right to the city" and based on this it investigates the relationship between power and the subject in urban Iranian daily life. Moreover, Lefebvre's ideas on making changes in everyday life and his utopian approach help me to understand the utopist regimes and populism in Iran and to write this critical history of the present in Iran.

To conclude, based on problematics I derive from Lefebvre's theory, I problematise Iranian everyday life using ideas of the 'right to the city', and 'terrorist society'. Moreover, modified versions of Simmel's ideas of 'boredom' and 'money economy' which underpin his theory of modernity further help me to explore Iranian urban life. Also, according to my critical discourse analysis approach I will seek to demonstrate how the 'representation' of everyday life shows the ways in which everyday life is constructed by discourses and how subjects come

to positioned within discourses. As explained given my approach a subject does not have a predetermined identity. My framework is also shaped by some of the problematics Laclau and Mouffe's theory describe, in particular the 'democratic subject' and the 'popular subject'. Using their idea of demands I will argue that if a subjects follow a demand qua request, they are democratic and if they follow the demands qua claim they are popular. According to this framework overall I am arguing a subject position is a discursive condition and in need of a political articulation. Subject positions are constructed in the process of subjectification and representation. applying this framework to the set of films I have selected my analysis seeks to reveal the gaps in the structures that shape urban Iran. The structural forces contain gaps in which freedom/resistance can exist and which can also shape Iranian everyday life.

Lastly, according to Simmel's problematics of everyday life, I use the bored subject and opportunistic subject to explain what is happening in Iran. By applying the set of problematics, I have outlined above and applying them to Iranian cinema, I will in this thesis explore the range of subject positions that Iranian films try to construct in the process of subjectification and representation. However, before I do this. in the next chapter I will set out my methodology. This includes explaining how I understand the process of representation as discursive and in relation to the realities of everyday life (Table 4.1). Key to this methodology I my development of a typology of signifiers of Iranian cinema.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Methodologies for Exploring Everyday Life

Sociologists tend to study everyday life through two perspectives: field and text. By focusing on field, specialists usually use a phenomenological or ethno-methodological approach and try to illustrate the nature of daily life (Psathas, 1980). They understand everyday life as a banal, repetitive world. By focusing on text, researchers explain how artistic works, such as novels, film, music, painting, and so on, represent everyday life (Rogers, 1984). This textual approach can be divided into two main types: the first is critical everyday life studies based on the theories of Henri Lefebvre and the second is semiotic analysis based on Gramsci's theories. These textual studies, most of which are based on Gramsci's theories, are influenced by post-structural ideas and particularly theories of Michel Foucault (Morton, 2003). Given this, they seek to understand everyday life in the context of power, resistance, and strategy. Generally, most of this research pays more attention to the discourse than the role of the subject, or, by relying on de Certeau's philosophy, they understand daily practices in terms of resistance/tactics, which I argue has a reductive effect on the perceived consequences of resistance.

With this in mind and thinking about my methodology given the focus on film and cinema, in this project I will explore 'daily life' in a discursive context. Therefore, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of daily life, I combine the representation of everyday life and the realities of Iranian urban life. That is, I draw on discourse theory to set out the articulation of Iranian cinema, the representation of everyday life in Iranian films, and the realities of everyday life. Reality is always mediated (mostly by language). Recognizing the conditions in which I undertake my analysis and so reflexivity assists in producing productive and meaningful analyses. So, I understand everyday life as a discursive articulation. In this chapter I demonstrate that reflexivity is a supportive perspective in articulating daily life. (I do this in the sections titled *Reflexivity*.)

In this chapter, I connect the theories I set out in the previous chapter –Simmel's and Lefebvre's understandings of the subject – to Laclau and Mouffe's method, which includes techniques such as semiotic and discourse analysis. To do this, an additional– and first - methodological step is required. The discourse of Iranian cinema needs to be mapped. This step reflects a major contribution of this thesis and will be described in detail later in the chapter. But, in short, it involves the development of a matrix which classifies what I see as the

fourteen nodal points that make up the discourse of Iranian cinema (These key signifiers are articulated by other signifiers in the Islamic Republic's discourse that shape the everyday life, as explained in Table 4.1.). In this matrix I use various films as the signs of the different political and social contexts that give the research its legitimacy and that open up wider democratic discussions. The connection of my theoretical framework, Laclau and Mouffe's method and the matrix enables me to connect micro sociology and macro sociology. I then deploy this methodology in the body of the thesis (Chapters Five to Eight) where I connect daily practices and the representation of everyday life in films to cinema within the discourse(s). I summarise this process in one diagram. Figure 4.1 explicitly shows the role of the author in the production of knowledge. It explains the relationship between cinema and sociology and critically analyses the discursive contexts that shape Iranian everyday life. The diagram is based on reflexivity and contextuality.

Principles of the Methodology

Representational Theories and Discourse Analysis

For Hall (1997), representation is the production of meaning through language and so, logically, meaning is produced within language, in and through various representational systems. In Hall's framework, language works as a representational system as well. According to Hall (1997), a set of processes connects concepts, objects, and signs in the system of language. He demonstrates that two processes, two systems of representations, are involved. Hall (1997) explains the process as follows: first, the concepts classify the world into meaningful categories in our mind – this is how we know the meaning of a concept; second, by using the signs in various articulations through a language, we represent the meaning that we have in our mind.

Signs convey meaning and translate our concepts into language and vice versa, just as if we possess codes. These codes, which are crucial for meaning making and representation, do not exist in nature; rather, they are rooted in our culture and social life. These codes, for me, are the different sections of the research, and I explore them by problematising the notion of everyday life. Hence, in this research I do not follow the reflection theory, which posits that language acts as a mirror and reflects the accurate and correct meaning of the world. A researcher cannot represent the social world as a mirror because he or she uses language.

Overall, the system of representation – as explained by Hall – includes three connected processes. They are the production, distribution, and consumption of meaning. These linked processes are associated with one another within a regime of power. So, when I ask how everyday life is represented in Iranian films, the heart of my question is: what is the meaning of everyday life, and how is this meaning produced? I also seek to know what discourses consolidate this meaning and what discourses distribute this meaning.

Any text is generated under certain conditions, thus is connected to its creator. Any text is related to a source of authority. According to Jørgensen and Louise (2011), Chouliaraki (1995), and Condor (1997), it is the researcher who decides that a project should be carried out and who defines what it should be about. This researcher also coordinates the whole process. By analysing and choosing Iranian films, I, the researcher, seek to explore what ideas have a monopoly over shared Iranian knowledge of film productions, who is silenced and what kinds of films are not categorised as part of Iranian cinema. I intend to set up a dialogue with the chosen films in order to create a platform that will enable me to bring together sociological knowledge, filmmaking, and understandings of everyday life in order to explore the process of meaning construction in films and everyday life in the context of contemporary Iran.

If I am to do this, I have to understand and tackle my own knowledge production. As Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory claims, texts always contain assumptions about how the world is, and in discourse theory terms, the production of a mode of objectivity is unavoidable (1985). That is, texts are ideological and not neutral. Further, a text can be viewed differently by different people. Texts should be viewed as a meaningful whole, but this meaning is not necessarily in the text. So, texts do something to the world more than just describing it. In this research, I analyse Iranian films as the text and Iranian cinema as the producer of this text, and I consider both in the context of everyday life. I seek to show how everyday life is represented in films. I explore how Iranian cinema discursively highlights its preferred meanings of everyday life and how it suppresses undesirable meanings of that life. I critically explore the concept of everyday life and critically explain my process of knowledge production in this research.

Reflexivity

Discourse analysis aims to deconstruct the structures that we take for granted; it tries to show that the naturalised organisation of the world is the result of political processes with social

consequences (Jørgensen & Louise, 2011, p. 48). As was developed in the theoretical chapter, the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, besides being based on different understandings of subject in critical theories of everyday life, also provides a conceptual framework for the consideration of the process of meaning construction within discourses. In this research, this process is focused on trying to articulate the meaning of Iranian urban life.

But who is going to represent this process? Who is going to articulate the meaning of Iranian daily life? How can I reveal common-sense understandings of a society that I am part of? Jørgensen and Louise (2011) demonstrate this representation as the common problem of the discourse analysts:

The discourse analyst is often anchored in exactly the same discourses as he or she wants to analyse. And, under all circumstances, the discourse analyst is always anchored in some or other discursive structure. Although discourse analysis is about distancing oneself from these discourses and ‘showing them as they are’, in this kind of theory there is no hope of escaping from the discourses and telling the pure truth, truth in itself being always a discursive construction. (p. 49)

According to Jørgensen and Louise (2011), researchers have tried to deal with this problem through a process of reflexivity. This is what I do in this project, although I take a new approach (summarised in a diagram, see Figure 4.1). I designed the diagram in the hope that it can solve the problems of the filmic discourse analysis research that will follow. Hence, in the following section I explain my diagram, but first I will demonstrate the need for reflexive consideration of the role of the researcher in knowledge production to clarify the main perspective behind my methodology.

Reflexivity is an attempt to take into account the researcher’s own role in knowledge production, an issue that arose in light of the relativist premise inherent in social constructionism. It seeks to figure out how to respond to a belief that one’s own knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (Jørgensen & Louise, 2011, p. 198). In constructionist theories, the researcher can never be ‘a fly on the wall’ who just sees things as they are. Rather, in the context of knowledge production, researchers are understood to produce reality and at the same time to represent it.

All in all, I have chosen the problematics of everyday life in the critical theories of everyday life to show what the concept of everyday life means in this research. I chose the

films and different experiences and references to articulate the meaning of Iranian everyday life. As Figure 4.1 shows everyday life is in the center and I articulate various signifiers to interpret their meanings. I try to show this process for example in the Table 6.2 where I set out how I understand the mainstream ideas in Filmfarsi studies and how I provide a different perspective to this existing set of ideas. I am suggesting here that a process of reflexivity can show the process of problematisation.

Mapping the Space: Developing a Classification System for Exploring Iranian Film

This section explains the process of classifying the texts used in the research (films, policy, etc). Extending my model of reflexivity and problematisation, I developed a matrix of fourteen key signifiers which reflect my classification (knowledge production) of Iranian cinema in the context of Iranian everyday life. These key signifiers are: (1) Filmfarsi, (2) Sacred Defence Cinema, (3) Value-based Cinema, (4) Big Production Films, (5) New Wave Cinema, (6) Social Films, (7) Children's Films, (8) Entertaining Movies, (9) Festival Cinema, (10) Poetic Cinema, (11) Underground Cinema, (12) Accented Cinema, (13) Independent Cinema, and (14) Art and Experimental Films. These are what I understand to be the key signifiers of Iranian cinema, but because of the articulation there are further signifiers in the Islamic Republic's discourse which give meaning to these fourteen key signifiers. For Film Studies scholars these look like descriptions of film genre but in sociology and in this research they do slightly different work and so call them signifiers (See these categories in Table 4.1.).

The Dataset: Selecting the Films

To begin with, I had to define a data set from amongst a huge set of Iranian films and other secondary texts. It is clear that selecting the films in this research in terms of data collection is one of the most difficult tasks. Today, Iran produces more than 100 films each year; before the revolution, it produced about 20 films per year. Given this research covers 50 years of film production in Iran, it involves more than 5000 films. I had to select those films that could help me to take a step forward in this research. Without watching a film, it is difficult to choose, so I watched many films and after discarding some of them I selected those that I believe are productive signs for each concept I wanted to work on.

One limitation in this research is that many of Iranian films are not available. Some are old, pre-revolution films and there is no proper archive to preserve these films. Some were produced outside Iran and only screened at festivals or in small, local settings. Some films are still banned and it is not possible to view them. Those films which had larger audiences and were more popular or won international awards were easy to find. Reviewing the literature, reading the synopsis and the film reviews also helped me choose the films. Fortunately, I have watched many of the films in the past and I am very familiar with Iranian cinema. This knowledge made it easier for me to select the films.

According to Munhall (2007), in qualitative research we look for ‘what’. That is, what sample can be meaningful in our research. So, the quality of our choice is more important than quantity. I had developed a set of the key signifiers - the matrix - to categorise the data. I therefore needed to choose those films that were signs for these fourteen nodal points.

First, based on the fourteen key signifiers, I used a process of cluster sampling⁵¹ and divided the films into different groups. I also used judgment sampling⁵² and quota sampling⁵³ for Chapter Four. This strategy helps me choose the case studies that provide important information to assist in answering the research questions. In the section *Tehran and Modernity*, I work on Underground Cinema, Art and Experimental Cinema, Accented Cinema, and Independent Cinema. From within these categories I selected those films whose title includes the word ‘Tehran’. In the section *Censorship and Terrorist Society*, I worked with the same categories but selected films that have been banned or censored; films that have been forcefully suppressed in Iranian cinema. Here I use politically important or sensitive case sampling,⁵⁴ because in this case I am only working on marginalised films. Moreover, based on quota sampling method, I chose the available censored and banned films that can expand the meaning of censorship in Iranian cinema and society. Consequently, the selected films, provide useful information. Given my constructive approach I argue the films shape the meaning of the categories; but categories also shape their meanings and support the arguments of each section.

⁵¹ A method of survey sampling which selects clusters or subgroups such as those defined by area of residence, organisational membership, or other group-defining characteristics (Jupp, 2006, p. 29).

⁵² This is where the researcher includes cases or participants in the sample because they believe they warrant inclusion (Taherdoost, 2016, p. 23)

⁵³ Quota sampling is a convenient method of research that data is collected from a homogeneous group and allows the researchers to sample a subgroup.

⁵⁴ According to Patton (2002), any sampling is a political act. The sampling in this research tries to draw attention to specific films.

Consequently, this sampling approach expands the theories and expands the meanings of the concepts. In Chapter Six, again using cluster sampling, I selected and analysed Iranian films from the categories of Filmfarsi and Sacred Defence Cinema. For this analysis, I again used the approach used in Chapter Four, which is selecting films that will expand the theories and meanings of concepts. However, I used a simple random sampling process⁵⁵ and, also used typical case sampling,⁵⁶ I constructed a sampling frame to analyse the hegemonic meaning of Filmfarsi and Sacred Defence Films as the Iranian culture industry. This sampling helps me to demonstrate the expectations of the culture industry and the process of meaning construction within it. But as I also wanted to pay attention to resistance in everyday life and heterogeneities, I added deviant case sampling⁵⁷ in the selection process in order to explore marginalised narrations. This selection of films helps me to expand our understanding of the culture industry in Iran.

Given my intention to explore how Iranian films represent Iranian urban everyday life and at the same time to consider how Iranian everyday life shapes Iranian films, the entire oeuvre could have been used. But I had to decide: which films? and which everyday life? I had to devise a method for choosing and classifying films. Is it reasonable to see one Iranian action movie and claim that Iranian everyday life is full of action stories? Is it reasonable to focus on a love story and claim that Iranian everyday life is full of love stories? As I discussed, and according to Hall (1997), representation is the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture through the use of language, signs, and images which stand for or represent things. So, I had to clarify the process of representation, the context and the articulation of the films I use in this research. I needed to define Iranian cinema but more importantly explain how I understood the discourse of Iranian cinema. In the end, I identified and developed a matrix of fourteen important key signifiers in the organisation of Iranian cinema. I sorted each of these key signifiers/nodal points according to their articulations and related discourses in order to provide meaning to the floating signifier of everyday life. This process happened on two levels. First, I explored how the key signifiers construct the meaning of Iranian cinema within the discourse of Iranian cinema. Second, I articulated how some films take on different meanings in chains of equivalence when they are combined with other signs.

⁵⁵ In this type of sampling, all cases of the population have an equal probability of inclusion.

⁵⁶ This type of sampling involves looking for the cases which are not unusual. In this research, I looked for typical cases that could illustrate the key aspects of Filmfarsi as they are manifest under ordinary circumstances.

⁵⁷ Finding unusual and different samples.

Developing a Matrix of the Key Signifiers

In this section, I explain how I came up with the key signifiers and then clarify what these fourteen key signifiers are and what they refer to in terms of the chains of equivalence, historical context, cinematic language and Islamic Republic Discourse. Following from the discussion in in the previous chapter, the below table sets out the articulated signifiers in relation to these fourteen key signifiers/nodal points of Iranian cinema. Each of these articulations are discussed below.

Nodal Points/Key Signifiers⁵⁸	Other Signifiers
Filmfarsi	Social Reconciliation, Bourgeoisie, Leisure Time, Persianate, Family, Honour, Proletariat, Sexual Objectification, Dignity
Sacred Defence Cinema	Social Justice, Anti-capitalism, War, Martyrdom, Social Mobilisation, Family, Islamic Law, Anti-American, Anti-Bourgeois, Dignity, Pure Islam, Mysticism
Value-based Cinema	Shiite Islam, Social Justice, Anti-capitalism, War, Martyrdom, Social Mobilisation, Family, Islamic Law, Insight, Islamic Jurists, Marginalised Groups, Tradition, Western Enemies, Seditious ⁵⁹
Big Production Films	Shiite Islam, Anti-capitalism, War, Martyrdom, Islamic Law, Insight, Islamic Jurists, Anti-American, Western Enemies
New Wave Cinema	Social Justice, Anti-capitalism, Literature, Lefties, Social Issues, Critique
Social Films	Construction Development, Privatisation, Tolerance, Rationalism, Institutionalisation, Citizens, Democracy, Social Freedom, Women's Rights, Uncertainty, Social Issues, Critique, Hypocrisy, Unfaithfulness
Children's Films	Leisure Time, Family, Social Memory, Happiness, Hope
Entertaining Movies	Leisure Time, Ridiculousness, Love, Hypocrisy, Sexual Jokes, Social Issues
Festival Cinema	Literature, Rural Life, Poetry, Uncertainty, Anti-war

⁵⁸ In general film terminology, these are often called genres. However, this term does not fully define what is being described in this analysis and therefore I use the term signifier.

⁵⁹ The Green Movement was labelled seditious (*Fetneh*) by Ayatollah Khamenei.

Poetic Cinema	Mysticism, Literature, Rural Life, Poetry, Simple Life, Peace, Children
Underground Cinema	Uncertainty, Democracy, Independent Art, Anti-Islamic Regime, Reform, Social Issues, Critique
Accented Cinema	Privatisation, Uncertainty, Democracy, Reform, Anti-Islamic Regime, Social Issues, Critique
Independent Cinema	Social Issues, Privatisation, Uncertainty, Reform, Unfaithfulness
Art and Experimental Films	Privatisation, Uncertainty, Reform, Independent Art, Experience, Social Issues

Table 4.1 Matrix of Key Signifiers

Filmfarsi

Filmfarsi is a cinematic term used in Iranian cinema criticism. It was coined by the Iranian film critic, Hushang Kavusi (Ejlali, 2016/1395). This term describes low-quality films with poor plots and mostly featuring dancing and singing. In my classification, the sign Filmfarsi signifies song and dance, plots that involve scenes of sex and seduction that combine Western genres with some local flavour. It was a popular form of cinema before the 1979 revolution. These were entertaining films and, as part of the culture industry, were the pillars of propaganda in the Pahlavi II period. (Ejlali, 2016/1395). They brought the bourgeois lifestyle of movie-going into Iranian everyday life.

With its fantasy tales, Filmfarsi tried to convey a contemporary message to its audience; to maintain the coherency of the family as the symbol of the country, and to maintain the status quo (Partovi 2017). Filmfarsi tried to hide social inequalities and manipulate a social reconciliation in order to ignore social conflicts. However, Filmfarsi was not successful in its mission and the revolution happened in 1979. Because of the poor quality of Filmfarsi movies in terms of authenticity, not enough consideration is given to this important genre in film studies and sociological research. Analysing this genre and exploring Filmfarsi movies can help clarify which ideas are dominant in Filmfarsi productions, why the films are ignored by academics, artists, and the Islamic regime, and the nature of the relationship between Iranian urban everyday life and cinema in the context of Filmfarsi.

After the revolution, Ayatolla Khamenei (cited in Algar, 1981), in his first public speech, talked about cinema as follows:

We are not opposed to the cinema, to radio, or to television; what we oppose is vice and the use of the media to keep our young people in a state of backwardness and dissipating their energy. We have never opposed these features of modernity in themselves, but when they were brought from Europe to the East, particularly to Iran, unfortunately, they were used not in order to advance civilisation, but in order to drag us into barbarism. (p. 258)

This means that some signifiers related to Filmfarsi refer to discourses or events that have no place in the new Islamic world. As part of the Pahlavi apparatuses, Filmfarsi carried the meaning of corruption and ‘Westoxification’⁶⁰. To construct the new meaning for cinema within the Islamic discourse, a new articulation was needed. Islamic discourse of Iranian cinema was shaped in opposition to Pahlavi’s discourse. By saying no to the objectification of women, Western consumption, American entertainment, representation of dance, music, alcohol, free relationships, and so on, ‘Pure Islam’, under the slogan of ‘neither West, nor East’, started to build its own discourse of cinema. It tried to shape its own culture, norms, values, and meanings. That is, by rejecting, deconstructing, and dislocating the previous meanings, it articulated the new meanings of Iranian anti-imperialism. However, I recognised ‘dignity’ as the common signifier in the Pahlavi era and Islamicate period. Dignity is articulated in different contexts by different meanings in both eras. In Chapter Six, I demonstrate how the Iranian culture industry before the revolution and after it problematises dignity but in different articulations. Two years after the revolution, the Iran–Iraq war started.

Sacred Defence Cinema

Sacred Defence Cinema is a good example of how a new discourse can be articulated through signs and meanings in terms of the problems of everyday life during the Islamic regime. The key signifier Sacred Defence comprises the values of the Islamic Republic as represented in Sacred Defence films. Sacred Defence Cinema is the sign that best connects everyday life to Iranian cinema during the eight-year war. Sacred Defence was an official representation of the solidarity of a nation in resisting despotism and corruption. It showed a nation after a revolution opposing corruption, social inequality, and imperialism from an invading country which had the support of Western countries. It illustrated the articulation of a new social identity around noble signifiers like independence, freedom, and dignity.

⁶⁰ Refers to “gharbzadegi” by Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Also used in *Selected Messages and Speeches of Imam Khomeini: From October 1980 to January 1982* (Tehran, Iran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance, 1982).

Sacred Defence films shaped the new discourse and tried to form a new identity for the revolutionary society in the 1980s, a society with high social cohesion in which individuals called one another brother and sister because they believed everyone was equal. Sacred Defence films acknowledged all Iranians had weaknesses, but they wanted to be better people. After the social pressures and restrictions they experienced during war and revolution, they looked for justice for all, despite attempts by the imperialists and bourgeoisie to repress them. This war lasted eight years and was one of the most traumatic experiences for Iranians. However, it provided an opportunity for the Islamic republic discourse to change its social, cultural, and political preferred meanings. By constructing its preferred meanings around the mentioned signifiers, the Islamic regime created its ideology (myth) and hegemonic discourses.

Value-based Films (Filmhaye Arzeshi) and Big Production Films (Filmhaye Fakher)

Value-based Films feature the explained values of the regime and Big Production Films aim to promote these values to other countries. The representation of the war in Sacred Defence Films was based on revolution being a response to conflicts of everyday life. In Value-based Films and Big Production Films, the representation of everyday life is the response by authorities to the political conflicts of a post-revolutionary society; the conflicts of a victim society that was under the control of imperialism but looking for freedom and justice. Sacred Defence Films present these victims as its heroes – and Value-based Films continue this. In Sacred Defence Films we can see the heroes who are looking for justice for all. Justice for all means promoting Islamic revolution to the world, the aim of the Big Production films. These heroes are represented as mystics who reject the materialistic world to become a better person. This is how Sacred Defence gained more coherency and meaning, and why Iranian cinema featured Big Production Films and Value-based Films in the following years.

New Wave Cinema (Filmhaye Moje no)

In the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, New Wave films brought new aesthetics and meanings to Iranian cinema before the revolution. When Iranian cinema was occupied with Filmfarsi films and propaganda films that tried to enrich the Persianate⁶¹ and represent a powerful Persia and modern Tehran, New Wave films represented villages and poor marginalised areas of Tehran. New Wave films are full of rebel protagonists who are tired of inequality in the city and look for change. Generally, these stories take place in urban areas and are based on social issues or

⁶¹ Refers to Persian culture, literature, art, and identity.

on Iranian novels. Following this avant-garde perspective on a time of criticism of social problems, Iranian Social Films in the 1990s focused on society and its problems.

Iranian Social Films and Children's Films (Filmhaye Ejtemaei va Filmhaye Koodak)

Iranian Social Films are those dramas and melodramas which visualise their story in the context of social problems in society. These films flourished in Iranian cinema in the late 1990s when the reformist president, Khatami, emphasised civil society and tried to find a place for Iran in globalisation. We can understand these films as the continuum of New Wave Cinema in terms of representation of everyday life. However, considering the political period and the power of reformists at that time, we focus on these films as the products of relationship between the social institutions and society. These films were produced and promoted in Iranian cinemas as part of the role of the cinema as an important institution in society. Therefore, governments, by focusing on civil society, gave Iranian cinema the opportunity to grow and make connections with society and daily conflicts. Entertaining Movies and Children's Films also had this role, particularly after the war. They aimed to bring hope and happiness to the traumatised post-war society. In this regard, we can see how cinema acted as a tool in the hands of authorities to lead the society and construct new meanings for Iranian cinema and Iranian everyday life.

Festival Cinema and Poetic Cinema (Filmhaye Jashnvarei va Sinamaye Shaeraneh)

As mentioned earlier, one important role of Iranian modern cinema was to maintain the coherency of the regime by playing its part as an element of modernity in society and constructing the new identity and meanings for the new articulations of the post-war/post-revolution society. Moreover, a cinema is recognisable that tries to make a connection with the world; a cinema that tries to be more active in globalisation and create its identity in relationship to the 'Other'. (I will discuss Poetic Cinema and Festival Cinema, which are based on poetry, literature, and a peaceful, rural everyday life further below.). The othering process results in the dichotomous formation of an us-group and a them-group. In this regard, others are created as different and the representations are exotic and based on objectification.

While the Social Films and Sacred Defence Films were trying to construct the meanings of Iranian urban everyday life, Festival Cinema and Poetic Cinema created a different aspect of Iranian everyday life that was more rural. These films, by problematising the traditional aspects of Iranian culture, mostly produce a peaceful characterisation of a post-revolutionary country which had been in a war for eight years. There have always been contradictions between different cinema genres, which have produced various social antagonisms.

However, in this research I do not want to explore only the conditions which made antagonisms possible; I aim to make visible the antagonisms themselves. What we face here is contradiction and opposition, and it seems that the relationship between the two is clear and fully reveals the identities we are concerned with. For example, Value-based Cinema is filled with the meaning of the regime's values and is in opposition to Underground Cinema (discussed below). As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) explain:

In the case of contradictions, it is because A is fully A that being-not-A is a contradiction – and therefore an impossibility. In the case of real opposition, it is because A is also fully A that its relation with B produces an objectively determinable effect. But in the case of antagonism, we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being fully myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution. The presence of the 'Other' is not a logical impossibility: it exists; so it is not a contradiction. (p. 123)

All of the films and cinema genres discussed above try to show that all the social relations are objective. However, antagonism is not an objective relation but a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are shown. So, this perspective and working with antagonisms help this research (as set out in later chapters) to discover the limits of society in constituting itself fully in Iranian films. Finding out more about the social antagonisms clarifies the attempts by antagonisms to destabilise the 'Other' identity. Also, it shows the conditions and the needs that exist for antagonisms to stabilise their own identity. Hence, this process realises the hegemonic project and temporal identities.

Underground Cinema, Accented Cinema, Independent Cinema and Art and Experimental Cinema (Cinemaye Zirzamini, Lahje'dar, Mostaghel, Honar va Tajrobe)

In contrast to the hegemonic power, there are some signifiers/cinemas which according to their articulations are understandable as the resistance islands in this context: Underground Cinema, Accented Cinema, Independent Cinema, and Art and Experimental Cinema. Underground Cinema refers to films which look to democracy and try to reform the society and solve its social issues. Usually, these films are against the Islamic regime or its cinematic rules. Therefore, they have no chance of being screened in Iranian cinema halls. Accented Cinema refers to films which are produced by artists in exile.

Iranian filmmakers who live outside Iran and the ways they represent Iran and Iranian identity display some 'accents'. Hamid Naficy (2018) coined this concept to problematise the

diasporic life and its representation. In terms of their content, these films share many similarities with Underground films. Independent films are usually hard to define. Theoretically, all Iranian filmmakers should produce and distribute their films in Iran according to certain rules, given that funding comes from the state, its organisations, or individuals who have some connection with the state. This applies particularly to representations of everyday life, which should feature the same problematisations as Social Films. However, some producers and directors declare their films to be independent, and I include such films in this research. Art and Experimental Cinema is a community which involves young filmmakers who look for new experiences in cinema. They aim to enhance the viewer's taste and discrimination in terms of visual aesthetics. Further, by ignoring the commercial aspects of cinema, they promote new cinematic experiences.

Sociology of Film and Sociology of Cinema: The Culture Industry and Representation Framework (Caseti, 1999)

Having explained my classification matrix of the identified signifiers and their chains of equivalence, I will now explain how I classify these signifiers with regard to the relationship between sociology and cinema. This second classification step is part of the reflexivity in knowledge production I explained earlier, which explicitly shows that the roots of this knowledge are in sociology and in its relationship with cinema. Moreover, the matrix of key signifiers highlights the contextuality of this research given that some of these signifiers, such as *Filmfarsi* and *Sacred Defence Cinema*, only exist in Iran. By comparison, other signifiers, such as *Festival Cinema* and *Poetic Cinema*, are globally well-known genres; however, while they share common worldwide meanings, they take on new meanings in Iran. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), every political question creates new groups and particular identities, although it is important that existing groups can be deconstructed to form new groups. This is the second part of the classification and grouping in this research. All these signifiers in the matrix/framework can be deconstructed and emerge with a new form and identity in another research project. So, this grouping and the diagram may look like a cliché and a format for further research, but they are very much open to change. However, the main structure of this perspective is constructed in the relationship between sociology and cinema.

According to Caseti (1999), sociology and cinema have four different relationships: cinema as industry, cinema as institution, cinema as culture industry, and cinema in terms of

the representation of the social. According to a macro sociology perspective, sociology of cinema is more about cinema as industry⁶² and cinema as institution.⁶³ Also according to a micro sociology perspective, sociology of film includes cinema as culture industry and the representation of the social. In this research, I apply my discursive approach to two of these relationships: cinema as culture industry and the representation of the social. That is, these two points are my starting points to analyse the Iranian cinema.

In terms of *cinema as culture industry*, my main focus is to analyse how films try to standardise audiences/subjects and how film as a cultural product tries to hegemonise society and represent everyday life conflicts. When applying the methodology, I use Filmfarsi and Sacred Defence Cinema to illustrate my points or to explore my theory. Regarding *representation of the social*, I problematise two important features of Iranian films, censorship and urban life. For each of Caseti's relationships, I problematise daily life to explore the process of meaning construction. Analysing the representation of Iranian urban everyday life in the selected films through the field of sociology of film helps me to define the subject positions designated in Iranian films. These processes reflect what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 127). The application of this logic helped me form and define what I see as key subject positions taken up in Iranian films and the discourse of Iranian cinema.

One may say this methodological framework still does not indicate a direct connection between macro sociology and micro sociology since as it has been shown that they are still separate and I have chosen to work on the sociology of film categorisations. However, as Laclau (1996) argues:

The basic point is this: I cannot assert a differential identity without distinguishing it from a context and, in the process of making the distinction, I am asserting the context at the same time. (p. 27)

⁶² *Cinema as industry* explores the relationship between the economy and cinema. It shows the structure of the economy of Iranian cinema and correspondingly the role of the powerful actors in this economy. Therefore, institution and industry become two different nodal points in Iranian cinema which by different chains of equivalence and articulations try to shape the discourse of Iranian cinema after the revolution, maintain the coherency of the regime and also support the civil society.

⁶³ As discussed in Chapter Two, *Cinema as institution* focuses on the role that cinema plays as an institution in society and its part in developing democracy. The sociological understanding in this area is shaped around the connection between social institutions, society and power relations. To highlight the role of cinema as an institution, I chose the key signifiers which, across different periods of time and in different chains of equivalence, connected to the films. For example, how policies in Iranian cinema after the war tried to send a peaceful image of Iran to the world, or how Iranian cinema in the 1990s tried to problematise the issues of the civil society to reform the old religious fundamentals in governance.

Thinking about what Laclau argues here, first, by problematising the concept of everyday life in each relationship type, I have connected the discourse of Iranian cinema and Iranian films. That is, by analysing the process of meaning construction through focusing on various daily practices, images, and daily examples as well as the role of the key signifiers and their articulation, I narrate Iranian daily life. Uncovering the hidden realities by problematising everyday life and using dissimilar data such as social media, news, and films supports the argument of each of Caseti's relationship types. Hence, discussion of each relationship includes the discursive contexts of the films, cinema, and everyday life and also the subject positions. Second, the construction of subject position and henceforth identities is rooted in Althusser's concept of interpellation. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 115), people are interpellated by discourses. That is, discourses designate positions for people to occupy as subjects. Through discursive analysis and by applying my theoretical understanding of subjects (set out in the previous chapter), I discover these positions and the identities. That is, by problematising daily life in films and society, I make visible the realities of the relationship between subjects and discourses.

In the following chapters, I work on (1) specific cinemas/*key signifiers* in my analysis which reveals the discursive context of the films. Then I explore the *storylines* that shape the content and outline the events, spaces and objects, and transformations, which enriches my analysis. Last but not least, I work on the *genre* of the films to analyse the cinematic language that films use to narrate their stories. Exploring the configuration of genre supports this research in clearly defining the subject positions.

Based on a discussion in Chapter Three, in the section *The Importance of the Problematic and Problematisation*, I problematise the notion of everyday life in each relationship type. So, in *cinema as culture industry*, I problematise the bourgeois ideas that shape the culture industry and Iranian films. As stated earlier, in *representation of the social*, I problematise two important features of Iranian films, censorship and urban life, to make a connection between censorship and violence in everyday life and the main concern of this research, urban everyday life. It is worth repeating that I do not work on cinema as industry and cinema as institution separately, although I do apply these relationships in my analysis.

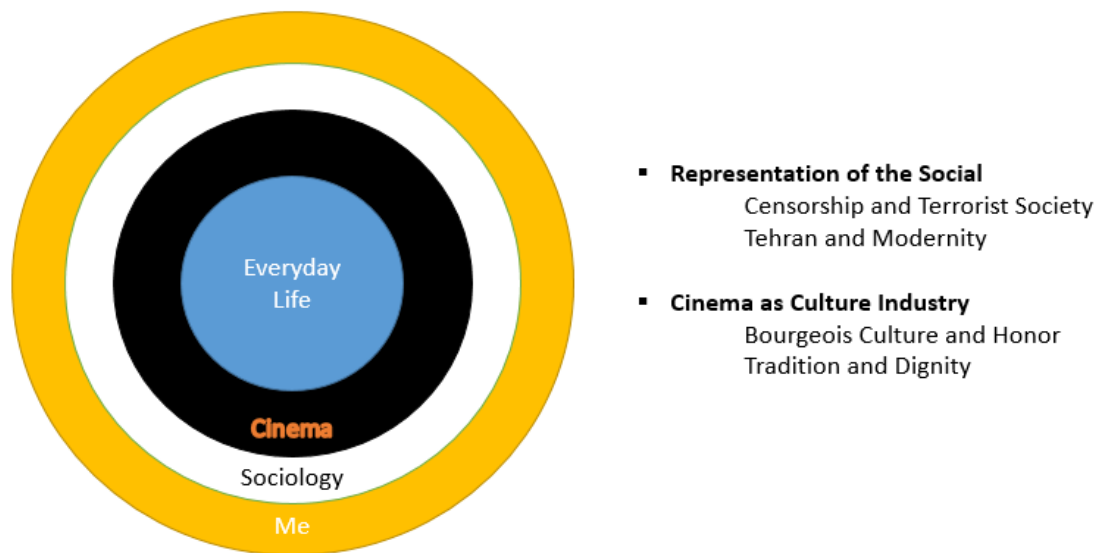


Figure 4.1 The Methodological Diagram

Consequently, I believe this methodology (as illustrated in this diagram) has more general application beyond this project. The following positive points could make this approach useful in further projects. This methodology keeps everyday life in its core. I believe any film is a social product and inherently political. A film is made by social actors and in a social context with various social aims, it also represents social phenomena even if it has an imaginary story. That is, as far as it communicates with the audience it shows there is a common language between the film and the audience and as I discussed language is social. This understanding of everyday life and the social improve our understanding about alternatives in everyday life. In this context everyday life contains power relations and highlights resistance in everyday life and the role of individual in shaping the social.

I believe this is a creative methodology which provides a map but which is not a cliché to slavishly follow. Therefore, it brings new ideas to the field not by itself but by the work of other researchers. These new ideas can produce further questions in multidisciplinary areas. For example, in this research I ask how we can think about our role as a researcher in a specific context. I problematize reflexivity and contextuality. In terms of contextuality, it draws our attention to problematization of a theory. Shall I read Henri Lefebvre's theory as same as an American sociologist? Shall I and an Australian sociologist have the same problematics of everyday life to describe our daily life? Tied to this point, in terms of reflexivity, if there is inequality or terror in society, and without any films that critique what happens is we compromise with this terror and reproduce it through cinematic language. Researchers can also reproduce what exist in the films through their use of a sociological language without criticizing it and exploring the film in its discursive context. The result will be a representation

of the status quo as what daily experience in that world should be. Clarification of the role of the author makes visible the process of knowledge production. And this helps a researcher to find a problematic connection with his/her research rather than simply applying existing theories and methods.

CHAPTER FIVE: CENSORSHIP AND URBAN LIFE: REPRESENTATION OF THE SOCIAL

The third objective of this research (which is explained in the introductory chapter) was to apply two questions that I see as important in terms of the representation of the social. The first question was *What do films not show?* and the second was *What do films show?* This objective is central to this chapter and is dealt with using two case studies: one relates to censorship and the other relates to cities. In the first section, the case study on censorship, I draw on censored films. In this section, by problematising censorship in Iranian films (that is, addressing the question of what films do not show) and using the concepts of ‘articulation’, ‘discourse’, ‘subject’, and ‘making the people’, I explore how censorship affects everyday life. One may ask ‘How can I find evidence of what has been *not* shown in Iranian films?’ I argue that Iranian cinema has no space for what Lefebvre calls ‘the right to difference’ (Lefebvre and Goonewardena, 2008). According to Lefebvre, ‘the right to difference’⁶⁴ is essentially the right to differ from pre-established groups and it is firmly linked to the right to the city. Instead, everything should follow the rules of the regime and its social positions. For example, in no Iranian film can you find a woman dressed in clothes that do not comply the regime’s code of dress. Moreover, based on the regime’s rules, censorship classifications show what needs to be absent in Iranian films. To summarise in my framework, the invisible is defined by the visible. By exploring what is represented I can see what is not. Here, the censored films can also support my research. I analyse censorship in terms of terror in everyday life. To do this I use Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the terrorist society (Lefebvre, 1984). The signifiers from my Matrix that are drawn on in this section are: New Wave Cinema, Social Films, Children’s Films, Entertaining Movies, Festival Cinema, Poetic Cinema, Underground Cinema, Accented Cinema, Independent Cinema, and Art and Experimental Films.

The second section of this chapter looks at a case study of Tehran and modernity. It focuses on the question what films do show and explores this through the representation of urban life in Iranian films. As foreshadowed in Chapter Three this section relies on the philosophy of Lefebvre and Simmel. Firstly, I use a Foucauldian approach to criticise the stereotypical ‘dualism’ used in the representation of Tehran in relation to other cities, and also to problematise the lack of a history of the present in this process of representation. Secondly,

⁶⁴ The right to difference, is the right including the categories created by the community itself not to by a homogenizing power.

I explore ‘uncertainty’ in Iranian films and its relationship with everyday life. This also entails that, I analyse the place of power and resistance in daily life. Thirdly, in the subsection *Tehran: City of Demands, City of Conflicts* I explore how Tehran is ‘problematic’ in Iranian films and how films, according to Laclau, try to ‘make the people’ and create demands (1994). Lastly, I survey the process of ‘traumatisation’ and daily shocks in the subsection *Traumatic Everyday Life in Tehran*.

Censorship and the Terrorist Society⁶⁵

Lefebvre emphasises the difference between a terrorised society and a terrorist society. According to his idea, the imposition of repression and terror on a society makes it terrorised. Also, in a competitive society each member becomes a terrorist as they all want to be in power. As he demonstrates, by way of comparison in a terrorist society terror is diffuse, violence is always latent, and pressure is exerted from all sides on its members (Lefebvre, 1984, p. 147). So, a terrorist society is a society of maximum repression. Censorship, as one of the most important constituents of Iranian cinema, is an example of this repression. In this section, I decipher how censorship works in practice, and the type of effects it produces.

Terrorism in society is found within the organisation of everyday life (which is also its objective). And terror is the outcome of repression (Lefebvre, 1984, p. 148). According to Lefebvre, a class-based society is a repressive society. In this type of repressive society, we see impoverished and privileged classes. Repression is maintained by the dual methods of (ideological) persuasion and compulsion (including punishment, laws and codes, courts, violence kept in store to prevent violence, overt violence, armed forces, police). (In this section I will demonstrate how censorship works as a social concept in Iranian society.) Lefebvre believes that consumer societies evolve into a repressive societies, then over-repressive societies and eventually terrorist societies. Choosing this concept to explain censorship in Iranian cinema is an attempt to demonstrate censorship not only as political terror but also as society where censorship is a key component of that terrorist society where every member is interpellated to follow and apply a repressive rule to themselves and to others in order to, first,

⁶⁵ According to Lefebvre (1984), people who live in capitalist societies are living in a state of terror. In this context, this concept has no relationship with terrorism and terrorist attacks; rather, it tries to draw attention to the violence and anxiety in everyday life.

survive (e.g. if a filmmaker does not follow the codes he/she cannot make a film), and second, gain power in everyday life (e.g. become an international filmmaker).

Naming is a political action and a means of identification. By choosing to name Iran a terrorist society rather than an over-repressive society, I aim to emphasise the danger that exists in Iranian everyday life, a danger that could lead to societal collapse. Lefebvre demonstrates that in a terrorist society people can be happy and satisfied; however, through their daily practices they still reproduce various forms of societal terror. By elaborating on and contextualising Lefebvre's philosophy on a terrorist society, this section depicts the types of repercussions of censorship that any terrorist society tries to disguise. I do this by analysing various forms of censorship in Iranian cinema and using the analysis to explain the processes by which censorship shapes terror in everyday life. What follows is a description of nine types of censorship and an explanation of each of these on an aspect of Iranian society. Together, they show how general censorship, as an over-repressive rule, leads to self-censorship which terrorises individuals as a purely private experience. Censorship is an example of the repressive rules used by a violent reign to maintain its dictatorship, but when these rules evolve into ideologies of everyday life and shape citizens' daily actions, they construct a terrorist society.

Firstly, I argue that censorship is about ignoring existing meanings and significations in discourse – something exists that censorship tries to erase in order to marginalise any articulations which have the capacity to break or challenge the hegemonic discourse. Secondly, I argue that censorship is a type of repression which not only suppresses existing signifiers but also tries to prevent any new signifiers from emerging. Hence, censorship aims to create a new articulation or reconstruct the existing articulations. In this regard, discourse seeks to protect its hegemonic significations and marginalise any meanings that not only are not hegemonic but also are understood as a threat to its coherency. Censorship is linked to propaganda. Fred Young makes this point in his 1930 book *Censorship: The Negative Control of Opinion*. Focusing on the relationship between censorship and propaganda, he writes:

Censorship is negative and repressive, and takes on the nature of taboo. Propaganda is positive and creative, and takes on the nature of legend- and myth-making which is so effective, as we have seen, in creating the social realities. (p. 633)

That is, censorship is an action that empties a signifier and tries to fill it with its own desired meaning or, by changing the articulation of a specific signifier, provides a new signifier. So, returning to an earlier quote from Ayatollah Khomeini what I interpret him to mean by the

statement ‘We do not oppose cinema, we oppose vice’ is that he wants to keep the signifier of cinema. However, he claims that at this time this signifier is filled with meanings that have no place in the new discourse of Iran. He is ignoring the existing meanings and (re)constructing new articulations. That is, his aim is to empty the signifier of cinema of its old meanings and fill that void with new meanings of cinema as articulated by his regime. The new meanings take the form of the new signifiers. Censorship is a type of a repression caused by our fear of the consequences of a group of individuals questioning the normative values of a group (Marx 1581–1582, Macmillan, 2013, p. 139). The claim ‘We do not oppose cinema, we oppose vice’ shows that Ayatollah Khomeini believes that in Islamic cinema there is no space for music, dance, women free of the hijab, and other elements that were present in *Filmfarsi*. In the new discourse, these are understood as “vice”. However, dance, music, drinking alcohol, and being free of a hijab are all part of the daily routines of Iranians. So, when he says ‘we’ it shows that he, as a part of the leadership of the new Islamic society, and the he is trying to set the values of his group as the norm.⁶⁶

The Ayatollah’s aphorism was played out on a larger and material scale that elucidates the ways film and cinema were understood by leaders at the time and some communities as sites of vice or as anti-revolution (ASL 19 in Decherney, 2014).

In the months leading up to and during the revolution, 185 cinemas in Iran were burned down, and as such film production came to a momentary standstill. The government annulled the screening permits of all national and international films for their reexamination. Only two hundred films were re-granted permission for screening, and only a few were screened without the omission and modification of certain scenes. Charged with corruption, propagation of prostitution, and connection with the Shah’s regime, some filmmakers were called to the Islamic courts. These were the first undertakings of post-revolutionary film censorship, and amongst the first efforts to Islamicize Iranian culture by way of cinema. (p. 229)

So, by naming pre-revolution cinema as vice, which is an immoral action against the values of the society, it becomes understandable as a crime. The new regime applied censorship practices in order to propagate the new values in society. If a signifier is seen as close to or

⁶⁶ At the same time, he is ‘making the people’.

tries to get close to the articulations which are named as ‘vice’ by the new discourse, this is interpreted as a threat against ‘the people’⁶⁷ and the discourse.

I believe that censorship has an important role in shaping Iranian life and have explained this through my framework focused on the everyday. The process of control and censorship is filled with violence and terror. One stark example is the Cinema Rex fire, when four men barred the doors of a cinema and doused it with petrol. They burned the cinema hall along with hundreds of people who were watching a movie.⁶⁸ With this example in mind I use a Lefebvrian approach, and argue that censorship, as an element of terror, must be seen as operating in everyday life in a way that converts Iranian society into a terrorist society. Using a Lefebvrian approach, I explore censorship as an element of terror in the process of seeing in everyday life which converts Iranian society to a terrorist society.

Censorship is a form, distinct from its contents. Censorship as a form contains a logic: everyone is guilty until proven innocent. I argue that experiencing this form constantly reproduces this logic since everyone needs to continually prove they are innocent. In this type of society ‘there is no need for a dictator; each member betrays and chastises himself; terror cannot be located, for it comes from everywhere and every specific thing; the system’ (Lefebvre, 1984, p.147). In order to explain the different ways that censorship shapes Iranian society I now set out nine terrorist forms that emerged in my research as the forms in which censorship manifests and is practiced in contemporary Iran. According to Lefebvre (1984), these forms are cumulatively embedded in everyday life via their instrumentalisation by bureaucratic regulations.

Type 1: Political Censorship

The first type of censorship is political censorship. It is a mode of censorship associated with the early years of the revolution. I classify it in terms of the effort made by Ayatollah Khomeini and his regime to use political power to invalidate existing cinema laws. As Naficy (2012a, p. 120) explains, in the first five years after the revolution, lack of concern with building new cinema halls was evidence of the regime not paying attention to the role of cinema in post-revolutionary society; rather, the Islamist government concentrated on criticising products of

⁶⁷ Here, ‘the people’ is a subject position which represents the values of the regime.

⁶⁸ 19 August 1978

the Pahlavi dynasty. After criticising pre-revolutionary films and cinematic laws, according to Zeydabadi-Nejad, Islamic cinema wanted to educate the people; that is, the Islamic regime aimed to create what they saw as an authentic cultural milieu based on Muslim–Iranian dignity. This political censorship is clearly observable after the 1979 revolution when changes to the whole political regime led to new laws and institutions and organisations being put in place in Iranian cinema. Naficy (2012a, p. 14) explains that this transition to an Islamicate cinema started with the purification process that was applied to the film industry and related social institutions and organisations. These changes were part of the cultural revolution in all aspects of everyday life. As Naficy (2012a, pp. 120–130) explains, this process involved new regulations and laws, new subjects, new cinematic language, new jobs and new cinema.

Political censorship did not start with the revolution. Political movies – by this I mean films that concentrate on a specific political situation – were marginalised in Iranian cinema both before and after the revolution (Gholipour, 2019/1397). However, I focus on post-revolutionary cinema here. Though there was political censorship before the revolution, but I would argue that cinema in the Pahlavi era was a new modern part of society and also as a part of a new modern society, so there were few rules and organisations in existence to control it. Although this regime did use cinema as a propaganda machine at that time, the lack of social institutions and fixed rules created uncertain conditions for cinema. That is, the signifier of cinema did not have a fixed meaning in a hegemonic discourse in comparison to its meaning in post-revolution cinema.

Another dimension that needs to be explored when thinking about the role of political censorship is the process of making the people. Ravadrad, in her work on sociology and Iranian cinema (2010b/1389),⁶⁹ demonstrates that after the revolution both fundamentalist and reformist factions ignored audiences’ ideas about what types of films they wanted to see and, instead by claiming they knew ‘what people wanted’, made new rules for Iranian cinema. For example, producing entertaining movies after the war period to make the society happy, producing love stories in the 1990s according to the reformist ideas of the president of the time, and producing films based on the Quran stories and revolutionary ideas in the 2000s. Narges Bajoghli (2019) explains this point explicitly as part of the concept of new strategies. She demonstrates that the regime believes the audience/the imagined people do not trust its cultural products. Thus, one of the new strategies of the regime is to produce ‘underground’ films.

⁶⁹ In *Political Sociology of Iranian Cinema (Obligations of Iranian Cinema Policy-Makers in 70s and 80s)*.

Through this strategy, the regime seeks to disturb reality and distort the process of production in order to convey its message. As a result, what has emerged is a ‘counter-hegemonic’ film that is produced by the hegemonic regime which tries to create a new structure of knowledge and counter-intuitively makes the underground discourse hegemonic.

I believe the Islamic regime ‘made the people’ through the production of new rules and cinematic representations. That is, the regime interpellated the people in order to construct its preferred subject. Thinking of the theoretical framework developed for this analysis and drawing on Laclau, I suggest ‘the construction of a “people” would be impossible without the operation of mechanisms of representation’ (Laclau 2005, p. 161). More recently, Thomassen (2019) argued the relationship between representation and the construction of a people worked so:

we do not first have the interests of individuals or of the people and then a representation of those interests; rather, representation – whether by social activists or by formal representatives – is constitutive of what is represented. (p. 30)

The first case study of political censorship, propaganda, and interpellation analysed in this chapter is the 2009 Green movement in Iran. Described as ‘sedition’ in the Iranian conservative media, it refers to the social movement that arose after the 2009 Iranian presidential election. Protesters did not accept the result of the election and labelled the election fraudulent. Protesters in various big cities chanted phrases such as ‘Down with the dictator’ and ‘Give us our votes back’. In response to the reformist protests, tens of thousands of people rallied in Tehran to support the victory of Ahmadinejad.

A number of films were made based on everyday life and 2009 Iranian protests: *Thesis*⁷⁰ (2010) by Hamed Kolahdari, *The Golden Collars*⁷¹ (2012) by Abolghasem Talebi, *Tehran Secret*⁷² (2011) by Mehdi Fiyozzi, *Report a Celebration*⁷³ (2011) by Ebrahim Hatamikia, *Lovely Trash*⁷⁴ (2011) by Mohsen Amiryousefi, and *I am Not Angry!*⁷⁵ (2014) by Reza Dormishian.

⁷⁰ *Payanname* (1389).

⁷¹ *Ghaladehaye Tala* (1391).

⁷² *Mahramane Tehran* (1390).

⁷³ *Gozareshe yek jashn* (1390).

⁷⁴ *Ashghalhaye Doost Dashtani* (1390). This film had its first screening in 2019, eight years after it was made.

⁷⁵ *Asabani Nistam* (1393).

Among the selected films only *Report a Celebration*⁷⁶ is banned. How did these films (the ones that made it through censorship when others were banned and not available) represent this important political situation and what does it tell us about the function of political censorship?

I argue that the films that were screened to try to stabilise the values system of the regime and hegemonise the regimes' favoured interpretation of the 2009 protests. By doing this, a type of interpellation, they sought to maintain the coherency of the political system. These films are part of the regime's propaganda machine that narrates historical events in keeping with the regime's structure of knowledge. In these films, 'the people' are represented as having been threatened by 'enemies'. As a group the representations in the film produce a narrative that the people who were in the streets are not 'Iranian', instead they are represented as foreign enemies. Indeed, President Ahmadinejad called them bits of 'dust and dirt'⁷⁷ (cited in Bahari, 2012, p. 67) that destroy public property and disturb the security of the people.

In this regard, the regime followed the easiest path, one that they had started to walk from the beginning of the revolution – they asserted that the 'other' (here the protestors) were fundamentally different from 'us' (the people and the regime's values). Foucault demonstrated that the 'Other' is perceived as an abnormal, mad, and delinquent person (1979). However, in this context protestors were not labelled just as criminal or abnormal, but as the enemy. After the Islamic revolution, according to the anti-imperialistic values of the revolution, the Iran–US political relationship was destroyed. In 1979, Khomeini called the United States a great Satan/devil. Decades later it was claimed that the protestors were following what the US and Israel wanted, so they were not Iranian. According to Harle (1994, p. 30), 'We can have nothing in common with the evil enemy. We must destroy him: this is not only justified but the uppermost duty. The evil enemy is, actually, the enemy of God, and the war against it is the holy war. The enemy must be eliminated from the face of the earth so that our God will be safe.'

All these films were screened in order to fill the gap that appeared because of the absence of facts created by the process of censorship. Political censorship aims to not let any 'other' perspective narrate the event and, in this case, cinema acted as a vehicle for this censorship. This narrative was not total. There were reformist filmmakers who supported the 2009 Green

⁷⁶ According to Esfandiary (2012, p. 147), it deals with the problems of the youth and presents a highly critical account of the Iranian police and the use of force in moralising the young generation.

⁷⁷ '*Khas o Khashak*'. Ahmadinejad said of these protestors who were against his presidency, 'The pure tides of this nation will eventually get rid of them' (cited in Bahari, 2012, p. 67).

movement who did try to narrate different perspectives. One example is *Lovely Trash*, a film about an elderly woman who one night during the 2009 Green movement removes all the politically troublesome items belonging to her family from her house. In a fantasy mode, her deceased husband, her executed brother, and two martyred and immigrated sons are brought back to life in their picture frames to help her out. The character of the old mother allegorically shows the dominant version of the country, Iran. Her husband, children, and brother, each of whom was a member of a different political party, demonstrates the pluralistic identity of the country. This film tries to say that in the history of Iran all political groups have tried to omit the leftist perspective from the political system for different, though what they all see as, urgent reasons. In the film, we see how the different members of the family prefer to ignore the leftist character because they do not like him and cannot see him as a member of their family. They also believe he could place the family in danger if the police find him/his picture. The film suggests that all social and historical events should be forgotten and it is now time to accept social reconciliation.

I am Not Angry is another film that challenges the political censorship of the time. The film is about the everyday conflicts of a student (Navid) who is expelled from university after the 2009 movement because of his political ideas. Navid is portrayed as having many social problems. The film suggests that being unable to finish his studies has limited his opportunities in life. Importantly, this means he cannot find a job. Since he cannot find a proper job, he cannot marry his girlfriend. He is alone and none of his peers help him. He becomes marginalised in society. However, according to the film, the roots of his problems are not social, but personal. They result from psychological issues, in particular his inability to control his anger. This conflates Navid's political beliefs with his psychological profile and the film creates a narrative that illustrates how this means Navid is against normative society, and this logic is played out in the film when Navid finally kills his girlfriend's father.⁷⁸

These examples have demonstrated the ways in which political censorship has a close connection to the way the Islamic revolution is enacted in ways that support films that represent the populist ideas of the regime. The political censorship process enables Islamic discourse and in the process of its articulation in film makes itself hegemonic. This process started in the

⁷⁸ Although this film was said to be an independent film which narrates the 2009 movement honestly, the message agreed with what the regime was looking for. However, this film could have been subjected to censorship.

antagonistic space of the 1979 revolution, where the enemy was the Shah. This antagonistic perspective continues but over time has expanded into other forms of censorship.

Type 2: Religious Censorship

Another form of censorship that has emerged is religious censorship. As discussed, one impact of censorship practices is the emergence of a fear of the consequences on a group of individuals who question the normative values. In Iran, religious censorship tries to censor other religions in order to not let Iranians question the values and norms of Shiite Islam.

In a famous and still relevant statement, Seyyed Hassan Modarres, an Iranian cleric (1870–1937), said: ‘Our religion is the same as our politics and our politics is the same as our religion.’ Given this understanding of politics and religion in Iran, some aspects of religious and political censorship are intertwined. When the structure of the political system and law are based on religion, every crime is ‘haram’⁷⁹ and vice versa. For example, drinking alcohol is haram in Islam, and it is forbidden in the law as well. So, if someone drinks, produces, sells, buys alcohol they are a criminal.⁸⁰ The problem is that this law is based on Islam. What if a person does not believe in Islam? In a secular situation, that person can drink alcohol, but in Iran they cannot because it is a crime in law.⁸¹ This understanding of religion and law technically marginalises⁸² all the other religions.

As was the case of the Green Movement, this type of marginalisation of religious minorities takes place in cinema. Not only can you not find films that pay attention to the problems of religious minorities, it is impossible for religious minorities, for example for Bahá’í people, to work in Iranian cinema. The persecution of Bahá’ís has a long history in Iran and the situation for Bahá’í people worsened after the revolution. In the ten years following the 1979 revolution, more than 200 Bahá’ís were killed or executed, hundreds more were tortured or imprisoned, and tens of thousands lost their jobs, access to education, and other rights – solely because of their religious beliefs (Momen, 2005). Meanwhile, when other marginalised religions are represented in a film, there is always a religious Muslim character who is

⁷⁹ A term used to refer to any act that is forbidden by Allah and is one of five Islamic commandments.

⁸⁰ Anyone can be a criminal if they do not follow the law. For example, a non-Muslim woman in the streets of Iran who is not following the Islamic dress codes and wearing the hijab can be arrested; not because of her religion, because of the law.

⁸¹ The law does not care about your religion.

⁸² This marginalisation is censoring the existing facts in a society.

represented as a better character in relation to the negative religious minority character. So, by repressing other religions, Shiite Islam is created as the fixed meaning for the signifier 'religion'.

Type 3: Gender-based Censorship

We can understand gender-based censorship as part of Islamic law (Naficy, 1995). Iranian Islamic law imposes compulsory hijab on women. An actress cannot act without wearing the hijab since there are different groups of 'namahram'⁸³ who will be part of the crew during the shooting and later who will watch the film. This can be seen as an example of political censorship intertwined with religion. Moreover, Islamic cinema from the beginning was against the 'vice' of objectifying women, when in the regime's beliefs had been done in Filmfarsi. I argue that this led to new and different uncertain conditions becoming part of the film making process. For example, in this censorship regime we cannot see a love-making scene, but what about seduction? What kind of action in a movie could be understood as a seduction and what might not? These conditions are not clear in law; they depend on view of the person or the committee in charge of control and censorship. Because of the censorship never being total (as was the case of the Green Movement) there is always a gap that filmmakers can exploit. So, they can make a film that has a seduction and it might get through the censors or it might end their career.

Type 4: The Quasi-official Censorship

This type of censorship is the common denominator of all the types of censorship. Babak Rahimi (2015) calls it quasi-official censorship combines of official and unofficial censorship regulations. It has a close connection to the present since none of the components has any fixed meaning. Meanings are changeable and depend on other signifiers, so they are flexible and link to the fluidity of time. We can understand them in terms the concept introduced earlier – a floating signifier. The quasi-official censorship is like an unwritten law. For example, according to Zeydabadi-Nejad (2010), close-ups of actresses, especially young and pretty ones, were banned after the revolution, as was choosing religious names for negative characters. Though they had not been formally told this was the case these were the types of censorship

⁸³ Anyone who is not a blood relative.

that filmmakers understood as actively applying to them in post-revolutionary cinema. They exemplify what are called uncertain rules and unwritten laws. As Naficy (2011b) and Zeydabadi-Nejad (2010) explain, these types of censorship were and still are applied irregularly. So, the quasi-official censorship depends on factors such as the film, filmmaker, the time it is made, and the censorship committee. For example, unlike the 1980s, we can see more close-ups of women in contemporary Iranian films. One example is *The Lizard* (2014). The main character of this film, Reza⁸⁴ Marmoolak (Reza the lizard), is a thief who dresses like a cleric. Representing this character in a film at that time was seen as breaking a taboo.

Type 5: Censored Artists

For the revolutionaries, pre-revolution actors and actresses, filmmakers, and singers were not seen as individuals or freelance artists. For the revolutionary communities and leaders, they were instead understood as corrupted people and signs of the Pahlavi dynasty. So, they censored all these artists as a group. This was part of the process where the Revolutionary society started to delete all the signs of the Pahlavi dynasty from society. ‘The people’ demolished statues of the King, changed the names of streets, smashed symbols of Western society, attacked the US embassy, destroyed bars and cinemas, and occupied luxury houses in the city. There was no exception for cinema. It was seen as an element of ‘vice’. Society was reconstructing its new articulation, and Western objects, bars, concepts, artists were all signifiers that were not allowed space in the new articulation. As Abrahamian (1982) explains:

Before the revolution, the clergy believed that Iranian and imported films were a threat to the public morals. This had mainly to do with the representation of women. Many of the Filmfarsi included women without Islamic dress who sang and danced in cafés. There were also many scenes showing the consumption of alcohol. Some of the clergy perceived their mission to be fighting back against the perceived ‘moral decadence and unseemly social filth’ that filled the streets and was promoted in film and television. (p. 474)

So, the regime began a purification process of cinema and artists aiming to not only Islamicise the cinema but also individuals in society. As the chaos of 1979 passed, the

⁸⁴ Reza is the name of the eighth Shia Imam.

filmmakers and artists who had survived in the early post-revolution period could not continue filmmaking and had to either find another job or leave the country.

Type 6: Bureaucratic and Interpretative Censorship

This form of censorship includes (1) bureaucratic obstacles and (2) weak cinematic rules which increase uncertainty. First, there are various bureaucratic rules and processes in Iranian cinema that are required to be followed at different stages of filmmaking, from script-writing to shooting and screening (Naficy, 2012a). However, this bureaucracy is multifaceted, leading to uncertainty for filmmakers. Interestingly, different rules are applied depending on who the producer or director is and who is applying to the bureaucracy. For example, first-time filmmakers or producers face extra requirements.

These bureaucratic obstacles, along with unclear cinematic rules known as ‘red lines’, create a form of interpretive censorship. Sajjad-Pour, the Secretary of the Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (cited in Decherney, 2014), explains these red lines as follows:

In Iran, only two red lines exist, one is the moral line: that which degenerates the sanctity of the family and modesty. The other is the red line of the belief system: that which offends the principles and values of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran will never be lenient when it comes to these two red lines; and other than those, there are no red lines. (p. 231)

I argue these red lines act like nodal points⁸⁵ in Iranian cinema. Drawing on this idea, it is possible to see that the first hurdles faced in understanding how censorship works in Iran is collecting the various interpretations of these red. Lefebvre argues that what happens in this type of system is ‘bureaucratic conscience is identified with social conscience’ (Lefebvre, 1984, p. 159). In the case of Iran, this system is associated with Islam, which becomes understood through a bureaucratic processes whose interpretations are rooted in Article 24 of Iran’s constitution. Article 24 mentions ‘Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.

⁸⁵ We can also understand them through a Barthian perspective: a myth which is both a form and a message and rooted in history.

The details of this exception will be specified by law.’ In this bureaucratic process ‘persuasion turns into compulsion’ (Lefebvre, 1984, p. 90).

What happened here is that Islamic discourse in Iran changed the articulation of law and articulated it using Islamic signifiers. For example, the constitution allows the press to have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam, and further delineates that ‘the details of this exception will be specified by law’.⁸⁶ Any criticism of the state is seen as being against religion and against national security. According to Article 19 of Iran’s constitution, ‘All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.’ However, ‘equal rights’ in this context means the rights that the Islamic regime accept as right, that is correct. Therefore, the right to follow any religion is not supported in Article 19. That is, any non-Muslim individual should follow the Islamic law, not because of the religion but because of the constitution. According to Lefebvre (1984, pp. 159–160), this is an exact definition of terrorism.

Bureaucratic Censorship is useful in understanding how the idea of *khodi* (insider) and *gheyre khodi* (outsider) work in Iranian cinema. Insiders have fewer problems in producing and screening their films; outsiders face more obstacles in filmmaking. Insiders processes match with the regime rules, but outsiders try to negotiate about where the red lines are actually drawn. Insiders support and promote the cinematic language of the regime, but outsiders, as Mottahedeh (2008) demonstrates, use a language that seeks to negotiate with the regime. I would argue that the outsider/insider is not a binary, but what happens is, both of the groups use the terrorist language of the regime to make movies. According to Lefebvre, style arises from desires and can change the everyday. However, in Iranian cinema, by following the repressive rules, filmmakers look out for their elementary needs (e.g., staying in business, travelling to a film festival) and so cannot follow their personal desire which is rooted in agency. I argued in the Literature Review that I would demonstrate the need to move beyond a binary. This section on bureaucracy has demonstrated in detail my alternative interpretation.

⁸⁶ At the same time, the law is Islamic and, according to Article 170, judges ‘are obliged to refrain from executing statutes and regulations of the government that are in conflict with the laws or the norms of Islam’.

Type 7: Censorship in Screening

Some films get through the bureaucratic process and are allowed to be screened, but after a short period of screening they are banned. Examples I will use are *The Indian Gift*⁸⁷ (1994) by Mohammad Reza Zehtabi and *Guidance Patrol*⁸⁸ (2012) by Saeed Soheili, both of which were targeted by Ansar-e Hezbollah. Ansar-e Hezbollah, a conservative paramilitary organisation in Iran, forced these films to be banned from the screen. Ansar-e Hezbollah is based on a rule in Islam, ‘Amre be Maroof Nahy az Monkar’.⁸⁹ For those who believe in it, this central part of Islamic doctrine has a positive role in helping others to take the straight path and to abstain from reprehensible acts. This rule prescribes what is good and what is bad, and a Muslim is responsible for spreading the ‘good’ and stopping the ‘bad’. Drawing on Lefebvre’s ideas of terrorism, it is possible to see how and why this type of action was taken up by Ansar-e Hezbollah. Lefebvre (1984, p. 145) states that an ‘over-repressive society modifies the conditions of repression’ and ‘directs *adaptation* into the channels of “purely” private experience’ (emphasis in original). In the context of everyday life in Iran, there are social institutions such as Basij⁹⁰ and Gashte Ershad⁹¹ whose duty it is to repress the free choice in the daily routines of individuals and force them to adapt to the values of the regime. For example, in the Islamic regime having hijab for women is compulsory because it is understood as what good women do. It is also the law. What happens is that, the morality police in the streets arrest those whose hijab is not ‘good’ enough.⁹² (This of course aligns with the Gender censorship described earlier). Censorship in screening is an example of this violent practice taking place in the cinema space. These rules the regime is supporting and that the morality police or Ansar-e Hezbollah implement come from the key Islamic text,⁹³ they were then interpreted and mixed with elements of the modern state and now appear as law in the constitution.

⁸⁷ *Tohfeye Hend* (1373).

⁸⁸ *Gashte Ershad* (1391).

⁸⁹ Two important Islamic requisites from the Quran: ‘enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong’.

⁹⁰ An auxiliary force engaged in activities such as internal security and enforcing state control over society (Golkar, 2015).

⁹¹ Guidance Patrol or morality police tasked to arrest mostly women who are deemed improperly dressed according to the dress code.

⁹² See *The Wind In My Hair* by Masih Alinejad.

⁹³ Refers to the Quran.

A history of writing (by and for society) would show that the written word is a necessary condition for all institutions, that there is no institution without writing (Lefebvre, 1984, p. 151). Ansar-e Hezbollah's slogan is: 'Then surely the party of God are they that shall be triumphant' (Quran 5:56).⁹⁴ This is why their main aim is helping others to take the straight path and abstain from reprehensible acts. However, there are different interpretations of this sentence from the Quran. Ansar-e Hezbollah have taken the sentence and made a particular interpretation of it and used it to support their aims. As Lefebvre (1984) demonstrates, a society that is founded on writing and written matter tends towards terrorism:

A society based on Scriptures (that is to say, a society whose conditions of survival are justified and upheld by manifestations connected with the written word) is based on prescription, it ordains the details of practical experience, ritualizes costumes, eating habits and sexuality (by commandments and interdictions); it also tends to enforce its stipulations by threats and sanctions, for it is not content with proclaiming general interdictions and leaving the rest to its members' initiative. (p. 151)

One of the sites terrorist society tries to organise is that of everyday life, but is it possible to organise it forever? Is it possible to give a fixed meaning to a signifier? Ansar-e Hezbollah are not total in their censorship but enormously powerful because they align with the regime.

Type 8: Genre and Censorship

There are also modes of censorship that are based on the genre of a film. The presence of this generic type of censorship highlights the importance of genre in cinema (and will be further explored through my matrix later in the thesis). As Moine (2008) demonstrates, analysis on genre can tell us about the society and its constructions of desire. It can also explain or clarify a society's cultural industry and the role of a genre in guaranteeing a particular form of social and political status quo by reaffirming normative social values (Moine, 2008, p.74). In different historical periods, Iranian society was faced with the bold presence of specific genres. For example, after passing through the chaotic years after the revolution, we were faced with the advent of religious films, which are ingrained in the ideology of the post-revolution system and propaganda. Later, during the war with Iraq, came Sacred Defence Cinema, which has become a genre unique to Iranian cinema. Moreover, the importance of entertaining movies increased

⁹⁴ *Al-Ma'idah* – The Food – Sura: 5, Verse: 56.

after the war, and also during the Ahmadinejad presidency, to amuse people who were in a bad social and economic situation. Melodrama is the most important and popular genre in Iranian cinema since early days that provides a context for moral issues in everyday life. Different genres work differently to produce censorship and as an example and case study I will discuss in detail how the genre of melodrama operates, and its role in constructing subject positions in Chapter Seven.

Type 9: Self-censorship

Self-censorship can have an external point of origin and something that we decide to do ourselves, although there is clearly a continuum here that means some cases will be closer to simple self-restraint while others will be closer to straightforward censorship. According to Foucault (1976, 1979), power works in such a way that we enact surveillance on ourselves. Furthermore, it is this uneasy relationship between these two components that is generally inclined to pull our responses in different directions (Horton 2011, p. 105). Thinking about all the types of censorship explained above, it is clear that artists' desire to be working in the cinema industry means accepting and undertaking self-censorship. Self-censorship is the result of all types of censorship since all these forms of censorship produce a 'bureaucratic conscience'. As Lefebvre (1984) wrote:

Thus, terror is not the space of false conscience (*La Fausse conscience*, a thesis by J. Gabel, Paris) but of true conscience or of the conscience of reality, isolated from possibility, virtuality and shaping activity; terror is not simply pathological, it becomes normal. (p. 179)

The forms of self-censorship by artists, censorship in screening, and quasi-official censorship are the best examples of the repression associated with a terrorist society. Self-censorship is a result of all the terrorist forms of censorship which leave no distinction between other directed and inner-directed consciousness, and these shape ambiguity– the aesthetic of Iranian films. Atwood (2012) tried to capture censorship as a lived experience in Iran, but he found it nearly impossible. I believe censorship has inflicted so many types of surveillance on Iran society and this causes collective trauma.

The first stage of a terrorist society is the production of a repressive society. Repression and propaganda started before the revolution and this was followed by the over-repressive rules

of the Islamicate period which meant Iran evolved into a terrorist society where each social group and individual have come to accept, internalize, and justify the ideologies of the terrorist society and now auto-pressurise themselves. Thus, censorship that is intertwined with propaganda is the context of terrorist society. In order to explore the particular societal context for Iran, I set out the specific modes of censorship that have created this terrorist society, I started by outlining the role of political censorship and moved to religious censorship, gender-based censorship, the quasi-official censorship, censored artists, bureaucratic censorship, censorship in screening, genre and censorship, and self-censorship. I illustrated how these various types of censorship demonstrate that censorship in Iranian cinema has a close connection with the concept of a terrorist society. Censorship is not just a force coming from the Islamic regime or law, it is about a society whose foundations are built on basic repressions.

Tehran and Modernity

Tehran is the symbol of Iranian modernity. Analysing the representation of Tehran helps us to explain the filmmakers' positions in constructing the meanings of Tehran and Iranian modernity, the characteristics of Tehran and Iranian modernity, and the relationship between Tehran and other cities. This section, which is mostly informed by the problematics of Simmel's philosophy in relation to urban life, analyses contemporary urban daily life and its representation. I work on 16 films, the titles of which include Tehran or an area in Tehran. In terms of my matrix these films come from the key signifiers of Underground Cinema, Art and Experimental Cinema, Accented Cinema, and Independent Cinema.⁹⁵ This section demonstrates how Iranian filmmakers 'read' Tehran as a text and then how they construct the meaning of this city for other readers. Given this approach, this section, rather than using the common variables of urban sociology —such as demography, housing, and leisure and time— interrogates the process of meaning construction in urban life and in the representation of it.

How Do We Read Tehran?

When I ask the question 'how do we read Tehran', I am trying to draw your attention to notions of common sense. In my question the 'we' refers to Iranian filmmakers, sociologists, and me.

⁹⁵ According to their articulations, they have the most modern approach to cinema and are against mainstream cinema. Each signifier is defined in Chapter Three.

It also refers to Iranian visual culture in terms of understanding the entity 'Tehran'; by using the 'we', I try to tackle my own knowledge and the things we take for granted. 'We' helps us to find ourselves in Tehran and enables us to read it as a text in our everyday life.

Lefebvre (1991) demonstrates that the city is a readable social text. Based on his ideas I understand the city is a representation, a representation that is involved with the discourses, symbols, metaphors, fantasies, and also material determinants, of the physical environment. The city is a sphere that produces social relations of production and reproduction, daily tasks, practices of government, a money economy, and forms of communication (Donald, 1992). According to James Donald in *Imagining the Modern City* (1992), cities generally have become a sort of metaphor for modernity itself. Reading the various interpretations of the city, finding out the ways it changes in different historical eras, and narrating daily life through these changes show us the process of 'seeing modern' and 'being modern' (Donald, 1999, p. 92).

Abbas Kazemi and Baharak Mahmoudi are two scholars who work on Iranian everyday life and cinema. In one of their important articles, they consider the problematic of urban life. In *Problematike moderniteye shahri: Tehran dar sinemaye ghabl az enghelab*,⁹⁶ Kazemi and Mahmoudi (2009/1388) argue that viewers of film can find two paradoxical Tehrans in films, 'Good Tehran' and 'Bad Tehran'. They are arguing that on the one hand, Tehran is a charismatic mythological space and on the other hand it is an evil being who abolishes the purity of human existence. In addition, the general contradiction in Iranian films between Tehran and other cities emerges from this point, that is, the contradiction between the modern and the traditional. This dualistic approach positions Tehran as the modern and is evil, and other cities are positioned as traditional and are good. After the revolution, this binary representation intensified and in most of the films, such as *Soltan* (1996)⁹⁷ and *The Feast*⁹⁸ (1995) by Kimiaei and *Under the Skin of the City*⁹⁹ (2001) by Bani-Etemad, the filmic representations are shaped to the core by this paradox of being both charismatic and evil. Generally, Kazemi and Mahmoudi (2009/1388) argue a cultural duality in urban films and Iranian modernity. They say people are represented as having a tragic fate in these films; they want to be good, but they do not know what is bad and what is good. As a result, we can see a

⁹⁶ *The Problematic of Urban Modernity: Tehran in Pre-revolution Cinema.*

⁹⁷ *Soltan* (1374)

⁹⁸ *Ziafat* (1373)

⁹⁹ *Zire Pooste Shahr* (1379).

dualistic stereotypical approach in representations of Tehran that splits Tehran into two opposing elements. In these films what happens is that first, all the complexities are simplified into one figure thus creating the stereotypical meaning of Tehran. Second, the stereotype also is split into a dualism of good and bad.

I believe the way that films represent Tehran/modernity and the way that scholars usually read these films (which is another act of representation) have a common perspectival problem which, as Simmel (1903) demonstrates, first will lead to and then perhaps end with a biased attitude. Second, this representation could be a result of what Simmel explains as ‘metropolitan intellectuality’ (Simmel, 1903). I draw on these points to offer a new reading of Tehran and argue that my reading enables us to ‘escape’ the dualism. Firstly, our understanding of the city cannot be viewed independently of the cinematic experience. As Nezar AlSayyad (2000) demonstrates, Jean Baudrillard’s notion of starting from the screen and moving to the city accepts a duality between the real city and the reel city that no longer exists. So, in order to understand the relationship between the city of Tehran and its cinematic representation, I do not start from one (e.g., the real) and then move to the other; instead, I examine both simultaneously. Rather than do what most urban planners, filmmakers, and artists have tried to do, which is to impose a single, definitive meaning on Tehran (Good Tehran or Mostly Bad Tehran), I attempt to decode the city; and figure out the role of the various paradigms in the moments at which their preferred meaning is authoritative and the moments at which their preferred meanings lose their power and new paradigms of representation and interpretation emerge. I focus on the process of meaning construction and explore the results of that process in relation to the production of subjectivities and in terms of subject positions.

The metropolis displays modernity with all its contradictions. In *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays* (1968), Simmel explains that the conflicts in modern life are part of the nature of modernity. I take three points from this interpretation. First, he explains that as life progresses to the level of mind, and mind in its turn progresses to the level of culture, an inner conflict appears since the modern mind has become a more and more calculating one, which is the result of a money economy. According to Simmel (1963), the whole evolution of culture is contained in the growth, resolution, and re-emergence of this conflict. Civil laws and constitutions, artistic works, religion, science and technology are all sites both for the creative life but also for the life that subsequently enters them. However, each of these sites has their own logic and laws and their own significance. At the moment of their establishment they are

well-matched to life, but as life continues its evolution, they tend to become inflexible and remote from life.

Second, it is not possible to place the filmmaker 'out' of society, that is, as someone who merely observes society far away from all the discourses. According to the notion of reflexivity used in this research, I cannot have a neutral role and just represent sociologically what films represent cinematically. So, I am doing something different compared to the existing literature: I am reading the real city and the reel city at the same time, and at times placing myself (reflexively) in these cities.

Simmel (2002), stressed the psychological impact of social existence in modernity. He argues that in this modern life we encounter two groups of people, one group of people have a blasé attitude and perceive themselves as worthless objects, and another group of people who, by contrast, look for the utmost in uniqueness, an attitude that leads them to extreme individualism. Urban films do not focus on Tehran, but they use it as a metaphor for Iranian modernity and by doing so reduce all the contradictions to one signifier. This signifier is Tehran and it is signified usually as a dystopia. The system of representation in this regard promotes the blasé attitude associated with Simmel's first group.

Third, to understand the city we must consider subjectivity as well. Simmel argues that the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of their existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of 'external culture', and of the technique of life (Simmel, 1968, p. 47). Thinking about this, I argue the filmmakers making Tehran films, from the selected signifiers in this section, according to their subject position, try not to follow the social forces set by the Islamic regime in Iran. By reading their films, we can recognise the relationship between these filmmakers as the modern subject with power in the context of daily life. I will work through the daily practices as I have nominated as key to real/reel Tehran to explore the power relations. In doing this analysis of daily practices I will demonstrate how we can develop the potentials of everyday life in order to, as Marcus (2012) demonstrates, illuminate and inform the future course of such practice of subjects moving through a city. I develop a way of interpreting everyday life to better use it to understand power and resistance in Iranian urban daily life. I demonstrate how everyday life in Iran is constructed discursively, what are the subject positions in daily life and clarify the relationship between urban daily life and its cinematic

representation. To understand the city, we must consider subjectivity. At this point to understand the city I will reintroduce my concept of subjectivity (set out earlier).

Overall, the problematics of Simmel's philosophy help me to explore modern Tehran. I use his ideas to discover modern conflicts in Iran. However, according to my methodology and approach, no meaning is given in advance. I cannot accept that there is a fixed meaning for urban life or modernity. I cannot accept the position Simmel took in order to explain modernity. Therefore, I work on the representations to demonstrate how meaning is constructed by various discourses. I use the points about urban life highlighted by Simmel but put them in my own chain of equivalence. That is, I use Simmel's problematics in a discursive context.

Urban Films: Ambiguity and Uncertainty

Scholars usually focus their analysis and work on allegory and ambiguity in Iranian films. According to Naficy (2012b), and Soltani and Zahraei (2016/1395), the use of symbolism is a fundamental method for Iranian filmmakers. They suggest that by using allegory and ambiguity, filmmakers have produced a new language for Iranian films that can convey meanings without doing so clearly and directly. Linking back to the earlier section and as Mottahedeh (2008) demonstrates, censorship is one of the main factors that led to filmmakers finding a way around repression of ideas. According to Michelle Langford (2019), it is a way of using deep cultural traditions that enables the filmmakers to express forbidden topics, and most skilled cineastes use it to critique social and cultural norms. In this section, I work on this aspect of the films, but by focusing on the message/content not on the cinematic form or what scholars call the strategy (Mottahedeh, 2008; Naficy, 2002; Mulvey, 1998) of the films.

In my view, film can use different forms and techniques such as allegory and ambiguity to send a message. By problematising the ambiguity I work on the message itself. Ambiguity puts us in an uncertain condition and uncertain situations raise ambiguities.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, instead of ambiguity I use the idea of 'uncertainty' in order to make connections between aesthetics of the films and uncertainty in modern life. Laura Mulvey also uses uncertainty to show how for example Abbas Kiarostami's films construct an uncertain world against the certain world of traditions (see Mulvey 2006) which is an interesting claim but different from what I demonstrate here. I use the word uncertainty because it is future oriented and directly

¹⁰⁰ According to Zielyk (1966), cognitive ambiguity is a form of uncertainty.

connects to judgment. In an uncertain condition we judge, and we make decisions. Making decisions means staying in the current subject position or, by changing the articulation, moving to another subject position. It is also the moment the subject appears in the structural gap.

Linking back to my theoretical framework, in this section I draw on some parts of Foucault's philosophy. In particular I focus on his claim that 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense it is neither an agency nor a structure. Power relations imagined like this create an uncertain space in Iranian cinema. Michel de Certeau was inspired by Foucault when forming his philosophy. According to Rabinow (1991), discourse is a site of both power and resistance with scope to evade, subvert, or contest strategies of power. De Certeau's philosophy aims to empower resistance in society and uncover the potential of routines as sites of resistance. He shows that resistance in everyday life is not an intellectual task; rather, it contains acts that occur through the simple existence of everyday life; 'acts of doing' such as walking, talking, cooking, reading, etc. According to Sheringham (2000), de Certeau looks for those aspects of everyday life which are dismissed as trivial – such as reading a book or inhabiting a neighborhood – and tries to locate them outside the discourses and disciplines. De Certeau (1998) argues that practices of everyday life can be the tactics individuals/consumers use from within as effective strategies in relation to powerful institutions (for example, capitalist firms). Tactics (that is consumers' procedures) and strategies (that is, the actions of corporations) both act in an effort to occupy time and space. As a result, 'tactics', which de Certeau equated with resistance, can include aspects of evasion or contestation although it seems they can never get close to subversion.

In this sense, we can say that using ambiguity and allegory is the 'tactic'¹⁰¹ used by filmmakers to convey their message when faced with the 'strategies' of the system and its uncertain codes of censorship.¹⁰² Henceforth, I accept that allegory is a positive tactic that allows filmmakers to form the aesthetic of Iranian films. I also accept that ambiguity is positive, although it does not guarantee that audiences will understand the vague messages in the way filmmakers want.¹⁰³ However, in my opinion, we would be too optimistic to think that a system that provides the facilities for film production and that controls even the tiniest aspects of the production and screening would not be aware of the tactics being used against its rules. So,

¹⁰¹ However, as with daily tactics, it does not have the capacity to subvert.

¹⁰² Uncertain rules of censorship are discussed in the section *Censorship and the Terrorist Society*.

¹⁰³ This refers to the power of the text.

why would the Islamic regime, which has the most restricted rules on cinema, screen these films? My answer to this question is, because of the message of the films.¹⁰⁴ That is, the message of the film should follow the regime's goals and I argue in most cases it does, otherwise there would be no screening.¹⁰⁵

Thinking about allegory and messages I believe there are two common features in urban films: uncertainty and trapped people in the city. For example, *Trapped (Darband)*¹⁰⁶ (2013) by Parviz Shahbazi is a moral thriller centred on the bristling relationship between two very different young women living in contemporary Tehran. Nazanin is a naïve but smart girl who moves to Tehran¹⁰⁷ to continue her studies at university. She rents a room from a vivacious shopgirl, Sahar. After a couple of bad experiences, a shock takes place and Nazanin finds herself in a complex web of debt and deception. Nazanin, the principled girl, faced with traumatic experiences in Tehran, ends up in an uncertain position. Darband is the name of a district in Tehran and also it means 'trapped', hence the English title of this film. *Trapped* is not about Tehran, but the story happens in Tehran. We watch how the naïve girl (Nazanin) and a lively 'brave' girl (Sahar) become trapped in Tehran.

Using Simmel's perspective, I call both women¹⁰⁸ 'the stranger' in the city. The stranger has both a close and a remote connection with the society, according to Simmel. A stranger exists on the border, not outside nor inside. According to Viera and Nunes in *Inequality and Uncertainty: Current Challenges for Cities* (2020, p. 218), the stranger is best understood as a social type whose sociological qualities arise not from the features of the individual nor from the individual's choice, but from his/her relations to the other. Nazanin and Sahar are both strangers to their neighbours. In fact, their friends/neighbours take advantage of them. The women are represented as mobile with unstable characters. They do not have organic connections with the locals; instead, they are looking for a way to survive and earn money in a city that does not have any space for them.

¹⁰⁴ Also, it is not possible to control everything to create one fixed, favourite meaning for any signifier. In this regard, *A Separation* (2011) by Asghar Farhadi is a good example.

¹⁰⁵ The people who are in charge of censorship are also audience members, but they have power. Usually, they understand the tactics. However, given the restricted rules, filmmakers have few opportunities to use this tactic against the dominant power. However, the social is coincidental.

¹⁰⁶ *Darband* (1391).

¹⁰⁷ Probably from a small city.

¹⁰⁸ Nazanin and Sahar.

In this film, the flatmates have to experience a series of shocks in their everyday life to learn the city's rules; this process is represented as adventurous. According to Wanderer (1987, p. 25), an adventure might involve risk, but these risks are not necessary. However, in this film, as with most Iranian films, adventure comes not only with risks but also with the chance of failure. Based on a range of ambiguities and allegories – from the name of the film to the theme of the story – what happens in the film is that in these uncertain conditions Nazanin, drawing on her traditional values, decides to help others, but Sahar decides to just take care of herself, including betraying Nazanin, because other friends have betrayed her. Nazanin is a good person and Sahar has a bad character, but both of them are the victims¹⁰⁹ of Tehran and modernity. In this film, the use of cinematic ambiguity in the film is not a tactic designed to challenge the social norms or the Islamic cinematic rules. However, it shows me the uncertainty of Nazanin's and Sahar's lives, and the different decisions these characters made in the same space. I would argue the message of the film and its cinematic tactic of ambiguity end in favour of the traditions. So, the ambiguity of the representations mean that the film can still be read in ways that favour conservative values and as aligned with the Islamic rules of the regime.

Saadatabad, which means 'felicity land' (the English name of the film), is a rich neighbourhood located in northwestern Tehran. But it is not one of the old areas in Tehran with high culture and familial inheritance. It is an area which has become popular with the middle classes and nouveau riche. In the film *Felicity Land* (2011)¹¹⁰ by Maziar Miri, ideas of modernity, Tehran, and uncertainty can be explored in terms of subject positions. *Felicity Land* examines the lives of three well-off Iranian couples who have a party to celebrate a birthday. As the party progresses, cracks begin to form. This film shows us the contrast between deceit and truth in relationships. It points out the lies, betrayal, and secrecy that exist between the characters.

The message of the film is that in an uncertain position any decision will make the future worse, so it is best to maintain your current subject position. Every character in the film is in a dilemma. They do not know whether to share a secret or keep it, to continue their routine life or change it. They are mostly opportunistic subjects who are thinking about their personal

¹⁰⁹ They are different, though. Nazanin comes to Tehran to study, so moving to Tehran is more symbolic here since she moves for a specific reason. Moving to Tehran is an obstacle between her and her destination (university). But Sahar is in Tehran for no particular reason. She cannot find a position in Tehran for herself. She grows tired of being a stranger, the city marginalises her even more, and she goes abroad.

¹¹⁰ *Saadatabad* (1388).

benefits – their issue is deciding between being good or being evil. In the end, all the characters, under a range of pressures, forces, and changes, conservatively decide to keep their secrets. They know it is wrong, but they make this choice because they think they are guilty and they want to avoid creating more problems for themselves. In order to not lose future opportunities, they prefer to feel guilty and keep their secrets.

However, there is one character in this film who is happy with his life, Mohsen (Hamed Behdad). This two-faced character's secret is that he has had an affair. He betrayed his best friend and his wife, but he does not feel guilty. This character is a representative of the second group of people in Simmel's theory: the competitive ones who look for uniqueness and extreme individualism. In the film, Mohsen is the one who lies and does not care about anyone. Mohsen (a dealer who has governmental connections) has the closest connection to the money economy. A sign of love is visible in all the characters. Sometimes they lie because they do not want to hurt their partner, but Mohsen just follows the financial benefits and acts accordingly. This is why he does not care, even if his wife does not share her secret with him. In the end, what the film says is that personal relationships in Tehran/modern Iran are full of betrayals, and it suggests to the audience to take the conservative path and to keep a secret since we are stuck in a situation whereby by sharing a secret we are just going to make more trouble for ourselves.

In both *Felicity Land* and *Trapped*, the concept of trust becomes problematic. In *Trapped*, Nazanin mistakenly decides to trust Sahar, and the characters in *Felicity Land* do not trust one another enough to share a secret. The issue of trust is widespread in Tehran films. The film *National Alley*¹¹¹ (2013) by Mehrshad Karkhani also explores trust. This film, which draws on a nostalgic perspective to illustrate how Tehran has changed over the years and how most movie theatres have been shut down, tells the audience not to trust in modern urbanisation. *Ekbatan* (2012)¹¹² by Mehrshad Karkhani a gangster story, shows that money can diminish social trust in society and destroy relationships and friendships. *Tajrish ... an Unfinished Story*¹¹³ (2014) is a love story that shows how modern people have lost their bonds, roots, and history. Its nostalgic approach conveys a meaning that the era of social trust is over. *Parkway*

¹¹¹ *Kooche Melli* (1392); a district in southern Tehran.

¹¹² *Ekbatan* (1391).

¹¹³ *Tajrish... natamam* (1393).

(2007)¹¹⁴ is by Fereydoun Jeyrani, and the title refers to the name of a junction and a famous bridge in Tehran. It is a horror thriller movie. The story of this film is based on trust. Through its violent sensibility, it tries to show the blasé attitude caused by high consumption and pleasure that ultimately destroys life and humanity.

In all these films, characters cannot trust one another. They feel guilty because of decisions they had to make and because of the unreliable uncertain conditions in which they live. According to Simmel (1950, p. 18), trust cannot be reduced to calculation. He (1950, p. 318) claims that trust is based on neither certainty nor ignorance. Mollering (2001), by considering Simmel's philosophy, explains that trust is based on a positive expectation of the future; it can overcome uncertainty even without sufficient knowledge. According to (Frederiksen, 2014), sociological research generally demonstrates that trust allows people to overcome uncertainty. In this regard, there is a strong link between uncertainty and distrust.

According to Aspers (2018, p. 139), who also used Simmel's philosophy in this context, one of the forms of uncertainty reduction is contest. 'Contest' for Simmel is about struggle. Contest/struggle is a direct way to settle uncertainty between those taking part. The outcome of a struggle is uncertain prior to the contest (Aspers, 2018, p. 142). In urban films we see people who are looking for a better life, but they usually fail because of the decisions they make in uncertain conditions. A simple mistake can end with or lead to a worse social experience. They live in an uncertain condition because of all the daily shocks they face in their everyday life. Their values are mostly formed by traditions. They are isolated in the city and suffer from a lack of social trust. However, we cannot see the roots of this traumatic everyday life in the films. So, according to the logic of decision-making and valuation forms of uncertainty reduction in the films analysed, none of the characters' decisions have a positive effect since the characters or the decisions are unstable and mobile, and based on vague values. Therefore, the subjects cannot reduce uncertainty by struggling with problems and making decisions.

Relying on Simmel and on Apres' discussion of his theories, institutionalising certainty is a way to reduce uncertainty. Institutionalising certainty is about clarifying what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. It is generally about making standard rules and laws. For example, *Tehran Symphony*¹¹⁵ (1994), directed by Rasoul Sadrameli, takes a different attitude to the films already explored. It illustrates the role of discipline in modern life in

¹¹⁴ *Parkway* (1386).

¹¹⁵ *Samfonie Tehran* (1373).

constructing the city and marginalising creativity.¹¹⁶ This film contributes to the symbolic order of urban life is about the roles of police instructions in ruling the city. In the film, a 12-year-old boy ignores the pedestrian rules when he commutes between his house and school. He is tired of obeying his parents' rules and uses the path to school as a free space in which he can rebel. In this sense he is at odds with the policy who enforce the rules of the city. However, at the end of the film he reconciles with the kind police character in the film, and in a dream-like sequence, by dancing on the pedestrian lines he is playing the symphony of Tehran. The logic of *Tehran Symphony* is that in order to decrease uncertainty, modes of institutionalised certainty (here using a crossing) are useful, albeit by excluding creativity, or what Lefebvre calls the 'right to the city'. This 12-year-old boy does not have any right to the city; he cannot make changes there and the parental culture controls him until he obeys – becomes hegemonic.

What is missing in the narratives in this film is a problem-solving inventiveness in everyday life; or, as Berger et al. (1974) argue, a 'tinkering attitude'. Ignoring the roots and structures of modernity in Iran and their effect on private lives and ignoring the role of social actors in creating new meanings for modernity, are the main flaws in the recognition of modernity by this filmmaker. I argue that as a result of urbanisation – there is a new awareness that has been linked to the growth of modern mass media, that penetrates from large cities to small villages across society – there is a tendency to represent a story that ignoring the role of agency and not paying attention to the meaning structures will lead to a sense of regret; regret for past choices and a sense of failure resulting from current and future decisions. Individuals understand their identity in the same way, as an identity with an incorrect past and an unknown present and future.

Most Iranian films, by using ambiguity and allegory¹¹⁷ along with the censorship processes, construct passive characters in an uncertain situation in which any change/decision makes everything worse for them and others. This is the type of message the system looks for. That is, ambiguity and allegory as the filmmakers' tactic is simply an aesthetic form to create the message that the Islamic regime counts on by representing the preferred subjects in order to reduce uncertainty in everyday life – to create passive individuals and preferred subjects and keep the discourse hegemonic.

¹¹⁶ The sequences where the filmmaker pays attention to nature, the scene where the mother dances in the yard (35'), the creativity of the kid, the fantasy scene of playing piano using the crosswalk (54') are all examples of creative actions that take place in a city but which eventually dissolve into order and discipline.

¹¹⁷ Rooted in the poetic culture of Iran.

Tehran: City of Demands, City of Conflicts

Tehran has a pluralistic identity. The city is the embodiment of the collective will. Tehran is the Other for the other cities of Iran. This is why the plot of most films is about a person or a family who moves to Tehran. People move to Tehran because the city is understood as a site that has promised to give them whatever they want in life, but at the end of the day it takes whatever they have. Still, people follow that dream. This section is about the demands of and conflicts between different groups of film characters in filling the Tehran signifier. It analyses a selection of films and explores how different filmmakers use their preferred signifier, which is made a part of the plot and narrative.

In *My Tehran for Sale* (2009), Marzieh is a young female actress who lives in Tehran and whose theatre work the authorities have banned. One night she meets a guy (Saman) at a party. Saman is Iranian born, now an Australian citizen, who offers Marzieh the possibility of leaving Iran in order to work freely. *My Tehran for Sale* follows the main approach of the other urban films I analysed; that is, Tehran is represented as an immoral, unfair city that creates problems for its citizens and the only choices available to those desperate people who are stuck in this situation are one, to keep abiding by the existing order by keeping themselves within the margins, two, to leave the country, or three to look for personal advantage. These characters are all innocent victims who are trapped in a bad situation, but even so they always feel guilty about their decisions. For example, in order to find a place to work freely, Marzieh has to go abroad since she cannot do what she likes in Tehran. Leaving the country is the only way for the protagonist to solve her problem. The film does not explore the problem, but it does show Marzieh's decisions. Despite all her efforts, she was not successful. She tests positive for HIV and Saman leaves her. Marzieh decides to leave the country illegally. However, at the end of the film she now has more problems and is in an uncertain situation in an Australian refugee camp waiting for permission to be free or to die in the camp.

Tehran: Another Side (2008), directed by Sam Ali Kashani, is a film that I have classified under the key signifier of Underground Cinema in my matrix. This film tries to represent a modern image of Tehran. 'Americans think we live in a desert and travel by camels, so I want to make this film to show to my American friends that Iran is a modern country and in Tehran we have whatever other modern countries have', the director says in the first five minutes of the film. In contrast to *My Tehran for Sale*, where Marzieh is represented as needing to go abroad to fully live her life, *Tehran: Another Side* suggests you can have whatever you want in

Tehran. According to his biography,¹¹⁸ Sam Ali Kashani's family moved to the United States after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. I would suggest given this that Sam, was thoroughly American, leading a lifestyle typical of any young Californian. Therefore, his perspective on Iran was much like most Americans, coloured by skewed media portrayals and political constructions. Yet, the Tehran he observed upon his arrival was nothing like what he had seen on television: the bustling, modern city squares; the influence of Western culture on the adolescents and young professionals; and the vibrant calls for social reform.

As discussed earlier, in Iranian films the Good Tehran is always the old Tehran. Whenever we see the Good Tehran, we are faced with its old elements represented through a lens of nostalgia. *Tehran Tehran* (2010) by Mehrjouei is a good example of this trope. However, *Tehran: Another Side* focuses on modern patterns of the city. So now by considering *Tehran: Another Side* we can better understand the meaning of modern Tehran and modern demands.

The core of this film is consumption. Kashani meets and talks with many people in Tehran; he even meets two of the most well-known underground musicians, both of whom have now left Iran as refugees.¹¹⁹ Kashani wants to say that Iranians are really modern, but the modernity he illustrates is about Western consumption.¹²⁰ I argue his narrative leads to a fixed identity for the people and a fixed meaning for life in Iran. In all the interviews in this film, people talk about their leisure time, shopping malls, and luxury cars. Kashani produced this film in the rich or middle-class areas of Tehran. However, as will be demonstrated, even though people try to defend their high standard of living¹²¹ for American eyes, in the background we can see that life is not really experienced at this high standard. The question that Kashani poses promotes bourgeois ideology. The ordinary people in front of the camera forget their needs; they talk about their desires, which are constructed by the bourgeoisie.

To understand the everyday reality of urban life, one has to pay attention to the structures of meanings and discourses of meaning production (Berger et al., 1974, p. 62). One way of seeing this different experience of low standards of living is to analyse the time the film was made (reel and real). This film was produced in 2008, and over the last decade the number of

¹¹⁸ <https://www.amazon.com/Tehran-Another-Sam-Ali-Kashani/dp/B001BCU64G>.

¹¹⁹ Soroush Hichkas and Bahram Nooraei.

¹²⁰ He goes to see hip-hop artists, he plays pool, goes to shopping malls, etc.

¹²¹ This scene was filmed in Saadatabad.

shopping malls in Tehran and the other big cities has grown sharply. As a result of urban neoliberal policies and gentrification, Tehran lost many of its traditional bazaars and old areas were replaced with modern shopping malls. Lefebvre (2003, p. 110) demonstrates that we can follow the fragmentation of the city through gentrification. Kashani does not see this fragmentation. He films some of the traditional bazaars, but he does not notice how they have changed and are now marginalised due to the modern malls.¹²²

On the other hand, for example, *Across the Highway* (2007) by Nahid Rezaei is a documentary about the conflicts around the improvement and renovation of one of the old areas of Tehran and problematises the right to the city and the ownership of the city. In this documentary, local people try to own their area and resist the top-down renovation. This documentary shows the bureaucratic process and urban policies and explores the power relations in the city and the daily resistance of subjects who try to own their city. Also, *Across the Highway* (2007), unlike *Who Do You Show These Films To?* (1992) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, which is about poor marginalised people who live in and around Tehran without having proper housing, does not criminalise and victimise poor people. Kashani sees the city as a space to consume inactively or as a product, but Rezaei represents it as a space to create meaning, as a space for subjects to have agency.

According to Birashk (1970), the effects of industrial civilisation on Iran were as follows: the connection between the ancient traditional culture and Iranian urban society was cut; and since the country was not prepared for accepting the new industrial culture, it faced many problems. Meanwhile, traditions and religious beliefs, which in their progressive form could have assisted the formation of a newer culture for society, instead became development barriers. Public awareness of developments in foreign countries and new technological facilities in well-developed urban households led to an increase in industrial commodity consumption in Iranian society. Therefore, the Iranian bazaar transformed into new bazaars for the consumption of foreign commodities. Birashk also argued social institutions changed completely due to Western culture (Birashk, 1970, p. 104). Basically, the purpose of creating shopping malls was to increase the desire to purchase and consume unnecessary goods. According to Shalchi (2012), ready-to-eat snacks bearing foreign names are the most purchased products in malls. Snacks such as popcorn, corn cobs, hotdogs, pizzas, and other fast foods are

¹²² He is looking for Western elements, not Tehran's modern elements.

the most common. These snacks propound the new style of eating, outside the identified style of traditional eating among Iranian families.

In a capitalist setting consumption operates to create and conserve a particular feeling of identity. ‘Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.’ Bocoock (1993) believes that people who are the users of clothing, food, accessories, furniture, and even certain types of leisure refer to these objects not in terms of what they are, but in terms of those people’s aspirations for who they want to be; they produce a specific feeling of identity linked to what is signified by the product. They become who they want to be, via the things they consume. This process of subject formation is clear in Tehran as *Tehran: Another Side*. These are the demands of the society. When a small group¹²³ of city people explain what they have, they are expressing what they value, what they demand, and what are they desire. The director misses the complexity of consumption patterns in Tehran, especially that malls lead to increased inequality; he only shows the part of the city that is a simulacrum of New York.

The next example is *Tehran Taxi* by Bahman Giarostami, in which a taxi driver has conversations about everyday life with his passengers as he drives around Tehran. This film might be helpful for building a bridge between a traditional and modern face of Iranian society. The conversations with different people of various ages and from different social strata bring to life the multitude ideas that shape the meanings of Tehran. In this film we can see some people who believe they can reform their society. (This is in the sequence related to the Green movement). There are some people who only care about their modern identity and try to distinguish themselves through consumption, there are some traditional and religious people who would like to keep the status quo, and there are some young people who believe that class conflict in Tehran produces different identities and cultures thus separating people.

At the end of the film we, as the audience, reach an understanding that life is really complicated and full of conflicts in Tehran, but there are some ways to have fun and hope to make a change. Contrary to many Iranian films, this movie does not humiliate the people by implying they are inactive subjects. It does not suggest they do not know the difference between what is good and what is bad, that they cannot do anything to change their life, that they deserve this traumatic everyday life. Rather, it clearly shows how the city and individuals are in a dialectical relationship. It shows how people construct their city and how pluralistic Tehran is. It illustrates how decisions made by individuals can reduce uncertainty. However, it also

¹²³ The big Other.

expresses that there is something about Tehran that still shapes the uncertainty in everyday life. At the end of *Tehran Taxi*, the taxi driver says: ‘It is more than 30 years that I am wandering in this city but still I do not know why... Tehran has something that I cannot leave it.’

I argue Tehran gives hope to the people, hope of progress in life. Yet Tehran also keeps its people in an unstable condition, makes them feel hopeless, divides them into losers and winners, entertains the winners with new Western brands and blames the losers because of their bad decisions. It gives them an uncertain future. Tehran also suspends social time. In *Precarious Lives Waiting and Hope in Iran*, Shahram Khosravi wrote ‘to keep people waiting and enduring hardship without ruining their hope is an exercise of power over their time’ (2017, p. 14). Harvey (1996, p. 38) explains that for many, the twenty-first century city is a dystopia full of human hopelessness, chronic diseases, wasteful consumerism, and excessive pollution. Applying Harvey’s idea I suggest Tehran is a dystopian nightmare because it tries to follow the Western utopian cities. But the question is who benefits from this situation? As Simmel explains, perhaps it is something in the nature of modernity. Tehran is produced through intersecting and contradictory discourses, including that of Iranian cinema. The city is a palimpsest of the past and present.

Two films that exemplify this are *Tehran Has No More Pomegranates* (2006) and *Tehran is the Capital of Iran* (1966). *Tehran Has No More Pomegranates* (2006) is a musical comedy film about 150 years of history in Tehran. It starts with a letter the director, Masoud Bakhshi, is writing to the President of a documentary centre who is the producer of the film. He claims that because of all the obstacles in the process of production he cannot finish the documentary and he will send all the materials and recorded sequences to the centre. After that, a monologue which sounds like a historical document narrates: ‘*Tehran is a large village near the city of Rey full of gardens and fruit trees. Its inhabitants live in anthill like underground holes. The village’s several districts are constantly at war. Tehranis’ main occupations are theft and crime, though the king pretends they are subject to him. They grow excellent fruit, notably an excellent pomegranate, which is found only in Tehran.*’ This monologue is taken from a part of a book *Asarolbalb* by Zakarya Mohammad Ghazvini, wrote in 1241 AD.

The history of Tehran we see in *Tehran Has No More Pomegranates* (2006) is fragmented. From a comic perspective, this film makes fun of people and the city and illustrates a silly alienated life with no original valuable cultural and historical roots. At the end of the film, we hear the director say: ‘I, the abandoned director, despairing, came to understand that

a film about Tehran was a waste of time.’ According to Harvey (1996), this is a common understanding of a modern city; however, in the Iranian culture industry this common representation of Tehran aims to show that Tehran is still a village shaped by its pre-modern conflicts. As Bakhshi explained in the first ten minutes of the film, Tehran is a city like all other metropolises such as London, New York, Tokyo, and Paris – they are all noisy, busy, crowded, dirty. However, instead of exploring modern life in Tehran, this film criticises all aspects of urban life. Even using a more flexible cinematic language that comes available through music and comedy that gives the director more space in which to compare a generic structure to narrate a story, he cannot either visually or through dialogue what he looks for. The question that remains in this film and that forces the director to discontinue shooting is why are the citizens satisfied in this dystopia and why do they like to live in this city – the same question asked by the taxi driver in *Tehran Taxi*. One answer could be that Tehran is not a dystopia for them. ‘City’ does not have a fixed meaning; as I am arguing ‘city’ is an open text, a floating signifier, and people read it in different ways.

Tehran is the Capital of Iran (1966) is a good example to show the role of author/director in producing meaning. During the time when most documentaries followed the Pahlavi II rules and attempted to represent a modern identity for Tehran and to create a narrative about a rich Persianate history, Kamran Shirdel in his film *Tehran is the Capital of Iran* represented marginalised Tehran citizens such as beggars, street vendors, and people selling their own blood. In the film, a teacher in the classroom reads aloud for the students to write:

*Tehran is the capital of Iran. Shahanshah¹²⁴ Aryamehr lives in Tehran.
Iran has many factories, hospitals and offices where people work night
and day. Iran has had kings since very long ago. Kingship is handed
down from father to son. The elder son of a king is called Crown Prince.
Our king is his majesty Mohhamad Rea Shah-Pahlavi.*

This film represents the poor illiterate people who have to huddle with dogs in order to keep themselves warm during the winter. This film, which in line with hegemonic discourses was supposed to represent a modern Tehran, represented the poorest groups of people of Tehran and was banned because of this representation. In contemporary urban films poverty, alienation

¹²⁴ King of kings; refers to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.

continues to be excluded and we still only see the moral dilemmas of the Tehran middle class or the personal problems and mistakes of poor middle-class people.

For me, Tehran is an imaginary environment, reel and real. It is an environment shaped by the interaction of practices, events, and relationships so complex that it cannot easily be visualised. This can be shown by comparing two films. First, *A Waltz for Tehran* (2016) visualises different groups of people, such as the street musicians who believe they have to stay in Tehran's streets and in doing so shape it in their own way. The narrative of this film suggests the musicians in this film believe in the 'right to the city', but when we talk about the 'right to the city' - as this filmmaker does - we have to ask whose right? To what city? These musicians are from different social classes, but they all want to play music in the streets. However, only the protagonist – who is from working class - firmly believes in what he wants. Demand and aspiration, deprivation, and discontent are clear in the movie. The demand for rights; comes from those directly in need and directly oppressed, and, as Marcuse in *Cities for People, Not for Profit* (2012) explains:

Those superficially integrated into the system and sharing in its material benefits, but constrained in their opportunities for creative activity, oppressed in their social relationships, guilty perhaps about an undeserved prosperity, unfulfilled in their lives' hopes. (p. 31)

Thinking about Marcuse's idea I would argue the demand and aspiration failed to fully come together in the film and the distance between the deprived and the alienated remained.

This film can be compared to a second film *Tehran: The Last String* (2010) in which we see a music band that faces problems trying to put on a concert. Different characters in this film make stereotyped decisions – one decides to leave the country, another changes his attitude to life and dies by an accident. However, the last sequence of the film is about a great decision. The band that is not allowed to play in a music hall decides to play in the city. They go to a hill that has a good view over Tehran and start to sing their song for the city – and symbolically they send their nationalistic message to the city. The message is: we are different people, some of us are modern and some of us are religious, but we all love our country, and we are not going to betray Iran. This film reminds me of *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009), which is about underground musicians who have trouble playing music legally. Even in this film, when facing different types of censorship they confess that they love their country and even if they leave the country it is because they cannot work in Iran. No matter what, they love their country. It seems that most Iranian film characters always have to prove they are not looking for an

opportunity to betray their country. Linking to my earlier ideas about trust and uncertainty, this is also one of the problems Iranian filmmakers have with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Overall, in these films the directors deploy different groups to make their points about the meanings of Tehran, for example, rich people, artists, thieves. The groups used across the signifiers from my matrix of cinema discussed in this research are not part of the regime's Islamic articulation. That is, they would all like to change the status quo. In this regard, they have some Laclauian demands. Thinking of the work of Laclau (2005), their demands make sense as 'requests'. They look for a way they can use the democratic process to reform the rules. In any process of demand, the source of power to which the people address their demands need to respond to the demand in order to reduce any effects of social antagonism brought about by the demands, which are responses to dissatisfaction with life. In each of the films, these demands were not satisfied and so the people making the demands changed their mode articulation and it then appeared as 'claim'. Thus, people's demands transform into a social movement which appears in the films as the presence of the bodies in the city, for example the band on the hill.

Traumatic Everyday Life in Tehran

Tehran as the symbol of modernity in Iran which transforms a traditional society into a modern one provides different shocks to the people's life. Additionally, many crises and traumatic experiences occur in Tehran, which leads me to the concept of a 'risk society'. I make a distinction here between a risk society and a traumatic society. Both are description of a negative side of modernity and are seen as being the result of human decisions, but I believe risk society is more about decisions that are beyond the control of ordinary people and, as Ulrich Beck (1999) demonstrates, are more institutional. So, by considering risk in this context, we are looking to reduce the effects of the risks by improving and expanding social institutions. I argue the city itself constitutes a site of shock. In this section I will explore how traumatic experiences are lived through the urban space. I use trauma as a concept in everyday life. My argument is that traumatic experiences are rooted in the everyday, in everyday practices and moral issues faced in daily life, and they emerge through the process of recognition and consciousness.

My first example is *Tehran 56* which is a body of social research project on Tehran carried out by Iranian and American social researchers a year before the Islamic Revolution. In this project, the researchers mention all the problems Tehran faces as a big city and suggest ways to solve these problems. Mohsen Goodarzi and Arash Isfahani (2019) published this research as a book to show how social researchers understood urban life in Tehran more than forty years earlier. Surprisingly, we can see that after forty years Tehran still has the same problems, and neither the King nor the regime heeded the warnings about what was required to resolve Tehran's issues, such as the need for development of infrastructure. In fact, Tehran went backwards in terms of economic, social, and geographical development and now cannot accommodate its growing population. Also, as the capital of Iran unequal development was reproducing inequality in relation to the other cities and in the economy of the country. At that time the population of Tehran was about five million people and now it is two times more than this. I argue that if we understand those problems as the elements of a risk society, the experience of living under these circumstances means living in a traumatic city.

The social history of Tehran is full of social conflicts – terror, war, revolution, and natural and human-induced disasters including air pollution and traffic congestion. Significant events in the history of the city include the Triumph of Tehran (1909), the Islamic Revolution (1979), Iran–Iraq War (1980), executions of Iranian political prisoners (1988), the shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655 (1988), chain murders of Iran (1988–1998), the Tajrish flood (1987), the ‘Night Bat’ serial killer (1992–1997), the Iran student protests (1999), the Green movement (2009), terrorist attacks in Tehran (2017) and the crash of Ukrainian Flight 752 on takeoff from Tehran (2020). I argue given these risks are closely connected to Tehran, they shape it as a risk society. So, if we understand the city as a live creature which is in a dialectical relationship with individuals, we can comprehend Tehran as a traumatic city. My argument will demonstrate how the traumatic city reproduces traumatic experiences in everyday life, and how this process continues through individuals.

By thinking about the images of Tehran provided by the films and thinking about Tehran as a city where I have lived for 30 years, I now want to illustrate Tehran as a traumatic city. Karami et al. (2008/1387) demonstrate that economic and urban factors have the strongest effect on the stress felt by Tehran's citizens. These factors are inflation and the high cost of living, heavy traffic and crowds, city noise pollution, air pollution, lack of housing, dealing with intolerable people, high rental rates, ethnic and linguistic discrimination, and family disputes. Moreover, Amir Kafi (2008/1387) in *Barresi ehsase amniat va avamele moaser bar*

an dar Tehran demonstrates that less than 50 percent of Tehran's citizens feel secure. He proves that population growth, urban expansion, and technological and industrial progress have created a new social environment that is individualised, competitive, and unidentified. And this complexity, which is a feature of big cities, has created a frightening atmosphere for citizens, along with social disarray, distrust, risk, and lack of social protection. These aspects of Tehran lead us to the concept of urban trauma.

Tehran is a traumatic city because uncertainty and contingency have become an issue that shapes the real/reel space. It is traumatic because acceptance of vulnerability is a dominant answer to the Laclauian problem of 'demand(s). According to Frederiksen (2014, p. 142), accepting vulnerability is a version of risk in which the adverse effects of avoiding a future are even greater than the adverse effects of the event itself. It is traumatic because 'demands', as 'request' and 'claim', are both postponed to an uncertain future. It is traumatic because of the daily shocks. These daily shocks are like a trauma trigger. For example, there was an instance when people who were just at a petrol station, noticed without any warning, that the price of petrol was increased 200 percent. This led to protests against the regime in more than a hundred cities. In these protests, known as Bloody November (2019-2020), thousands of people were killed by the repressive state. Thus, to explain Iranian everyday life I cannot just use the concept of risk society. It has to be a trauma society. Tavakol and Hasanzadeh in *Fahme jameshenakhtie tromaye shahri*¹²⁵ (2013) demonstrate that trauma is born of a competitive society. Competitive societies create competitive relationships and unequal structures and then this situation produces an opportunistic and also individualistic subject; for example, when citizens are in competition for fuel for cars.

In the process of modernising, Tehran has been changing and growing in a fast and careless way. Living in Tehran means living in a dystopia. Facing various aspects of dystopia everyday produces a range of different traumatic experiences for the citizens. Here I am arguing that trauma must not just understood here as simply the experience of specific catastrophic events, but also in a more general sense as 'shock' Shock experience [Schockerlebnis] is a key concept for Walter Benjamin, particularly in *The Arcades Project*, written between 1927 and 1940 (Benjamin et al, 1999); I explain this further in Chapter Six. The shock experience has a direct connection to collective memory and is bound up with the experience of the modern city. An example of my argument is renovation. I argue renovating buildings and streets in the

¹²⁵ *Sociological Understanding of Civic Trauma.*

process of gentrification can be understood as a shock for a citizen who has had no role in this process. They may experience the shock of losing all memories of the familiar place or losing their sense of belonging to the city.

Gilloch and Kilby (2005) explain, we can understand shock or traumatic experiences by exploring the relation between memory and the city or its representation. The points Gilloch and Kilby make suggest to me that cinematic and metropolitan shock experiences are inextricably intertwined and they leave scars on the human unconscious and memory. Memory is based on everyday experiences, and collective memory is a process not a thing. 'Collective memory is the active past that forms our identities' (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.111). Across different historical periods in Iran, this memory process renewed itself through a dialectical connection between amnesia and remembering. Cinema creates visual memories, as do museums and art galleries which preserve artefacts that then produce memories to construct the present (Gilloch and Kilby, 2005). The construction of Tehran's meaning in Iranian cinema is like a cultural trauma; it is a city that filmmakers view from a pessimistic perspective. Most of the films represent Tehran like a city in a classic Hollywood noir movie. Some well-known features of the noir movies are an oppressive atmosphere of menace, pessimism, anxiety, suspicion that anything can go wrong, and a sense of defeat (Chan, 2019). I would argue a stressful life and the lack of certainty are the most relevant variables in this respect.

The film *Nights of Tehran* (2001) is a good illustration of this idea of noir and uncertainty. This film is about Mina who gets lost in Tehran. Her friend, Shirin, and Mina's mother inform the police of her absence. Their search leads to finding Mina's body in the hills surrounding the city. The police inform Shirin that Mina was the fourth victim of a serial killer. Shirin, who is a social sciences student, decides to find the killer herself. The first monologue in *Nights of Tehran* describes the city for us:

This is Tehran. The city for tall and glass buildings which are waiting for earthquakes. A city built on household sewage. A city with postmodern architecture with non-modern lives. The city of brokers, traders, the city of low-income employees, the city of overnight millionaires. A football city.

This monologue draws our attention to a fear of the future, lack of trust, and uncertainty about the present – glass buildings and earthquakes. It shapes Tehran as a dualistic city that is beautiful on the surface because of its buildings, but dirty and ugly at its roots. However, while we are hearing this monologue we see an ugly image of Tehran's buildings. This monologue

shows the dualistic approach of good and evil used by many filmmakers in representing. The narrative suggests there is uncertainty in urban life for poor middle-class people, and that ultimately that society is to blame for their non-modern lives. There is no hope in this narration and representation of Tehran. It depicts a dead end.

Tehran Taboo (2017) is an animation drama which tries to explore this urban trauma. This film is about a single mother forced into prostitution who befriends a young woman who needs an operation to restore her virginity. This film shows the reproduction of violence at every level of everyday life. People show no mercy towards each other. Within a patriarchal system, their lives are filled with secrets, hypocrisy, terror, and corrupted morality. A relevant example of this is a scene in a photography store. The photographer asks the individuals [who are getting photographs printed] what the photos are for. He wants to know if they are for a job application in a private company, and so the background should be white and bright; or if they are for a court hearing and so, the mood should be sad and dark. Throughout the film these people lie to get what they want. For example, the girl mentioned earlier wanted to restore her virginity so she could earn more as a sex worker abroad; she lied about her financial situation so the single mother would help her.

From the youngest to the oldest, the most religious to the most democratic, all the characters are sexist. As a result, by criticising the Islamic regime, patriarchy and the repressive control over private lives, this film represents all Iranians as corrupted immoral subjects. Every day they face traumatic experiences because of the regime and they then reproduce this violence in different ways in order to survive. In this film, there is not one neutral character; all the main and secondary characters are negative. This film visualises my concept of a terrorist society. In the earlier section *Censorship and the Terrorist Society*, I focused on the repressive rules that can reproduce violence in everyday life, but this film tries to follow and visualise the decisions of the characters. That is, instead of exploring the negative impact of the dominant ideologies, it victimises the subjects and blames them. It shows them as guilty subjects and hides any form of resistance that is being enacted in everyday life.

Another animation is *Tehran 1500* (2012), which shows a Tehran municipality in a fantasy space-age Tehran in 2121 AD with all its cultural conflicts. The film's story explores the past and the present of an elderly man, Akbar Agha, who is 160 years old. This animation shows that in 2121 people live with robots, and in such a world, rich people can live very long lives. I argue this film support the status quo of the regime. It does this by creating a future of

stability for traditions, the regime and imagines a type of social reconciliation for the society. However, it does grapple with some issues of repression. It shows that even in 2121 there are some people who try to control others' privacy. For example, there is a sequence in which the two main characters suggest a female robot should be more careful about wearing the hijab and cover its metal legs for its own safety. Looking at these two animations, *Tehran Taboo* and *Tehran 1500*, we can see the filmmakers intent to suggest Islamic regime rules and neoliberal competitive rules as the main discourses in Iranian urban life. The narratives suggest that traditions and the Islamic values of the regime repress the everyday life; and by intertwining the money economy and neoliberalism the film personalises these social problems. An example of this is taken from another film, *From Tehran to Heaven* (2014) which represents a surreal story about a Tehrani woman who looks for her lost husband in a remote desert. This woman from the noir city of Tehran, which is full of tragedies, discovers that even in a remote desert, you cannot trust anything or anyone. At the end of the film she finds out everything is rooted in the individual and its mind. The suggestion is she should ignore and forget the social issues and keep her distance from society in order to live in peace. This discourse creates passive subjects and a traumatic everyday life in which poor middle-class people never deserve a better life and should be happy with what they have. In all the selected films there is a traumatic everyday life that is filled with demands and conflicts, all that remains for society is lost hope.

As I know, the experience of living in Tehran is based on shock and losing hope. Characters in these films have to go through traumatic experiences in their futile attempts to meet their needs, wishes, or hopes. The 'Bad Tehran' is always against them. However, even if they do not face the Bad Tehran, they face the Bad Tehranies (citizens of Tehran). The films use a stereotypical dualism which, according to Hall (1992, p. 215), collapses the complex differences into a simple 'cardboard' type. It is this exaggerated simplification that is attached to the signification of Tehran.

Although we have been discussing post-revolutionary films, I would suggest that we can in fact find this dualism in the first sound Persian language film ever produced. In 1932, Ardeshir Irani and Abdolhossein Sepanta made the film *The Lor Girl*, which is also known as *The Iran of Yesterday and the Iran of Today*. When the character Jafar asks the girl, 'Will you come to Tehran with me?' she surprisingly replies, 'Tehran? Tehran is a nice city, but its people are bad'. The pair go to Tehran and Bad Tehran takes everything they have. But at the end of the day, these people who lost their hopes are represented as more culpable than Tehran since they knew what Tehran was like, but still decided to live under its shadow.

As a dystopian traumatic city, Tehran is a good setting for filmmakers. It is a place where they can make money and, like the film brokers, look for personal advantage. However, their films represent the city as a corrupted city with its inactive guilty citizens. In this regard, filmmakers, by representing the stereotypical dualism,¹²⁶ act like a torturer who by using psychological methods forces the innocent person to accept the allegations made against them and confess. Audiences condone this in the cinema theatres and as a consequence get trapped in a reel/real traumatic city which the film constructs for them. Those films that establish convincing lies persuade audiences to confess in order to prove films are a mirror to society. They make people confess their guilt and accept that they deserve their current miserable life. When audiences confess, they become free of any social responsibility. (Foucault 1976, pp. 61–62).

In conclusion, this chapter extended the understanding of the regimes of censorship in Iranian cinema and classified them into nine different forms of censorship that affect society and that are also understandable as various forms of terror in everyday life. The forms of censorship were used to explore the cinematic rules and social laws and values of Iranian society under the control of repressive censors. The chapter discussed how this made the people and terrorised daily life. Next it explored the city of Tehran and modernity, demonstrating the role of the author in creating meaning for urban life and showing the mainstream perspective of the intellectual and filmmaker in reading the city and modern life. It proved that modern uncertainty, which I argue some scholars present as a productive form of ambiguity in Iranian films, has a connection with the processes of traumatising and ‘making the people’. In this regard, I moved on to discuss how the representations of Tehran create a traumatic everyday life for the people and how both a reel and real dystopian city increases what I describe as a ‘victimhood culture’ in society. I concluded that a duality of good and evil still dominates in representations of Tehran and Iranian urban life and that this traumatises everyday life and marginalises capacity for narratives of resistance in daily life.

¹²⁶ Many Iranian films reproduce false consciousness and support the dominant ideology. As discussed, however, some films do make social requests but the requests are asked within the existing dominant discourse.

CHAPTER SIX: CINEMA AS CULTURE INDUSTRY

In this chapter, I explore Iranian film and cinema through the theoretical framing of the culture industry. I analyse it both before and after the 1979 revolution. As explained in the Introduction and Chapter Three, understanding the Iranian cinema as culture industry helps us to explore how film as a cultural product hegemonises society. By considering the role of the bourgeoisie and tradition in Iran, I am able to show the importance of the culture industry in shaping different signifiers from my Matrix including: (1) Filmfarsi, (2) Sacred Defence Cinema, (3) Value-based Cinema, and (4) Big Production Films. By focusing on the Iranian culture industry, I illuminate the crucial point of this chapter, that is I argue the conflict between ideas of honour and dignity, in the context of the bourgeoisie and tradition, powerfully shapes the traumatic core of Iranian cultural identity.

Pedram Partovi (2017), a professor in history department of American University, is a historian of the medieval and modern Muslim world who focuses on the history of youth movements in Iran. He wrote a comprehensive book on Filmfarsi in English that is also the most recent book in the field. According to Partovi Filmfarsi films were well-known because they contain belly dancing scenes and have themes of sex and fate at the core of their story. Partovi (2017) also demonstrates that Filmfarsi films are often ignored in film studies because they are deemed to be of low quality. Drawing on Partovi and by focusing on these “poor-quality” films, I demonstrate how this cinema played a significant role in the embourgeoisement of Iran’s working class, and I highlight the role of conflicts between themes of honour and dignity in framing stories in the films as well as in society.

Honour – which occupies the same place as chastity in Iran – is the ideological leftover of the bourgeoisification of Iranian society. Honour is rooted in a person’s social position. It is an aristocratic concept associated with the hierarchical order of society. By way of contrast, dignity is about the individual, not their social position. Berger et al. (1974) explain it this way The concept of honour implies that identity is essentially, or at least importantly, linked to institutional roles. The modern concept of dignity, by contrast, implies that identity is essentially independent of institutional rules. (p. 343)

My argument is that Filmfarsi films problematised the notion of dignity to make the audience politically inactive. I will demonstrate how in these films the representation of the conflict

between honour and dignity – that is, the importance of the individual versus a social position – shows the role of censorship in pre-revolution cinema, as well as explaining the process of modernity which at the time was understood as a top-down process. Promoting and supporting the notion of dignity is part of the discourse of bourgeois modernity (Berger, 1974). Filmfarsi films, as the key product in the culture industry at the time, tried to replace the concept of honour with the concept of dignity to support the embourgeoisement process. As a signifier, the films in the Filmfarsi group, in an age of the triumphant bourgeoisie, produced narratives that tended to invalidate the concept of honour to civilise the society by respecting the individual and its being, and its agency. Thus, over time the large body of Filmfarsi films replaced the traditional, upper-class and dominant cultural concept of honour with the concept of dignity, which is a modern concept. However, in Filmfarsi, dignity (tended to be articulated by traditional signifiers such as *lutigari* and *darvishi*, which are traditional concepts and so eventually these films ended up articulating a form of narrative of dignity that operated in the interest of tradition rather than embourgeoisement.

The honour/dignity conflict became the main core of the Islamic culture industry as well, indeed it was expanded in the articulation of the Islamic Republic discourse. In this cultural context the conflict came to sit at the core of the traumatic cultural identity of Iranians, which in turn can be understood as rooted in the repression of everyday life and the suspension of the present. The technique of the suspension of the present was a strategy of both the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic regime and will be explored here in the context of ‘power and resistance’ in everyday life. To undertake this analysis this chapter utilises the following themes: (1) traumatisation, (2) uncertainty, (3) victimhood culture, (4) dissatisfaction, and (5) boredom in Iranian daily life.

Filmfarsi, Trash, and Wandering

In this section, I focus on Filmfarsi, the most popular Iranian cinema before the Islamic revolution, to explore some aspects of the culture industry, Iranian cinema and bourgeois culture, that set up some of the cultural groundwork for contemporary trauma in everyday life. Focusing on Filmfarsi delivers a unique perspective on the origins of the culture industry in Iran. As noted by Partovi (2017) a result of its “poor quality” in terms of production values, the quality of the film stock, and cultural inauthenticity, Filmfarsi films have been largely ignored by the state, critics, and private organisations. In this section, I consider what has been

largely left out or dismissed in the literature on Iranian films. I do this in order to write history from below, rather than to survey it from above. This history explains why in the crucial period of time, when Pahlavi II (1941/1079) was trying to modernise the society, Filmfarsi, the dominant sign of the Iranian culture industry, was promoted as traditional rather than reflecting the ideas of the bourgeoisie.

Filmfarsi is the product of a prolific commercial Iranian film industry that first took shape after World War II but reached the peak of its popularity in the 1960s and early 1970s. According to Partovi (2017), during Filmfarsi's heyday in the 1960s and early 1970s there were on average 60 releases every year. Iran was also at this time undergoing rapid social and economic change coinciding with the dramatic expansion of the state's role in people's lives. Today Filmfarsi films are seen as "trash" in the history of Iranian cinema and cultural studies. What I am doing in my exploration of this archive of films is an act of 'wandering' – like Simmel did, and which Frisby describes as connecting seemingly isolated fragments with other apparently unrelated fragments (Frisby, 1981, p. 81). I am 'wandering' to explore the origins of the culture industry and bourgeois culture. I do this by sifting through this garbage of Iranian cinema to find out more about Iranian everyday life and its historical visual culture. I take the role of the ragpicker in the sense that Walter Benjamin demonstrates in his understanding of history, particularly in his *Arcades Project* (1999).¹²⁷ The 'ragpicker' actively pursues waste, creating the potential to transform sudden acts of historical remembrance into a politics of memory (Benjamin 1999). For Benjamin, the 'ragpicker' points towards a capacity to unlock the revolutionary potential stored in forgotten or wasted historical events (Roy, 2017, p. 129).¹²⁸ I am like the ragpicker who roams the streets to gather waste material, leftovers of history and consumption. By reassembling this waste, I can explore unseen and unforeseen

¹²⁷ The *Arcades Project*, written between 1927 and 1940, is a history of city life in Paris in the nineteenth century. Benjamin uses different concepts in *The Arcades Project*, such as 'flaneur' and 'ragpicker', in order to explain the everyday life of nineteenth-century Paris. Flaneur and ragpicker are representative figures of modernity for Benjamin: '[flaneur and ragpicker] are itinerant metaphors that register the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten and reread. The flaneur walks idly through the city, listening to its narrative. The rag-picker too moves across the urban landscape, but as a scavenger, collecting, rereading and rewriting its history' (Parsons, 2000, p. 3). According to Featherstone (1998), we can understand the 'flânerie' as a method for reading texts and writing and constructing texts. This method is closely related to what Weinstein and Weinstein (1991), by considering Simmel's method, call the bricoleur's method, the result of which is a bricolage: 'a construction that arises from interrogating "all the heterogeneous objects" of which the bricoleur's treasury is composed to discover what each of them could "signify" ...' (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161).

¹²⁸ One year before Baudelaire wrote *Le Vin des chiffonniers* (*The Rag-Picker's Wine*), Honoré de Balzac published a prose description of the figure (ragpicker): 'Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day's refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste...' (Benjamin, 2006, p. 108).

dialectical images. Further, by using Baudrillard's philosophy on modernity (1987), I explore the relationship between Filmfarsi and Iranian everyday life. Consequently, I will respond to what these films might have to tell us about conflicts between modernity and tradition in Iran, particularly in those final decades of Pahlavi dynasty rule.

Filmfarsi 1940–1970s: Iranian Discourses on Wealth/Consumption and Democracy

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's culture industry theory (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) considers the role cultural products play in placating the working-class segment of society living under a capitalist system. They argue the culture industry's primary aim is to continue support for capitalism among the masses. To do this they contend, it must create a homogenised product or products that appeal(s) to as many people as possible, while also continuing their support for capitalist values. Working with Rolf Tiedemann, Adorno and he believe that in the modern period art is linked to commercial exploitation, and further, that art can be considered as a commodity to buy/sell in support of a type of consumerism (Adorno & Tiedemann, 1992). Thinking about Adorno and Tiedemann's ideas of consumption and art, it is possible to understand some aspects of the culture industry and the popularity of Filmfarsi.

There is no doubt that Filmfarsi movies were popular between 1948 and 1976. I draw on the Adornoian perspective on consumption in order to place Filmfarsi as part of a broader democracy/wealth discourse of the time. For example, in expanding a general democratic ideology, back in the early 1960s in Iran, Prime Minister Hoveyda paid a visit to Peykan automobile factory in Tehran where cars with the same name were assembled and sold at fairly affordable prices for an average middle-class family. His famous claim is — 'let's all hope for a day that all Iranians drive a Paykan'. Cinema was also a part of this economic/cultural expansion and the idea of the democratic availability of new wealth. In his capacious works on Iranian cinema Naficy (2011b) sets out the story of film viewing habits in Teheran from the 1950s to the 1970s:

In the late 1950s, there were some 80,000 moviegoers per day, a figure that had jumped to between 350,000 and 400,000 patrons a day by 1963 In 1963, Tehran residents went to movies 24 million times A decade later, the MCA's statistics showed that 42,658,000 movie tickets were sold in Tehran in 1973, suggesting repeat viewings (an average of eleven viewings per person), with total box office sales of 1,297,975,000 rials. Ticket prices ranged

between 10 and 200 rials. The thirty-rial tickets constituted the largest percentage of all tickets sold in Tehran (35 percent); many patrons of the commercial cinema came from the lower classes. (p. 156)

Making a similar point, according to Gholipour (2019/1397), movie-going was understood in the late 1950s as a part of a modern lifestyle by policymakers, who believed this social activity increased democracy in society. This description seems to suggest that at this time it was believed that economic growth meant affluence, and affluence meant democracy. But as suggested by Adorno and Tieddemann (1992), this type of consumption can be understood as a way of managing the working class. Pahlavi II tried to cover-over the absence of democracy in their regime, as well as the non-existence of equality by constructing a narrative of consumer needs for middle-class citizens as an alternative to rights. The glamorous Filmfarsi films acted as a balm for working-class Iranians. According to Ejlali (2016/1395), this was part of a policy that aimed to grow the urban middle class, and it demonstrates that Pahlavi II conflated every Iranian having a car with modernity, affluence, equality, and democracy.

Filmfarsi played a significant role in the growth of Iranian cinema and in creating a movie-going lifestyle in Teheran society. However, the growth of cinema across urban centres was unequal. For example, in the period 1973–1974 alone, there were 432 movie houses located in urban centres, but Tehran had 122 of them. This unevenness in the distribution of movie houses suggests affluence does not equate to equality. In this regard, Baudrillard (1998) says:

We shall no longer say with the enthusiasts: ‘Growth produces affluence and therefore equality.’ Nor shall we take the extreme opposite view: ‘Growth produces inequality.’ Overturning the false problem of whether growth is egalitarian or inegalitarian, we shall say that it is growth itself which is a function of inequality. (p. 53)

Thinking about Baudrillard’s argument that ‘it is growth itself which is a function of inequality (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 53), it is possible to see how in Iran this played out in the increasing wealth gap between Tehran and other parts of Iran.

By the 1960s, movie-making had become profitable and cinema was one of the most lucrative businesses in Tehran. I would add here the important point that Iranian culture industry emerged in a global context. This meant the screening of various international films in Iran was often seen as a threat to national film productions (Ejlali, 2016; Naficy, 2012a) (see

Table 6.1). It also meant that in order to gain larger audiences, domestic producers began incorporating foreign movies' ideas, particularly those from American movies, into their own films.

Country of Origin	Number of Films, 1967	Number of Films, 1970	Number of Films, 1973
USA	198	113	80
Italy	115	66	78
India	39	13	27
Hong Kong	0	0	21
England	16	27	20
France	27	21	20
USSR	18	2	8
Others	27	29	26
Total	440	271	280

Table 6.1: Number of Foreign Films Exhibited in Iran.

Source: Slightly modified from Ministry of Culture and Art, 1973, p. 137.

However, to return to Baudrillard, this growth and development of Iranian cinema needs to be understood as also creating particular types of social unevenness. Baudrillard (1998) writes:

One of the contradictions of growth is that it produces goods and needs at the same time but does not produce them at the same rate – the rate of production of goods being dependent on industrial and economic productivity, the rate of production of needs on the logic of social differentiation. (p. 63)

Baudrillard makes this point in order to draw attention to a certain reality whereby people in particular social positions never aspire much beyond what they can reasonably hope to attain. I would suggest that Baudrillard makes a good point. But in the context of Iran, there is perhaps just one thing that is seen as being able to change this realism. It is 'fate'.¹²⁹ So, for example, if purely by chance (that is, it was fated), a poor person from a remote village reaches a bourgeois position in a modern city – this capitalist culture trap which is at the core of the Filmfarsi films stories will be interpreted as 'fate'. And so, in the 1960s, first, the production of films grew, second, Iran's culture industry grew, albeit unevenly due to Tehran dominating

¹²⁹ As opposed to the US where it is hard work or Korea where it is finding good connections through family.

the consumption of films, and third, the narratives of these films used the trope of fate to highlight the possibility of class mobility. Fate can change everything. According to Gholipour (2019/1397), this belief sat at the core of the Filmfarsi filmmaker's life as well since most of them started their careers in the cinema business as low-status flunkeys. What this demonstrates is that both Filmfarsi films and foreign films of the period (re)produced general desire for a bourgeois life, and what was represented for the audiences of these films was a sense of class mobility based on fate in everyday life.

So, to summarise, adopting Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972) ideas about cinema and the culture industry and linking them to the emergence of Iranian cinema at a time when the Shah was being metamorphosed, in relation to the utopian future he imagined and wanted the country to follow, how film came to be part of his road map for reaching the great era of civilization. Hegemonic and bourgeois forces, transmitted through the popularity of US cinema in Iran acted as a catalyst in promoting a mode of cultural hegemony that tried to Westernise society. As Adorno has shown, in this period film, as a cultural commodity, entertained people around the world, and tried to respond to their cultural needs as consumers of film while also supporting capitalist dreams. According to Gholipour (2019/1397), Filmfarsi was also closely connected to the audience's desires instead of following the ideas of intellectuals/critics or the state.

This homogenising, and hegemonic drive, as set out by Baudrillard and demonstrated in my discussion of Iran, takes place in the instrumentalisation of culture itself. Cinema, as one of the modern elements of cities, plays a key cultural role in the modernisation of a country and in producing the taste of the people. If we accept, as I have argued, the notion of culture as a resource or tool, it becomes important to consider who exactly is wielding the tool of culture, and what they plan to use the tool for. Generally, the commodification of culture makes the interests of dominant groups normative. In exploring this issue Gramsci (1992) is useful as he demonstrates the way hegemony supports bourgeois domination of thought, creates a discourse of 'common sense', and therefore generates the way of life and the everyday assumptions of the working class.

Historically, the culture industry has mostly been connected to the nation-state system. Sociologists such as Todd Gitlin (1979) have discussed mass media culture as an avenue for promoting hegemonic ideals and principles. This approach is useful to understand the growth of film clubs, cinema halls, film studios, and the large-scale importation of films in Iran. According to Gitlin (1979), cultural hegemony is applied by conveying hegemonic ideology

through curated cultural content. This is done in order to maintain the status quo. As a result, making films that aligned with hegemonic ideologies was far easier for production companies. Producing standard stories and static characters rather than characters who develop and break loose from the status quo was a more profitable or an easier option. This argument suggests that cultural industries can be considered as a means to internalise social control via the domestication of dominant ideologies.

Thinking about this in terms of Iran in the mid-twentieth century, it is possible to imagine the standard Filmfarsi cinema, which is known as ‘escapist’ (*roya pardaz*) cinema, as playing this hegemonic role. Filmfarsi was a ‘character driven story’ (Partovi, 2017) and over time created Iranian stars and superstars. This growth took place in the context of a more general ongoing economic and social transformation that promoted bourgeois ideas. The position of Filmfarsi as a cultural commodity in this context was designed to entertain the proletariat and promote the bourgeois culture in urban life.

Filmfarsi: Sex, City, and Fate

In this section, I work on three main themes in terms of semiotic signifiers of Filmfarsi: sex, city, and fate. According to Partovi (2017),

critics have long derided the Pahlavi-era popular commercial cinema’s ‘manipulation’ of its audiences by supplementing their ‘second-hand’ scenarios with sexual titillation, insipid musical numbers, gratuitous violence, and the glorification of the crude but honourable lives of those populating the old city quarters. (p. 7)

Relying on Partovi’s approach, I argue that, by articulating how themes of sex, city, and fate are used in Filmfarsi, it is possible to produce new readings of the films that more effectively explain some of the work this signifier did in relation to creating a narrative of modernity that came into conflict with post revolution narratives of honour in Iranian society.

In a well-known cartoon from 1976 (see Figure 6.1), the *Ettela’at* newspaper¹³⁰ satirised Filmfarsi cinema with an image showing a director of Filmfarsi as a fisherman who objectifies women’s bodies (as bait) in order to “catch” the audience who are represented as a fish. This

¹³⁰ A Farsi daily newspaper published in Iran since 1926.

image illustrates the familiar and dominant everyday understanding of Filmfarsi at its most popular: ‘The Filmfarsi director lures his audience with sex and music’ (Partovi, 2017, p. 6).



Figure 6.1: Filmfarsi Cinema Cartoon.

Source: Cited in Partovi (2017, p. 6).
Reprinted from *Ettela'at* newspaper in
Hamid Shuai, *Namavarane Sinamaye Iran*
(Tehran: Sherkate Hirmenkoo, 1976), 3, p.
34.

The representation of the objectified women is one of the main characteristics of Filmfarsi. Mainstream cinema of the time coded the erotic into cinematic language within the dominant patriarchal context. In terms of a Lacanian symbolic order, which is an intersubjective framework for how women appear this articulation of sexual relations creates a particular framing of desire and represents women in patriarchal terms. According to Laura Mulvey (1989), displaying women as sexual objects creates a certain type of patriarchal pleasure and represents this desire in terms of an active male and passive female. Mulvey, in her well-known book *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989), explains these representations as follows:

The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the *film noir*); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so

that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star).

This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue, voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with asserting castration), control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. (pp. 21–22)

Applying Mulvey's ideas to the protagonist and audience to *Filmfarsi*, I argue that in *Filmfarsi* a woman is constructed as a sexual object (dancers, prostitutes) who needs the attention of the male protagonist. They are also figured as a weak object¹³¹ (naïve women) who needs the empathy of the male protagonist. Alongside the presence of sex in film, another main story type in *Filmfarsi* films focuses on either a young naïve women from a village or small city who are trapped in big cities, or a young male or married male city dweller who goes to the bars in order either to deceive young women and seduce them or to have fun with prostitutes.¹³² Thinking about the *Filmfarsi* signifier and the city, I suggest the theme of the city can be discovered in *Filmfarsi* films in two different senses. In the first we are presented with the city as an absence in the film, and in the second we see the city visualised. In the first group of films, we only sense the city, we do not see it in terms of its landscape or geography. Instead, what happens is that, by watching the relationships between the characters in the film, and through the events, we are able to understand that everything in the narrative is taking place in the context of the city – which is in this context, a symbol of modernity. So, the 'city' is represented without visualising it. I argue that was in very important in these films is understanding that what happens in this setting in *Filmfarsi* is a confrontation between modernity (city dwellers) and tradition (naïve villagers).

In the second take on the city in *Filmfarsi*, here the city is visible, we tend to see the city but without its people. In these situations, the city is represented by its famous monuments or locations, and I would argue in this context they are used to display the context of the film with the aim of enriching the script of the movie. So, what these few films do is picture the city from

¹³¹ In this regard, we can add another weak and respected object (mother) who also needs the respect of the male protagonist.

¹³² The first experiences of Iranians watching sexy scenes in cinema is related to the importation of foreign films. And the first state censorship codes in relation to screening films with these erotic scenes was assigned in 1930s. By the 1940s, this problematic matter became more under control because policymakers put more restrictions on screening explicit sex in Iranian cinema as well as foreign films.

a tourist's perspective. A good example of this type of Filmfarsi film is *Shepard's Daughter*¹³³ (1951), the forty-eighth Filmfarsi film by Moezodin Fekri. This film is about 'Ziba' and 'Ahmad' who love each other. But Ahmad's father, the village's sheriff, does not agree with their marriage. He wants his son to marry the daughter of a wealthy family. Ziba is disappointed, leaves the village, and heads to Tehran. Once Ziba reaches the city, again we have the dominant story of Filmfarsi, but we also have four minutes where the audience sees the good qualities of the 'modern city' of Tehran. The viewer sees the big statue of the Shah riding a horse and protected by statues of Achaemenes soldiers. There are also traffic lights and policemen, cars and bicycles in the streets, tall modern buildings, and big squares with statues of powerful lions, all these scenes try to represent a neat, organised and alive city. *Shepard's Daughter* is one of many Filmfarsi productions that tried to visualise a modern city and to suggest that its inhabitants had a great sense of well-being.¹³⁴ However, I would argue that generally the reality of the city was the opposite. This can be seen in films from other genres at the time. One example is Kamran Shirdel's documentaries such as *Tehran, the Capital of Iran* (1966), which documents life in Tehran's poor area. Shirdel was asked to produce a movie about modern Tehran. Though perhaps the people who commissioned the film expected something similar to the four minutes in *Shepard's Daughter*, he made this documentary by focusing on the poor areas in order to show the unevenness of modernisation.

Given the period in which they were made Filmfarsi represents the conflict between modernity and tradition. What they omit is the social context of life in the city and its deep inequality. In the films that never visualize the city itself these hegemonic productions try to reduce societal conflicts to individual personal problems. And in the second group where they have visualised the city as modern, exciting, and enviable the use of a tourist's perspective tends to highlight the positive aspects of modernity, such as the 'growth' of urban life, and ignore inequality.

As stated earlier, Filmfarsi is based on the narratives of fate (Ejlali, 2016; Naficy, 2011b; Partovi, 2017, Tahaminejad, 2001, Omid 1998).¹³⁵ According to Partovi (2017, p. 25),

¹³³ *Dokhtare Chopan* (1332).

¹³⁴ There are not many of these images in Filmfarsi, although there are rare films with an archival perspective that try to 'document' the city.

¹³⁵ For them, fate is one of many aspects of Filmfarsi. They use this concept to explain Filmfarsi and its social or cosmological roots. However, I articulate the concept of fate using the notions of honour and dignity.

‘fate as the god of popular civil religion has differed from the God of Islam in the sense that its focus has never been universal. Rather, its interests have been narrower with its workings applying only to the characters in the films and, by extension, their viewers. In other words, they have applied only to Iranians.’

Framing film narratives around stories or characters based on ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is at the core of Filmfarsi. In these films, there are just two dimensions to life – good/bad – and there are no shades of grey. Fate in Filmfarsi is central to narratives, as something that solves all social problems and as a phenomenon that protects the status quo.

In a fate-centred plot a character’s destiny has already been designed and ordered by God, that character must carry out this destiny. Just as fate is developed in Filmfarsi films as a way to solve all problems, Pahlavi II believed that fate could solve the country’s social problems. He believed that what Iran needed was Western elements, economic growth and God’s help. In his book, *Mission for My Country*, Pahlavi stated:

I concluded that my destiny had already been designed and ordered by God, and that I must carry it out. But to carry out anything you must do something. You must act. You must make decisions ... It is not sufficient to believe that in the cosmic universe there exists God’s grand design; one must link one’s self with the divine plan and do one’s utmost to help carry it out. For me that meant political action, economic reconstruction, social change. (pp. 222–223, cited in Partovi, 2017, p. 189).

Filmfarsi films have happy endings; at the end of the film everyone is happy. Good always defeats bad. In this framework, good is usually represented by the poor people/tradition and bad is represented by rich people/modernity. Accordingly, ‘good fate’ is usually represented as through a story of the success of a male protagonist in supporting his family/loved or being the lover of a rich young woman. By shaping the story around the concept of good fate, Filmfarsi films conceal the reality of social inequalities. Instead in Filmfarsi, fate brings contentment to the lives of the proletariat at the same time as it provides a mechanism whereby they move ever closer to embourgeoisement. Fate produces social reconciliation.

Given the way Filmfarsi depends on and uses the idea of fate, I suggest it can be understood as a mode of cinema without artistic elements. Instead, it is a mode that tries to

draw audiences into the cinema halls and to accelerate their embourgeoisement. Again, I draw on Baudrillard (1996), and his idea of the simulacra of life, to explain this argument:

The bourgeois and industrial revolution gradually freed the individual from his [sic] involvement with religion, morality and family. He thus acceded to a freedom in law as an individual, but also to an actual freedom as labour-power – that is, the freedom to sell himself as labour-power. This parallel has nothing coincidental about it, for there is a profound correlation here: both the serially produced ‘functional’ object and the social individual are liberated in their ‘functional’ objectification, not in their singularity or in their totality as object or person. (p. 18)

According to Baudrillard, the bourgeois and the industrial revolution gradually freed the individual from an earlier and central involvement ordered around religion, morality, and family. I argue that Iran never experienced this emergence of the bourgeois brought about by the industrial revolution. Instead, what happened was Westernisation. I argue that rather than passing through an organic shift towards modernity, Iran imported Western elements and used them according to their particular function. For example, cinema as an element of modernity was imported to Iran and Iranians practiced it through consumption.

Some scholars of Filmfarsi cinema such as Kavusi¹³⁶ suggest we should interpret this Iranian cinema/signifier in terms of classic Hollywood cinema. I do not agree, and part of my argument is about the place of modernity in each type of cinema. The type of top-down assertion of modernity seen in the production of Filmfarsi films, undertaken in order to hide significant social inequalities and to promote a modern nation, that did not really exist, did not work. At the time Filmfarsi dominated in Iran not everything had Westernised (that is modern), because neither society nor the Shah were ready for this change. An important case study that assists in exploring this issue is Foucault’s time in Iran (in Afary and Anderson, 2005, p. 194). Foucault interviewed a person in Tehran who is described by the philosopher as an austere economist with malicious eyes. The story was published in a report titled ‘The Shah Is A Hundred Years Behind Times’ in 1978. At the end of this interview, the economist says:

¹³⁶ Akin to Althusser’s citizens who turn to face the policeman in the street when he calls to them, ‘Hey, you there!’ Kavusi and other critics had turned to face the dominant cinema’s beckoning and thereby become its willing subject, internalising Filmfarsi’s conventions (Naficy, 2011b, p. 152).

What is old here [Iran] is the shah. He is fifty years old and a hundred years behind the times. He is of the age of predatory monarchs. He has the old-fashioned dream of opening his country through secularization and industrialization. Today, it is his project of modernization, his despotic weapons, and his system of corruption that are archaic.

Linking the economists ideas of Filmfarsi we can see how the belief in fate and the promotion this belief is also the central point of Filmfarsi stories. Filmfarsi is an example of the ways in which Iranian society struggled with a social that was not based on religion and traditions. Filmfarsi films illustrate the way that subjects cannot choose their own way or make their own decisions – that is, operate as individuals – because, before anything else, they are under the control of a pre-modern, non-urban discourse of tradition/family. This is the logic of fate, which is not individualistic. So, unlike classic Hollywood cinema, which was produced in a space of high modernity and individualism, Filmfarsi films are intertwined with old traditions.

To conclude, I have argued that to understand Filmfarsi thoroughly we cannot read Filmfarsi just in terms of early Cheap B-grade commercial films part of the culture industry. As I demonstrated, this approach to Filmfarsi misses some significant functions of Filmfarsi films. I suggested that instead it is a key signifier that enables us to better understand the messy arrival of modernity in Iran. If we use the three themes of sex, the city, and fate in relation to modernity and Filmfarsi we can better understand the role and emergence of the Iranian culture industry. This mode of analysis draws our attention to the role of Filmfarsi in the embourgeoisement in “making the people” and the process of modernity. I argued this makes it clearer that Filmfarsi cinema tried to bring bourgeois culture to society- via the notion of dignity- but at the same time to cover up social conflicts in order to reach a type of social reconciliation. It did this by using the theme of fate in narratives. As we demonstrated in my reading of *Shepherd's Daughter* this social reconciliation is best represented as protecting the family and marriage of the poor and the rich. To achieve these aims, Filmfarsi films tended to objectify women's bodies and consider fate as the central part of these women's stories.

Fate, Honour, and Dignity in Filmfarsi

Filmfarsi, as with any other concept, does not have a fixed meaning. For example, when I write about Filmfarsi I do not recognise it in the sense that Kavusi understood it. Filmfarsi for me is a bridge I can use to reach back into pre-revolution cinema and into the roots of the Iranian

culture industry. One way to address the roles of Filmfarsi in Iranian society is to again utilise one of my key methodological modes and turn to the notion of the “ragpicker” and, metaphorically, “wander” in the streets of Filmfarsi. I do this in order to find other examples of Filmfarsi films that are even more marginalised in this already disregarded cinema. I hope to discover more about the relationship between Filmfarsi and society. More specifically, in this section I return to my consideration of fate as the most important characteristic of the Filmfarsi films, but this time I do so in order to explore the relationship between the ideas of honour and dignity in films and its link to Iranian modernity. As set out at the beginning of this chapter, honour and dignity are important because, as I argued, Filmfarsi films try to replace the concept of honour with the concept of dignity to support the embourgeoisement process.

Ejlali (2016/1395) demonstrates the various types and themes of Filmfarsi films and categorises this cinema in terms of different historical eras and cinematic groups. In a similar project of classification, Gholipour (2019/1397) cites a cartoon from *Film va Honar* magazine (1969/1348) to demonstrate the range of this signifier. The cartoon (see Figure 6.2) shows what are popularly understood as the three different types of Filmfarsi films. First, films that have a tendency to portray the village life,¹³⁷ second, the Stewpot type¹³⁸ and third the Tough guy type.¹³⁹



Figure 6.2: Different Types of Filmfarsi Films.

Source: *Film va Honar* magazine (1969/1348) cited in Gholipour (2019/1397, p. 209)

¹³⁷ *Dehatigari*.

¹³⁸ *Abgooshti*.

¹³⁹ *Jaheli*.

This cartoon also shows how in different eras Filmfarsi took on different forms. Ejlali (2016/1395) explains the main themes of pre-revolution cinema across various genres, including: family breakup, representation of foreigners, representation of law men, individual revenge and rebellion, loneliness and the anti-hero's defeat. The themes of the *luti*¹⁴⁰ and of the helpless girl are the most important ones. For this research, the different modes of Filmfarsi in relation to cinematic genres do not matter in and of themselves. Rather, my approach as explained is to explore Filmfarsi and its different genres, so I can better understand Iranian daily life. Returning to Ejlali (2016/1395), by considering the representation of class mobility in the content of the films, he introduces 36 themes and 15 'ideological messages' of Filmfarsi films.

In this section, I will argue that all the 'messages' he identifies are based on messages or themes involving the ideas of dignity and honour. However, my broader point is that the culture industry in Iran is based on conflicts between 'honour' and 'dignity'. To make this argument, I demonstrate how the different themes introduced by Ejlali are also directly linked to dignity and honour and that the plots of the films are based on the theme of fate. While seeing the value of Ejlali's system, I think it can be pushed further. I rely on Ejlali's classification of messages, themes, and forms as a foundation, but I use a different methodological approach that enables a different type of interpretation, one that brings forward the historical context of Iranian film.

The first ideological message Ejlali introduces as prevalent in Filmfarsi is that 'class mobility is heinous, and each class should stay in its place' (2016/1395, p. 368). He argues that three themes illustrate or are used to share this ideological message. Theme one is that of a poor character who gets rich by chance, but this wealth does not bring happiness to his/her life, and he/she goes back to his/her simple life. Theme two involves a poor woman who meets a rich man, but when she discovers his problems in life, she prefers her poverty. And theme three is that of the poor and the rich person who meet each other. In this scenario, the rich person loses his/her money, so the class difference is no longer a barrier between them and they marry and live happily ever after (2016/1395, pp. 368–369). Examples of this ideological message of 'class mobility is heinous and each class should stay in its place' can be seen in such films as

¹⁴⁰ 'The term *luti*, meaning 'ruffian or thug', and its plural *alvat* were almost always pejorative unless in reference to circus performers' (Vejdani, 2019, p. 1186).

*The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries*¹⁴¹ (1974), *The Hen with the Golden Eggs*¹⁴² (1972), and *Love Taxi*¹⁴³ (1970).

Taking a different approach, I suggest that each of these films also tries to say that the dignity of human beings (poor people) is more valuable than the honour of rich people. *The Ghost Valley's Treasure Mysteries* is about a farmer who finds treasure on his land. He decides to go to the city and once there starts to sell the treasure. After making some money, he sets up a luxurious life for himself in the city. In a typical gendered narrative, he divorces his wife and marries a young woman from the city. However, some of the villagers are after his treasure and cause problems for him. The moral of the film is that he is faced with all these problems because he acted against human dignity – against what is ‘good’. In the film *Love Taxi*, a taxi driver rescues a girl (who unbeknownst to him is a millionaire) from a scam in Tehran and then falls in love with her. But as soon as he realises that the girl is rich, he tries to forget this love because he believes that according to their social position, they are not a good match. However, with the passing of time he notices that the girl’s uncle, who adopted this girl, has lost all his money gambling. When the driver finds out that the girl is no longer rich, he decides to marry her. His patriarchal dignity didn’t let him love the girl – he did not want to marry a woman who was wealthy as it would be his role to look after her, but fate leads him to marry her. According to my interpretation of Ejlali’s themes, the poor tend to return back to poverty which is represented as a both a good and a simple life in order to preserve their dignity. Alternatively, a poor person and a rich one can get married happily if their fates connect them rather than their social class/honour.

As discussed, most film scholars criticise fate, arguing that Filmfarsi films use this idea to try and cover up social inequalities. They argue Filmfarsi films, by ignoring the social contexts and the daily conflicts that shaped everyday day life at this time and by locating fate at the core of the story, try to protect the status quo. For example, Partovi (2017) uses a cosmological framework to demonstrate why ‘fate’ is at the core of Filmfarsi films. This is our common understanding of Filmfarsi. I agree with this understanding, but I aim to go a layer deeper into these films in order to explain the roots of this understanding. I do this by arguing that fate is connected to honour and dignity.

¹⁴¹ *Asrare Ganje Dareye Jenni* (1353).

¹⁴² *Morgh-e Tokhm Tala* (1351).

¹⁴³ *Taxie Eshgh* (1349).

Well-known Filmfarsi films with fate-based stories include *Gate of Fate*¹⁴⁴ (1965), *The Wheel of the Universe*¹⁴⁵ (1967), *Qaroon's Sons*¹⁴⁶ (1967), *A Man from Isfahan*¹⁴⁷ (1965), *The Love Thief*¹⁴⁸ (1950), *The Millionaire Groom*¹⁴⁹ (1957), and *Bride of Bianca*¹⁵⁰ (1959). The narrative of this type of Filmfarsi says poor people are satisfied with their life since they have 'safaye baten', that is harmony in thought, emotion, speech, and action' (Partovi, 2017, p. 64). *Qaroon's Treasure* (1963)¹⁵¹ and other films such as *The Champion of Champions*¹⁵² (1963) and *The Charlatan*¹⁵³ (1964), which are similar in style to *Qaroon's Treasure*,¹⁵⁴ tend to produce a narrative that 'poor people' – and here they mean the lumpen proletariat rather than for example a worker – help other people, and they ridicule the honour of rich people since they know that humanity and the value of the individual and their dignity are more important than social position/honour.

In another example, in *Love You*¹⁵⁵ (1961) the poor character(s), in order to teach a lesson to the rich one(s), makes up a story that his young poor friend is a woman in order to deceive and impress the rich person and convince him that love is more valuable than money. One interpretation of this type of plot is that it operates as propaganda for the Shah's regime and by romanticising poverty tries to cover up the real social conflicts. However, I would argue we cannot simply say these films are the result of a top-down type of modernisation which by entertaining the audience tries to reduce a nation shaped by significant social inequalities to a series of moral decisions or funny moments. I argue they show the importance of dignity. They provide a lesson that the poor can teach to the rich. This lesson is part of the embourgeoisement process and promotes the importance of human dignity over social honour – the idea of

¹⁴⁴ *Darvazeye Taghdir* (1346).

¹⁴⁵ *Charkhe Falak* (1348).

¹⁴⁶ *Pesarane Gharon* (1348).

¹⁴⁷ *Mardi az Esfahan* (1346).

¹⁴⁸ *Dozde Eshgh* (1331).

¹⁴⁹ *Damade milioner* (1338).

¹⁵⁰ *Aroose Bianca* (1349).

¹⁵¹ *Ganje Gharoon* (1344).

¹⁵² *Ghahremane Ghahremanan* (1344).

¹⁵³ *Sharlatan* (1345).

¹⁵⁴ Ejlali calls it 'the wave of Ali Bigham (Happy Ali) social mobilization'. Ali Bigham is the main character in *Qaroon's Treasure*.

¹⁵⁵ *Doostet Daram* (1342).

bourgeois revolution. Other examples include films such as *Knucklebones*¹⁵⁶ (1972), *The Morning of the Fourth Day*¹⁵⁷ (1973), and *The Parrot*¹⁵⁸ (1979). Ejlali (2016/1395) categorised most of these films under the theme of ‘loneliness and the anti-hero’s defeat’. My interpretation of these films is the protagonist of these films are always faced with a conflict between honour and dignity and so are always worried about making a decision about what to choose. This is the case whether they are male or female, rich or poor. The choice to protect dignity in good-fate films ends with happiness since the protagonist, in order to protect his/her dignity and family, is not looking for social upward mobility. By way of contrast, in a bad-fate movie the protagonist looks for social mobility since he/she is not happy with his/her current situation. For example, *Knucklebones* (1972) is the story of Borzou and his wife. Borzou keeps himself busy by gambling. He is always looking for an opportunity to escape from his wife even though he loves her deeply. He sleeps during the day to avoid having to socialise with other people and goes out at night to gamble. However, he is not happy with this lifestyle. He is lost. He would like to live an honourable life – which would include a stable job and being nicer to his wife and having a good social position – but he cannot. Borzou is tired of everything. He seeks self-growth, which according to Jacobsen (2019) is a sign of dignity but fails to find it. He is waiting for a moment, for a gap in which to reveal himself and leave behind his miserable life. This film does not deploy the happy-ending and good fate themes that are often at the core of the Filmfarsi films. This is not what awaits Borzou – and without them there is no ending point except death. He chooses to die. The character of Borzou in *Knucklebones* is similar to the audience of Filmfarsi films. Viewers were people who had been humiliated by intellectuals because they hated avant-garde movies but were excited by watching the action scenes in movies. I argue that, like Borzou, Filmfarsi audiences were looking for belly dancing in cinema halls, but when they found their moment in a gap that exist in the structure of Iranian daily life, a moment where the hegemony of the structure fails for a short time and there is space and chance to act differently, they found a way to act to get what they wanted. Hence, where intellectual interpretations of this type of Filmfarsi narrative see it as conservative, I argue it can be read as a moment where poorer or non-intellectuals can through a daily activity – watching a ‘bad’ film – live with dignity and resist other calls that tell them how to live their lives.

¹⁵⁶ *Seghap* (1350).

¹⁵⁷ *Sobhe Rooze Chaharom* (1351).

¹⁵⁸ *Tooti* (1357).

By focusing on the role of fate in Filmfarsi, I have made two points. The first is the main scholarly interpretation and everyday understanding of Filmfarsi, is that it is a type of film based on fate and happy endings, is partly correct. The general belief is that Filmfarsi is a type of film that provides a message of social reconciliation in order to maintain the status quo. (They are what I call good-fate films.) In these films, the poor are happy about their lives and in terms of social mobility they are represented as able to marry a rich person because of their good fate and dignity/humanity. I argue that another way to interpret Filmfarsi films is they tended in their stories to articulate the concept of dignity and good fate to cover up social inequalities in the process of embourgeoisement. They tried to promote their idea that dignity is more important than honour. However, using Gramsci's concept of "passive revolution", Davidson (2005, p. 34) explains that a passive revolution is perhaps the most evocative [concept] to describe the process of "revolution from above" developed within the classical tradition: the dignity of action is reserved, in the main, for the state and the forces which it can bring into play, rather than the masses themselves. As Baudrillard (1996) demonstrates, the bourgeois tradition inclined naturally towards redundancy. Therefore, it is possible to argue that these films which are based on bourgeois culture are no exception. These films reduce all social conflicts to the 'good' and 'bad' binary, and by focusing on telling the good-fate story, they tried to maintain the coherency of the Shah's regime.

The second point is about the protagonists in Filmfarsi who try to challenge the new honourable world but are defeated. These films have a sad ending and are linked to what I call bad fate. My question is why are the characters happy in the good-fate films and sad in the bad-fate ones? The mainstream approach in interpreting Filmfarsi believes that the good-fate film's happy characters are represented as happy because they are members of the lumpen proletariat who are satisfied with what they have in life. As noted earlier, this perspective understands Filmfarsi as part of a top-down modernisation process led by the Shah and sees these films as part of a propaganda machine. However, in relation to the bad-fate group, characters are sad according to Ejlali (2016/1395), because cinema at that time was influenced by Italian neorealism but the film audiences of the time were looking for more reality in movies. My argument in terms of the conflict between honour and dignity is that both good-fate and bad-fate films can be understood in terms of first, the tendency to draw on a single fixed meaning/hegemony in the traditional interpretation of Filmfarsi and second, in terms of my aim of dislocating the traditional meanings. This later aim is found set out in my re-reading of the films (see Table 6.2 below).

Good Fate	Mainstream Understanding (Fixed Meaning/ Hegemony)	These films, by their happy endings, reduce social inequalities to the funny, entertaining moments in order to maintain the status quo.
	My Argument (Dislocating the Meanings)	<p>The characters of these films are happy because they keep their dignity in the face of modernity. And they promote the idea that dignity values which have a close connection with tradition are more valuable compared to the honourable inhuman modern life.</p> <p>They make fun of the rich characters and their honourable life.</p> <p>They criticise modernity/the honourable life.</p>
Bad Fate	Mainstream Understanding (Fixed Meaning/ Hegemony)	<p>The characters do not adapt to the modern transformations of the society. As a result, they die alone.</p> <p>These films try to lead society to accept modernisation.</p>
	My Argument (Dislocating the Meanings)	<p>The characters are sad because, although it goes against their inner desires and their ‘dignity’, they are forced to commit crimes. They want to preserve their dignity even if they die. By their death they are no longer anti-heroes – they become heroes of a society which looks for dignity.</p> <p>They become rebels because they are humiliated by the honour of upper-class people.</p> <p>They are victims of the bourgeoisie.</p>

Table 6.2: Two Aspects of Filmfarsi

Thus, the problematisation of honour and dignity is obvious and found at the core of all the themes of Filmfarsi. By problematising the relationship between honour and dignity, I want to show other aspects of these films, and therefore make visible other aspects of Iranian everyday life. I argue that all the types of Filmfarsi criticise rich people and their bourgeois culture, even those happy-ending films that are interpreted as trying to maintain the status quo.

Understanding Filmfarsi films as part of the culture industry ends with the mainstream ideas I explained in the above table. From this perspective of the culture industry and Filmfarsi it is possible to perceive Filmfarsi films as part of the ideological state apparatuses. Therefore,

we cannot answer why the working-class people, the audience of Filmfarsi become the revolutionaries of the Islamic revolution. I further argue, that understanding hegemonic modes of power as force cannot help us to delve into Filmfarsi and its messages for the audiences. As I explained, Filmfarsi tried to entertain audiences and tell them to be happy about their social position/class because social mobility is a dream that becomes a nightmare if it comes true. This ideological state apparatus in the context of embourgeoisement under the top-down authority of the Shah problematised honour and dignity. But the dignity represented in Filmfarsi, which was supposed to support the status quo, did not work well. Instead of being articulated by modern signifiers, it gained its meaning from traditional signifiers. That is, dignity became a traditional concept in Iran rather than a modern one. This traditional concept was perceived by audiences as a revolutionary idea rather than as counter-revolutionary and law-abiding.

Audiences of Filmfarsi liked to see a poor hero who is against the rich and powerful people, a hero who is smart, who is handsome, an athlete, and as a *luti*, who does not do anything to jeopardise his dignity. In fact, the type of character they liked will do anything, even kill people, to preserve his dignity. These audiences liked to see poor, honest characters who at the end of the film find out they are from a rich and respected family. That is, the audiences liked the respectable character (associated with dignity) but not characters who are respected (associated with honour). I would suggest this is similar to what the Shah was trying to do for the society with the 2500-year celebration of the Persian empire and the Shiraz Festival of Arts. By promoting the idea of a great civilisation, the festival 'hailed' the people as part of a great civilisation, whereas in real life an honourable life was (only) for the bourgeoisie. Ordinary people did not want to engage with all the respected political characters of the world in the 2500-year celebration when they do not have respectable (that is economically and socially dignified) life.

In good-fate Filmfarsi films, usually the proletarian characters are represented as smarter than the upper-class characters, and they make fun of upper-class characters by mocking their honourable life, their clothing, and the furnishings in their houses. Further, according to Oeur (2016), social dignity refers to the ways in which the meaning of value(s) varies according to time and place. Oeur argues that value tends to receive its meaning by reference to traditional values and social justice – that is it is seen as being against, or the opposite of, the hierarchy of the honourable life. The idea of inherent dignity also gets its meaning through the concept of tradition where dignity often refers to a person who has a sense of humanity and to the

respectable proletariat who, as the victim of modern society, need to draw on dignity as one of their few resources.

The idea of substantive dignity, according to Ferguson (2000), exists alongside respect. “Substantive dignity” is articulated by traditional values such as honesty, lack of greed, and hard work, and in the discourse of the traditional family it includes being faithful, respecting the parent culture, and valuing marriage. Some scholars argue that dignity is about understanding the rights of citizens/subjects and that avoidance of humiliation for all people is the main result of promoting the values of dignity (Ferguson, 2000). However, in bad-fate Filmfarsi films we can see that protagonists from the lower social classes are humiliated or marginalised by the bourgeoisie. An example of this is in the film *Distance*¹⁵⁹ (1975). There is a scene where “Mehdi Sooske” (that is, Mehdi, the cockroach), the protagonist, goes to his girlfriend’s house to meet her parents for the first time. The bourgeois family of Mehdi’s girlfriend humiliates him because of his family, social class, and background.

Dignity and respect are connected. Nussbaum argues that if dignity is ‘nourished by imaginative engagement with the lives of others and by an inner grasp of their full and equal humanity’ (Nussbaum, 2013, p. 380), it brings respect for everyone. According to Pugh (2009), “substantive dignity” joins to a sense of belonging. Besides being linked to belonging, dignity also gets its meaning in Iran through its association with tradition. In Filmfarsi, characters rarely have a sense of belonging to the city they live in. Instead, the city is usually represented as evil, and the only safe place in a city is inside a family space. Also, the only social institution in Filmfarsi films through which the hero can receive his/her dignity is his/her family or through their love of God (religion). Dignity is viewed as the principle behind self-growth and respect for others (Misztal, 2013, p. 51), and as such Filmfarsi is full of *lutis* who care about others, in particular, the *luti* is usually a man who cares about a woman, or his family, or for a friend. Furthermore, dignity connects the poor and the rich, or the lumpen and the bourgeois. The moment that characters across these categories reconcile is a moment that engages with the notion of substantive dignity articulated by traditional values. I argue that a society based on honour separates the people and that it is dignity that can bring them together and produce some sort of social reconciliation.

Dignity is a modern concept and the result of bourgeois revolution. However, substantive dignity in these films is associated with rural areas, proletarian life, tradition, and the family

¹⁵⁹ *Fasele* (1354).

rather than the bourgeoisie and their lifestyle. In this context, I argue that the concept of dignity is articulated with the key signifiers *lutigari* and *darvishi*, which usually refer to a man who cares about a woman, family, or a friend. I would further define this as a person who is paying less attention to the economy and materialistic ideas and more attention to the importance of family and elders in making decisions, a systematic belief in human inequality, a reliance on emotion and fate to understand life, a local sense of belonging. According to Ejlali, these are the values of a traditional society. Ejlali argues the importance of dignity as part of the modern culture. Thus, I am suggesting, these films problematise inherent dignity of modernity by using it in relation to traditional signifiers without generating the contingent features of dignity associated with modernity, such as social mobility for every individual. For example, in the film *I Die for Money*¹⁶⁰ (1957), a young worker who falls in love with the factory owner's daughter finds some money by chance. He uses the money to make a great life for his mother and lends money to the father of the girl he loves. However, one day he suddenly wakes up and realises that it was all a dream, and in real life he is still just a worker, and nothing has changed. I suggest this film criticises the real life of a worker (not a member of the lumpen proletariat). It argues that the life of a worker is hard and unfair by putting the usual Filmfarsi idea of a happy life out of reach of the real worker and into a dream. The film depicts the dignity of social mobilisation as a dream.

Modernity appeared in Iran as a type of rapture. The Persian Constitutional Revolution took place between 1905 and 1911 and is understood as the inception of modernity for the nation. Baudrillard (1987, p. 69) argues that 'in the absence of a political and industrial revolution in depth, it is often the most technical, the most exportable features of modernity which touch the developing societies'. This was the case in Iran, and since that first importation of what Baudrillard calls 'spectacle' without 'the long process of economic and political rationalisation peculiar to the West', Iran has been struggling with modernity. It has absorbed negative aspects of modernity, especially 'the objects of industrial production and consumption, the mass media', more than the positive ones. (Baudrillard, 1987, p. 69)

In conclusion, as explained, Filmfarsi films brought to Iran a new type of social activity and led to the development of new tastes in society. The impact of these films on the audiences was, as Adorno argues, strong, as were the values reflected in the films as well as the actual film practice (going to the cinema). They led to economic growth in the cinema industry

¹⁶⁰ *Mimiram baraye Pool* (1338).

through the emergence of a modern film-going culture. As part of the culture industry, Filmfarsi tried to promote a type of social reconciliation; that is, to represent the gap between rich and poor as minimal. I argue that they problematised the notion of dignity through the use of narratives about good fate that reproduced the capitalist culture trap and the American dream in order to preserve the status quo. In tandem they, used bad fate stories of loneliness to show that acting against the status quo by seeking to make changes to one's life would put the character outside the law and against God's will and thus would end in tragedy and even death. The aim here was to politically deactivate the audience. I demonstrated how this worked by using the wave of Ali Bigham films. Overall, the impact of this was preservation of the status quo. This is why it is important to explore the role of dignity, as it is important in embourgeoisement. I have demonstrated that by making the concept of honour obsolete, Filmfarsi tried to invalidate this concept in an age of the triumphant bourgeoisie. Making honour obsolete can civilise a society by fostering respect for the individual and its being, and agency. Thus, Filmfarsi replaced the traditional and upper-class concept of honour with the concept of dignity, which is a modern concept. However, this concept was articulated through the use of traditional signifiers such as *lutigari* and *darvishi*, which meant that eventually these films articulated dignity in the interest of tradition.

Tradition and Dignity in the Post-revolutionary Period

In this section, I explore the culture industry in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. Following on from my argument about the conflicts between the bourgeoisie and dignity in the previous section, *Fate, Honour and Dignity in Filmfarsi*, in this section I discuss first, how the concept of dignity is both drawn on and shaped within another key signifier from my Matrix, Sacred Defence Cinema, and second, how Sacred Defence Cinema has developed new articulations and appearances of dignity which in turn have led to new genres or as I call them signifiers in Iranian cinema such as Value-based Cinema¹⁶¹ and Big Production Films.¹⁶² These signifiers are now the main pillars of the Islamic culture industry, which has constructed new meanings about how to be Iranian and about national security for Iranian citizens and their daily lives.

¹⁶¹ *Sinamaye Arzeshi*.

¹⁶² *Sinamaye Fakher*.

Through my focus on Sacred Defence Cinema, I explore the new representations of dignity and a good citizen.

Sacred Defence Cinema has appeared in diverse genres across different periods from 1980 (see Figure 6.3). I explore this diversity using the figuration set out in Figure 6.3.



Figure 6.3: Sacred Defence Cinema (1980–2020).

Dignity: A Social Concept

In the first few years (1980–1982), Sacred Defence Cinema was similar to the war cinema. These films were about trained warriors who kill their enemy in combat. They were based on epic stories that tried to convey hope to Iranian society during the Iraq–Iran war. Films like *The Imperiled* (1982)¹⁶³ and *Crossing the Minefield* (1982)¹⁶⁴ are about brave Iranian soldiers who easily defeat Iraq’s army. In 1982, a new perspective emerged. In contrast to the previous films’ perspective on war, this one was influenced by American war films and was based on fast zoom-ins and zoom-outs, and epic, unreal stories. A second generation of Sacred Defence films were inspired by Russian war films. These films, made between 1983 and 1988, used wide-shot sequences to show the bravery and discipline of Iranian soldiers. Further, they focused on collective forces and the harmony between the soldiers, instead of on one skillful, brave soldier.

Moreover, most of the characters in these films are ordinary people; even the protagonists of the films are not dissimilar to other citizens. A common trope is a character who understands war as a mental journey that can be used to improve oneself and become a better person. *Land of Lovers*¹⁶⁵ (1983) by Kambiz Roshanravan is a good example of these films. *Land of Lovers*

¹⁶³ *Barzakhhiha* (1361).

¹⁶⁴ *Oboor az Meydane Min* (1361).

¹⁶⁵ *Diare Asheghan* (1362).

is about Ali who is summoned as a reserve soldier and who might have to go to the front. He does end up going to war, but in an area far from the danger where his role is to cook meals for the frontline soldiers. He gradually understands what it means to fight against the enemy. As a result, he severs his relationship with the materialistic world/urban everyday life in order to refine his soul. In this regard, I would argue Ali is the first mystic character to appear in Sacred Defence Cinema. *The Scout*¹⁶⁶ (1988) is a later film that is also about a mystic character. In this case, the character goes under heavy enemy fire to gain information about the enemy to help the Iranian army, which is under pressure. Another mystic character film is *The Immigrant*¹⁶⁷ (1990), which is about a man who controls small airplanes in order to detect the Iraqi militaries' front line. These are the three most important films representing the mystic character. The mystic character seeks love and knowledge through personal experience of God. I will argue these films represent war as a space for Iranian people to explore their dignity through their inner lives.

In the Russian-style war films these mystical characters are represented through the Sufi/selfless people. For this research it is important to note that in the social context of Iran, Sufi people are those who always experience inequality, and are oppressed, but they are also represented as patient because of their spiritual chivalry (Lewisohn, 2009, p. 304). With regard to Islam, selfless people believe that the world is a prison for the believer.¹⁶⁸ They do not want to fight in wars as this does not accord with their Sufist beliefs, but at the same time they have no fear of war and death – they are mystic. For them to be killed is to help them to get rid of the body that imprisons them. Interestingly, selfless people have some characteristics in common with Filmfarsi heroes. I argue this understanding of selflessness appears as an expression of the 'peaceful but skillful fighter'¹⁶⁹ in everyday life rooted in the lower-class youth culture who can be fans of Filmfarsi protagonists as well. These selfless types are not looking for a materialistic life; rather, they are looking for dignity. However, in Filmfarsi most of these selfless characters, who tend to come from the proletariat, are represented as similar to the lumpen proletariat and as not having any social honour. We can follow this idea of the mystical character in contemporary Iranian society as well as in film. The most respected

¹⁶⁶ *Dideban* (1367).

¹⁶⁷ *Mohajer* (1369).

¹⁶⁸ A famous hadith by the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁶⁹ *Solhtalab ama Jang Balad*.

Iranian soldiers are known as The Unknown Soldiers of Imam Zaman¹⁷⁰ – no one knows who they are. Another example of selfless military personnel is the generals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in contrast to Western generals, do not wear medals on their chest. Rather than looking to be recognised for their military feats, they are looking for ‘truth’, looking for ‘dignity’, not fame or rewards.

As discussed in chapter Five, Khomeini, in his first Islamic Revolution Day speech, said that cinema is a manifestation of civilisation that should serve the people and be used for bringing them up. When he refers to people, he is referring to a non-elite proletariat, to the ‘Mostazafan’.¹⁷¹ In hailing this group, he is making a new people. When Khomeini says ‘bringing them up’, he means to make them better people. For him this means that as a nation Iranians need to be paying more attention to their dignity, not to their materialistic needs. He says this revolution is not just about providing free electricity and water to poor people, it is also about your individual spirituality. In this regard, the understanding of Khomeini’s new regime was that the proletariat and the lumpen proletariat were mistakenly getting ideas about their dignity through the bourgeois culture of *Filmfarsi*, when they should actually be attaining their dignity through the Islamic revolution, the revolution for dispossessed poor people that highlighted spirituality. Consequently, extending on my earlier argument that explained how dignity entered Iranian cinema through *Filmfarsi* I will argue dignity sits at the core of contemporary Iranian cultural identity and Sacred Defence Cinema. Dignity is articulated in both the films and daily life through tropes of nationalism (in relation to Islam, not Persian history), religion (Shiite Islam), marginalisation (the working class/peasants; communities who are always far removed from social honour, which is linked to wealth and status), and Sufism.

Michel Foucault visited Iran during the revolution. This led to him expanding his ideas on the rebellious subject concept and the notion of political spirituality. His texts on the Iranian uprising manifest a sharp awareness of the need to (re)think, within an extra-European present, the complex articulation of religion and politics. He argues this could be done in a way in which politics is not conceived in opposition to spirituality, but instead as a way to access a spiritual experience that it capable of being used to criticise the established political order (Cremonesi, Irrera, Lorenzini & Tazzioli, 2018, p. 304). In this section I will demonstrate how aspects of

¹⁷⁰ The Unknown Soldier is believed by Shia Twelve Muslims to be the Mahdi, an eschatological redeemer of Islam and ultimate saviour of humankind and the final Imam of the Twelve Imams who will emerge with Isa (Jesus Christ) in order to fulfill their mission of bringing peace and justice to the world.

¹⁷¹ The dispossessed people.

this complex, multi-sited identity articulated by Foucault was used to create a determined cinematic hero and the revolutionary people who would fight with empty hands against worldwide suppression; a hero who was ready to sacrifice his life in God's path for justice, for dignity.

Suspension of the Present

This research, like most recent sociological research on Iran, is intertwined with the conflict between modernity and tradition in Iran. However, I try to keep a distance from the representation of Iran as a series of dichotomies in particular tradition and modernity. As Tofiq et al (2020) demonstrate, most research, by using the transition literature, tries to explain the path of Iranian society as a transition from tradition to modernity. According to Tofiq et al (2020), this perspective suspends the present. Tofiq et al (2020), in a research plan for a critical historical sociology in Iran, suggest a new approach to understanding modernity in Iran. According to them, the most accurate methodology in this context is problematisation. In this research, I problematise everyday life and demonstrate Iranian everyday life as a problematic concept.

Iranian society has experienced a process of modernity across the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic era (see Figure 6.4). What I suggest happened in both periods is that both regimes leaped from an existing framing of life to a new one. I call this new framing of life a 'utopian time'. So, in the case of the Pahlavi dynasty, instead of working through a slow, inexorable process of modernity, the Pahlavi dynasty used a process of Westernisation to try to skip the conflicts modernity was creating in urban everyday life to reach what was understood to be a utopian time of modern Iran, or what the Shah called the Great Era of Civilization. Similarly, the Islamic regime, by repressing the conflicts that arose in the post-revolutionary society – including social justice and civil society demands – took up a position of being against what was understood as modernity. They also wanted to reach a 'utopian time', but the Islamic regime imagined this as Islamic Iran in an Islamic World (see Figure 6.4). I argue that everyday life is suspended in both the Shah's and the Islamic regime's imagining of national life.

To further explain what is happening in these leaps to utopia, I use the concept of social time. Hassard (1980) traces distinct traditions of time analysis in social science to explain how our time perceptions change in line with changes in culture and how time comes to condition our everyday actions. Hassard (1990, p. 18) argues that social time shows 'how the various

images, perspectives or metaphors, instead of being incompatible factors, can be mediated and harnessed in the process of developing rich explanations of time and society'. Social time highlights the quality of time, the discontinuity and heterogeneity, the social life of the publics in a specific period of history and location – it gives contextuality to the concept of time. It also expresses the movements of social phenomena and changes in the structures – it shows the fluidity of meaning of social phenomena.

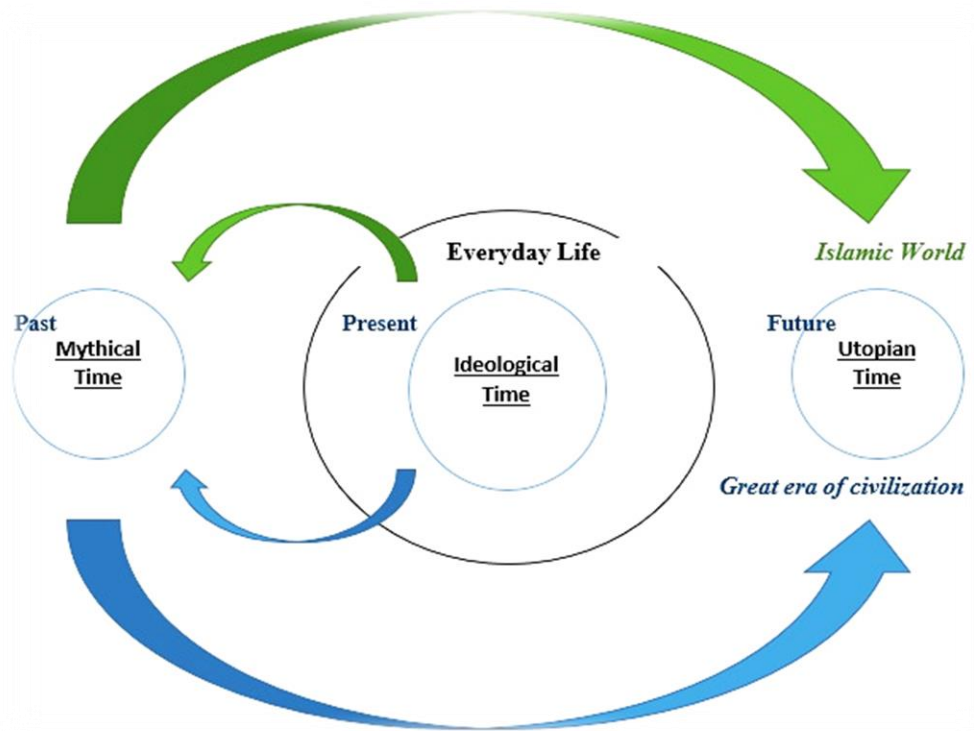


Figure 6.4: Representation of Iranian Process of Modernity.

Blue = Shah's era

Green = Islamic regime's era

My model of Iranian modernity is based on three periods, the past, present, and future. Adding the idea of social time, I further argue that each regime to construct and materialise their imagining of Iran they needed to deploy discourses that assisted them to represent both the past and present. My logic is that the present of the past is memory, and the present of the future is expectations. So, in relation to the past, each regime needed to construct 'state' memories for Iranian citizens. I argue they used existing powerful myths of society in order to mask the discontinuities and heterogeneities and to make their own powerful, singular, national, solid, and unproblematic history. Regimes 'leaped' over the present or refused to engage with everyday living, and social justice in particular. This meant there was a

discontinuity for citizens because they recognised the historical and social roots of the contemporary social problems; but the story they were told by each regime went straight from the past to the future. In relation to the future, the regimes needed to construct expectations and desires that aligned with their imaginings of utopian time. According to Lewis Coser and Rose Coser (cited in Hassard, 1990, p. 198), ‘people adapt to present conditions in terms of their expectations of the future’. Given this, I am suggesting the Shah used a mythical era of the Persian empire (the past) in order to create a narrative about how the people would be able to reach what he called a Great Era of Civilization (the future). And the Islamic regime used Islam as a religion that explains the past in order to construct and link to a future Islamic world. Their aims were both designed to control the everyday life in order to create citizen identities that aligned with their ideologies.

As I have argued, modernity in Iran appeared as a method; that is, ‘what to be’ rather than a process of ‘how to be’. Given this approach to modernity, what happened in the case of both regimes was an ignoring of the real world of the present, and of daily life in favour of a focus on the creation of utopian time. This was done first by force and then by propaganda. The Pahlavi regime tried to skip to the modern world/utopian time by linking to the idea of an Iranian honour that was seen to emerge from a mythical past and to be taking the country directly to an emerging Great Era of Civilization. According to Gurvitch (cited in Hassard, 1990), we can understand this process as creating something called ‘enduring-time’. Among the social classes it is the peasant class and among the global societies the patriarchal structures that appear to actualise this time (Hassard, 1990, p. 70). That is, the past is projected into the present and into the future. The post-1979 Islamic revolution regime took the same path and suspended the present, but the Islamic regime used the theme of dignity, not honour. By discussing dignity as a way of being that needed to be experienced worldwide by all humanity, regime tried to construct new revolutionary subjects/new people who were created against what was represented as Western imperialism. Here I suggest that what is being produced is what Gurvitch (cited in Hassard, 1990, p. 71) called ‘cyclical-time’. This time visibly prevails in the mystic–ecstatic groupings (churches, sects, mystic–ecstatic cults). It is predominant in archaic societies where the mythological, religious, and magical beliefs play such an important part. This is where the past, present, and future are mutually projected into one another with an accentuation of continuity and a weakening of contingency.

Therefore, under the influence of the transition society literature, it seems the process of modernity in Iran is understood as conflict within a developing country which is going from

tradition to modernity. However, according to Foucault (2005), the 1979 revolution demonstrated a negative form of resistance which said 'no' to the status quo; it also gave a positive answer to a new way of living, 'a sort of religious eschatology'. Eschatological thought goes back to at least the Old Testament, professing a divine plan in history and thereby discarding the view of history as eternal cyclical movement (Bultmann, cited in Villadsen, 2015, p. 15). This alternative religious eschatology is a form of coexistence and a non-political form of living together which does not follow the Western model. That is, Foucault is suggesting the 1979 revolution revealed what the Iranians were dreaming about – a new form of modernity. This new form of modernity was articulated by the tradition around the signifier of dignity against the Shah as the symbol of honorable life and bourgeoisie. The Shah systematically dismantled the judicial system of Iran along with the country's guarantees of personal and social liberties. According to (Berlatsky, 2012) the Shah 'consistently violated the codes of law and justice, destroying the dignity of our people by treating them like backward savages to be pulled with an iron hand out of the middle ages into the light of the modern era' (p. 70). My argument is that this articulation and new way of living - which was unjust and undignified can be understood in terms of a regime that accentuated its vision of utopian expectations that depended on the suspension of the present, here the rule of law.

Through to my model (Figure 6.4), I am arguing both regimes used mythical time to reach utopian time. They suspended the present because of their utopian expectations. Given the utopian expectations of the previous regimes, the 1979 revolution started with a new way of living based on dignity which pursued a new form of modernity. An Islamic government by definition is something very old, and also something that projects itself very far into the future; it involves a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet but also of advancing toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience. In pursuit of this ideal, the distrust of legalism seemed to be essential, along with a faith in the creativity of Islam (Foucault, 2005, p. 206). According to the creativity of Islam, this collective will happen through a revolution and in the present.

1979 revolution has brought out an absolute collective will, something few people in history have experienced. The collective will is a political myth with which jurists and philosophers try to analyse or justify institutions. As Foucault wrote: 'It is a theoretical tool: nobody has ever seen the" collective will"', and personally, I thought the collective will was like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter' (Foucault, 2005, p. 253). I would argue the revolution was a time when Iranians lived the future in the present. 'The time of

collective effervescences, of aspirations toward the ideal and the common values, and of collective acts of decision and innovation (Gurvitch, cited in Hassard, 1990, p. 72). However, after the revolution, Iran existed in an ‘explosive-time’ where the present as well as the past were dissolved in the creation of an immediate future. Drawing on Gurvitch I suggest that what happened in this time discontinuity, is that the contingent, and the qualitative are maximised and their opposites reduced to a minimum (Gurvitch, cited in Hassard, 1990, p. 72), and also the present was again suspended by the regime in order to replace the Shah’s utopian with its utopian expectations. But dignity has remained important in the politics of Iranian society. For example, Foucault also realised that the dignity of revolutionary actors and the formation of historical subjects, in contradistinction to subjects of history, could only materialise by retreating from the Enlightenment’s universal referent (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016, p. 158).

Since Lefebvre is the main theoretical inspiration of the thesis, I would like to clarify my relationship with the idea of utopia. What I criticise here is the type of utopia that devolves into a totalitarian dystopia. However, as I have explained, Lefebvre believes that social agents can change everyday life, and this needs a utopian perspective. According to David Pinder, Lefebvre sometimes distinguished between ‘utopist’ and ‘utopian’ (2015, p. 32). I critically review the role of totalitarian utopists in Iran but also try to expand the utopian perspective on urban life in order to reconstruct the possible. Coleman (2013, p. 361) demonstrates Lefebvre’s utopian perspective on everyday life and how the city creates other possibilities, ‘especially with regard to overcoming the emotional emptiness that now pervades spectacular tourist and commercial cities, wherever they are, and no matter how entertaining they may be’. I critically reviewed Tehran and its filmic representations and the way these representations try to entertain subjects and construct passive individuals. Here, I also showed how utopist approaches to the future suspend the present in Iran. In the following section, I try to narrate critical history of the present.

The critical history of the present (1990 to 2009)

Linking my model for conceptualising time in Iran to the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, it is possible to argue that the regime saw this as an opportunity to promote the revolution (i.e. the movement or leap to utopia). According to the regime, the war was not against Iraq: it was against the United States and all other powerful countries. For the regime the eight-year war has always been seen as taking place under the shadow of the revolution. War was just the next

step for the revolutionary leaders to fulfil their duty to produce dignity for all humanity via an Islamic revolution. In the following, by problematising the urban everyday life in this ideological time, I construct a critical history of ‘the present’. I start this history from 1990, and by moving between society and cinema, I compress these two sites into one, and through this explain how cinema is part of the production of the everyday.

Sacred Defence Cinema is in my matrix a signifier unique to Iran. It refers to a mode of engaging with others that is designed to extend the revolution. War created a vital feature of the regime: despite differences of opinion, all citizens/subjects were hailed (Althusser 2006) as a single Ummah; that is, a coherent nation of Islam. The narrative of the regime was that everyone, by participating in the war, was supporting the sacred defence of Islam. So, rather than being a process whereby Iran was simply protecting their national borders, the war came to represent a process whereby citizens/subjects could become a better people, and everyone could reach utopian time.

The continued use of Sacred Defence films in the 1990s after the war is key to my examination of utopian time under the regime and to understanding how it represented the undeniable problems that cinema and society faced in the post-war condition. As post-war society looked for peace and progress, it meant the community had no space for the revolutionary soldiers who returned from war and no need for war films. As a result, in the 1990s, the Sacred Defence Cinema of the 1980s transformed into Social Films. These transformed Sacred Defence films were about the proletariat/soldiers who arrived back from war to a developing city. They echoed the Filmfarsi stories of the proletariat and lumpen proletariat who had arrived in the city from remote villages, though in the Social Films the characters were returning from war. In both Filmfarsi and Social films, neither of these groups is represented as having any right to the city – a space beyond the control of both the state and capitalism – in the two different moments of ideological time. In each case different discourses dominated the categorization of time and urban life – the present of present things. And this led to repression because ideological time represses any voices against its myths and to the future to which it seeks to transcend.

In the 1990s, city walls started to be used to narrate the story of war heroes, men who in reality only became heroes after their death in the sacred defence of the utopian Islamic future. Government-sponsored graffiti – which included images of the soldiers – was sprayed on almost any wall in the city. Through this process, the soldiers associated with the past made

into myths for society and were used as a means of narrating/producing the regime's future-seeking present. The ideological time of the present hailed the mythical time of the past. I was in Tehran during this period, and I remember how sad the city was. There was a feeling that whatever young people did was wrong and was disrespectful towards the people who had fought in the war. The feeling was that whatever modern urban dwellers did was wrong, even things they did in private. I remember as a child I needed to be careful to not let my classmates or the staff of my primary school know that my parents did not pray or that we had satellite and could use it to watch American TV channels. Keeping secrets because of the large disparity between private life and public life was an essential life skill we needed to learn. Even today we still need to have these skills to exist in society, and even now instead of the singular pronoun "I" I use "we". The regime's system of control tried to hail us as 'we' – a dignified nation; there was not enough space left to construct a sense of 'I'. It seemed to me that the city walls spread a guilty feeling across the city – these people are dead because of us, our revolution, our society, because of our future expectations (utopian time) and because of me. Althusser's thesis on ideological state apparatuses (2006) confirms that ideology is materialised in the entire organisation of the society. 'Graffiti makes space social and public, through the promotion of use values and meaningful acts of colonisation and inhabitation versus the homogenising practices of planning, design, commerce, and their overarching concern with surveillance, order and security' (Zieleniec, 2018, p. 2). In this sense, the graffiti was a sign of utopian time appearing in the present so as to not let society – "us" - forget the aims of the revolution. Sadness, boredom, and fear covered the city, and we were under the control of eyes that followed us everywhere.

The Khatami presidency, which began in 1997, was a time for civilians, voters, and consumers, not Ummah. The perspectives of two different political factions – fundamentalist and reformist – were vying to own the city. Step by step, the images of revolutionary heroes plastered on walls across the city dissolved into consumerism, and the utopian time began to fade back into ideological time.

The best example of these contrary interactions between reform and the revolutionary ideas can be seen in the film *The Glass Agency*¹⁷² (1997). This film is about two veterans of the Iran–Iraq war, Abbas and his wartime commander, Kazem. Abbas comes to Tehran to seek medical treatment for a war injury. The doctor recommends that he should go abroad for the

¹⁷² Azhanse Shishei (1376).

operation and Kazem wants to help Abbas to get this medical care. However, it is almost New Year's Eve, and arranging an overseas flight becomes difficult. The banal daily problems the pair encounter in trying to arrange the travel make Kazem lose his temper, and he ends up taking the whole travel agency who are making the booking hostage. Some of the main dialogue in this film is delivered by the police who are in charge of solving the hostage problem. One of the police hostage negotiators says to Kazem, 'Your era is finished, master!' Thinking about the city's graffiti narrative, he is telling Kazem that the soldiers of the Sacred Defence might still be on the walls of the cities, but the Islamic utopian expectations are changing, and they are now influenced by modern concepts such as civil society, freedom of individuals, and democracy. Alongside 'reel' message Khatami's [real] speech at the Majles included the text:

'Protecting the freedom of individuals and the rights of the nation, which constitute a fundamental obligation of the President upon taking the oath is a necessity deriving from the dignity of man in the divine religion ... [It requires] provision of the necessary conditions for the realisation of the constitutional liberties, strengthening and expanding the institutions of civil society' (Khatami, 1997, p. 78).

By the time of the Ahmadinejad presidency (2005–2013), more things had changed in the city and cinema, and again the story was told on city walls. I argue that President Ahmadinejad can be read as a sign of utopian expectations of the revolutionary mythical time in the present. Ahmadinejad was known as the Rajaei of the time. Rajaei was a Sufi-style mathematics teacher who believed Iran had to be governed by the revolutionaries who stood before bullets. Ahmadinejad's dress codes similar to Rajaei was simple suits in a neutral colour suits. His looks and ideas were both signifying simple the life slogans of revolutionaries, and they were signs of mythical time. In the first term of Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005–2009), the city walls represented the basic ideas of the mythical past/premodernity through images of village life. In this graffiti, the images convey the simple and peaceful life of the villages. In these images it appears that everyone is happy with the achievements of the revolution and the eight-year war. Soldiers and heroes were back on the city walls again, but this time with happy and satisfied faces. This government-sponsored graffiti was more colourful and artistic. Compared with the 1990s, this time, the walls told stories like those from the earlier *Filmfarsi* films. I suggest the government was trying to cover over all the conflicts of urban everyday life that were taking place behind these colourful walls. They were also accentuating their utopian expectations and hailing 'the people' using representations of a collective mythical memory in order to shatter the ideological time of the Khatami era.

Dignity Dislocation

In 2009, the urban middle classes and the proletariat of the cities grew tired of the dead-end, ambiguous fatalism of the Islamic regime; they went back to the streets, as they had in 1979, to create change. Niakooee claims that ‘Various social forces especially the urban middle class were frustrated by the decreased international prestige of Iran, the expansion of repression and economic mismanagement during Ahmadinejad’s first administration’ (Niakooee, 2020, p. 1). I suggest they were looking for their dignity. In the following section, I focus on the film *Deportees-3* to demonstrate a dislocating moment that took place in this period around dignity in the social identity of Iranians. I suggest that the regime believes people need to know how to protect their dignity in order for it not to become dislocated again and threaten the status quo.

Masoud Dehnamaki made *Deportees* in 2007, *Deportees-2* in 2009, and *Deportees-3* in 2011. Masoud Dehnamaki spent three years fighting on the front lines of the Iran–Iraq War. After returning home, Dehnamaki joined an Islamic paramilitary group called *Ansare Hizbullah*, a militia accused of attacking theatres showing films that were deemed ‘un-Islamic’. Dehnamaki always says he follows two principles, justice and fighting corruption, both of which are evident in his indie documentaries such as *Poverty and Prostitution* (2004) and *Which Esteghlal? Which Perspolice?* (2006). Over time he changed from being a person who forced his views onto the viewer to one who uses art to persuade. Still, Dehnamaki is known as a fanatical fundamentalist in cinema. In his interviews he always claims that his main concern is to narrate the story of his generation – the soldiers who believed in utopian time. In his films he is always against both the reformist and fundamentalist perspectives, especially in *Which Esteghlal? Which Perspolice?* and *Deportees-3*.

Deportees begins when Majid Suzuki, a local thug from Tehran, is freed from prison. Majid falls in love with Narges, whose father, Mirza, is a pious man in the neighbourhood. To impress Narges and her father, Majid decides to go to the front and fight against the Iraqi Army to show that he is an honourable man. Majid and his friends, a band of wisecracking misfits that includes a drug addict, a pickpocket, and petty conmen, sign up for the war and head off to training. Here they meet Haj Saleh and Kamali, who are in charge of selecting which soldiers will be sent to the front to fight. Haj Saleh and Kamali question their faith as they watch Majid and his friends not pray, gamble, use foul language, smoke, and use drugs. For this pair and in the discourse of the regime, the Iran–Iraq war was a space in which to become a better person. But Majid and his friends are a far cry from the characteristic Sacred Defence soldiers. They

are lumpen, lumpen people of the Shah's regime. However, Morteza (whose role will be explained late in this discussion) tries to help them stay in the army. Sacred Defence Cinema always show Iranian soldiers as flawless holy warriors, but in *Deportees* Dehnamaki shatters that myth and showed the soldiers as flawed but real people. At the end, Majid dies in the war and becomes a good person since he sacrificed himself to help the others.

Deportees-3 shows the relationship between the Iranian soldiers, the two political parties of the regime – fundamentalist and reformist – and the civilians during the 2009 election. In 2009, many civilians had tried to reconstruct their lives and their city. However, the regime arrested thousands of these ordinary people, activists, and students. Hundreds of people were killed in the protests. It was the first time since the 1979 revolution that the state had confronted this number of people in the streets protesting against the heart of the regime. I argue the 2009 movement was acting against what many citizens saw as a big lie, acting against the lie of utopian time. Dehnamki thinks differently. In *Deportees-3* there are scenes of people protesting in the streets, but they are represented as just a bunch of crazy young people who like to dance and party in the streets. They are represented as having no idea about politics and are figured mostly as the young petit-bourgeois of Khatimi's era. The only group of people in the film who have some idea about the political situation are the religious young people who support fundamentalism.

However, in Dehnamaki's view, all the protestors are following the wrong leaders and for Dehnamaki this is due to the lack of a third force in society. This third force is Dehnamaki's alternative to the existing situation. In Dehnamaki's vision, the revolution had promised to bring back the lost dignity of Iranian society but had instead managed to destroy the powerfully constructed dignity of Iran's revolutionary soldiers. In *Deportees-3* reformism and fundamentalism, as the only political movements available to citizens, are both represented as corrupt with members who are only interested in their own benefits – like the characters Dabagh and Haj Saleh. I would suggest, however, that we can see in the film how the real soldiers are marginalised in society and do not have a voice. They are ethical people who are not status-hungry and do not want to get involved in debasing themselves for an honourable social position. These characters are like the mystics of Sacred Defence. They are victims of the war and also victims of both the reformist and fundamentalist regime's policies.

Dehnamaki suggests an alternative position to the reformist/fundamentalist dualism which he first characterised in *Deportees* and then expanded in *Deportees-3*. The only voices

of reason in this trilogy who represent Dehnamaki's alternative, are Morteza, Mirza, and a good-hearted clerk. Morteza is the person who tried to help Majid and his friends stay in the war in *Deportees*. Morteza understands the meaning of war. He is the mystic character of Sacred Defence Cinema. The actor who plays Morteza, Javad Hashemi, in contrast to the other comic actors (Akbar Abdi, Amin Hayai, Arzhang Amirfazli, and Amir Nouri), is one of the most famous actors of Sacred Defence Cinema. In Iranian visual culture, he signifies martyrs. In *Deportees-3* he portrays a university professor who does not want to get involved in the hypocritical opportunistic policies of the reformists and fundamentalists. He only trusts the clerk. The clerk is represented as tolerating both sides (reformists and fundamentalists) as well as raunchy songs, off-colour jokes, and lies. The clerk is a sign of the regime's leadership and of the concept of *Velayat*. Generally, the articulation of wisdom, trust and the melodramatic narration of this trilogy is shaped by the honest decisions of Mirza, the clerk, and Morteza. They are the most responsible and authentic characters. They shape the space in ways that signify the importance of dignity and trust in humanity. The third character, Mirza, is the sign of Khomeini, the supreme religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979; the clerk is the sign of Khomeini and *Velayat*,¹⁷³ and Morteza signifies the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.¹⁷⁴ Morteza is the ideal subject of the regime, a 'committed expert force'.¹⁷⁵

Returning to thinking about the actual protests in 2009, the year 2009 was the moment when many civilians took the last step in reforming their country in order to protect the dignity they saw as the core of Iranian social identity. According to the most important proclamation after the Arab Spring known as Wathiqat al-Azhar, which is about the role of Shari'ah in the modern democratic modern state, the protection of human dignity is one of four objectives and principles of Shari'ah (Esposito & Shahin, 2013, pp. 23–24). For the regime, dignity is articulated by a type of historical Islamic rather than Persian nationalism, religion (Shiite Islam), marginalisation (always being far away from social honour), and Sufism (which under the Islamic regime means a selfless person who seeks God in 'his' life). From the regime's perspective, protesters were against the type of dignity they believed in. In this regard, the protestors were seen as enemies of the Islamic regime/ the state and a threat to national security.

¹⁷³ *Velayat* literally means governance. It refers to the supreme leadership and protectorship of the Islamic jurists (*Velayat-e Faqih*), which is the Islamic governance of jurists.

¹⁷⁴ *Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslamie Iran*.

¹⁷⁵ '*Nirooye moteahed va motekhasas*'. This phrase was used by the regime for forty years to describe the ideal revolutionary subject. It is a position where modern science and Iranian Islamic ideology of the regime come together.

Ironically, by repressing the protestors the regime ignored the main aim of the 1979 revolution; that is, giving lost dignity back to the people. So, in this 2009 conflict, the idea of dignity was removed from the aims of the regime even though it was a promise of the 1979 revolution, a promise that committed to ‘bring them (civilians) up’. From the response to the 2009 actions of the people, it became clear that dignity is not something this regime can give to the people. However, I am going to argue it is a mode of treatment; it is something that everyone should have. It is something like nationality.

Insight protects dignity

In terms of maintaining the coherency of the regime, the culture industry actively engaged in making films to support the regime and its meaning of utopian time. Using the metaphor of a snake, I would suggest Sacred Defence Cinema did good work to create a vision of utopian time, but by 2007 the snake had grown, society had changed, and so this skin needed to be shed and a new one – more suited to the new situation – grown. In 2007 when *Deportees* was made, Sacred Defence Cinema needed to shed its skin in order to manage its changes and further growth. To continue the metaphor, this shedding would also remove any parasites that may have attached themselves to the old skin. As explained earlier, Sacred Defence films were about the eight-year war. Their plots were based on events in this war, but their ideology, as was the case with the Iran–Iraq war, was filled with the values of the revolution and in particular the post-revolutionary understanding of dignity. The new type of Sacred Defence Cinema that appeared around 2007, particularly by the time the *Deportees* trilogy was released, is what I call in my matrix Value-based Cinema. This shift happened because at this time Iranian cinema needed to some flexibility in terms of the usual portrayals seen in Sacred Defence films. In the context of the revolutionary ideology the meanings of Sacred Defence film seemed fixed. It makes sense that if a story is sacred, its filmic articulation should be attached to a fixed meaning. But the passing time meant this supposed ‘fixed’ articulation had in fact changed. Given nothing was fixed by the late twentieth century, new ‘fixed’ meanings had emerged and needed to be attached to stories in films. So, Sacred Defence Cinema converted to Value-based Cinema – a type of cinema that is based on ‘values’. But as will be discussed now: what values? whose values?

Value-based Cinema and Big Production Films literally emerged after the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 in order to maintain the coherency of the Islamic Republic discourse at this crucial moment. Value-based Cinema started by focusing on the Iranian Green Movement and narrating it in a way that was favourable to the regime. It tried to discredit any allied political groups or ideas that were against the values of the regime. Big Production cinema has the same aim, but it creates its narratives by focusing on the main goal of the Islamic revolution – promoting the revolution – and trying to connect with other Muslim countries.

In his scholarship on Big Production/Value-based films, Khoei (2016) focuses on three popular and costly series produced after 2009 and broadcast on Iranian national TV – *Shams-ol Emareh*,¹⁷⁶ *Condition White*,¹⁷⁷ and *The Book of Mukhtar*¹⁷⁸ in order to demonstrate three important signifiers that appear in the films. The signifiers are ‘insight’, ‘*Velayat Madari*’,¹⁷⁹ and the concept of ‘Otherness’.

<i>Standing in the Dust</i> Mohammad Hossein Mahdavian 2016 Value-based This film is about a famous soldier, “general”, who tried to save Khorramshahr- a city in south of Iran.	How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?	Insight
<i>Muhammad: The Messenger of God</i> Majid Majidi 2015 Big Production This film depicts the pre-Islamic Arabia as seen through the eyes of Muhammad from birth to the age of thirteen.	How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?	<i>Velayat Madari</i>
<i>Damascus Time</i> Ebrahim Hatamikia 2018 Big Production The movie is about an Iranian pilot and his son, as co-pilot, whose plane is seized by ISIS forces in Syria while carrying a cargo of humanitarian relief supplies to people in a war zone.	How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?	<i>Velayat Madari</i>

¹⁷⁶ Consisting of 26 episodes aired during the summer of 2009.

¹⁷⁷ *Vaziyate Sefid*. This TV series containing 42 episodes was aired from November 2011 to March 2012.

¹⁷⁸ *Mukhtar Nameh*. Forty episodes aired from October 2010 to July 2011

¹⁷⁹ *Velayat Madari* is a term used by followers of the supreme leader in Iran. It can be described as making *Velayat* or supreme leadership the focus of one’s mind and actions. This term literally means adherence to *Velayat*; *Velayat Madar* persons are *Velayat* adherents (Khoei, 2016, p. 191).

<p><i>The Golden Collars</i> Abolghasem Talebi 2012 Value-based As part of a conspiracy orchestrated by the British intelligence service, a group of Iranian expatriates, recruited mainly from the Mojahedin-e-Khalq organisation, plan to instigate riots in the aftermath of 2009 Iran presidential elections.</p>	<p>How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?</p>	<p>Insight</p>
<p><i>The Lost Strait</i> Bahram Tavakkoli 2018 Big Production A group of Iranian soldiers is returning home, but an Iraqi attack on a strategic border forces them to make a choice: return home for a long-awaited family reunion, or head back to the battlefield?</p>	<p>How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?</p>	<p><i>Velaryat Madari</i></p>
<p><i>Track 143</i> Narges Abyar 2014 Value-based Olfat is a single disposed mother. Her son leaves home to join the war and Olfat waits for him many years.</p>	<p>How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?</p>	<p>Insight</p>
<p><i>Midday Adventures</i> Mohamad Hossein Mahdavian 2017 Value-based This movie shows the efforts of Iranian revolutionary intelligence services who are trying to arrest members of Mojadedin</p>	<p>How do you respect yourself, and how do you protect your values and dignity?</p>	<p>Insight</p>

Table 6.3: Dignity and Insight

Khoei argues that in the three Value-based films he analysed, the weak people/characters do not have ‘insight’. And ‘foreigners’ can easily deceive people who are weak and without insight and this is why these ‘weak’ citizens protested in the streets. The argument is that the filmmakers define what insight is by identifying those who lack insight. This means that by definition all those who do not have insight when confronting the enemy, firstly, end up helping the enemy to reach its goals, and secondly, destroy themselves (Khoei, 2016, 189–190). So, in a sneaky move these films define insight as something that cannot be held by anyone who holds non-normative ideas. Big Production cinema has the same aims and an extra one: to promote the Islamic revolution. The leadership of Shiite Muslims, by supporting Shiite Muslims in Arabic countries and all Muslims around the world (i.e. in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Philippine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Western Europe), presents the promise of heaven for his Ummah, and also encourages the proletariat and oppressed individuals (i.e. Indigenous peoples in Canada and Black people in the United States) of the world to fight against inequality, imperialism, and capitalism to protect their dignity. In this discourse, insight can protect dignity. This is also the reason why the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was created. The goal of the

Revolutionary Guard (*pasdaran*) is to protect the country's Islamic republic political system. The Revolutionary Guards state that their role in protecting the Islamic system is preventing foreign interference as well as coups by the military or deviant movements (Najdi and Karim, 2012). Most of the Value-based and Big Production films are produced and supported by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. For example, Owj Arts and Media Organization is a media unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. These films try to connect with other Muslim countries to promote Shiite Islam and acceptance of the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih*, of which the leadership of Iran is leader (See Table 6.3). To do so these films problematise insight and promote Velayat madari.

After the revolution, the regime had to struggle to produce ideological hegemony in Iran. They drew on the notion of dignity and promised dignity to all citizens. Of course, ideological hegemony is never absolute and so the issue of dignity – having it, losing it— returned again with the eight-year war. This conflict gave the regime an opportunity to hegemonise its ideas. After the war, the right-wing populists – who were fundamentalist – tried to attach themselves to the regime's utopian expectations. At the same, the left-wing populists – reformists – tried to support an economic regime aligned with the market economy. Though in the West this is usually associated with 'freedom', in this case there was still tight control of the media. These two discourses within the regime meant that they could no longer present a fantasy that the people/nation was united in their dreams/utopic vision of the future. These discourses divided the nation into progressive nationalism and regressive nationalism in order to prevent the people from unifying. What this meant is that while the regime officially 'hailed' Iranians as member of a dignified nation,¹⁸⁰ informally, it blamed Iranians, hailing them as guilty of failing the nation because they could not protect their dignity. At the same time, given the levels of existing corruption within both political parties (reformist and fundamentalist), the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps positioned itself as the signifiers of the status quo whose role was to protect the nation's dignity through their unique insight.

In conclusion, the conflict between honour and dignity, which is rooted in the difference between the bourgeoisie (who use honour to justify their status) and tradition (which draws on dignity), is a crucial space for 'making the people' in order to for them to make sense of their lives—present, past and future. This is why I call this conflict between honour and dignity the traumatic core of cultural identity. This chapter clarified how this conflict was shaped in pre-

¹⁸⁰ Melate Sharif.

revolution Filmfarsi cinema and then changed its articulation in the period of the Islamic Republic Discourse. Through the useful model (see Figure 6.4) I developed to illustrate the process of ideology, change and time, I explained how both the pre- and post-revolution regimes tended to offer discourses that suspend the present in order to make what they saw as ‘the people’ of the future and create a normative Iranian subject. This suspension of the present to produce a type of modernity has the effect of repressing everyday life, traumatising society, increasing uncertainty in daily life, and making the people dissatisfied with their present. This strategy has been undertaken for more than fifty years, and I suggest it has also increased boredom in everyday life, a key issue which I discuss further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: A PORTRAIT OF IRANIAN URBAN EVERYDAY LIFE

In the previous chapter, I set out ideas of subject formation and everyday life in terms of ideas about honour and dignity. Much of the analysis used Sacred Defence Cinema, Filmfarsi, Value-based Films and Big Production Films. This chapter draws on different concepts, this time power and resistance in order to explore another aspect of subject formation in Iranian urban everyday life. In this chapter, rather than honour/dignity framing my analysis, I consider the themes of traumatisation, uncertainty, victimhood culture, dissatisfaction, and boredom. Whereas Sacred Defence Cinema and Filmfarsi were key in Chapter Six, here melodrama, is the main cinematic genre I draw on and it is central to this argument. In relation to the precariat – the key subjects considered in this analysis, a typology of subjects emerges from my exploration of this space. I classify them as: (1) the democratic subject, (2) the bored subject, (3) the opportunistic subject, and (4) the marginalised subject. Building on the previous chapters, this chapter continues to be informed by the fourteen key signifiers introduced in the methodology chapter, the forms of censorship from Chapter Five, and the importance of honour and dignity discussed in Chapter Six. In addition, I explore new effects including the daily shocks of modern life, and the rules and laws of the Islamic regime. Lastly, I continue to do analysis by interpreting the storylines/content of the films and their genre.

The chapter has two sections. In the first I explain, in relation to my matrix of signifiers, that melodrama is the main genre in Iranian cinema and accordingly victimhood as the main subject position in Iranian films. In the second section I argue that traumatisation, uncertainty, victimhood culture, dissatisfaction, and boredom shape the Iranian everyday life. From a Lefebvrian perspective, I explore each of these themes and demonstrate key aspects of the domain of everyday life from everydayness to everyday ‘refo-lution’. Together this chapter continues to clarify the portrait of everyday life in Iran.

Daily Subject Position

In this section I explore victimhood as the main position that Iranian films construct for the characters through techniques including the censorship forms, melodrama, daily shocks of modern life, the rules and laws of the Islamic regime, and the importance of the way honour

and dignity conflict and work together. To do this, I use three elements: (1) my fourteen key signifiers, (2) storylines/content of the films, and (3) genre.

In this section I try to find a balance between data-focused analysis and macro-contextual analysis to demonstrate subject positions not as an abstracted, anchored or fixed concept, but neither as a quickly changing one. To do so, I use the results of the previous chapters and categorise them in terms of three elements (see Table 7.1). Element one is the *fourteen key signifiers*; it shows the main point of view of a specific cinema as it exists in a particular discursive context. Element two is *storylines* or *main content*; when analysing storyline and content I focus on events, spaces, objects, and transformations. My understanding of the relationship between elements one and two is that the discursive position of subjects in relation to the key signifiers does not change, but the storylines can narrate an event that happened hundreds of years ago or took place in future. For example, *Tehran 1500* (2008) by Bahram Azimi narrates the future of Tehran in 2121 and *Muhammad: The Messenger of God* (2015) by Majid Majidi is set in the sixth century. These details are about the content of the films; their synopses and the main events in the movies have been discussed in previous chapters. Element three is *genre*. I use this element to discuss the structure of the cinematic language. What is important for me about this element is how the genre is configured in telling a story. Genre accentuates the main cinematic genre—melodrama—and its characteristics in Iranian cinema. I combine these three elements to clarify my argument about the way subject positions are constructed via discourses through the articulations of element one (key signifiers), element two (content of the films), and element three (genre/cinematic language). In the following paragraphs, by using the data-focused analysis results of the previous chapters (categorised in Table 7.1), I demonstrate the main subject position in Iranian films.

Element Section	Key signifiers/nodal points (Main point of view)	Storylines (Main content)	Genre (Main categories)
Tehran Modernity	Independent Cinema Underground Cinema Art and Experimental Cinema Accented Cinema	People are captivated by Tehran	<i>Melodrama</i> Urban Films
Censorship and Terrorist Society	Independent Cinema	Critical social stories	<i>Melodrama</i> Urban Films
Bourgeois Culture and Honour	Filmfarsi	Looking for dignity (nationalistic values)	<i>Melodrama</i> Stew Pot Tough Guy
Tradition and Dignity	Sacred Defence	Protection of dignity (the regime's values)	<i>Melodrama</i> War Films Social Films Comedy-War Films Religious, Historical Value-based Films Big Production Films

Table 7.1: Communicating the Results.

According to the argument I put forward in the section *Tehran and Modernity* in Chapter Five, Iranian films design a subject position in terms of choosing what is bad or worst in a patriarchal traumatic context. Therefore, the subject position that dominates in representations of daily life is the traumatised victim. In this regard, the films convert subjects to victims, but these are victims who usually feel guilty; that is, the films' representations tend to victimise the subjects and blame them for their victimhood. In addition, I demonstrate that generally, Iranian films present the city as filthy, as full of abominations, pain, discrimination, dead-ends, and darkness. Naïve girls and good innocent people go to this city and get trapped there as a result of unconsciously making a mistake or trusting a roguish stranger. Iranian films tend to suggest through their narratives that these victims need to and should learn the rules of Tehran: one must defraud others first in order to avoid becoming their victim. In Iranian films, representations of these 'good' people are restricted to portraying them in terms of the negative aspects of tradition and modernity. This means they end up sitting between being represented as bad and even worse. Therefore, in these films the plots are framed in ways that characters, as victims, have to choose between the limited filmic narrative options of taking care of themselves, looking out for their own benefits, dying, falling into depression, or getting disappeared.

Censorship and propaganda accentuate the normalisation and frequency of the above subject position. As discussed in *Censorship and the Terrorist Society* in Chapter Five, censorship is a type of repression caused by fear of the consequences of questioning the values of the dominant group. Imposing systematic multi-censorship methods is the main feature of the type of violence and repression that occurs in everyday life in Iran. Translated into representational logics, censorship tries to eliminate narratives that open up the possibility of subject positions that project agency in films. As a system which constructs a traumatic everyday life in which everyone feels guilty, and becomes a traumatised victim, the logical outcome of Iranian censorship is to marginalise a subject position filled by individuality and active agency. Daily life appears as a lack, a lack of certainty, a lack of trust and a lack of social responsibility, and this uncertainty leads those in this society to take on a competitive, individualistic, cold and sad nature. I argue the repressed/eliminated subject position in this context is that of the subject who can 'be critical'. This subject position is present but becomes empty, and its meaning is absent but full. At the same time, propaganda creates the released and postulated subject position – the unreal but full one. An example of this in Iranian cinema is the reformist filmmakers who take the role of the critical subject but in reality, they support the repressive system and understand censorship as a positive element in enriching filmmakers' creativity. This idea will be explained more in the next section.

The normative subject position in the pre-revolution culture industry was connected to nationalism. It was a position deployed by filmmakers who tried to produce social reconciliation; a position rooted in what was represented as the magnificent past, a past marked by a splendid, rich culture. As argued, this nationalist subject position was also used to refer to a utopian great civil era in the future (see Figure 6.4). The subject position represented in post-revolution propaganda problematises dignity and the protection of dignity. I suggest this subject position is connected to how we decide to answer two questions: Are we (Iranians) 'good' citizens? Do we (Iranians) love our society, family, country? The answer that films offer is always yes, and according to the rules of the regime it should be yes. However, when discursively fixed by or to this position, subjects face inner problems and outer problems, and this creates for them a bad faith existential crisis. The problems everyday Iranians have in a post-war/post-revolution society is the constant threat of enemies. So, taking up a subject position in this context is always about being ready to make a decision as each crucial situation arises; the situation changes so quickly that was at one moment the most current and crucial issues changes is suddenly no longer the most important. So, decisions about who is or is not

an enemy need to be made again and again. This is discussed more in the next section of this chapter.

In June 2019, in a series of tweets, US President Donald Trump said Iran and the United States were ten minutes away from war. In a society that is always trying to assess enemies, I would regard this event as one of the most crucial current situations in the contemporary history of Iran. TV/radio journalist Zeinab Badawi interviewed Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, a reformist politician, about this conflict between Iran and the US on 17 July 2019 in New York. From my perspective there are two important parts at the beginning and at the end of this interview. Javad Zarif mentions dignity. In one response he says that Iranian dignity does not allow them to deal with the US. He called the US a 'bully': *'if you allow a bully to bully you into accepting one thing, you will encourage him to bully you into accepting other things'*. This second part of his interview helps me to clarify the normative subject position in this period:

Z.B: Under the nuclear deal, Iran is only allowed to enrich its uranium to 3.67%. We now know that you are enriching uranium beyond that to around 4.5%, so why do this? It doesn't help the Europeans make your case, does it? To the Americans?

J.Z: We implemented the agreement fully. The IEA made 15 reports from the beginning, five of them after the US deposit withdrawal, and all of them indicated Iran was revealing its commitments fully. Unfortunately, the Europeans could not take advantage of these and just cracked their feet. It won't happen again. Iran is a country with an old civilization. For us the dignity of our people is extremely important.

His answer to Badawi's question comes just after explaining the consequences of the US sanctions on the lives of ordinary people and the way that many children died as a result of the epidermolysis bullosa¹⁸¹ and many people died from multiple sclerosis¹⁸² because of Iran's inability to produce some pharmaceuticals. My reading of this text is that it is an example of the discursive creation of the Iranian subject. In this text the narrative is that it is a matter of choice, a decision that Iranian subjects have made in order to preserve their dignity at any price. My interpretation, based on discourse analysis, is that through his interview, Javad Zarif re-creates a subject position that posits Iranians as putting dignity above all else:

¹⁸¹ Also called EB, this is a rare inherited skin disorder.

¹⁸² Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a potentially disabling disease of the brain and spinal cord (central nervous system).

Z.B: Finally, and briefly, what would it take to find a way out of this impasse? Some kind of face-saving deal for you and Iran and the Americans to give some impetus to the deadlock we have now?

J.Z: We do not have to have the deadlock. We do not want to embarrass anybody. We believe all we want is what we negotiated and implemented, and then we can go even further. I believe our region has enough real problems. We do not want imaginary problems.

Z.B: Could you negotiate the deal from scratch and sell some oil to China and India? If there was a way that allowed you to do that, would that be a step forward?

J.Z: We will continue to sell our oil, but we will not sell our dignity.

My further interpretation, based on discourse analysis, is that protecting this dignity is always a melodramatic decision. As I will explain in the next few pages, melodrama is signalled by a character who wants to protect his/her dignity and values but faces too many difficulties; melodrama is about a good character who is oppressed by bullies but tries to stay 'pure', 'clean', and 'good'. This sensibility that we find in Iranian films is similar to the aesthetic of Iranian cinema. An example, in April 2021, on the 'leaked' audio file, Javad Zarif, the reformist politician, revealed all the 'secrets' that everyone knew. In the file Zarif is heard explaining he had always clashed with Qasem Soleimani, an Iranian major general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps who was known as the second most powerful person in the regime. Zarif tried to show that as Foreign Minister, he has done everything to protect Iran and the values of the regime against national and international threats/interference (that is in melodramatic terms to be 'clean'). However, as the victim of a political situation he noted that his popularity had dropped from 90 percent to 60 percent, while Qasem Soleimani's popularity had grown from 70 percent to 90 percent. Soleimani, the charismatic general of the regime, helped bolster the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, and ran Iran's operations in the Syrian Civil War. This highly ranked 'selfless hero' was killed by a US drone strike in Iraq in January 2020. In my framing of 'daily life he died not in a 'war', but as a victim. A couple of hours after Soleimani's assassination, President Donald Trump tweeted his first statement about the event: 'Iran never won a war, but never lost a negotiation!' Applying my model of time and ideology, I suggest Trumps' tweet refers to the suspension of the present as a strategy of the regime in suspending a focus on the present in favour of an ideological vision of a utopian future.

This analysis of a ‘real’ event in terms of melodrama is of course linked to the ‘reel. Langford (2010, 2019) demonstrates that Iranian films negotiate with the regime through melodrama. In this understanding, the past is projected into the present and into the future and as a community we end up with a suspended present. After the Soleimani’s assassination (past), Khamenei, the leadership of Iran, promised a ‘hard revenge’ to happen in the future. I argue that this leads to a suspension of the present and under this suspension the everyday becomes melodramatic. As Anker (2014) has explained, melodrama is not just a genre but a political discourse that by articulating national suffering and heroism in relation to sovereign action casts a shadow of surveillance over a community or state and this shadow acts as a moral imperative that aims to eradicate villainy.

To summarise the ideas on subject positions in Iranian films presented in this section, I have suggested, by building on my case studies (presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six) about the key signifiers and storylines, that the main subject position in Iranian films is *victimhood*, and this has a direct connection with the most popular genre in Iranian cinema, *melodrama*. In the following section. I will join my idea of the third element, genre, to these results and demonstrate the relationship between victimhood and melodrama in Iranian films in more detail. From there I will make the case that melodrama operates as the key mode, or as a powerful political discourse in everyday life in Iran rather than just a cinematic genre.

Melodrama is the best genre for maintaining the status quo. This is why Elsaesser (2016) calls it the most important placeholder of the political. Melodrama does not allow the possibility of the birth of a new society. It does help a society to reform and develop. But what type of reform? And whose reform? From where to where does the reform shaped by melodrama take a society? Assessing Iranian melodrama films, based on my research I will argue that mostly this reform is from tradition to modernity, that is it offers another dualism. From this point, we confront another question: which modernity? The dark modernity we have already discussed, particularly in the *Tehran and Modernity* section? Or the modernity that suspends the present, as discussed in Chapter Five?

Melodrama freezes everyday life somewhere between evil and good. It is also a path on which a person can only go one way. Both Iranian social dramas and melodramas suggest society and those living within it need to compromise. It proposes people cannot be all good, indeed, to survive they actually need to move into shades of grey, a move caused by the fact subjects face both inner and outer problems. For example, Langford, in her critique of

Tahmineh Milani's Fereshteh trilogy, demonstrates that 'the honour code figures in the films as a key melodramatic device for generating pathos around its contradictory construction of woman as guilty victim' (2010, p. 348). While Langford (2010) understands this aesthetic as a space in which the protagonist Milani can criticize patriarchy and the dominant ideologies of the regime, I will argue that the message of these films constructs an inactive audience/subject.

Aesthetic forms are a means for interpreting and making sense of experiences. They are how we make sense of our lives (Brooks, 1985, pp. 205–206). If, as Anker argues about Hollywood films, American heroes can single-handedly fashion their own fate via hard work, perseverance, and repudiation (Anker, 2014, p. 81), then Iranian films claim: (we) Iranians do not like our tragic life, but we are stuck with it since it is our destiny, or alternatively we are stuck with it because it is our fault and the best way to emancipate ourselves is to compromise and accept our destiny. Given this is the genre language of Iranian film, it is not surprising that fate remains an important core of the film plots. What this leads to are narratives that represent this language where subjects are often in an in the immediate and crucial situation position where they need to compromise in order to survive. The language or aesthetic of melodrama may saturate one's current daily difficulties and so function as a means of revising one's notions of value and one's behaviour.

But it is important to see how this subject position is articulated. According to Brooks (1985), a great deal of melodrama interweaves pathos and action. This is what happens in modern Iranian melodrama. If *Filmfarsi* melodramas and New Wave melodramas represent(ed) some rebels as acting to secure their rights, and if the self-less heroes of Sacred Defence were represented as ignoring the materialistic rules of life to reach 'Hagh' (Truth/God/ Right), then generally Iranian social drama and melodrama represent naïve, miserable, inactive, and opportunistic wicked subjects. So, not only do they ignore narratives where the subject is an agent and disregard plots where characters take positive actions rooted in the resistance of individuals, they promote compromise and a populist good-versus-evil dichotomy instead of representing subjects shaped by critical thinking and individuality. This is the Iranian melodramatic imagination.

The term melodramatic imagination suggests that melodrama is a way of perceiving the world, a response to a specific social pressure that can be located in literature and drama as well as in cinema (Landy, 1991, p. 31). Singer (2001), in relation to the representation of modernity in the US press in the nineteenth century, demonstrates:

The portrayals of urban modernity in the illustrated press seem to have fluctuated between, on the one hand, an antimodern nostalgia for a more tranquil time, and on the other hand, a basic fascination with the horrific, the grotesque, and the extreme. The illustrated press's images were, paradoxically, both a form of social critique and, at the same time, a form of commercialized sensationalism, a part of the very phenomenon of modern hyperstimulus the images decried. In both these aspects, the illustrated press traded in bombast. This is not surprising, since the press had an obvious commercial interest in portraying the world in a drastic light. (pp. 89–90)

As does Singer I believe modern life brought with it uncertainty and new life issues associated with the urban. Modern life changed human beings' understanding of time, cities, and daily life. Therefore, the representations of a negative modernity that appear in Iranian films in the context of a dystopia match the convulsions and shocks that were occurring in daily life.

Another aspect of Iranian melodrama films is that they transformed daily conflicts into tragedy. Heilman (1968) states that we should understand tragedy as an experience that we would try to avoid if we can. Iranian melodrama is premised on an understanding that 'we cannot' avoid tragedy, so in this context tragedy implies the inexorable workings of destiny. What happens is that Iranian melodramas manipulate daily conflicts and personal mistakes and (re)present them as tragedy. This is what the supporters of the regime call '*Siahnama*' (Black Portrait). Film examples of *Siahnama* include *Tales* (2014), *I am Not Angry!* (2014), *Blockage* (2017), *Hattrick* (2018), *Crazy Rook* (2014), *The Girl House* (2015), and *Lantouri* (2016). Many of these films were banned as censorship authorities claimed they represented the society in a miserable way. They claimed these films exaggerated the issues of the society. Usually, the filmmakers who represented Iran in this way received awards at various international film festivals or acted in opposition to the regime. As was illustrated in the section on censorship, by showing the miserable life of the people, these films tried to criticise the structural issues of the society that embedded inequality. This is why the Islamic regime banned them and the opposition groups support them. However, I want to read these films outside a binary of good/evil. I argue that what is actually happening in these films is the victimisation of the people.

Many filmmakers claim their films visualize the real problems that exist in the daily life of the poor middle classes. However, in Iran the regime does not want any negative representations of social issues. At this point, this disagreement on the role of film even caused

a problem between the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the filmmaker Hatamikia, who referred to himself as the filmmaker of the regime. Overall, this disagreement about the role of film results in uncertainty in filmmaking, (as discussed in the section of *Censorship and Terrorist Society*) and as a result many filmmakers face obstacles, misunderstandings, moral dilemmas, when planning their films and find the ‘rules’ incomprehensible. What I am going to argue is that what happens to ‘resolve’ this conflict is that the regime blames the filmmakers for not being ‘good’ and filmmakers use their films to displace this blame and shift the blame on to the ordinary people/characters in their films by personalising their social issues. According to Majumdar (cited in Gardiner, 2017, p. 161), representations of real problems tend to ‘push their victims not only toward the intense theatre of trauma but also toward the pervasiveness of banality and the iterative cycle of boredom’. In this regard, Heilman (1968) demonstrates that critical thinking replaced by a simplistic black and white view.

When we equate all evil with what happens to us (at the hands of nature or of careless or malicious people), we fall into a too easy view of life that makes life harder. We throw away intellectual tools needed to face the complexities of actuality, where evil never moves in one direction only, where chance and resolve, accident and will, others and ourselves, are mingled in a trying existential disorder. Hence, we need adequate ways of ‘positioning’ ourselves with respect to what goes wrong, and they will hardly be easy. (p. 23)

Thinking about these points I suggest Iranian films tend to manipulate daily conflicts and social issues, so it is represented as tragedy, and from there blame civil society, which is under too many social, political, and economic pressures. I argue that what is actually taking place in their films is a type of symbiotic relationship between regime and filmmakers and this leads to a continuation of the status quo even as the films are banned, and the filmmakers aim to upset the status quo. Representing the individuals as inactive victims leads the society to a blasé attitude and evasion of social responsibility. As I quoted earlier, melodrama is a placeholder for the political. And victimhood is the particular subject position that is taken up in melodrama. To return to the issue of genre, according to Elsaesser (2016), this placeholder function of melodrama and the victimhood subjectivity firstly serves to support an impossible hope of finding a modality of exchange, equivalence, and justice. And secondly, Elsaesser argues that the melodramatic imagination gives way to abjection and in this regard, victimhood emerges as the only subject position of authentic action or agency. That is, this melodramatic imagination cannot attach any positive value to present/everyday life and its subjects; therefore,

I argue the only option remaining is a black portrait of a despairing society. What is produced is a society where the key discourses keep it within a set of parameters that only allow representations and imaginations about a conflict between honour and dignity and produce what I have called a victimhood culture.

Any analysis of daily life required a study of class and difference. When trying to understand the role of status, one needs to think about its different aspects and the degree to which it is taken up as a subject position. I apply this to victimhood as a status. Campbell and Manning (2018) describe victimhood as a kind of moral status that, like honour and dignity, is based on suffering and neediness:

Victimhood exists in a variety of contexts, but like honour and dignity it plays a greater role in some than in others. Those enmeshed in a culture of victimhood might also value dignity and perhaps even elements of honour, but to a greater degree than elsewhere they emphasize the moral worth of victims and their allies, while condemning the vice of privilege and the evil of oppression. (p. 23)

Expanding on this, I suggest victimhood culture based on the idea of the honour/dignity dualism divides people into two groups – those who are privileged and those who are not – on the basis that only those who are not economical and socially privileged are fully deserving of courtesy. Some logics of victimhood culture always create a space for the unprevailed individuals to be protected. It is also distinguished by a tendency to ask third parties for support in conflicts, and to do so in ways that advertise or exaggerate one's victimisation (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 74). My argument is that by problematising the issues of the specific groups, the subject position of victimhood can become available as *a safe space* for the victims. Safe spaces are spaces where the victims can be heard, respected, and accepted without fear of judgement and discrimination. To quote Campbell and Manning, 'If dignity culture makes safety a virtue, then victimhood culture practically deifies it' (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 79). What tends to happen in this situation is that any support given goes to those who are not privileged but are not so abject that they have no ability to attract support, which in itself is a privilege. In this scenario—especially films—there is always a third party who is called on to be a passive witness, a subject who make peace, or takes a side between the aggrieved and the offender. The third party frequently is someone only slightly higher in status. Examples would be people in a tribal village bringing their dispute before a respected elder, or a situation where the third party might have the power and authority of the state. Campbell and Manning (2018,

p. 46) argue that whether these authorities actively suppress other ways of handling conflict or merely provide an easy and appealing alternative, their presence can lead to a kind of moral dependency.

Consequently, linking this conceptualisation of victimhood as the main subject position represented in Iranian films and visual culture about the city, it is possible to understand victimhood as the key subject position within the broad cultural context that shapes Iranian society, and melodrama as a very common mode in daily life. I have demonstrated that victimhood is the main subject position of Iranian cinema across a range of different genres (see Table 7.1). That is, bringing together my argument in previous chapters and focusing on some film storylines I have made an argument that the main victim characters of Iranian cinema are young women, naïve girls, *shahrestani* people (people from cities other than Tehran), reformists, artists, students, selfless religious people, the lumpen proletariat, the proletariat, and soldiers; all in all, victims are the poor middle classes who try to protect their dignity. This victimhood subject position is the equivalent to the assertion of dignity by subjects discussed in earlier chapters. That is, the articulation of dignity I presented in this thesis aligns with victimhood subject position. Outside of cinema, both political factions—reformist and fundamentalist—victimize their preferred subjects, blame society, and individualise what are in fact structural social issues. The result is that, in general, cinema, through its representations, victimises poor middle-class people rather than creating a reel/real safe space for the victims of the society.

The Problematic of Everyday Life: From Everydayness to the Everyday Revolution¹⁸³

As discussed in previous chapters, all concepts need a political articulation in order to be pregnant with significance. So, the signification of everyday life depends on its political articulation; that is, different theoreticians understand everyday life in different ways. From a Lefebvrian perspective, everyday life is understood as an identifiable domain which is a product of modernity itself. In this section, drawing on some cinematic representations of everyday life and my understandings of the realities of Iranian urban life, I articulate my

¹⁸³ Asef Bayat coined this concept to demonstrate the resistance of everyday life in the Middle East.

argument about the importance of (1) traumatising, (2) uncertainty, (3) victimhood culture, (4) dissatisfaction, and (5) boredom as key tropes that are used to portray everyday life in Iran.

Traumatization as a mode of experience of Iranian everyday life is intertwined with modernity. Many sociologists have explained aspects of this process. Berman (1982, p. 21) argued that modern humans found themselves in the midst of a great absence and emptiness of values and yet, at the same time, faced a remarkable abundance of possibilities. Micale and Lerner similarly suggested that 'Trauma is responsive to and constitutive of modernity' (2010, p. 38). Most arguments about modernity and trauma focus on the West. In the case of Iran, trauma is also associated with the repression imposed by the Islamic regime. I argue we need to be aware of trauma processes play out in cross-cultural contexts. According to Visser (2018, p. 130), who did research on 'international trauma around the world' in seventeen nations including Iran, Western classical trauma theories argue that trauma means a weakening or crippling of a community or a nation (Visser, 2018, p. 132). He suggested that people respond to traumatization in different ways throughout the world, and that the spiritual and ritual responses to trauma are often culturally determined. I proposed and illustrated an example of this cultural specificity can be seen in Iran in the rise of post-war poetic cinema, such as Majid Majidi's films and Sacred Defence Cinema. These spiritual Sufi-centred plots are understandable as a specific cultural response by the regime to the eight-year war. In another cultural context Susan Najita in *Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific* (2006, p. 27) demonstrates that in Pacific regions trauma can invoke cultural forms for the future by 'exorcizing the past'.

Trauma is born in fragmented and competitive societies.¹⁸⁴ As argued in Chapter Five, trauma has a close connection with uncertainty. Trauma is also associated with shock, and this element is further associated with destruction and crisis in urban life. All of this shapes community collective memory. There is an Iranian expression that says, '*Iranians have four tenses: past, present, future and the time of Shah*'.¹⁸⁵ This shows how some groups of people still praise their pre-revolution life. This saying is part of the Iranian collective memory. According to Hirschberger (2018, p.1), 'collective trauma is also a crisis of meaning'. Drawing on Arnold-de Simine, she writes:

Trauma, defined as the psychological effects of suffering on an individual or a collective, has been conceptualized in memory

¹⁸⁴ Discussed in the section *Tehran and Modernity*.

¹⁸⁵ Tense and time in Farsi are both '*Zaman*'.

studies as a temporary or permanent interruption of the ability to represent the traumatic event and to make meaning of it. (p. 141)

Applying this idea in the context of Iran, many Iranian youth believe they are paying the price for others, in particular the fathers, who revolted against the Shah. I remember as a teenager in the late 1990s and early 2000s there were always political discussions among young people and older people in public spaces, particularly in taxis. One day, an old taxi driver told my friend, who was criticising the taxi driver and his generation for the revolution, ‘You are right, we do not have what we expected and what we revolted for. You’re right, we shouldn’t have poverty or all these religious repressions. So, it is your time to revolt again, make a change and complete what we started’. My friend fell silent. I will never forget that taxi driver. I would argue that these feelings of the young people demonstrate how the repressed past and the traumatic history can return in the present.

We can see this popular Iranian perspective metaphorically represented at the beginning of *The Salesman* (2016) by Asghar Farhadi when the character Emad looks at the city and says, ‘I wish we could destroy everything in this city and rebuild it again’, and his friend replies, ‘We did it once and this is the result’. The suggestion in this film is that this trauma from the past, from the revolution in particular, leads subjects to try and avoid any type of revolution since they do not want to make the same mistake twice. It further demonstrates that the subjectivity of these characters/youth is produced in terms of an historical resentment about the revolution. My argument is that this resentment/trauma is passed from generation to generation as each cohort of youth have to compromise around their social and political desires in their daily lives as a result of the repressive regime. Based on this idea, I will now argue and demonstrate for Iranian youth the central effect of this repressed desire and resentment is boredom. However, this all takes place in a context where people, including youth, understand history in different ways; one group of people might feel guilty because of the revolution, but it can foster pride in another group. The effect depends on how each group articulate their past and their present and how they make meaning of it. In the 1990s and 2000s, society was divided into two groups: one group was made up of the university-educated middle class, who criticised the regime and its revolutionary ideas; the opposing group were supporters of the regime and were mostly from the working classes.

Given this set of circumstances I argue that the present is limited by the past, and subjects find themselves living with the decisions of past generations. For example, the new flow of protesters appearing since 2016 in the different cities of Iran and abroad who are all supporting

Reza Pahlavi, the exiled Crown Prince of Iran, proves that a significant group of people confronted with the traumatic past are trying to construct their future in relation to the Pahlavi dynasty. I argue it is important to understand this group, whose members are from different generations and social classes, as representing a collective traumatisation that is the result of repressing the past. They are a group who never had a chance to narrate their own story of the legacy of their traumatic experiences. After the revolution, the Islamic regime eliminated all signs of the Pahlavi dynasty in everyday life, such as street names, public sculptures, books, and dress codes. For example, wearing jeans, which were seen as a symbol of Westernisation, was against the regime's rules. Also, wearing a tie was seen as a symbol of idolatry and banned and still now it is not a part of the normal dress code in Iran. Anyone who had any connections with Pahlavi felt themselves to be in danger of death and execution. All these actions, designed to discredit the past, can trigger the victims/survivors of the revolution. These survivors have different ways of reacting politically; some might be supporters of Pahlavi, others might be leftists. They can belong to any of the social groups who were marginalised after the revolution.

These groups might have some shared experiences, but they do not experience the past in the same way. For example, more conservative groups want to return the 'Prince' while the leftists are against the Pahlavi dynasty, but both of them see the regime as their enemy.¹⁸⁶ The first group cannot find an alternative to the status quo, so they look for it in the past; the second group driven by a specific ideology uses the past (focused on discourses of class and change) to construct a different future. This is similar to what Eva Illouz (2016) calls the 'melodramatic self'. Here we can see how different groups define themselves and what they look for. For example, the first group, based on nostalgia, look for pity for themselves bemoaning the fact their great 'Persia' is being destroyed by Mullahs, whereas the second group looks for justice to demonstrate what is wrong with the world. According to Illouz (2016, p. 167), the first group feels pity for itself, and it should not be understood as political. But the melodramatisation of the self in the second group looks for a change in the social world for all sufferers. This is political.

The traumatic past of a particular community is constructed socially and culturally through the representation of the specific traumas that are seen to be normative or central to most people and are seen as collective traumas. That is, a narrative of a traumatic past is

¹⁸⁶ This is a point that Reza Pahlavi highlights in his talks in order to collect more supporters for himself against the regime.

produced by remembering traumas. But not all trauma is created equal. So, some trauma becomes part of what is seen as a collective memory – constructed for the people. In Iran this collective memory has been produced through the representation and circulation by the regime and culture industry of a set of specific traumas. Other traumas are left out.

According to Rodi-Risberg (2018), the past is shaped through the process of meaning construction. For Lalonde (2018, p. 199) – and important for a study of film – traumatic memories can be visual in nature. In Iran, these representations range from the compulsory confessions of the leftists or ministers of Pahlavi, to the TV series, for example *The Enigma of the Shah* (2014–2016), which tried to humiliate Pahlavi. Other visual constructions of the past range from cinema/reel to social media/real; From *Midday Adventures* (2017) and *Midday Adventures: Trace of Blood* (2019) by Mohammad Hossein Mahdavian, which represent leftists as terrorists and show how the Islamic forces defeated these leftist groups, to force a teenage girl by the regime to confess to a crime on state television after she had posted a dance video on Instagram. All of these are examples of traumatising society visually in order to control it. As I argued, all these narrative representations are melodramatic, be they melodrama movies or news items; they have melodramatic imagination.

When people see some type of representation or collection of representations, they generally tend to define themselves in relation to it. This often means that through these representations people start to be aware of their common problem; they talk about the problem and their experiences of it. Sztompka (2000, p. 28) asserts that ‘The expression of trauma may go beyond the subjective, symbolic, outbursts of protest, forming of groups, collective parties’. An example of this is a campaign by leftists on social media which says, ‘We never forgive, we never forget’.¹⁸⁷ The slogan originally referred to a series of executions in 1988 of Iranian political prisoners, but its definition is expanding in response to more recent arrests and torture of protestors. This campaign, which is rooted in their memory of trauma, helps the members not to forget the perpetrator group of the regime. I would argue it also enhances group survival and promotes vigilance, motivates a desire to construct new meanings around the experiences, and brings a sense of continuity to the self.

Many scholars understand the trauma process as a linguistic process that produces new meanings and changes old articulations. It also highlights uncertainty in modern life which, according to Zinn (2006, p. 226), is a fundamental modern experience. Iranians have a

¹⁸⁷ *Na mibakhshim na faramoush mikonim.*

particular modern experience of certainty. The current regime represses any efforts or representations that imply uncertainty about their values and norms. As argued earlier, I understand the Iranian experience as a type of traumatisation that is produced through ongoing daily shocks. Some approaches to uncertainty, such as the regime's approach, wrongly assume that tight control can maintain the coherence of a system and can transform uncertainty into certainty and ambiguity into clarity in order to manage unpreventable uncertainties. This perspective depends on strong rules designed to control all aspects of life. However, I argue even though the regime promulgates copious rules, their Islamic laws are wide open to interpretation, and the ambiguity that emerges when applying the rules based on the 'current crucial positions' increases uncertainty in Iranian society and shapes the experience of a permanent state of exception. This process increases trauma and daily shock in everyday life, and all in all it increases uncertainty in daily life.

According to Laclau, each nation – 'our kind' – is based on the fantasy of an enemy. The enemies of the reformists were the inflexible fundamentalists, and the enemies of the fundamentalists were American Islam¹⁸⁸ and the bourgeois ideas of reformists. However, even after the Chain murders of 1988 to 1998,¹⁸⁹ they both still believe in *Velayat-i Amr* (the absolute authority of the command) and that the Other has always been capitalism, the United States and Israel, which are understood as pure evil, as the enemy. Based on this, it is possible to see the construction of this enemy everywhere, from the slogans in weekly Friday Prayer, to the government-sponsored graffiti scrawled around the cities. A film example is *Bomb: Love Story* (2018)¹⁹⁰ by Payman Maadi, which illustrates a scenario in which the residents of Tehran are under bombardment conditions during the eight-year war. In the film, we viewers can see that the walls of the school are already covered in regime sponsored slogans and there is not enough room to write any more. Also, as discussed in Chapter Six, the main story of Sacred Defence films – which is the selfless soldier(s) who fight against the big armies with only their empty hands and a heart filled with spiritual love and dignity – promote the idea that capitalism, particularly as represented by the US and Israel, is the enemy of the nation, and that in order to maintain the dignity of the nation, Iran must never deal with either of them. Further, Laclau (1994, p. 219) explains that fascism, by using radical revolutionary discourse, reconstructs

¹⁸⁸ Fundamentalists use this phrase to refer to the reformists who they believe are alienated from their tradition.

¹⁸⁹ A series of murders and disappearances of certain Iranian intellectuals who had been critical of the regime.

¹⁹⁰ *Bomb Yek Asheghnae* (1397).

nationalism. Fascism calls out capitalism as the main enemy; however, in the end fascist regimes only try to preserve the existing relations of capitalist production.

Earlier in the chapter it was explained that by dividing the nation into two opposite poles, the regime suspends the present. It increases the ambiguity of how to be Iranian and how to reconstruct the dignity of the nation. This overextended ambiguity carries with it an uncertainty about everyday life. I also demonstrated that double standards in the application of policies shaped the state as a permanent ‘state of exception’ (Agamben, 2005). And everyday life is understood as being about a need to fight and defeat an external enemy. What has happened in Iran has transformed from a revolutionary society that looked for and sought to establish humanity and dignity into a terrorist society plagued by daily violence. In this society, you are either with the regime or against it. This makes everyday life problematic.

After the revolution, Islamic revolutionary groups created a victim identity for themselves that allowed them to apply ‘Islamic’ laws and to label the opposition a perpetrator group. This victim identity, the melodramatic self, and the approach to law that accompanied it, still exists strongly in the articulation of the regime. For example, Khamenei, in a famous speech delivered after the 2009 movements, cried for his supporters and acted as a victim leader. He took on the role of a selfless hero who is disappointed by a group of rebels who protested against the sacred regime, ‘against Islam’, and so disrespected him. However, he ‘generously’ stated: ‘In this current crucial position we have to forget the dissent and support our country – even those groups which may have some disagreements with the regime.’ In 2020, he declared on state television: ‘Today, voting is not only a revolutionary and national responsibility, it is also a religious duty’. The Islamic regime, by using its politicised religion, made moralistic policies for the society that see any minority’s attitudes against it as being persistently misguided. In this regard, the law of the post-revolution state of exception has continued until now. There are many examples of this situation, such as the executions of the 1980s, the arrests of journalists and the shutting down of newspapers in the 1990s, the emergence of the Guidance Patrol during the Ahmadinejad presidency, and, in 2009, the social effects and economic pressures that resulted from the neoliberal policies of the previous decade.

The double standards at the heart of Iran’s Islamist regime – besides maintaining revolutionary ideas, even by enshrining them in the constitution, bring uncertainties both in law and public life. Sovereignty becomes problematic. Accordingly, Carl Schmitt (1985) writes

that ‘sovereign is he who decides on the exception’. The uncertainty that I have explained and state of exception in law are clear, particularly in the first two articles of Chapter 5 of the constitution:

Article 56: Absolute sovereignty over the world and the human being belongs to God. And it is He who has made human beings sovereign over their social destiny. No one can take this divine right away from human beings or apply it to the interests of a special person or group. The nation exercises this God-given right in ways that are specified in the following articles.

Article 57: The governing powers in the Islamic Republic of Iran consist of the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary powers. They operate under the supervision of the absolute authority of the command (*Velayat-i Amr*) and religious leadership (*Imamat*) of the community of believers and according to the forthcoming articles of this law. These powers are independent of one another.

In the first part, Article 56, divine sovereignty belongs to God alone, which God bestows on humans as a human not as a ruler. Hallaq (2014, p. 158) demonstrates this article as a failure because of the inner contradictions of an Islamic state as a modern institution. He argues as a result this article opens an ethical space to push back against earthly powers. So, the section on *Velayat-i Amr*, Article 57, could be read as a modern invention to impose earthly powers on the members of the society. In this regard, the exception claimed by the regime clarifies the rules and demonstrates the rules are designed to follow what regime calls the ‘expediency of the regime’, especially at crucial moments of dissent from citizens.

I suggest that in these articles, what is important is the enemy. It is because of their (potential or permanent) enemies that a system, here the regime, needs to make crucial decisions in crucial moments and follow a path that is convenient for itself. My interpretation of the logic of the constitution, suggests the contemporary Iranian situation is based on an undecidable condition, an unstable balance. The state of exception appears for Iranian people as an ambiguous and uncertain zone, a threshold where fact and law seem to become undecidable - a threshold beyond which it is always difficult to decide what is the law or what are the facts. Accordingly, everyday life becomes a domain in which the sovereign rules on all the micro routines of daily life, from what to wear to when to eat.

By putting together these aspects of everyday life, I argue a most likely scenario for Iranian youth one might find is one where a subject amid the boredom of everyday life, is

bombarded by traumatising and uncertainty. This subject exists in a position full of repressed desires, a suspended present, an uncertain future, and a victimhood culture. However, in the following paragraphs I argue that this space – filled with traumatising, uncertainty, and victimhood though dissatisfaction—shaped as it is by the boredom of everyday life, that this everydayness can be transformed into a positive force of everyday ‘refo-lution’ (Bayat 2017).

Gardiner explains Lefebvre’s understanding of modern boredom as something that ‘hinges on a transformation in our experience of time’ (2012, p. 43). Drawing on this idea, I have suggested that one of the main features of Iranian everyday life is the suspension of the present. This feature is mostly observable in the representation of everyday life and in the conflicts between tradition/modernity, Islam/West, and other dichotomies. As discussed in Chapter Six, this suspension brings with the use of a mythical approach that uses the past in order to illustrate a utopian time in the future. It also can produce nostalgic or nihilistic attitudes. Therefore, the living in the present one is imprisoned by ideologies that try to construct a mythical time and that ignore the heterogeneities of society, and this leads to a narrative based on the ideological time of the past, or of utopian future-based expectations. Accordingly, Gardiner (2012), referring to Lefebvre, describes this understanding of time as a time of endless ‘nows’.

According to Lefebvre, to ‘get bored you need leisure’ (1995, p. 353). Thinking about this in the Iranian context, and playing with the idea, I would suggest you need the left (reformism) in order to accept the right (fundamentalism). In a regime where only these two formal political options exist, the result is what would be expected in a dualist framework: a choice of two options – reformism or fundamentalism. Because of the independence on this duality normative discourses tend to reduce conflicts to a binary in a process of identification that leads the society to ‘positioning’. As explained by Lefebvre (1995), positioning refers to the positions themselves not to the signification, critical thinking, heterogeneities, minorities, or other voices in society.

Signals reduce the semantic field to a fixed image or idea, and interrupt the continuity of historical experience and collective memorialization. This creates a situation in which, as Bergson also noted, the ‘immediate instant tends to disappear in an instant which has already passed’, rather than embedded organically in the flow of perceptual and experiential ‘duration’. (p. 166)

This dualistic binary underpinning, the political strategy of the regime, makes it difficult to assess or understand contemporary Iran using the past (and therefore history) and also makes it difficult to think about who you want to be if the past is unavailable for open scrutiny. Instead, it tries to forcefully categorise everything into its binary. Experiencing this binary system in any aspect of life increases boredom in everyday life. Darden (1999) defines boredom as follows:

We conceive of it as the socially disvalued emotion we experience in a setting where the drama fails for some reason; when the only scripts and props available are too well rehearsed and overly familiar; any roles which exist are undesirable and without the possibility of negotiation; there are no others whose roles we can or want to take, and we feel distant from our roles. The situation has no apparent future, in the sense of anticipation, although it may have a temporal dimension, because time seems to stretch endlessly ahead without a foreseeable denouement. (p. 18)

However, boredom has some bright sides. Boredom comes from critical questions of the individuals about their daily life. Also, because boredom can be seen as an awareness of anticipated consequences (Darden, 1999, p. 19) it makes visible certain expectations, repressed desires, and claims. According to Lefebvre, boredom highlights the lack of style in a society. By style he means what people are looking for and what they get. Defining style in the third volume of *Critique of Everyday Life*, he writes: 'The term "style" refers to an "aesthetic" or ethical bearing in which the middle classes are precisely lacking' (2005, p. 128). Therefore, this lack emerges in as the experience of boredom and raises critical questions and claims for the precariat. I agree with both Standing (2011) and Bayat (2017) that it is more useful to use the concept of precariat (Standing) and 'poor middle class' (Bayat) rather than middle class when exploring what is happening in urban Iran. According to Bayat, poor middle-class people are revolutionaries without a revolution. He explores social non-movements in order to demonstrate the 'refo-lution' as a mix of revolutionary struggle and a reformist trajectory in everyday life. Bayat argues that it is through what he calls a 'politics of presence' of the subjects in everyday life that it becomes possible to slowly transform everyday life. If revolution is the fundamental and sudden change in political power that occurs when the population revolt, then refo-lution is a reformist change that is shaped by the dynamics of the post-socialist and neoliberal times.

Accordingly, I further Bayat's idea of 'refo-lutionary' and have developed a set of types that describe the four main subject positions taken up by these refo-lutionaries. They are; democratic subject, bored subject, opportunistic subject, and marginalised subject. The democratic subject suggests individuals who look for reform through the available opportunities inside the system and the existing law. The bored subject constructs a blasé attitude; these individuals perceive themselves to be part of the dominant discourses. The life of the bored subject is occupied by the negative aspects of the boredom of everyday life. The opportunistic subject position constructs an individualistic subjectivity intertwined with the concept of terrorist society. And the marginalised subject position is plagued by a traumatic everyday life; these individuals are victims without the privilege to be heard. All these subjects are shaped in the process of the making of political identities, and they are shaped by the five problematics of Iranian urban life (traumatisation, uncertainty, a victimhood culture, dissatisfaction, boredom). As explained by Laclau and Mouffe, individuals have agency because of the gaps in structures filling their lives. In the context of this research, the gaps are the problematics of everyday life. For example, boredom positions a subject in the boredom subject position to make them inactive; however, boredom has positive aspects that can convert banal daily life into a problematic one.

Overall, dominant ideologies try to control and marginalise the individuals by locating them in the mentioned subject positions. However, these subjects, particularly the marginalised ones, creep towards urbanity a little every day, although according to Bayat (2021, 1997) we cannot say when they make a collective movement. That is, we cannot say when they become radical subjects. However, the boredom of their life always provides this chance. According to Gardiner (2012, p. 53), 'a certain kind of boredom is important for both Benjamin and Lefebvre, because it represents what the former calls (in *The Arcades Project*) a "Trojan horse", by which a gradual mode of awakening can stealthily enter our commodified dreamworld and transform it into dialectical possibility'. In the Iranian context, I argue that vague dissatisfaction can 'stealthily' transform into a common problem that leads the society to rise up against their oppressors. Over-repression and unsatisfied demands of citizens can transform any social request into social movements and protests that take an antagonistic way. What happens is that the different social groups occupying the various subject positions get together temporarily and shape 'us' against 'them'.

This chapter has demonstrated victimhood as the main subject position in Iranian films and as a culture in urban daily life. Meanwhile, when victimhood as a subject position is over-

represented in culture, especially in films, critical thinking and critical subject/revolutionary subject fade away. In a culture where victimhood dominates, it is more and more likely that people will be inactive and those who are not convinced by the normative discourses of the regime (with its binary narratives of life) will need to look for a third party outside the reform and fundamentalism dualism to protect themselves. The claim made by the regime that excessive or extra state power it wields is required in a current crucial situation has created a permanent state of exception in Iran. This has increased the power of the sovereign state, which then controls society more and more. I have demonstrated how this political move suspends the present within a traumatisation process and increases levels of uncertainty and boredom in daily life, that lead to dissatisfaction. The people's dissatisfaction with the current situation shapes subjects in four key modes: (1) the democratic subject, who tries to make change from within the current situation; (2) the bored subject, who cannot find any collective forces and value in everyday life; (3) the opportunistic subject, like the individualistic individual in Simmel's philosophy, who looks for the utmost in uniqueness; and (4) the marginalised subject, who is like a floating signifier far removed from the powerful articulations of the regime. However, because no power is total there as gaps in the social, economic and political structures of Iran. As a result, traumatisation, uncertainty, victimhood culture, dissatisfaction, and boredom work together in these gaps to shape Iranian daily life and make it problematic rather than a banal concept.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This conclusion brings together the ideas from each chapter and sets out my explanation and model of Iranian everyday life. As this thesis has demonstrated, through its exploration of the relationship between representations of everyday life and the realities of urban life, this approach enables sociologists to better articulate the material and representational structure of everyday Iranian urban life. As argued in Chapter One, the Introduction, an approach to this issue, like that of the sociology of cinema and film, can only deal with the structures of cinema and the representations of everyday life. It does not make the material aspects visible. The reason the sociology of cinema and film cannot help us to depict everyday life is because it does not produce evidence of real life, including conflict between different discourses and the resistance of subjects. This type of articulation of the everyday life is visible in this thesis because the methodology enabled an expanded field of research that combined the study of multiple sources, especially cinema and films, urbanisation and social movements, the use of archives, and also a personal familiarity with the context of the study.

The use of the notion of problematisation and Laclau and Mouffe's approach to discourse analysis enabled me to give a coherent discursive perspective on Iranian everyday life. In contrast to the more common approach in this field, which is the use of a convenient dualism – good/bad, representation/material, etc. – this method has allowed me to connect the sociology of film and the sociology of cinema in order to gain this understanding of Iranian daily life. This methodology, which combined the city and the representations of it in the same analytical space, enabled an analysis that is deeply connected to a series of different historical moments and social changes.

First, Chapters One and Two explored the idea of dualism in order to link back to the existing scholarship and explain the innovation of this thesis. Having read other scholarship on Iranian cinema, I suggested that the dominant approach in this field can be limited and I investigated a different perspective. Chapters Three and Four set out the conceptual framework I developed for explaining everyday life. I problematised the critical theories of everyday life in order to shape a coherent approach to Iranian daily life. In a later section in this chapter – *Beyond a Dualist Approach to Everyday Life and Cinema*– I set out the results and achievements of this approach (discussed in Chapters Five to Seven) in understanding Iranian cinema and daily life. This section shows the impact of censorship on cinema and society, the process of traumatising in representations of urban life, suspending the present in everyday

life, creation of a victimhood culture, and uncertainty in modern life, and explains the role of boredom and dissatisfaction in daily life. The last contribution of this pair of conceptual chapters was that I set out a typology of subjects I developed. Based on the analysis of a series of case studies, both the agentic and structural (or the micro and the macro), I have suggested these subjects are produced or hailed in a complex set of processes explored across Chapters Five to Seven. I also set out the possibility for change in everyday life experiences associated with these subjectivities.

Dualism and Othering

By relying on Dabashi's (2007) and Khosravi's (2017) perspectives and criticising the dualism approach in Iranian studies such as work by Katouzian (2010), I argued most studies of Iranian everyday life that use cinema or film tend to classify the representations as high/low, we/them, self/other, tradition/ modernity, pre-revolution/post revolution. For example, in film studies there is an effort to create a high-culture avant-garde identity for Iranian cinema. That is, as Pedram Partovi and Blake Atwood in an interview by Cameron Cross (2019)¹⁹¹ demonstrated most of the research focuses on specific high-profile filmmakers such as Farhadi, Kiarostami, Panahi, Makhmalbaf, and Beizai, and therefore explores either international award-winning films or films censored by the Islamic regime. These works – both the scholarship and the films – do create a space of value, but at the same time they leave the bulk of Iranian films outside of the research space. This process leads to what I have called othering, and means, firstly, this research has not thoroughly explored the broad range of Iranian cinema, and secondly, the chosen films in these works are analysed ideologically.

I have argued there is a dualistic 'us and them' approach in the Iranian film industry, cultural studies, and the law and everyday life. This can be seen in three ways: first, there is a dualistic approach in the representation of everyday life in films; second, dualism is part of a scholarly concept in cultural studies; and third, dualism is a political grouping in law and cinematic rules. This approach increases the application or use of a duality of good and evil. This good/evil duality is clear in Iranian films, particularly in representations of Tehran and Iranian urban life (discussed in Chapter Five). Filmmakers use the dualist good/evil approach to represent everyday life, and usually scholars use this dualist approach to analyse the films.

¹⁹¹ <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2019/04/iranian-cinema-then-and-now-an-interview-with-blake-atwood-and-pedram-partovi/>

For example, the representation of Tehran, which is seen as the symbol of modernity in Iran, is of a traumatic city full of daily shocks and uncertainty. That is, filmmakers do not represent any resistance in the everyday life of Iranians; instead, they criticise modernity and blame society. Moreover, many cultural studies and film studies scholars such as Kazemi (2009/1388) and Ravadrad (2010a/1389) by focusing on the representation of Tehran in these films, reproduce the meanings constructed by filmmakers without critiquing them. For example, they reproduce the stereotypical dualism between Tehran – which represents all the traumatic experiences – and other cities in Iran without exploring the process of meaning construction, that is without clarifying ‘who’ constructed these meanings in everyday life as well as ‘how’ and ‘why’ they did so. I argue this dominant representation of Tehran as a dystopia in both films and academia victimises the film audience and constructs both of them as passive subjects.

The Islamic regime also has a dualist approach and follows this ‘us and them’ dichotomy. This political dualism is visible in terms of the law and cinema. It creates a dualism between the supporters of the regime and the ‘opposition’ groups. This grouping is usually understandable as fundamentalists and reformists. However, as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, in the end both of these groups support the values of the regime. The fundamentalist group does this by producing propaganda movies that support the fundamental revolutionary religious and traditional values. The reformists do it by criticising ‘modern life’, and this victimises the people. Further, by following neoliberal moral values, reformists blame society for problems, which personalises social problems and again creates passive subjectivity.

The Islamic regime and the Shah’s dualist approach in law and cinematic rules also expands and creates different forms of censorship. In Chapter Five, I set out my classification of these modes of censorship: (1) political censorship, (2) religious censorship, (3) gender-based censorship, (4) quasi-official censorship, (5) censored artists, (6) bureaucratic and interpretive censorship, (7) censorship in screening, (8) genre and censorship, and (9) self-censorship. I argued these types of censorship show the high rates of terror in everyday life that shape society and present Iran as a terrorist society.

Another part of my argument was that this dualism is based on the suspension of the present. This suspension has a close connection to what I argued is the traumatic core of Iranian cultural identity – the conflict between honour and dignity. For me, this conflict highlights the question that has shaped Iranian everyday life across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

‘How to be?’ The Shah’s response to this question involved using a mythical time called the Great Persia. By using the past, he could ignore the present and repress daily conflicts in order to construct his own utopia, which he represented as an era of great civilisation. Similarly, the Islamic regime repressed aspects of everyday life. It did this by focusing on the religious and traditional values of the past, using them to try to construct its own utopia. I argued that both of these regimes achieved their goals by problematising important Iranian ideas of honour and dignity, but each used different articulations in their attempts to convince the people to believe in their utopias. As a result, the Shah and the Islamic regime both repressed society and everyday life.

This dualist approach was also used to explore daily conflicts and urban life. Dualisms led Iranian filmmakers (particularly those associated with the key signifiers of New Wave Cinema, Social Films, Festival Cinema, Underground Cinema, Accented Cinema, and Independent Cinema) to represent urban life and social issues in terms of good/bad, etc. These dualisms are mostly favoured by reformist filmmakers. However, most Iranian films were under the control of state cinema systems and censors and tended to use the same dualist approach of good and evil. This was discussed as the main core of melodramatic stories, and in Chapter Seven I demonstrated how it represses daily life and resistance in everyday life. For example, I argued that the regime’s rules repress the art of cinema through censorship, and that filmmakers reproduce this repression through the use of a cinematic language – known as ambiguity in Iranian films. Unfortunately, because of a lack of problematisation, contextuality, and reflexivity in cultural studies methodology, most academic research reproduces this repression. In Chapter Six, I demonstrated that by ignoring Filmfarsi, Entertaining Movies, Sacred Defence Cinema, and Value-based Cinema scholarship in film and cultural studies, a large section of Iranian film is overlooked, narrowing our understanding of everyday life.

[Beyond a Dualist Approach to Everyday Life and Cinema](#)

As was analysed in Chapters Five and Six and further discussed in Chapter Seven, the cinematic translation of this dualistic approach appears most clearly in melodrama and social drama films – the main genres of Iranian cinema. By using the melodramatic imagination discussed above, Iranian cinema creates what I have called a victim identity for the members of the society and converts melodrama from a genre in cinema to a mode in Iranian daily life. Cinematic language converts melodrama to a mode of self-understanding. As the main subject

position of Iranian films, this cinematic language ends up victimising its subjects. I argued this illustrates that the function of melodrama as a cinematic genre is to protect the status quo. I also argued that victimhood culture can both raise and control social change. I demonstrated this by arguing that in the plot of most Iranian films, a simple mistake tends to lead to a tragedy and a disaster. This is, I suggested, part of the process of traumatisation in Iranian films.

The process of traumatisation in films, as analysed in Chapters Five and Six and demonstrated in Chapter Seven, includes three elements. Traumatisation is first explored in terms of the content and story of the films, second in terms of the form and the generic structure of the films, and third in terms of social events, such as different forms of censorship in Iranian cinema. This process of traumatisation represents avant-garde filmmakers and reformists filmmakers as the main victims of censorship and the fundamental values of the Islamic regime. It represents the propaganda filmmakers as victims of the reformists values, which are said to threaten the values of the regime. This victimhood culture, which I argue is borne out of the process of traumatisation alongside the expansion of social media and international Farsi television channels, increases a sense of a duality existing between being a supporter of the regime or a supporter of the opposition groups. It reinforces the dualistic approach in everyday life. In this regard, both sides of the media (supporters of the regime and those who side with the opposition) construct the people (their preferred subjects) as victims. In Chapter Seven, I demonstrated how, as a result, victimhood culture grows powerfully as an alternative for a society within which the conflict between honour and dignity is key, and how this leads to 'passive' people looking for a third party to judge and support their miserable lives.

Censorship is a central practice in the film/cinema space as a means of controlling the subjects of the state. Censorship in Iranian cinema is used to try to control the narratives that Iranians see in films in order to make them follow the status quo. Censorship increases compliance and reinforces hegemonic ideology aligned with the regime. That is, censorship is utilised to create a stable narrative of Iranian life that fits with Islamic regime ideology. Censorship in Islamic regime discourse tries to support the values of the discourse, to strengthen the articulation of these values, to reduce the uncertainties, and to control the society. But in reality, censorship actually increases uncertainty and this brings instability into the discourse. However, in a vicious cycle, this increase in uncertainty also increases various forms of censorship in society and reproduces violence. In Chapter Five, I suggested the uneven application of censorship existing alongside what I have argued is a strong dualistic approach ends up dividing the society into two groups again (good/evil). The hegemonic groups try to

apply censorship in various parts of Iranian cinema and films, which also means applying it in terms of different types of representations of everyday life. At the same time, different censorship strategies are applied to try to control daily life and the subjects. Censorship at this level is therefore transformed into a fixed meaning and is represented as common sense, as a way of being. This is why some filmmakers and film studies scholars (as discussed in Chapter Five) believe that censorship had a positive role in Iranian cinema. To me, this is finding positivity in the devil! I do not ignore the positive result of the censorship. Certainly, censorship is an important element that has shaped the new cinematic language of Iranian cinema, but at what price? As a result, censorship has become part of the daily life.

I argued above that censorship tends to increase uncertainty. I have also argued that uncertainty is linked to boredom, and that the process of traumatising which takes place with the suspension of the present increases boredom in everyday life too. I assert that boredom is the result of the uncertainties of modern life along with the repression enacted by the Islamic regime and their neoliberal policies. I concluded that first, boredom is negative because it promotes a blasé attitude in society. Individuals in a society who cannot see a clear future because of the suspension of the present and are living under repression tend to demonstrate what Simmel described as absolute boredom and lack of concern. But from a Lefebvrian perspective, boredom has a positive aspect as well since it can make everyday life problematic and those experiencing it ready for change. Boredom helps the society examine itself and criticise social time; boredom helps people ask the question of ‘how to be’ in order to create their future, rather than following the utopian future set out for them by the regime. So, the experience of boredom brings up critical social questions for subjects and draws their attention to the politics of presence.

My analysis, first using my database of 100 films and then the specific case studies, has demonstrated that an effective way to understand Iranian urban life is to see it as shaped by the following key experiences: (1) traumatising, (2) uncertainty, (3) a victimhood culture, (4) dissatisfaction, and (5) boredom. I have illustrated how these five key aspects of everyday life, as shaped by acts of power and resistance, most effectively explain the micro/macro experiences of daily life. My argument has been that, given the dominant ideologies driving life in Iran, the process of traumatising – as represented in film but also in macro discourses of the law, etc. – tries to victimise the subjects, or ‘hail’ them as victims in order to control them. But by problematising some aspects of their life, subjects can show their dissatisfaction with their circumstances by breaking the rules, using hybrid spaces in the city, criticising the

democratic ways of negotiation, creating informal communities, and finding alternative ways to survive in the city.

New Subjects

Another key part of my argument is that Iranian daily life – through its five main pillars of (1) traumatisation, (2) uncertainty, (3) a victimhood culture, (4) dissatisfaction, and (5) boredom in the context of power and resistance in everyday life – creates a domain where it is possible to become a hegemonic subject or a revolutionary one. I suggested that in this situation a typology of subjects emerges. I named them as follows: (1) the democratic subject who tries, by supporting the status quo, to reform the society and I suggest ends up making only insignificant changes; (2) the bored subject, who is a hegemonic subject and who cannot see any value in change; (3) the opportunistic subject, who is a modern subject and who tries to achieve some sort of uniqueness; and (4) the marginalised subject, who is the least common subject type and yet is also the one who has the most capacity for making change. I argued that marginalised subjects reform the society within daily life and through their daily practices, and, like the floating signifiers, they are ready for a new articulation of ‘who to be’ and to challenge the status quo.

In summary, I have argued there exist the values of the regime and its utopian future, which repress aspects of everyday life and act to suspend the present. Further, there are the neoliberal policies introduced by this regime which personalise structural social problems and enable the construction of a passive consumerist society. Society in this context becomes a terrorist one and people struggle with daily violence in their routines. In this context, the different subjects – democratic, bored, opportunistic, and marginalised – show their dissatisfaction in various ways. However, the general rise of victimhood culture, as supported by Iranian film, makes the victim subject position the most popular one. Hence, this subjectivity and its material aspects shape daily life as a problematic concept in Iran but also a problematic way to exist.

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