CINEMA, CULTURE AND POLITICS IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
THE FILMS OF MOHSEN MAKHMALBAF

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to chart the development of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its cinema from the 1979 Revolution to the present day by looking at the work of Mohsen Makhmalbaf as an illustrative case study. Operating exclusively under the new regime Makhmalbaf's cinema is simultaneously a product, and reflection, of the changed ideological system and is instructive and indicative of the political and social development of the state as seen through the refracting prism of cinema. Towards this end chapters one and two set out to establish a workable theoretical framework for critically analysing, and understanding, the development of cinema in the Islamic Republic. The former seeks to understand it from within a reconstituted Third Cinema frame of reference and within the history of indigenous filmic development. The latter examines the cultural and ideological basis of the new Islamic state that emerged after the 1979 showing that its foundation held a number of competing intellectual traditions that would effect all aspects of life in Iran. Chapter three sets out to examine the claims for the establishment of a new form of cinema as the new regime sought to create an 'Islamic cinema' that reflected the changed ideological circumstances. The following chapter looks at the development of this 'new' cinema through a decade of war and revolution and the debate between culture as an official propagandist tool and the beginnings of more socially engaged cultural forms. Chapter five evaluates the development of a 'quality' cinema in the era of reconstruction when Iranian cinema emerged on the international in response to changed ideological conditions. The final chapter, six, looks at the current development of cinema in Iran as part of the power struggle attempting to introduce reforms and elements of a civil society into the Islamic system.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Cinema as a mode of cultural expression acts as both a product and document of a society. As such it derives its immediate existence from the localised and contextual interactions of social institutions, social upheavals and events, and most particularly the culture of its people as reflected in the lives and aspirations of all individuals living in a society. Within the workings of these various elements it situates itself as a record of a society which "reflects, directly or indirectly, both the components and the historical process of [a] society"(Ghanoonparvar, 1984: 1). The attempt to examine such an undertaking necessitates the linking of text and context, which seeks to look beyond the aesthetic and the esoteric and place cultural products within the historical, social, and cultural context in which a particular work of art has been conceived and received. This is an essential enterprise in the case of cinema with its global reach and ability to operate and project from the local to the universal in articulating the concerns and collective lives of the members of a particular society. The starting point for a critical engagement with the cinematic medium in Iran must begin with an interrogation of the processes involved in the formulation, and use, of cultural images as ideological products of inter-group struggles and dependencies, which act as a means of comprehending the state and its workings as well the political nature of its domestic culture projected which becomes transformed further through global projection (Featherstone, 1990). Such an undertaking requires the positioning of the cinematic within a frame of reference that encompasses a cultural historicity and a critical political engagement of mutual non-exclusivity, which is derived from specific cultural contexts. In essence the approach of the following

dissertation in analysing the workings of the cinema in Iran is to view it as a form of popular culture that is an important part of popular consciousness that derives from, records and reflects how society reacts to economic crises, social strains, political upheavals and historical transformations.

Cinema in Iran

Cinema in Iran is an ideologically charged battlefield and has been one of the main cultural elements in the drive to define the nation. It is therefore not surprising that cinema, like the country itself post-1979, returned to "ground zero", experiencing a "purging" baptism of fire before being reborn as a child of the revolution to operate in and serve the needs of a "hierocratic state"[1]. The cinema would play a vital role, arising from what was essentially a media influenced cultural revolution, in operating under a system of government in the Islamic Republic that has shown itself high on rhetoric and more interested in "changing cultural and educational institutions than in overthrowing the modes of production and distribution" (Abrahamian, 1993: 38).

As such, cinema has at times found itself used as an ideological weapon in the struggle to maintain power in response to shifting socio-political contexts. Such a situation has resulted in the operation of what might be termed a dual "revolutionary" cinema. The first may be defined as that used by the government, adhering to the goals of the

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[1] Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and State in the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1998), p.3. This is a term used by Schirazi to describe the political system of the Islamic Republic. In essence it refers to the rule of a particular class, in this case the clergy, and in contrast to the officially presented image of rule, enacts a situation where real religious issues are seen to recede into the background and serve merely as a means of legitimising political power.

revolution and promoting a form of Islamic propaganda. This was a vaguely defined desire by the present regime to establish the idea of an 'Islamic cinema'. According to Mohsen Tabatab'i, director of the government department of the biggest government institution for Islamic film production, "the best definition of Islamic cinema is that the cinema must play its role in propagating Islam, just like the mosque" (Petrie, 1997: 130). The second is a socially committed cinema comprised of "non-believing" directors who act as the "anxious eyes of the revolution"[2] in creating a cinema which is politically and philosophically engaged in reflecting the complex multi-faceted aspects of Iran and its society. Such an undertaking is derived from a passionate commitment to art and its power to communicate and articulate the problems and frustrations of the people. As Moshen Makhmalbaf, (1991: 19), has stated "our problems had their roots in history and were of a cultural rather than a political nature" and the cinema has become a key element in highlighting and intervening in these problems.

Cultural Conflict

In the historical context, the conflicts and problems that have arisen in Iran have been for the most part cultural in nature. The main reason for this arises from the fact that Iranian culture is composed of two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, parts; an ancient Persian culture dating from some 7,000 years BC and an Islamic culture (albeit a unique Iranian

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[2] This is a phrase which I have taken from Mohsen Makhmalbaf's film *The Marriage of the Blessed* (1989) where it was used to describe the socially and politically committed work of the main character, Hagi, who tries to use his position as a photojournalist to document the ills of the country through the lens of his camera.

manifestation of it – Twelver Shi'ite Islam[3],) dating from the Arab invasions of the seventh century. It is the tension between these two elements and their exploitation by various rulers who have sought to legitimate and consolidate their power by exclusive claim to, and emphasis on, one aspect over the other that has lead to the politicisation of culture, and the development of a type of cultural schizophrenia, which has conversely served to open up a space within which artists have sought to explore, examine and theorise the notion of Iran and nation. In this sense the multi-faceted position and preoccupations of cinema have been no different, being both a reflector and a reflection of the socio-political and historical development of the country in cultural ideological terms. It is this urgent social agenda engaged in the ideological struggle over the possession and interpretation of culture and nature that has led to the notion of "Iran" and "cinema" co-existing tenuously, each asking questions of one other (Cheshire, 1993).

Cinema Reborn

The 1979 revolution, the ensuing struggle for power in the country and the clerics subsequent attempts to Islamicise all aspects of life all had a devastating effect on the film industry. Associated with the ills of the Pahlavi regime and seen as a symbol of

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[3] This is a uniquely Iranian manifestation of Islam arising from the Iranian ability to adapt and assimilate foreign cultures to their own unique and rich Persian cultural heritage (Islam was brought to Iran by the Arabs in the 7th century, however it was not until the Safavid dynasty in the 16th century that Shiism began to impose itself as the official religion. By the 18th century approximately 95% of Iranians were Shi'ites). The basis of the Twelver sect lies on the question of the lineage, the legitimacy to rule and the role of the Imams following the death of Ali, the Prophet Mohammad's cousin. However, it was the battle of Karbala, which saw the death of Ali and his followers, that was to prove a turning point for Shi'ites, turning them from a "loosely knit group of Ali's devotees into a separate sect" (Mackey 1998: 55). It also helped to establish the main themes of the Shia faith, the tradition of sacrifice, martyrdom, resistance to the death against unjust authority. It is these elements that have found strong expression in the Iranian psyche. If Iranians could be said to have provided Islam with its 'golden age', between the 8th and 10th centuries, then Shi'ism could be said to have provided Iranians with a territorial and political identity distinct from the Arabs, a religion that allowed them to be Muslims within a specific Iranian identity and a religious basis to their age old instinct of self preservation and self affirmation.

western modernisation the cinema became a prime hate target of revolutionary zeal. Indeed Imam Khomeini decreed in a rather obscure statement that "we are not against cinema, we are against prostitution" (Algar, 1985: 285), the interpretation of which, according to Reza Allamehzadeh, Iran's film industry has been trying to establish ever since (Petrie, 1997). Indeed by the time the Islamic government was installed in power, the industry was in ruins, production had become non-existent, 180 cinemas nation-wide had been destroyed and an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty pervaded as to what was permissible in the changed ideological system, a situation which was exacerbated by the exile and departure of many of those who had worked in the industry during the time of the Shah. However once the clerics had gained power their task was to set about consolidating their position and consequently the role of cinema changed as they sought to institutionalise and control the medium for this purpose – political consolidation meant cultural consolidation.

Therefore the examination of indigenous cultural forms, their meaning and their use becomes crucial not only in understanding the Islamic state but also the forms and discourses that are used to bring it into being and ensure that it continues to exist. This establishes a complex relationship between the State and cultural forms, which sees them act as dialectic reflectors and reflections of one another in a type of parallel development. In the highly centralised and ideologically governed system of the Islamic Republic all institutions are at the service of consolidating and reproducing the clerical interpretation of Islamic hegemony. Under such circumstances "cultural norms have a direct and habitual impact on how people evaluate their social world" (Farsoun & Mashayekhi,

1992: xi). In this sense culture and political development have a large influence on one another and are sensitive to and defined by the changes that emanate from both fields. The ideologues of the Islamic Republic have attempted to control all aspects of Iranian society in order to promote a Shia influenced political culture, which is derived almost exclusively from native sources and incorporates a discourse built on nationalism, populism, social justice and third worldist revolutionary violence (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992: 3-4), all in the service of consolidating and perpetuating clerical rule. For the cinema this has seen it operate in a dual system as both the legitimator of those in power and in attempting to open a critical space whereby it can articulate the social realities of the country.

Cinema, Culture and War

Nowhere was the ideological opportunism of shifting justifications, between Iran/nation and Islam more evident than in the war with Iraq. Here cinema was in the frontline mobilised as Cinema for the Sacred Defence. Buoyed up by the belief of the revolution as a unifying cause, the charisma and stature of Khomeini as a leader and the possibility of a new hoped for utopian society, combined with the ideological and structural control that the government held over culture, cinema began to emerge in its new "Islamic" format. These developments led to the appearance of three new genres of mass cinema in Iran, the miraculous, which attempts, through piety and divine intervention to justify an Islamic philosophical outlook on life, the "crime does not pay category", and finally the war genre. Jingoistic and propagandist in nature these films were forged out of the political dedication and fervour of conflict at the time, with their main aim being to

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promote action and the righteousness of the Islamic Republic (usually relegated to the symbol of Khomeini), rather than contemplation. Moreover, this was very much the defining feature of much Iranian art during the post-revolutionary period and was by no means unique to cinema. The literature of the time was seen as being "mechanical in flow and metallic in flavour…too propagandistic – i.e. chanting, revolutionary slogans etc. – to contain any engaging intellectual reflections on the meaning of the revolution" (Karimi-Hakkak, 1985: 155).

However, as the war continued the nature of the propaganda changed. The defence of the nation was replaced by Khomeini's elevation of the war into God's war, the defence of Islam against the infidel, "Our war is not aimed solely at Saddam, but against all unbelief", [and is] "an essential element of the Islamic revolution" (Khomeini, 1983: 12). Indeed this can be seen as the manifestation of his desire to actively export the revolution and establish rule over a world-wide non-aligned Islamic state, as reflected in his oft repeated phrase "Neither West nor East but Islam"[4]. This saw the war enacted in the language and symbols of the Shia themes of sacrifice, dispossession and mourning, and in simplistic divisions between good and evil, oppressed versus the oppressors, and it was these dualisms which structured the majority of the cinema at this time. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, has commented on his own work during this period by stating that the Manichean division between good and evil was too simplistic and superficial and that ideological positions are too complex to defend in blind faith. "I now take up ideology only insofar as I deal with people. My main concern is with people – I observe them,

their problems and I try to understand the reason underlying their actions" (Makhmalbaf, 1991: 19).

Comparably, this humanist stance began to be reflected in the war literature, where writers sought to express "war as experienced by ordinary people, combined with personal feelings about war as human tragedy" (Karimi-Hakkak, 1985). However it was not until the war had ended, and Khomeini had died in 1989, that filmmakers began to question and analyse the complexity of the conflict and its effects, through films such as Makhmalbaf's, *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989) or Ebrahim Hatamikia's, *From Karkh to Rhine* (1993). A few films which sought to take a more questioning and problematic view of the war were made but these were invariably banned e.g. Bahram Bayzai's, *Bashu, the Little Stranger* (1986). Indeed it was this humanist message which was to be the defining characteristic of Iranian cinema in its coming of age post-1989 as it took to the international stage.

Iranian Cinema on the International Stage

The changing face of Iranian cinema may be gauged by looking at the figures for film production as well as the presence of Iranian films in international festivals and events. The establishment of an industrial and economic base capable of supporting and sustaining an increased film production capacity, of "superior Iranian films", has seen an

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[4] For further information on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic see, Nikki R. Keddie & Mark J. Gasiorowski, *Neither East Nor West, Iran The Soviet Union and the United States*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

average of 50 films produced annually, rising from 17 in 1981 to a high of 66 in 1992[5]. Similarly, the creation of a more "liberal" atmosphere and the desire to open up to the outside world has seen the presence of Iranian films increase dramatically in international festivals, from 47 in 1988 to 744 in 1995, with a concomitant rise in the number of awards won, from 2 in 1988 to 41 1n 1995.

The Basis of a New Wave?

Taking 1979 as year zero, both Iran and the cinema have in a sense been 'reborn' and this is predicated on and exemplified by the dominant theme of search. Filmmakers are locked in a constant struggle of trying to find a space in which their art can operate, a process which necessitates and is predicated on an engagement with the social, and the nature of filmic art itself. Thus we have a dual dialectic that is constantly in a state of flux, and political in the broadest sense of the world, a cinema which problematises and interrogates the very notions of a "revolutionary" and a "political" cinema. If we examine the second period of films (1985-92) the search is one of a desire for better social and economic life and a reappraisal of the broken promises and failures of the revolution. This theme continues into the third period (1992-97) where the nature of the search changes and focus turns to the political. The notion of the search is of vital importance if Iranian cinema is to be an active and meaningful actor in social and cultural debate for it allows the possibility of opening up a space engaged debate that can offer the possibility of a "guide to action rather than a specific or easily achieved solution" (Wayne, 2001: 149).

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[5] The figures for the years up to 1999 were as follows; 1993 – 50, 1994 – 45, 1995 – 62, 1996 – 63, 1997 – 54, 1998 – 64 and 1999 – 46. (*Film International*, Vol. 7, No. 2 and 3, Autumn/Winter 1999/2000).

Following the election of President Khatami in 1997 we may be said to have entered a new phase where culture forms the engine in the search for greater freedom, liberalism and the establishment of a civil society. What has emerged is a cinema deceptively simple in its complexity. Instructive in illustrating all these points and standing as a manifestation, both personally and artistically, of the development of the Islamic state is an examination of the career of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, an internationally renowned filmmaker whose work has attempted to reflect and engage with the changing face of the country since 1979.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf: The Anxious Eye of the Revolution

The career progression of Mohsen Makhmalbaf over the past twenty years serves as a good template for examining the artistic progression of an artist and the development and maturation of cinema in Iran under the Islamic Republic as well as providing a means by which to relate text and context. Makhmalbaf was born in Tehran in 1957 to a staunchly religious family and was raised by his grandmother after his parents divorced. Growing up in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960's and 1970's, and through the influence of his father, he became a supporter of the militant religious and political ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini and began to agitate against the Shah's regime. In 1972 he formed his own urban guerrilla group and was jailed two years later for attacking a policeman. He remained in jail until 1978 when he was released as the revolution toppled the Shah. Following his release he began to turn his attention to cultural activities in support of the new Islamic regime and joined the Islamic Propagation Organisation, a semi-governmental centre for the promotion of artist projects that has been described as

"an outfit of avowed militancy" (Cheshire, 1997: 63). It was here that he began his cinematic career, directing his first film *Tobeh-Nassouh* (Nassouh's Repentance) in 1982. As a child of the revolution Makhmalbaf's career has grown in tandem with, and attempted to reflect the changing situations (culturally, politically, socially and economically) of the country, and as such can be divided in four stages of development, each marking a progression but linked to and derived from one other and serving as cultural reflections of the development of the nation[6].

The first period may be referred to as the "Islamic period, 1982-85 and covers his first four films. These films are propagandist in nature reflecting the idealism and faith in the Islamic utopia promised by the revolution. The theme is one of looking to God, the belief in the miraculous and the simplistic division of the world into good and evil. His second period centred around a trilogy of films (*The Peddler* (1987), *The Cyclist* (1989), *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989)) which were socially and politically committed works documenting the state of the nation and the course and development of the revolution. The subject matter is still dark and religiously inflected but God is a little kinder. Explaining *The Peddler* (1987) Makhmalbaf has said that his film intended to convey that God is the Light and therefore the source of all life. Furthermore, death, expounding Shi'ite doctrine, is an eventual return to the Light, while our life on earth is the deciding factor which determines the quality of our life after death (Riza'ee, 1993: 18). In these films he is trying to distance himself from intolerance and focus instead on the human aspects of everyday life.

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[6] These divisions arose from an interview that I conducted with the film producer and critic Bahman Maghsoudlou in New York, 14th October 1999.

The third period 1990-95 is one of doubt where Makhmalbaf is working towards a more reflective, philosophical and tranquil cinema, where the focus has shifted to an examination of the filmic artform itself as a means of representation, its possibilities, power and history, all firmly located within an Iranian cultural context and sensibility e.g. *Once Upon a Time Cinema* (1992), *Salaam Cinema* (1995). Finally, his current phase of development is towards a poetics of culture and a pre-occupation with form in films such as *Gabbeh* (1996), *The Silence* (1998). Robin Wood, (1998: 58), has bemoaned this change in Makhmalbaf's work, stating that, "it appears that for the time being we must accept the predominance...of the aesthetic over the political, an escape into the obsession of beautiful images". Such a sentiment is to deny Makhmalbaf the opportunity (and Iranian cinema as a whole) to develop outside of a narrow and didactic notion of political/revolutionary art. It also highlights the fact that foreign critics seek elements and signs that ratify their subjective images of the Third World. As Houshang Golmakani (1993-94: 55) has stated, "the Western critic and intellectual does not expect to like a film by a Third World filmmaker, for example, on the crisis in the relationship of a couple, unless this relationship derives from a social or political background".

The political is a much broader and complex phenomenon in Iranian cinema and arises from the twin concepts of the focus on the human and an interrogation of cinematic form, which itself is predicated on the dialectical notion of documentary and fiction. With regard to the former, Makhmalbaf's assertion that "life is larger than politics" and that "the best approach to save humanity is through going back to the beauty and poetry of

everyday life", is a notion very close to Jorge Sanjines[7] broad categorisation of "revolutionary art." This notion he states "will always be distinguished by what it shows of a peoples way of being, and of the spirit of popular cultures which embraces whole communities of people with their own particular ways of thinking, of conceiving reality and of loving life" (King, 1990: 66). In this sense Iranian cinema is "political" in the broadest sense of the word. This has given rise to an Iranian cinema where filmmakers are constantly striving to combine their own interests and aspirations with a popular discontent whilst at the same time questioning films ability to give voice to such expression. Indeed in adopting such a stance they have placed themselves firmly within a developmental and experimental Persian cultural tradition, which "has shown the slow but steady rise of a rebellious stance framed by such seemingly discordant ideals as, the vision of an egalitarian future, a greater artistic freedom and an undertone of nostalgia all clad in an esoteric language at odds with objective reality"(Karimi-Hakkak, 1985: 152). In an era of increased globalisation, which has given rise to an increased localisation, the metanarratives may be treated with scepticism but the spirit of liberation that they engender still lives on and is worth fighting for. In such an atmosphere the Iranian cinema is providing an example of an inverted image of Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and

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[7] The Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjines has attempted to critically reflect and directly intervene in the tumultuous history of his country through an activist and interrogative form of cinema that is intimately linked to immediate and indigenous social and political developments. Beginning his career during a time when Bolivia was experiencing a period of unprecedented democratic rule (the 1952-1964 social experiment of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement) his early short films celebrated the new indigenous revolutionary movement. However, the years 1966-1971 was a period of coup and counter coup, where the government was increasingly at the mercy of the military, and of failed revolutionary ideals. Sanjines set out to document these changes by focusing on the problems of the ordinary people and social issues such as poverty and infant mortality. It was this committed and critical approach that saw his work banned and resulted in Sanjines being exiled. It is this belief in revolution followed by disillusionment and the suffering of his work, as a category of struggle and search, at the hands of the authorities that bear similarities with Makhmalbaf's own career trajectory.

Ali Mohammadi's, (1994) notion of the role played by the media in the 1979 revolution, "small media, big revolution", operating in the context of a big media, small revolution.

Cinema and State – Theory and Practice

This dissertation sets out to examine the development of cinema in Iran since the revolution by critically assessing it as a reflection and reflector of the social, political and cultural development of the Islamic Republic through a critical case study of the work of Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The main aim is to provide a comprehensive examination of the development of cinema in Iran over the past two decades by showing that it is primarily derived from, and needs to be understood from within, the specific social, historical and political conditions from which it is derived and which, consequently, it seeks to reflect. A structural content analysis of the films of Makhmalbaf will provide the illustrative basis in underpinning such an approach. Whilst the focus in this case will be primarily thematic, this is not to suggest that form will be completely displaced by a total concentration on content. Rather, both concepts will be analysed within the framework of indigenous cultural forms and influences, such as 'Islamic art' (or rather its uniquely Persian manifestation) and the tradition of Persian poetry, which themselves carry specific historical and ideological modes of meaning and interpretation. Such an undertaking requires the establishment of a workable theoretical framework through which to situate and appraise the emergence of new politically and ideologically influenced cultural forms. Towards this end the following work begins with two theoretical chapters.

In the first, the basis and foundations for understanding the post revolutionary cinema are laid down by placing it within a reconstituted Third Cinema frame of reference that sets out to propose an interrogative model based on the notions of historicity, politicisation, critical engagement and cultural specificity. It is from these perspectives that we must seek to locate Iranian cinema in order to develop a model for its critical understanding by firstly examining the historical development of cinema in the country up until 1979. The second chapter seeks to establish the ideological and cultural basis of the Islamic State by examining the revolution as a form of cultural praxis that held within it a number of competing intellectual narratives that would shape and alter the orientation of all aspects of life in Iran. It is these varying intellectual strands, operating within Quranic and constitutionally established foundations, which defined and illustrated the complex ideological basis and orientation of the new state. Such a dual interaction has been the defining feature of all political and intellectual developments in the Islamic Republic as competing factions, operating within the system, have attempted to frame and legitimate their arguments and position through an interpretation of the Islamically ordained declarations of the state's founding father, Ayatollah Khomeini. This has resulted in the establishment of a narrow framework for debate, which permeates down through all levels of society, including cinema, leading to a situation where competing factions rush to lay claim to, and appropriate their arguments through a particular interpretation of Khomeini's version of neo-Shiism. Under such a restricted sphere of debate positions are often relegated to the simplistic division of - for or against the revolution, for or against Islam. The legitimation and promotion of competing ideological positions lies in their

recourse to indigenous and knowable cultural forms, particularly their presentation through the media. Such a complex, and at times contradictory interaction was clearly illustrated in the revolution itself where traditional religious cultural forms were disseminated through means of modern mass communications whilst at the same time castigating these methods of information transmission as symptomatic of the ills of the Pahlavi regime and the evils of foreign influence. To a certain extent this is a situation that has persisted throughout the lifetime of the Islamic Republic, albeit in a mediated form, where cultural representation by and for the regime is *halal* (allowed), that which is against is *haram* (forbidden). This is the basic structure within which cultural practitioners have to operate in Iran, (and on which I structured this thesis), a highly volatile and complex space in which they seek to intervene as social commentators on, and contributors to, the development of the nation.

Chapter 3 sets out to examine the 'new form' of cinema that emerged under the changed ideological system as seen in the official drive to create an 'Islamic cinema'. This new cultural form is evaluated by placing it within the historical development of Islamic art as a whole and the clergy's attempts to instigate a form of Cultural Revolution by seeking to Islamicise all aspects of society. It will also assess the effectiveness of this process and the truth claims of creating a unique cinematic form of representation. Chapter 4 looks at the development of cinema through the decade of war and revolution, from its use as a propagandist tool in promoting nationalism and Islamic virtues during the war with Iraq to the tentative emergence of a socially engaged and critical cinema. Following the death of the revolution's spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the ending of the war

with Iraq the country entered a period of reconstruction and self-examination. The new leadership sought to promote a more 'liberal' agenda and an opening up to the outside world in a bid to rebuild a shattered country. The cinema was to form an integral part of this project no more so than in its emergence on the international stage as a unique and distinctive cultural voice. Chapter 5 evaluates the development of a 'quality' cinema in the era of reconstruction, caught between poetry and censorship and striving for a form independence in the maelstrom of changing official ideological requirements. The final chapter looks at cinema under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami as part of the power struggle in attempts to build a 'civil society'.

The methodological approach undertaken in pursuit of these aims has primarily consisted of a review of literature (through the resources of the British Library's Office for Oriental and Indian Studies, as well as those at the Library for Irainan Studies and the British Film Institute) that has sought to reappropriate certain sociologically based theoretical models to the particularities of cinema whilst at the same time seeing the latter as a volatile culturally derived element of socialisation operating within constantly changing ideological circumstances. Such a practice has necessitated the establishment of a theory of cinema, which is compatible, and capable of being combined with a method of investigating cultural production based on an examination of the historical development of indigenous forms and the rationale behind their usage within the flux of changing social and political circumstances. This theoretical application is achieved by taking the original notion of the Third Cinema as laid down by Solanas and Getino (1969), with its desire to establish a relationship between film and its socio-political environment, and

examining it within the light of further investigations of the subject, Gabriel (1982), Burton (1985), Armes (1987), Willemen (1987), Shohat and Stam (1994). Through a critique of these varying theoretical strands, an approach to the engagement and assessment of cinema based on the notions of a critical examination of historical, political and culturally specific derivations will be applied to the unique situation of Iran. However, this is not to suggest some form of exclusivity and the fact that such a model is applicable only to the circumstances found in the Islamic Republic. Rather it involves recognising similarities and elements of consistency that have been the hallmarks of Third Cinema's theoretical development and drawing points of comparison, as well as contrast, to their application in a revolutionary state. Towards this end the case of other revolutionary states, albeit with marked ideological differences, such as Cuba and Algeria, are used as points of comparison in illustrating the fact that a Third Cinema frame of reference is a comprehensive and practical means of understanding the interaction of cinema and politics.

In relation to the question of the 'uniqueness' of the Iranian situation, and the emergence of the Islamic Republic, the referential framework employed has been derived from Fischer's (1980) 'Karbala paradigm', which seeks to explain the basis of the new state from the point of view of its location within and recourse to the symbols of religiously informed Shia cultural practice. Allied to this is the notion that this framework is further informed and influenced by competing intellectual traditions (Shariati, Bazargan, Motahhari Safavi), skilfully employed by Ayatollah Khomeini, in determining the ideological basis, as laid down by the Quran and enshrined in the Constitution, of the new

state. These traditions were employed as expediency demanded and were used as a means of aligning 7th century religious exigencies with the practicalities of running a modern state. This balancing of religious tradition with the needs of the modern state, which has been referred to as 'neo-Shiism', (Mackey, 1998) or 'Khomeinism', (Abrahamian, 1993), has become the key ideological problem for the clerical rulers. This is very much the basis in which I have tried to situate and understand Makhmalbaf's early 'Islamic' films where I have postulated that they are both a product of the needs of the state i.e. the consolidation of rule through the Islamicisation process, and of Khomeini's interpretaion of religious doctrines, in this instance the notion of *irfan* (Martin, 2000). This balancing act became more difficult during the war with Iraq where the needs of Islam were superseded by the needs of the nation in an evolving society that was moving from the rhetoric of revolution towards a more 'inclusive' model of class harmonisation, which, while recognising some of the failures of the new regime, was primarily aimed at consolidating and perpetuating the power of the ruling elite (Abrahamian, 1993, Menashri, 1990). This has become an increasing ardent form of debate in the post-1989 period where Khomeini's legacy has been reappropriated, in conjunction with Constitutional reforms, as the basis on which all political agendas, be they the attempted reconstructionism of the Rafsanjani government, or the present administrations attempt to create an 'Islamic civil society', are argued and derive their legitimacy from.

Instructive in this last instance was a six-week field trip to Iran which I conducted as part of my research. This was particularly helpful in providing me with the opportunity to speak to a wide range of people as well as experiencing first hand the direction and state

of society under Khatami's 'reformist' government. The information which I gathered was instructive in informing Chapter 6 as well as allowing me to experience the 'popular' cinema that fills Iranian theatres and the general attitude of people towards it and their perception of the 'quality' Iranian cinema seen abroad. My research has also been supplemented by a number of selected interviews of which Bahman Magsoudlou's thoughts on Makhmalbaf's cinema, S.A. Moussazadeh's description of the problems facing the domestic film industry and Hamid Kheireddin's experience of directing films during the war period, were most instructive. In addition to these I have also attended a number of conferences and film festivals on Iran and its cinema, such as the Iranian Film Season at the NFT, June/July 1999, the conference on Iranian cinema held at SOAS, 1999, the Asian Cinema Conference, May 2000, the conference and season of films by Iranian women filmmakers held at the Barbican, May 2001, the conference of Iranian Studies, May 2002, which have all provided me with an opportunity to discuss and debate certain theoretical propositions as well as alerting me to the existence and possibilities of other avenues of exploration.

Conclusion

When Abbas Kiarostami was asked why his films were so popular in the West he was at a loss for an explanation citing the fact that he has more or less made the same type of film since the release of his first feature, *The Traveller,* in 1974[8]. This is true to a certain extent but highlights the fact that Iranian cinema is primarily addressed to and focused on Iran and its people. On one level it could be described as a cinema of reaction: the Islamic

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[8] This was the response given by Kiarostami when asked why he thought his films were popular in the West during The Guardian Interview at the National Film Theatre London, 22nd June, 1999.

Republic sought to react against the "prostitution cinema" of the Shah's era, redefining it for its own ends as an "Islamic cinema" and the uneasy drive towards a "quality cinema" (with the re-emergence of the pre-revolutionary directors and so called non-believers) could be read as a reaction against the failed project of this undertaking and an attempt to regain and maintain control of the cultural landscape. Defining it as such allows for an explanation of the oft-cited simplicity of Iranian cinema. Aside from the practical problems of language and illiteracy the desire for a "quality" cinema has had to define itself in relation to the constantly changing history of Iranian cinema and its audience. In the case of many Iranian directors this had lead to a superficially simple narrative style to which layers have been constantly added in order to achieve as much density as possible. This helps to explain the universal significance of a cinema located in and addressed to the local. Speaking on a similar theme Satyajit Ray, (1982: 29), has said, "I am forced by circumstances to keep my stories on an innocuous level. What I can do, however, is to pack my films with meaning and psychological inflections and shades, and make a whole which will communicate a lot of things to many people". The importance of the national is emphasised within Iranian cinema as it attempts to reflect and question the multi-faceted nature of Iran, its people and their problems whilst simultaneously engaged in a dialectical debate with the multi-faceted complexity of Iranian cinema itself. In this respect Iranian cinema is a national cinema not as a bulwark against Hollywood. Its adversary is indigenous popular cinema (usually poor copies of Hollywood genre types) and those who seek to control the medium, which sees it firmly located in the socio-political formation of the modern state, with its internal structure as a determining factor in cultural production.

CHAPTER 1
From the New Way to the New Wave

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the theoretical foundation and outline the historical

background with which to begin a critical and engaged examination of the Iranian cinema

that has emerged since the 1979 Revolution. This involves placing the Iranian cinema

within a Third Cinema frame of reference in an undertaking that seeks to interrogate the

latter notion through a critical engagement with its historical development and to

reappraise it by applying it to the particularities of Iranian cinema. The first stage will be

to examine the development of cinema in Iran prior to the revolution by viewing it

through the lens of the Third Cinema and then using this as the basis through which to

view and interrogate the cinema that has emerged under the Islamic regime.

Towards the development of a Third Cinema.

"The cinema of the revolution is at the same time one of destruction and construction:
destruction of the image that neo-colonialism has created of itself and of us, and
construction of a throbbing, living reality which recaptures truth in many of its
expressions".
(Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Winter 1970-71: 6).

"In Iran film-making.....will not be a sedative, rather it will show the way to overcome
the tyrannies of world exploiters. The post-revolution Iranian cinema.......will be
proclaiming the message of the revolution in cinematic forms, because our revolution is a
cultural and spiritual Renaissance".
(Mehdi Kalhor, 1982: 11-13).

The notion of a third cinema from the outset was a vaguely defined notion of cultural

practice which sought to wage an ideological warfare with the "camera as a gun" in the

liberation of the exploited and the oppressed. Arising from the revolutionary fervour of

the late 1960s and expressed in Marxist language, the original Latin American manifestos called for a militant guerrilla cinema that set out directly and explicitly to fight the system of established film-making, both structurally ("an alternative, independent and anti-imperialist cinema", "a third cinema independent in production, militant in politics, experimental in language" Solanas and Getino (1969)) and aesthetically (Glauber Rochas "aesthetics of hunger" (1965), Julio Garcia Espinosas call "for an imperfect cinema" (1969)). These call to arms spoke the language of populist rebellion and revolutionary rhetoric and, whilst genuinely committed, exhibited a myriad of contradictions. It was these contradictions which were to weaken the initial declarations but also paradoxically to provide the terms of debate for future examinations of the concept of a third cinema.

Solanas and Getino's original statements were firmly located in their Argentinean context showing similarities with Peron's idea of a "third way" i.e. non-aligned countries pursuing a new path between capitalism and communism. This arose from universalising attempts to speak on behalf of all the oppressed of the "third world". Indeed, "the third cinema described by Solanas and Getino in the 60s would become by the 70s an explicitly Peronist cinema, albeit one very critical of the rightist elements within historical Peronism"(Newman 1993: 247). Paradoxically, the somewhat contradictory alliance of elements of Marxist theories of class struggle and Peron's personal vision of the nation built on his ideas of social justice serve to highlight some of the most pertinent and pressing issues in the area of third cinema. Foremost is the emphasis on the political. "In my opinion politics is a fundamental matter....If politics is approached in its precise sense as a science that allows us to interpret human problems, then it is the most

23

important and necessary subject of our time" (Solanas in Benegal, 1975: 47). It is this desire to speak a socially pertinent language and to examine the relationship between film and the socio-political environment in which it operates that is perhaps the enduring characteristic of the third cinema.

Secondly the emphasis on the national, despite the universalising aims and tone of these manifestos, is crucial, as context is essential as the foundation for elucidating a cinema built on the similarity of difference. Indeed Getino himself has stated that "the attempt to create a Third Cinema in Argentina was bound up in our own particular historical and political circumstances" (Barnard, 1986: 101). This gives it the flexibility and dynamism to constantly adapt to the shifting dynamics of social and political struggle. Such a situation demands a self-examining and critical cinema that constantly attempts to surpass and challenge any form of homogeneity that seeks to rob individuals and societies of their particularity and to act on behalf of the less powerful elements of society who have had their histories ignored. The third cinema must attempt to reveal the contradictions and elided differences which have tended to be subsumed under the universalising attempts of theory and attempt to celebrate similarities whilst taking into account the changing social atmosphere and geopolitical climate. However the celebration of the national is not without its dangers and it too needs to be approached in a cautious and analytical manner so as to avoid the myopia of an essentialist nationalism and nativism and their uncritical acceptance and undue romanticism of the past. This requires a recognition of the complexity, diversity and multi-layeredness of specific cultural-historical formations, which are shaped by the interaction of intra as well as

international influences and traditions because "to skip the question of the national and slide directly towards an international aesthetic, eliminates the defining characteristics of third cinema" (Willeman 1987: 8). This calls for a definition and interpretation of culture, and by extension cinema, that is grounded in the specifics of the regional but which at the same time exhibits the ability to project critically onto a universal plane of understanding.

This last point is referred to by Teshome Gabriel when he sets out a framework, grounded in Fanons genealogy of third world culture, for the development of cinema in the third world. For Gabriel this cinema passes through three stages. The first is the unqualified assimilation of Hollywood films. This is followed by what he terms the remembrance phase where we see an indigenisation of the film industry and an attempt to explore native culture and themes such as rural versus urban, tradition versus modernity. The final stage is the combative phase where film is viewed as a public service and ideological tool that sets out to reflect the lives and struggles of people living in the third world. To this "process of becoming" he adds three stages of critical theory; text, reception and production. From this Gabriel then goes on to propose an aesthetics of third cinema. This is a laudable if short-sighted undertaking and it highlights once again many of the problems encountered in the original Latin American manifestos.

The Question of Representation

The main problem with Gabriel's theoretical undertaking is the fact that it leads him towards universalising statements based on over-simplification. Like Solanas and Getino before him, Gabriel sets out to define the third cinema by that which it is not i.e. the

absolute antitheses of Hollywood. This is a self-defeating process that sees a cinema, in trying to define itself as different, having the terms and basis of its difference defined by Hollywood. Such a binarism results in "condescension and propagates the us versus them attitude, in which the Third World is different in an inferior way from the First World" (Ghosh 1996: 61). Indeed, this definition is further complicated by the fact that in many countries of the third world, e.g. India, due to the unique cultural preferences of its audience, or Iran due to ideological and government import restrictions, the need to define the indigenous cinematic product as distinct from the Hollywood monolith is a cultural question which is non-existent. This desire to define third cinema as a distinct category has been a constant from the start. In doing so Gabriel reduces all Western filmic representation to Oedipal conflicts based on literary/written conceptions as opposed to the activist aesthetics, socio-political conflicts and critical spectatorship of third cinema. He then goes on, based on the premise that the Third World has a culture derived from oral and folk traditions, to explain the differences between these two types of films in their deployment of cinematic elements e.g. the close-up in Western film practice is used to connote individual psychology whereas in third cinema it is unnatural and used only for information purposes. Not only does this fact ignore the multifaceted and varied cultures and histories of those countries in the so called third world it also shows a fundamental naivety and misunderstanding of the complexity of film language as a site of contested meaning. This clearly illustrates the fact that any attempt to develop a unifying aesthetic for non European-American cinemas is doomed to failure. The image by itself cannot and should not be the ultimate statement as "image alone cannot hope to

perform the critically vital function of man's art; how to render communicable the dialectic plight of man's subjective-objective existence" (de Laurot 1970: 16).

A similar, if somewhat contradictory, definition of third cinema in relation to the established cinema was also made at the outset by Solanas and Getino. They sought to surpass first (Hollywood/commercial) cinema which they saw as feeding the interests of "US financial capital" and leading to "the absorption of forms of the bourgeois world-view" (Solanas and Getino, 1970-71: 4). Likewise they were critical of what they called second cinema (auteur/art cinema), which they saw as a step forward but which ultimately left the filmmaker "trapped inside the fortress". Paradoxically, in their call for a militant cinema they refer with praise to Western examples such as the work of the *Etats Generaux du Cinema Francais*, British student movements and Chris Marker during the 1960's. However, what this emphasises is the fact that the idea of a third cinema is a cultural category that is, and has to be, in a constant state of becoming, that is not definition specific, and encompasses a virtual geography. This shows that these categorisations and distinctions are not easily separable but are enclosed within a dynamic that is dialectical in nature. If third cinema is an open-ended category then it must attest to the multi-faceted nature of cinema itself. The third cinema can, and does, incorporate features and elements of the first and second cinema, for specific purposes and related to context, without losing its revolutionary power.

Such an understanding requires a self-reflexivity and self-critical dynamic as a driving force that moves beyond the level of the purely aesthetic towards a new set of practices in

constant evolution. Indeed the focus on the aesthetic by Gabriel and those such as Espinosa have in a sense served to weaken the position of the third cinema and make it more easily co-optable by the West. This in effect reduces these films to the level of the exotic. The unfamiliar is made familiar through dispensing with the complexities of the social, historical and cultural contexts. This recovering of the strange is made possible by an "acknowledgement of an international film style (formal innovation; psychologically complex, ambiguous, poetic, allegorical, or restrained characterisations; rejection of Hollywood norms), and second the retrieval of insights or lessons about a different culture (often recuperated yet further by the simultaneous discovery of an underlying, cross-cultural humanity)" (Nichols 1994: 18). The exclusive emphasis on the textual ignores the interdisciplinary, multifaceted claims of the third cinema and highlights the importance of the aesthetic to the detriment of institutional factors. This sees the decentring of the question of aesthetics as crucial if the third cinema is to be a genuinely distinct and engaged artform centred on questions of power and knowledge (Taylor 1987), and points of intellectual intervention especially important in defining and structuring the third world. Indeed any claims towards examining a "radical aesthetic" must take into account the specific factors within that culture which have shaped the mode of expression. If this is not done these films become merely orientalist curiosities, and in the case of Iranian films for example, sees them reduced to the humanist, the poetic, or mysterious images of chador clad women and deserts.

Text and Context

However, despite these criticisms Gabriel (like Solanas and Getino who developed their theories in tandem with their filmmaking work, specifically their groundbreaking 1969 film *The Hour of the Furnaces*) has sought to highlight the centrality and importance of linking the theoretical and the practical to any meaningful understanding and definition of the notion of a third cinema. This is the legacy of the original declarations and should continue to be the defining aspect of the third cinema where theory and practice are interdependent and of value only when related to and dependent on the terrain in which the praxis is carried out. In effect this is an attempt to relocate the historical progression of the third cinema in the actual circumstances of the third world by tracing and inter-linking their origins as beginnings, causes and contributions to the ongoing political endeavour of developing a new kind of cinema. However this does not mean a retreat to a position of isolation and cultural puritanism but is more an attempt to reflect a similarity of difference or "the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularisation of universalism" (Robertson 1991: 73). It is also a recognition of the fact that in focusing on the domestic we must be aware of intra-cultural, cross-cultural and trans-historical influences and their historical specificity.

In a sense this can be seen as an attempt to redefine and reinterpret the notion of "subaltern realism" (Ayoob, 1998: 45) in cinematic terms in an attempt to show that domestic issues and regional balances of power form the defining impact of global structures, i.e. the local as the starting point of definition. It recognises the importance of a particular contextual socio-historical grounding and also acknowledges the fact that

"oppositional" cultural practices cannot be severed from dominant cultural practices and ideologies. This is not a dilution of the original claims of third cinema nor a bowing to the inevitable co-option by mainstream/dominant cinema but an attempt to open up a new space for the third cinema, one which recognises that it is a set of practices that have become increasingly diffuse in attempting to demonstrate and articulate different and varying degrees of marginality and opposition. The new cinema is a para/meta third cinema in a constant state of historical evolution, grounded in the national but able to cut across its boundaries. Indeed it is this cutting against the national, and centralised organisation, which opens up further spaces for the heterogeneous and multifaceted projections of the local. Such possibilities have led to proposals calling for the establishment of a further category of denotation, a fourth cinema who's function is in reclaiming, documenting and giving voice specifically to the local.... "purely local films that are testimonies or agit-prop, film souvenirs of action or demonstration, film post cards to tell others <I was here>...." (Clarens 1978: 21). Despite bearing similarities with the experimental work of the British student experiments et al, referred to in the original Latin American manifestoes, Clarens declaration does however attest to attempts to develop an alternative film practice based on democratic principles, the avoidance of universalism and essentialism, the need to reclaim a social space and a practice located in the community, for the community, speaking to the community. The central tenet of this practice is that it seeks to establish a space for an engaged dialogue whilst at the same time recognising that this dialogue itself is never neutral, uncontested or homogeneous. Therefore, if the third cinema is to exist, and develop, it cannot be separated from third world communities (if it is it is an attempt to kidnap the concept by the metatheorizing

30

first world), because "connectedness to communities struggling against oppression is an essential characterisation of third cinema and of its symbiosis with the third world" (Taylor 1987: 144).

Mapping the Field

Roy Armes, in his seminal book *Third World Film Making and the West* (1987), takes the first step in categorising and providing an overview of the entire field and attempting to reflect its diversity by referring to third cinema as the ensemble of films produced by third world countries. However, despite his emphasis on the fact that these films should be approached from their specific social, cultural and historical contexts, so fearful is he of charges of Eurocentrism that he adopts an ambiguous and objective approach that fails to engage in a meaningful way with the subject matter that in a sense serves to undermine the goals of the book. Mary Alemany-Galway (1989: 64) states that "he takes the Third World filmmakers as his object of study, in the scientific manner, and therefore he cannot avoid objectifying them and adopting a somewhat paternalistic tone". Taking such a perspective ignores the fact that the issues of social power, which the third cinema seeks to address and define itself by, need to be approached in a critical and committed way, for what is at stake here is the emancipation of history and the ability to define oneself as subject rather than object, "objectivity almost always works against the colonised" (Fanon, 1990). This is the task that third world writers and intellectuals are constantly aspiring towards, "a culture-changing process capable of assuming entirely new dimensions of self-realisation," "moving beyond nativism," or moving toward "the full development of a new cultural hegemony" (Puchala, 1998: 147). Cinema is no different.

In this context it is a cultural practice where ideas and ideologies assume the most important role.

Paul Willeman adheres to and develops this idea by referring to the third cinema as an ideological project that goes beyond the boundaries of the so called third world to encompass a body of films allied to a particular political and aesthetic program regardless of where and by whom they are made. According to him such undertakings are to be found in the work of Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Ousmane Sembene and Ritwik Ghatak (referred to as the masters of this type of cinema), with each "summing up and reformulating the encounter of diverse cultural traditions into new, politically as well as cinematically illuminating types of filmic discourse, critical of yet firmly anchored in, their respective social-historical situations" (Willeman, 1987: 8).

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994: 248-288) seek to add to the debate by developing the idea of the third cinema as "collective projects to be forged," seeking to reconstitute it in the light of a changing geopolitical landscape. Firmly located in the cinematic and cultural history of the third world they attempt, through the employment of the proliferation of terms provided by post-colonial theory to define cultural mixing (syncretism, hybridity, creolization etc.) and the "cultural contradictions generated by the global circulation of people and goods in a mediated and inter-connected world," to interrogate a changing third cinema and propose a new aesthetics of resistance. They see the third cinema as having evolved to what they define as "post-Third Worldist films." Such films (occurring in the 1980s and 1990s) are seen as displaying " a certain

scepticism towards metanarratives of liberation, but do not necessarily abandon the notion that emancipation is worth fighting for." Acknowledging the historical legacy of attempts to define and develop a third cinema they propose a new classificatory model consisting of a series of overlapping circles of denotation. The first consists of a core circle of "third worldist" films produced by and for the people of the third world and adhering to the principles of third cinema. The second circle contains those films that are again produced by the people of the third world but which do not adhere to the principles of third cinema. Thirdly they include those films adhering to third cinema principles and in support of the third world but which are made by individuals not of the third world. And finally, works which they define as "diasporic hybrid films," which attempt to build on and interrogate the conventions of third cinema. These categories are an attempt to develop Roy Armes's undertaking of providing a fuller understanding of third world film culture by including in their analysis all films made in the third world both for the purpose of entertainment as well as those that deal with social and political issues. It is also an attempt to reflect the fact that the third cinema is a mixed site and as such includes, incorporates and reflects elements from the filmic first world. Indeed, this is a crucial point which the third cinema has grappled with from the start and attests to the fact that any serious artistic expression must, (whether it attempts to refute, liberate from or assent to), take into account the presence and influence of the first world.

Shohat and Stam attempt to develop the idea of the third cinema as an open category by its ability to incorporate as many elements as possible. Indeed they refer to the militant cinema proposed by Solanas and Getino as but one category or genre of third cinema.

Citing the progression of Solanas' work from *Hour of the Furnaces* (1969) to *Tangos: Exilos De Gardel* (1983) they state that the "diversification of aesthetic models has meant that film-makers have in part discarded the didactic third worldist model predominant in the 1960s in favour of a post-modern politics of pleasure." What we are seeing now is less use of the camera as a revolutionary weapon, with its focus instead being directed as a "monitor of the gendered and sexualised realms of the personal and the domestic, seen as integral but repressed aspects of collective history" (Shohat and Stam, 1994).

The shift in definition from a guerrilla cinema to a post-modern aesthetics of pleasure, whilst seeking to move the debate on and to open up other categories of discovery and exploration for the third cinema (and indeed questioning and problematising the whole notion), in fact raises more questions and highlights the difficulties in appropriating such terms to the third world. In referring to the notion of the post-modern what must be realised is the fact that this is a western term applicable to a state of advanced capitalism and is a notion that in itself is debatable as to whether the west is indeed "post-modern." Moreover if the term is to be applied to the third world it needs to be reappropriated to the specific particularities of the third world, as well as recognising the fact that the idea of a third world post-modern is not the same as that of the first. Ali Mirsepassi (2000:192) refers to this point by stating that post-modern as a critical format is helpful and liberating in societies "where modernity is institutionalised and fully installed". However this critique is difficult and problematic in "the difficult context of third world societies and may lead to the catastrophic collapse of institutions and orders with gravely undesirable consequences". This is particularly instructive in the case of Iran where Islam

"remains a classical religious view trying to negate the modern, not a post-modern view or a pre-modern view, and find ancient cyclical mythologies to re-enchant and rejuvenate the 21st century" (Inayatullah, 1990: 96). Such a situation stems from the different ways in which modernity ahs been experienced in the third world as well as the fact that debates over issues such as tradition versus the modern, the legitimacy of the nation and state, are very much alive and at the heart of discussions on culture and society in the third world. By way of comparison Homi Bhabha (1983: 31) has pointed to the problem of overlaying cultural categories, in this case, on the economic structures of imperialism, "the originality of the colonial context is that the economic substructure is also a superstructure…you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should be slightly stretched every time we have to do with a colonial problem".

If the notion of the post-modern is to be used at all then perhaps it is best employed in viewing the third world as a dialectically mixed site of the pre, the post and the modern. A third cinema operating within the interstices and margins of the structural differentiation caused by these states opens up the possibility of interrogating the local (and escaping the essentialist nationalist strait-jacket) by realising the reflection and complexity of the co-existence of different layers of social time existing together in the present (Jameson, 1992). The elucidation of the differences between these theories in relation to the state "offers the opportunity to integrate system and unit level theory within a single set of concepts" (Buzan, 1998: 229). Combining such an undertaking with Jameson's (1992) idea of cognitive mapping, through its intimate linking of the local to

the global, would help to combine the political and the cultural, in all their socio-historical specificity and complexity, in such a way as to project and understand the interconnectedness and dialogic relationship of the global and the local. Such a system offers the advantage of concrete content (imperialism, the world system, subalternity, dependency and hegemony) highlighting the concern with the relationship between films and the socio-political environment within which they are made. Located in variable contemporaneity but embracing an historical dimension (in conjunction with a cinematic historiography) with the express purpose of making sense of the present, such films provide the possibility of not merely interrogating the signifier and signified but of creating the space to intervene directly at the level of the sign. Such an undertaking offers the concrete possibility of a cinema of deconstruction and construction, not operating in a detached meta-theoretical forum that functions without any mandate for practical application outside the realm of theorists and critics, but which seeks to de-alienate alienating and alienated social relations.

This last point is based on the notion of the dual recognition that "social change has its deepest roots in self-realisation and that the creative process provides a quasi-utopian space in which more ideal social relations may develop" (Burton, 1985: 12). Combining these elements with Thomas Gutierrez Alea's (1987: 191) call for the need to "re-centre the legacy of the cinema within the context of and according to the needs of the third world itself", offers the possibility of a workable theory based on the reclaiming, emancipation and interpretation of the cultural and political historical narratives. Such an

undertaking is ideologically located in the present and reflects the notion of the third cinema as a diverse site in a constant state of becoming.

Despite the, at times, problematic and contradictory development of the notion of a Third Cinema a number of core points remain crucial, and have remained constant elements throughout its theoretical development: the centrality of linking theory and practice, an artform derived from and intervening in the social and the political, the awareness of a social and cultural historiography, and an artform that is critical and experimental in nature and exhibits a cultural specificity that is derived from and speaks to the local but is capable of projecting to the universal. It is from these perspectives that we must seek to locate Iranian cinema in order to develop a model for its critical understanding. However before doing so an examination of the development of cinema in Iran in the seventy-nine years prior to the Islamic revolution must be provided. By starting at the level of the local and in examining the unique historical and cultural development of cinema in a particular context it is hoped to surpass the Oreintalist/development theories, which seek to define the Third World as a singular essentialised entity operating in terms of the "abstracted conditions of European historical conditions" (Mirsepassi 2000: 8), and locate it within its own existing terms, conditions and processes.

Cinema in Iran 1900-1979.

"The past should not be the object of mere contemplation if the present is to be meaningful. For if the past were viewed as a "frozen reality" it would either dominate and immobilise the present or be discarded as irrelevant to today's concerns".
Renato Constantino

The history and development of cinema in Iran prior to the Iranian Revolution in 1979 provides a necessary background, and acts as a template and basis for examining the origins and antecedents of the "new progressive" wave of films emerging under the Islamic Republic. It also shows the dominant characteristics prevalent throughout history e.g. censorship, cultural assimilation, and their various manifestations in contributing to the development of Iran and its cinema. Furthermore this pre-revolutionary history acts as a bridge linking the development of the idea of a third cinema with the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema in an attempt to explore ways in which to combine the theoretical and practical historical development of distinct cultural movements.

To better understand the overall approach to film presentation and production in Iran it is necessary to locate it within the history and culture of the country. The traditional mass entertainment forms were replaced by cinema in a relatively short space of time. However the coming of cinema did not simply lead to the immediate destruction and disappearance of the traditional artforms. Moreover, the rich Persian history and the particular cultural nuances of the people became manifested in, and bore influence on, the cultivation of a foreign art form according to the uniquely original and specific cultural needs and sensibilities of the people. This arises from the fact that throughout history, from the conquering influence of Alexander of Macedonia right through to the Qajar dynasty, Iranians have accepted conquering influences but have synthesised and transformed them into their own. Indeed the Greek historian Herodotus has stated that "there is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. As soon as they hear of any luxury they instantly make it their own" (Wilber 1978: 29). This process

of overcoming conquerors by assimilation has lead to the survival of and transformation of traditional cultural codes that come to find expression in unique forms. Indeed one of the defining aspects of Iranian cinema has been this ability to assimilate, imitate and copy imported culture, and it is this foreign influence that was one of the key elements in the establishment and development of cinema in Iran. Furthermore, unlike the progression of cinema in the West, from vaudeville fairground attraction to bourgeois respectability, the cinema in Iran followed a different path of development. Initially brought to Iran by the fifth shah of the Qajar dynasty, Mozaffer al-din Shah, whilst on a visit to the International Exhibition in Paris in 1900, cinema was strictly the preserve of the elevated strata of society and at the service of the royal court before becoming in later years a popular form of mass entertainment (Maghsoudlou 1987: 20).

Certain other pertinent historical moments are also of relevance to the development of the cinema such as the Shah Abbas 1 (1587-1629) programme of reforms which saw the introduction of five to six thousand Armenian workers into Iran. It was immigrants who were, through education abroad, to become the pioneers and key technicians of the Iranian cinema e.g. Avanes Ohanian who was responsible for founding the Cinema Artist School in 1930 and directing the first Iranian feature film *Abi va Rabi* the following year, and Esmail Kooshan who began dubbing foreign films into Persian in 1947 and was responsible for establishing the Mitra Film Company were both Armenians. Furthermore, the fact that Iran came under the influence of European powers during the Qajar dynasty was also to play a significant role in the development of cinema in the country as foreign films flooded onto Iranian screens. One of the lasting legacies of this foreign influence

was most explicitly evident with the USIS/Syracuse documentary and newsreel productions in the 1950's which marked a turning point both technically and aesthetically for future indigenous film production, most markedly in the fact/fiction dialectic and obsessive self-reflexivity that have become a defining feature of 'quality' Iranian cinema. Thus history and culture, past and present, in this sense form a symbiotic relationship. Here the past and present become inextricably linked but are not merely reflections of one another. The historical imagination is crucial to survival and understanding. The recognition of the past aids a sense of national as well as personal identity in that it forces us to distinguish between transformations which are irreversible and those which are not. However the past is irrecoverably lost[1] and can only ever bear superficial resemblance to our present. Therefore history can be seen to carry an infinite set of meanings which societies formulate for current use. In other words a complex combination of historical elements lie beneath cultural form.

Cinema and the Traditional Cultural Forms

The coffee houses and the passion plays (*rowzeh* and *ta'zieh*) were the most popular forms of entertainment before the advent of cinema and their influence, both on a practical and socio-political level, is seen in their rapid assimilation into (rather than replacement by) the cinematic artform. The *naqal* (story-teller) of the coffee houses moved into the cinema to narrate the silent movies and were extremely popular with

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[1] The lament for the past, particularly the glories of ancient Persia has been a constant theme of much Iranian art from Ferdowsi's epic *Shahnameh*, to the poetry of Omar Khayyam and Hafez and into the modern era in the works of writers such as a Sadeq Hedayat and Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi. Indeed, such is the weight of the past that, in a different context, the ideologues of the Islamic Republic have also turned to history, revering the glories of Iran's Islamic heritage and the society and times of the Prophet.

audiences up until the advent of sound and dubbing. Of more importance was the influence of the *ta'zieh*, which enacted the death of Hossein at the battle of Karbala[2]. Aesthetically this had an overarching influence on the bulk of commercial Iranian film. The *ta'zieh* had little scenery or props relying instead on an audiences imagination, placing importance on the actors, dramatic delivery and atmosphere. These features carried over into film where an influence was placed on sound effects and the use of special effects (Issari, 1989). However the *ta'zieh* also served a socio-political function. This was a fact not lost on the Shah who introduced a royal decree in 1932 banning it. The main reason for this was the Shah's desire to minimise the stronghold of the conservative mullahs over the masses of people and to move towards a separation of church and state[3] so that he could proceed with his modernisation programmes. Thus, cinema became the major entertainment of the people. This was in direct contrast to its early development in the country and saw the cinema intimately caught in the debate between tradition and modernity which structured the terms of much Iranian intellectual thought in the pre-revolutionary era.

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[2] This is an event of huge significance for Shia muslims containing many cultural significances. At the heart of this event lies the question of succession and the legitimacy to rule after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'ites believe that the Prophet entrusted succession to his cousin and son in law Ali who was assassinated in the ensuing debacle by rival Sunni tribe leaders. Ali's son Hossein was then decreed the next in line for succession but he was killed in the battle of Karbala in an attempt by his enemies to end the blood line to the prophet. The Battle of Karbala has imbued the Shia sect with the themes of oppression, rebellion, the true lost tribe, the search for justice and martyrdom. In the battle, Hossein lead an army of seventy-two against an opposition of thousands. All were killed including Hossein's infant child, struck down by an arrow through the throat. At the end of the battle, Hossein, standing alone and mortally wounded, was finished off by Shimir, a figure of evil to which Ayatollah Khomeini would later compare the Shah.

[3] Other undertakings by the Shah towards this end included a ban on women wearing the *chador*, and changes to the judicial law that led, much to the consternation of the clergy, to clashes with Qur'anic law. These moves were all done to reduce the power of the clergy and to remove the influence and traces of Islam on life in Iran by simultaneously emphasizing the Persian aspects of Iranian culture. Indeed the name chosen by the Shah to represent his dynasty was Pahlavi (the name of the language spoken by the Sassanids in pre-Islamic times) which was an attempt to create a myth justifying the legitimacy of his rule by laying claim to 2,500 years of unbroken governance, whilst at the same time ignoring the influence and existence of Islam in Iranian history.

Cinema and the State

However, the advent of cinema as a form of mass entertainment introduced a whole new set of problems into society as the clergy, along with a number of intellectuals, became concerned with cinema's influence and asked the government to censor "morally" unsuitable films. Consequently the advent of censorship arose in Iran in 1936 by ministerial act, being updated in 1950 and again in 1968 when a committee was formed by the government to discuss the censorship laws. Despite the fact that these laws seemed to forbid a whole host of activities, such as attacks on Islam, incitement to revolt, immoral activity, the reality of the fact was they were implemented in a haphazard manner and for the most part were generally not adhered to. Indeed it is hard to imagine the survival of the commercial sector, with its high quotidian of sex and violence, if they had been followed to the letter (of law). However, the fact that these laws existed and could potentially be invoked, did lead to a situation where producers were cautious, once they found a formula that worked they tended to stick to it with the result that it gave rise to a cinema with nothing much to say. The only aspect of the censorship laws that were strictly adhered to was in relation to any political stance that criticised the Shah's rule. This is a fact strongly echoed in the implementation of censorship laws under the Islamic regime, where of the multitude of issues forbidden, only those criticising Islam – and therefore the legitimacy of the regime – and by extension, issues of morality, are strictly enforced and adhered to.

These last points raise another defining feature of Iranian cinema, the close relationship of the government to the cinematic art-form. This is evident in many forms, and raises,

amongst other things, the question of patronage, which is necessary for artistic survival in an autocratic regime where all roads inevitably lead to the government. It is a highly fraught and difficult relationship where for the most part final decisions, usually based on political expediency, rest in the hands of the government. Thus a situation arises which oscillates between regressive measures, high tax on the importation of equipment, stringent censorship, and progressive measures such as the 1958 tax exemption for the building of new cinemas or the USIS/Syracuse contract in 1950. There is considerable complexity in the relationship between the state and filmmakers in Iran. This is not only an important consideration for Iran but for many Third World film-makers who operate under a system of state finance and patronage. Both are inextricably linked by mutual need but their relationship is much more complex than the simple assertion that state cinema equals government propaganda. This is perhaps best seen in the inexhaustible funds and the massive building and development programmes for both movie studios and theatres, (Omid, 1974), which resulted in the establishment of an officially sanctioned and supported 'art cinema', many of the productions of which were highly critical of the hand that fed them.

This cultural investment programme formed part of the Shah's overall modernisation drive buoyed up by the rise in oil prices in the 1970's and the resulting influx of petro-dollars into the Iranian economy[4], which saw Iran brought into the orbit of international capitalism predicated on a system of American economic, military and cultural influence, assistance and reliance. The Shah's centralised and autocratic rule, which in effect sought

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[4] Between 1972 and 1978 GNP grew from $17.3 billions to an estimated $54.6 billions. Fred Halliday, *Iran Dictatorship and Development*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p.138.

to introduce modernisation without modernity (liberalism, political opposition and debate, freedom of speech and protest), made the desire to control the voices of dissent and their manifestation through art inevitable. In the absence of political opposition artists became the voice and conscience of the people. The Shah's support, and particularly that of his wife the Empress Farah through her patronage of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, can be seen as an official attempt to channel and direct a limited form of protest. Furthermore, it allowed at least the appearance to outside commentators of a liberal cultural atmosphere which the regime was keen to promote abroad e.g. a cultural manifestation of the economic reforms demanded by Kennedy in the 1960s, and Carter's promotion of human rights issues in the late 1970s. Thus, the regime was able through its control of the cinematic medium to selectively promote films that were of a critical nature by showing them to an international audience at the Tehran International Film Festival or by banning them at home but allowing them to be shown as examples of high cultural development in film festivals broad[5]. Indeed, this is very much the policy that the officials in the Islamic Republic have in relation to the development of an artistic and critical cinema – they like the fact that it is popular abroad but are wary of its power at home.

The Development of an Indigenous Commercial Industry

Given the rich cultural and artistic Persian past, it is not inconceivable to think that indigenous cinema would have developed quickly into a highly original and aesthetically rich artform. This however was not the case. As with much Third World cinema, output was perceived as trite, formulaic and mediocre at best. This can be explained by a

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[5] See Peter Cowie on Dariush Mehrjui's film *Mina Cycle*, in *Sight and Sound* (London: BFI) Spring, 1975.

number of reasons. Firstly, cinemas in Iran developed into two kinds; a small number of first class cinemas catering for the elite and middle classes, and a large number of second and third class cinemas which catered for the lower and uneducated classes. This division remained strong and had a direct impact on local feature film production. The sophisticated rejected Persian films because of their poor technical quality and risible subject matter. Consequently these films were driven into the second and third rate cinemas where profit was small but audiences were content as long as the film was Iranian and spoken in Persian. Thus a precedent was set where cinemagoers did not challenge the local industry to make better films, merely being content with feeble escapism. This was further compounded by the fact that the local industry was in the hands of short-term profiteers who were satisfied with a small gain rather than developing a true Persian film industry. However producers were beginning to learn that the prerequisites for box-office success lay in films which exhibited comedy and Persian singing and dancing e.g. of the 324 major feature films released between 1950-1965, 102 were comedies with singing and dancing (Issari, 1989). Indeed the first Persian feature *Abi va Rabi*, was a comedy based on the Danish series *Double Patte and Patchon*.

These commercial films were generally of low quality, bore the influence of Egyptian and Indian song and dance films and melodramatic American B-movies and were referred to as Film Farsi's[6]. This was a derogatory term used to denote films where "the heroine was raped or forced to take up a career dancing. The hero, the only man in

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[6] These films were also referred to as "meat stew films" or "meat stew cinema" due to the fact that the "camaraderie of the poor was often feasted with meat stews" ("Irans Cinema History" by Massoud Mehrabi in *Cinema '96*, July 1996). Other terms included "cinema lati" in recognition of a type of felt hat usually worn by the hero/main protagonist.

Tehran not to desire her, engages in several fights, usually committing a series of murders in order to avenge her honour" (Pearson, 1978: 11). It was the Film Farsi, with its simple plot, singing, dancing, sex and violence, which formed the bulk of pre-revolutionary cinema in Iran. For the revolutionaries of 1979 these films were symptomatic of the corruption and decadence of the Shah's rule and immoral Western influences. This resulted in a backlash against the cinema, which saw some 185 cinemas being burned down throughout the country[7]. Indeed, "in Tehran alone, with 118 theatres, only seven remained intact in 1978" (Akrami, 1987: 138).

However the desire to purge what Khomeini referred to as a "cinema of prostitution" and to replace it with a cinema that would be "put to the service of man and his education" has not lead to the disappearance of the Film Farsi. The ideological atmosphere may have changed but many of the commercial films produced in Iran under the present regime exhibit many of the formulae and traits specifically attributed to the Film Farsi. War and martyrdom as the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice (in the service of the state and Islam) have been a recurrent theme in these films and have replaced the singing and dancing: "The commercial aspects, with false attractions which were sex and violence previously, have now been replaced with violence. It is noticed in an over-abundance and at a disgusting level in the present films" (Talebinead, 1995: 10). As with the quality 'art

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[7] Indeed this uneasy and at times violent relationship between the clergy and cinema has existed since the its inception in Iran as a form of mass entertainment. The first public cinema in Iran, established by Ebrahim Khan Sahafbashi in 1905, was ordered closed by the Shah in an attempt to appease the protests of the clergy (Akrami in Downing, 1987: 133). This was done amidst the rising waves of protest emanating from the 1905 Constitutional Revolution (a popular uprising, which succeeded in 1907 in establishing an order where the monarch would reign rather than rule, although this order was constantly violated by the ruling Shahs until its abolition in 1979). What this event does show is the complex interconnectedness of politics, religion and culture, which would arise at important junctures in history i.e. Mossadeq in 1953, the Islamic revolution in 1979, and the fact that cinema has always played a key role.

cinema' the antecedents of film in Iran lie at the conflux of a deep-rooted culture and indigenous cinematic intertextuality operating within changing social and political contexts.

The Question of Entertainment

The question emerges as to the relevance of these "low class" entertainment films in the definition and promotion of a national cinema. Indeed such a format is similarly evident in other Third World countries, the *masala* films in India, the *chanchadas* in Brazil, which would seem to warrant closer examination than curt dismissal. However this is enormously difficult since there exists no accepted critical methodology with which to handle these films. Reactions have usually been of a negative kind but their importance should be evidenced in the fact that they are local productions conceived and made purely for consumption by local audiences who have generally shown themselves to be enthusiastically receptive. In general, critics and film-maker's rejection of the standards implicit in a local commercial cinema is only seen then as the beginning of an authentic film culture i.e. Gabriel's remembrance phase. In the case of Iranian popular cinema certain tentative points need to be made. In a country of high illiteracy and poor education, cinema emerged as the most important factor in the cultural life of the country e.g. in 1930 there were 33 cinemas in the country, by 1965 this had risen to 304. In a period of modernisation under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979), through the Point IV Program or the 1963 Revolution of Shah and People, where a lot of the traditional forms of entertainment and expression were lost, cinema became the format which attempted to articulate this old heritage in an assimilated "artistic" way, that was

unique to Iranians e.g. as seen with the *ta'zieh*, or stories adopted from folklore such as *Zendani Amir* (1948). The large number of films dealing with the theme of the simplicity of life and values in villages as against the complexity and deceitfulness of large cities, can be seen on one level as an attempt to articulate (however simplistically) the onslaught of rapid change. Indeed, such themes, albeit in a different cultural and ideological context, have become the hallmark of the 'quality' Iranian cinema with their focus on the rural and the simplicity of life. What needs to be pointed out at this stage is the fact that Iranian cinema is very much the product of changing social and political conditions and as such is rooted in, and primarily definable within, the indigenous historical progression of the medium.

These commercial films, such as *Toofane Zendegi* (1947), which criticised the pitfalls of arranged marriages, attempted in their own way to articulate the local and knowable concerns of its audience. Therefore, they cannot be simply dismissed as trite entertainment's because the relationship between them and the majority of spectators was incomparably more lively than with the corresponding foreign product and in one sense can be seen to involve a relationship of creative participation. As Salles Gomez states with relation to the ambiguity of the Brazilian critics position with regard to his country's film production, "The national film is a disturbing element in the artificially coherent world of cinematic ideas and sensations which the critic has created for himself...Angrily attacking or defending in order to encourage, directed by an awareness of patriotic duty, the critic always reveals the unease which fills him. All these attitudes, above all destructive sarcasm, are used to veil the deepest feeling, which his national cinema

provokes in a cultivated Brazilian: humiliation" (Hennebelle and Gumucio-Dargon, 1981: 129).

It may seem that during this period the local industry was in a poor state. This may perhaps be true in the artistic sense but indigenous production continued to grow annually from eight feature films in 1952 to an all-time high of ninety in 1972. The survival and growth of the local industry lay in the experience gained by producers during the post World War II era where they found that high-cost movies were not economically viable and emphasis was therefore placed on low budget productions, aimed at the second and third class cinemas where a return on investment could be more or less guaranteed. During the period 1948-1965 Persian films were of a poor technical quality and produced in a haphazard way based on a synopsis with minimum pre-production and little or no synchronous sound. This came about because of commercial necessity and the pragmatism of Iranians but was also due to a shortage of educated and experienced film-makers. This situation was to change with the arrival of the USIS/Syracuse documentary teams in 1950, which were to sow the seeds of artistic and infrastructural development that would bear fruit in the 1970's with the emergence of the Iranian New Wave.

The New Wave

Set against the "mindless" escapism of popular cinema a "realist" tradition emerged in Iran similar to the mode of criticism in many Third World cinemas. This is best evident in the emergence of the Iranian New Wave in the 1960s and 1970s. However its mid-wife was most certainly the documentary movement instigated by the USIS and the Syracuse

University 1950-1959.This project was undertaken at the behest of foreign embassies in Iran (especially Britain, the Soviet Union and the US) who wished to expand their information services and saw film as the most important medium for diffusing propaganda. This period, which saw the production of educational documentaries for government use, was to leave its mark technically, structurally and artistically on the local industry. By the time the Syracuse team left in 1959 Iran had the most up to date Audio-Visual Centre in the Middle East with well trained and technically proficient film-makers about to emerge. The newsreel production was also essential in providing studios, such as Iran Film or Badie, with a regular source of income which ensured that they would not go out of business.

Following the departure of the Syracuse team, indigenous productions began to be produced under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Art. These were of a much-improved technical standard and began to receive prestige and awards in the West e.g. *Dawn of Capricorn* won two awards at the Cannes Film Festival in 1964. Similarly films such as *Siavosh at Persepolis* (1964) and *Gav* (1969) (perhaps the most important Iranian film at the time) were well received at western festivals but did not receive a commercial release, or experienced censorship problems at home. In the light of current Iranian film production this situation seems all too familiar and relevant. Certain directors are forced to live in exile or are lauded in the West but have difficulties in having their films seen in Iran. This obviously leads to questions of authenticity, whether there is a symbiotic relationship between the film-maker and the West leading to the accusations of a

synthetic foreign construct or of pandering to western notions of auteurism and social realist aesthetics.

From a domestic point of view, films such as *Siavosh at Persepolis* were also important in an artistic sense. This film was influenced by folklore tradition (it is based on Ferdowsi's folkloric stories in the *Book of Kings*) and a *nouvelle vague* approach, (the director was educated in France at the time that the French New Wave was emerging) is perhaps one of the earliest examples of Brechtian cinema (indeed it had a huge influence on the style of Jean Marie Straub) whilst expertly juxtaposing, combining and problematising past and present. This showed a fresh approach (as well as the complex intertextuality in approaching Iranian cinema) to film making in which time and place are irrelevant phenomena and past, present and future are interwoven not chronologically but in a manner new and refreshing to the Iranian cinema. Indeed, this film influenced many Iranian film-makers to break away from the commercial conventions and produce films "worthy of the artistic reputation of Iranians" (Issari, 1989: 192). This artistic reputation was to flower in the 1970s when several groups of Iranian film-makers started producing films of high artistic quality in a movement known as *Cinemay Azad Iran* (The Iranian New Wave).

Case Study: Gav (The Cow, 1969)

The pinnacle of this new artistic flourishing and a defining moment in Iranian cinema was the release of Dariush Mehrjui's film *Gav* (The Cow) in 1969. This film serves as a template in which to examine the complex problems besetting the cinematic artform in

Iran, the socio-political elements which impinge on its development, and the resonances and influences which it bears on the current development of an 'artistic' post-revolutionary cinema. Financed by the Ministry of Culture and Arts, *Gav* told the story of the relationship between a farmer and his cow. Following the death of the cow the farmer, so distraught by his loss, begins to take on the characteristics of the cow. The film was based on a short story by the celebrated playwright and novelist Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi (who also provided the story for one of the other critically and artistically important new wave films at the time Nasser Taghavi's, *Tranquility in the Presence of Others* (1973)). This latter point is instructive when examining the development of these New Wave films. The incidence of adaptation is one of the distinct attributes of this intellectual cinema and given the fact that artists were provided with an institutional framework and felt the need to comment on the changes taking place in society it is perhaps inevitable that literature and cinema should meet. This contrasts sharply with the experience of the post-revolutionary "quality" films, most of which are from scripts written by the directors themselves, whilst others such as Kiarostami's, *Where Is the Friends House?* (1987) or *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) bear traces of and exhibit the structure of Iranian poetry (Samini, 1999/00: 99). Such a state of affairs can be attributed to the fact that after the revolution literature was in a worse state than cinema with intellectuals and writers becoming one of the main targets of the revolutionaries resulting in the exile of writers and the banning of books and the subsequent creation of an intellectual gap from which the industry never full recovered. However with the release of *Gav* the interaction of literature, cinema and government served to highlight the complexities of the relationship between artists and officials.

The government, knowing of Sa'edis story, approved the story thinking it would be a psychological exploration of one man's obsessive love for his cow. However the film turned out to be a savage social satire on poverty and how the loss of a cow affects the whole life of a village, painting a grim picture of Iran (which was in the midst of the Shahs modernisation programmes) as a country centuries behind any other civilisation. So infuriated was the government that it banned the film, only relenting two years later when, having been secretly smuggled out of the country, the film won an award at the 1970 Venice Film Festival, and under the condition that a disclaimer was added at the start of the film stating that these events took place prior to the rule of the Shah (Akrami, 1987). The story of *Gav* highlights the fundamental problems facing Iranian cinema: government interference, the nature and potential of cinema for indirect and ambiguous communication, and the importance of film festivals and foreign markets. These points are crucial and highlight a series of complex issues given the present success of Iranian films in festivals abroad[8] (this issue will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5). The final point in relation to *Gav* is the fact that it introduced the notion of "realism" into Iranian cinema, a concept by which it has increasingly been defined. Issari in identifying Dariush Mehrjui's *Gav* (1969) as seminal, groundbreaking and the most important film in the history of Iranian cinema states that, "for the first time since feature film production

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[8] A prime example would be the position of Abbas Kiarostami's film *The Taste of Cherry*, which was banned from Iranian screens before being allowed a limited domestic release after it had won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1997. Furthermore, the question of subjective interpretation and ambiguity of meaning within changed ideological, social and political circumstances can be seen in the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini voiced his approval of *Gav* (the only film it is believed to have ever seen) seeing it as an example of the potential for cinema to educate rather than corrupt, See *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar, (London: Kegan Paul Internation, 1985), p.258.

began in Iran in 1930, a Persian film was not packed with singing and dancing and trite comedies...The film was an honest exercise in realism" (Issari, 1989: 240).

Iranian Cinema and Theories of a Third Cinema

It is only when we refer to the organisational structures and implicit ideological assumptions of Third World film production that it will be possible to begin to evaluate the range of personal achievements to be found here. This is why the question of "realism" is of central importance. It sets Iranian film clearly within the paradigm of notions relating to the development of a third cinema. This approach advocates a 'cinema of discovery' [particularly pertinent given that the dominant theme in Iranian cinema is one of search], "showing how reality is and in no other way. This is the revolutionary function of social documentary, realist critical and popular cinema in Latin America. By testifying critically to this reality - this sub-reality, this misery - cinema refuses it. It rejects it. It denounces, criticises and deconstructs it because it shows matters as they irrefutably are and not as we would like them to be (or as, in good or bad faith, others would like to make us believe them to be)" (Chanan, 1983: 12).

This is the undertaking of the New Wave and perhaps current Iranian cinema, which can be seen as its offspring - filming reality critically of and for the people, the critical documenting of national consciousness. However in this embrace of "reality" it must be remembered that reality is never neutrally rendered, it is always constructed by the filmmaker. It is this contradiction of apparent objectivity/transparency, which is always rendered false by the nature of its construction. Filmmakers need to be aware of the

constructed nature of this 'objectivity' and much constantly seek to question by problematising the artifice of representation. This coupled with the realist mode of production, i.e. its relatively low cost and accessibility, helps to explain its popularity and emergence in Third World countries. The filmmaker has the possibility of conveying an authentic sense of life with its daily dramas and of reflecting the rhythms of time and a sense of space. Iranian cinema could be seen to exhibit such characteristics. However realism is a western construct and the filmmaker needs to question this form of western fiction and to define his specific relationship to it. It is for this reason that Iranian filmmakers are caught between the idea of 'Iran' and 'cinema'. The two terms are not mutually exclusive and to interrogate one is to interrogate the other. Nelson Pereira dos Santos states that "without neorealism we could have never have begun and I believe that no cinematically underdeveloped country would have been able to express itself without this precedent" (de Cordenas and Tessier, 1972: 62). This is a crucial point in that it suggests that neorealism is a transitional stage in an overall process of development. It is seen as a necessary period of focusing attention and of defining priorities. Due to the premature demise of the Iranian New Wave and the subsequent stifling of film production in the post-revolution period, it is perhaps not surprising to see the emergence of a "realist" strand in current films as Iranian cinema after the revolution had to begin once again from year zero, a state of becoming.

Iranian Cinema on the Eve of the Revolution
By the end of 1965 some 336 films were being produced in 73 local studios and shown in 264 cinemas across the country. However, this encouraging picture was characterised by

a number of paradoxes. Firstly, the documentary tradition had brought fame and recognition to Iranian cinema in the international arena. Furthermore, an artistic and intellectual creativity had begun to emerge as a by-product of the government's modernisation program, labeled the 1963 Revolution of Shah and People. This was significant because it marked the end of an intellectual moratorium that had begun with the fall of Mossadegh's nationalist government following the CIA-backed coup of 1953[9]. From this period onwards until the fall of the Shah in 1979, Iran, politically and culturally[10], came under the influence of America and all political and anti-government activities were crushed as the reinstated Shah sought to re-establish and consolidate his power. Furthermore the reforms of the White Revolution created a new social structure with class differences that resulted in increasing social tensions. Artists sought to reflect the new social situation. It was perhaps inevitable, or at least desirable, that artists came to fulfill a socially active role in order to fill the political vacuum that was left after the Mossadegh affair. Dariush Mehrjui, the director of *Gav*, has stated that "because of dictatorships, suppressions and lack of freedoms...people expected artistic works to express their feelings. Even if the artist did not want this the circumstances necessitated such a commitment" (Amiri, 1998). This shows the importance of the artist and his voice in a country like Iran where the pattern of political life has been one of, "when the central

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[9] During the period 1951 – 1953 the Iranian parliament, under the leadership of Dr. Mossadegh, passed a law nationalising Iranian oil, wresting it from British control. The British enraged by the threat to their oil concessions froze all of Iran' Sterling assets and took the case to the International Court of Justice who promptly ruled in Iran's favour. The ensuing debacle caused the Shah to flee the country and the British, backed by the American CIA, used the pretext of a communist takeover to instigate a coup, which toppled Mossadegh and placed the Shah back in power.

[10] A prime example of this can be seen in the development of the first television station in Iran. Established by Harvard graduate Iraj Sabet, (whose family were agents for RCA and Pepsi-Cola in Iran) with the assistance and planning of American firms, the station was privately run and commercially driven. "RCA technicians trained the stations staff and US advertising agencies imported its programmes, the bulk of which consisted of MGM films and NBC TV series" (Naficy in *Life and Art the New Iranian Cinema*, BFI 1999: 16).

authority is at its weakest, a dynamic political public sphere emerges...When central authority is strong, an atmosphere of repression exists, with central control over activity and expression" (Mohammadi, Serbreney-Mohammadi 1994: 54). As a result of the modernisation programme artists sought to (and in a sense were able to) reconcile these two conflicting notions and were now provided with an infrastructure, ironically under the auspices of the government, in which to do so.

Of central importance here was the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Arts and the National Iranian Radio and Television. These institutions provided progressive and helpful services, such as establishing the College of Dramatic Arts in 1967, as well as providing work and training through the television medium for those involved in the cinema industry. It was under the auspices of a governmental framework that a socially, politically and artistically committed "serious art" cinema, which was to become known as the Iranian New Wave, began to emerge. This cinema, through the work of directors such as Dariush Mehrjui, Amir Naderi, Sohrab Shahid-Saless, Parviz Kimiavi, Abbas Kiarostami, Bahman Farmanara, Nasser Taghvaee, Bahram Bayzai, created a body of between forty and fifty films, in the period 1969-1974, that elevated cinema to a socially engaged cultural category and won international recognition and awards abroad. It also had an immense influence on other filmmakers at home and laid the foundations for the "quality" post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. This situation also exhibits another constant in Iranian cinema, the volatile and uneasy relationship of mutual need and antipathy that exists between government and filmmaker. The government's support was part of the Shahs dual policy of "leading private sector cinema towards vulgarity by keeping the

doors open to commercial films from abroad and to control serious filmmakers and their films by investing in their kind of cinema. In this way the regime boasted about its support to serious cinema by encouraging abstract films" (Golmakani, 2000: 17). This fitted well with the image of a progressive, modern and culturally diverse Iran which the Shah wished to project in deference to his autocratic rule. Indeed these films had little resonance in Iran itself despite winning awards and critical acclaim abroad (they were often held up between the censor's scissors) and can therefore be also seen as an exercise by the regime in repressive tolerance. Similarly, the present regime has also sought to present and promote its version of 'Iranian reality' through the cultivation and export of a 'quality' cinematic culture abroad. This point is of critical importance when we take into consideration the fact that at present there are approximately 300 film directors currently working in Iran. Added to this is the fact that another twenty directors make their debut annually in an industry that produces between fifty and sixty films a year and it is clear that the handful of films seen in the West by directors such as Kiarostami, Panahi, Jalili, form only a small unrepresentative picture of overall film output in Iran.

Infrastructurally and artistically at this point the medium seemed to be in its strongest position. So why then the gloomy predictions such as "Iranian Cinema's Death Throes" by Kayhan newspaper in 1978 and the fall off in productions? A number of reasons can be postulated for this state of affairs such as competition from television, inflated costs of production and high government taxes. More specifically the problems were related to the fact that Persian films had not been able to infiltrate foreign markets, government leadership and support was ill-defined, censorship laws that were unpredictable at best,

and the industry was in the hands of producers with little or no knowledge of the business of cinema. However, these problems for the most part have beset Iranian cinema from the outset and can only partly explain how an economy supposedly experiencing the benefits of an oil boom declared its main artistic medium, after so many years of struggle, to be in dire straits. In the commercial sector box office receipts began to dwindle as audiences became bored with local productions which compared miserably with foreign films, the importation of which had risen to 500 by 1974. Things were little better in the "artistic" sector as the government, increasingly aware of the growing discontent in society at large and increasingly sensitive to criticism from cinema, began a gradual withdrawal of financial support for these films. The figures for overall films produced during this period show a steep decline from an all-time high, (as yet still unsurpassed) of 91 films in 1971 to just 19 in 1978, the last rites being administered the following year with the coming of the Islamic revolution.

Conclusion

Taking its cue from the 1970's and after a long winter of discontent, the 'quality' Iranian films of the post-revolutionary era are taking their first steps towards maturation based on artistic originality and social awareness and comment. However maturation implies development and change which is essential if these films are not to become enveloped in mawkish humanism and sentimentality. A true and original voice has to be developed. This should ultimately be towards the development of a truly revolutionary cinema and crucial here is the issue of context. As already stated the elevation of certain films and film-makers through formal/aesthetic analysis is somewhat problematic in a Third

Cinema context where films seek to address and locate themselves within socially, historically, politically and culturally specific contexts. This is not to say that formal experimentation is absent or unimportant but merely to highlight the fact that it is but one contributory, rather than all consuming, element of a mode of cinematic practice that views itself, not as a self contained entity evaluated solely on the basis of narrative content and formal technique, but as a mode of cultural practice that seeks to define itself by its continual interrogation of the modes of production, distribution and ultimately the human responses it engenders as it interacts with its intended audience. Thus film becomes an activator for social and political change rather than a passive reflector of social and political problems. In other words a film cannot by definition be deemed "revolutionary" except in relation to the particular socio-historical context for which it was intended. This is not an elitist call to arms. It is merely the first part of a process which seeks to understand the particularities and nuances of Iranian society, politically and culturally, but also the diversified nature of its cinematic history which ranges from the commercial Film Farsis to public relations documentaries funded by the Shah to award winning films such as *Gav*. Iranian cinema since its inception has been derived from and operated within the conflux of Persian, Western and Islamic influences, each exhibiting stronger periods of influence or dominance depending on the ideological context of the time. In this sense it could be said (within the terms of the pre-revolutionary debate) to operate in the mixed site of the Third Cinema. Whether it be a monarchical dictatorship or Islamic theocracy, culture, art and communications, in the absence of autonomous political activity, will always be used by those in power to propagate their version of his-story or "reality", enforce nationalist or religious feelings

and legitimate the right to rule. This is the space against which Third Cinema seeks to intervene and operate.

CHAPTER 2
The Iranian Revolution and the Emergence of a New Society

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, to deal with the 1979 revolution and it's

immediate aftermath by placing these political events, and indeed defining them, within a

cultural frame of reference. This entails placing them within the uniquely Iranian

religious/political rubric of Twelver Shi'ite Islam, but also examining how the unfolding

events not only took on the language, but also the form, of religious cultural ceremony.

Secondly, it sets out to explain the complete cultural and ideological transformation of

the country that assumed paramount importance, as both a consolidator and legitimator of

those in power[1], following the instigation and consolidation of political power and the

emergence of the Islamic Republic. The ideological/cultural transformation was grounded

on the twin pillars of the Qu'ran and the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

which combined to operate in a symbiotic relationship. These wholesale and monumental

changes form the framework on which to base the interrogation of the reconstituted

cinema that emerged after the revolution.

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[1] The Islamic Republic has attempted to define all aspects of life in Iran, politically, socially, culturally, economically, according to the dictates of Islam. In doing so those in power have sought to deny, ignore or ban, references to Iran's Persian and pre-Islamic cultural heritage. This is almost a perverse mirror reflection of the deposed Shah's modernisation programs of 'reform', which along with his right to rule, were legitimised in the language of a Persian culture containing no traces of Islam. Thus Iranians have suffered from a type of cultural imbalance or schizophrenia with certain aspects of their culture being denied them or suppressed due to the political needs of those in power. In other words, whoever controls culture in Iran controls power and whoever controls power dictates culture, or a particular version of it. However, it is within this desire to monopolise cultural production and its interpretation that leads to its politicisation and, paradoxically, holds within it the means of resistance and counter readings. Such an interpretation is very much derived from the work of the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci and his emphasis on culture and ideology as sites of resistance and domination by which society constructs and circulates meanings and values. See, *Marxism and Social Science*, (eds.) Andrew Gamble, David Marsh & Tony Tant, (London: Macmillan, 1999).

The Iranian Revolution as Cultural Praxis[2]

"There is no such thing as public opinion in Iran, there is only public emotion. But public emotions, since Mossadegh has been certified as an agency of social change".
(Daniel Lerner, 1964: 377).

The Iranian revolution was one of the most remarkable events of the 20th century. Whilst the root causes may have lain, for the most part, in political grievances, it is perhaps more accurately defined as a media influenced cultural revolution shaped and voiced by the language and ritual of Shia Islam. Indeed, the uniqueness of the Iranian revolution lies primarily in the role-played by religion in orchestrating the disparate voices of discontent (Fred Halliday, 1988). The causes of this discontent arose as a result of the rapid and uneven development experienced by the majority of the population under the Shah's modernisation program, the political weakness and lack of legitimacy of the monarchy, cultural dislocation and the frustration experienced from the lack of political representation. These grievances succeeded in bringing together a broad coalition of groups, Marxists, the middle-class, intellectuals, and the poor, under Ayatollah Khomeini's "skilful fusion of Qu'ranic and modern themes with the Shi'ite hope of a just society to be created by the returning Imam" (Halliday 1988: 50). However this is not to suggest that Shi'ism spoke in a uniform and universal voice. The development of the Islamic Republic, and indeed the revolution itself, can be seen to rest on the competing ideology of an intelligentsia employed as expediency dictated in the service of consolidating and legitimating the political action of the clergy. These competing voices

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[2] This definition and approach seeks to align culture and historical practice, in the Gramscian sense, where the former is the means of attaining a higher awareness through which "one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations", Antonio Gramsci, *Political Writings 1910-1920* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), pp.10-11. This is a particularly instructive means by which to analysis the Iranian Revolution as it derived its historical value, and sought

as emanating from, and being broadly attributable to, the differing positions and interpretations of Islam voiced by Ayatollah Motahhari, Dr. Ali Shariati, Sayyed Mujtaba Mir-lowhi (better known as Navab-Safavi) and Mehdi Bazargan (Rahnema & Nomani, 1990). These could be said to have emerged from a tradition of Iranian intellectualism whose main preoccupations have been autocracy, despotism, Western influence, and tradition versus modernity. This tradition has sought to play an active social role in "influencing their society and reacting to it, sometimes leading it, sometimes being lead by it but always engaged in a passionate and constructive dialogue and interaction with it" (Rahnema, 1999). It is these conflicting voices and their employment that formed the cultural language of revolution and the ideological bedrock for the development of the Islamic Republic.

Furthermore, it needs to be recognised that the revolution and the ensuing revolutionary society differ greatly from one another in outlook, interpretation and development. This arises from the fact that "the formal ideology of the state and of the revolution reflects a particular interpretation of Shia Islam, and the form of the revolutionary government, known as the *velayat-e faqih* ("guardianship of the jurisconsult"), is Khomeini's interpretation of Shia political theory" (Rajaee 1990: 64). Indeed, a distinction needs to be drawn between the revolutionary discourse of Shia Islam, as articulated in the struggle against the Pahlavi state, and Shia dogmatism, which became the official monolithic ideological discourse of the Islamic Republic once the clergy had assumed full control of the reigns of power (Moaddel, 1993). An examination of the different units of analysis

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to articulate the frustrations of the people, by recourse to deeply felt indigenous cultural forms i.e. Sia Islam.

offered by Motahhari, Shariati, Navab-Safavi and Bazargan, and their subsequent

employment by Khomeini, will show the complexity of the revolutionary discourse and

the way it succeeded in balancing all styles of Shiism and their various interpretations,

from the popular religion of the poor to the scholars of the religious colleges, the mystical

counterculture of Sufism and the ethical and liberal religion of the upper and educated

classes and embracing all members of society.

New Paradigms of Ideological Discourse

Motahhari and Shariati could be said to have influenced the language of the revolution

itself, with Navab-Safavi and Bazargan having more of a bearing on its immediate post-

societal development. Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari attempted to present a humane and

liberal interpretation of Islam. He grounded his system of analysis in the role of the

individual in a bid to "reform the traditional structure of Islam and improve the

organisational structure and quality of the clergy, in order to protect it from ...anticlerical

revolutionary currents" (Rahnema and Nomani 1990: 39). The individual is the main

factor for social change as each person undergoes a psychological transformation that

leads him to God on the path of righteousness provided by Islam. Consensus is built by

referring to the notion that this transformation, derived from the Qu'ran, is all-inclusive

and that the pious and believers can occur from all classes; "And whoso taketh Allah and

His messenger and those who believe for friend (will know that), lo! the party of Allah,

they are the victorious"[3]. This was very much the language and the ideological

requirements needed at the beginning of the revolution in the need to appeal to as wide an

audience as possible. What Motahhari's belief system also sought to do was to reduce the

influence of Marxist based class analysis, particularly amongst the young, by offering an inclusive alternative through Islam that "will benefit the disinherited, but will not entirely depend upon them; nor will the disinherited become the movements' sole beneficiary" (Rahnema and Nomani 1990: 42). Within the Shia belief system such thinking is very close to that of Imam Ali.

Within the paradigmatic passion play that was the Iranian revolution the initial language and form was based on Ali as syntagam. Motahhari, (1982: 145), drew comparison between the Iranian peoples struggle and Ali's struggle to become the Fourth Caliph (reigning from 656 to 661); "The revolution of the Moslem people in those days was very similar to today's revolution in Iran, since both were popular revolutions comprising all the people. In other words not only the poor people, but also the rich people had revolted". However the cultural relevance resonates further than the mere need to unite disparate groupings. For Shi'ites Ali is a paragon of virtue, a figure of righteousness engaged in a moral battle with the corrupting forces of elitism, wealth, power and corruption. To Iranians, he "fulfilled within Islam, the tradition of charismatic kingship...a perfect model of the noble virtue of justice which they believe has always been a central part of their cultural tradition" (Mackey 1998: 54). For many, Ayatollah Khomeini was seen to embody the virtues of Ali and as the modern day incarnate of the Twelfth Imam[4], come to deliver the country from tyranny. Furthermore his revolutionary rhetoric was heavily indebted to and made constant reference to Ali.

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[3] Sûrah V No. 56, *The Koran*, translated by M.M. Pickthall (Reading: Star Books, 1989), p.102.
[4] The Shi'ites believe that the true lineage of successors to the Prophet consisted of Twelve Imams, beginning with Ali and ending with the last of the direct male descendants Mahdi (Messiah). However, Mahdi is believed to have gone into hiding a century after the martyrdom of Hossein at Karbala to appear

This was a situation that was to become even more heightened during the course of the revolution as the point of reference shifted from Ali to Hossein and the themes of martyrdom and sacrifice.

The Revolutionary Use of Shia Symbolism

The bridge linking the progression from the thought of Motahhari[5], and the egalitarian interpretation of the role of Ali that was non-class specific, to a more militant revolutionary form of rhetoric emphasising the role of the oppressed, lay in the formal progression of the revolution as envisioned by the exalted figure of Khomeini. Perhaps the turning point of the revolution came during the Ashura marches on the 10th and 11th of December 1978[6], which signified ratification of Khomeini as the leader of the revolution and emphasised the Islamic nature of the movement. This change had been taking place throughout the year in what might be termed the second phase of the revolution. Five distinct phases can be discerned in the progression of the revolution; non-violent mobilisation, usually small demonstrations organised by the intelligentsia (June-Dec. 1977), extension of the social base as cyclical urban riots took hold, mass demonstrations (Aug.-Sept. 1978), mass strikes (Oct.-Nov. 1978), and finally, dual sovereignty (Dec.-Feb. 1979) (Ashraf &Banuazizi 1985). What is significant in this

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some time in the future to prepare for the Judgement Day when the world is rife with decadence and corruption.

[5] Khomeini saw Motahhari as the most important theoretician of the Islamic ideology to be followed by the leaders and the revolutionary movement and as a bulwark against alternative 'unIslamic' currents. This importance was reflected in his appointment, by Khomeini, as one of the key members of the Revolutionary Council. "The Council was responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of the anti-Shah activities of the Islamic opposition forces during the revolution and was given the responsibility of acting as the nation's legislative body after the revolution, until the time when a new constitution was adopted and a parliament convened" (Rahnema and Nomani, 1990: 39).

[6] A figure of between one and three million people are estimated to have taken part in these marches where a seventeen point article was read and ratified declaring Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of the revolution and emphasizing Islam as its dominant ideology.

delineation is the fact that the role of the clergy and the position of Islam were relatively

low key up until the organisation of mass demonstrations and strikes. However, it was

through their increased intervention that the revolution began to take on a more visible

Islamic character as protest was organised by the clergy through the use of religious

ceremonies, such as Moharram or Ramadan, and mourning rituals that became cyclical in

nature usually centring on the fortieth day of mourning those 'martyred' in the course of

the protests. One of the most famous and tragic examples of such an incident involved the

cinema.

On the 19th of August 1978, two weeks into Ramadan and twenty-five years to the day

since the restoration of the Pahlavi monarchy to the throne following the 1953 coup,

arsonists attacked the Rex cinema in Abadan killing between 300 and 400 people. The

authorities blamed "Muslim reactionaries opposed to state-ordered religious reforms and

in attendance at movies during the current holy month of Ramadan"[7]. The revolutionaries

for their part blamed the Shah's secret police force SAVAK for perpetrating the act in a

bid to discredit the revolutionary movement. To date no one has been found responsible

for the atrocity but it must be noted that traditionally and historically cinema has been the

victim of the wrath of religious zeal in Iran. Seen as a force of Western corruption, many

cinemas were burned during the course of the revolution "as a reaction to modernisation"

(Fischer 1980: 197). Indeed, the "setting of movie theatres on fire across the country took

its toll on the cinema industry, and within a month after the burning of Cinema Rex in

Abadan all film presentation and production activities in Iran came to a halt" (Issari,

1989: 246). The events at Abadan were to prove a turning point in increasing the support

and pace of the revolution but also resulted in the massive infrastructural destruction of the Iranian cinema industry, a situation from which it has still not fully recovered.

The Karbala Paradigm

The symbolism of Karbala, or the 'Karbala paradigm'[8], signified a shift in the character and language of the revolution. Passive demonstration was superseded by active protest, through the thematics of self-sacrifice, martyrdom and death, in fighting for the ideals of Hossein, who had become the symbol of protest. Khomeini was seen as the upholder of the ideals of Hossein, while the Shah was depicted as the evil Yazid (the Sunni 'usurper' caliph following Hosseins death). Indeed Khomeini had argued that Imam Hossein had died at Karbala trying to liberate "the oppressed from the clutches of the satanic despots" (Abrahamian 1993: 48). The demonstrations became more vociferous in their demands and confident in their actions with lines of men dressed in white (the colour of martyrdom) leading the crowds against the army's guns, and many protestors waving black flags (the colour of mourning used during Moharram). Within the changed ideological and structural framework the language of protest also began to take on a more militantly revolutionary tone. Khomeini was still using the reference of Imam Ali but in more divisive terms, now seeing society as formed of two antagonistic classes, the oppressed (*mostazafin*) and the oppressors (*mostakberin*) with the clergy leading the oppressed to liberation (Khomeini, 1978: 42-43). The parallels with the thoughts of Imam Ali are easy to see, as evidenced in his declaration to the leader of Egypt, "look after the

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[7] Parviz Raein, "Arsonists Hit Iran Theatre", *The Michigan State News*, 21st August, 1978.
[8] Based on the ritualistic mourning of Hossein's death at the battle of Karbala, Michael Fischer sees it as an endemic feature, exerting a strong influence, unique to the Iranian psyche. According to him, "the Karbala paradigm has been honed over the years into a device for heightening political consciousness of the moral

deprived (*mahrum*) and dispossessed (*mostazaf*) who need food and shelter. They deserve your help" (Durraj, 1990: 50). However, this change in emphasis reflected deeper concerns than a mere response to the quickening pulse of revolution. The clergy were now assuming the position and voice of leadership and in doing so were seeking to secure their position through rallying the support of the downtrodden masses, the foot soldiers of the future Islamic state. Despite the diverse groupings operating together within the revolutionary movement the clergy were able to assume their elevated position through the cultural unifier of Islam, and the various discordant interpretations that it was able to hold, as well as the blind eye to which many groups turned as to the real intentions of the clerics. For most groups the purpose of the revolution was the removal of a despot, for the clergy it was the first stage in the establishment of an Islamic state in which they would rule. The language of class division served also as an appeal to certain intellectuals, students and left leaning groups, and in this instance Khomeini could be said to be echoing the influential language of Ali Shariati.

Islam and Class Struggle

Dr Ali Shariati was a Sorbonne educated intellectual[9] whose writings exhibited a third worldist genealogy influenced by Marx and Fanon, which espoused a socially active anti-imperialist, anti-western and anti-capitalist stance, which manifested itself through the cultural language and symbols of Shia Islam. Shariati differs from Motahhari in his belief that man's fate is determined by his own action rather than the will of God, emphasising

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failings of the government" (Fischer, Michael, M.J., *Iran from Religious Dispute to Revolution*, Harvard University Press, 1980).

the material rather than the spiritual, and that society is based on class struggle (the oppressors versus the oppressed) rather than social harmony among the faithful. This belief promoted an activist view of society that identified with and sought to place the figure of Hossein as the epitome of revolutionary struggle. The aim was to create an Islamic utopia through social revolution leading to a classless community of Muslims ruled by enlightened intellectual thinkers (Ashraf & Banuanzizi, 1985). By emphasising the 'Karbala paradigm' and its notions of martyrdom and sacrifice, Shariati was appealing to, and attempting to revitalise, through its application in a modern theoretical framework, elements deeply ingrained in the Iranian psyche.

Whereas the Shiism of Ali was seen as political protest demanding equality, compassion and justice, that of Hossein was characterised by political action, martyrdom and sacrifice. "The factor that distinguished Hossein and Zeinab (Hossein's daughter) from others in the Shi'i world was not their piety but their active participation in the revolutionary struggle" (Rahnema and Nomani, 1990: 71). It was this taking of key theological and traditional terms, and giving them, modern, ethical and socially progressive interpretations that appealed to the young, the left, and made Islam more palatable to the intelligentsia and middle classes. The militant and activist nature of the discourse was in keeping with the heightened militancy that orchestrated the religious processions, holy days and days of mourning and quickly saw them transformed into demonstrations and occasions for political protest, particularly in the final stages of the revolution. Indeed Shariati had popularised a saying, which Khomeini was to use with

much frequency, that was to become a staple revolutionary slogan, "Every month of the year is Moharram, every day of the month Ashura and every piece of land Karbala" (Rahnema, 1998: 315).

The recognition of and reference to Shia culture are clear and the revolutionary call to sacrifice and action reflect the words of Hossein himself, "O people the Apostle of God said during his life, He who sees an oppressive ruler violating the sanctions of God, reviling the covenant of God.......[If a man sees such a ruler] and does not show zeal against him in word or deed, God would surely cause him to enter his abode in fire" (Durraj, 1990: 66). The increased militancy based on Shia culture undoubtedly served to increase the momentum of the revolution, but what of the other component of Shariati's theory, the class struggle, which acted as a divisive element. Again the unifying element came in the form of Khomeini and once more the adaptability of the Islamic leaders to circumstances and expediency was very much in evidence.

Khomeini and the Issue of Class Division

Khomeini's shift from the position of social unity and harmony espoused by Motahhari and declarations such as "All together" and "Advance together with a single voice and purpose"(Algar, 1985: 244), to a partisan position championing the cause of the dispossessed and oppressed; "All heavenly ordinances which have descended have the deliverance of the oppressed as their objective. The *mostazafin* of the world should unite, and expel the oppressors from the stage, since the world belongs to God and the *mostazafin* are his inheritors" (Kohmeini, 1982: 102), was the result of a number of

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Islamic Utopia: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati, I.B. Tauris, 1998.

factors dictated by events and his belief that the revolution served as the precursor to the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by the clergy. Such a shift was predicated on movements by the clergy to seize power as well as Khomeini's realisation that the adoption of Motahhari's belief system and the "appeal to all social classes could not be sustained, since implementation of Islam according to himself was alienating the middle-class professions, civil servants, the bourgeoisie and segments of the students" (Rahnema and Nomani, 1990: 60). Therefore in order to build and solidify a power base that would act as a base and legitimator of power he adopted the language of Shariati to express his moral and spiritual support for the dispossessed who were to become the future foot-soldiers of his proposed Islamic state.

However, Sahriati's revolutionary/radical discourse was in direct contrast to Khomeini's view of "an Islamic state ruled by the *ulama* (the clergy) as vice-regents of the Hidden Imam" (Ashraf & Banuazizi, 1985: 30) under the auspices of the *velayat-e faqih*[10]. The explanation for this lies in the fact that the term *mostazafin* was extracted from the internal logic and meaning under which it operated in Shariati's subsystem and used by Khomeini as a form of rhetoric when political expediency dictated[11]. One of the best examples of the co-option, pragmatism and ability of Khomeini to integrate contradictory

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[10] This refers to a form of Islamic government based on the jurist's guardianship operated by the clergy as laid out by Khomeini in a series of lectures in early 1970 called *Velayat-e Faqih: Hokumat-e Islami*. In this lectures he refers to the power of the ruling clergy being absolute with their main aim being the implementation of God's commandments and to act as moral guardians of the people. According to Asghar Shirazi (1998) the pervading spirit is one of absolute hierocracy with the ruling jurists exercising "the function of a legal guardian, a protector and a liberator. The people are not acting subjects of the state but the states objects".

[11] Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, (London: I.B. Taurus, 1993), pp.47-54) has noted how the term had changed from 1982 onwards, as the need to secure a broader base of support became a priority. No longer was it viewed as an economic category but instead became a political category denoting the regimes supporters including wealthy bazaar merchants, intellectuals and the middle class.

elements from different subsystems can be clearly seen in his declaration on the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Here we see a clear contradictory reference to both social solidarity and social division; "The rain of Compassion of the Qu'ran and the Traditions falls upon everyone evenly", "All are brothers and equal", whilst later on in the speech he states that, "The slum dwellers around cities…they are the group for human rights, not you and I. Come and do something for them. The people and the government should do something for them"[12]. Whilst the use of competing subsystems operating within the language and ideology of Islam were attempts to maintain cultural power, one of the main themes and formal operations of the revolution revolved around the conflict between the issues of 'tradition' and 'modernity' – historically and even today one of the main preoccupations of intellectual cultural and political discourse in Iran.

The Traditional and the Modern

If the Iranian revolution can be seen as a popular collective uprising against the evils of dictatorship it was also a reaction against what was seen as the by-product of the Shah's modernisation programmes, cultural dependency on the West. In a country that has never been directly colonised but has experienced some of its effects indirectly, through the political machinations and meddling of foreign powers such as Britain, the Soviet Union and the US, the question of the harmful influence of western cultural forms on indigenous ones has been a main preoccupation of intellectual and religious thought. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, one of the most influential figures of twentieth century Persian literature, spoke at length about the dangers of cultural alienation and the duality of Iranian identity; "Today we stand under the [Western] banner, a people alienated from ourselves…we try

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[12] *Kayhan*, 3rd April 1979.

to find solutions to every problem like pseudo-Westerners" (Sprachman, 1982: 33). Ali Shariati labelled the problem "Westoxification" and Ayatollah Khomeini (1984: 21) referred to the corrupting power of the media in foreign hands in a speech, Feb. 1979, "We are not against radio, we are against corruption. We are not against television, we are against that which is in the service of foreigners and is used to keep our youth backward and destroy our manpower. We are against that". Such a national feeling that resulted in the radical rejection "by a people not only of foreigners but of everything that had constituted for years, for centuries its political destiny" (Foucault, 1988), and enacted in the language of a religious tradition that took a 7th century model as its ideal society, would seem to suggest that the division between 'tradition' and 'modernity' as an organising thematic was clear-cut. However the reality of the situation was to prove to be more ambiguous. This ambiguity arose not only from the complexity of the message being transmitted but also the medium being used to transmit it.

The Role of the Media

The Iranian revolution can be seen as a 'reactionary revolution' due to its rejection of historical progress and material improvement; echoed in Khomeini's oft repeated phrase, "We did not make this revolution for cheaper water melons". The rejection of materialism lay in the elevation of the struggle against an evil despot into a spiritual battle that gained its legitimacy from the Qu'ran and the words of the Prophet with a view to implementing a utopian model of society laid down in the 7th century. However the composition of the various groups involved in the revolution, and the language used, exhibited a complexity, diversity and ambiguity that was built on the combining of

'tradition' and 'modernity', which Halliday (1988: 35) notes exhibited "both institutional and ideological" elements in what might be termed the first 'modern' revolution. The success of this combinational strategy lay in the pragmatism and adaptability of the clerical leadership in presenting religious 'tradition', not as an essentialist search for a lost pure essence, but as a dynamic, universalistic force engaged in a form of "ideological retraditionalisation" (Geertz, 1973). This manifests itself in a self-conscious, politicised defence of 'tradition' against forces that are attempting to weaken or displace it. In the Iranian context we have the reconstituted and politicised identity of Islam, deeply embedded in the psyche of the people, a part of their cultural heritage that had been denied them under the Pahlavi's[13], that came to be manipulated by the clergy for its own interests in an engagement with, rather than an estrangement from, the modern. Indeed, the ideology of the Iranian revolution when viewed in detail "emerges as less as a monolithic clash between "modernity" and "tradition" than as an attempt to actualise a modernity accommodated to national, cultural and historical experiences" (Mirsepassi, 2000: 13). The Shah's drive to create a modern state exhibited the tendency of many Third World states in that economic modernisation assumed a higher priority than democratisation or the creation of a public sphere of political representation. Such a situation had created a vacuum where secular opposition was weekly rooted and ineffectual. The only valid and workable opposition came in the form of an orchestrated politicised Islam that articulated a cultural opposition through the skilful use of localised

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[13] The Pahlavi dynasty, 1921-1979, of Mohammad Reza Shah and his father Reza Shah, had constantly sought throughout their rule to limit, suppress and ignore the Islamic component of Iranian culture in their bid to construct a centralized secular state. This was undertaken both institutionally, such as the 1936 law banning the wearing of the *chador*, to limit the influence of the clergy, and ideologically, such as the emphasis on Persian cultural elements, which served as legitimators of their power and right to rule. Indeed examples of the latter can be seen in the name Pahlavi, which was the language spoken in Iran in pre-

media operating in the private sphere. If the voice of revolution was retraditionalised Islam operating from within modernity, and indeed Khomeini has said that the Iranian revolution had ushered in a society surpassing the utopia created by the Prophet in the 7th century[14], then the mode of expression was through the uneasy and contradictory relationship between the clergy and the media.

The most persuasive weapons of the Iranian revolution were not guns and bullets but cassettes, fax machines, photocopiers and graffiti on walls, through which the politicisation of culture occurred. The media in Iran were seen as symptomatic of the Shah's modernisation program, emanating from and reflecting Western cultural influence and dependency. However despite these intellectual problematics, and the historical opposition of the clergy to the evil and corrupting influence of the media, they succeeded in using what Mohammadi and Sreberny-Mohammadi (1994) called "small media" in infiltrating the 'private spheres' (homes, the network of mosques etc.) which in turn succeeded in creating a 'public sphere' of political protest and action. It was the infrastructural network of the mosques and the traditional Friday sermons, supplanted and enhanced by the use of modern media, that allowed the clergy to get their message across and position themselves as leaders of the revolution. Moreover, the contradictory relationship, and the use of the media by the clergy during the revolution was to serve as the blueprint for the future development of all media, including film, under the Islamic Republic. The Shah had built an extensive broadcasting infrastructure for his own promogation and the clergy were not slow to realise its power and harness its energy for

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Islamic times, and the lavish 1971 celebrations by the Shah in the ancient ruins of Persepolis to signify 2,500 years of unbroken rule.

the glory of Islam. It is within such light that we must view Khomeini's declaration of the 'corrupting force of the media'. The medium is only 'corrupting' depending on who controls it and it was the media who were one of the prime targets and one of the main means of instigating the future regimes policy of Islamicisation touching on all aspects of life in the country. This was perhaps the logical outcome of a revolution that had been co-opted by the interests of one group and elevated to a moral and spiritual battle against an infidel in the universal interests of Islam over the national interests of Iran. It was only when the clergy had consolidated their position of power that they could set about installing their Islamicised version of Benedict Anderson's (1983) "imagined community".

The Hopes of a New Order

On the 16th January Mohammed Reza Shah was finally forced from the throne and fled the country. February 1st saw the messianic return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran accompanied by mass scenes of unbridled joy and celebration. However, this was not to be the culmination of some two years of protest and struggle but merely the beginning of a more violent period, stretching from mid-1979 to mid-1981, as the struggle for power pitted group against group in the right to define the culture and direction of the Iranian state. This period was characterised by the conflict of different ideological subsystems competing to define the future orientation of the state, as evidenced by the marked progression from the liberal democratic stance of the provisional government, to the institutionalisation of absolute clerical rule as laid down by the new constitution, to the

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[14] Khomeini made these remarks in a speech printed in the *Iran Times*, 4 Dec. 1982.

militant rhetoric and repressive measures used to eliminate all those deemed opponents of the new theocracy.

The immediate aftermath of the revolution was characterised by a need to unite all the disparate elements of protest. Under such circumstances Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan, a religious minded liberal and leader of the Iran Freedom Movement[15], as the man to lead Iran through this difficult transition stage and the one to transform the broad-based popular support into institutionalised legal state power. Indeed, Rahnema and Nomani (1990: 98) have stated that the "premiership of Bazargan was, in reality, Khomeini's affirmation that the Iranian revolution would only approve an honest broker who was acceptable to not all, but to the majority of the Iranians". Bazargan had tried to combine liberal democracy and Islam in the formation of a democratic Islamic state and it was his Provisional Government that was entrusted with drawing up the constitution of the future state. In his first official public address as prime minister Bazargan emphasised the notions of tolerance, democracy and unity by laying out the following standards of governance; Iran's government does not belong to any particular class; in an Islamic government the existence of freedom is not only a right but an obligation; until

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[15] The Iran Freedom Party established on May 15 1961 was a direct descendent of Mohammad Mossadeq's National Front. The latter was a broad coalition of political parties formed in 1949 with the express purpose of forcing the Shah to hold free democratic elections and restore press freedom in the country. Following the oil nationalisation crisis (Bazargan was the first president of the then newly nationalised Iranian Oil Company) and the ensuing coup, which led to the downfall of the Mossadeq government and the reinstatement of the Shah to power, the National Front was outlawed. However in 1954 it emerged under a new name, the National Resistance Movement, and continued to pursue the goals of Mossadeq's nationalist movement. In 1956 the movement was once again outlawed and its leaders arrested on the grounds that they were undermining the 'Constitutional Monarchy'. This pattern was to continue with the formation of the Iran Freedom Party (IFM), which was subsequently banned two years after coming into existence. Despite this it had managed to bring together a broad coalition of disparate forces all struggling against the Shah's autocracy. The IFM was not to make a true comeback on the political scene until 1978 but its existence shows that despite the lack of willingness of those in power to allow representative political protest and opposition the will existed strongly amongst the people.

the new constitution is drawn up the government would respect the old constitution, minus the monarchy (Bazargan 1984).

The Bazargan government had tried to accommodate all sections of society by trying to formulate a "lay dominated religion that would be acceptable both to the anti-Shah clergy, especially to the junior clergy, and to the modern, educated middle class" (Abrahamian, 1980: 9) in an attempt to show that Islam was compatible and relevant to the contemporary world[16]. However the Provisional government was constantly thwarted in its attempts at reconstructing the post-revolutionary society as hostile competing political alliances and autonomous centres of political power emerged[17]. In essence the real struggle for power evolved between Bazargan's government, which was becoming increasingly more isolated and ineffectual, and the traditional clergy who saw themselves as the true vanguard of the revolution and who had formed the Islamic Republican Party with the express purpose of instigating their ideological vision of an Islamic Republic. The writing and control of the elements within the constitution was to prove the defining moment for both groups and was ultimately to decide who assumed total power.

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[16] For Bazargan the relationship between country and religion was defined by the maxim "serving Iran through Islam". This put him in direct conflict with the traditional clergy who believed that all aspects of social and cultural life were subordinate to the needs of Islam.

[17] Examples of these centres of power that began to act in the name of Ayatollah Khomeini and independently of the provisional government, thus undermining its effectiveness, included; the Revolutionary Council, Komitehs, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the Islamic Courts. The most glaring example of this took place with the occupation of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on 4th November 1979 when a group calling itself Students Following the Line of the Imam held fifty-two Americans hostage for 444 days. This was an action supported by Khomeini, which left Bazargan's position untenable.

See, Riaz Hassan, "Iran's Islamic Revolutionaries: before and after the revolution", *Third World Quarterly*, July 1984, Vol. 6, No. 3 pp. 675-678.

Media in the Immediate Revolutionary Aftermath

It was during this period of political instability that the media experienced a period of hitherto unknown freedom of expression and opinion. In this uncertain and anarchic atmosphere the press flourished as the various political groups struggled for power. The first year after the revolution saw the appearance of 444 newspapers and magazines covering all shades of public opinion (Schirazi, 1998). However this new found freedom was not to last very long as the Islamic state began to emerge and the institutional framework was put in place for control and governance of all aspects of life by the clergy. This can be seen by the fact that less than a few years after their appearance fewer than half of these publications remained in existence. In 1981 alone, 175 newspapers were shut down, and by March 1988 the total number of newspapers and periodicals published in Iran was no more than 121. The situation in relation to cinema was somewhat different. The following is a table indicating the number of Iranian films produced per year since 1970:

Year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Films	58	82	91	83	59	65	56	43	19	3
Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Films	23	17	22	30	40	40	48	48	42	49
Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Films	42	54	66	50	45	62	63	54	64	46

Source: *Film International*, Tehran: Autumn/Winter, 1999/2000, Vol. 7, No. 2-3, p.6.

The revolution had resulted in the almost total collapse of the Iranian film industry, both artistically and infrastructurally. The cinema was seen by many of the revolutionaries as being representative of the evils of modernisation and Western cultural influence implicit in the Shah's rule. As a result it experienced the full wrath of revolutionary zeal with many cinemas being destroyed[18]. Thus the freedom experienced by the press during the immediate post-revolutionary period was not extended to cinema as financially and infrastructurally it lay in ruins. Furthermore, such was the uncertainty and fear that existed in the industry that many actors, producers and directors fled the country. Those who remained were unsure as to what was permissible amidst the upheavals of the post-revolutionary struggle for power. This is reflected in the themes of the paltry number of films released in the early years following the revolution, which for the most part revolved around stories related to the revolution or moral stories usually in a rural setting[19]. Examples from the period 1979-1980 include;

- *Faryad-e Mojahed* (The Cry of Mujahed), dir, Mehdi Ma'danian. A religious activist fights against the Shah's regime.

- *Parvaz Beh Suye Minu* (Flight Toward Daisy), dir, Taqi Keyan Salahshur. A domestic servant is sacked for his political sympathies. He decides to become an activist fighting the Shah's regime by kidnapping a member of SAVAK (the Shah's secret

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[18] This is a situation from which the Iranian film industry has never fully recovered, a problem further exacerbated by the almost doubling of the country's population in the twenty years since the revolution. The government have attempted to address the problem by introducing a bill through the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) in 1999 that "stipulates that bank loans and other necessary facilities be given to the private sector for construction of cinema halls and complexes in cities with a population exceeding 15,000" (Housang Golmakani, "A History of Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*", Bulletin of The 10th Festival of Films from Iran*, Film Centre in Chicago, 24/10/99). This is an attempt to alleviate the economic pressures on the industry and also to address the fact that 20 years after the revolution the country possesses only half the number of cinema theatres that existed in 1979.

[19] For a comprehensive list of the films of this period see Bahman Maghsoudlou, *Iranian Cinema*, (New York: New York University Press, 1987).

police force) and attacking Evin prison. He is captured and faces a martyred death in front of a firing squad.

-   *Samad Beh Shahr Miravad* (Samad Goes to the Town), dir, Parviz Sayyad. The adventures of a simple-minded farmer who goes to town.

-   *Khiabaniha* (Street Wanderers), dir, Mohammad Saffar. The adventures of a group of honest but poor men.

These films show a certain caution as well as a desire in certain instances to celebrate the momentous historical events that had just taken place in the country. For the most part they were poorly made and propagandist in nature with the over-riding principle being to castigate and criticise the former regime in none too subtle terms. The result is that of the small number of films produced during this period "only one film seems worthy of short mention" (Daryoush, 1982: 184). Indeed, three distinct categories can be discerned from those films produced in the first four years after the revolution; "quasi-political ones dealing with the campaign against the Shah's regime, films about drug traffickers and drug addiction with allusions to the former regime, and films with rural settings where peasants revolt against feudal tyranny" (Golmakani, 1999: 2). This can be seen as the early days of an ideological change and self-censorship in a shattered industry as well as an example of what Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (1985) has called, in relation to post revolutionary literature, an art-form forged in certain instances out of "political dedication rather than creative impulse" combined with a "deep-seated ambivalence or uncertainty about what may lie beyond the political present".

However it is perhaps ironic that the only way for the industry to be rebuilt was through the investment efforts of the government, which not only involved infrastructural investment but also institutional and ideological change as the new government sought to introduce their specific interpretation of culture in the service of the Islamic state by using "the state-controlled modern technological network of communication and entertainment and its submission to censorship" (Cambridge History, 1991: 814). The first steps towards the institutionalisation of cinema had begun as early as March 1980 with the introduction of a number of measures aimed at reviving the domestic industry. These included the banning of films from Iraq, Pakistan, India and Turkey unless these countries bought Iranian films and the introduction of a points system from one to four, which allowed Iranian producers to import an equivalent number of foreign films to the grading that their film received (McDonnell, 1980-1981). Ideologically such undertakings signalled a desire by the new regime to create a 'new' cinema that would be the antithesis of the 'decadent' pre-revolution cinema and put to the service of Islam and the revolution. For the ruling clerics this meant the transformation of the medium into an 'Islamic Cinema'. This formed part of the overall drive of the revolutionary clergy to Islamicise all aspects of society. The media were to perform the central position in this respect, for as Ayatollah Khomeini stated, "if radio and television are not Islamicised it means that Iran is not Islamicised" (Algar, 1985: 30). In this sense it was heralded as the overriding and unique attribute of the reconstituted post revolutionary society and as such bears comparison with similar undertakings with similar undertakings of revolutionary societies in the third world.

Cinema and Revolution in the Third World

The Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) was set up on 24 March 1959 with the aim of fusing art and revolution, educating the spectator and modifying the existing conditions of production, distribution and exhibition. Similarly the Islamic government founded the Farabi Cinema Foundation in 1983 to "streamline and control the import and export of films and to encourage local production" (Naficy, 1996: 676). Discussing the aims of the foundation its director pointed out that "the foundation wants to make good movies and enhance Iran's cinema industry". However in practice, it essentially "works to project Islamic values and revolutionary ideals through its films, many of which have been well received in international film festivals" (Rajaee, 1990: 75). Also, a stringent set of guidelines to control the industry and promote "Islamic values" was introduced, and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was charged with their enforcement. These included: any criticism of Islam was strictly forbidden, women had to wear the Islamic dress, males and females were not to be photographed in close proximity to one another in the same shot, signs of physical affection were totally unacceptable.

The similarities between Cuba and Iran show the birth of a reconstituted cinema from revolution and the desire for each respective government to institutionalise the cinema for ideological purposes. Whereas in Cuba art was seen as an integral process of the ongoing and evolving socialist revolution which, according to Castro "has to understand and should therefore act in a manner that the whole group of artists and intellectuals who are not genuinely revolutionaries can find within the Revolution a place to work and

create…This means: within the Revolution, everything, against the Revolution, nothing" (Baxandal, 1972: 276). By contrast the "Islamic" revolution set itself the main task of the guardian of morality. Therefore, in essence what the devotees of Islam long for is "a highly puritanical social system where moral and religious imperatives are dictated to the people and direct all their choices" (Kozemi, 1985). Indeed, the fate of all mass communication has been the same in Iran over the past 15 years, "a short-lived initial freedom that gave way to long-term strangulation…[where] the media are either directly censored or they censor themselves" (Schirazi 1998: 136-138). This is a point not lost on the filmmaker Dariush Mehrjui who has worked under both the Shahs and the Islamic regime - "for years I have been censoring myself, and it makes you crazy" (Abdo, 1998: 20). Thus the government saw cinema and the media in general as the service of those in power and, aware of its potential power, sought to control it with an iron grip. The first steps towards this transformation, and indeed the whole socio-political, economic and cultural structure of the country, occurred with the drafting and implementation of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

Iran's Internal Revolution: Clerical Rule and the Emergence of an Official Religious Discourse

The struggle for power had given rise to a dual sovereignty operating between the Provisional government and the clergy, the latter seeking to undermine all the efforts of the former, with Ayatollah Khomeini acting as an expedient intervener. However, it was the Constitution that was to prove the decisive weapon in winning and defining the right to rule. Aside from making declarations on all aspects of life in Iran, under a system of

Islamic governance, the Constitution also acted as the legitimator, consolidator and raison d'être of the clergy's right to rule - the rule of the reverend religious jurists. The 175 clause document, far from being a religious "fundamentalist" text, is a complex interaction of Islamic legalist (emanating from the divine law of the Qu'ran, known as the *shari'a*), secular and democratic elements. Indeed Ervand Abrahamian (1993: 33) has likened its central structure to that of the French Fifth Republic in that "it divides the government into the executive, headed by the president, supervising a highly centralised state; the judiciary, with powers to appoint district judges and review their verdicts; and the national Parliament, elected through universal adult suffrage". However, it is with the introduction of the 'Islamic' elements, especially the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, that we see a usurping of these universal democratic elements.

It is for these reasons that the Islamic Republic has been deemed undemocratic, because it deems the interpretation and implementation of the *shari'a* (Islamic law) to be " the exclusive domain of the *ulema* (jurists), the *mojtaheds* or *muftis*" (Rahnema & Behdad, 1996: 10). Indeed, Ayatollah Khomeini has reiterated this point by stating that the "expression of agreement and disagreement with the precept of Islam is the exclusive right of our reverend jurists"[20]. The absolute control of power by the clergy was further guaranteed and consolidated by the establishment of the Council of Guardians and the concept of *velayat-e faqih*. It was in these two institutions, rather than the parliament, where the real power resided. The Council of Guardians is a twelve-member assembly whose members are *mojtaheds* (Islamic legal experts) who decide on whether resolutions and laws passed by the *Majles* (parliament) are in accordance with 'Islamic law'. In this

respect the Council occupies a dominant position in the legislature in that it has the power of veto and it is only through their approval that resolutions passed in parliament become law. However, the power of the Council of Guardians is itself subservient to the power of the *velayat-e faqih* or the Supreme Jurisprudent.

Article 107 affirmed Ayatollah Khomeini as the *Velayat-e Faqih* – "The exalted *marja-i-taqlid* and leader of the Revolution" and article 110 defined the position as having the powers to appoint senior clerics to the Council of Guardians, to ensure that all laws passed by the *Majles* conformed to the scared law, dismiss the president, appoint the main military commanders, declare war and peace (Algar, 1980). In essence this placed the supreme, final and ultimate authority of the State in the hands of whoever occupied the position of *velayat-e faqih* – the position is currently held by Ayatollah Khamene'i who has been the Supreme Jurisprudent since 1989 following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. The institutional framework and declarations of the constitution not only succeeded in placing the clergy into positions of power, as well as defining the State in their own image, but laid the foundations for a system of government based purely on ideology. This is due to the fact that the legitimacy of all government policies must be sought in the authenticity, argumentation and subjective ideological interpretation of the irrefutable principles of Islam. It was for this reason, and perhaps aware of potential problems, that one of the chief architects of the constitution, Ayatollah Mohamad Beheshti called for continual *ejtehad* (seminary study), "because in a government based on ideology all questions to do with legislation, arrangements for implementing regulations and establishing procedures must be determined by ideological

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[20] *Kayhan*, 19 June 1979.

considerations" (Schirazi 1998: 35). Sandra Mackey (1998: 293) has noted that, "in essence the constitution created a republic while repudiating popular sovereignty". Having laid the foundation for a "hierocratic" state based on interpretative ideology it was inevitable that culture would assume a position of prime importance.

The New Cultural Arena

Under a system where religion and politics are inseparable, culture is the weapon that implies who in society wields power and who enjoys legitimacy. References are made in the constitution to issues concerning the media, culture and freedom of expression. In the preamble to the constitution the position of the mass media was laid out in somewhat vague terms that leave it open to the subjective interpretation/manipulation of those in power; "it must serve the diffusion of Islamic culture in pursuit of the progressive path of the Islamic Revolution"[21]. In relation to freedom of expression Article 24 reads: "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"[22]. Again the principles are vague but what is clear is the fact that in the Islamic Republic, all is subservient to the needs of Islam. Freedom of expression is subject to the ideological interpretation of those in power and must therefore conform to the government's notions of propriety. "The Iranian Constitution's guarantees of freedom of expression are subject to qualifications that effectively impede the free exchange of ideas. Freedom of expression is conditional on compliance with the government's interpretation of Islamic norms and public interest"

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[21] *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran: Department of Translation and Publication Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, 1997), p.18.
[22] Ibid., p.37.

(Bahar, 1993). The Constitution marked the first stage in the institutionalisation of all aspects of society in Iran to the dictates of Islam.

Almost 16 million voters approved of the new constitution giving it a 99.5% margin of acceptance[23]. This represented a major victory for the traditional clergy over the nationalist liberal minded intelligentsia and made the position of Bazargan and his Provisional government untenable resulting in his resignation from office[24]. He was replaced in January 1980 by Abol Hassan Bani Sadr[25] who was elected the first president of the Islamic Republic. This marked the beginning of a violent phase of internal revolution where the clergy sought to eliminate all opposition groups and begin the politico-ideological process of Islamicisation. Relying on their populist appeal, widespread repression and the brutal force of state coercion, the clergy had, by the summer of 1981, succeeded in gaining absolute control of the country. The dominant tendency at this stage was still leaning towards a populist-statist interventionist state that emphasised the rule of the *mostaz'afin* (the oppressed); "This tendency was a strong agitation in the early post-revolutionary expropriation movement and in opposition to Bazargan's Provisional Revolutionary Government, and later to Bani Sadr's presidency. Moreover, this faction of the Islamic Republic supported the establishment of various

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[23] This figure is somewhat misleading in that the electorate was simply given the option of voting "yes" or "no" to the constitution, meaning that they were either for or against the Islamic Republic with no alternatives being offered.
[24] Bazargan objected to the principle of *velayat-e faqih* and the clerical nature of the constitution as a whole as well as believing that a document containing some 175 articles could not be put before the people in a referendum where they were simply asked to vote either "yes" or "no".
[25] Abol Hassan Bani Sadr had been one of Ayatollah Khomeini's most trusted and advisors and supporters whilst the latter was exiled in France. He played a key role in the revolution and was the first and only lay person to occupy the presidency of the Islamic Republic. After being ousted from power he was forced to flee the country where he joined the exiled leadership of the *Mujahedin-i Khalq* in opposition to Khomeini's rule.

revolutionary foundations in an attempt to create grassroots support for an Islamic regime

and to confront the radical opposition to the Islamic Republic" (Behad, 1996: 105). These

aims were to be pursued under a changed ideological system influenced by the thought

system of Navab-Safavi[26].

Ideology and the Clerical Dominance of Power

This subsystem was very much in tune with the needs and vision of the clergy as they

sought to assume total power and enforce their idea of an Islamic Republic. Such a

system took the view that "the model individual is one who mechanically rejects all that

is non-Islamic or un-Islamic through blind faith and total devotion to Islam and to the

clergy – the custodians of Islam" (Rahnema & Nomani 1990: 80). Furthermore, to

achieve such a society requires the 'purging' of those elements and individuals who it is

deemed perpetuate un-Islamic or counter-Islamic practices. These were the immediate

requirement for the establishment of an Islamic state, which Navab-Safavi saw as being

built on; the application of Islamic law in its entirety, the administration of punishments

according to Islamic rules and edicts, the immediate abolition of all un-Islamic laws

passed in the Iranian parliament and an end to man-made law making and the immediate

prohibition of such things as alcohol, music, and films (Khoshneiyat, 1981: 127). The

dogmatism and militancy of these declarations can be seen to have found their expression

in the progress of events, and the announcement of various decrees, during the immediate

post-revolutionary phase.

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[26] Navab-Safavi was the "non-intellectual voluntarist" leader and founder of a conspiratorial militant
terrorist group known as the *Fadaian-e Islam* or Devotees of Islam that were associated with a series of

The main militant opposition to the clergy came in the form of the *Mujahedin-i Khalq*[27] and it was they who experienced the full wrath of the Islamic state with an unprecedented blood-letting resulting in the execution of between 20 - 30,000, (Hassan, 1984), of its members. This was very much in keeping with Navab-Safavi's 'purging' of non-Islamic elements in society, which was clearly echoed in the actions and language of the prominent leaders of the Islamic Republic[28]. The new President, Mohammed Ali Rajaee (he had replaced Bani Sadr in the summer of 1981as the final piece in the clergy's full monopolisation of power) reflected the changed militant environment; "If the realisation of Islam and the goals of the Islamic revolution require the sacrifice of our lives then death will become our greatest hope and desire" (Rejaee, 1981:31). Ayatollah Khomeini too echoed the thoughts of Navab-Safavi with his view of Islam as a totalitarian force that subordinated every aspect of life and the need to eradicate Islam's 'enemies'. Referring to the establishment of the state he stated that "it is a Republic of Islam which can implement all purposes. It is a Republic of Islam whose progressive laws are higher than all laws"[29]. Ever aware of the threats posed by the 'enemies of Islam' to the Islamic state

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political assassinations during the instability and turmoil of the 1945-56 period.

[27] The *Mujahedin-i Khalq* was an organisation that evolved out of the religious wing of the National Front in the 1960s. They began a militant campaign against the Shah's regime in a bid to achieve a classless society and eliminate all forms of oppression such as imperialism, capitalism, despotism and conservative clericalism. By 1976 they had suffered heavy losses against the state and had seemed a spent force. However, following the 1979 revolution, where they played an active part, they regrouped and became a viable and influential social organisation. Opposed to the establishment of a clerical state under a clerical constitution they began to carry out guerilla attacks on members of the Islamic government, killing several hundred of them. The government reacted with extreme severity crushing the movement with many of its members killed or exiled abroad.

[28] This was perhaps best evident in the case of Shaykh Sadeq Khalkhali who after the revolution proclaimed himself the new leader of the *Fadaian-e Islam*. Khomeini appointed him the first prosecutor-general of the Islamic Republic and Khalkhali soon earned himself the reputation as the hanging judge for his summary style of sentence and execution. "The quick and indiscriminate meting out of death sentences by the Islamic revolutionary courts can, to a large extent, be accounted for by the prevalence of Navab-Safavi belief in the swift and exemplary elimination of Islam's enemies" (Rahnema and Nomani 1990: 92).

[29] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, "The Deprived will Dominate the Arrogant", speech on Iranian Radio and Television, April 3, 1979.

and the power of the clergy he saw the *Mujahedin-i Khalq* as the most dangerous threat, referring to them as "the *monafeqin* (hypocrites) who want to destroy Islam"[30]. Furthermore, these "hypocritical and self-righteous members of the outlawed *Mujahedin-i Khalq* organisation and their anti-State elements must be put on trial and suitably punished"[31]. Indeed Rahnema and Nomani (1990: 95) have noted quite a similarity in the ideological outlook of Khomeini and Navab-Safavi. "Both men detested secularisation, intellectuals and foreign ideas that challenged the universal truth and applicability of Islam; both were genuinely concerned with the implementation of a predominantly superstructural Islam; both were dogmatic about their religious ideas and intolerant of dissent and 'deviation'; both derived their strength from their decisiveness which was, in turn rooted in their uni-dimensional world outlook". This final point is somewhat misleading as Khomeini has shown himself to be less of a dogmatist and more of a pragmatic/opportunistic populist whose behaviour has been determined "less by spiritual principles than by immediate political, social and economic needs" (Abrahamian 1993: 4). It is in the light of this fact that the context in which this ideological belief system was enacted needs to be considered.

The overriding principle at this time was the need to monopolise power and to consolidate that power by eliminating all forms of opposition in order to instigate a system of clerical rule. This was not only achieved by the use of brutal and repressive means but by the manipulation of the dispossessed or marginalised. The foot-soldiers of

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[30] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, speech, *Ettela'at*, 26 June 1980.
[31] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, "Imam Khomeini Commends Services of Islamic Revolutionary Corps", Press Release, Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, August 1983.

the revolution became, in the post-revolutionary society, the foot-soldiers of the clergy. They were elevated into positions of power, (based on revolutionary credentials rather than suitability or qualifications) from where they acted as the support base, the legitimator and vengeful executive arm of the clergy. Although the Islamic government has shown its expediency and adaptability over the years, what must be realised is the fact that the ideological and institutional systems undertaken in the early and formative post-revolutionary years set the tone and laid the foundation for developments in the intervening years to come. It was not until 1984 that the atmosphere in the country began to relax as "the revolution and its bloody aftermath were starting to recede in people's minds, and the fervour which had created it was fading fast" (Simpson & Shubart, 1995: 87). However, by then the clergy had firmly consolidated their power and established their institutionalised network of control over all aspects of society. Once absolute political control had been established the primary concern became the politico-ideological Islamicisation of the country. This was undertaken on three fronts, the institutional, the educational and mass communications (Haghayeghi, 1993), in what might be described as Iran's second revolution, the Cultural Revolution. It is in this light that we must examine the position of cinema and the drive to create an 'Islamic cinema'.

Conclusion

The final point that needs to be made concerning the clergy's monopoly of power is the fact that they do not present a unified monolithic ideological point of governance. Despite the fact that after 1981 the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) was the only political grouping allowed to organise or hold seats in the *Majlis* it was nevertheless a coalition

representing opinions ranging from conservatism to radicalism and pragmatism. However, these groupings and their various ideological positions have continued to define politics, and therefore all aspects of life in the Islamic Republic, often to the point of stalemate, crippling the proper functioning of the 'political system'. The central division is based on how far the state should involve itself in the economic and social life of the country and in this latter point the position and control of culture is of crucial importance. Khomeini himself acknowledged the existence of ideological conflict but stated that this was permissible as long as certain irrefutable truths were adhered to; "It is clear that if disagreements occur amongst those who are loyal to the revolution, their differences would be solely political, even though they may take on an ideological form. This is because they all share the same bases and principles and that is why I endorse them all. They are all loyal to Islam, the Qu'ran and the revolution" (1988). It is in the light of these conflicting opinions, the pragmatic implementation of shifting ideological subsystems, the institutional weapons of the Constitution and the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, the use of force, censorship and other means of state oppression, the drive to Islamicise all aspects of society, and a religio-political system based on ideology, that form the critical framework in which culture, and by extension the cinema, must be approached and evaluated in the Islamic Republic.

CHAPTER 3

The "New Cinema" Emerges

Introduction

It has been an article of faith since the early days of the revolution that whoever controls Iranian culture controls Iranian politics. This is due in no small part to the constant need to define the nature of Iran and its culture. Khomeini's Iran (based solely on Islamic principles) is as distorted a creation as that which operated during the Pahlavi dynasty, sought to define the nation solely by its Persian heritage. Indeed they are mirror reflections of each other and highlight the fact that these two factors are not mutually exclusive, but are both essential components of the Iranian psyche. Just as the Shah sought to ground his authority in the glories of Persia, the ruling clerics, having failed to deliver on most of the promises of the revolution, have sought to anchor their legitimacy in Islam and its manufactured cultural manifestations.

This chapter aims to examine the reconstituted cultural forms that emerged under the changed political and ideological conditions of the post-revolutionary State. For the cinema this involved a reconstitution of the medium both formally and thematically in the official drive to constitute a new 'Islamic cinema' that was reflective of, and in the service of, the new regime. In pursuing this undertaking we must interrogate whether the notion of an 'Islamic cinema' is a genuinely radical and unique departure for cinema by placing it within the framework of the historical development of 'Islamic art', (and its unique Persian manifestations), and also as part of the wider ideological Islamicisation

project, which the regime undertook in order to create a society obedient to and serving

Islam with the express purpose of consolidating and perpetuating clerical rule in Iran.

Finally, within these machinations we must place and evaluate the early work of

Makhmalbaf. An exponent and ardent advocate of this new 'Islamic cinema', his early

work is replete with religious and revolutionary fervour and dedication. This nascent

period in his career stretches from 1982-85 and covers four films, *Tobeh-ye-Nassouh*

(*Nassouh's Repentance*, 1982), *Do Chashme Bey Sou* (*Two Sightless Eyes*, 1983),

Esteazeh (*Fleeing from Evil to Good*, 1984), *Baycot* (*Boycott*, 1985). These early works

formed the learning and developmental basis of his cinematic career, leading him to be

declared the most trusted and respected filmmaker by the new regime. It also offers a

body of work that serves as the perfect commentary and trajectory of the progression of

the artist, cinema, culture, and the country itself, in the early formative years of the

Islamic Republic.

Towards an 'Islamic Cinema'

Iranian culture reflects a long tradition of contemplating the spiritual realm and the

meaning of existence. In this atmosphere "mysticism, the ambiguity of poetry, belief in

the many-faced subtlety of evil and the never fully resolved choice between the roles of

hedonistic cynic and selfless devotee have created the great interior spaces in which the

Iranian soul has breathed and survived" (Mottahedeh, 1985: 144). To understand the

multi-layered nature of Iranian culture, and by extension the cinema, means recognising

the fact that it is based on a complex duality arising from a dialectical interaction between

a centuries old Persian culture and Shia Islam. This is a situation that is further complicated by the role that culture plays in legitimating political power and authority. Those who are in power, be they king or cleric, seek to control, monopolise, and create a vision of this culture in their own image, emphasising one element to the detriment of the other, resulting in a type of split cultural inertia.

With the progression of 20th century Iran witnessing growing state control over all aspects of civil society, the question of cultural control has assumed prime importance and the divisions between both factions have become more marked. The Shah sought to define Iran within the glories of ancient Persia, whereas the Islamic Republic has relied on the exaltation of Islam. Both are 'false' cultural pictures in that each 'interpretation' denies the complex and interlocking nature of the two traditions existing within the Iranian national psyche. The cultural weapon assumes prime importance in the armoury of a state whose main aim is to socialise people into accepting the legitimacy of state domination. In this sense the cultural weapon can be said to have "greater potency than economic tools because it affects the soul of a community" (Siavoshi, 1996: 210). It is these elements – the historio-cultural, the politico-ideological and the institutional – that form the context in which to examine the development of post-revolutionary cinema. The drive to create an 'Islamic cinema' can be seen to have its origins in the larger historical development of 'Islamic art' (or more specifically, as will become evident, a unique sub-section that can be referred to as 'Persian Islamic art'), which itself must be placed within the context of the changed post-revolutionary socio-ideological atmosphere (the Cultural Revolution) and the institutionalisation of culture that saw all cultural activity brought

under government control, either through legislation, force or censorship. Under such circumstances culture, and particularly film with its international reach, becomes highly volatile and contentious.

Iranian Culture as an Instrument of Power and Representation

According to Robert Graham (1978: 199-200), "culture is just another tool of the political system in Iran and survives only where it is allied to the system". In such an instant it seems to become merely a manipulative plaything for those in power and as a result exists in a complete vacuum. Whilst this may be true to a certain extent it tends to ignore the depth of feeling that Iranians feel towards their culture as well as its ability to assimilate influences and its adaptability to changing contexts. This arises from the cultural perception that Iranians have of themselves, in that they see themselves as the protectors of an ancient culture and the custodians of the Shia sect of Islam. As a result they see their culture as uniquely rich and different and experience it with an unusual and deeply felt sensitivity. The sense of difference and uniqueness was referred to by Donald N. Wilber (1978: 38) in relation to the Iranians reaction to the introduction of Islam in the 7th century: "the cultural superiority of the Iranians and their pride in their institutions remained to stamp the cultural and artistic future of Islamic Iran with a character quite different from that of any of the other Muslim countries". This difference is built on the dualism of Persia and Shia Islam.

The Concept of 'Islamic Art'

'Islamic Art' is a notion that is uniquely difficult and problematic to define. Bearing no discernible formal and thematic traits that would allow it to be defined generically as belonging to a particular artistic school it is more often defined as the antithesis of Western art, or by general and tacit consensus, the sum total of all art produced by Muslim people, whether it is deemed to be religious or not. However, this is a rather simplistic definition of the complex relationship between 'art' and a religion that bases itself on legislating for all aspects of spiritual and social life. It is the total order that Islam represents in relation to all planes of physical existence into which Islamic art seeks to insert itself as a sacred and esoteric form of divine expression in the service of God (Burckhardt 1976). In this sense arts are placed in a hierarchy of functions, defined and operating within the limits of holy scripture, and to be used for the dissemination of Islamic ideology, towards which end "without doubt there is no more effective way than to employ art" (Research Unit, 1980: 205). It is within this context that we may begin to highlight some of the particularities of the notion of 'Islamic Art'.

The main tenet of 'Islamic Art' is centred on the debate concerning the image and its reproduction. Abstract representation and decoration, consisting of arabesque, inscriptional and geometrical elements (Khazaie, 1999), was the preferred method of representation in opposition to the figurative reproduction of Western art. The main reason for this is that God is seen as the sole creator of all things and has prescribed them with perfection. As a result artists operated in a sphere of "religiously motivated Islamic

iconoclasm, prohibiting the depiction of creatures – man and beast, who, unlike plants, carry a 'soul'" (Shafik, 1998: 48), a form of art recognising the subservience of man in the face of God. However, no direct reference on the subject of image making can be found in the Qu'ran, the closest being in relation to idolatry[1] and one who worships an image other than God making one an unbeliever (Beg, 1981: 47). It was only as expressed in the sayings of the Prophet (*hadiths*) that explicit reference is made prohibiting the making of images and for punishment to be administered to the producers of such images (Grabar, 1987: 82-83).

The central arts of Islam are therefore generally seen as architecture and calligraphy with the former taking pride of place in the building of sanctuaries and places of worship and the latter acting as a perfect decorative geometric accompaniment (Burckhardt 1976). What this emphasises is the functionality of art in the service of God and Islam and the unchanging relationship/equilibrium that exists between the artist and his work. The artist is not consumed by individual artistic creation but seeks to transform material giving meaning and expression to those who use the objects in a spiritual union with the immensity and presence of God in all things. The equilibrium and unchanging nature of this relation is based on the Islamic belief in monotheism and One Reality, which is the reason as to why 'Islamic Art' avoids certain means of expression such as an adherence to the prohibition of images. This absence is perhaps the most striking feature of 'Islamic

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[1] These are to be found in: Surah 2, verses 105, 135; Surah 4, verses 48, 51, 76, 116; Surah 5, verses 60, 82; Surah 6, verse 138; Surah 9, verses 1-17, 28, 36, 113; Surah 22, verse 17; Surah 35, verse 14, 40; Surah 48, verse 6. *The Koran*, (trans.) M.M. Pickthal, (London: Star Books), 1989.

art' but it perhaps understandable given the contemplative and scared nature of the artform. In this respect anti-iconism, by precluding every image, invites "man to fix his mind on something outside himself and project his soul onto an 'individualising' form" (Burckhardt, 1976: 29). The issue of image representation became somewhat more complicated when 'Islamic art' encountered Persian culture.

Persia and Islam, the Golden Age

The problems faced over the prohibition of images did not mean that figurative representation did not exist in any way, shape or form. Showing figures as shadows, denying spatial illustration, highlighting their artificiality or destroying their corporality often circumvented these difficulties. However, this was a process that was to become more prevalent under the Persians who felt that such constraints and prohibitions did not apply to them. Despite the fact that the coming of Islam did produce profound changes in the political, economic and social structure, as "the age old Iranian ideas of divine right and autocratic control were challenged by a democratic spirit and the internationalism of the new religion" (Wilber 1978: 37), it is worth noting that the change to this new religion with its absolute monotheistic attitude had little effect on Persian art which has maintained a permanent character throughout the ages "in spite of the influx of large new population groups, of great historical upheavals an change of religions" (Ettinghausen, 1979: xiv). This was due to the fact that Iranian art has traditionally been decorative and non-representational, with its works, no matter how colourful and elaborate, being characterised by precision, clarity and lucidity. Furthermore, the development of Iranian

art exhibits a slow, steady stylistic progression, based more on the addition of layers and nuance than any abrupt changes in style, generally seen as one of the defining features of the new 'quality' cinema to emerge on the international stage after the revolution. This according to Donald N. Wilber (1978: 79) is the reason why there is no dramatic break between pre-Islamic and Islamic art in Iran "as familiar decorative forms were continued and the basic plans and methods of construction common to temples and palaces reappeared in the Muslim monuments of the country". It also shows the age-old Persian ability to assimilate elements of foreign culture and adapt them, or make them adapt to their own specific needs. Furthermore, the individualism and difference felt by Iranians in the face of their Arab invaders, who viewed all non-Arabs as inferior, drew them towards Shia Islam, which was felt held within it the base to link with the historical traditions of Persia as well as ideas of Iranian nationalism and identity. Islam was acceptable to Iranians only in so far as it contained within it elements of their pre-Islamic beliefs (Zoroastrianism and Manicheanism[2]) such as monotheism, the fear of evil, the acceptance of Judgement Day.

In cultural terms this conflict manifested itself within the *shuubiyah* movement. This movement arose in relation to literature and centred on the merits and superiority of Persian cultural traditions over those of the Arabs and is a debate that manifested itself in much of the intellectual debate amongst Iranian intellectuals in the twentieth century (Blondel Saad, 1996). Perhaps the greatest example of this movement lay in the famous

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[2] For a comprehensive explanation of Iran's pre-Islamic religious beliefs see, I.J.S. Taraporewala, *The Religion of Zarathushtra*, (Tehran: Sāzmān-e-Faravahar, 1980).

Iranian poet Ferdowsi's epic poem *Shahnameh*[3] (King of Kings) where he tackled the

conflict between pre-Islamic Iranian identity and the Arab Muslims foreign beliefs[4];

"Damn on this World, Damn on this Time, Damn on this Fate,

That uncivilized Arabs have come to force me to be Muslim"

(Lament uttered by a Persian general facing the Arab army from Ferdowsi's, *Shahnameh*).

Thus a much bigger Persian influence can be discerned in 'Islamic Art' than vice versa,

e.g. the introduction of miniatures into the realm of calligraphy, and the introduction of

floral and geometric designs, as well as the domes found in Sassanian period palaces

being introduced into the architecture of mosques. Developing in tandem throughout the

centuries have been forms of Persian art, such as poetry and painting that might be

deemed 'un-Islamic' or incongruous with the dictates of the religion. The place of Persian

poetry, and in particular the *ghazal*[5] is of particular importance in relation to the

development of the post-revolutionary 'quality' cinema. Traditionally the *ghazal* deals

with themes of love, ecstasy, freedom, humanity and sympathy for the problems of the

ordinary man. The giant of this form is the poet Hafez, whose most famous work, *The*

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[3] This is an epic poem containing 60,000 lines that took 35 years to write. It covers one thousand years of Iranian history from the genesis of Iran right up to the invasion of Islam. Combining myth, fact and lore the poet poured the whole folk history of Iran into a long hymn to humour, valour, wisdom, bravery and patriotism. The whole work according, to Sandra Mackey (1998), "is charged with the preservation of Iranian sovereignty and the defense of Iranian territorial integrity against all enemies mythical and real".

[4] This conflict of cultures is a constant strand and preoccupation in Iranian intellectual thought throughout the centuries right up to the writings (referred in Chapter 2) of such scholars as Shariati, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ayatollah Khomeini's famous declaration of "Neither East nor West".

[5] This is a lyric poem of six to fifteen couplets linked by unity of thought and symbolism rather than a logical sequence of ideas. See, Annemarie Schimmel "Poetry and Calligraphy: Thoughts about their interrelation in Persian Culture", in, *Highlights of Persian Art*, (eds.) Richard Ettinghausen and Ehsan Yarshater, (New York: Westview Press, 1979).

Divan, attempts to reflect the epic and universalism of the everyday in the search for the reality and love of God. This was a search not conducted within the restraints of conventional religion, but within the freedom of a personal union with God through individual spirituality and Sufi mysticism. Structurally and thematically films such as Makhmalbaf's *Gabbeh* (1996) or Rakshan Bani-Etemad's *The May Lady* (1998) exhibit many of these attributes and serve as a huge affront to the monotheistic vision of the Islamic Republic (Samini, 1999/2000). Indeed, this poetic genealogy has been noted in relation to the work of Abbas Kiarostami. His Koker trilogy[6] is seen as the cinematic manifestation of Sohrab Sepehri's poetry (Dabashi, 1995), and his most recent film, *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), takes its title from a poem by Forough Farrokhzad. Similarly, Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *The Silence* (1998) is influenced by the poetry of Omar Khayyám. It is these elements combined with the aestheticism of Persian art that shows a readiness to "include unforeseen elements, to exaggerate certain parts and give them proportions that are out in the ordinary and to stress other parts in an opposite manner" (Ettinghausen, 1979: xv-xvi) that allows the artist to create complex, unexpected and stimulating inner tensions in the. These factors provide the context within which to interrogate the clash of Persia and Islam and the emergence of a Persian Islamic art-form that contains within it influential strands for the development of cinema. It remains to be seen how this tension between Persia and Islam would manifest itself under the strict ideological controls of the Islamic Republic, which attempts to depict Iranian culture in purely Islamic terms.

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[6] These three film are, Where is the Friend's Home? (*Khaneh-e Doost Kojast?*) 1987, And Life Goes On (*Va Zendegi Edameh Darad*) 1992, and, Through the Olive Trees (*Zir-e Derakhtan-e Zeytoon*) 1994. Koker refers to the region of Iran in which these films were shot and set.

Islam, Representation and the Cinematic Image

The Islamic prohibition of image making was never strictly adhered to in the case of cinema, a fact heightened in Iran by the existence of an expressive Persian cultural influence. Indeed, acceptance of the photographic image can be found within the rubric of religious justification. In this context it is seen as a sign and not a creation by virtue of the fact that it lacks spatial characteristics and therefore does not give a soul to things. This assumption is based on the hadith; "Angels do not enter a house where an image is stored except if it is a sign on fabric", which Viola Shafik (1998: 49) states, justifies "photography, and in the same way, 'moving images', as a shadow, reinforcing the power of God, the creator, rather than competing with it". The main area of religious resistance to cinema arose in relation to issues of morality.

The complex relationship between Islam and the media was clearly seen in the Iranian context where media was used by Islam in toppling the Shah whilst at the same time seen as signifiers of the very ills of that regime i.e. excessive modernisation and Western influence. These contradictions are clearly evident in the following statement by Ayatollah Khomeini, which provides a good indication of the role of the media in the Islamic Republic. Its resonance can be seen in the complete ideological transformation and Islamicisation of all aspects of society which began at speed with the closing of universities and colleges in the summer of 1980 and marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution;

[radio and television]….. "have lawful intellectual benefits from the point of view of Islam. Their lawful benefits are acceptable such as news and the sermons over the radio and showing lawful things for education, or the showing of articles and aquatic and

terrestrial wonders of creation on television. However, unlawful things such as the broadcast of songs and music and propagation of such unlawful things as counter-Islamic laws and the extolling of a traitor and a tyrant and spreading the voids and the presentation of those things which corrupts a society's morals and shakes their beliefs are unlawful and [it] is a sin[7].

The Creation of an Islamicised Society

The drive to create an 'Islamic cinema' can only be understood within the larger context of the regime's ideological campaign to accelerate the cultural dimension of the revolution. At issue here is the creation and definition of all aspects of society in 'Islamic' terms. This necessitated a complete 'overhaul' of the education system and the control and 'restructuring' of history. Indeed, these twin concepts are closely interrelated in that the former serves as the means by which the Islamic regime produces its version of "historical truth". The control and propagation of this "historical truth" has been used by the regime "to give itself populistic as well as religious legitimacy", to isolate and marginalise its opponents, and "to reduce complex ideological issues to simple personality conflicts in which one side epitomises goodness, the other wickedness" (Abrahamian, 1993: 92). The universities, long seen as a hotbed of political protest, secular and oppositional ideologies, were identified as the primary targets of the Islamicisation process known as the University Crusade (*Jihad-e Danesh-gahi*). At the basic level this process sought to de-emphasise Iran's pre-Islamic past and glorify its Islamic heritage, and to replace all Western values and culture with their Islamic counterparts (Haghayeghi, 1993: 42). In essence this reflected the attempt to apply the

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[7] Ayatollah R. Khomeini, *A Clarification of Questions*, (trans.) J. Boroujerdi, (Westview Press, 1984).

politico-ideological orientation of the Khomeini regime to the arena of education with the express purpose of creating obedient 'Islamic' citizens. In this sense its main aims were:

- strengthening students beliefs with respect to the basic theological tenets of Twelver Shiism,

- the promotion of such sacred values as the family, Islamic brotherhood, socio-economic justice, respect for the law, and the virtues of education,

- the promotion of ideas such as pan-Islamism, and political independence, to strengthen the nation's defence capabilities through military training on campuses,

- the enhancing of the spirit of investigation and innovation in scientific as well as cultural and Islamic fields (Mohsenpour, 1988: 85-86).

In order to implement this system textbooks were rewritten proclaiming the message that "Islam is an ideology that does not submit to the artificial separation of religion from social and political issues" (Siavoshi 1996: 206). This resulted in the systematic transformation of education into an instrument charged with the promotion and replication of official thought patterns at all levels of learning. Particular attention was paid to, firstly, teaching students "the main religious principles and the ideal pattern of state-citizen relation", before moving onto more complicated notions such as "the concept of *velayat-e faqih* and the overall leadership role of the clergy", and finally emphasising "the basic foreign policy orientation of the Islamic Republic", which usually involved castigation of the West (Haghayeghi, 1993: 43). The result of this policy was that, by the time the government started to incrementally re-open schools and universities

in October 1981, the education system was infrastructurally and intellectually devastated. The ideological purges had seen more than 60,000 teachers lose their jobs because of their political beliefs[8] (the seriousness of which was further heightened by the post-revolutionary population explosion), and an overall lowering of the level of education where "students ardently committed to the values of the revolution and Islamic government" (Bahar, 1993: 118) were the ones assured places in universities rather than in relation to their academic merit.

The actual effect of this socialisation process on a generation raised exclusively under the Islamic Republic has been hard to assess. However, with the death of Khomeini in 1989 and the weariness felt after the long years of war with Iraq, there was a general slowing down of revolutionary zeal as the government was faced with the real and pressing issues of governance. People too had had enough of official sermonising, and the advent of satellite broadcasting began to open up a whole new world of possibilities to Iranians, which led to a situation where, "by 1994 it was estimated by the Iranian press that more than two million people watched foreign broadcasts" (Simpson and Shubart, 1995: 215). Once again the media assumes a role of prime importance. It was precisely because of this power and its ability to 'corrupt the youth' and produce a 'counter-Islamic' message (Grand Ayatollah Araki declared in 1994 that, "installing satellite antennae opens the Islamic society to inroads of decadent foreign culture and the spread of ruinous diseases to Muslims and is forbidden" (ibid, 1995: 216)), that the regime placed the media, in

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[8] *Iran Times*, February 22, 1991, p.5.

conjunction with the Islamicisation of education as the prime means of disseminating and propounding its ideological message. Furthermore, cinema is seen as a more controllable medium, and was therefore seen to possess within it the ability to act as a bulwark against the uncontrollability of satellite communication. This belief lead the present Supreme Religious Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i to encourage the production of 'Islamic' films stating that:

"The enemy carries out its cultural onslaught against the Islamic Republic of Iran in an organised way. If our response is not organised, the danger of the enemy's onslaught increases. Therefore, this issue must be addressed seriously and all the component bodies must co-operate and use various methods to neutralise the cultural onslaught of the enemy"[9].

The First Step Towards a New Cinema?

The first step towards an 'Islamic (or more accurately an 'Islamicised') cinema' was to bring all aspects of the medium under government control and this meant institutionalising all elements of the industry, including the issues of creativity and artistic freedom. For the policy makers in the Islamic regime cinema was to fall in line with the wider drive to Islamicise all aspects of society. Indeed, Article 175 of the Constitution calls on the Islamic Republic's Radio and Television Service to disseminate and observe Islamic norms and work in the service of the country's interests[10]. Towards this end the issues of prime importance in relation to the medium became centred on the

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[9] IRIB Television First Program Network, December 10, 1992, as reported in FBIS, December 11, 1992.
[10] *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic* (Tehran: Department of Translation and Publication, Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, 1997), p.130.

control of morality and its usefulness in propagating Islamic ideology. The 1981 Censorship Act laid down the boundaries of what was permissible under the changed ideological system. This essentially forbade the depiction of any romantic relationships or physical contact between male and female characters/actors, music and dance were banned, women had to adhere to the Islamic dress codes (*hejab*) on screen and any shots depicting the curvatures of their bodies or deemed of a sexual nature were strictly outlawed (Riza'ee, 1993: 17). Other regulations prohibited the showing of any material that subverts or insults Islam, the Islamic Republic, or the principles of *velayat-e faqih*, the Leadership Council or qualified *mojtaheds*[11]. In July 1982 the parliament ratified a general "Guideline to Govern the Policies of the Iranian National Radio and Television", which sought to legalise the doctrines of Ayatollah Khomeini with respect to the operation of the mass media. According to these guidelines Islam is to govern all programming and the media is to adhere to and promote the principles of independence, freedom and the Islamic Republic as well as giving "widespread expression to the ideas of the jurist/ leader, that is Ayatollah Khomeini, and his constitutional successors" (Chelkowski & Dabashi, 2000: 266). Thus, the prime function of the media was the propagation of the ideological, political, social and cultural objectives of the new Islamic State.

Film regulation fell under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance who established the Farabi Cinema Foundation in 1983 "to control the import and export of films and to encourage local production" (Naficy, 1996: 676). Established as a semi-

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[11] In 1993 the government publicly released a full list of regulations governing film content. This was reproduced in *Film*, March/April 1993, p.41 and appeared in translated form in *Middle East Watch*, August 1993, pp.30-31.

autonomous group with government assistance its members, "who combined their concern for the endangered art of film with impeccable Muslim credentials" (Aufderheide, 1993: 31), proclaimed its task as "setting the parameters of cinematic activities…to provide opportunities and filmmaking equipment, take on the role of leasing out film supplies, and offer financial credit" (Issa & Whitaker, 199: 29). It has basically been through the efforts of Farabi that the domestic film industry was revived and its reputation enhanced by their aggressive marketing in international festivals. However, in reality Farabi acts as the Islamic government's arm for controlling the cinema industry in Iran with the "foundation wishing to project Islamic values and revolutionary ideals through its movies" (Esposito, 1990: 75). Behjat Riza'ee (1993: 21) emphasises this point in somewhat harsher terms by stating that, "according to the Islamic officers at the Farabi Cinema Foundation, anything that cannot be used by them for propaganda purposes must be destroyed and wiped out from the face of the earth". Other bodies were also set up in order to bring all aspects of filmmaking under government control and to establish a highly centralised/censorised system of film production. Towards this end the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance established a number of councils to be charged with the supervision, production and censorship of film;

1. The Council of Screenplay Inspection is responsible for reviewing and approving a submitted short synopsis of the screenplay of the proposed film. If this is approved it is then passed to the,

2. Council for Issuing a Production Permit. The director must submit a full working version of the completed script to the council for approval. Furthermore, a full list of

cast and crew must also be submitted to the council before a production permit can be issued and shooting can begin.

3. The Council of Film Reviewing. This council reviews the completed film and has the power to reject, accept or require modifications to be made. If the film is finally approved the council award it a viewing permit according to a four-grade system (A, B, C or D). In essence this system acts as a final subtle means of censorship in that "grading is based largely on an assessment of what is aesthetically valid and ideologically correct rather than on any objective quality standard" (Bahar, 1993: 98). The grade that a film receives determines the exposure it will receive, its access to advertising resources and promotion, and its ticket price.

An example of this last form of surreptitious censorship can be seen in the case of the veteran director Bahram Bayzai's[12] film *Bashu, the Little Stranger* (1986). The narrative tells the story of a single mother in rural Northern Iran who takes in a young boy from the South who has escaped the Iraqi war after seeing his family killed. The film was banned in Iran until 1990 for what was deemed its "anti-war message". However, a more plausible explanation could be seen to lie in Bayzai's focus on aspects of Persian rather than Islamic culture, his strong female characters and his compassionate desire to reflect the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Iran, all of which have been constant elements in his

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[12] Bayzai is one of Iran's most accomplished film directors. Emerging from the vanguard of the 1960's he was, and continues to be, active in the fields of literature and theatre, publishing some twenty plays, before directing his first feature film in 1971. A committed approach to culturally reflecting the social and political problems affecting Iran has meant that Bayzai's work has encountered problems with the authorities from both the Pahlavi and Islamic regimes.

work throughout his career. After the ending of the war with Iraq, the post-1989 desire to reflect a more 'liberal' society, and following the film's critical acclaim abroad[13], it was finally allowed onto Iranian screens. However, being issued with a low-grade rating gave the film poor exposure and allowed Farabi to declare that it was a financial failure in the main urban centre Tehran (Riza'ee, 1993: 37).

Finally, films that have received official approval and made it to the screen may have their showings terminated in response to criticism from the government affiliated press. Two of Mohsen Makhmalbaf's films, *Time for Love* (1991) and *Nights on Zayandeh Rud* (1991), were banned following protests by the main government newspapers, *Keyhan*, *Resalat*, *Jomhouri-ye Islami* and *Arbar*, at the Ninth Fajr Film Festival in Tehran, who attacked them for their depiction of human love and for undermining the values of the Islamic Revolution (Bahar, 1993: 107). It is therefore in relation to the issue of control that we should approach the definition of an 'Islamic cinema', or more correctly an 'Islamicised cinema' that is a reflection of wider cultural changes introduced by the new revolutionary regime which sought to create a society in its own image, one which legitimised their right to rule. Indeed, such was the influence of this centralised and censorial apparatus that in the first four years after the revolution a total of forty films were made, of which twenty three were banned by the authorities (Motavalli, 1983).

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[13] It received the First Prize at the Festival of "Art et Essai" Films for Children in Aubervilles in 1990.

The Drive to Create the 'Islamic Man'

The Islamicisation process was an undertaking by the ruling clergy to create a 'new society' in their own image and to submit all aspects of life in Iran to an Islamic conformity for the purpose of consolidating power, through the elimination of all oppositional ideologies and discourses (particularly Marxism), and perpetuating clerical rule. Indeed, this Islamic ideology "substituted for the secular and nationalist ideas of previous decades a new ideology, that of Islamic revolution" (Halliday, 1986: 92). However, it was simply not enough to Islamicise the institutional and organisational apparatus of the State. These changes, if they were to have a meaningful impact and effect real socialised change, would have to extend to the level of changing the individual psychology of the individual. This meant that creating a new society was incumbent on resocialising its members to reflect the changed ideological circumstances and orientations of the State i.e. the Islamic Republic required servile Islamic citizens.

The transformation of the populace into a reflection of and advocate of the clerical system resulted in utilising the institutions of the State, particularly the mass media, in promoting the ideal image of a *homo Islamicus,* (Hosseini, 1992: 103-121), whose defining characteristics were an "absolute submission to the will of God as communicated by the *velayat-e faqih*, fractured individualism, spiritual materialism, dogmatic philistinism and Islamic unidimensional" (Parvin & Vaziri, 1992: 120). This

drive to create the revolutionary man[14] and elevate him to a new level of consciousness lies very much within the historical development of other revolutionary societies. The Cuban revolution sought to create a new man from moral stimulus and social consciousness in order to effect a spiritual rebirth that would free man from alienation through the dignity and liberty of labour[15]. However, the fundamental difference in the case of Iran lay in the fact that the new society, and by extension the creation of the new man, was being built on a reappraisal of familiar indigenous cultural forms that were some 1,400 years old and deeply embedded in the consciousness of the people i.e. Islam. This was the main factor, bolstered by the absence of oppositional voices and the complete monopolisation of the media, which allowed for the identifiable dissemination of these cultural forms to the majority of the population. The cinematic manifestation of this 'Islamic culture' led to the promotion and proliferation of a patriarchal worldview, which centred on the individual and virtuous Muslim male standing firm against 'corruption' and promoted an ascetic philosophy of life built on the worth of sacrifice and martyrdom (particularly in the war films that emerged during the conflict with Iraq) in the service of God and Islam.

Psychologically rounded characterisations were jettisoned in favour of unidimensional characters who merely served as mouthpieces for the promotion of Islamic ideals as a

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[14] I use the term man to deliberately delineate the fact that this socialisation process and its cultural manifestation through Shia symbolism emanated from a patriarchal perspective that placed men as its primary focus of address. Furthermore, it serves to highlight the fact that the imposition of clerical culture was appropriated differently according to gender.

[15] For further elaboration on this point see, Che Guevara, "Notes on Man and Socialism in Cuba", *Che Guevara Speaks, Selected Speeches and Writings*, (New York: Pathfinder Press 1997), pp.121-139.

matter of duty and moral obligation. This lead to a situation where the cinema was employed as a means of socialising the populace along officially sanctioned Islamic lines. In other words art, personal expression and the ability to explore the full panacea of Iranian culture, became subjugated to the promotion of clerical ideology. Through tight official control and the codes of censorship art was relegated to a form of state propaganda in the service of the Islamic Republic and in the promotion of clerical culture rather than as a means of freely expressing aesthetic concerns or attempting to understand the complexities of life, society and the human condition. Makhmalbaf, as a zealous advocate of the new regime sought in his early work to reflect and place his art at the service of promoting the new ideology. His early films are very much concerned with the creation and promotion of the virtuous Islamic man and are therefore very much part of and stand as good examples in understanding the new 'Islamicised cinema'.

Tobeh-Nassouh (Nassouh's Repentance, 1982), *Do Chashme Bisou* (Two Sightless Eyes, 1983), *Este'azeh* (Fleeing from Evil to God, 1984)

Makhmalbaf's early films stand as works of a religious devout revolutionary zealot with an ardent belief in the righteousness of Islamic ideology and the ethos of the new theocratic regime. Produced under the auspices of the Islamic Propagation Organisation, whose proclaimed objectives were, "presenting Islamic ideology through artistic media and challenging artists whose ideas and modes of expression are not harmonious with those of the organisation" (Zahedi, 1993: 36) they are uncompromising, propagandist and ideologically committed to the ideals, legitimation, and perpetuation of the Islamic

117

Republic. As works of art they are extremely poor being weak on just about every level, plot, mise en scéne, acting and overall conception. Stylistically they resemble a series of interconnected talking heads expounding official ideology and a Manichean approach to the world, in a tone that is pedantic, moralistic and sermonising where the message is more important than the medium. Aware of these shortcomings, Makhmalbaf has spoken of his early works as "aridly religious", governed by prejudice, and chiefly concerned with moral and political issues; "these first works were very much influenced by my religious beliefs then, and they are clearly the works of a person without a background in film" (Dabashi, 2001: 182-184). However, despite the fact that these films may be artistically risible they are extremely important elements of the ideological debate structuring the cultural and political undertakings of the new regime in its efforts to create and implement its vision of an 'Islamic society'. Furthermore, they stand as referential interventions in, and reflectors of, the ideological debates and influences underpinning the new regime, as well as perfect examples of a centrally controlled propagandist media in the service of the state in 'socialising' the nation along correct Islamic lines. In this respect these films could be seen as manifestations of Navab Safavi's belief that cinema should "be under the supervision of Islam, related to Islamic concerns and free from unlawful melody" (Martin, 2000: 131). The theoretical influence on Makhmalbaf's early work can be seen to rest primarily on the thoughts of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Motahari with the purpose of creating the 'Islamic man and the just society'. Indeed, all three films are simplistic and dogmatic treatises instructing man on the need to follow a path towards God.

Nassouh's Repentance[16] is based on one man's attempt to atone for his misdeeds of the past and the search for forgiveness. *Two Sightless Eyes* shows the righteous mans belief and faith in God being rewarded with the latter's miraculous intervention in curing his ill son. *Fleeing from Evil to God*[17] tells the story of five men in search of salvation and victory over the temptations of the carnal soul. Satan manages to deceive four of them but the fifth, a true believer, survives and achieves purity by fleeing to God.

The Path to God

The path to God is depicted in these films not merely as a spiritual or religious action but also as a revolutionary discourse based on doctrinal and ideological teachings located in and directed towards the needs of the historical moment in instigating and 'guiding' socio-political change. Such an undertaking was predicated on the propagation of Qur'anic and Shia-derived principles in the establishment of a worldview in conjunction with the ideological convictions of the Islamic Republic in socialising/Islamicising the population to the needs of the revolutionary political programme. The framework for this socialisation/Islamicisation process can be seen to lie in Khomeini's notion of the journey man must take on the path to perfection. This is but the first step in a greater undertaking, the path to social and political change, but one which is predicated on change in the individual; "We cannot change our country unless we reform ourselves. If you want your

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[16] The script for this film was adapted from the writings of Ayatollah Motahari and Ayatollah Dastgheyb. The latter was the Friday mosque speaker in Shiraz who during the height of the revolution called on religious devotees to destroy the ancient ruins Persepolsis deeming them unIslamic. He is also remembered for his pronouncements on carnal and sexual matters.

[17] The scenario for this film was based on a late medieval religious text written by Majlesi's Balwar al-Anwar.

country to be independent begin with yourself" (Khomeini, 1994: 53-54). The search for perfection is a form of personal *jihad,* (Moin, 1999), the first step of which involves mankind forsaking the domain of human limitations and moving towards God in the search for truth. In the second stage man learns from God the qualities of love, anger etc. and the ability to see them in the people. Having witnessed the omnipotence of God and being no longer separated from him the traveller returns to the people whereupon having gained godly attributes he attempts to guide and direct others in the way of God.

Cinema in the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful

The thematic progression of these three films, and the position of the 'revolutionary' cinema itself, can be seen to function as a type of culturally manifested spiritual guide expounding the path to perfection. In *Nassouh's Repentance* the moving towards God is evidenced in the main character's (Loft Ali Khan) spiritual rebirth and realisation that, in adherence to Quranic dictates such as, "But whoso repenteth after his wrongdoing and amendth, lo! Allah will relent toward him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (Sūrah V: 39), forgiveness comes from God not man. *Two Sightless Eyes* relates to stage two where man witnesses the compassion and love of God who rewards the faith of the righteous man by showing him His mysteries in the form of a miracle. The third stage is witnessed at the end of *Fleeing from Evil to God* where the virtuous man having survived Satanic temptation by his faith in God leaves the island no longer separated from Him to return to the people. The final stage of the journey where the traveller acts as a spiritual guide for another along the righteous path can be seen as the ardent function of the official 'Islamic

cinema' acting as the pedagogical tool of the state. However, it is here that certain tensions and contradictions emerge.

Exhorting man to the necessity of individual change predicated on a personal joining with and knowledge of the mysteries of God would seem to suggest the notion of free will and pluralism with the possibility of man attaining the position of *velayat*. This view is given further credence by the fact that the theoretical underpinning of the path to perfection is based on the mystical philosophy of *irfan*, "which encompasses the possibility of unity with the divine one and universal self" (Martin, 2000: 31). It is this focus on individual choice and the "attribution to man of an active – though implicit – agency of an instrumental role in the outcome of a dialectical opposition between the possibilities of Good and Evil" (Dabashi, 2002: 132), which offers a point of conflict with the all-encompassing ideology of the Islamic Republic (particularly the foundation stone of the regime, the *velayat-e faqih*) and unwittingly, according to Hamid Dabashi, position these works as a type of 'Trojan horse'. Whilst there are elements of truth in Dabashi's assertion, what it tends to ignore is the fact that active agency and expression of free will is tempered by limitations and is but the preliminary element for a social and political transformation designed and directed by the clerical rulers. The free will given to man in this instance is a mediated form of 'free will' for the path to perfection is only made known to him through the intervention and guidance of the *ulama*. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic makes this point clear by stating that "the exalted dignity and worth

of the human being and its freedom accompanied with its responsibility"[18] is based on "continuous *ijtihād* by qualified jurists on the basis of the Qu'ran and the Sunnah of the Inallible Ones"[19]. It is the clergy who are the true vice-regents of God on earth, imparting His mysteries to the people. In other words it is the necessity of the political agenda and the expediency of the historical moment that acts as a limitation and disclaimer to any notions of unbridled free will. Motahari noted these restrictions in stating that "man must know his own limitations and weaknesses to know how great God is" and it is the ability of human beings to construct themselves through such self-knowledge, "which enables them to shape their future and that of society" (Martin, 2000: 42-43). Thus this revolutionary man is safely located in a mythological definition of the world which is derived from the word of God as laid down in the Qu'ran and interpreted by His viceregents on earth; "He hath placed you as viceroys of the earth and hath exalted some of you in rank above others, that he may try you by (the test of) that which He hath given you" (Sūrah VII: 166). What this meant in the institutional theocracy of the Islamic Republic was deference to the figure of the *faqih* and the *ulama* and that human 'free will' was 'free will' in the service of the state.

This ethos is very much evidenced in the socialised call to action which these films, particularly *Nassouhs Repentance* and *Two Sightless Eyes*, impart. In the former Loft Ali Khan's search for forgiveness from one of his neighbours is rebuffed with the charge "you should not be asking for my forgiveness you should be asking yourself have I done

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[18] Article 6, *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran: Alhoda, 1997) p.22.
[19] Article 6a, ibid., p.22

my duty to Khomeini, have I done my duty to Iran". His path to salvation is eventually shown to lie in submitting to the religious guidance of a cleric and service at his local mosque where his son, having devoted his life to the revolution and the subsequent war, provides an example of the righteous man. Similarly in *Two Sightless Eyes* it is the righteous man, in this instance contrasted with an unprincipled leftist teacher and a greedy merchant as if to hammer home the point, who, having given his son to the cause of the Islamic Republic in the war with Iraq, is the recipient of God's blessing in providing a cure for his blind child. In this way the cinema is used as a means of conveying official ideology through a mixed message of individual collective action mobilised through Qu'ranic authority 'directed' by the clergy in the socialisation/Islamicisation of the masses according to political expediency. Makhmalbaf's early work formed an elemental part in the attempt to transmit religious authority and ideology into a collective political force that could be harnessed for 'revolutionary' purposes. The cinematic propagation of these purposes functioned as a delicate balancing act, in order to make them Islamically viable and historically relevant, between the notions of 'free will' and collective responsibility. These notions were built on the myth that promoted a false view of human action where the freedom of the individual to change oneself through unity with God would lead to an ability to actively alter the course of history. However, the contradiction to this thesis lay not in submitting oneself to the eternal truth of God but to the will of his vice-regents, i.e. the clergy, on earth for it is only they who are capable of leading the people to the promised land. For the clergy this promised land is the Islamic Republic whose perpetuation and legitimacy is incumbent on 'informing' the people of their collective duty to ensure its survival.

Baycot (Boycott, 1985)

Boycott stands as the most accomplished film of Makhmalbaf's 'Islamic' period. Despite the fact that it is still very committed to, and supportive of, the ideals of the Islamic regime, and sets out to reflect official historical and ideological perspectives, the film exhibits certain elements of doubt regarding the absolute belief in politics and ideology as a whole and their role in the destruction and depersonalisation of the individual. However, the main aim of the film is to attack the 'soulless and atheistic Left' as enemies of the state and Islam. In this respect the film is very much influenced by Ayatollah Motahari's refutation of Marxism (see chapter 2) and is a reflection/commentary of the reign of terror conducted against the Left, especially the Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran, in the immediate years after the revolution, through the use of the media as a form of official propaganda. Within the generic codes of 'Islamic cinema' *Boycott* is very much located within the (ideological) 'crime does not pay' category, attacking not just the former regime, but also those now deemed enemies of the Islamic Republic. However, despite its location in the immediate historical past it is a film that resonates with the concerns of the present and it is within this mode of historical revisionism that cracks and gaps occur that allow for the space and possibility of readings against the grain that cast doubt on the new regime's methodology in enforcing ideological conformity and control. These issues are counterpointed by the development of a cinematic form that combines a number of different styles and modes of experimentation that not only seek to encompass an ardent political programme through a multitudinous form of representation but also serves as a means of casting doubt on the pervasiveness of all totalising ideologies.

Set in the years before Iran's revolution in 1979, *Boycott* tells the story of Valeh, a young anti-Shah activist who forsakes his family for the cause of leftist politics. His arrest and imprisonment causes great hardship on his wife. Valeh's acquaintance with his Marxist colleagues in jail force him to rethink his ideology, which he renounces before being taken away and executed by the authorities.

Islamicisation and the attack on the Left

The campaign waged by the Islamic regime against the "corrupting influence" and "treachery" (Moin, 1999: 175-180) of Marxist groupings marked the final stage in the clerics total control of power. The assumption and consolidation of this power was achieved by using the full armoury of the State, through both propaganda and harsh repressive measures, to rid itself of the last voices of opposition to clerical rule. In the initial period following the revolution many parties and organisations of the left, including the Tudeh (Iranian Communist Party) and the Mojahedin, supported the new Islamic regime on the basis of its radical agenda and anti-imperialism. However, once it became clear that the new regime was more concerned with consolidation and enforcement of a theocratic state and a cultural revolution rather than a revolution in the relations of production, the ownership of the means of production, or the establishment of democratic institutions, support turned to opposition and opposition was met with repression. This repression took the form of armed action, mass arrests and executions as well as the deployment of the media in a propaganda campaign that attempted to vilify the Left and erase them from history. It is within this context that *Boycott* much be

situated. Within the context of the drive for absolute power Khomeini used this historical revisionism to attack the Left and erase their contribution in bringing about the fall of the Shah by stating that, "[The Left] did not contribute anything. They did not help the revolution at all…They were not decisive in the victory, they were not responsible, they did not contribute anything…The people fought for Islam" (Behrooz, 2000: 95). The conservative *marja'-e taqlid* Ayatollah Golpayegani declared the Left to be the main threat to Islam and told people to be on the lookout for atheistic communists pretending to be revolutionary Muslims[20]. This onslaught continued in the media and through Revolutionary Tribunals, which in one case blamed Marxists for causing the notorious 1978 fire in the Rex cinema (see chapter 1) in Abadan (Abrahamian, 1989: 95). These verbal attacks were bolstered by a vicious campaign of terror, which began with the impeachment of the President Bani-Sadr in June 1981 and was to last for almost another four years, resulting in violent sieges, street confrontations and bombings, which claimed the lives of "12,250 political dissidents, three quarters of whom were Mojahedin sympathisers or members" (Abrahamian, 1989: 223).

It is within this context that *Boycott* must be seen as part of the Islamicisation process by espousing official ideology in the castigation of the regime's enemies through a socialisation of the masses. Indeed, Makhmalbaf himself has stated that he sees Marxism as "useless and ignorant…and for a century has ruined lives of part of humanity…I no longer believe in absolutes"[21]. These sentiments are echoed in the film when the main

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[20] *Ettela'at*, 5th July 1980.
[21] Interview with Mohsen Makhmalbaf, *Cinema '96*, 1996, p.6

character, Valeh, on entering prison states, "I now doubt the principles I had upheld for a long time. I began with the postulate, I fight therefore I am. But now I doubt whether I really exist and therefore I don't care to fight. One needs a philosophy in order to fight". Later on he says to his comrades in jail, "I know all of you have robbed me of my faith and gave me nothing in return. Let me tell you I am doubtful of all ideology, of politics, of you, of myself, of everything and everybody" and when he is being told to die like a hero for the cause of socialism and the obliteration of imperialism, he states that "imperialism and socialism are the same to a dead person". The central issue at stake here is the obliteration of the individual in the service of empty ideals. The structure which the prisoners impose on all activities and action is a Marxism that is presented as a totalitarian and despotic system of conformity that espouses a nihilistic and anti-human ideology that robs the individual of his sense of self and leads to the destruction of man. This fact is highlighted in scenes where one of the prisoners is continuously painting his own self-portrait, a search for an identity that has been subsumed and denied under an all encompassing ideology, and where one prisoner is murdered by his comrades for acting and thinking outside acceptable 'dialectical and scientific' thought patterns. Such a depiction of socialist ideology is instructive on two counts.

Marxism and Islam

Firstly, despite the rhetorical and superficial depiction of Marxism in the film certain points are pertinent with regard to the development of the Left in Iran. One of the main reasons posited for the failure of the Iranian Left, apart from relentless State repression,

127

has been the fact that organisationally they have often demonstrated undemocratic means of dealing with ideological opponents, which arouse from their adherence for the most part to a Stalinist ideology which failed to respect the rights of "individual members in internal disputes...serious party differences were resolved...either by silencing ideological opponents or purging" (Behrooz, 2000: 160-161). Part of that ideological legacy was an attachment to Bolshevism and a belief in the leading role of a professional vanguard revolutionary party, allied with a deep attachment to and toeing of the Moscow line, which prevented them from adapting to and recognising the realities and particularities of Iranian society. This rigid conformity is very much reflected in the internecine ideological debates that take place within the hierarchical structure which the prisoners create for themselves. Secondly, the anti-humanist critique of Marxism espoused throughout *Boycott* is very much a reflection of Ayatollah Motahari's thoughts in the projection of an Islamic ideological alternative. Motahari propounded that Marxism belittled man by denying him of a conscience of his own and an interior being. As a result he loses the freedom of individual choice by being regarded as a mere tool or product of society and its means of production. Therefore, "his power to progress, to improve and indeed to perfect himself is lost" (Martin, 2000: 94). By contrast Islam presents man as possessing a grand destiny as the chosen creation of God, capable of knowing the ineffable. In this respect Motahari contrasts what he sees as the pessimism of Marxism with "Qu'ranic optimism and man's noble destiny under the one compared to his role as the instrument of blind determinism on the other" (Martin, 2000: 95). Makhmalbaf highlights this division in the contrast between Valeh's death and martyrdom of the Islamic militants, Ali and Fatemeh, at the start of the film. The latter's death in a shoot-

out at the start of the film is presented in melodramatic terms with swelling music and stirring action sequences using frantic cross-cutting, multiple close-ups and subjective camera angles, which sees them die a noble death as martyrs attaining paradise in a hail of bullets for a higher cause. By contrast Valeh's death for the "future of socialism" is presented as an entering into nothingness, a non-existence to which he asks, "what will happen to my family? Ideology has no answer for that question". Indeed, this dichotomy, which on the one hand suggests that certain types of activism and causes are more noble than others, is itself pervaded with doubt as to the effectiveness of all forms of political/ideological violence. The prime locus of this concern is predicated on the effect that such actions have on the family. The death of Ali and Fatemeh is counterpointed by the pathos of their crying child who has just lost his parents whilst the consequences of Valeh's political activities are shown by the effect that they have on his family e.g. his wife is interrogated, she has to sell all their possessions to pay the rent and their new-born child will lose his father. Whilst on the one hand such juxtapositioning is an attempt to give a human and personal point of identification to the political sloganeering it also highlights a constant theme that is developed further in Makhmalbaf's work from this point on; the centrality and importance of the family as the most important fundamental unit of society.

The Ideological Use of the Media

The final point that needs to be made in relation to the film is the function of the media as evidenced in the trial scene. Here the aim is to present the media which operated under

the Shah as a manipulative propagandist tool. The attendees in the public gallery at the court are all military personnel who we see change into civilian clothes in order for a partisan media to transmit a manufactured picture to the nation of a populace in support of the models of state, the rule of law and the actions of its rulers. This point is made clearer when, during the course of the trial, Valeh rises to make his plea. The director of the television crew filming the unfolding events calls cut, refusing to record Valeh's defence case. In this respect the media are portrayed as merely the ideological tool of those in power, primarily concerned with the workings and righteousness of the court and the functioning of the law which is portrayed as functioning as a legitimator of power and as an instrument for punishing those deemed enemies of the State. Whilst the explicit aim is to castigate the former regime the implicit meaning, within the contextual development of the Islamic State and the events occurring at the time, is that these are the very same methods by which the media is being used by the current regime; the only difference is the ideological setting. This complex intertextuality and its interpretation (the use of the media by the former regime to manipulate its audience and prosecute its enemies i.e. the Left, within a film which may be seen as part of the present regime's ideological campaign to prosecute its enemies i.e. the Left) highlights the comparison of a common enemy dealt with through similar means with the common aim of enforcing acquiescence to the will of the State by eliminating all dissenting voices. Makhmalbaf's loose adaptation of historical subjects to mixed generic conventions (in this case, action/thriller, prison/political drama) in the service of a particular ideological agenda leads to an "undermining and arbitrary reinterpretation of history" (Shafik, 1998: 165) that sets loose a whole set of alternative meanings that offer alternative interpretations of the present.

This is particularly evident when present political considerations determine the functioning of the modes of representation and their interpretation of the past and where historical revisionism sets in motion unexpected counter currents of meaning and provide evidence not only of nascent elements of doubt in Makhmalbaf's work, but the beginning of an awareness of the complexity of ideological positions. *Boycott* oscillates between a localised ideological dedication and a universalised doubt as to the merits of grand ideological themes. In this respect it is very much a site of contradictory meanings and uncertainties that exhibits a myriad of contradictions standing as a template for the operation of artistic expression in the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, it stands a pointer to Makhmalbaf's subsequent artistic development and thematic preoccupations; his questioning of absolutes, his search for a reconstitution of the individual and his recognition of the fractured nature of reality.

Conclusion

The idea of an 'Islamic cinema' does not, like 'Islamic art', have a claim to some pre-defined, unique essence, or readily possess definable formal traits that set itself apart from all other forms of cinema. The films of this period were poorly made, exhibiting melodramatic and stock generic elements (particularly the war genre), containing an unsubtle message that preached "moral values, often via didactic slogans and aphorisms superficially woven into the dialogue or shrill rhetoric orated by characters" (Golmakani, 1999). Indeed the attempts to define the purpose and characteristics of an 'Islamic cinema' have been at best vague, "performing the same functions as the mosque". A

more accurate term would be to label the term an "Islamicised cinema" which formed a part of the Islamic regime's overall strategy to control all aspects of society through ideological transformation. As the Deputy for Cinematographic Affairs at the time, Mehdi Kalhor (1982: 11), stated, "cultural tradition forms the jumping board for the serious film-makers who are witnesses to the most exciting period in the history of this country. They are experiencing almost at first hand heroic acts of courage and self-sacrifice. It is therefore their duty to set to work and act as candid chroniclers of this glorious moment".

Towards this end all aspects of the filmmaking process were brought under centralised government control. The 'Islamicised cinema' can therefore be defined on the twin themes of propagating official Islamic ideology and the strict control of morality. The former has meant expounding the socio-political ideology of the regime by acting as a form of, and functioning in the same way as, the altered education system, in acting as a cultural means of legitimating and consolidating the position of those in power. In addition, the issue of the strict control and enforcement of a moral code has perhaps given cinema in Iran its uniquely 'Islamic' appearance. However this has been in an unnatural and superficial way with the 'Islamic' element in films being reflected by the absence of intimacy between the sexes and the regulations governing the appearance of women, resulting in a strange absence and a series of signs searching for signifiers. It remains in the coming chapters to see how filmmakers dealt with these restrictions, how cinema itself progressed throughout the years of changed political, social and cultural contexts,

and how the Islamic regime itself dealt with these changes on the domestic, and the increasingly prevalent, international stage.

CHAPTER 4
State of the Nation

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to chart and evaluate the development of the Islamic

Republic from the period when the clergy consolidated their total control on power,

through the elimination of any remaining opposition groups, up until the death of

Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. This was a tumultuous time in the history of the country,

which saw it face a whole host of problems such as "war, lack of reasonable planning,

multiplicity of power centres, intensifying economic crises, inflation…stagnation and

unemployment, corruption in sections of the ruling regime, housing problems, low

incomes, political economic and social insecurity" (Menashri 1990: 354). Having

assumed power the clergy then set about the task of governing. This saw the creation of a

highly centralised state with control over all aspects of life in society, the main purpose of

which was to perpetuate clerical rule and fully implement Khomeini's revolutionary

ideology, "neo-Shi'ism", where "the tenets of the faith constitute the rules of government

and members of the *ulama* exercise authority as the political elite. In terms of Iranian

culture, the theocracy endeavoured to purge Iran's pre-Islamic past from society and

nation" (Mackey, 1998: 335). However, this fact tends to ignore the adaptability of the

regimes ideology and its ability to change as expediency dictated in their multi-faceted

application of cultural norms. Thus the internal consolidation of the revolution through

the Islamicisation process slowed somewhat as focus was shifted to the international

arena and the second tenet of Khomeini's revolutionary ideology, exporting the

revolution. The central issue in this regard was the eight-year war with Iraq (1980-88)[1] against which all ideological, social, political and economic issues were to be argued and defined.

The means of consolidating power by the regime quickly turned from the issue of culture to that of economics although the later was still fought in the realms of ideology and rhetoric in what might be termed cultural economics. This resulted in increasingly marginalised and unrealistic calls for an 'Islamic economics' built on the ideas of justice for the dispossessed and justified through the *sharia*. In essence the theory followed the line of much Third World populism in attempting to advocate a new way between socialism and capitalism (Khomeini's oft repeated phrase "Neither East nor West but Islam") when in reality it merely served to combine different aspects of the aforementioned economic systems as expediency dictated. The argument over the economy centred on the creation of divisions within the ruling elite as radicalism began to be replaced by creeping realism and the question emerged as to which should take precedent, Iran or Islam. Indeed, Iran's revolutionary decade has been characterised as one beset by "considerable instability, the breakdown of law and order, a widespread feeling of insecurity among the population" that has "eroded business confidence....resulted in little capital investment and a brain drain" (Hunter, 1992: 44).

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[1] The Iraq-Iran war began when Iraqi forces invaded Iran in September 1980. The cause of the conflict are historically complex but essentially the dispute arose from the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's attempt to gain control of the disputed Shatt-al Arab waterway and to position Iraq as the main power in the Middle East. Fearing that the revolutionary rhetoric emanating from Iran would incite Iraq's Shia population to rebel (other countries with sizeable Shia populations, such as Bahrain and Pakistan, also feared the spread of revolution from Iran) and sensing that the Islamic Republic was weak and disorganised he decided to attack believing that a quick victory and the collapse of the Islamic Republic would ensue.

This was also the period when the cinema industry was revitalised and rebuilt and began to come of age artistically and intellectually under a series of government initiatives that sought to establish, support and maintain a viable domestic film industry. However the tension between a state sponsored film industry "employed to consolidate and reproduce Islamic (clerical) hegemony" (Farsoun & Mashayekhi 1992: 2) and artists attempting to articulate their concerns over post-revolutionary issues became a heightened area of conflict. In the charged socio-political atmosphere both filmmakers and those in power were aware of the fact that cultural variations had the ability to play a decisive role in determining the political development of the society. The cinema began to articulate the concerns of societal issues and to take stock of and reflect on the years of revolution. It is in this atmosphere that we must examine a trilogy of socially committed films by Makhmalbaf that marked not only a formal break but also an intellectual break from his previous work, setting aside the sermonising of the new 'Islamic man', to critically investigate the problems facing the country and to examine the possibility of creating a new cinematic language through which to articulate these concerns. The three films to be examined within the context of the social, political and economic development of the country[2] and the development of the Iranian film industry itself are, *Dastforoush* (The Peddler, 1987), *Doucharke Savar Bicycleran* (The Cyclist, 1989) and *Arusi-ye Khuban* (Marriage of the Blessed, 1989).

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[2] I have decided to refer to these films as 'The *Mostaz 'efin* Trilogy' as they focus on and deal with the plight of, and the problems besetting, the oppressed masses of people (*mostaz 'efin*) who formed the vanguard of the revolution and the main centres of support and legitimisation for the Islamic regime.

Radicalism and Moderatism: Political Culture in a Decade of War and Revolution

The eight-year war with Iraq was the overarching feature affecting all aspects of life during the first decade of Islamic rule in Iran. Having eliminated their internal enemies, silenced opposition and Islamicised almost all aspects of society, clerical rule attempted to make its ideological presence felt on the international arena. The war was not so much a military conflict as an ideological struggle which provided the clerical rulers "with a platform from which to rejuvenate the drive for national unity and Islamic revolution" (Hiro 1991: 255) and gave the Khomeini regime a new lease of life in that they were able to use it as a "primary instrument of consolidation and control" (Ramazani, 1988: 85). Once again the ideological apparatus used was that of Shia Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini described the conflict as a holy war (*jihad*) being waged against an "infidel" (Saddam Hussein) in defence of Islam, "they [Iraqi forces] have attacked Islam and we have to defend Islam. Our weapon is faith, our armoury is Islam and with the weapons of faith and Islam we shall succeed and we will win"[3]. The invocation of religious ideology saw the emergence once again of the potent Shia symbols and themes of martyrdom and self sacrifice[4]. By referring to Saddam Hussein as Yazid – the caliph responsible for the massacre at Karbala and the death of Hossein (see Chapter 2) – in the same way that they had referred to the Shah, the clerics were able to channel "the religious-historical sentiments of the people and their frustrations" (Menashri 1990: 10) against their external enemies.

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[3] *New York Times* 19 Oct. 1980.

[4] The ideal of martyrdom as a lofty ideal and the path to God was wholeheartedly embraced by many Iranians and is described in the Qu'ran as, "Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision". Surah III, verse 169, in *The Koran*, (trans.) M.M. Pickthall, (London: Star Books, 1989) p.76. Indeed many of the Iranian troops used in human wave offences were distributed with keys prior to battle in order to open the gates of heaven upon being martyred.

This served a dual purpose for the clerics in that they were able to further consolidate their power domestically by rallying the nation behind a common cause but also allowed them to "postpone decisions on major socio-economic issues" (Hiro 1991: 258) and to pursue Khomeini's other revolutionary aim, the export of revolution; "Islam is a scared trust from God to ourselves and the Iranian nation must grow in power and resolution until it has vouchsafed Islam to the entire world" (Ramazani, 1983: 9). However in elevating the war to a spiritual battle, Khomeini, for whom nationalism was anathema, was placing (what he saw as) the needs of Islam over those of Iran. In doing so he was merely following Islamic ideals for which the idea of 'nation' is totally foreign, the community of which is not founded on nationalistic notions of race or myth but on a community of believers (*umma*) (Zemzemi, 1986). Indeed, "this new [Islamic ideology]…substituted for the secular and nationalist ideas of earlier decades a new ideology, that of Islamic revolution. The legitimacy of the Islamic Republic therefore required a depreciation of those other trends" (Halliday, 1986: 92). However in taking such a stand the repercussions for the country and the future of the Islamic state were to be immense and far-reaching.

Nation versus Islam

The central question concerning the conflict arose over the universal interests of Islam versus the national interests of Iran. This formed the basis of the political debate between the clerics, which was to eventually lead to conflict and an ideological split into two opposing camps, radicals versus pragmatists/moderates. This division was to act as the defining characteristic of the future political development and progress of the state and

138

was to permeate throughout all levels of Iranian society. Under such circumstances the cultural realm was not to remain immune for very long and indeed, formed the arena for the conflict among Iran's opposing political factions. Of prime importance was the position and control of the cinematic medium; "due to its wide reach and its impact, cinema was in the forefront of discussions and skirmishes among the domestic political wings" (Golmakani, 1999: 5). This confluence of the political and the cultural was also recognised and highlighted by Makhmalbaf when he stated, in an open letter to the media protesting about the censorship and prosecution of his work in public, that, "The writer of these columns knows well that these arguments have nothing to do with him. The fight is over nothing other than the struggles between the different factions who seek power"[5].

Indeed, future threats to the Islamic Republic were not to come from those deemed the 'enemies', of clerical rule but from within clerical rule itself based on the question of whether to give priority to the revolution or to the state. Khomeini for his part was well aware of this threat when he decided to disband the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) on the 1st of June 1987, which by this time was the party of power and the only legally operating political organisation in the country. His actions were dictated by the fear that the growing division between the radicals and moderates could have a destabilising effect on the Islamic Republic. The dissolution of the IRP was a tacit admission of the failure to promote the idea of unity amongst Islamic subsystems and a recognition that ideological differences existed. However, rather than signalling the beginnings of 'liberal' debate it

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[5] *Film*, (Tehran), March/April 1991, p.125.

in fact resulted in the further entrenchment of clerical rule, increased centralisation and control, and a strengthening of the principle of *velayat-e faqih.*

The consolidation and perpetuation of clerical rule was the overriding principle of the leadership who "conceded that differences could emerge among true believers as long as they remained loyal followers of Imam Khomeini" (Rahnema & Behdad 1996: 88). The clerics still relied on this support and loyalty coming from the *mostaz'efin* but even here a split was discernible. A dual system began to operate whereby an increasingly hollow sounding rhetoric was used by the leadership as an assurance of their devotion and commitment to the cause of the *mostaz 'efin* whilst in reality an ideological shift had taken place as the government sought to align itself more and more with the middle classes, in a bid to establish the mosque and the bazaar as the twin pillars of the state.

The Changing Class Orientation of the Islamic State

During the height of the war Khomeini deemed 1983 – 84 to be "the year of the *mostaz'efin*", going on to state his alarm at the gulf separating what he termed the "shanty dwellers" (*kukh neshin*) from the "palace dwellers" (*kakh neshin*) and warning that if the mentality of the "palace dwellers" were to prevail the revolution would be in danger (Menashri, 1990: 277-280). However, by the fourth year of the new regime the dispossessed had become the disenfranchised. The 'owners of the revolution' were the ones who suffered most from the economic constraints of war and who filled the

increasing number of coffins coming back from the front[6] yet had experienced little or none of the benefits promised them by the revolution. However, their voices of discontent were prevented from becoming a dangerous political threat to the established order by two main factors. Firstly, Iran's oil income, despite the war, was still significant and, combined with rationing and the systematic discouragement of materialism, managed to maintain a sufficient supply of basic necessities (Menashri, 1990: 12). The second factor lay in the person of Khomeini himself, who still commanded zealous support from the people and was politically astute in his use of ideology in achieving some form of national unity. This latter point is clearly evidenced in his ideological restructuring of society from a "dichotomous image of society" to a "trichotomous" one, (Abrahamian, 1993: 51-52) that recognised the existence and contribution of the middle classes. Society now moved from an antagonistic revolutionary dichotomy to a trichotomous state of post-revolutionary semi-harmony that saw an ideological shift in the use of the term *mostaz 'efin* where it ceased to be an economic category depicting the deprived masses becoming instead a political term used to describe the regimes supporters and all those fighting oppression. Indeed, Khomeini went on to make clear his recognition of the middle classes and this new vision of society by stating that, "the revolution will remain secure as long as the Parliament and the government are manned by members of the middle classes"[7].

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[6] Indeed, Khomeini was well aware of this fact, "To which class of society do these heroic fighters of the battlefield belong? Do you find even one person among them who is related to persons who have large capital or had some power in the past? If you find one we will give you a prize. But you won't". *(Tehran Times* 10th February 1982, p.6). However, is worth noting that in January 1983 Khomeini, in recognising the need for unity and the growing (financial) importance of the middle classes, was at pains to stress the historical link between the clergy and the *bazaari's* and to express his gratitude for their support in offering their sons and finance to the war effort. *(JI* 31st January 1983).
[7] *Ettela'at*, 9th February 1982.

What needs to be understood is the fact that the drive by the leaders of the Islamic Republic to establish a strong link between the bazaar and the mosque did not represent a total betrayal of revolutionary ideals per se but was a reflection of the chameleon like quality of the Islamic regime and more so a recognition of the historical particularism of Iranian civil society. Historically this has resulted in the construction of a society by two influential groups, whose social authority rested on the socio-economic cultural bonds between them, the *bazaari's* and clerics.

In the post-revolutionary era these historical claims formed an important element of government policy as the war with Iraq consumed the country's attentions, the radical/moderate divisions became more pronounced and "the discrepancies between the revolutions grand promises and the harsh realities of living under its rule were beginning to be aired in the Iranian press and parliament" (Hunter 1989: 133). Indeed, the need to counteract such developments and to build unity and consensus in the face of an external enemy highlighted the importance of employing the realm of culture in promoting the 'correct' ideological message. Of central importance in this regard was the role of the media and this period was to see a rejuvenation in the cinema industry through a series of government backed initiatives that saw an increase in both the quality and quantity of films being produced. The position of the cinema reflects the post-revolutionary political developments and requirements of those in power in that it was used as a propagandist tool and consolidator of power in the war with Iraq ("The Cinema for the Sacred Defense") as well as acting as a cultural reflection of the radical/moderate split. Thus cinema was used to reflect, and also as a reflection of, the state of the nation, caught

between the desire of those in power to retain it as an instrument of centralised control and the recognition that some form of 'liberalism' was needed in the cultural realm to avoid a backlash against the incessant sermonising of the Islamicisation process. It is within the context of these issues that the changed socio-cultural position of the cinema needs to be evaluated.

A Decade of War and Revolution

The period from 1979 up until the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 was marked by revolution and war, factors that were to have a devastating effect on all aspects of life in Iran. The war with Iraq cost Iran heavily, with an estimated 262,000 people killed, expenditure of between $74 and $91 billion, as well as indirect costs such as the loss of oil revenue and the destruction of infrastructure and agriculture, all of which amounted to costs of around $627 billion (Hiro, 1991: 251). This merely served to exacerbate the failure of the Islamic regime to deal effectively with the multitude of economic and social problems besetting the country. The official rate of urban unemployment had risen from 7.1 per cent in 1976 to 14.1 per cent in 1986[8], a figure made worse by a growing population that contributed a further 400,000 job seekers to its ranks each year. Inflation had risen from 9.9 per cent in 1978 to a high of 28.9 per cent in 1988,[9] with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) falling by an average of 1.3 per cent per annum over the same period[10]. Furthermore, "by the end of the decade, the revolution had not even radically changed the distribution of wealth. Only 10 per cent of the people owned 64 per cent of

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[8] *Kayhan,* 26th February 1991.
[9] *Mahnameyeh Baressihayeh Bazargani* (Monthly Trade Reports) No. 3, Summer 1991.
[10] *Kayhan,* 26th April 1990.

the wealth...Despite the teachings of Islam that proclaims the meek to be the most noble, in Iran, it was the wealthy who were the most admired" (Omid, 1994: 177).

The Media: Control and Interpellation

In Khomeini's call to war, cinema was once again cited as a key element in the political process; "our devout wish [is] to save our youth, to save our future from these dens of corruption. We are going to take our youths away from the corrupting pleasures of the flesh. We drive them out of the cinemas and away from the dream machine and take them to the battlefields where they make real contributions, where they can place their lives on the line to defeat the enemy and defend our nation...We will take them and arm them and send them to the battlefields. This is the kind of freedom that we need in this country" (Omid, 1994: 156). However, as has been seen earlier the clerics soon discovered the usefulness of the cinema as an essential tool in their desire to consolidate and reproduce Islamic (clerical) hegemony, a need brought into sharper focus by the exigencies of war.

Khomeini himself was aware of this when he moderated his view somewhat by declaring that television should become a "popular university" of the people carrying the message of revolution to the masses and that no "uneducational" programmes should be broadcast in the future[11]. This is a reflection of the carrot and stick approach adopted by the authorities towards the media in general but which must be considered within the context of developments at the time i.e. the Islamicisation process and the radical/moderate split in the ruling elite. The appeal to the radicals as well as the desire to keep the media under

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[11] *Kayhan* newspaper 14th of February 1983.

strict central control can be evidenced from the 1985 Media Bill, which further to the regulations already in existence with regard to the cinema decreed that any publication would be banned that was deemed to contain material that could be construed as disrespectful to Islam or the religious leaders or which was seen as 'immoral'. The terms of this Bill were further reiterated three years later in August 1988 by The High Council of Cultural Revolution[12] who went on to add that any material that could be described as socially or politically divisive or likely to undermine the unity of the nation or supported corrupt Western values or advocated sexual freedom or feminist issues would also be banned.

The year 1988 also saw the removal of the need to achieve script approval before beginning a film project. The reason behind this has been cited as the fact that "authorities came to the conclusion that the current criteria and standards were already known to filmmakers, while the Reviewing Council, which issues release permits, could always exert sufficient control and supervision" (Golmakani, 1989: 28). The delicate balancing act needed to maintain a sense of unity amongst opposing factions can be seen from the fact that these measures, which gave the government sweeping powers of control, were counterbalanced by the voice of moderatism. Khomeini advised the clerics not to press down "too hard" on the people and to "refrain from extremism"[13]. The Speaker of the *Majles* also began to criticise the harshness of many of the government's

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[12] This was the organisation set up by Khomeini one year after the revolution to 'revise' (i.e. Islamicise) the new educational system.
[13] *JI* newspaper, 3rd September 1984.

145

reforms, calling for more entertainment and sports programmes rather than strictly religious ones to be made for public consumption[14].

However, such moves should not be misunderstood as heralding a new-found liberalisation and opening up of society. Indeed, if these attitudes were translated into practice at all they caused no more than a changing degree of intensity, with the ultimate aim still being to create a 'new' form of Islamic lifestyle and "in a period of war…to keep religion and revolutionary zeal alive and to foster the spirit of martyrdom" (Menashri, 1990: 324). Criticism of the regime when it did emerge was either silenced or, like much else in the Islamic Republic, strictly controlled. The tentative voices of criticism, which were to become louder after the death of Khomeini in 1989, began moves towards a subtle analysis rather than outright criticism of conditions in the country. This undertaking involved a process where anti-regime sentiments made sure that they did not attack Islam, the government or the clergy directly. Indeed, in such instances such negative assertions occurred they were immediately countered by pro-government or pro-regime voices[15]. This factor is symptomatic of the fact that the media at large, as with the government, are divided into moderate and radical groupings. In this respect cinema is no different[16] with discernible split between a "populist cinema",

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[14] *JI* newspaper, 8th and 29th September 1984.

[15] An example of this process can be clearly seen when the Hamshahri newspaper claimed in an edition, dated (11/04/'93), that it had come to the conclusion that faith and religion were matters of personal and spiritual perspectives and could not and should not be imposed as a matter of government policy. These assertions were immediately countered by the pro-government press as being pro-Western and seeking to undermine the revolution. (See, Homa Omid, (1994) *Islam and the Post-Revolutionary State in Iran,* New York: St. Martins Press p.172-174).

[16] The Managing Director of the Farabi Cinema Foundation highlighted this point by stating the following; "When a filmmaker introduces a miscreant, say a police officer, teacher etc. it has to be seen whether he is criticising an individual or the system as a whole. If the latter is the case then he has to be stopped". Interview with *Film Monthly*, Tehran, No. 14 June 1984.

which affirms post-revolutionary Islamic values, and a "quality cinema", which seeks to engage with these values in a critique of social conditions under the Islamic regime (Farsoun & Mashayekhi, 1992: 23). This division is crucial to understanding its evolution in the decade of war and revolution and nowhere was the contradiction of this division more visible than in the cinema of Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

Cinema at War, Art in Conflict

As has been shown, during the first decade of Islamic rule keeping the country running and fighting in the war with Iraq were the prime concerns of the Iranian leadership. Into this milieu cinema was to be pushed with mixed results. Indeed the difficulties and confluence of art and politics in a highly charged ideological atmosphere are made clear in comments made by the Managing Director of the Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF) Mohammad Behesti: "In a sense, our government authorities were wrong in their estimation and expectation of the film medium. Starting with the premise that significant social phenomena usually entail the emergence of artistic creations of great impact and magnitude, they expected the extraordinary events that occurred in the country to bring in their wake artistic creations of comparable significance. But when we do not have artists inspired by the revolution dunces take over, and when they make films on the war, their works turn out to be worthless reels"[17]. The fundamental issue here is the fact that revolutionary zeal and support for the regime are more important factors than artistic or intellectual creativity, which are generally treated with suspicion. Indeed, as Houshang Golmakani (1989: 26) has noted, "preserving the revolutionary morale - whether in time

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[17] *Film Monthly*, No. 13, May 1984.

of war or peace – constitutes the basic moral principle of Iranian cinema". Both these

points are borne out by the figures which show that during the war period "a total of fifty-

six feature fiction films about the war were made [with most of them emphasising] action

and violence over sensitivity and psychological depth" (Naficy, 1992: 200). Furthermore,

on the thematic level it must be noted that "although war led to an increase in the quantity

of films, which emphasise Islamic values of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, it negatively

affected the quality of films, which, by and large, have been limited to circulating clichés

and slogans" (Naficy, 1992: 200-201). War provided a perfect genre for the portrayal of

"the Muslim male standing firm against corruption and injustice in the name of the

revolution" (Mackey 1998: 336).

Indeed, the war film was a genre in Iranian cinema that only emerged after the revolution.

The Iranian film magazine *Film International* has noted that most of these types of film

"have nothing new to say or no distinguished features to put forward…the number of

noteworthy war movies in Iranian cinema is disappointing". However the same article

does go on to say that despite these shortcomings they do "create such heroes whom by

themselves are appealing to spectators"[18] i.e. the ideal Islamic man. This shows the

dichotomous nature of Iranian 'popular' cinema where technical ability and intellectual

depth are substituted by sloganeering in support of the ideals nurtured and propagated by

those in power, all in the service of Islam and the Islamic republic.

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[18] *Film International*, Autumn 1994, pp.54-55.

However, what could not be denied was the social effect that the war had on the people and the country as a whole. It was here that the 'quality' directors used the war film as a means of subverting the genre (at least in its Iranian manifestation) and using it as a means with which to criticise and analyse the problems besetting Iranian society. Central here was the position of the *mostaz'efin* as represented by the depiction and elevation of the *basiji* in these films. The *Basij,* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) a popular reserve controlled by the Islamic Guards Corps, were largely uneducated men and boys drawn from the poorest sections of society, who proved to be the most ardent and dedicated supporters of the revolution. During the war with Iraq they were organised "into poorly trained and equipped infantry units which were often used in Iran's human wave assaults" (Cordesman 1994: 78). It was these who proved the prototype for the 'ideal Islamic man' fighting injustice, but paradoxically also acted as the framework within which to analyse the problems besetting Iranian society and the failure of the revolutionary rhetoric to improve their status and position. The latter could be said to represent a sub-genre within Iranian cinema as the examples of the "war returnee, *basiji,* coming to terms with the many failures of the revolution" (Omid, 1994: 175) are many in Iranian cinema, as seen in such films as Ebrahim Hatami Kia's, *Az Karkheh ta Rayin* (From Karkhe to the Rhine, 1993) or Mohsen Makhmalbaf's, *Arusi-ye Khuban* (The Marriage of the Blessed, 1989). Indeed, it was Makhmalbaf who, more than anybody else, embodied the contradictions between the thematic representations of 'popular' and 'quality' cinema as he moved from Islamic idealist to social commentator. The most trusted and respected filmmaker of the regime up to this point was now subjected to censorship and mounting criticism from the hard-liners "as he presented vivid and critical

149

portrayals of the effects of abject poverty, and the disillusionment of soldiers with the Iran-Iraq war" (Bahar, 1993: 107).

Cinema and the Post Revolutionary State: A Third World Comparison

This historical progression of the Iranian cinema entwined with, defined by and defining, the social and political process bears comparison with the early development of cinema in Algeria. Following the war of liberation Algerian films concerned themselves about the recent past. Concentrating primarily on the theme of war these films became known as "Cinema Moudjahid". As one Algerian critic has written: "The first thing that hits you when see many of the films about the period 1954-62 is their astonishing superficiality compared with the complexity of the problems of the period. Lacking the necessary distance, the young film-makers took anecdotes out of context...the resulting dynamics are therefore the two elements in a disarmingly naïve Manicheanism.... The Algerian people become a homogeneous entity, as though colonisation had not existed since 1830" (Salmane, 1976: 25). As in the clerics employment of cinema during the war "Cinema Moudjahid" served to mask the contradictions of complex social issues. The struggle in Iran has been conducted over the control and interpretation of history, the war with Iraq provided a prime opportunity for such a programme to be undertaken in the present as it actually happened.

Seeing history as emanating and beginning from 1979, the Islamic Republic has sought "to reduce complex ideological issues to simple personality conflicts in which one side epitomises goodness, the other wickedness" (Abrahamian, 1993: 92). The war as an

extension of the revolution served as the perfect arena in the employment of cinema as a consolidator of power and a detractor form the more immediate and pressing problems of the day. As long as such a situation prevailed the core of the regimes ideology, of extracting the revolution from the world of material concerns and politics and placing it into the world of spirituality, remained intact. How then would cinema seek to open up a new space of enquiry in a war ravaged society with real and pressing problems thereby seeking to reverse and interrogate a seemingly entrenched situation reflected in Khomeinis oft repeated statement, "we did not make this revolution for cheaper melons and cheaper houses" (Mohammadi & Sereberney-Mohammadi, 1994: 167). Again the case of Algeria is instructive and bears striking similarities with the emergence of what became known as "Cinema Dijid" following the agrarian revolution of 1971, marking a move from the war of liberation to cultural liberation.

"Cinema Dijid" marked a break on the thematic level (a reinterpretation of the national war of liberation, a social analysis founded on the theory of class struggle) and the aesthetic level (small personal films) as a means of reflecting the actual experience of people, and "a way of approaching film not as an end in itself but as the first element in the search for an aesthetic and a political analysis" (Salmane, 1976: 31-32) from Algerian films that had gone before. Ali Mocki saw this type of cinema as an engaged ideological and social struggle which, "by filming everyday life as it is lived and experienced by the masses, by using their language and cultural forms......is already a defeat for cultural colonialism" (Salmane 1976: 41). Cinema in Iran began to take on these features post-1989 in an affront and challenge to what might be termed internal colonialism and the

151

desire to reflect the multi-faceted nature of the Iranian soul, rather than simply its (imposed) Islamic aspect, as well as a desire to reflect the problems of the people after ten years of rule under the Islamic Republic. However, as always, these aspirations and undertakings were not done in artistic isolation but were bound up with the complexities and "larger" aims of a highly centralised and repressive government operating according to its own institutionalised agenda.

Makhmalbaf's *Mostaz'efin* Trilogy

This trilogy of films, which marks the beginning of Makhmalbaf's "second period" of artistic development, rests on the contrast between the ideas of justice and injustice (Goudet, 1996), and must be seen within the context of the socio-cultural, as well as the previously mentioned political and economic developments occurring in the country at the time. One of the explanations given for the fact that it was possible for such highly critical films to be made was that the period 1985-1990 was seen as a time of qualitative growth when censorship was at a low ebb (Ditmars, 1996). Furthermore, the authorities had come to realise, through the experience of the war movies, that forcing subjects upon filmmakers had resulted in poor quality films that had merely adapted, in this case, the generic formula of the Hollywood war film infused with propagandist statements and officially sanctioned religious sentiments. The war itself and the peoples experience of the effects of a decade of war and revolution also affected filmic content in that "when the war ended in 1988 the 'happy ending' was no longer a prerequisite and an increasing number of films opted for a critical look at social issues depicting the bitter atmosphere"

(Golmakani, 1993: 56). However, this is not to suggest an increased liberalisation of the cultural arena but reflects the oscillating space between radicals and moderates in which artists were now operating. The carrot and stick approach, which maintained a strict control of the artistic avenues of criticism, and the division between the 'in-group' and the 'out-group', which acted "as the yardstick for the managers and officials to support or refuse to support those active in different areas" (Golmakani, 1999: 5) still served as the means of controlling dissenting voices within acceptable parameters.

For his part, Makhmalbaf, at this time, was seen as part of the 'in-group'. Indeed, at the time of the release of *The Peddler* he was seen as a "film director as well as a theoretician for the super-structure of the Islamic Republic" (Riza'ee, 1993:18). However, it was this position that was to allow him the space and opportunity to voice his criticisms within the narrow confines of dissent that operates in Iran. Furthermore, such arguments must be placed within the context of the political cinema that operated in Iran after the revolution. Iranian political cinema after the revolution operated on two fronts. The first was of the propagandist kind that sought to reflect the official ruling religious and political ideology, as seen in Makhmalbaf's early work. The second type consists of a cinema of protest whose effect is seen as limited due to the fact that "wherever cinema has gone beyond the compromising frame with existing conditions and said something against the statesmen, the prudent have suppressed and censored them" (Solhjoo, 1999/2000: 94). Makhmalbaf had crossed the border and he was only able to do so because of his up until then, 'in-group' status. Soon the insider would become the outsider as he continued to develop

artistically and intellectually and move further away from his initial position of

dogmatism and moral preaching[19].

The Evolution of an Artist

Makhmalbaf's *Mostaza'efin* Trilogy marks the first stage in his maturity as an artist as

well as a critical engagement with the problems besetting Iranian society and its poorest

members at the time. Whilst these issues unite the films at a thematic level, stylistically

they are marked by an experimentation in film form and the search for an appropriate

language, as well as a questioning of that language, which is engaged in a dialectics of

how to represent the realities and problems of Iranian society. Thus we see the emergence

of what will become a constant throughout Makhmalbaf's work, the existence of 'Iran'

and 'cinema' as separate but constantly entwining entities each asking questions of the

other.

The three films of this period are of central importance, not only to the larger cultural

debate occurring in Iran at the time, but also within Makhmalbaf's oeuvre as a whole, as

they herald the emergence of a passionate and dedicated artist who was prepared to

stretch the boundaries of the medium and who located the importance of culture/cinema

in intervening in and solving the problems of Iran. Jonathan Rosenbaum (1999) has

remarked that "all three are troubled, lyrical arias about human suffering in contemporary

Iran that attack social problems, urban squalor, social cruelty and crime in *The Peddler*;

capitalist exploitation in *The Cyclist*; the nervous condition of a traumatised veteran of

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[19] Positif, no.422, April 1996, p.25.

154

the Iran-Iraq war in *The Marriage of the Blessed*, with an unrelenting hallucinatory fury".

Similarly, Yves Thoraval, (1993/1994: 62-63), refers to these films as dealing "from a

religious perspective with human dignity and/or the dark sides of human behaviour such

as in the disturbing 'film noir' *The Peddler*, his iconoclastic *The Marriage of the Blessed*,

or his powerful *The Cyclist*, a plea for the worlds refugees and its deprived". The

reference to the religious perspective is of crucial importance as this forms another of the

constants in Makhmalbaf's work, his engagement and changing relationship with God.

He may have turned his back on the dogmatism and religious fundamentalism of his

earlier work but he has not turned his back on God, rather he has moved away from a

particular representation of God i.e. that promulgated by the Islamic Republic. The

theological debate continues throughout his work, a fact Makhmalbaf, (1991:19), himself

recognises; "I am more religious now than I was earlier. But my idea of God has become

broader". These elements form the framework within which to examine this trilogy of

films.

Dastforoush (The Peddler, 1987)

The Peddler consists of three tenuously linked episodes dealing with different aspects of

the harsh daily lives of the poorest and forgotten members of Iranian society, the

mostaza'efin. The first episode tells the story of a couple living in the slums of Tehran

with their four children each of who has a physical handicap. The wife has just given

birth again and fearing that the same fate awaits the new-born child the parents attempt

unsuccessfully to leave it at a number of places such as, the mosque and the house of a

wealthy man in a bid to offer the child the chance of a better life. The second episode

tells the story of a scatterbrained, deluded and infantile man who cares for his ageing and senile mother. Whilst out collecting his mothers pension he is knocked down by a car and robbed. On returning to the flat his mother has passed away but he seems oblivious to the fact and continues his chores and monologues as if she were still alive. The final episode concerns a young hustler/peddler selling shirts at the bazaar for a criminal gang. In flashback it is revealed that he has been a witness to a murder which was carried out by two members of the gang. Fearing that he will talk, the peddler, after a series of chases, is finally caught and executed by the gang.

Episode one sets out to document and portray the poverty and desperation of those forgotten by the revolution. William Johnson (1990: 39) has stated that "virtually all of episode one is realistic, with no unusual camera set-ups or lighting effects and with fairly sparse dialogue", before going on to remark that this realism is increasingly combined over the following two episodes with elements of fantasy and surrealism. According to him it is the introduction of these elements that compromises the 'realism' of the film, a criticism which ignores a number of important facts not least of which is the complexity of the issue of realism itself and its application/manifestation within different cultural and ideological contexts. Furthermore, *The Peddler* must be taken within the context of a filmmaker who is experimenting and searching for an appropriate language and theory of filmic representation within which to examine the fundamental social questions that he now seeks to explore and assess in a changing society. The change of style within the film is not an abrupt shift but more of a logical natural progression. Makhmalbaf (1995: 9) makes reference to this by stating that, "in *The Peddler* I change my style very slowly

in the film. I don't confine myself to a particular style…The anxiety about form is evident in all my films. I have always liked the experimental cinema. It is in search of unknown and undeveloped topics". The documentary/realism question has been symptomatic, and a defining feature of the 'quality' Iranian cinema to emerge after the revolution.

The Question of Realism

Indeed, for most filmmakers in the third world, realism is the first point of contact that has to be passed through in the search for an authentic and personal voice with which to render the immediate social reality. It is the documentary feature that has allowed Iranian cinema "to more closely reflect the social realities" (Talebinezhad, 1995: 9), affecting the society. However, realism should not become an end in itself due to the fact that it does not neutrally render reality and is based more on the notions of subjective response and personal discovery. Whilst realism is seen as having a certain commitment towards society and social issues, and constitutes, particularly so in the case of third world filmmakers, a reclamation of space within which to reconstitute meaning, thereby engaging in the subversive act of restoring "things to their real place and meaning" (Solanas & Getino, 1970-1971: 6), what needs to be recognised is its limitations. This necessitates the fact that the filmmaker has to engage constantly in defining not just his relationship with his subject but also the means by which he represents that subject matter (Armes, 1987: 80-85). Makhmalbaf seems to be aware of that fact in starting with the question of realism and seeking to undercut and surpass it by entering into the surreal and the fantastic. He is able to do this because realism has opened up the necessary space for

experimentation, but also from a belief that a distinction exists between realism and the real; "sometimes we talk about form and say that it is realistic but sometimes we mean the realistic or naturalistic content of the film…reality is a prison" (Makhmalbaf, 1995). For Makhmalbaf realism leads to the surreal and he states that *The Peddler* consists of many documentary style scenes, which for him act as a means of experimentation; "I try to work in the genre of documentary realism in order to create a sort of symbolism, in coming towards surrealism" (Goudet, 1996: 23).

The Changing Face of God

The combining of the real and the surreal can also be seen to have its antecedents in a more culturally specific place of origin, Islam. According to Makhmalbaf (1991), this aspect of his work is influenced by the Qu'ran; "Just as in our holy text the human and the divine coexist, so in my stories the real and the surreal may be found side by side, resulting in personal narrative technique". Indeed, these elements are realised in the last section of the film when God's angels visit the dying peddler. Here religious form and content coalesce as the intended message of *The Peddler*, according to Makhmalbaf, is to convey the message that "God is the Light and therefore the source of all life, we come from the Light and we will go back to Him. Death is an eventual return to the Light, while our life on earth is the deciding factor which determines the quality of our life after death"(Riza'ee, 1993: 18). According to Behjat Riza'ee (1993: 18), such a interpretation fails to tackle or apportion blame for the causes of the plight of the poor and seems to say that their situation "is their own fault, if they had been good Muslims they would not be

158

suffering now". This somewhat short-sighted view fails to take into account a number of considerations.

Firstly this is the film of an artist in transition. Secondly it tends to overlook the fact that presenting the daily struggles of life and the despair of the dispossessed was the first step in showing a reality that had been concealed beneath the official rhetoric, which has actively sought to promote the image of the ideal and virtuous Islamic hero. It also served as a tacit questioning of the revolution, for the dispossessed, who were the children and foot-soldiers of the revolution, were not experiencing an improvement in their lot or the Islamic utopia promised by their leaders, leading to the question, what was and who was the revolution for? Makhmalbaf has turned from the official Islamic rhetoric to a more complex interpretation of man's relationship with God, which is more in line with the traditional teachings of the Qu'ran and is imbued with a certain compassion and humanism that is at odds with the all encompassing interpretative version of Islam promoted by the authorities (or as Ervand Abrahamian has called it "Khomeinism" – see chapter 2).

What Makhmalbaf has in fact done in the film is to highlight certain trends that had emerged in Iranian society at the time. The first and last episode, being situated for the most part in the mosque and the bazaar, clearly identify these two entities as the foundation stones of Iranian society. The couple in episode one leave their child beside some wealthy businessmen in the mosque who ignore it and continue talking about their business deals. The bazaar for its part is depicted as a squalid den of corruption and

murder. The traditional centres of power are seen to be ineffectual and uncaring to the plight of the *mostaza'efin* (this in a time when the government was shifting toward a trichotomous model of society and actively seeking the support of the *bazaari's* and the middle classes) who were merely paid lip service by official rhetoric. What Makhmalbaf is in fact attacking is the lack of humanity towards the situation of the less well of and the increasing accumulation of wealth by certain classes and capitalism in general. This in a paradoxical sense put him very much in line with the orthodox rhetoric of those in power who constantly preach on the evils of materialism (e.g. Khomeini's oft repeated phrases such as "We will drag all capitalists to the court of justice"), usury and hoarding. In this sense the film could be said to, intentionally or otherwise, oscillate in the space between, and offer a complex interaction between official acquiescence and permissible criticism. This illustrates perfectly the constraints under which artistic expression operates in the Islamic Republic, criticism must be eschewed and guarded and must not be seen to be directly criticising the regime or Islam itself (as laid down in the 1985 Media Bill and the many other censorial constraints in operation – see start of this chapter). What *The Peddler* has done is shown the complexity of the issues involved and highlighted the questions of concern that Makhmalbaf was to develop over the course of his future work – the beginnings of the pursuit of what Fernando Birri called a critical "cinema of discovery".

Doucharkhe Savar Bicycleran (The Cyclist, 1989)

The Peddler tells the story of Nasim an Afghan refugee who accepts a challenge to ride a bicycle non-stop for seven days in a bid to raise money to pay for his ill wife's hospital

treatment. Cycling around in a circle, taken as a metaphor for the country[20], in the centre

of the bazaar his endeavour attracts the attention of a number of different groups, such as

shady businessmen and hucksters, who place bets on whether he will succeed or not, and

government officials who think that he is a spy. Despite the fact that he is forced to cheat

he succeeds in the end but continues to go on cycling.

Multi-Cultural Representation

In contrast to *The Peddler*, *The Cyclist* is less experimental and is stylistically more

closely related to the neo-realist school of filmmaking (bearing more than a passing

resemblance to the work of Vittorio De Sica) but nonetheless attempts to raise "many

questions about Iran's inadequate economic structure, the nations vicious circle of

poverty and the absurd lengths financially desperate people will go to"[21]. Indeed,

Makhmalbaf himself has stated that this trilogy of films "are a critique of capitalism and

its effect on our society" (Dabashi, 2001: 186) and it is in this context that we must once

again look at the question of realism. The concept of realism, as expounded by André

Bazin and depicted in the post-war Italian neo-realist films, is generally, theoretically at

least, associated with the maintenance of liberal and democratic values from the point of

view that it is the spectator who is given the space to interpret the directors filming of

'reality' and is therefore an active co-creator of meaning. However, the concept of

realism does not refer simply to the objective and neutral rendering of reality but is in

actual fact a complex interaction of competing discourses and modes of interpretation. In

this sense it has also been seen "as an aesthetic movement" that can also function "as one

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[20] Meridian on Screen, *BBC Radio 4*, 30th May 2001.
[21] *Variety*, 1st April 1991.

of the mechanisms of the modern states hegemonic project, giving substance to the states claim to represent the 'nation' that it encompasses" (Prasad, 2000: 61). This is done by the realist ability to appear to represent a truthful objective sense of there-ness. In the Islamic Republic this is a crucial component of the legitimisation process of the ruling elite who attempt to portray a picture of a homogeneous society united under a constructed version of nation and Islam derived from a competing, complex and unstable ideological basis. Makhmalbaf is aware of the volatility of the realist aesthetic and seeks to undercut any co-optable or essentialist notions by combining an ardent social programme with an aesthetic where camera angles are more varied and at times arbitrary, which displaces their coded meanings, leading to a "scattershot technique"[22] that combines freshness with an overall sense of chaos but which crucially is caught in a constant process of self criticism. The resistance to the essentialist forces of 'nation' are shown on the thematic level are reflected by the fact that Makhmalbaf has chosen to represent the hopelessness and despair of the underprivileged by depicting the plight of an Afghan refugee.

This choice of central character is significant for a number of reasons most notably by the fact that it marked the beginning of Makhmalbaf's desire to reflect the multi-cultural and ethnic diversity that makes up the Iranian nation[23]. This was a preoccupation that was to become more pronounced in his later work, particularly with regard to the issue of the

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[22] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Tortured Genius Films by Mohsen Makhmalbaf", *Chicago Reader*, www.chireader/com/movies/archives/0497/04117.htn

[23] What must be recognised is the fact only half of the population of Iran is of Persian descent, one-fourth are ethnic Azerbaijanis with the rest consisting of ethnic tribes and ethnic minorities such as the Baluchi, the Bakhtiari, the Qashqai as well as some two million refugees – more than any other country in the world – mostly Afghan and Iraqi Kurds. See, Fen Montaigne, "Iran Testing the Waters of Reform", *National Geographic*, Vol. 196, No. 1, July 1999, pp.12 – 13.

Afghans[24]. Whilst this can be seen as an extension of Makhmalbaf's universal humanity the desire to reflect the multi-cultural nature of the nation is a strong trend and a feature almost unique to the cinema appearing after the revolution. Previous to this, cinema was predominantly based in and tended to reflect a homogenous Tehrani bias[25]. Furthermore, this new trend serves as an affront to the homogenous picture of a united nation put forward in the rhetoric of the ruling clerics, "the Islamic government has constantly stressed that no ethnic distinctions existed within the Muslim community" (Menashri, 1990: 287). However, the attitude to the minorities must be taken within the context of the ideological shift that was taking place in the Islamic Republic at the time, which saw it attempt to move towards a more socially inclusive model of society preaching harmony among the classes. This policy extended to minorities such as Khomeini's recognition of the contribution of Jews in the struggle against the Shah and the granting of certain concessions to Armenians (Abrahamian 1993: 51).

The shift in policy was based on the need to maintain unity during the war with Iraq as well as a desire to avoid antagonising minorities that would see them allying with the enemy and seeking autonomy i.e. the Iraqi Kurds in Iran. The changed position was also reflected in the desire to present a more conciliatory face in the area of foreign policy by presenting a moderate programme and acting as a mediator in a dual desire to export the revolution by example rather than force and an awareness that actions abroad had implications domestically e.g. the intervention as an impartial mediator in the conflict

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[24] In part three of *The Peddler* there is a short scene where two Afghan refugees are accused by the police of committing the killing witnessed by the peddler. Makhmalbaf's most recent film *Kandahar* (2001) deals with the issue of Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. He followed this film with a

between Armenia and Azerbaijan was done in order to prevent an Azerbaijani alliance with Turkey which would have serious and destabilising consequences for Iran given their own large Azerbaijani population.

Whilst the government was attempting to promote the idea of class harmony Makhmalbaf was once again attempting to show the deep divisions that still existed in Iranian society. Once again we find the bulk of the film being located in the bazaar, the centre of middle class trade and commerce, and once again it is presented as a place of corruption and exploitation. Here we have the dispossessed cycling around in circles while the merchants and business get rich off their backs by exploiting them, as well as highlighting the extent to which the poor have to go to in order just to subsist. Iran is presented as a fractured country where the masses are still searching for justice. The picture thus presented of the nation further highlights the question of a national cinema in Iran.

The Question of a National Cinema

The idea of a national cinema in most countries, particularly those of the Third World, is built on the notion of an anti-imperialist struggle and the means of presenting and legitimising the dominant metanarratives expounded by those in power. Indeed, placing *The Cyclist* within the dominant socio-political discourse in Iran and reading it against the grain reveals the discourse of power that lies behind the notion of official nationhood and "serves to challenge the homogenising and monological narratives that have been

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plea to the Iranian government and the international community at large to take notice of the plight of, and act on behalf of the Afghan people (BBC Persian World Service, 18th June, 2001).

served up as the real ones, thereby undoing the totalising proclivities reflected in traditional history-making" (Dissanayake, 1994: xxi). Iranian filmmakers find themselves caught in a position where they are operating within the confines of an official version of history and nation, and a set of means laid down by which to represent this ideal, whilst at the same time trying to find means and ways of voicing alternative narratives and dissent within this cultural straitjacket. This is a feature that is exacerbated in the Iranian setting by virtue of the need to recognise and attempt to reconcile the greater cultural split between the Persian and Islamic components of Iranian culture. In relation to the artistic and intellectual development of Makhmalbaf and his work *The Peddler* must be seen as opening up the question of cinema as a means of representation, whilst *The Cyclist* represents the attempt to open a space around the notion of 'Iran'. These elements were to combine in the last film of the trilogy, *The Marriage of the Blessed*, to produce what can be seen as Makhmalbaf's most accomplished and committed film to date and one in which he has found the means of expressing a way in which to discuss and highlight the 'progress' and 'development' of Iran ten years after the revolution.

Arusi-ye Khuban (The Marriage of the Blessed, 1989)

The Marriage of the Blessed is Makhmalbaf's most accomplished, ardent and committed film up until this point in terms of technical formal adventurousness and the scope and complexity of its thematic concerns. It tells the story of Hagi a *basiji* photographer who returns from the war front suffering from shell shock and unable to assimilate back into a society which he sees as rife with poverty and injustice.

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[25] See, "Le cinéma iranien", *Cinemarabe*, June/July, no. 9, 1978.

Three lines of graffiti (the first, "Volunteer combatant a lion in battlefields a victim in towns" is ironically contrasted with two quotes/hollow revolutionary rhetoric from Ayatollah Khomeini, "The country belongs to the shanty dewellers" and "We shall drag all capitalists to the court of justice"), scrawled on a wall and shot from a moving car, framed against the hood ornament of the vehicle (a Mercedes, the ultimate symbol of affluence and capitalism) form the opening scene, encapsulate and set the tone of *The Marriage of the Blessed*. It is an extremely dense, committed and visually complex film which works on three levels of interpretation, each showing an ardent social and political engagement. Firstly we are presented with a simple sequence of events - a shell-shocked photographer who cannot settle back into society after the Iran-Iraq war. Indeed, the depiction of shell shock being can be seen to be used as a symbol of the national condition in that it is "detached from its basic medical condition and looked at not only as the result of the war, but of everything that lead to it and is still unresolved, e.g. crime poverty and women's conditions, in Iran"[26]. This provides an opportunity for social engagement where pertinent issues in contemporary Iranian society are examined and in the case of Makhmalbaf where some critics believe he is casting an angry and satirical eye on the modern day revolutionary hero and mocking the Iranian-Islamic model of rectitude (Nayeri, 1993). Finally a critical engagement and examination of the film medium itself as a method of representation and the constant self conscious debunking of the artifice of cinema as providing a window on the neutral rendering of reality.

In the case of style we see a constant examination and concern for form, which, (particularly the film within a film/documentary format) has not lead to an empty, showy

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[26] *Variety*, 16th August 1989.

formalism but stems from a specific and sometimes urgent social agenda that seeks to

link method and subject in a struggle to produce (as well as showing the process of

production) an aesthetic grappling to attain the "beauty of truth" (Cheshire, 1993).

Makhmalbaf uses stylistic adventurousness to combine a passionate vision with

disarrayed tours of natural and unnatural ravages and an engagement in a non-judgmental

way with what actually exists. The giving of knowledge has replaced the didacticism of

his earlier work.

The Insider as Outsider

Through the central character of Hagi we are presented with the image of the insider as

outsider. Makhmalbaf has referred to him as "a symbol of a generation in anger against

that which they have not been able to have. It is the symbol of the generation of the

revolution which searched for justice, but which now sees injustice" (Goudet, 1996:25).

The viewer is taken on a personal and physical journey through a ravaged and

disillusioned society by an individual weighed down by the baggage of memory. This

creative understanding is predicated to a certain extent on a location, culturally, and in

time and space, outside the object. Consequently new aspects and semantic depths are

revealed about the complexities of culture and society. However this outsiderness (as

Makhmalbaf has now positioned himself) is as threatening as it is productive, both to the

individual and the establishment as it questions the status quo (this Hagi finds out through

censorship, frustration and ultimately alienation). Yousef, one of Hagi's war comrades,

makes a speech at the wedding banquet that testifies to this fact, "brother Hagi's camera

is the anxious eye of the revolution. He has a passionate mind and a sorrowful heart. Let

us hear the remembrance of this sorrowful heart". The use of the word revolution here is crucial and is presented in an ironic way. The children of the revolution are now the dispossessed having seen their initial fervour and ideals frustrated and thwarted. Here the utterance becomes an intense conflict between ones own experienced and another promised ideal world, be that imagined or forgotten. This is a situation symptomatic of the film itself that sees the image, like the word, emanating from an individual as a product of the living interaction of social forces. Makhmalbaf has very much situated himself in the centre of this conflict with his camera as the "anxious eye of the revolution".

The Interrogation of the Image

Central to this examination of the film is the idea of memory as baggage and the recovery and rehabilitation of traditional occupied space and their associated problems. The site of conflict for this is the camera and the image. Memory is the only baggage the characters carry, the only thing that is left to them amongst the loss of values. Hagi's betrothed, Mehri, shows him a series of photographs of their childhood in an attempt to rehabilitate him and draw them closer together through their shared past. Remembrance through the image is crucial here because knowledge of the self is gained through a foreign medium. This implies that a constant questioning of the technology and language of construction is central if the myth of representation is to be explored. This is a preoccupation of the film, constantly questioning how, by whom and why images are constructed. In one startling scene, Hagi, whilst taking photographs around the city imagines he sees crowds of fanatical demonstrators waving fists and placards shouting "down with USA". He raises

his camera to his eye, clicks to take the picture and the imagined image disappears. By this act the stereotypical western image of Iran disappears by an indigenous reclamation of space providing the opportunity for a more "truthful" representation of Iranian "reality". Indeed, this is very much in accordance with the aims of the third cinema as laid down by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1970-1971), "imperialism and capitalism whether in the consumer society or in the neo-colonialised country veil everything behind a screen of images and appearances....The restitution of things to their real place and meaning is an eminently subversive act both in the neo-colonial situation and in the consumer societies".

Film and the image have shaped Hagi's past to such an extent that he attempts to construct a present through the camera. The war is over and the camera must turn to the emerging post-war society and its myriad of social problems that were denied or ignored in the Islamic Republic due to a preoccupation with the conflict with Iraq. The newspaper editor on offering Hagi a job says "this is much more complex than the front where you train your camera on the enemy and shoot (i.e. the camera as weapon). Focus on shortcomings but preserve a balanced view" (this can also be seen as a comment on the proliferation of poor quality propagandist films which appeared during the war, the genre which Makhmalbaf attempts to subvert in a call to embrace the challenge of attempting to document the "reality" of a complex society). As Hagi goes to photograph the 'real' Iran (one beset by poverty and social problems such as drug addiction and homlessness), Makhmalbaf himself seems only too aware that "realism" and documentary "truth" are confined by the limits of individual response and personal discovery. At times the work

can be seen as much in terms of a self-discovery as the desire to discover and document some form of national identity. This is seen most vividly in the scene where Makhmalbaf and his crew appear on screen, where their shooting of the film is stopped in real life by a policeman asking if they have permission to shoot - fact and fiction become blurred as artistic expression and official constraint collide in a politics that demands a questioning of the mode and means of representation, a factor that was to become more visible and earnest throughout Makhmalbaf's later work. The question of aesthetics and politics and the present and future of Iranian cinema are located in the cross-breeding of fact and fiction where "aesthetically relevant terms are currently negotiated on the no-man's land of creativity where ferocious facts have to accommodate the workings of a noble fantasy" (Dabashi, 1999: 117).

Documenting the Social Reality

These "ferocious facts" are attested to when Hagi goes into Tehran's drug infested slums to document and experience the destitute lives of the "shanty dewellers". When the pictures that he takes are eventually censored by the newspaper, the editor remarks that "you can't solve social problems with a couple of photographs". Makhmalbaf knows this only too well and steers well clear of pedantic value judgements. This factor is realised in the almost obsessive foregrounding and Brechtian self-reflexiveness/consciousness to which the camera/image is constantly subjected. If *Salaam Cinema* "is a radical and disquietingly ambiguous investigation of the dynamics of the director-actor relationship and the irrational power that the idea of movies still exerts over the mass imagination" (Smith, 1996: 44), then *The Marriage of the Blessed* may be seen (in as much as it is

socially and politically committed) to be an investigation of the director/camera/image relationship. This allows Makhmalbaf the opportunity not only to explore a whole host of social problems (poverty, the position of women, post war trauma) in a lucid and committed manner but also the manner in which these problems are to be approached, examined and represented in all their complexities. Indeed these factors are expertly realised in the scene where Hagi learns that the only picture which the newspaper has chosen to publish is of a flower. This not only represents the difficulty and frustration of expressing "ideals" and the search for "truth" (and may also be seen as a satirical slight on the notion of Islamic revolutionary ideals as the tulip, *laleh*, is the Shia symbol of martyrdom) but also provides a commentary on Iranian film itself which is caught between poetry and censorship.

The role of the camera is explicitly central in the debate over representation. This is clearly evidenced in the scene where Hagi, whilst driving his motorbike, learns of the newspaper editors "censorship" and starts to have a seizure. What the spectator then gets is a series of iris shots from Hagi's point of view. He has now become inseparable from, and the physical embodiment of the camera being constructed and defined through the image and literally becoming the "anxious eye of the revolution". However, those in the positions of power refuse to countenance this view. In emphasising this point Makhmalbaf has presented us with a more complex picture of the image and cinema in an attempt to build a bridge between despair and hope, devastation and survival, poverty and plenty, subject and object and most importantly between people.

Subject and Object: The Representation of Women

The link between subject and object (in this case between image and audience) is most startlingly realised in a straight to camera long take at Mehri's photo exhibition. The exhibition features photographs taken by women covering all facets of women in Iranian society (young girls, derelicts, *chador* clad women with guns). The camera remains static throughout the scene acting as an image/photo/mirror and a direct link to the audience as characters pass by, are questioned by an interviewer, before addressing the camera full on. Here the illusionist tendency of cinema is most effectively and self-consciously shattered and the spectator is forced into an analytic rather than a sympathetic relationship with the subject matter. The illusionist tendency, which seeks to penetrate individual psychology, appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect and requiring passive audience reception, is constantly subverted throughout.

The exhibition scene also provides a picture of women in the Islamic Republic. Gavin Smith (1996: 44) asserts that one of the reasons Makhmalbaf is celebrated in Iran is for his "populist hard-hitting films championing the cause of the oppressed particularly women", and here we are shown women from a number of different facets. Iranian women are not the silent and weak inhabitants of inner rooms and the home, as the regime likes to promote, but the equal and often dominant partner in family life. This approach gives the women in the film an unusual sense of autonomy in a society where female virtues are essentially defined according to a woman's relationship to men. Indeed as Makhmalbaf himself notes "the chauvinist mentality is something very established in

Iran. Even in our literature you can see that in the stories about lovers, the man is most often the real subject of the narrative, the whole story is based on him" (Ditmars, 1996: 13). The presentation of women in Iranian film has been so problematic that they are generally reduced to subservient, simplistic, maternal roles or removed from stories altogether. *The Marriage of the Blessed* tackles this problem head on, presenting women in a wide variety of circumstances that stands in contrast to the official view which defines women as subservient to men and relegates them to the sole role of mother.

The Politics of Criticising the System

Makhmalbaf also sets out to criticise and satirise the selfish materialism of the new class of 'entrepreneurs' that have emerged since, and in contradiction to, the expressed ideals of the revolution , seeking gain through exploitation. It is men who seem to have to embraced the new capitalist vision with vigour, and know how to use its methods. Women are outside of this system and the film shows the effect that this has on them as well as calling into question the doctrinal teachings on which the Islamic Republic is based as well as the desire to create an 'Islamic economics' that sought to forbid such practices as "dealing in interest which takes advantage of others and permits an increase in the wealth of the lender of money without his working for...Neither are any sorts of commercial interests permitted to exploit people" (Haneef, 1979: 114). This is seen in the marriage registry office where men secretly propose exploitative land deals, or in the bazaar when Mehri's father grumbles over the price and quality of water-melons, an ironic echo of Ayatollah Khomeini's assertion that "we did not make this revolution for cheaper melons".

The attainment of higher ideals, in this instance through the economic sphere, is but another facet of the drive to create the 'Islamic man' (see chapter 3). Through a system of 'Islamic economics' based on the Koranic dictates of justice and the forbidding of usury it was hoped to alter behavioural norms by creating a dedicated, humanistic and altruistic individual, and by extension society (Hosseini, 1992: 103-121), based on the Prophet's declaration "O ye who believe! Let not your wealth nor your children distract you from the remembrance of Allah. Those who do so they are the losers" (Pickthall, 1989: 401). Indeed, such a critical position puts Makhmalbaf in line with official rhetoric/policy and shows the fine line between 'official criticism' and something that could be deemed 'anti-government or unIslamic'. While Makhmalbaf does criticise the current situation in the country he is careful to do it within 'acceptable' guidelines and not directly attack the system itself, in other words using a level of acceptable criticism as a lever with which to introduce other certain unpalatable ideas surreptitiously.

Indeed, Makhmalbaf himself attests to this insider/outsider manoeuvring between poetry and censorship by stating that the central character of the film does not signify an opposition to the established order but is "someone who believes in justice and the revolution that he took part in" (Goudet, 1996: 25). What the film is attempting to examine is the betrayal of the revolutionary ideals and a call for the existing system to make good on its promises – the reform of the system not its overthrow. This is a fact that is mirrored in the debate of how to represent a complex situation given the complexity of the image itself, its multiplicity of connoted meanings and representations. This point is

174

further established at the wedding feast where Hagi takes photographs of children playing and we cut to images of starving children. Later in his wedding speech he invites the guests to "eat the food robbed from the poor". Hagi is once again trapped by the connotation of meaning and memory, a fact which is stylistically rendered near the end of the film by a zoom in and rack focus on the bars in the hospital as he talks to Mehri following his breakdown at the wedding. He is mentally and physically behind bars and in a sign of resignation tells Mehri that it is people like her father who will "defeat the revolution from the inside" i.e. middle class materialism and capitalist exploitation. This serves as a prelude for the films closing scene.

At the end of the film Hagi escapes from the hospital and starts to live on the streets becoming in the process the subject of someone else's photographic reportage, as does Mehri, who goes in search of him. Thus, in a neat reversal the photographer becomes the photographed - the creator of the image is now the image. The attempt to uncover a "reality" behind official rhetoric has resulted in a voyage of self-discovery and a definition of ones relationship to the subject. For Hagi this has resulted in frustration, alienation and censorship. The complexities involved in constructing images of 'reality' in an attempt to uncover the 'truth' has in a sense resulted in failure for Hagi. The only way for him to come to terms with his past and present and to discover this 'truth' is to physically live the image. This questioning of the interpretative power of the image is further evidenced in one of the final images of the film.

The film ends with a high angled shot of Tehran as gunfire fades into music. It is a contemplative shot. In a society scarred by war and a whole host of social problems how are artists to approach the representation and interrogation of these problems? According to Abbas Kiarostami "the only thing that art can do is encourage the audience to think, to ponder meaning...as directors we have no right to pronounce judgements. Our mission is to raise issues" (Nayeri, 1993: 28). However, Makhmalbaf's is a more active and at times polemic cinema. If his ardent undertakings are not to revert to the didacticism of his Islamic period then a crucial component of his work has to be a constant self-examination and critical awareness of the audience as collaborators in the construction of meaning. The open ended nature of *The Marriage of the Blessed* attempts to articulate such a position, ceasing to position the spectator as a passive consumer of art but as an integral and necessary part of the production of the work.

Conclusion

The country's defeat by Iraq and the death of the revolutions spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989 left a host of unresolved problems and marked the end of the "radical" phase of revolution. These problems included a "cacophony of conflicting views on the future direction of the devastated economy and scarred society, structural weaknesses in, and controversy over the political system; a highly politicised clerical establishment whose legitimacy had declined precipitously in the course of the decade" (Hashim, 1995: 4). Allied to this was an intense reassessment of the achievements and failures of the last ten years. The instigation of what came to be known as the Second Republic seemed to herald a new beginning with its promise to implement a programme

of economic reconstruction and reform, strengthen the powers of the central state and undertake an opening to the outside world. This initial optimism quickly turned to frustration and despair as the proposed reforms were implemented half-heartedly or faced tremendous institutional and political obstacles, most significantly in their conflict with the Islamic Republic itself which they experienced as an entrenched system. The camera as gun was replaced by the camera as scalpel as cinema entered the era of reconstruction.

CHAPTER 5
The Poetics of Contemplation

Introduction

"It is a fact that...we have problems and that criticisms are justified. We realise that we have not attained all the aspirations of the Islamic revolution".
(Prime Minister Moussavi, 2nd June 1988)

"Now that the war has been halted, we are in the reconstruction phase. In this phase we should think that the revolution has just started".
(Speaker of the *Majles*, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, December 1988)

This chapter sets out to evaluate the development of Iranian cinema in the post-Khomeini era. This was a period that marked the end of the radical phase of revolution where attention was switched to trying to reconstruct a country shattered by a decade of war and revolution. It was also an era that saw the cinema mature artistically and thematically and emerge on the international stage to critical acclaim. These changing circumstances will be critically assessed by situating the cinema within the social, political and cultural developments of, what might be termed, the era of reconstruction. These factors are clearly illustrated in the discernible shift in Makhmalbaf's cinema during this period, which sees it seek to articulate a space of critical engagement with the medium itself along with attempts to develop a philosophical aesthetics of contemplation that is caught between poetry and censorship. It is this work which will provide the practical application for theoretical elaboration and allow for an evaluation of the continued development of cinema under the Second Republic.

Khomeini's Legacy

The first decade of the Islamic Republic can be said to have come to an end on 3 June 1989 with the announcement of the death of its founder and spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi Khomeini. What he left behind was a battle scarred and war weary nation[1], a divided ruling elite, a shattered economy with mounting social problems, and a political system that had just lost the creator and embodiment of its raison d'être, the personification of the principle of *velayat-e faqih*. According to *The Economist* Khomeini's legacy to Iran was "muddle and division, economic collapse and isolation" and a failure to create, or anything approximating, the "ideal Islamic society"[2]. However, those seeing in the death of Khomeini the end of the Islamic Republic itself were to be sorely disappointed. The Khomeini decade had been marked by the elimination of all internal opposition groups and the consolidation of a religio-political system that provided for the perpetuation of clerical rule (see chapters two and four respectively) and as such, any dissonant voices, or indeed calls for reform, could only come from within the system itself. Therefore, the scramble to fill the power vacuum created by the death of the Ayatollah became one which was fought among different ideological interpretations of, and through recourse to, the late Imam's legacy, seen as the legitimating basis of the right to rule and dictating the future course of developments in all areas of Iranian society.

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[1] The eight-year war with Iraq had seen hostilities end in August 1988. However, peace negotiations were to drag on and the war was only officially ended in August 1990 when Saddam Hussein signed the terms of a negotiated settlement, as laid down in UN Security Council Resolution 598. This was done more in a bid to guarantee Iranian neutrality before Iraq became embroiled in the 1991 Gulf War than in any desire to reach a final agreement. Indeed, the legacy of the conflict still sours relations between the two countries as a whole host of issues, such as the transfer of prisoners of war, still remain unresolved.

[2] "After Khomeini", *The Economist*, 10-16th June 1989, Vol. 311, No. 7606, p.18.

The Second Republic

These political machinations began less than twenty-four hours after Khomeini's demise with former President of the Islamic Republic Ali Khamane'i being elevated to the rank of Ayatollah and, somewhat controversially, decreed as the country's new Supreme Leader. The make-up and orientation of the new ruling elite was completed some two months later when the former Speaker of the *Majles,* Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was elected as the country's new president. He declared economic reconstruction to be his top priority and pledged to move society towards liberalisation, reform and an openness to the outside world. The new Rafsanjani-led administration, composed mainly of pragmatists (a loose coalition of conservatives and 'reformed populists'), and which came to be known as the Second Republic, promised much and seemed to mark a radical departure from the previous decade and the old order of insularity, dogmatism and revolutionary rhetoric, with its promises to install the equality and freedom as stated in the original aims of the revolution. However, despite initial causes for optimism many of Rafsanjani's proposed reforms were never effectively implemented, due to the internal factionalism of competing ideologies, and his failure to address the state's structural problems. These factors were compounded by a lack of political will and an all encompassing preoccupation with economic reforms, which manifested itself in protecting the monetary interests of the elite and middle classes resulting in a widening of the already large disparity of wealth in society.

The Second Republic became increasingly governed by open disputes between radicals and conservatives on all aspects of governing the state and eventually led to a situation

where Rafsanjani, due to political expediency and personal interest, reneged on his initial reformist tendencies and sided with the conservatives in stifling progress, openness and debate. Indeed, by the mid-1990s the conservative faction were in complete control, rendering the executive branch ineffective and smothering any debate on issues of reform or societal development that might threaten their privileged status. As always these debates and their consequences were played out and reflected in the cultural sphere where attention was focused once again on the preservation of "moral values", the perceived threat from the "cultural onslaught" of foreign influences, increased censorship and centralised control of the media with a view to propagating true "Islamic values". This situation led to the arrest of many intellectuals and writers as the conservatives sought to close all avenues of protest as well as the imposition of some of the harshest and most repressive measures seen since the early days of the revolution. By the end of Rafsanjani's final term in office in 1997 the situation was of a country, "rife with corruption more extensive than during the Pahlavi Dynasty, paralysed politically by irreconcilable factional disputes and sinking fast economically. It was in many ways, in a worse condition than at the end of the first republic" (Wright, 2001: 24).

Cinema in the Era of Reconstruction

The social and political changes taking place under the Second Republic also had repercussions within the cultural field. For the cinema certain changes and advancements were discernible, such as an increase in quality and a higher profile on the international stage. However, the underlying tensions between the medium and those in power remained with issues such as censorship, the ideological use of film for political purposes

and the conflict between an 'official' and 'artistic' continuing to be the key elements of debate. The post-89 period witnessed an increase in films of a higher quality, in both form and content, the aggressive entering of Iranian films in international festivals and the implementation of the financial, regulative, technical and production infrastructure necessary for sustaining the high level of film output necessary to accommodate a swelling population and offset the perceived evils of Western cultural imperialism. However, censorship and governmental control of the medium still remained a major problem. Perversely, it is this factor which can be attributed to the constantly changing focus, adaptability and ingenuity of Iranian cinema. However, what must be noted in relation to the changing circumstances of the time is the fact that "although political and social criticisms were not unknown in films, care was taken not to offend the clerical establishment or the religious doctrines and saints. This tended to be accomplished by the almost total erasure of official Islam from the bulk of high-quality post-revolutionary films" (Naficy, 1999: 24). Such a change is perhaps understandable given the social and political changes occurring in Iran at the time.

The development of the cinema during this period reveals a picture of oscillating and contrasting fortunes. This was the era when Iranian cinema appeared on the world stage due in no small part to its active and officially sanctioned promotion abroad through the office of the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance and the work of the Farabi Cinema Foundation. This saw cinema, in a certain respect, evolve into a strand of government foreign policy as the latter sought to reformulate its desire to "export the revolution" through example, and in this instance through a universal cultural product,

rather than by a policy of confrontation as was the driving force of the war with Iraq. Such a reformulated policy also served the purpose of presenting a positive image of the ruling regime abroad as it sought to open up to, and develop relations with, the outside world, not least in its attempts to attract foreign finance for the massive post-war reconstruction programme. Whilst repression of free speech and censorship of artistic expression continued on the domestic front these films (many of which were critical of the regime, or deemed "unIslamic" and therefore banned from screens in Iran) became, unwittingly, the simultaneous voices of protest (in a restricted and controlled sense) and the promoters of a false cultural liberalism that the regime was keen to manufacture even if the reality could not be further from the truth.

Throughout the lifetime of the Second Republic cinema, like the media, press and other forms of cultural expression, proceeded from an initial relaxing of restrictions in the early days of the new administration, through to the post-1992 period, which saw the parliament purged of radical and reformist elements, and the consequent consolidation of conservative power and control, leading to a severe crackdown on all 'dissident' cultural voices and attacks on what was seen, by those in power, as a nefarious foreign "cultural onslaught". Once again the clamour for reform and the course of the country's future development was being formulated in the cultural realm. However, this time circumstances had changed. The effects of globalisation, the emergence of a new, educated and articulate elite, as well as the demands of an increasingly disgruntled youth population, meant that these demands could not go unheeded and that the traditional recourse to repressive measures could only go so far. The changed intellectual and

ideological environment and the agents driving the demands for change meant that reform was being called for and operating in the cultural realm in a language through which the conservatives were finding it increasingly hard to adapt and respond to.

It was in this new atmosphere that a qualitative growth in the cinema was seen as "the credible directors of the pre-Revolutionary days such as Dariush Mehrjui, Bahram Bayzai, Massoud Kimiai, Abbas Kiarostami, Nasser Taghvai and Ali Hatami returned to resume their interrupted careers" (Golmakani, 1999: 13). The reasons for, and implications of, this turnaround are manifold. Rhetoric displacement and the slowing down of the tempo and fervour of the drive to Islamicise the mass media were replaced after Khomeini's death by a switch in emphasis to more pressing social problems. The primary reason for this change in policy by the government was the fact that "the incessant sermonising had created a backlash reducing the size of the audience and hence threatening the reach and effectiveness of the medium as a convenient ideological tool" (Haghayeghi, 1993: 48). Furthermore Constitutional amendments had further increased the institutional roles of the President and the new Spiritual Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamene'i, both of whom were keen to portray a more "moderate" image of Islam and improve Iran's position on the world stage. Thus a rather nervous and unsure government sought to create a more liberal and diversified programming policy in order to reach a wider audience but facing an unknown interpretative future.

Makhmalbaf's Third Period

For Makhmalbaf this period was characterised by three stages of development that functioned in, and were a product and reflection of, the aforementioned changing socio-cultural terms of debate. The first stage consisted of two films, both of which were banned, and which seemed to confirm and consolidate Makhmalbaf's transformation into one of the leading members of the 'outsider' group of filmmakers. *Nobat-e Asheqi* ("Time of Love", 1991) and *Shabha-ye Zayandeh-rud* ("Nights on the Zayandeh-rud", 1991) continued in the socially committed vein of his *mostazafin* trilogy and set out to explore sensitive social issues such as adultery and physical love. The next stage concerns four films, *Naseroddin Shah, Actor-e Cinema* ("Once upon a Time, Cinema", 1992), *Honarpisheh* ("The Actor", 1993), *Salaam Cinema* (1995) and *Nun va Goldun* ("A Moment of Innocence, 1996). These films are concerned with an examination and an exploration of the history, state, and means of cinematic language as a mode of artistic expression. In these films, and particularly in *Salaam Cinema* (1995) and *A Moment of Innocence* (1996), we see the full realisation of the dialectic of 'cinema' and 'Iran' positioned as refracting lenses in a state of constant debate with one another. Finally this period is brought to an end with *Gabbeh* (1996) which heralded Makhmalbaf's emergence onto the world scene but which also marked a change in aesthetics and form that was to influence his proceeding work. Still preoccupied with the question of form this film saw Makhmalbaf dispense with the self-reflexivity of his previous work and attempt to break cinema down to its basic component parts through which to approach a more humanist, poetic, and philosophical, celebration of life.

The 1989 Constitution and the New Power Structure

The foundations, make-up and consolidation of the new emerging power structure lay in the 1989 amendments to the constitution. These changes were undertaken in a bid to ensure a smooth transition of power, bolster the legitimacy of the new ruling elite and create a framework in which the aims of the state (in this instance economic reform), rather than Islam, could be pursued without the stalemate that had plagued previous administrations. The complex and contradictory nature of the new reforms can be seen in the overarching importance of measures taken to reduce the power and influence of the *faqih* in deference to the establishment of a presidential style of government. This was done through separating the charismatic authority of the *faqih* from the principle and stated requirement that he be a *marja* (the highest source of religious imitation) and redefining its role in purely rational terms. Rather than possessing divine piety and moral authority, as originally stated in the 1979 Constitution, Article 109 was rewritten to state that the new Leader should possess sufficient "scholarship as required for performing the functions of *mufti* (religious interpretation) in fields of *fiqh*". In essence what this did was relegate the post of the *faqih* to a position where the country's Spiritual Leader no longer had to be a source of religious imitation but could be chosen from among any religious scholars possessing the necessary political and legal skills. Therefore, the nature of the new appointment and the constitutional changes made to facilitate it had "unwittingly undermined the theological foundations of Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih*" (Abrahamian, 1991: 116). This new definition of the *faqih* was undertaken in a bid to give legitimacy to the appointment of Khamene'i, who possessed neither the seniority of rank nor the principle of *marja*. Furthermore, this change was also undertaken in an attempt to place

more authority in the hands of the President. The expanded role of the president was laid down in Article 60 with the abolition of the post of prime minister in a measure that was "designed to prevent the bifurcation of executive and legislative power that had paralysed previous governments" (Brumberg, 2001: 147). However, the ramifications of these developments gave rise to a number of very important consequences, which all emanated from the reconstituted notion of *velayat-e faqih*.

Given that the system of governance in the Islamic Republic is built on the rule of the jurist, the weakening of its definition inevitably draws questions over the legitimacy of the entire system. Furthermore, by separating the religious charisma of the *marja* from the *faqih* there now occurred the possibility that this charisma would be displaced onto the president[3] or to a *marja* outside the system leading to fractured and competing power bases that perpetuated rather than transcended "dissonant institutionalisation"[4]. However, the apparent weakening of the position of the *faqih* was more than compensated for by the extension, as laid down in article 110, of his institutional powers, which included; assuming supreme command of the armed forces, responsibility for the issuance of decrees for national referenda and the ability to appoint, dismiss or accept the resignation of, amongst others, the supreme judicial authority and the head of national radio and television i.e. further centralisation of the media. These changes were designed to further

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[3] This was something that Rafsanjani was keen to encourage due in no small part to his own vanity and his desire to protect his own privileged interests. Perhaps the full manifestation of this transfer of charismatic authority is to be seen in the adulation and elevated expectations that have been projected onto and manifested themselves in the person of the current president, Mohammad Khatami.

[4] This is a term used to describe a situation where "competing images of political community and the symbolic systems legitimating them are reproduced in the formal and informal institutions of society, and in the political rhetoric or ideology of the ruling elite". Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), pp. 33-35.

centralise power in the hands of the clergy by attempting to legislate and compensate for the absence of the unifying presence of Khomeini and to alleviate the stalemate of competing power relations[5] by concentrating power in the hands of the executive branch of government so that the proposed economic development plans and infrastructural reconstruction could be undertaken in a comprehensive and non-conflictual manner. This was to be the reconstituted political structure in which the new administration would operate, and society reformulated, a structure in which the republican and popular sources of legitimacy, rather than the Islamic sources, were increasingly emphasised.

The manifestation of this difference lay in the conflict of authority between a *faqih* who derived authority from a traditional office and a president whose authority arose from the people and the modern institutions of government. The nature of these reforms had succeeded in creating a system, which aimed at giving more power to the president but in reality left him facing two uncomfortable choices where he could either "exercise authority as the democratically elected guardian of the Constitution, thus risk alienating the *faqih*, or subordinate himself to the Supreme Leader and in so doing defer to traditional authority at the expense of the modern office of the president and the constitutional authority of the *Majles*" (Brumberg, 2001: 149). This was to become an increasingly difficult balancing act to maintain and inevitably resulted in the

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[5] This had been particularly acute between the *Majles* and the Council of Guardians (the body appointed to rule on the Islamic credentials of all bills passed by the parliament and to decree whether they should become law) with the latter essentially having veto over all laws. In a bid to solve the problem the Expediency Discernment Council was set up in 1988 with the power to override a veto by the Council of Guardians. Article 112 of the 1989 Constitutional review made the Expediency Discernment Council into a permanent body in a bid to strengthen Rafsanjani's parliamentary hand. This was seen as a necessary step that would compensate for the absence of the authoritative interventionary presence of Khomeini, but in reality it has merely resulted in the further formalisation and division of competing power sources.

abandonment of Rafsanjani's initial reformist stance in favour of an alliance, in the interest of self preservation, with the *faqih* and the conservative elements in the government, which led to a situation where the president was effectively rendered impotent to such an extent that in the 1992 to 1996 session of parliament no major legislation was passed (Wright, 2001: 23-24).

Cultural Glasnost?

The initial days of the Rafsanjani presidency offered much promise. The stated priority of economic reform was reflected in the makeup of the new cabinet, which was dominated by technocrats, no less than a third of whom were educated in the West, and who were charged with reconstructing the country's infrastructure after the devastation of the war years. They sought to instigate a recovery programme that would involve enlarging the private sector and encouraging the role of foreign investment under the direction of a series of Five Year Plans, which began in 1990 and were intended to move the country towards a form of economic liberalisation and openness. This openness was also reflected in some tentative moves in the socio-cultural sphere, which saw the legalisation of amateur boxing, fencing and chess as well as the growth of the theatre and arts and the revival of traditional Iranian classical music. Perhaps of more significance was the recognition by Ayatollah Khamane'i that the ruins of the ancient pre-Islamic monarchy at Persepolis were "a heritage of mankind that must be preserved"[6]. This marked a change of thinking on the part of the clergy as the ancient ruins were seen as a symbol of corrupt monarchies and forever associated with the extravagance and arrogance of Mohammad

Reza Shah[7]. It was also a tacit admission by the regime of the notion of an "Iranian nation" and the fact that Iranian culture was "Persian Islamic" in nature as well as an unconscious recognition of the failure of the Islamicisation policy of the previous decade. The press was also experiencing something of a renaissance in the new 'liberal' atmosphere with the number of journals and newspapers rising from 102 in 1988/89 to 369 in 1992/93 (Schirazi, 1998:132), many of whom were critical of the new government.

These developments may appear insignificant but the fact remains they could not have been implemented in the first place "without the changes in the structure of power [that occurred] after Khomeini's death" (Ehteshami, 1995: 76). The fact that there was no substantial or real structural change in the liberalisation of society can be attributed primarily to the monotheism of the economic programme and its developmental benefits which accrued to and strengthened the position of the mercantile bourgeoisie. In this regard Rafsanjani acted, despite the rhetoric, on the premise that the need, and demands, to develop society along civil lines, and the consequent establishment of channels of free expression and political protest, would become unnecessary and irrelevant if the economy improves. All factors were to be in the service and promotion of the economy and the veneer of a liberal society was only useful in so far as it served economic purposes i.e. the attraction of foreign investment, or to legitimate the position of the ruling elite.

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[6] Rafsanjani went one step further in April 1991 when he visited Persepolis, calling on Iranians "to reinforce their national dignity". See, Shireen T. Hunter *Iran after Khomeini*, (Washington; Centre for Strategic International Studies Washington DC, 1992), p.94

[7] The last Shah of Iran held an elaborate ceremony among the ancient ruins of Persepolis in 1971 to celebrate 2,500 years of monarchy at which statesmen from all over the world attended. The pomp and extravagance of the event was seen as symbolic of an arrogant leader increasingly alienated from the general populous most of whom were living in conditions of extreme poverty at the time.

Rafsanjani's policies of deregulation, privatisation and integrating Iran into the capitalist world system resulted in fuelling the profit-making spirit of private entrepreneurs and shifting the balance of the economy from the deprived to the middle classes.

Rafsanjani had essentially succeeded in creating "a bourgeois republic dominated by a bureaucratic-authoritarian structure which sought to compensate for the loss of charismatic authority by establishing a political network founded on mercantile interests" (Ansari, 2000: 22). What needs to be recognised is the fact that this was not an entirely new occurrence as the shift towards the middle classes had begun under Khomeini (see previous chapter) as an expedient element for consolidating and firmly locating the locus of power in the twin towers of the bazaar and the mosque. Rafsanjani had merely extended the concept, and consequently elevated the role of the middle classes, by developing it into a concrete political structure based on commercial power and operating through a self-serving bureaucratic administration patrimonally dominated by himself. The exclusive emphasis on the economic, to the detriment of all other aspects of society, became essential to the maintenance of this political order.

Indeed, it must also be noted that the authoritarian economic form of governance, which sees "political despotism and economic oppression" (Lenin, 1968: 53), intimately linked, has a long and pronounced history in Iran. The Shah had tried to introduce modernisation without modernity and the establishment of civil institutions and was eventually overthrown, as were the Safavids and the Qajars, due to the fact that despotism and its concomitant economic development "prevents a widely diffused power base from

emerging" (Sefy, 1988:7), resulting in the alliance of disparate voices of protest through alternative channels i.e. the example of the Iranian revolution itself. However, in the Second Republic emerging tensions were kept in check by the use of economic safety valves, such as the exemption of essential imported foodstuffs from exchange rate fluctuations, which served the dual purpose of guaranteeing the support of the less privileged elements of society and of the powerful institutions and religious foundations that administer these good for further economic changes (Farzin, 1996: 184-9), (it also showed how tightly controlled and inextricably linked economic and political power were in the Second Republic). These safety valves were further enhanced by the use of state repression and cultural manipulation. The latter point is clearly seen in the use of cinema during this period, which came to function as the regime's cultural ambassador abroad.

Culture and Ideology Refocused

This role marked an ideological shift in emphasis on Khomeini's desire and primary foreign policy objective (coupled with an ideological form of non-alignment as evidenced in the slogan "Neither East nor West, but Islam") to export the Islamic revolution abroad: "We should try hard to export our revolution to the world...because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is a supporter of all the oppressed...If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat...we [shall] confront the world with our ideology" (Khomeini's first Iranian New Year Speech, *FBIS* 24th March 1980).

The war with Iraq provided the framework in which to actively pursue the objective of exporting the revolution. However, given the failure of the war this policy objective, in

its confrontational manifestation at least, seemed somewhat redundant. What began to emerge was a reconstitution and reappropriation of the terms of Khomeini's objective in order to adapt it to changed circumstances and changed ideological needs. This in itself serves as an example of the wider debate and struggle amongst the ruling elite in the post-Khomeini decade to lay claim to an interpretation of his legacy, which had as its basic aim the legitimating of the right to rule and the successful implementation of policy objectives. Furthermore, the other stated aims within Khomeini's speech, the role of "the oppressed" and the fears of remaining an "enclosed environment", had also exhibited marked changes over the years. The former had seen a widening gap develop between rich and poor since the start of the revolution as well as a shift in emphasis by the ruling elite towards the needs and concerns of the middle classes, a fact confirmed with the mercantile bourgeois orientation of the Second Republic. However, the second point was to prove the more complex part of policy reorientation and revolved around a cultural economic axis that exposed the deep differences of opinion amongst the ruling clerics.

Economic Reconstruction, Ideological Reorientation

Part of the new economic reconstruction plan required an opening up of the country in order to attract much needed foreign loans and this was concomitant on proving to potential investors that a liberal and stable society, which actively encouraged investment, now existed within the country. Furthermore, the effects of globalisation and the new information technology meant that Iranian society was becoming increasingly exposed to outside influences that no longer made the pursuit of an isolationist policy realistic. The balancing act of those in power became one of trying promote the veneer of

a liberal, active and culturally open society and to prevent the spread of "westoxification" and foreign influences that were seen as the driving force behind demands for increased freedom, democracy and a civil society and which ultimately posed a threat to the position of the conservative and reactionary ruling clerical elite.

Rafsanjani had attempted to manipulate Khomeini's ideas in order "to legitimate a project that was economically liberal, politically authoritarian and philosophically traditional" (Brumberg, 2001: 153). By the end of his first term in office he was finding this course more and more difficult to maintain and was been increasingly pushed towards a traditionalisation strategy by conflicts that were emerging within the ruling elite. The isolation and removal of radical *Majles* deputies in 1992 by the conservative clerics was to prove a double-edged sword for Rafsanjani. This arose from the fact that whilst these political machinations had removed some of his harshest critics it forced him into an exclusive alliance with the conservative clerical establishment that left him no room to manoeuvre. The latter were supportive of the economic reform programme, which proved beneficial to their financial interests, but were extremely hostile to any attempt to instigate a political or cultural reform programme. Towards this end, and with their position enhanced by the defeat of the radicals, they began a policy of state repression that sought to quell all those forces that they perceived to have "facilitated the West's onslaught against Islamic Shi'ite culture" and to restore "supreme authority...in the hands of the *faqih*" (Brumberg 2001: 183). These moves were taken in an attempt to re-establish the politico-religious concept of power and the concept of authority (embedded in the religious hierarchy of Shiism) as being embodied in the person of the *faqih*, with

the aim of isolating the president and the technocrats and reasserting the dominant rule of

the clergy, which inevitably led to a reassertion of the constrictive limits of protest and

freedom. Once again any form of open debate was stifled by establishing parameters that

deemed any ideas outside of the established Islamic legal framework to be illegal and

thereby constituting an attack not only on the Islamic Republic but on Islam itself. In

pursuing this goal the conservatives began to remove reformers from those state

institutions seen as necessary to imposing and controlling ideological conformity.

The Media and the Export of the Revolution

The changed ideological format of the export of the revolution saw a shift from

aggressive confrontation to the promotion of good examples, which it was hoped would

be emulated abroad, primarily through and by the use of the cultural medium. For

Rafsanjani, this was to be achieved, and could only be made possible, through economic

success and the setting of a good example to countries abroad which could be publicised

and promoted through the use of the new information technology and opportunities

provided by the impact of globalisation. Indeed, the two main 'successes' to come from

the policy of the export of revolution have been "the example of the 'Islamic behaviour'

of Iranians and the missionary work of both Iranian and sympathetic foreign *ulama*"

(Ramazani 1988: 30) all actively promoted through a heavily controlled government

media. The centrality of the media and its close control was seen as crucial to the

pursuance of these aims. 'The General Policies and Principles of the Voice and Vision

Organisation of the Islamic Republic of Iran' had clearly laid down the duties and

obligations of the mass media by stating that it should endeavour to promote and uphold

the principles of Islam, the *velayat-e faqih* and the policy of 'Neither East nor West'.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was charged with the

formulating and carrying out of these ideological policies both inside and outside of Iran

(Haghayeghi, 1993: 46-47). The ideological change in focus and circumstance was

clearly reflected in the words of the Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati: "We must

continue to export our revolution, but in cultural terms. The Western countries are doing

the same thing. They export their culture, their way of thinking, through the mass media

or universities where foreign students are taught"[8]. Once again the cultural and the

political became inextricably linked. This was a crucial area for the new administration to

maintain control of, as the absence of real and meaningful structural reform in the social

and political arena meant that they sought to create the illusion of a new liberal society

through the tight control and selective promotion of ideologically servile cultural

products.

Iranian Cinema on the World Stage

The progress of Iranian cinema during this period was a clear reflection of the changed

and complex conditions of expedient revolutionary export. In 1988, the year before

Rafsanjani came to power, 47 Iranian films were shown in international film festivals and

events around the world, winning a total of 2 awards. The following table shows the

dramatic increase in their presence abroad during the Rafsanjani administration's first

term in office, 1989-1993:

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[8] FBIS – NES, September 21, 1988.

Year	Number of Iranian Films shown in Foreign Festivals and Events	Number of International Awards won by Iranian Films
1989	88	17
1990	377	19
1991	291	22
1992	279	23
1993	415	26

Source: Mohammad-Mehdi Duagoo, "Government Policies", *Cinemaya: The Asian Film Quarterly*, No.22, Winter 1993- 1994, pp.64-67.

The main reason for this qualitative and quantitative increase was as a result of the centralised policies that had been adopted over the past decade (see chapters three and four). Furthermore, the Farabi Cinema Foundation, operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, began to implement a series of measures to actively and aggressively promote Iranian cinema (Golmakani, 1993-1994: 54), in line with government policy. The measures taken in order to pursue such a policy included the strict governmental control of imports and exports and a system where the Ministry of Culture paid for the expenses of promoting "superior Iranian films" (Duagoo, 1993-1994: 65), at the international level, only receiving repayment from producers when the films had been sold in foreign markets. Furthermore, a whole arsenal of government facilities, advertisement, distribution, licensing and screening, was placed at the service of promoting these "superior products". The desire to extend and promote cinema as an element of government policy can be further evidenced in the political machinations that operated in placing Iranian cinema on the international scene where according to Fakhreddin Anvar, Under Secretary for cinema to the Minister of Culture and Islamic

Guidance, the aim was in "changing foreign viewers image of Iran and making them question their attitude about the country" (Tahami, 1993: 4).

In 1990 the Mostra International Del Nuova Cinema Festival in Italy approached the Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF) with a view to procuring a selection of films by the director Amir Naderi[9] in order to hold a retrospective of his work. The FCF, who control the import, export and licensing of all Iranian films shown abroad, agreed to release the films on the condition that the festival screened some thirty other films that had been produced or financed by Farabi. These additional films were of a poor technical and artistic quality and propagandist in nature, serving the express aim of promoting the "achievements [of the Islamic Republic] since the 1979 revolution…and propagating Shi'ite cultural values" (Riza'ee, 1993: 22). In this way official cultural policy has allowed controversial and critical films to act as the 'promoters' and 'reflectors' of a heavily controlled false image of the existence of a liberal and vibrant cultural atmosphere, whilst simultaneously serving as a means through which the ideologically desired for aims of the regime can be simultaneously pursued through the release of films in tune with true 'Islamic' values.

What is also interesting to note is the fact that the international promotion of Iranian cinema also further reflected and enhanced the division between an 'artistic' and a

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[9] Amir Naderi is one of Iran's foremost film directors. Having begun his career in the pre-revolutionary era he has found it increasingly difficult to make films under the Islamic regime because of his critical and highly allegorical style. He has been refused production permits on numerous occasions and has had many of his works either banned or heavily censored e.g. his film *Water, Wind, Sand* (1984) was banned for five years before being released for screenings at international festivals only. Shortly after this film was made he was forced to leave Iran in a bid to continue making films. He settled in New York where he continues to make films to this day.

'commercial' cinema with the former being the vanguard of foreign promotion and the latter being strictly limited to the domestic market, thus giving foreign audiences a somewhat skewed picture of the film industry in Iran. This division was further reflected in disputes within the political power structure concerning the implementation and course of government cultural policy, the uncertainties and fear of the potential power of these films and the need to maintain strict control over the domestic cultural sphere. The latter point is particularly instructive given the fact that many of these 'artistic' films, while praised and lauded on the international scene, were either censored or banned from being shown on Iranian screens. This contradictory cultural policy in relation to the domestic and international arenas has served "to promote the misconception that that at least in the area of filmmaking, there is freedom of artistic expression in the Islamic Republic" (Sayyad, 1996). The case of Makhmalbaf's first two films to be produced during this era, *Time of Love* (1991) and *Nights on the Zayandeh Rud* (1991) are symptomatic and instructive in this case[10].

Censorship and the International Market

Both of these films caused a storm of protests when they were screened at the Ninth Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran in February 1991. They were attacked for their depictions of physical love and comments on society, which the government-sponsored press saw as advocating corruption and fornication, insulting the families of martyrs and

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[10] These examples are in no way intended as exclusive and limited to one particular time period. Jafar Panahi's film *The Circle* (2000), a hard hitting social commentary on the constraints and difficulties faced by women in Iranian society, was widely shown on Western screens but remains banned in Iran. This illustrates the fact that the domestic/international debate still continues even into the so-called changed cultural atmosphere under President Khatami's 'liberal' government.

serving to undermine the 'values' of the Islamic Revolution. For many in the establishment these films marked the latest stage in Makhmalbaf's transformation from "an Islamically committed filmmaker [who] had finally crossed the hair's width…that separated the acceptable from the unacceptable" (Naficy, 1994: 148) and placed him firmly within the 'outside' group of artists. The conservative elements within the government, most notably Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, a leading member of the Council of Guardians, and Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, speaker of the *Majles*, already alarmed at what they perceived to be a liberal cultural onslaught, added to the voices of condemnation. This promptly led to the films being banned at home but actively promoted on the international festival circuit where they were critically well received: Dimitri Eipides of the Toronto International Film Festival described *Time of Love* as "an intriguing commentary on the social order in Iran, expanding on the social criticism of Makhmalbaf's earlier works such as *The Peddler* and *The Marriage of the Blessed*"[11]. In total these films were shown in thirteen international festivals (Beig-Agha, 1996: 110). This complex interaction between the domestic and the international fields was further illustrated when the European distributor MK2 decided to distribute *Salaam Cinema* and *Gabbeh* after they were shown at the 49th Cannes Film Festival despite the fact that the latter had been banned in Iran.

However, beyond the issue of censorship and control the whole debacle was to have wider ramifications for the entire cultural field as it highlighted the growing tension and escalating scale of disputes between the reformist and conservative elements within the

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[11] "Salaam Cinema: The Films of Mohsen Makhmalbaf", *Cinematheque*, in www.cinematheque.bc.ca/archives/makh.html.

government. Makhmalbaf himself was acutely aware of the intimate connection between the cultural and the political. When responding to the public prosecution of his work he stated that:

"The fight is over nothing other than the struggles between the different factions who seek power. The person who has more might is right. It is clear from now who the loser in this dispute is. Very well, congratulations. Who is the next person?"[12]

These comments highlight the complex functioning of art and protest in the Islamic Republic, which operates within a system of narrowly defined and officially sanctioned norms of behaviour laid down by the ruling elite. This complexity stems from the fact that these critical visions are operating in a double bind relationship with the political superstructure. On the one hand they were seeking to challenge and undermine the authoritarianism and patrimonial rule of Rafsanjani whilst on the other they served the needs of government by providing Rafsanjani with the intellectually legitimating terms of argumentation through which he could attack his opponents in the establishment. These challenges to the system were initially "tolerated by members of the political elite anxious for ammunition in their internecine contests" as well as being "useful for their own legitimacy, the legitimacy of the system and the image of the Islamic Republic abroad" (Ansari, 2000: 80). However, such a relationship, built on expedient political and ideological requirements, was invariably volatile and fraught with tension. These tensions were to come to a head with the parliamentary purges of radicals and reformists in 1992

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[12] *Film*, March/April 1991, p.125.

that saw the assumption of conservative majority control in government, which then set about quashing criticism and intellectual 'freedom' of expression by force. From this period onwards "culture became the front line for a broader existential conflict over the extent of freedom that would be tolerated in the Islamic Republic" (Wright, 2001: 89) and once again the media were in the eye of the storm.

Controlling the Voices of Dissent

In late 1992 the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Khatami was forced to resign by conservative elements who felt that his policies had had a corrupting effect on the youth of the country. Khatami was generally seen as being responsible for the rebirth in Iranian cinema by promoting a liberal policy that encouraged filmmakers to explore sensitive and, at times, controversial issues. This desire to reposition cinema away from being a tool of official policy/propaganda can be seen in Khatami's declaration that "cinema is not the mosque...If we transform cinema to such an extent that when one enters the moviehouse one feels imposed upon...then we have deformed society" (Naficy, 1992: 205). However, the changed ideological atmosphere was evidenced by his replacement, the hard-line conservative Dr. Ali Larijani, who promised to instigate a cultural policy that would show "the deceptive face of the West that infiltrates the societies in the guise of human rights and democracy in order to achieve its filthy purpose of domination" (Brumberg, 2001: 193). For cinema this resulted in the

approval of film scripts and the issuance of production[13] and screening permits becoming

more difficult as well as increased bureaucratic and supervisory controls occurring during

production. The desire of the conservatives to reassert control of the media continued

unabated with the removal of Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani (the president's brother)

as director of Iranian Broadcasting, the Voice and Vision Broadcasting Company, on the

charges of promoting a liberal broadcasting policy, which the conservatives saw as being

pro-Western and not in keeping with 'Islamic values'. By the mid-1990s most reformist

newspapers had been banned or closed down, hundreds of intellectuals and supposed

dissidents had been imprisoned or executed and tens of thousands arrested for 'social

corruption'. The film industry responded to the ensuing crackdown by publishing a

petition, signed by over two hundred film directors and actors, calling on the government

for a "cancellation or serious reduction in the straitjacket regulations and complicated

methods of supervision"[14]. The government responded by tightening controls and

announcing a ban on the export of any film that portrayed a 'negative image of Iran'.

Indeed, in an echo of the militant declarations made during the early drive to create an

'Islamic cinema', President Rafsanjani himself signified this conservative shift at the

closing ceremony of the Twelfth Fajr Film Festival by stating that, "if you directors make

good films there will be no need for pulpits" (Alami, 1999: 66). Once again cinema was

being openly viewed as the ideological mouthpiece of the State. However, despite the

imposition of these harsh measures the cultural battle showed no signs of abating and

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[13] At this time Makhmalbaf had a screenplay rejected for a proposed film on Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990/91. The screenplay was rejected by the Council Of Screenplay Inspection for portraying Iraq as too much of an aggressor, and Kuwait as too much of a victim, for portraying the West as liberators and not sufficiently depicting the innocence of the Shia people. See *Film*, May/June 1993, p.20. This example makes clear the regimes intention to enforce, and expect, official government ideology/policy to be reflected in cultural products.
[14] "Iran Filmmakers Want Less State Control", *Reuters*, 10th March 1994.

rather than being forced into silence, with each repressive measure artists and intellectuals responded with further argumentation and debate.

By this stage the 'quality' Iranian cinema had evolved into a mature and distinctive artform, which was displaying recognisable thematic and aesthetic attributes. Ironically, it now appears that the cultural export of the revolution and the Islamicisation process has led to a cinema bereft of Islam, a 'secular' cinema of morality that perhaps, paradoxically, bears certain similarities to the institutional undertakings of the Shah to deny or remove the influence of Islam from all aspects of Iranian society. Therefore we now have a situation where, "the Iranian government like the fact that Iranian cinema has become popular abroad, but they are also afraid of its power...Iranian cinema is caught between poetry and censorship" (Ditmars, 1996: 13). Whilst the institutionalised and ideological efforts of the Islamic regime have no doubt given rise to such a situation the influence of the pre-revolutionary "quality" films (the Iranian New Wave of the 1970s) have also played a part, as evidenced by the fact that many of the standard bearers of this new post-revolutionary Iranian movement have emanated from the pre-revolutionary period. The "new" Iranian cinema has been described as minimalist, neo-realist, poetic, humanist, documentary based, it is all these things and more. What needs to be acknowledged is that such terms must be contextualised and qualified when appropriated to the Iranian cinema.

Towards a Theoretical Model of Cinematic Practice

The monumental changes and prolonged series of crisis experienced by Iran and its cinema have provided the template, detail and depth in encouraging the development of a unique visual art-form, which manages to avoid, and is only too aware of, the dangers of didacticism and blind faith in grand ideological themes. Instead it examines the micro, projecting it onto a grand scale, individual responses and dilemmas at their most personal and emotional but firmly located in their historical context. In this sense it could be said to bear more than a passing resemblance to Garcia Espinosas idea of an "imperfect cinema", with its location in reality and desire to "present a plurality of non-judgemental, non-prescriptive expositions of the problems faced by 'people who struggle' as a process" (Chanan, 1997: 377).

However in the Iranian context such a definition is problematised and somewhat reconstituted, for here is a cinema that is derived simultaneously from "reality" and cinema itself (and indeed seeks to surpass both notions) and is inflected by, and in conflict with an all pervasive, falsely created ideology. This is an ideology that is still engaged in the battle between tradition and modernity and which sets itself the task of creating a utopian society from the dictates of the 7th century. Indeed, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema can be seen to argue for "modernity to be subservient to tradition", and is concerned with issues concerning the "legitimisation of what constitutes the Iranian state and culture" (Asha 1998: 277). However the issue of modernity in Iran is one of immense complexity and the fulcrum on which social tensions (and their representation) have

swung and as such Iranian cinema could be said to operate in the space defined by Jürgen Habermas's model of interest[15].

This model is very close in a sense to the developmental and experimental Persian cultural tradition. In Habermas's model, all authentic human discourse aims at a universal unrestricted communication and that ideology, which is defined as the "systematic deformation of communication" by covert operations of force, is a betrayal of such an aspiration. Calling for a critique of ideology based on a critical "comprehension of cultural traditions", he goes on to state that all human knowledge is governed by interest and can be located in three categories, instrumental interest, practical interest and the interest in emancipation. Iranian cinema could be said to occupy the level of practical interest where it is concerned in the human dimension and "the symbolic interaction of human meanings transmitted by texts of our cultural traditions and embodied in our social norms and institutions" (Kearney, 1994: 225).

However, in the Iranian context where the instrumental interest of those in power is projected as all encompassing and the only valid form of knowledge, the practical (and in this instance the challenge for Iranian cinema and culture in general) seeks to undermine and question the validity of the former in the hope of opening up the eternal search for emancipation and justice. Furthermore, Habermas's endorsement of the Enlightenment as

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[15] The recourse to Habermasian modes of debate is perhaps even more pertinent given the fact the current President of the Islamic Republic, Mohammad Khatami, has been heavily influenced by Habermas's notion of rationality in developing his model of civil society and calling for a 'dialogue among civilisation'. For a comprehensive view of Habermas's theory see his book *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (trans.) Thomas Mc Carthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

an unfinished project and a Marxist critique of ideology supplemented by psychoanalytic theory, which seeks to relink "modern culture with an everyday praxis that still depends on vital heritages but would be impoverished through mere traditionalism" (Habermas, 1985: 14), (through reintegrating the spheres of Economy, Art and Polity with the alienated individual) needs to be qualified. In the skewed nature of theory application in the third world and (noting the importance of context), in an Islamic context, modernity alienates man from God and it is only by returning to the notion/ideal of 'tradition' (instigating the 7th century utopian society decreed by the Prophet) that man can gain emancipation through his strengthened relationship with God. Paradoxically, focusing on the human, in an attempt to go beyond the structure of spiritualism and transcendental consciousness, not only questions man's relationship with God but draws him closer to Him. This is inevitable because the two great questions facing Iran are those of legitimacy, and the interpretation of Islam. Given the entrenched system of government which the clerics have installed, social transformation can only occur within the theoretical battleground of Islamic ideology, criticism of which is forbidden. Therefore attention is focused on the social and the suppressed Persian elements of the Iranian psyche in an attempt to open up an alternative space and create a uniquely Iranian 'secular' and moral affront to the all encompassing official ideology but which seeks to attack it on the question of legitimacy. This however is not to suggest that the recourse to humanism is non-religious or anti-religious, for to do so would be reductionist and ignore a large and essential part of Iranian culture. Rather, the focus on the human, and its manifestation in Iranian cinema, can be taken as a combination of concern, thought and action with the aim that people in their social groups and individually, release their

207

human nature. Such an undertaking recognises the existence and importance of the spiritual realm but situates it as an organic and complex phenomenon that is the absolute antithesis of officially enforced dogma. It is this ideological tension combined with the self-reflexive desire to unite the social, art, life and the individual that forms the ardent programme of Iranian cinema and provides the basis from which it draws its power.

Formal Attributes

Formally, this project is undertaken by the mixing of documentary and fiction. This is a strategy that has existed since, and indeed was a defining feature of, the desire to establish a third cinema as evidenced in *The Hour of the Furnaces* and in the revolutionary films from Cuba. Whereas Cuban films sought to use documentary as a form of education, which tried to explain and comment on the proceedings unfolding before the spectator, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema has gone beyond this type of division to a situation where the two notions co-exist seamlessly, problematise one another and are encased in a constant dialectic about cinema as a form of representation. The divisions become irrelevant as Iranian cinema seeks to operate in the margins and interstices created by the melding of the two forms. Such undertakings are not self-indulgent and playful aesthetics but the reflection of an ardent programme which seeks to examine and question the relationship of the real, the authentic, and the control of these elements, to the represented. In doing so filmmakers create, by simultaneously "showing the way in which art is viewed in lived culture, a portrait of the audience which views the text and encourages the viewer to consider their own act of viewing" (Dabashi, 1999: 96). Art matters as does the audience that views it and in the first instance Iranian films,

despite their international standing, are addressed, first and foremost, to an Iranian audience. This is crucial if Iranian cinema is to play a meaningful role in defining and critiquing the social milieu from which it is created and it is in this context that we need to evaluate Makhmalbaf's work.

*Nobat-e Asheghi (*Time of Love, 1991) and *Shab-hay-e Zayandeh Rud* (Nights on the Zayandeh Rud, 1991)

Maknmalbaf's first two films of this period continue the engagement and questioning of social problems that began with his *mostazafin* trilogy. However, in this instance the focus has shifted from the economic to the personal and the exploration of issues of freedom of individual choice and action in the face of societal and cultural restrictions. The central thematic driving this undertaking is an examination of aspects of the taboo subject of human love. Stylistically these films also mark something of a formal progression in that the linear narrative and unidimensional commentary has been jettisoned in favour of a multi-voice perspective and a fractured narrative exhibiting temporal and spatial disjunctions e.g. the distinct episodic structure of *Time of Love* where the same story is told from three different perspectives with the main protagonists exchanging roles in each section. The latter point is very much a product of the complex nature of the issues being explored as well as the contentious and controversial nature of the subject matter, which can be seen to influence the choice of setting in a bid to circumvent censorship constraints by choosing different spatial and temporal surroundings (*Time of Love* was shot in Turkey with Turkish actors and dialogue and

Nights on the Zayandeh Rud was set partly in the pre-revolutionary era) that attempt to distance and eschew the immediate drawing of parallels with present circumstances.

Time of Love adopts an episodic and complex structure in exploring the consequences of a woman's extramarital affair on the participants of the love triangle. Presented as a tragic trilogy, all three episodes are variations on the same story, each with a different ending, which is further complicated by the fact that the two principal male characters exchange the roles of the husband and lover from episode to episode. This transposition of roles and the repetitive but fractured sense of perspective allows for a meditation on issues such as the complexities of the moral position, the limits of individual responsibility and the pressures of social forces in determining and conditioning individual actions.

Moral Perspectives

The opening scene of the film begins with an old man in a graveyard holding an empty birdcage listening to the sound of birds in the wild as the lovers hold their illicit and clandestine meeting nearby. The audience are positioned within this private meeting through the old man's aural point of view and a series of fractured and claustrophobic close-ups that illustrate the tension on which the film revolves; the contrast between domesticity/capture and nature/freedom. People are enclosed and trapped throughout the film either in cluttered apartments, taxi cabs or through the constraints of society, which sees love in terms of economics – the girl in resignation and sadness tells her lover that happiness depends on having a taxi and finishing his army conscription. The epic, poetic

and idealistic notions of love and the ability to freely choose one's own destiny and happiness are tempered and negated by the expediency of reality and the expectations of society. It is this contrast which forms the framework of the debate on notions of love. The lovers operate in the realm of (although not completely detached from) culturally created notions of love whilst the married couple operate in the reality of the everyday, being both created and bound by the rules of society. However, both these worlds are presented as not being mutually exclusive and tend to overlap, influence, and impinge on one another.

Poetic Symbolism

The epic and ethereal notions of love are based on the symbols of Persian Sufi poetry, which Makhmalbaf tempers through their attachment to, and recognition of, the reality of social constraints in an everyday existence bereft of innocence. The sea and prevalence of birds are the signifiers of poetic love. The sea in Sufi literature and poetry is a symbol of eternal Truth and Love. Drowning in the sea signifies the unity of Being and a rejoining with God (Rahnema, 2000: 173). In the first episode the lover takes a fish from the frying pan and rushes to put it back in the sea where it quickly regains life and swims away emphasising the restorative power of love and the freedom that follows. At the end of the episode the husband has killed his wife's lover and is sentenced to death by the court/society, who states that, "The judge doesn't benefit from execution but society does. The court defends people's right to live. Nobody is allowed to take anybody's life except the law". The husband asks to be executed by being thrown to the sea, remarking, "for those who die at sea are reborn". Once again the redemptive power of the sea is

emphasised. Whilst society administers punishment only God can offer forgiveness. The sea signifies the union of eternal love in life and the union and mercy of God in death. Without love and faith in God life is meaningless. This last point is highlighted in the final scene in this episode where the wife commits suicide and says goodbye to her lover in a dream. She goes to put the fish back in the sea but in this instance it is not revived. All that remains in the absence of the beloved and the belief in God is the emptiness of death.

The presence of birds throughout the film, both aurally and through the actions of the old man who spies on the couple and who records bird calls, signifies the duality of a happiness and despair mediated by reality through the use of culturally specific motifs. In episode one the old man sits with an empty birdcage in the graveyard where the couple meet. In episode two he traps a bird in the cage but releases it into the air and in the final episode he presents a bird in a cage to the husband as a gift so that he will not be lonely following the marriage of his wife to the lover. The line between the desire for freedom and the reality of an existence imposed by the limits of the cage operates in the cultural space between the Islamic and pre-Islamic Iranian meaning of the bird motif. In the former peacocks, or composite birds, are depicted as the birds of paradise that were, according to legend, expelled from the Garden of Eden along with Adam and Eve. Their mournful refrain is a reflection of their pain and grief at having left the heavenly garden. The pre-Islamic Iranian legends depicted the bird as an omen of good having brought the sweet nectar of the gods down to earth. Their appearance in Persian literature generally symbolise joy, good luck and happiness (Khazaie, 1999: 261-264). The lovers in the

fallen garden (the graveyard) surrounded by the incessant bird chorus trying to snatch fleeting moments of joy aware of but insulated momentarily from the harsh realities of life, symbolise the oscillation of these two polar points. The desire for the ideal and a freedom of choice resigned to and checked by the imposed barriers and rules of society are also the hallmark of Forough Farrokhzad's poetry. She illustrates these points by using the image of the bird in two poems which show a progression from sad resignation to despair. In *The Bird was Only a Bird* she presents a picture of freedom restrained;

"The bird said, 'What, scent! What sunshine! Ah!
Spring has come
And I shall go in search of a mate…

The bird flew through the sky…
At the altitude of unknowingness
And madly experienced
Blue moments.

The bird, Ah, was only a bird[16].

In *The Bird is not to Die* the motif continues but the tone is darker and more sombre;

Lamps of relationship are dark.
No one will introduce me
To the sun
No one will take me to the feast of sparrows.
Remember flight.
The bird is to die.

Episodes one and two of *Time of Love* echo these sentiments, unfettered emotions and the hope for a future of possibilities tempered by the results of one's responsibilities to the community and lives of others, with the desires and actions of the protagonists leading to

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[16] Both these poems are taken from Forugh Farrokhzad, *Another Birth Let us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season*, (trans.) Ismail Salami (Tehran: Zabankadeh Publication, 2000), pp.64 & 122.

death and despair. However, Makhmalbaf attempts to overcome this pessimism in the final episode through a plea for understanding in a humanist spirit of compromise.

A Third Way

The final episode concludes with the husband allowing his wife to leave and marry her lover. Stating as his reason the fact that "I loved her. She's in love too. When I can be in love, then why can't she?" the scene is a call for tolerance and forgiveness and a belief in the ability of individuals to conduct their lives with propriety far from the interference of state bodies and social institutions. This call for a greater freedom of personal action and choice in a highly centralised society where the divisions between the private and the public sphere are not clearly marked and moral guidance is seen as the preserve of government, marks something of a challenge to the accepted and decreed norms of Islamic law where the punishment for adultery is extremely harsh; "The adulterer and the adulteress, scourge ye each one of them (with) a hundred stripes. And let no pity for the twain withhold you from obedience to Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of believers witness their punishment" (Sūrah, XXIV: 2). Makhmalbaf in calling for each individual to be afforded a greater control over the decisions they make in their own lives is not as may appear implicitly challenging the veracity of divine ordinances and the way that they are employed in blind faith without recognising the complexity of human life. It is a call for a more balanced and humane consideration of the reasons behind actions rather than a belief in achieving end results in a Manichean universe. These issues are clearly illustrated in the speech which the judge gives at the wedding ceremony, "We are not real characters...You had to kill this man and I had to

214

execute you…All my life I've been performing a social role. I've stopped acting as a judge since I heard about your marriage. Judgements suit the person who thinks of the practical results of the criminal actions, not the reasons". However, Makhmalbaf further muddies the water at the end of the film by showing that freedom of choice is not necessarily without its costs and responsibilities. After the wedding the lover turns to his new wife and says, "We are united at last". "I'm still not happy" she replies. "Then what does happiness mean", asks the lover. "I don't know, but I feel that my heart is still with him", she answers. This highlights a conflicting message to the liberal tone of the film, which seems to suggest that happiness is relative, unbridled love is not all and that kindness and forgiveness are equally important attributes, with each person taking account of the fact that individual actions have wider ramifications in the larger social arena.

Despite these conflicting messages their application and relevance to Iranian society is complicated and distanced by the fact that the film is set in Turkey. This results in the creation of a fictional Iranian cinematic world located in a foreign setting, which consequently removes the film from the immediate indigenous social and cultural sphere that it seeks to address. The argument that the film is an appeal to universal values is also problematised by the fact that the starting point for universal projection is the realm of the local, which *Time of Love* locates as a fictionally created no mans land, an incongruent cinematic simulacrum operating through a system of mediated signs. This mediated space of filming a contentious subject in a foreign country necessitates the codifying of that country to make it compatible with Iranian cinematic restrictions. In this

instance we have the main female character conforming to *hejab* for the benefit of Iranian screens and censors in a country where such dress codes are not compulsory. Therefore the Turkey of this film is merely a cinematic creation a place which loses its "native political and historical character and become more of a metaphorical or exotic space and image" (Saeed-Vafa, 2002: 208), bearing traces rather than substantive cultural meaning. In this instance a fictional and distanced country is rendered as an imagined space through the restricted codes of Iranian cinema with the result that the application of implied meanings becomes difficult with signs oscillating between two imagined spaces. It is this factor that detracts from the overall power of what is a thoughtful and provocative film but one, which bereft of specific cultural and social moorings, lacks substantive relevance and significance.

Shab-hay-e Zayandeh Rud (Nights on the Zayandeh Rud, 1991)

Set in three different periods before during and after the Revolution, *Nights on the Zayandeh Rud* is a controversial and searing indictment of Iranian society where the life choices facing the individual are ones filled with bitterness, hopelessness and despair. The film is essentially divided into two sections. The first, set in the immediate pre-revolutionary years, tells the story of a university professor with outspoken views on the Shah and his society. He is interrogated by SAVAK for his beliefs as the mood of revolution begins to grip the streets. During an evening walk with his wife they are knocked down by a speeding car. She dies and he is confined to a wheelchair. Increasingly bitter and disillusioned he withdraws from life as the violence and protest of revolution rage around him. The second part of the film is situated in the post-

revolutionary era where the focus shifts to the university professor's daughter. She works in a hospital unit treating individuals who have attempted to commit suicide and is in love with two different men, one of whom is a paralysed veteran from the war with Iraq. Caught between personal desire and the oppressive expectations and pressures of society she finds herself deprived of the freedom of individual choice and sinks into despair.

The Personal and the Political

The central concern of the film is the notion of individual personal choice caught between the social and political pressures of the historical moment. Makhmalbaf's early belief in the individual progressing along the path of perfection and becoming an active participant in effecting revolutionary change has been jettisoned in favour of showing society's effect on the individual, a society that is cruel and unforgiving without joy or hope. The professor dissects society in his classroom at one point telling his students that monarchy is an intrinsic part of Iranian culture and history but one that has been abused through the cult of personality worship of the monarch. Despite being situated in the era of the Shah these comments resonate beyond the historical frame where the changed ideological circumstances under the Islamic regime have taken the other component of Iranian culture, Shia Islam, and used it in creating their own determinist view of society under the cult of the *faqih*.

An all-encompassing ideology does not allow for dissonant voices, trivialises any notions of debate and depersonalises the individual. This point is clearly shown in the film when the professor, after being interrogated by the secret police, stops to buy a drink from a

street stall before proceeding to smash the bottle and shout, "I drink therefore I am".

However, the unthinking dehumanised individual simultaneously creates, and is created

by, the dehumanised society. In the scene where he and his wife are knocked down by a

car we are presented with a microcosm of a society that is uncaring, debased and soulless.

A drunken group of men pass the couple prior to the accident and as they are lying

prostrate on the road no one comes to their aid. The spirit of collective action is shown to

be a false myth replaced with the selfish actions of a collection of isolated and detached

individuals. The choice then becomes one of the disillusioned individual withdrawing

from society into the bitter isolation of the self. This the professor does, throwing his

notes and research papers from the window of his apartment, a purging realisation of the

futility of resistance in effecting change, and retreating to a detached position of

observance. The sense of isolation is further emphasised through a stylistic rendering that

sees the pronounced use of wide shots and long takes. This functions in isolating the

individual in space and decentring the focus of attention away from the main characters,

opening alternative spaces of contemplation and investigation, through the distanciation

of the audience, in suggesting meanings that impinge on but operate outside the frame.

The political has depersonalised the individual and conspired to rob him of his sense of

self but paradoxically by driving him into the misanthropic cell of isolationism it draws

him closer to an evaluation of the self. The conclusion is that, while the political robs the

individual of any sense of self, without the individual the political is meaningless. In one

particular scene we see the coalescing of these elements where the personal and the

political converge in providing a subjective personalised challenge to grand ideological

claims. From his window the professor looks down on the street battles and

demonstrations of the ensuing revolution. Detached and withdrawn from the event we cut to a picture of his wife which is followed by a shot of one of the protestors on the streets spraying a stencil of Ayatollah Khomeini onto a wall. The inferred connection between the two scenes is clear; the influence of the image and the subjective meaning it signifies for the individual are the motivators to action not the belief in abstract and distant ideological beliefs. For the professor his belief in the image of his past paralyses his present and renders his future empty. Once again it is at the micro level of human relations, more specifically the family, on which society is based and for which individuals act and by which they have their actions driven rather, than the exhortations of the state.

The Disillusioned Generation

The second part of the film focuses on the professor's daughter in the years after the revolution and life in a new society. Here the roles are somewhat reversed in that she is an active participant in society, but a society that ultimately serves to frustrate and isolate the individual. Whereas the professor withdrew from society choosing personal isolation over political intervention, his daughter has chosen social intervention, in working to alleviate the suffering at the hospital's suicide ward, but becomes incarcerated in a prison of personal isolation through the restrictions placed on women in society. In the former case the choice is made by the individual and highlights the personal basis of the political but the latter shows how the political functions in socialising/repressing the individual by removing freedom of action. The hospital ward provides a window on a cross section of a generation, army officers, 'war heroes', young girls, without hope scarred by a society

that promised much and delivered little, seeing their only salvation and freedom of action lying in taking their own life. This is a particularly prevalent problem among young women where their roles in society are severely restricted and regulated. In the first six months of 1991, 40 women alone killed themselves through self-immolation[17]. Although particularly acute among the female population, serious social discontent, given the burgeoning population, lack of employment opportunities, and entertainment outlets, is widespread among the country's large youth population at large[18].

The daughter is faced with the dilemma of loving two men at the same time in a society where the role of women is seen as subservient and restricted to motherhood. During a conversation with one of her suitors in a restaurant she asks him if it is possible to love two people before saying, "maybe the heart has two corners one for each of them...I wish I were a man then things would be easier". The picture is further complicated by the fact that one of the men she loves is a paralysed veteran from the Iran-Iraq war. Gone are the lofty ideals of martyrdom and the virtuous 'Islamic man' standing firm against the infidel in the name of God. Now we are presented with the harsh realities behind the rhetoric, a generation lost to hollow ideals and a future without hope. Once again the search is for a sense of being in the face of an oppressive society that has failed its people. The norms of (a patriarchal) society even extend to the level of interpersonal relations as the professor forbids his daughter from engaging in a relationship with the disabled veteran. Everyone

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[17] *Zan-e Ruz*, 22nd September, 1992. See also, Haideh Moghissi, "Public Life and Women's Resistance", *Iran After the Revolution Crisis of an Islamic State* (eds.) Saeed Rahnema & Sohrab Behdad (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995).

[18] A particular problem has been the large increase in drug abuse with the number of heroin users recorded at some 3 million in 1999. Furthermore, prostitution, as a result of the 2 million young women who have run away from home in Iran, has reached such high levels that the Majles have recently considered legalising the practice in state run 'houses of decency'. BBC World Service Special Report 30th July 2002.

is trapped in prisons not of their own design. The sense of frustration and despair is all-pervasive. At the end of the film the girl, unable to and prevented from pursuing the life she wishes, goes to the bridge over the Zayandeh Rud river and sinks to her knees in sadness and resignation. Nearby some street musicians sing a lament about the need to wait, the future will come. However, it is a forlorn and empty refrain, which induces pessimism towards any faith in the future after previous dawns that have yielded nothing but darkness.

Nasseredin Shah Actor-e Cinema (Once Upon a Time, Cinema, 1992), Honarpisheh (The Actor, 1993), Salaam Cinema (Salaam Cinema, 1995)

This trilogy of films stands as Makhmalbaf's paean to and exploration of the various aspects of the cinematic medium and the relationship of the artist to his work. They also exhibit a more reflective, celebratory and less controversial and confrontational stance than the previous two films of this period. However, it is his experience and treatment at the hands of the censors and political authorities which influences and infuses the playfulness and frivolity of this cinematic trilogy with a sense of gravitas as issues such as censorship, the culturally created persona of the artist, and the power of cinema to communicate and corrupt are explored.

Once Upon a Time, Cinema is an intoxicating palimpsestic depiction of the coming of cinema to Iran. It is a celebratory fantasy of a western artform placed into an eastern setting which jumps backwards and forwards across time and space, conflates history and shatters the illusion of fact and fiction by creating a fractured hyper-reality derived from

and brought into being by the creative ability of the cinema to reshape and give meaning to the essence and emotions of life. The film, set during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896)[19], tells the story of a monarch who is prejudiced against cinema, but on seeing his first film falls in love with the heroine and abandons everything to become an actor.

The tone and style of the film is encapsulated in the mixing of codes and fluidity of language which jettison and problematise expected referential meanings by offering multiple forms of connotation through the subjective, intersubjective and objective coalescing and separation of sound and vision. The opening scene of the film shows the court cinematographer, Ebrahim Khan, placing objects on the back of a cart. Included amongst these objects is a large mirror (the symbol of the cinema) in which his beloved, Atieh (the future), is reflected. The cinematographer wishes to, but is unable to marry Atieh because, as he states, he is "married to the cinema". This is then followed by documentary archival footage of the Shah's ceremonial activities with the cinematographer declaring; "All is fair here. Plenitude everywhere. But there is no Atieh (future), not for my Atieh". The play on the word Atieh is used to signify a number of different meanings and refers simultaneously to the fact that there is no future for this opulent monarchical system of governance, no future for this type of cinema i.e. an instrument serving those in power, and no future for his personal relationship with Atieh.

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[19] The 'false historical' setting highlights this notion of an artistically created hyper-reality which pays no attention to factual accuracy as the cinema and the artist combine to construct their own sense of meaning through the rearrangement of time and space. In fact cinema came to Iran under the reign of Mozaffar al-Din Shah (1896-1906) when he purchased a cinematograph in Paris in July 1900 whilst on a trip to Europe. The first indigenous Iranian film footage was filmed less than a month later when the court photographer, Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkasbashi, used the new equipment to record the Shah's visit to Belgium on the 18th August 1900.

What follows is a narrative built on a disordered montage of consciously acknowledged indigenous influences (both cultural and political), which serves as a meditation on the development of Iranian cinema by using that cinema itself as the basis, through a process of reconstruction and reference, of a metacommentary on its own historical progress. The key referential point in structuring and influencing the content and formal attributes of this artistic undertaking is Parviz Kimiavi's 1973 film *Moghola* (The Mongols).

The Medium Creates the Message

After the opening sequences the next scene shows the cinematographer with his head in a guillotine, sentenced to death for the crime of "cinematography in the royal chambers". This is a direct reference to a similar shot in *The Mongols* where the frustrated director puts his head in a guillotine (indeed Makhmalbaf underlines the point of reference by showing a group of Mongol horse riders pass through the shot). However, this is not merely a homage to cinematic influence but a recognition of similar thematic concerns, which still preoccupy Iranian cinema despite the temporal and changed ideological and political circumstances that separate the two films. *The Mongols* attempted to articulate a vision of Iran that contrasted an ancient civilisation with modern-day mechanisation and the on-rush of modernisation by comparing the coming of television with the destructive Mongol invasion of the country in the thirteenth century. This was very much within the ideological context of the time with much of the intelligentsia articulating a concern about the Shah's modernisation programmes and the increasing influence of Western cultural forms in Iran. Makhmalbaf for his part has also attempted to show the influence of a foreign cultural form within a Persian setting. However, whereas Kimiavi was

223

sceptical about the influence of television as a link between past and present, Makhmalbaf is more optimistic regarding the position of cinema and attempts to articulate its essence as operating between the twin concepts of artistic freedom and the interference of those in power wishing to create a medium in their own image. The central issue in this respect is the question of censorship and the volatile and uneasy relationship between the State and the artist.

Dictates of the State

The cinematographer is eventually saved from the guillotine by the court sorcerer who in answer to the Shah's question, "Of what purpose is cinema?", answers, "Grow rice should you intend to harvest in one year. Plant trees to gain fruit in ten. Cultivate a person to develop in a hundred years. Cinematography cultivates people. The cinematographer relates his account". This is very close to Ayatollah Khomeini's assertion that the media should be a university educating man to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. The question remains as to the ideological form and purpose underpinning this 'cultivation'. The film highlights these issues by using the guillotine as an elaborate means of censoring the cinematographer's screenplays. Proposed scripts for films about a Sultan prone to love and passion and an officer of justice "apt to press taxes on the peasants unjustly more than flesh and blood can take" are rejected on the basis that they are an insult to the Sultan and a threat to the police department. Once again the subjective and arbitrary nature of these decision are highlighted with the overriding principle being attempts to offset any criticism of the State and those in power. Regimes may change but their fundamental preoccupations remain the same. As Mohammad Beheshti, managing

director of Farabi until 1995, stated, "Criticism is not forbidden…But when a filmmaker introduces a miscreant…it has to be clear whether he is criticising an individual or the system as a whole. If the latter, then he must be stopped" (Golmakani, 1992: 21). Indeed, by locating his film within an historical epoch in which cinema did not exist and then tracing its history, Makhmalbaf is drawing attention to the fact that censorship has been a constant element in government dealings with the cinema. Regardless of ideology both the pre and post-revolutionary regimes have shown similar concerns in suppressing political and social dissent. Since censorship was first introduced in Iran in the 1920s, formally institutionalised by the Pahlavi regime in the 1950s (see chapter 1) and reconfigured by the Islamic Republic in the 1980s (see chapter 2), the unifying element has been to regulate the medium with regard to different ideological contexts. Indeed, these sentiments are echoed when a series of laws for the functioning of cinema are drawn up in the film:

"The Cinematographer must abstain from discontented remarks directed towards the person of the Sultan in any manner, explicit or indirect, brief or at length.

The script must not display any signs of insolence, anomie or insensibility towards the cavalry, the police, the Ministry of Justice, the Ruling Governors or their kin.

On failing to do so the regisseur shall be confined, his instruments confiscated, tribunal charges collected and public dignity defended".

As these decrees are being read out they are inter-cut with the Sultan and his harem watching cheaply made slapstick comedies of the *Abi va Rabi* type popular in Iran in the 1930's. Following the decrees the Sultan brings the cinema to the people, but due to the heavy restrictions the film that is exhibited in public is seemingly unending single shot of

an old woman trying to thread a needle. Makhmalbaf's intention is clear, censorship leads to a reduction in freedom of expression and a resulting drop in quality with art being replaced by trite and low grade productions. This is a situation echoed by most filmmakers in Iran where "contrary to the belief held by many abroad, censorship does not lead to better films and more ingenious ways of filmmaking. What we need are less restrictions, not more, to be able to produce the films we want to make, not what we are allowed to make[20]". This is very much the thrust of *Once Upon a Time, Cinema*, which is a reaction by Makhmalbaf against his "own censorship woes...and struggle between authority and artistic freedom"[21]. Furthermore, the playful aesthetic and metacinematic form which he employs allows him a mediated space in which to flaunt the censorship regulations e.g. by showing women dancing in clips from Bollywood films and the exposure of women's hair in early films such as *Dokhtar-e Lor* (The Lor Girl, 1933).

The Influence of Pre-Revolutionary Cinema

Despite the restrictions placed upon him the cinematographer (who acts as Makhmalbaf's surrogate in the film) states his intention to make a film about " a person (the Sultan) resentful of cinema...The regisseur records his daily life. Upon seeing himself on the screen he makes amends with cinematography. I have named this script *Haji Agha The Actor of Cinema*" (the first feature film to be made in Iran). This film turns out to be *Once Upon a Time, Cinema* which Makhmalbaf constructs as a work brought into existence and shaped by cinema itself, thus establishing a relationship where cinema is created by cinema and an interaction with 'reality' through which each derive their

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[20] Interview with film producer S.A. Moussazadeh (*Djomeh*, 2001), 25th March, 2002.
[21] *Variety*, 23rd March, 1992, p.110.

meaning from the functioning of the other but where the divisions between the two concepts are fluid and interchangeable. The central strand on which the conflation and inversion of the reality/art division is the Sultan's obsession with the heroine (and by extension the cinema itself) from the film *The Lor Girl* (1933, Iran's first sound film) which structures the narrative drive of the film and allows for the cinema to create its own reflection of reality through the recourse of its own historical artistic development. The division between the cinema and the 'reality' of the Sultan's court (which in this instance is further problematised as it must be seen as a film within a film of a film) is rendered obsolete as characters jump in and out of cameras, projectors and screens and impinge on and influence the shaping of each spatial realm. As characters pass from one realm to another the Sultan remarks, "Was this a fancy or reality. Cinematography makes fancy of the real and shows the real to be fancy". The 'reality' of the court begins to resemble cinema by taking on the formal attributes of the early days of the medium as we witness speeded up chase scenes, over the top acting styles and slapstick comedy, and the replacement of royal portraits with pictures of Charlie Chaplin. When the cinematograph is on, the heroine of *The Lor Girl* (Golnar) is on the screen, but when it is off she is in the palace, the Sultan's obsessive imagination has replaced the projector in forming an alternative (cinematically induced) version of 'reality' – reality is heightened and made more 'real' through the cinema. However, this heightened sense of the creative real is rendered through the projection of indigenous cultural products. Whereas the French New Wave of the 1950s and 1960s was underpinned by a love of American cinema Makhmalbaf has sought to show that the local reality and sense of self is created through indigenous cultural forms. It is only through the interaction of the historical, the political

227

and the culturally specific at the domestic level that art derives its primal essence and forms the starting point for the exploration of universal themes of understanding. These points are illustrated in the film when the Sultan receives a letter from Amir Kabir[22] stating, "Your Royal Highness. The State and Nation are devastated as the Sultan is engaged with his Malljack and lady fair. Only a hero can bring honour to this nation". The Sultan replies in disgust telling his courtiers to, "Search our domain, provide us with the mightiest of our peasants to release Amir Kabir from the burden of our nation's honour". This exchange is then followed by a scene where we are presented with a number of clips from Film Farsi's showing the moody muscular heroes engaged in a series of fights and confrontations. The Sultan has become so consumed by the cinema and the 'reality' that it has created that is for him now the only reality and the solution to the country's problems lies in the heroes of the 'cinema lati' (see chapter 1). The blurring of these lines becomes complete when the Sultan decides to become an actor. Makhmalbaf adds a further dimension by playing on the star persona of the actor Ezatollah Entezami, who plays the part of the Sultan, in another form of metacinematic commentary and construction by getting him to take on the role of a cow, a reference to the role acclaimed Entezami played in Dariush Mehrjui's groundbreaking film *Gav* (1968) (see chapter 1). Whereas Mashdi Hassan in *Gav* is driven to madness and despair by the loss of his cow, the Sultan in *Once Upon a Time, Cinema* is driven to the point of insanity by is inability to differentiate the 'real' from the 'projection of the real' and his

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[22] Amir Kabir was appointed Chancellor to the Court of Naseral-Din Shah in 1848 and is accredited with introducing many much needed reforms to the country, including the balancing of state expenditure, the rebuilding of a strong army and the introduction of a modern education system, before his exile and execution, as a result of the political intrigue of his opponents, in 1851. He is seen by many Iranians to occupy a special place in their history as a result of his attempts to modernise the country and stand up to Western interference at a time when Iran was in a weakened state. See A. Amanat, *The Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy 1831-1896* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).

228

unobtainable love for the fantasy heroine Golnar. Once again it is the cinematographer who is sentenced to death for insulting the "Royal figure of the Shah" by transforming him into a cow. This again highlights the historical prevalence of censorship with regard to Iranian cinema as *Gav* itself was famously banned by the government at the time who felt that it insulted the Shah and his reform programme by presenting a picture of the country that was backward and poverty stricken.

The ending of the film attempts to situate the nature of cinema in Iran within its present context. Kimiavi's *The Mongols* once again functions as the point of reference with Makhmalbaf recreating the scene where an a iron gate materialises in the desert in front of a group of Mongol warriors to which they pose the question "What is cinema?". For Kimiavi the answer was Jean-Luc Godard but for Makhmalbaf it is the indigenous cinema that has been produced in Iran since the revolution. There then follows a celebratory and elative montage sequence featuring clips from various post-revolutionary films, emphasising the presence of children, characters embracing across a wide spectrum of genres, war films, melodramas, and ending with a shot from Kiarostami's "Where is the House of My Friend? (1987) which shows a young boy running up the zig zag path on the side of a hill. The final scene of the film shows the Sultan dragging the cinematographer's possessions, including the mirror, on a cart through the snow echoing the film's opening scene. The reflection in the mirror shows the cinematographer's beloved Atieh sitting on a bench. The Sultan mistakes her for Golnar, to which she replies, "My name is Atieh (the future). Did anyone ask after me on your way". The implication here is clear, cinema in Iran is a beautiful woman in the snow but if the

control of the medium remains in the hands of those who wish to place restrictions on artistic freedom and expression and use it for their own ideological purposes then cinema and creativity is condemned to perish in the snow or continuously zig zag up the side of a hill.

The Actor (1993)

The Actor continues the cinematic chaos and frantic style of *Once Upon a Time, Cinema* by telling the story of an actor (the Iranian film star Akbar Abdi playing himself) who wants to act in serious 'art' films but is forced by his family's economic situation to star in low grade commercial films. His plight is further compounded by his unstable, neurotic and infertile wife who becomes obsessed with having a baby. She finally convinces him to marry a second wife, a mute gypsy girl, in order to father a child. What ensues is a social farce that is both surreal and semi-tragic, satirical and comedic, and which touches on issues such as class differences, the culturally created persona of the artist, fame and wealth. It has been described "as a bizarre portrayal of reality, or a realistic depiction of a bizarre situation…a painful encounter with an existential situation which seems to be shot through and through with irrationality" (Zahedi, 1993: 39). *The Actor* is also perhaps Makhmalbaf's most straightforwardly commercial film, employing well-known stars in a linear narrative, which combines elements of comedy and melodrama. This is evidenced in the fact that *The Actor* became the highest grossing film in Iran in 1993, breaking the Iranian box office record with returns of some 505 million rials (Tahami, 1994: 61). However, despite this, the film stands as one of Makhmalbaf's lesser and least satisfying works, a film which jettisons the search for the simple delight

in life in favour of a life of tiny miseries, which are antithetical to the general aims of his films (Dabashi, 2001: 199).

The Essence of the Artist

Makhmalbaf has described *The Actor* as a further manifestation of his search for an answer to the question "what is the truth?", through, in this instance, recounting "the story of a person who wants to become an artist but conditions won't allow him too" (Dabashi, 2001: 188). Following on from the questions raised in *Once Upon a Time, Cinema*, Akbar Abdi is functioning as Makhmalbaf's surrogate in voicing his frustration about being prevented from making the films that he desires and as a result being reduced to making commercial inoffensive new versions of the Film Farsi. The central preoccupation of Makhmalbaf's "Cinema Trilogy" is a meditation on the relationship of the artist to his work. Whereas *Once Upon a Time Cinema* used the 'historical' development of cinema in Iran as its template, *The Actor* situates the artist within the framework of a contemporary setting in a search for an understanding of the way in which art is derived from and given its meaning from societal factors. According to Makhmalbaf (1993: 39), "the main idea of this film...is the responsibility of artists towards their social surroundings... My protagonist in *The Actor* cannot choose the films he acts in. The film is looking for an answer to the question, to what extent the artist is to be blamed for this inability to choose". In other words art is formed from the immediate conditions of the social reality, the expectations of the public and the restrictions placed on notions

of artistic freedom and expression by those in positions of power. The key scene in the film reflecting this interaction of forces comes when Akbar's wife Simin jumps out of their car instigating a huge traffic jam. Passers-by stop to look at the ensuing argument between the couple believing it to be a film to which Akbar, in despair, gives the title, "a dog's life, a cow's life". Makhmalbaf's belief that the artistic assertion of realism as an extension and generalisation of our personal beliefs through which we try to reach an implicit consent with the feelings and beliefs of others[23] is problematised in this instance. The fluid boundaries between reality and fiction have finally collapsed into a system of constructs in which the artist is trapped in the prison of expectation, a puppet whose strings are pulled by other hands. The artist becomes a commodity, a construct, as much as his art and is caught in a constant battle in trying to define and redefine himself and his work in opposition to the straitjacket of an imposed image. This is clearly illustrated in the scene where Akbar on seeing a poster of himself advertising his next film starts to hurl abuse at the image, "It's all your fault. What do you want from me? Get lost. Leave me alone. Everybody likes you, you shit. Nobody likes me. You sent these people to disturb my private life. You idiot. You've risen so high. I myself have been the cause. I'll bring you down myself. Leave me alone". As a filmmaker Makhmalbaf has strived to make himself anew by creating films that are constantly changing and which attempt to reflect current social conditions in interaction with a personal and developing intellectual consciousness. In placing himself within the 'high art/low art' debate he has attempted to articulate his concern over the fact that the restrictions placed on artists results in the production of compromised and low quality work. Ironically these sentiments are

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[23] See, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, "The Unbearable Lightness of Determinism", *Film International*, Summer, 1993.

expressed through a commercial film format displaying a variety of different styles. It is this combining of the farcical, the surreal and the comedic which gives the film a disjointed and uncertain feel which is unable to hide the bitterness of tone and integrate the desire to combine elements of social commentary, such as class divisions, which are superficially treated and appear incongruous with the general aims of the film. Whereas the poor living in the slums of Tehran as shown in *The Peddler* were a cause for anger at the injustices in society, those presented in *The Actor* (or more specifically the character of the gypsy girl) function as a means of showing those who have wealth that money does not necessarily equate to happiness and that they should be content and grateful with what they have. Indeed, the film as a whole appears somewhat trite and uncertain of its aims and tone and ends rather depressingly with Akbar collecting his wife from a mental asylum, resigned to his fate for better or worse.

Salaam Cinema (1995)

The last part of Makhmalbaf's "Cinema Trilogy" is a complex and ambiguous investigation of the dynamics of the director-actor relationship, the social power of cinema and its influence over the mass imagination in Iran as well as the cruelty and ability of this interrelationship to corrupt. Makhmalbaf attempts to highlight issues such as the abuse and corruption induced by power, the non-questioning acceptance of authority, the relationship of power and art and the desperation and hopelessness of a people who will submit themselves to the humiliation and cruelty of the camera lens in the belief that the cinema/art will provide them with solutions to their life problems. By taking these various strands and presenting them in a stylistic format consisting of

repetitive full frontal addresses to camera, the artifice and illusion of cinema is stripped back and attention is refocused on the structural elements of the creative process. The effect of this undertaking creates a dialectic relationship between a self reflexive text that constantly draws attention to its own signifying practices and process of construction by focusing on the relationship between the director and the actor as treading the problematic creative line between the perception, manipulation and creation of alternate realities.

The starting point of *Salaam Cinema* occurs as a result of an advertisement which Makhmalbaf placed in a Tehran newspaper inviting people to audition for his latest project. Almost five thousand people turned up for these auditions, almost instigating a riot which forms the opening scene of the film. The rest of the film focuses on the screen tests of a number of these hopefuls who, in often cruel and manipulative ways, are asked to sing a song, cry on demand, mime a melodramatic death or simply talk about their lives or reasons for wanting to be in a film. The naked space in which the prospective actors and actresses are isolated, the relentless interrogation of the unemotive camera and the gentle tyranny of Makhmalbaf as a director, combine a form of self-analysis with a discreet dramatic structure, "which touches on some serious issues…that allows both personal and political readings"[24].

The Social Power of Cinema

The opening scene sets the tone for many of the film's thematic explorations. Here we see the camera on top a car, filming the gathered masses, as it progresses slowly on its

234

way towards the audition hall. Resembling a reverential presidential style motorcade the camera films the crowd below from on high, an omnipotent position of godlike power. The scene is shot in a hand-held documentary style, with the camera being posited as merely the recorder of the ensuing events whilst at the same time, in dialectical tension, it is also the catalyst which has brought events into being. Furthermore, the scene highlights, especially when the application for the auditions are thrown in the air and we witness the mad scramble of the crowd to grab one, the desperation of a people who have nothing and who are prepared to put their faith in the opportunities and possibilities that they believe cinema can offer them. The chaos outside with the camera as the godlike documentor catalyst is contrasted with the calm, controlled atmosphere in the studio where the auditions take place. In this environment the role of the camera shifts and it becomes the cruel unblinking tool of the interrogator, provocateur, godlike director.

The series of auditions alternate between comedic exercises and harmless play-acting to more emotionally charged exercises of humiliation and manipulation where performers are interrogated as to their reasons for wanting to be an artist. The answers range from the general to the specific and the personal where one girl tells Makhmalbaf that she would like to be in a film so that her boyfriend in France can see her. In all these cases the performers are prepared to submit themselves to the will of the director and acquiesce to his every demand. The use of such harsh methods have been taken as a reflection of Makhmalbaf's personal view of cinema "as a kind of mass hysteria in which performers self interest enables them to rationalise their masochistic submission to the sadistic

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[24] *Variety*, June 5-11, 1995, p.39.

authority of the director" (Smith, 1996: 44). This is a somewhat cynical and disingenuous analysis as it fails to take into account the wider and specific social and cultural influences which the film seeks to reflect and from which it derives its essence. On the one hand these influences can be seen in the traditional and historical structure of Iranian society, which has revolved around the general will being dictated by a strong central and domineering figure, be that the person and cult of personality of the king in governance or the father in the household. Moreover, such submission also reflects a sense of hopelessness and despair of a people that have been denied a role in society and are willing to place their faith in alternative structures and suffer such degradations in the misguided belief that, in this instance art, can offer them the possibility of a better life. Indeed, Makhmalbaf himself has referred to this point by saying that "the soul of our people is in this film – their hope…It shows that not much of a role has been given to them in society…The distance between their hope and their hopelessness could be switched by one sentence" (Smith, 1996: 44).

The Distance Between Hope and Hopelessness

The key scene in this regard, and one which forms the complete illustration of the films meditation on the moral workings of power, occurs when two girls begin to question Makhmalbaf's methods as cruel and inhuman. Makhmalbaf challenges them in turn by telling them, "If you stay you'll be an artist…if you leave you will be more humane". On hearing this the girls promptly turn to go whereupon, Makhmalbaf calls them back and offers them the opportunity to assume his position and direct the next set of auditions. Following their assumption to the director's chair the girls begin to replicate the exact

same cruelty and dictatorial style that they had castigated Makhmalbaf for. This is quite a depressing and bitter conclusion on the functioning of power. On the one hand we have the majority who will follow unquestioningly the dictates of the ruler and on the other a minority who when they do speak up against tyranny and corruption are themselves corrupted and merely replicate previous patterns of behaviour on assuming power. Within the context of the time this stands as an oblique but prescient commentary on the performance of the Second Republic which having started with high hopes had, by this time, degenerated into factionalism, corruption and inaction being preoccupied in the maintenance of power at all costs to the detriment of the people and the country as a whole. The Era of Reconstruction had given way to the Era of Broken Promises and the resultant economic collapse and increasing enforcement of repressive social measures to stifle dissent in the service of maintaining and prolonging the power of the status quo. This sense of hopelessness is clearly reflected in the cross section of those who applied to be in the film; 80% male applicants, 19% female and 1% children. Of these 83% came from the capital and 17% from the provinces. 28% of the applicants possessed a third level education, 30% were high school graduates, 40% had incomplete high school education, 1% had only elementary school education and 1% were illiterate. Finally, regarding employment, 40% were government employees, 20% had independent jobs, 10% were manual workers and 30% were unemployed (Golmakani, 1994: 58). In the absence of any meaningful method of social and political intervention the function of art and the artist becomes one of showing and articulating the frustrations of the people. *Salaam Cinema* attempts to assume such a function by interrogating the space between the realities of peoples lives and their perception of cinema's fictional construction of the

real. The film is built on the contrast between the role which each individual is asked to perform and those who just tell their life story. It is the stories of the everyday and what they show of the lives of the people which forms the essence of the film. As Makhmalbaf comments,

"We started shooting with a specific notion of reality and tried to bring out that reality by placing people in special circumstances. But they encountered us with a totally different kind of reality, which we tampered with and which we tried to return to them. I believe this process of give and take went on throughout the auditions and new aspects of reality were intermixed with make believe. It is of course impossible to disentangle these two threads of the events" (Golmakani, 1994: 59).

Stripping back the artifice of the creative process allows for the reconfiguring of its component parts and their recombination in different formats. In displaying its own signifying practices the film is showing itself not as a neutral rendering of external reality but as a producer of ideology that can become all encompassing and is easily reproduced. This makes the artistic undertaking to continuously question and remake the presentation and perspective on reality anew an ardent task if we are not to simply repeat the renderings of the past.

Noon-o Goldoun (A Moment of Innocence, 1996)

The central preoccupation and concern running throughout all of the films of Makhmalbaf's third period is the desire to investigate the complex conditions governing

238

peoples lives through a multiple perspective form of representation. By presenting a multitude of conflicting voices he is attempting to open a space for public discourse that seeks to challenge certain problematic cultural traits of Iranian society such as individualism and the belief in absolute truths (Dabashi, 2001: 205). Artistically and intellectually *A Moment of Innocence* stands as the most accomplished and complete realisation of this undertaking due to the fact that it manages to seamlessly combine reality and art, fact and fiction, the personal and the political, in a rendering and examination of the historical moment as an interactive living site of past, present and future wrought from memory, regret and possibility. The unifying element within this milieu is the power of the cinema to intervene in the localised social arena of the personal in an attempt to reconstruct history and recast reality in a search for truth and meaning in life.

The film is based on an event that occurred during the teenage Makhmalbaf's life when as a member of a militant anti-Shah group he tried to attack and disarm a policeman. The incident resulted in the policeman being stabbed and Makhmalbaf being arrested and sent to prison. Twenty years later the same policeman turns up at the casting sessions for *Salaam Cinema* hoping to become an actor. Makhmalbaf convinces him that they should work together on a cinematic reconstruction of the tragic event that brought them together so many years ago. This sets in motion a dual narrative where we follow the separate efforts of both Makhmalbaf and the policeman to coach the actors that will play their youthful selves. These different strands come together in the end with the reconstruction of the personal historical event.

Idealism, Realism, Cinema and Reality

At the start of the film Makhmalbaf is asked what the film is about, he responds, "I want to recapture my youth with a camera". Similarly, the policeman says about acting and his reasons for doing the film, "I thought I'd rediscover my life. I wanted to act for the sake of my life". In this sense the cinema is being used as a means of self-discovery actively intervening in the process of social determination by presenting a picture of society as a site of fragmented, conflictual and discordant discourse. However, such an undertaking necessitates an interrogation of the mode of representation and a laying bare of its artifice through a self-reflexivity, which rejects the idea of omnipotence, wholeness and closure, in a bid to create a collaborationist, active and interventionist artform which is the virtual embodiment of the fractured reality it seeks to portray. Self-discovery and artistic self-reflexivity form the dual creative impetus directing *A Moment of Innocence*. This is made clear from the start where the cinematic devices are broken down into their elemental forms and exposed as active participants in the construction of meaning. The opening credits are spoken and written. We are constantly shown clapperboards to underline the fact that this is a work in progress, a film about filmmaking. This dissection of the means of representation allows for an open and egalitarian space which can accommodate the heterogeneous voices of personal memory, love and loss.

The dual narrative, where both the policeman and Makhmalbaf are recreating their own version of the same event, presents a subjective and personalised view of history where politics divides and art offers the possibility of reconciliation and a bridge to understanding. Notions of truth and falsehood and the division between fact and fiction

collapse as the search is ultimately for humanity. What is essential is not the actual occurrence of the event or its actual authentic existence but the necessity of conceiving, developing and depicting the process whereby each individual arrives at their own version of reality and truth. Makhmalbaf is setting out to create a fractured fictive truth rooted in reality. The final scene where the stabbing is actually recreated attests to this fact. Previous to this the viewer has witnessed the exhaustively detailed reconstruction of personalised histories where the "young actors mimic the characters they are playing to such an extent that they often seem to have assumed the older men's identities" (Macnab, 1998: 51). Throughout this process we are constantly made aware of the process of construction and the artifice of cinema with Makhmalbaf and the policeman constantly in the frame directing events. However, when the actual stabbing is finally reconstructed the scene is devoid of self-reflexive referents. In this respect it is the young actors themselves who are determining the outcome of the scene through an implicit form of self-direction that rejects their tutors version of history. The last shot bears testament to this. It is a freeze frame where the young protagonists offer a flower and bread to one another instead of violence and destruction. The shot connotes hope in the future and faith in a new generation not to repeat the mistakes of the past. At the beginning of the film the young Makhmalbaf states that he wants to save mankind. The film provides him with his opportunity and Makhmalbaf with a form of redemption through the realisation that love and humanity are the essential elements governing human interaction. Such a statement may appear obvious or even trite but it is arrived at through a rigorous form of self-analysis and the questioning of a society that has depersonalised the individual by locating him as a mere functionary of ideology and politics. In this respect *A Moment of*

241

Innocence is an ambitious and honest film that on one level can be deemed to be revolutionary in pursuing such an undertaking. Here is a political art that operates on the micro level of the personal and which seeks to defamiliarise its society by drawing its meaning and realisation from the inclusive differences between two worldviews and multiple artforms, but does so in such a way that plays off our connections to these worlds. Thus a world of new possibilities is opened up. A joy in the knowledge of an alternative worldview and the fact that the world can be remade in this new image, an image in which the individual is an active creator rather than a detached participant passively fulfilling a predetermined role. Asking questions instead of giving answers, learning to listen to alternative opinions, and a realisation of the tyranny of absolutes, these are the modest even self-effacing revolutionary virtues of Makhmalbaf's practices in *A Moment of Innocence*. These practices rest on the assumption that works of art are created and controlled by the apparatus of society as much as by the individual artist. It is the awareness of this fact and the artist's ability to actively intervene in and mediate this relationship through an elemental investigation of the constituent parts of the personal, the social, the political and the cultural, which allows for their reconstitution in new constantly changing but critically engaged formats.

Gabbeh (1996)

Makhmalbaf's last film of this period marks a transition in his artistic and intellectual development. *Gabbeh* heralded his arrival on the international scene and saw the emergence of a more tranquil, esoteric and poetic sensibility rooted in a rural idyll, which seemed to move from direct social intervention to a contemplation of a personal and

spiritual aesthetic rooted in a complex Persian cultural milieu exploring the nature of art and mans search for, and relationship with, God. Indeed, in this respect *Gabbeh* can be seen as a work which has brought to the foreground elements that have been a constant though, up until this point at least, less than fully explored cultural concern. The specific and complex historio-cultural basis, and by extension the analytical frame of reference, of this work sets it out as an attempt to portray, both in form and content, a Persian Islamic/religious sensibility. The recourse to a localised frame of analysis is crucial to the understanding of *Gabbeh* particularly in light of its success abroad where it became the first Iranian film to secure an extensive foreign distribution deal[25] and where it has been co-opted into a critical frame of reference which has seen it rendered an orientalist curiosity or a technically beautiful exercise in form. At the centre of this debate is the question of the need for a workable framework of analysis and the representation, reception and decoding of Iran and its cinema on the international stage. In other words how and to whom does the medium speak? For *Gabbeh* this is particularly pertinent on two counts, given the problematic approaches and conclusions of most Western critics and also the fact that the film is very much part of the trend of successful Iranian films in the West which are rendered as part of a European art-house sensibility i.e. those that exhibit a slow, contemplative, poetic/realist sensibility located in a picture postcard and idyllic rural setting[26]. The crux of this theoretical debate centres around the fact that for many *Gabbeh* is seen as a fabled packaging of Iran for tourists, a travel-poster, fairytale

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[25] *Gabbeh* was released by the European distributor MK2 in France and Switzerland on World Cinema Day (June 26) in 23 cities. This was the first time in French history that a non-French or non-American film received such a wide screening It was also the first Iranian film to secure such a large simultaneous release. See, "Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Gabbeh* Wins Awards", *Cinema '96*, 1996.

[26] In this regard it must be noted that despite the wide distribution and success that *Gabbeh* achieved internationally it was initially banned from Iranian screens.

substitute for the realities of life in the country[27], a vague uncritical picturesque work[28],

or a critique of patriarchal culture and the censor of women's rights (Ridgeon, 2000: 26).

The problem with these analyses is that they have take minor strands which exist within

the film and made them stand for the whole whilst ignoring the thematic development of

Makhmalbaf's work as a whole and the complexities of indigenous socio-cultural factors

in which Iranian cinema is located and derived from. A more comprehensive and

productive approach is one which seeks to dissect a culture, not as a picturesque postcard

of the imagination, which attempts to blend a "European ethnographic interest in

categorisation and classification with an aesthetic and tourist desire for the exotic"

(Behdad, 1999: 85), but as the articulation of a personal vision situated within the

palimpsestic heterogeneity of historically derived indigenous cultural forms, which

despite their specificity allow for universal understanding.

Gabbeh tells the simple tale of a young woman from a nomadic tribe who rebels against

her traditional role to be with her beloved. Gabbeh is also the name given to the original

and distinctive hard-knotted coarse rugs made by the women of nomadic tribes whose

patterns and designs are inspired by the lives of their makers. From this simple premise

emerges a film which seeks to combine life and art as reflections and determinants of one

another, a film like the gabbeh, inspired and brought into being by the "surrounding

landscape and natural elements as well as folklore and fables recounted from time

immemorial" (Ahmadi & Makhmalbaf, 1997: 5). These are the formal elements which

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[27] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Packaged Fables", *Chicago Reader*,
http://www.chireader.com/movies/archives/0897/08297.htn
[28] David Walsh, "Gabbeh and A Moment of Innocence: two films directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, *World Socialist Web Site*, 23rd September 1996, www.wsws.org/arts/1996/sep1996/iran-s96.shtn

frame a work that has at its core an examination of the nature of art and the continued

search for man's, in this case Makhmalbaf's personal, changing relationship with God as

framed through a Persian Islamic mode of reference.

The central preoccupation of *Gabbeh* lies in the artist's search for God and its rendering

through specific cultural forms. This form is the realm of poetry where Makhmalbaf

echoes but eschews the work of poets such as Fāhereh Saffārzādeh, who engaged in a

search for the self in a "quest for spiritual-religious identity vis-à-vis the harsh realities of

modern society" (Blondel Saad, 1996: 70), or Omar Khayyam who asserted the simple

life of sustenance as the means of making a paradise out of an ideal setting. However, it

is the essence of these works, rather than the Islamic universalism of the former and the

pessimism and scepticism of the latter, which Makhmalbaf has taken and transformed

into a quest for self-knowledge in approaching the divine through a process of artist

creation that is derived from, both in the historical and spiritual sense, the essence of

God. The foundational basis of this self-knowledge lies in a formal and spiritual melding

of Persian and Islamic artforms, which in this case is rendered through the complex

communicative functionality of the Persian carpet.

The Artistic Template of the Persian Carpet

The position of the carpet in Iranian cultural heritage is of an artform which is based on

the beauty of pattern as decoration. It is representative of a specifically Persian artistic

mindset which exhibits "a strong predilection for embellishment and arabesque"

(Yarshater, 1971: 303), and manages to encompass the main tenets of 'Islamic art' (see

chapter 3) with its "symmetrically arranged floral motifs, patterns of rectilinear shapes, arabesque systems, combinations of bright colours and little narrative or figural didactic content" (Hillman, 1990: 76), into an expressive whole. Makhmalbaf uses these attributes as the formal means of constructing the style of the film, whilst at the same time attempting to go beyond the purely decorative by anthropomorphizing the gabbeh as a visual narrator which derives its essence and being from nature and life and stands as a document reflecting and counterpointing human interaction with and transformation of the immediate environment. These issues are most clearly evidenced in the scene where we see a gabbeh being weaved from the point of view of the weaver, wool being woven horizontally across vertical hanging strands framed by a loom that looks onto a golden field of sown wheat whose vertical standing is being made horizontal by the blowing wind. This complex interaction of shape and framing serves to highlight the very essence of creative endeavour; God creates nature, nature is acted on by the artist to create the gabbeh, the gabbeh creates the cinema[29].

The Search for God

It is within this complex interaction of specific cultural conditions that the spiritual/religious dimension emerges in the relationship between God and the artist through which the latter seeks a closer union with the Almighty by recognising that He is the sole creator of heaven and earth and that the artist merely transforms elements that are imbued with Gods essence; "He hath created the heavens without supports that ye can

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[29] Indeed, Iran Darroudi has referred to Iranian cinema as being derived from, due to the lack of a flourishing painting tradition, the Persian carpet, which itself is the essence of an Iranian national visual artform. See, Iran Darroudi, As Plain as Truth", *Film International*, Winter/Spring, 1996.

see, and hath cast into the earth firm hills, so that it quake not with you; and he had dispersed therein all kinds of beasts. And We send down water from the sky and We cause (plants) of every godly kind to grow therein" (Sūrah, XXXI: 10). This ideal that God has created and prescribed perfection in all things gives spiritual meaning not only to the work of the artist in transforming these raw materials but gives meaning to the objects themselves and those who use them. In this respect Makhmalbaf is highlighting the utilitarian and spiritual nature of the artist and his work, both of which are combined in the gabbeh, and as such is approaching the essence of 'Islamic art' where all acts of creation are an uplifting of the soul to God and a "becoming aware of His omnipetence in the creation of life and individuality" (Papadopoulo, 1980: 57). Indeed, Makhmalbaf delves further into the dual process of creation by examining its individual component elements and highlighting the function of the artist and the presence of God in his work through an examination of colour.

The key scene in this regard occurs when Gabbeh's uncle goes into a school to quiz the children on their knowledge of the different colours. In the first instance he reaches out of the frame and pulls in a number of objects; poppies as an example of red, wheat as an example of yellow. This is then followed by him pointing to the sky, "the blue of Gods heaven", the sea, and the "yellow of the sun that lights the world". Each time he points his hand is transformed into the colour of the object to which he refers. Finally he combines his blue hand and his yellow hand (water, sky and sun, the elements of Gods creation) and creates green, physically denoted by the appearance of grass in his hands. The first two examples are given physicality whilst the last three are rendered essences

247

whose combination gives life. The next scene sees the women of the tribe using the natural elements to form colour with which to dye the wool for their gabbeh. Life is colour, a beauty created by God through which the artist seeks to know Him. The artist therefore considers beauty to be a Divine quality and in creating beauty is co-operating with God in the perfection of the world.

Life is Colour

Furthermore, Makhmalbaf's meditations on the notion of colour also exhibit his ongoing self-reflexive analysis of the formal properties and means of cinematic representation (e.g. the focus on sound in *A Time of Love*) but also reflects the specific cultural location of his work, which serves to counteract the claims of picturesque packaged fables. This derives from the fact that the term "colour" in Iranian has tended to have a peculiar usage, usually meant to refer to mode or manner, which in turn is given as the explanation and point of influence on the Koranic reference to the "colour" of God, which is taken to "denote the style, mode, spiritual shape of God" (Shaked, 1995: 41). This highlights the complex interaction of historical cultural forms in Iran where stylisation and abstraction have traditionally been influenced by different devotional ties, from Zoroastrianism to certain forms of Islam such as Sufism, which have emphasised the compatibility of art and beauty, a compatibility that has always been imbued with a culturally specific spirituality. This has been a constant element throughout Persian history where a "close relationship has existed between the arts and the spiritual discipline deriving from the religion dominant in Persia at the time, which was a major factor in shaping them" (Khazaie, 1999: 269).

The migrating journey of the tribe signifies not only the artists search for the Divine but is also a reference to the two poles of the Muslim world, the sedentary and the nomad, whose interaction is illustrated through the artistic evolution of the knotted carpet. The gabbeh stands as the sedentary limit, frame and order, in contrast to the nomads love of rhythm and infinite space. It is this living balance between stability and movement, and the exchange between these polarities, on which Islamic civilisation lives and evolves (Burkhardt, 1976). Throughout the film the gabbeh intervenes within this space as a commentary on life/reality and its depiction through art in the approximation of truth. Near the end of the film Gabbeh runs away from the tribe to be with her beloved and is pursued by her father. Two gunshots ring out. Her father returns to the camp saying that he has shot them both. He then throws a gabbeh on the ground that unfurls to reveal a scene of a man and woman escaping on horseback. Thus the gabbeh/art questions and provides a counterpoint to the validity of the father's story. The final scene confirms the truth claims of the gabbeh as we hear Gabbeh in voice over state; "My father didn't kill us. That was just a rumour he started so my sisters wouldn't run away. So they would never answer the call of the wolf. That is why for forty years no one has heard the canary's song by a spring". The truth claims of art and its ability to question and stand as a document of the real, as well as its ability to reveal that which remains unsaid, are reinforced by the visuals which accompany Gabbeh's regret tinged speech where we see a gabbeh depicting a scene of a migrating tribe floating down a stream away from her, signifying all that she has left behind. Gabbeh's sense of regret at the end of the film once again reveals the effects of individual choice in the pursuit of passion and freedom at the

expense of the family/community/society (as depicted in different ways in films such as *Boycott*, *Marriage of the Blessed* and *A Time of Love*).

The Notion of the Beloved

During the course of the film Makhmalbaf has positioned the relationship between Gabbeh and her lover as an inverted and problematised depiction of the Persian literary notion of the beloved. Traditionally the beloved has been characterised as an ethereal woman of great beauty who is "unattainable, passive and silent and the narrator has no desire to touch her as a physical touch would constitute a violation of the classical love relationship" (Ghanoonparvar, 1984: 15). This idealistic vision of women in turn formed part of a greater idealistic vision in terms of the possible structures of a utopian society of individual freedom, choice and happiness. In *Gabbeh* the beloved is male (object) as seen through the eyes of a woman (subject) offering a means of release from the restrictive structures of the tribal structure. However, Gabbeh's freedom means isolation and a barren existence (reinforced by the fact that she is infertile and therefore incapable of having a family of her own) a sort of punishment and purgatory for allowing her own desires to surmount the needs of society and the maintenance of community. Her migration is restrictive rather than expansive and is a clear echo of not just the migration of the tribe but also of women in general as stated in the Qu'ran; "Whoso migrateth for the cause of Allah will find much refuge and abundance in the earth, and whoso forsaketh his home, a fugitive unto Allah and His messenger, and death overtaketh him, his reward is then incumbent on Allah" (Sūrah IV: 100). Once again Makhmalbaf is walking a fine line between a desire to highlight the problems of chauvinism in Iranian

society and give voice to those denied it and a conservative religious belief in the strength and stability of the family/community that is very much in accordance with official ideology; the fine line for the Iranian artist balanced between the expressible and the acceptable.

Conclusion

By the end of its tenure in power the Second Republic was facing major problems that threatened to unravel the whole system. The economic safety valve no longer existed as the much-vaunted economic reforms stalled. The currency was devalued in 1993, development projects were shelved as the technocrats were ousted by the conservative, inflation was running at around 35% per year (Ehteshami, 1995: 116-119), and the Chamber of Commerce admitted that by 1996 up to 40% of Iranians lived below the poverty line (Wright, 2001: 24). Rafsanjani's position as president had become ineffectual and isolated from the main locus of power, which was increasingly located within the alliance between the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamane'i, the Speaker of the Majles Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri and the dominant parliamentary grouping of conservative clerics, which effectively paralysed the executive branch and stifled any debate on issues on reform. The early dark days of the revolution seemed to be back with any form of dissent being harshly repressed.

However, circumstances had changed from these early days and the dissent that now appeared was more persistent, articulate and coming from diffuse sources within the system many of whom were children of the revolution now questioning the conduct of

their parents. Thinkers such as Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, who are the most high profile, public, and vociferous articulators of this growing social discontent, have begun to challenge the idea of authoritarian rule through a language that called for the recognition of individual rights, the establishment of a civil society and the need for a revival in Islamic thought, which revolved around the idea that Islam should be separated from those who interpret it, as this had seen religion become detached from its spiritual meaning in deference to an ideological form of justification for the maintenance of power. These debates (which will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter) found eager recipients in the country's massive youth population (65% of whom are under 25 years of age (Judah, 2002: 90-96)) who were increasingly alienated by the states dogma and methods of repression. The tight controls that the ruling elite were able to enforce on domestic films and media were increasingly being undermined and flying in the face of logic as Iran became increasingly enmeshed in the global economy. The availability of satellite television, despite parliament outlawing the use of satellite dishes in 1995, and the development of the internet were exposing a new generation to the ideas and cultures of the outside world. This exposure was feeding the desire for change at home, which culminated in the election of the reformist liberal former Minister of Culture Mohammad Khatami in 1997 as the hoped for figure head of change that would herald the beginning of a new era of freedom, pluralism and democracy. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6
The Aesthetics of Reform

Introduction

The situation in Iran at the end of Rafsanjani's tenure in power was one of a country in turmoil and an economy in freefall[1]. A ruling elite beset by corruption and inefficiency, Five Year economic plans that had stalled, and were widely seen as ineffective had merely resulted in widening the gap between rich and poor, and had given rise to a population increasingly dissatisfied and alienated from a state whose only means of controlling increasing discontent was the introduction of ever harsher methods of repression. The Islamic system seemed to be near breaking point and parallels can be clearly seen with the situation that existed in the country at the time of the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979. This recourse to the narrative of Iranian history is instructive in that it serves not only as an example of the uniquely "cyclical nature" of events in Iranian history where "people are very strongly conditioned by their past, to such an extent that they act in patterns imposed by the past" (Frye, 1993: 2), but also provides a template from which to evaluate, contextualise and explain the emergence of the post-Rafsanjani administration.

It was soon clear that by the time of the new presidential elections in 1997 the voices clamouring for reform had reached a crescendo and that change, in some form, would have to occur if the Islamic system was to be prevented from unravelling. This desire for change manifested itself in the unexpected election of, the reformist, former Minister of

Culture and Islamic Guidance, Mohammad Khatami to the post of president of the Islamic Republic on the 23rd May 1997. He fought his election campaign on a policy platform that held as its priority "the implementation of the rule of law" and the development of a "civil society which would operate as a balance against the intrusions of the State, not only in the fields of politics and economics, but also on....the social and cultural aspects of life" (Ansari, 2000: 96) as well as promising "greater social justice...administrative reform and a fairer distribution of wealth" (Hiro, 2001: 225). Khatami's reform programme was seen as a radical break from the exclusive economic focus of the Second Republic. This shift of emphasis, which focused on the need for social and cultural change as a prerequisite for improving economic performance, seemed to offer the genuine possibility of a new reconstituted society. This chapter sets out to assess and examine the development of the Khatami era by placing it within the framework of a historical narrative of hegemonic cultural debate that oscillates between "socially engaged visionaries and instrumental-bureaucratic functionaries" (Boroujerdi, 1996: 22).

Cinema in an Era of Reform

It is within the context of the new cultural terms of the debate and the developing structures of the Khatami era society that the position of the cinema must be located. This period was to prove perhaps the pinnacle of post-revolutionary cinema, at least on the international stage, with Kiarostami's *The Taste of Cherry* winning the Palme d'Or in

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[1] The annual growth rate had fallen from 8% in the early 1990's to 1% in 1996. Per captia GDP was below $1000 a year and the economy was only creating two fifths of the 700,000 jobs required annually to keep pace with the rising number of graduating students. See, *The Financial Times,* 2nd May 1997.

1997, followed by Samira Makhmalbaf winning the same award for *Blackboards* in 2000, and Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven* being nominated for the Best Foreign Film Award (the first Iranian film to do so) at the 1998 Oscars. However, artistically it appeared that the medium had reached something of an impasse. Many films (particularly those shown abroad) began to exhibit formal and thematic repetitions that centred around children, village life and beautiful landscapes, which reduced them to formulaic picture postcard orientalist curiosities that created "an imaginary space inhabited with strange natives" (Bohrer, 1999: 85). The filmmaker Bahram Bayzai has referred to this kind of cinema as "fake folklore…that make it look as if Iran were a quiet country where everything is good, people are innocent, we have God…they are not real films but they present themselves as real" (Dupont, 2001). It is this apparent separation of the notions of 'Iran' and 'cinema' which saw Iranian cinema became engaged in an intellectual debate on the question of representation and the nature of engagé and neutral art.

The question of the representation of Iran, Iranianness and what constitutes Iranian culture is an unfinished project that has come into sharper focus given the current government's vaunting of Islamic democracy and the notion of a Persian Islamic consciousness. These transformations have highlighted the fact that cultural representation must be viewed within the context of its historical antecedents and the broader issues of national culture and their discussion and reflection through art. For Makhmalbaf this period covered two feature films *The Silence* (1998) and *Kandahar* (2001) as well as one a short film *The Door* (1999), which formed one of three short films, along with contributions from Nasser Taghavi and Abolfazl Jalili, released under

the title *Tales of Kish*. His films from this period are a continuation and development of the poetic and aesthetic format that he had developed in *Gabbeh* (1995) and can be seen as part of the continued exploration and investigation of the notion of a Persian consciousness. In this sense they form part of an important contribution to the ensuing cultural debate in that this new aesthetic development seems to be located within the conflicting spaces of Persian poetry (particularly the works of Omar Khayyam and Forough Farrokhzad), and towards approaching a Sufi mystical relationship with God. The cinema of this period is very much located in the complex realm of the politics of the personal and the spiritual in attempts to discover an individual form of piety and morality in approaching a freedom autonomous of institutional politics and ideology but firmly located within the conflicting and contested spaces of Iranian culture.

Realigning the Politics of Change

Khatami's 'new' political/cultural directive finds itself bearing lineage to, and needs to be appropriated within the context of, historical precedence in its drive to reconstitute and ground the drive for reform on the foundations of the cultural project undertaken in the first decade of the Islamic Republic i.e. the Islamicisation process and a return to, and extension of, the original aims of the revolution. Furthermore, this cultural emphasis is based on the notion and belief that "identity" and identification in the Iranian sense is based on ideas of culture rather than nation, "a sense of Persian consciousness, of identity – *iraniyyat* – which runs throughout the country's history" (Morgan, 1988: 7). Khatami's reform/civil society project must be seen in these terms as an attempt to awaken this consciousness by laying claim to, reapproriating and reinterpretating Khomeini's legacy

in a Persian Islamic guise. The basis and guarantor of this 'civil society' was seen to lie in the full implementation of the 1979 Constitution, which in turn was co-opted into a historical narrative, and seen as but one stage of a movement towards democracy "that began in 1906 during the Constitutional Revolution, continued to the 1953 coup and culminated in 1979" (Ansari 2000: 150).

Although the Khatami era is still characterised by the struggle between conservatives and reformist elements within the ruling elite this struggle has spilled over more visibly into the public arena with the tentative emergence of certain civic elements that are at times seen to be driving the debate and setting the agenda. However, what must be realised is the fact that the distinction between hardliner/conservative and reformist/liberal needs to be qualified and treated with a certain amount of circumspection. Timothy Garton Ash (1985: 198-199), illustrates this point in talking about the authorities in communist Poland, stating that these divisions can be found to exist in any ruling elite if you look hard enough and that these differences are played up, and indeed manufactured, for western consumption. This can be seen as a hegemonic structure garnered to win support for the unpalatable implementation of policies by a regime – based on the principle that, well the alternative is much worse! – by creating the myth of deep ideological divisions within the ruling faction when in essence the gap between the hardliners and moderates is not as wide as promoted. Furthermore, the shifting patterns of alliances within the Iranian political structure makes the application of such distinctions fraught with difficulty. These divisions are further called into question by the nature of the Islamic Republic's

political system itself where "protean leadership makes a mockery of these false categories" (Ajami, 1988-1989: 144).

Indeed, within the Iranian ruling elite these points are particularly salient. For example, in the economic sphere there exists little difference between the conservatives and reformists on the issue of policy implementation. While the reformists emphasise the need for social justice and the conservatives avidly promote the expansion of the free market, both sides support the liberalisation of the economy and recognise the need to attract foreign investment. Furthermore, both sides recognise their mutual need for one another and the necessity of forming alliances if the Islamic system is to remain intact. This point is clearly illustrated in the ritualistic patterns of political behaviour that have developed in response to the public demonstrations of discontent that have occurred during Khatami's time in power.

The largest and most serious demonstrations and riots (those during the 1998 World Cup and the qualifying World Cup matches in 2001 and the violent student demonstrations in 1999[2]) can be seen to follow a clear pattern; public discontent is met by the dual forces of state repression and Khatami calling for calm, followed by the dissipation of the crisis and the formation of new alliances between the conservatives and reformists. Ayatollah Khamanei was quick to support Khatami and offer his pledge to work together following

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[2] The student demonstrations in July 1999 occurred after the reformist newspaper *Salaam* was closed down. The demonstrations after soccer matches have become a phenomenon in recent years with large public gatherings being used as forums for political protest. What is interesting to note is the change in language of the protestors. In 1999 the chant was, in response to Khatami's conspicuous absence and silence, "Khatami where are you? Khatami what is your reaction" (See, *The Guardian* 17th July 1999). During demonstrations and aftermath of the 2001 World Cup qualifying matches the chant had changed to "Khatami, do something or resign" (See, *The Sunday Independent*, 30th December 2001)

the attacks on student dormitories during the demonstrations in 1999 describing the event as "a bitter and unacceptable incident". In this way these demonstrations act as a "safety valve" whilst at the same time never seriously threatening the structure of the system and the locus of power and indeed, have lead in certain circumstances to a further entrenching of the position of the ruling elite. As Abbas Abdi has noted, the hardliners recognise the fact that "Khatami is the last chance of this system and state and they are not particularly prepared to stand up to Mr. Khatami strongly" (Ansari 2001: 222). This highlights the fact that one of the major weaknesses of these demonstrations is the fact that they are more often than not spontaneous in nature and lack an organised and clearly expressed mandate or set of demands through which to channel and articulate their discontent.

The Elements of a Civil Society

The key element in giving form and direction to this discontent lies with the position of the press and the intelligentsia, a central pillar in any civil society and the barometer by which the progress of reform and democracy is measured. The press and intelligentsia in Iran have traditionally filled the vacuum created by the absence of oppositional parties by informing, educating and extending political consciousness to the general public. Under Khatami the number of publications in circulation increased dramatically and they not only became an overt factor in political strategy but also began to set the terms of political discourse and dictate the agenda, becoming not only a conveyor of ideas but a central pillar directing the course of reform in society. These developments also saw the emergence of a new group of intellectuals, both lay and religious, who began to articulate the new terms of the debate around issues of freedom, democracy and civil rights, finding

259

a platform for the expression of their ideas in the resurgent press. The artistic community joined in this debate, many of whom had dealt with Khatami during his tenure as Minister of Culture, and who now offered their unconditional support to the new president. These included Makhmalbaf himself who declared his allegiance publicly during the election campaign and was quickly followed by twenty-two other filmmakers who declared their support for Khatami in an open letter to the press[3]. This new resurgent intellectual environment (despite having to operate within strictly defined parameters of debate and under the constant fear of threats and intimidation) seemed to signal, or at least offer the possibility of, a new oppositional alliance.

In Iranian society opposition to the state has traditionally arisen from a combination of the clergy, bazaar and members of the intelligentsia[4]. With the assumption of the clergy, and by association the bazaar (their position having being consolidated under Rafsanjani), to power, and the purging, persecution and exile of many members of the intelligentsia, it would seem that the Islamic regime had succeeded in eliminating the possibility of any threat of an oppositional alliance forming against itself. However, a new alliance could be said to be tentatively emerging within the changed socio-cultural environment between certain reform minded elements within the clergy, a new intelligentsia seeking to articulate the reformist debate in exclusively Iranian/Islamic cultural terms and a large

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[3] Many filmmakers also played an active part in Khatami's election campaign producing a number of campaign films in a contest in which television was to prove an important medium. Khatami himself has also been the subject of a number of films, including Mohsen Makhmalbaf's 40 minute video film *Testing Democracy* (2000) and the acclaimed Iranian actress Fatemeh Mo'tamed Aria's *A Man For All Reasons* (2001). Although it must be said that neither of these were particularly informative or critically engaging.
[4] As happened in the 1979 revolution. See also, Ervand Abrahamian, "The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905-53" in *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil* (ed.) Haleh Afshar (London: Macmillan Press 1985) pp.121-149, for an historical analysis of the development and composition of mass oppositional forces in Iranian society.

disgruntled youth population that has had its cultural and material expectations raised, but constantly thwarted and unfulfilled, by the effects of globalisation, i.e. particularly through the infiltration and penetration of satellite television and the internet into the country. It is this last group that is the largest and most vocal in their demands for reform. The youth and student population form the core element of Khatami's support and may be seen as the new *mostazafin*. This section of society has no recollection or experience of the Shah and their discontent is directed solely at the Islamic Republic. The Islamicisation process has failed to socialise the youth in they way that the clergy would want and they have yet to find a way of getting through to them.

The Politics of Change?

Despite the enthusiasm and hope engendered by the election of President Khatami in 1997 it must be borne in mind that he, despite the orientation of his policies, was not the instigator and articulator of the drive for reform. These demands already existed in Iranian society[5], becoming more acute and vocal following the failures and disillusionment of the Rafsanjani period. What Khatami has in effect attempted to do is to articulate and manage social content, "transforming alienation into a political movement" (Brumberg 2001: 187) as a means of hegemonic control, dedicated to ensuring that the Islamic system remains intact. Indeed, "what most distinguished the third republic from the two earlier phases – and what gave it the greatest prospect of enduring – was the fact that leadership increasingly came from the streets, not mosques or political offices"

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[5] This is clearly seen in the fact that the majority of the landslide 70% of the 30 million votes cast in the 1997 election that Khatami came from the most disenfranchised and reform minded section of the electorate, women and students.

(Wright, 2001: 29). In this respect Khatami can be seen to be operating from a dual perspective, responding to a popular mandate whilst simultaneously acting as a "safety valve" (Lyden, 1999) for the ruling regime. Furthermore, Khatami has not "become President of the Islamic Republic in order to dismantle it" (Smith, 1999), stating that "the most important…[problem] is the preservation of the system and of our Islamic values…What is a priority is that the system should be preserved, improved and strengthened…It should be made strong and stable"[6].

This is the central tenet of Khatami's agenda, to preserve the Islamic system as established by Khomeini, (the notion of the *faqih*), by aligning it with and implementing fully the declarations laid down in the Constitution. Indeed, Khatami can be seen as another stage in self-regulating clerical reform that had begun with the constitutional reforms undertaken by the previous administration in 1989. The problem thus arises of how to align pluralistic notions such as democracy, freedom and a civil society with the monotheism of a revolutionary ideological state built on an undemocratic system of governance. The difficulty in attempting to solve this apparent contradiction can be clearly seen in Khatami's attempt to link the notion of the *faqih* with the democratic will of the people; "the pivot of the system which was created by the people is the supreme jurisconsult"[7]. This cuts against the very logic of the definition as laid down by Khomeini who declared that a jurisprudent " has the same authority that the Most Noble Messenger

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[6] Interview with *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, February 1997, in Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) p.220.
[7] Ibid. p.221.

and the Imams had" (Rose, 1983: 177) and which therefore establishes an undemocratic system of the subservice of the many to the infallible pronouncements of the few.

The Question of the *Velayat-e Faqih*

Indeed, such pronouncements highlight how deeply entrenched and intractable the political system of the Islamic Republic really is. This is based on the fact that the system of *velayat-e faqih* essentially means that any real power is located in the hands of the conservative elements within the ruling elite, i.e. the Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council and the Expediency Council, and their control of the judiciary. The reconstituted political system that has emerged after the Second Republic allows for the public voicing (within controlled parameters) of discordant elements of protest, which creates the appearance of debate and democracy and offers the possibility (if not the reality) of change in a hegemonic struggle that has as its primary objective the retention of power and the maintenance of clerical rule. The fact that protests, demonstrations and discontent have continued, and in fact increased throughout Khatami's presidency, may be attributed to a certain 'liberalisation' of the intellectual climate, which has created more opportunities for the voicing of discontent, but primarily stands to highlight the inability and unwillingness of the system, as it stands, to instigate meaningful and wholesale reforms within society[8]. Furthermore, the superficial changes that have occurred have merely led to demands for an increased and quicker pace of change whilst also

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[8] In an interview with students conducted in Tehran during the course of a research trip, which I made to Iran in September 2001, many expressed their frustrations with the slow pace of change with one student remarking that "all Khatami has done is change the psychology of the people".

highlighting the fact that the political structure of the Islamic Republic itself must be radically altered or even removed if the full extent of these demands are to be fully met and meaningfully implemented.

This is the dilemma of the Islamic regime, how far it can introduce reform without ultimately annihilating itself. The ruling elite has attempted to surmount this problem by counterbalancing a limited form of political disenfranchisement with efforts to control and dictate the process of change. This control is facilitated by the conservative grip on the armed forces and the economy, which acts, in conjunction with Khatami's belief that political pluralism is the handmaiden of economic liberalisation, as a means of preventing dissent from becoming action. This situation emanates from the fact that "conservatives run the judiciary, where they interpret the legislation any way they like, and hand out verdicts that promote their politics rather than implement the law. They control the army, police and *Baseej*...They run the mass media...They control certain sectors of the economy. Thus we have two parallel, but unequal systems here"[9]. The lack of progress on the economic front is another important factor of control in that by keeping the majority of the populace in a state of economic subsistence and by offering the possibility if not the reality of change, a form of hegemonic control is created that serves to illustrate Alexis de Tocqueville's famous observation that revolutions tend to happen not when things have been getting worse but when things have been getting better or when an elite loses confidence in itself[10]. Furthermore, the maintenance of the economic status quo

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[9] *The Observer*, 17th December, 2000.
[10] See, Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (London: Everyman's Library, 1994) and Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution* (Manchester: Fontana, 1966).

benefits and consolidates the ruling elite since it is they that possess the wealth. Indeed, not a single significant economic bill, apart from the budget, was introduced to parliament during Khatami's first two years in office (de Roquefeuil, 1999).

However, the central question governing any notions of change still remains the question of the *velayat-e faqih*. The comments of the conservative ideologue Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi perfectly illustrate this point and the highlight the precarious position of the reformers: "In a democracy, people can decide to change the rules of their life through elections and parliament. In Iran no such change is possible because the rules are fixed for eternity. Those who expect the new parliament to change our system will be soon be disappointed…the ultimate decision rests with the Leader" (Hirst, 2001). This fact counteracts Ansari's (2000: 113) positive analysis of the Khatami reformist agenda, which he sees as not being a rejection of the Islamic Revolution per se but a rejection of the authoritarian interpretation of it. However the authoritarian nature of Islamic governance is grounded in and derived from the system of *velayat-e faqih* and it is the institution itself rather than its actual manifestation which needs to be fundamentally altered. As the political theorist Tabataba'i notes, "for now the religious tradition and the Revolution have entrapped many…because Ayatollah Khomeini has forced religious tradition into a situation where it does not belong. This offers an opportunity whereby our cultural traditions can be re-evaluated in its entirety.….It is my belief that in Iranian political thought monarchy has many bodies. We need to deal with it so that its present reincarnation in the "rule of the jurist" [*velayat-e faqih*] does not last long"[11]. These

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[11] Interview in, Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernisation, Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.184.

comments illustrate the centrality of the recourse to history and the importance of the cultural aspect in Iranian politics and form the central preoccupation on the ensuing intellectual debates on the notions of freedom, democracy and the creation of a civil society.

The Intellectual and Cultural Debate

What needs to be recognised with regard to the stated drive towards a civil society is the fact that the term and its proposed implementation and subsequent manifestation differs from the way in which it is seen in West. This stems primarily from the fact that this new civil society is more accurately seen as an Islamic civil society and it is within Islam that the terms of the debate are enacted, or perhaps more accurately in relation to the terms of the *velayat-e faqih*, but also from the fact that 'civil society' in Iran differs from that experienced in most western societies. This distinction lies in the fact that Iran's civil society is one based on "communities and institutions rather than individual citizens and their associations" and has traditionally been an entity constructed and resting on "the socio-economic cultural bonds between...*bazaari's* and clerics" (Kamali, 1998: 11). This is very much akin in Gramsci's notion of civil society in the feudal state where social groups are organised into mechanical blocs, which the modern State then tries to subordinate "to the active hegemony of the directive and dominant group" (Sassoon 1987: 198).

If these groups in Iranian society have traditionally acted as the counterweight to the state the question now becomes one of how to reformulate a new civil society given the fact

that the clergy, through the theory and position of the *velayat-e faqih*, have conflated and eliminated the dualism that traditionally existed between politics/the state and religion. It is this issue, which sees intellectual debate centre around the issue of trying to 'democratise' the position of the *velayat-e faqih* as the first step in trying to separate the notions of religion and power. The most influential thinkers in this debate at present are Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, but the key to appropriating and analysing the terms of the debate lies in realising their historical basis in the debates conducted in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, through the work of liberal ideologues such as Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Motahari (see chapter 2), and not least within the myriad and complex ideological legacy left by Ayatollah Khomeini himself.

The New Intelligentsia

Soroush's argument is essentially a religious revisionist argument that implicitly attacks the religio-political manifestation of the Islamic Republic by calling for the separation of the body of religion from those who interpret it[12]. According to him the blurring of this division has lead to the present system of governance where the clergy have manipulated religious interpretation in order to reproduce the ideological positions that best serve to manipulate and justify their position of political power. In a similar vein Kadivar has argued against what he sees as the perversion of the notion of the *velayat-e faqih*, saying that its present interpretation has elevated it to the level of absoluteness that had seen it become an instrument of arbitrary power devoid of legal restrictions and responsibilities, which had resulted in the institutionalisation of divine ordinance for political purposes.

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[12] For further details on Soroush's work see, Abdolkarim Soroush, "The Evolution and Devolution of Religious Knowledge", in C. Kurzman (ed.), *Liberal Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

This had lead to a situation where the peoples rights have been treated as matters of secondary importance, and that consequently they and religion and the true ideals of the Islamic revolution had suffered and been perverted as a result; "the central queation that the clergy faces is whether it can preserve its independence"[13] and by extension the respect and support of the people. Such sentiments echo the thoughts of Ayatollah Montazeri, (originally designated as Khomeini's successor) who stated that a "republic means a government of the people" and that the role of the *velayat-e faqih* should be purely supervisory and that the religious leaders should "stop imitating the Imam because you are not him"[14]. These arguments, and indeed much of the reformist debate as a whole, are not new and are very much located in the thought and ideological debates of the early years of the revolution. Indeed, Ayatollah Motahari had repeatedly stated the need for this separation of religion and political power whilst highlighting the importance of social justice if Islam and the revolution is to survive and develop; "the future of our revolution will only be secure if we preserve justice and freedom, if we keep political, economic, cultural, intellectual and religious independence" (Motahari, 1985: 218). Others such as Ayatollah Shariatmadari went further in explicitly stating that the role of the *ulama* should be to advise rulers but not directly rule.

The Religious and Historical Basis of Debate

However, these arguments were not calling for the abandonment of Khomeini's idea of the *velayat-e faqih* but merely sought to reapproriate the terms of interpretation. This

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[13] Eric Rouleau, "La Républic Islamique d'Iran Confrontée à la Société Civile", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1995, http://wwww.monde-diplomatique.fr/1995/Rouleau/1542.html.
[14] Speech in *Keyhan*, 4th December, 1997, reproduced in <http://eurasianews.com/iran/montadrs.html>

undertaking lay in the fact that the notion of the *faqih's* power holds a number of different meanings in Shia theological debate, which denotes guardianship to extend over a number of different areas of community life quite distinct from Khomeini's controversial elevation of it to the position of direct political authority. The generally accepted and agreed upon areas of guardianship include guardianship over those who may be victimised, guardianship over the property and activities and property of the religious community and guardianship over the welfare of the Muslim community. This last point encompasses "the responsibility of serving as a social force aimed at carrying out the injunction to command the good and forbid the reprehensible" (Rose, 1983: 169). It is on this point that Khatami's drive for reform and the institution of the civil society can be seen to rest.

However, the problem is one of promoting a religious pluralism that in essence would result in uncoupling faith and politics and thereby removing the position and power of the ruling clerics and questioning their right to rule. The task then becomes one of trying to avert such a situation by introducing a new mechanism by which another interpretation of religion could enable it to influence the social and political realms, moulding them in an image of mutual co-existence and dependency. This is in essence the undertaking behind the drive to introduce a model of Islamic civil society, a re-legitimising of the form and right to retain power through establishing a controlling dominance in the direction and pace of reform and its terms of debate within a cultural framework.

The contradictory situation that has occurred in the Islamic Republic is one where the State talks of the virtues of the civil society but constantly subverts and undermines the pluralistic basis of the notion by concentrating all political and cultural activities in its own hands. This establishes a legitimacy problem for the ruling elite in that they have restricted the hegemonic function of power maintenance, which has seen their rule being directed increasingly towards propaganda, maintaining public order and enforcing moral and cultural influence. These steps are undertaken as the only means by which to protect the economic and political interests of the ruling elite. Such a situation is similar to Gramsci's discussion of totalitarianism where the State and party "which claims moral, ethical leadership in the absence of a pluralism of the political and cultural forces remains on the terrain of coercion and economic-corporativism" (Sassoon 1987: 224).

This is very much the state of affairs in Iran at present where the reformist/conservative influence of the ruling clergy on society has resulted in a more or less familiar pattern of political behaviour developing where any hard fought changes to the social structure that are introduced are usually followed by a period of liberalisation, then repression and a return to the status quo, with superficial changes introduced that pose little threat to the overall ruling structure[15]. It is therefore the ruling structure, the *velayat-e faqih*, as it stands that forms the greatest obstacle to change in Iran. This is due to the fact that, "the jurisprudent is positioned to guarantee institutional conformity to the agenda for restructuring consciousness and to articulate...the content of the genuine Islamic identity

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[15] Indeed, a student at the university in Yazd, when I asked him of the changes that had occurred under Khatami, remarked, "so headscarves are worn a little further back but what has that changed, nothing, things are still the same as they have always been" (research trip to Iran, September 2001).

sought…[and] who mobilises the ideological unity" (Rose, 1983: 187). Therefore, it is only with the removal of this office or "until a new *faqih* emerges to totally redefine the very foundation of his authority" (Brumberg 2001: 248) that substantial and far-reaching social reforms can begin to be introduced. Until that time power will remain linked to an office that stands in the way of reform and which reforms cannot repudiate without calling into question the very existence of the Islamic Republic. Khatami himself his well aware of this situation when he declared, on the 26th November 2000, that "after three and a half years as president I don't have sufficient powers to implement the constitution…the president is unable to stop the trend of violations or force implementations of the constitution"[16].

Cinema and the Cultural Debate

The new era of 'liberalisation' seemed to hold much promise for those involved in the cultural field. The first signs indicating a new era of less restricted expression occurred in the press, which saw 890 publications in circulation in 1998, nearly four times the number that appeared during the unprecedented, but short-lived, period of freedom that took place immediately after the fall of the Shah. This figure is even more startling when you consider the fact that in 1996 fifteen daily newspapers accounted for most of the readership of 2 million…two years later the corresponding figures were fifty and 3.5 million" (Hiro 2001: 237). Khatami himself saw the important role of the press in society and encouraged this proliferation of publications, "the more independent and freer the press, the greater their representation of the public opinion"[17]. These initiatives were

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[16] *The Observer*, 17th December, 2000.
[17] BBC SWB ME/2999 MED/13, 16th August, 1997.

further strengthened by the appointment of the reformist, erudite and moderate candidate Dr. Ataollah Mohajerani to the crucial post of Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance who stated that "we must value our artists, writers and filmmakers …We must create a seedbed which allows these seeds of creativity to blossom. We must create an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity in all centres of art and culture"[18].

For the cinema this meant a relaxation of the censorship laws, which saw a number of previously banned films being given screening permits, including Ali Hatami's, *Haji Washington* (1982), Dariush Mehrjui's, *The Lady* (1992) and Mohsen Makhmalbaf's, *A Moment of Innocence* (1996). Filmmakers also began to tackle more risqué and taboo subjects in their films, especially a number of women directors[19], who came more to the fore during this period, such as Tahmineh Milani's, *Two Women* (1999), which explored how a woman's destiny is controlled by outdated patriarchal laws, or Rakshan Bani-Etemad's, *The May Lady* (1998), which dealt with a divorced woman's need for love and companionship[20]. The deputy for cinema affairs, Seifullah Daad, also announced the government's intention to redress the country's chronic shortage in the exhibition sector by beginning a comprehensive cinema theatre building programme. This plan proposed to build cinemas in towns with a population over 15,000 people[21] and was seen as one part of the government's plan to encourage the development of the industry. These policies were further enhanced by Daad's decision to leave cinema policies unchanged for five

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[18] BBC SWB ME/3005 MED/12, 23rd August, 1997.
[19] In an interview at the London Film Festival in 1998, Samira Makhmalbaf stated that she felt that her film *The Apple* owed its existence to the new circumstances and changed atmosphere that now prevailed in Iran as a result of the Khatami presidency (National Film Theatre, 12th November 1998).
[20] See, Sheila Johnston and Hadani Ditmars, "Quietly Ruling the Roost", *Sight and Sound*, (London: BFI) Volume 9, Issue 1, January 1999, pp.18-20, for interviews with both directors.
[21] *Film International* (Tehran: Ziba Press), Volume 6, Number 4, Spring 1999.

years, (thus replacing the Ministry's fifteen year old policy of annual declarations) in order to create an atmosphere of stability that freed filmmakers from the uncertainty and constant changes of official whims. Furthermore, the Khatami administration included in its Third Development Plan a number of proposals aimed at developing the Iranian film industry, which included, regulations to improve productivity, encouraging private sector investment, inviting foreign investment in order to improve the international image of the Iranian film industry, establishing an organisation for the promotion of a national cinema, developing a visual media system throughout the country as well as a research and training programme for all aspects of the cinema industry (Mohammadi, 2002: 6). However, the cultural sphere in Iran is like a dog on a leash that will be allowed to go to the limit of the lead before being yanked back and brought to heal by its master.

One Step Forward Two Steps Back

The increasingly outspoken views of the press and the perceived liberalisation of the cultural sphere had caused alarm within the conservative ruling faction. On the 7th July 1999 a new Press Law was introduced in order to counteract "those who were using the pretext of press freedom to plot against the system and to stem the tide of a new cultural invasion" (Wright, 2001: 261-263). The new law was comprehensive in the scope of its control requiring newspaper publishers to submit a list of their employees to the judiciary and journalists to reveal their sources. Furthermore, it extended the powers of the Press Court, allowing it to overrule jury verdicts and conduct summary trials on those seen as 'endangering the security of the State. The closure of many publications soon followed causing widespread demonstrations. However, the bill remained in force and had further

clauses added to it a year later, which extended the responsibility for press violations to journalists and commentators and banned all publications from receiving foreign financial support or criticising the constitution. The latter point was of particular significance given the fact that the implementation of the constitution formed the main plank of the reformist drive towards freedom and a new civil society and highlights the desire of the conservatives not only to stifle and control the means of debate but also the very terms of the debate itself.

Having attempted to stifle the opposition press, and controlling television and radio, the conservatives moved to bring the cinema under tighter control. A new Cinema Law similar to the Press Law was drafted in 2000. The bill aimed to remove the permit requirement for screening a film and place the responsibility for the production and screening of their films onto the producer and director. Those within the industry voiced concern over the fact that this proposal rendered them defenceless against the judiciary and in fact increases the arbitrary power of the latter to intervene directly in screening decisions[22]. Indeed, these fears were well founded when, for the first time ever, the Iranian judiciary intervened to ban the film *Party* by Saman Moghaddam. Indeed, the incidences of censorship and the persecution of artists and intellectuals has continued unabated under the Khatami administration. The most shocking incident came with the brutal murders of three authors and the former nationalist politician Dariush Foruhar and his wife in November 1998. The film director Tahmineh Milani was arrested in August 2001 on charges of abusing the arts and using it as a tool to support "counter

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[22] See, *Film International*, Volume 8, Number 4, Spring/Summer 2001.

revolutionary groups…and those waging war against God"[23]. Despite the fact that she was released on bail the charges still hang over her and if convicted she could face the death penalty[24].

The State of the Industry

There was also a feeling among many within the industry that the medium was beginning to suffer both financially and artistically. Poor box office receipts and a 25% increase in production costs, which had seen the average Iranian film budget jump from $80,000 in 1999 to around $100, 000 by the start of 2001, made it very difficult for any film to make a profit[25]. One of the reasons attributed for the drop in audiences was the lack of invention with many films simply repeating the same old storylines. Part of the blame for this has been attributed to the success of Iranian cinema at international film festivals[26] where the films has become a very recognisable generic form in danger of being moulded into a "European-based film culture" and pandering to a "universalising festival taste" (Mulvey, 1998: 24), which has seen it become clichéd, culturally co-opted and lacking in artistic invention. It is against these charges and in a bid to reclaim the domestic cultural space, whilst placing the cinema within the socio-political developments occurring in the country at present and as the basis of an indigenous cultural discourse that attempts to intervene in and make sense of the new emerging reality that we must attempt to critically evaluate Makhmalbaf's film *The Silence* (1998).

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[23] Associated Press BC-Iran-Director Arrested, 31st August 2001.

[24] See, *Sight and Sound* (London: BFI), Volume 11, Issue 12, December 2001, p.68.

[25] *Film International*, ibid. p.9. Indeed, these economic problems were symptomatic of those occurring throughout the economy as a whole. Inflation was officially running at 20%, unemployment was at 15% and economic growth was registered at just 2%. See, *The Economist*, 14th August 1999, p.49.

[26] Ibid., p.4.

Sokut (The Silence, 1998)

The Silence can be seen as very much a continuation of the style and poetic preoccupations begun in Makhmalbaf's previous film *Gabbeh* where the filmmaker has once again "returned to the roots of Iranian-Persian narrative and visual culture, combining the pictorial beauty of medieval illustration with the ornate structures of the national mythology"[27]. The film continues to explore and celebrate the beauty, passion and spirituality of life, but where *Gabbeh* (1996) did this through the medium of colour, *The Silence* revolves around an exploration of sound and in this sense can be seen as two sides of the same coin exploring the process of art creation. However, *The Silence* is much more deeply and firmly rooted in a tangible Persian cultural tradition, in this instance a tradition emanating from the poetry of Omar Khayyam. Makhmalbaf has jettisoned the multi-perspective narrative technique used in his third period films and focused solely on the plight of the individual, which gives his central character more psychological depth.

Furthermore, this sees a shift from the purely social to the individuals position and search for identity within the social through the experiences, conflicts and dilemmas of the everyday. In this respect *The Silence*, in its preoccupations and formal execution, could also be seen to bare many of the hallmarks of the poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad, which in turn situates the film in a complex cultural debate comprising of an oscillating engagement/disengagement with the real and a definition of the self through art. This is a

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[27] Simon Louvish, "Gabbeh", *Sight and Sound*, Volume 6, Issue 12, December 1996, p.47. Indeed, the two films share another point of similarity, in that both were banned by the authorities. The 'guardians of morality' cited the 'immoral' scene of a young girl dancing as their reason for refusing *The Silence* a screening permit

notion that is complicated further by Makhmalbaf's developing relationship with God which can now be seen to exhibit many of the attributes of Sufi mysticism. These factors position the film as a work very much committed to a politics of the personal that seeks to engage with a location of the self within the complexities of a specifically Persian Islamic historical and cultural debate. It is this attempt to define the self within the space between culture and society/reality that intimately ties the film to the present intellectual debates occurring within the country, which seek to define and develop the notions of freedom and the individuals place within Iranian society i.e. individual freedom as the prerequisite of a civil society.

Set in Tajikistan[28], *The Silence* tells the story of Khorshid (which means sun in Persian), a ten year old blind boy who works as a tuner of traditional musical instruments. Khorshid's blindness has sensitised him to sound and the simple sensations of everyday life intoxicate him. However, the reality of life is that his family, who rely on his salary, are being threatened with eviction. Khorshid's mother tells him to apply for an advance on his wages so that they can pay the landlord. But Khorshid becomes caught up and distracted by the minutiae experiences of everyday life, forgets to ask for the advance and eventually loses his job. The film ends with Khorshid's family being evicted as he stands in the bazaar, having mentally incorporated all the sounds he has experienced during the day, conducting Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to the noise and rhythm of coppersmiths

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[28] This is Makhmalbaf's second film (although parts of *The Cyclist* (1989) were shot in Pakistan) to be shot exclusively outside of Iran. The first was *Time of Love* (1991), which was shot in Turkey after being refused a shooting permit in Iran. Makhmalbaf states that his reason for shooting abroad was due to the increasing severity of the censorship laws, which meant that he would "have had to change things and make certain concessions". See, Mamad Haghighat, "Interview with Mohsen Makhmalbaf", www.filmlinc.com/wrt/programs/11-99/makh/silint.

beating their pots.

Art and Life: A Changing Relationship

The Silence is Makhmalbaf's attempt to explore universal themes of compassion, humanity and spirituality by locating the individual in a space between the harsh realities of life and the poetic possibilities of an art located in the details of the everyday, through which he seeks to transcend the brevity and bitterness of life. The negotiation of this space is conducted through, and firmly rooted within, an exploration of Persian cultural traditions. This film stands as a confirmation of Makhmalbaf's movement from the concerns, preoccupations and doubts of the past towards an aspirational/inspirational poetics of the personal that turns towards life and seeks to emphasise the "astonishing brightness which lives on in the hearts of darkness" (Saffarian, 1999/2000: 116). The break from the past is clearly illustrated by examining the artistic and intellectual evolution of the central theme of blindness. In his previous film *Two Sightless Eyes* (1983), firmly located within the miraculous tradition of 'Islamic cinema', blindness was seen as barrier requiring the intervention of God and it is only through Him that we are allowed access to the light. *The Silence* makes clear that there is no longer any need for divine intervention and the performance of a miracle because the notion of light and seeing has taken on a less literal and more complex set of meanings far removed from religious dogma. In this instance if there is no light there exists no corresponding shadow and darkness as light only comes into being in the presence of darkness.

Thus, it is Khorshid himself who becomes the source of light through his actions, which seek to constantly revel in all aspects of the everyday elevating them from the level of the ordinary by challenging the ways in which they are perceived and subsequently leading to a contesting of the signified nature of the sign e.g. in one scene in the film Khorshid equates the sound of an apple to its probable taste. This forms the central tenet of the film, the conflict between the individual and his/her situation, the space between objectivity and subjectivity, and the search for the self and the individual path to freedom. It is this emphasis on the self and the creative process within the present, shorn of the complexes of the past and the anxieties of the future, which most clearly illustrates the film's Khayyamic[29] influences and leads Makhmalbaf himself to assert that the film itself "is a kind of contemporary representation of the spirit of Khayyam"[30].

The Khayyamic Vision

The comparison with the work and spirit of Khayyam is instructive in that many of his poetic preoccupations are clearly present in *The Silence*. The Khayyamic vision is one which posits the idea of a paradise of this world built on the simple pleasures of adequate sustenance, shelter, art and companionship (Hillman, 1990). For Khayyam the brevity of life commands that one should live for the moment with romantic love and wine offering solace and consolation for the harshness of life. Thus the celebration of life is underpinned with a heavy scepticism and pessimism that sees the life on this earth as a

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[29] Omar Khayyam was an eminent poet, astronomer, philosopher and mathematician who was born in Nishapur in the Khorasan region of Iran in the latter half of the eleventh century. His most famous poetic work was his *Rubaiyat*, a series of four lined verses, which revelled in the celebration and enjoyment of the present, believing life to be fleeting and therefore made to be enjoyed as death is a finality of nothingness.
[30] Mamad Haghighat, "Interview with Mohsen Makhmalbaf, www.filmlinc.com/wrt/programs11-99/makh/silint, p.2

sole end in itself with human beings possessing only corporeal existence and lacking spiritual souls.

This is a path that Makhmalbaf seeks to travel through Khorshid's collection of sounds and his reappropriation of the everyday in a bid to create an alternative art based 'reality' as an alternative to the harsher reality of 'real' life i.e. in this instance music and sound as a bulwark against eviction and poverty. However, he does differ from Khayyam by virtue of the fact that he does not share the latter's pessimism and is keenly aware of the fact that the vision of an alternative artistic reality can only be brought into being by a recognition of, and a transformation of the materials existing within a certain social reality. The alternative vision is one that is created by the artist through his ability to represent the world differently and by recognising the fact that this representation operates within the realm of the possibilities of the future.

This marks a fundamental difference with the work of Khayyam whose vision of a paradise garden is one of an idealistic pristine world untouched by man. For his part, Makhmalbaf views the garden as one that is created, and indeed can only be created, by man through the tool of art, as exemplified by the final scene of the film when all the sounds that Khorshid has collected are transformed into a Beethoven symphony by the banging of coppersmiths. In this way the banal and the everyday are dislocated and removed from their natural functions and transformed into the epic – the elements pre-exist but it is only through their artistic transformation by man that they acquire meaning and form and offer the possibility of a changed environment. This highlights the

280

proactive nature of cultural change, rather than the despair of Khayyam, and indeed many of the modernist poets who followed in his wake, and shows the important function of art, which for Makhmalbaf offers the possibility of bringing "about a revolution wherein all people would arrive at decisions that may or not be related to the aspirations of this revolution but would naturally result from the event" (Dabashi 2001: 206).

Indeed, this is very much part of the cultural nationalism that has been a constant throughout Persian literature and manifests itself "through the depiction of social history, local colour, regional customs, dialects…all of which imply the authors deep attachment to the region" (Blondel Saad 1996: 4). This has been a social, political and personal problem that has resulted in a search for an 'authentic' national and historical identity through a process of self-definition. For Khayyam, and others such as Ferdowsi, as well as many of the modernist Iranian writers, this search led to a deep-seated nostalgia and sadness at the loss of Iran's pre-Islamic grandeur. Makhmalbaf has approached this problem not through recourse to some essentialist pristine essence but by a critical engagement of the very notion and nature of Persian art itself, only through which an understanding of the present can be made. The transformative power of art therefore, opens the possibility of a heterogeneous space for the functioning of debate, which serves as a timely intervention into the civil society debate of the Khatami era. In this sense Makhmalbaf is very much echoing the work of Forough Farrokhzad in attempting to develop a socially attached universally transformative voice through a poetics of the personal.

The Search for Self in a Poetics of the Personal

Farrokhzad's poems are concerned with expressing a feminist sensitivity that seeks to counteract the conventional moral order and the problems of patriarchy, encouraging her readers to paint the world anew. Her work was very much attached to the reality of the world in which she inhabited and it attempted to articulate an alternative worldview that presented a picture of an ideal but unromanticised Persian garden in which the individual was engaged in a personal struggle to define their own identity. It is this refusal to detach herself from the reality of the present which sets her apart form Khayyam despite the fact that both see the perfect image of life as represented in the idyllic Persian garden. This is a garden that is brought into being through poetry which is a "frank, intense and straightforward representation of very personal experiences, conflicts and dilemmas couched in everyday images and vocabulary" (Hillman 1990: 157). This is a constant throughout almost all of her work, as for example;

"Those days are gone
Those days like rotten vegetables rotting in the sun
Rotted in the sun
And those alleys intoxicated with the scent of acacias
got lost
In the noisy crowd of streets of no return
And the girl who coloured her cheeks
With cranesbill petals, ah
Was now a lovely woman,
Was now a lovely woman"[31].

These elements of the everyday are clearly evidenced throughout *The Silence* but perhaps most strikingly and vividly in the scene where the young girl, Nadereh, puts petals on her nails and cherries on her ears to imitate nail varnish and earrings respectively, a process

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[31] Ismail Salami (trans.) "Those Days", *Forugh Farrokhzad Another Birth, Let us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season*, (Tehran: Zabankadeh Publications, 2000) p.8

whereby innocence, and our perception of it, are transformed by the displacement of the meaning of elements, which in this instance sees the young girl becoming "now a lovely woman".

Indeed, Makhmalbaf has remarked of his admiration for the charismatic nature and lack of innocence evident throughout Farrokhzad's work (Dabashi 2001: 199). The combination of Khayyam and Farrokhzad serve as a complement and counterpoint to one another which allows the oscillation between artistic engagement and detachment to take place. It also highlights the esteem and importance of the non-conformist and anti-establishment figure, (in this instance Khorshid) as "one aspect of didactics that seems an enduring feature of Persian aesthetics" (Hillman, 1990: 82). Makhmalbaf's recourse to a Persian literary and cultural milieu forms part of his continuing development as an artist who is attempting to express the universal and emotive aspects of humanity, and "the reality of life, its joys and pains" (Dabashi 2001: 211) through an examination of the particularness of the local. This is an attempt to reconfigure the undertakings of modernists such as Al-e Ahmad and Shariati who "attempted to construct a 'local' image of Iranian culture in opposition to the 'universal' West" (Mirsepassi 2000: 13). This was in essence, and practice, an essentially insular and reactionary project. By contrast, the examination and exploration of a multi-faceted cultural history and its reconstitution within current social and political developments, whilst at the same time attempting to articulate universal themes beyond the 'local', serves as a means of offsetting and challenging the monolithic nativism and search for a primordial and exclusionary essence that has historically blighted Iranian cultural development and debate.

The Nature of God

The search for the self through a Persian cultural discourse is but one half of the Persian Islamic debate. Therefore due attention must also be paid to the religious and spiritual aspects of the Iranian cultural tradition if cultural monotheism and exclusion are to be avoided. Makhmalbaf's developing relationship with God has seen him approach a point where the moral didacticism of his early career has been replaced by an intimate and personal religious spirituality, which is located in the beauty of the world and the joy of living. This change is clearly evidenced by his declaration that, "I accept God in my heart. But I would never try to persuade someone else to accept him. This is a personal matter. The details which attract us to the world are the details of living" (Dabashi 2001: 211).

It is this search for a closer individualistic relationship with God, combining elements of mysticism and personal spirituality, which form the main elements of Sufi belief. In this sense the recourse to Sufism could be seen as another strand of the debate undertaken by Soroush and others calling for a separation of the idea of religious belief from those who interpret it. Therefore, a religion of the personal stands in contradistinction to the ideologues of the Islamic Republic who continuously emphasise religious practice over belief. Indeed, the origins of Sufism lay in a form of social-political protest "against the *ulama*, the learned clerics of Islam, who, in Sufi perception, exhibited more interest in political power than religion" (Mackey, 1998: 74).

Sufism as a mystical and intuitive form of religious belief attempted to bridge the gap between man and God through the establishment of a personal faith that it was felt had been lost through the sober, didactic and legalistic traditions of official dogma. While the *ulama* see God in terms of omnipotence, Sufis perceive God in terms of love and they are willing to use a multitude of varying forms such as "music, song and dance to help in the search for God, to help the worshipper achieve mystical union with God" (Lewis 1995: 239). As a mode in Persian poetry Sufism represented an approach to life's dilemmas which emphasised the life of the spirit over the concerns of the material world, as evidenced in the poetry of Hafez;

"With tulip blood on rose-leaves, it is written
That he who mellows quaffs the ruby wine.
See fortune grasped when havoc swept the world,
The Sufi with his cup did not repine"[32].

Makhmalbaf uses Sufism as a counterpoint to Khayyamic resignation and despair and as a means of reclaiming an innocence that is lost in Farrokhzad with a view to becoming part of a universal order by standing in the light of God, a light that is located in the joy of life and which through art creates another level of consciousness. However, this is not to ignore the harsh reality of life as evidenced at the end of the film when we see that Khorshid's family has been evicted from their home. What Makhmalbaf has attempted to do is to realise that the life of the spiritual and the life of the 'real' co-exist, are derived from one another and are not mutually exclusive. Such an avenue of intellectual exploration is only made possible through an interrogation of a Persian Islamic mode of discourse, which historically has promoted the idea of individualism and the rejection of

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[32] *Hafez in English*, (Tehran: Parsa, 1998), p.55-56.

the blandishments of this life. As Micheal C.Hillman (1990: 88) has stated in explaining

the relationship of Hafez's poetry to the social realities of his time, as well as the

continuing esteem in which he is held in Iran; "…few Iranians could afford to live lives

of love or survive on thoughts of love. Iranians have needed both art that transcended

their realities and artists, like Hafez, who maintain the fiction of the ideal". This

continues to be the case in Iran today where a dialogue within a civilisation is much more

urgently needed than Khatami's much vaunted call for a dialogue among civilisations.

The first step towards this undertaking is through an examination of Iran's own cultural

tradition and a laying bare of its competing and conflicting histriographies in an attempt

to critically examine the endless array of opposites that make up the Iranian psyche.

This is the urgent cultural task that Makhmalbaf has undertaken in *The Silence,* an

attempt to create a new discourse. It is at the level of the cultural that change can occur

for as he has said "democracy before being a political issue is a cultural issue. We have

no tradition of public discourse" (Dabashi 2001: 205). The making of new discourses

therefore becomes the ardent task of the artist particularly given the present regimes

attempt to stifle all debate and the emergence of alternative ideologies. Hillman (1990)

highlights the importance of such a cultural project by referring to the Islamic Republic in

cultural terms as a continuation of the Sohrab and Rostam narrative from Ferdowsi's

Shahnameh. In this sense the theocratic regime is not a revolutionary movement but a

coup d'état where "one patriarchal son-killing force was replaced by another" so that the

historically dominant patriarchal order could continue, albeit in a superficially different

guise. In this respect he goes on to state that a true cultural revolution can only happen in

Iran with "a victory for the Sohrab's or a compromise by which their values would play a part". Thus it is the need to reappropriate and recognise the fractured multiplicity of Iranian cultural narratives, which serves to counteract and challenge the dogmatic monolithic interpretation of the past and its tyrannical manifestation in the present, whilst holding hope for the future.

Safar-e Qandehar (Kandahar, 2001)

Filmed along the border area between Iran and Afghanistan, *Kandahar* stands as Makhmalbaf's personal and ardent humanitarian plea "to tell the world something of the sadness and problems of people in Afghanistan"[33]. The story concerns the plight of an exiled Afghan woman, Nafas, who has returned to Afghanistan in a bid to save her sister who has threatened to commit suicide at the next eclipse of the sun. In the race to get to Kandahar we are presented with a picaresque series of events as Nafas meets a number of different characters who accompany her on her journey. These characters include an Afghan refugee family returning from Iran, a 12 year old boy who has been expelled from a religious school because he cannot memorise a text form the Quran, a disguised black American acting as a village doctor who came to Afghanistan in a search for God, and workers at a Red Cross camp who are dispensing artificial limbs. The film ends with Nafas joining a wedding party on their way to Kandhar before being discovered and lead away by the Taliban at a militia checkpoint. The final image of the film is of an empty earthenware jug standing alone in the middle of a desolate desert.

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[33] Mohsen Makhmalbaf, interview for "Meridian on Screen", *BBC Radio 4*, 30th May 2001.

Made before Afghanistan emerged onto the world stage and became embedded in the universal consciousness following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre on the 11th September 2001, the film attempts to reflect "the story of a people's devastation and a country's destruction [and how] people's lives reflect the state of their war-shattered economy" (Pazira, 2001: 13). Traditionally the view of Afghanistan from Iran has been one of a problem that needs to be solved and as a means of gaining increased geopolitical influence in the Central Asian area. Indeed, Afghanistan is one of the key issues that must be resolved "if President Khatami is to push forward his reform agenda at home" given the drain on resources caused by funding Shia militia groups and in attempting to stop "the drugs, weapons and sectarian spillover" across the border (Rashid, 2000: 205-206). Political and economic development within Iran is also dependent on a resolution of the problems in Afghanistan given the fact the Iranian economy now shoulders the burden of supporting some 3 million Afghan refugees living within its territory[34]. The two countries also share a strong historical and cultural alliance, especially among the Hazara Shiite and the Persian speaking Tajik tribes, arising from the fact that Afghanistan was one part of the Persian Empire.

Limbs of the Same Body

However, Makhmalbaf is not concerned with these particularities of history and culture, and has instead attempted to focus on levels of human suffering and hopeless as themes through which to elicit a response, predicated on a belief in the universal compassion and

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[34] President Khatami in his first meeting with the interim Afghan leader Hamid Kharzi spoke about the need to establish a repatriation programme that would initiate the return of refugees back into Afghanistan. An initial starting figure of 40,000 refugees was cited as a starting figure. BBC World Service News 24th February 2002.

connectedness of humankind where, in quoting the Iranian poet Sa'di, "all people are limbs of the same body" (Makhmalbaf, 2001: 3). The reference to Sa'di is instructive as he, in his most famous work *Golestan* ("The Rose Garden"), offers the metaphor of the rose garden as an eternal blooming paradise that stands as a place of solace from an unforgiving landscape and the harshness of life. Whereas in *The Silence* Makhmalbaf has attempted to articulate the rose garden as an artistic creation emanating from, and serving as a counterpoint to, the harshness of life, in *Kandahar* the garden in gone and all we see is the harshness and desolation of life, the life of a barren desert. In this instance he is attempting to use film as a way to highlight the bitterness of life and, in so doing, to make a desperate plea for something to be done. Despite the ardent programme such an undertaking is fraught with difficulty and only serves in a sense to highlight the limitations of art in effecting tangible change in the face of complex social and political problems. The jettisoning of the belief that all filmmakers can do is to "illuminate" and "hold a mirror to society" inevitably leads to a sense of frustration, despair and doubt in elevating film to the level of the impossible, a fact which Makhmalbaf himself seems only too aware of; "And even now that I have finished making *Kandahar*, I feel vain about my profession. I don't believe that the little flame of knowledge kindled by a report or a film can part the deep ocean of ignorance…Why did I make that film?" (Makhmalbaf, 2001: 23). It is this uncertainty and confusion and the gulf between aims and execution, which ultimately adversely effects the outcome of the finished film.

The Voice of Despair

The problems with *Kandahar* are manifold but perhaps its main shortcoming is its failure to deal adequately and in any real or substantive way with the plight of the Afghan people themselves. The film is packed with metaphors and striking images that serve as a checklist of the various problems besetting the country, landmines, lack of adequate healthcare, poverty, and the oppression of women. However, none of these issues are fully engaged with in a meaningful way, with the filmmaker preferring instead to indulge in "uncertainties of tone and brazenly rhetorical flourishes, which make one wonder how heartfelt it is" (Andrew, 2001: 18). The centring of foreign eyes and voices (a returning Afghan exile and a black American, as well as the screen time given to two female Red Cross workers) as the main driving force of the narrative and its episodic nature relegates the Afghani people to background objects of curiosity, depriving them of independent action and voices, consequently stripping them of human dignity.

This is perhaps best evidenced in the scene where we see a group of amputees racing across the desert to catch artificial limbs that are being dropped by a helicopter. In this instance human dignity, hopelessness and despair are displaced and rendered impotent by an aestheticisation, which lacks subtley and amounts to a crude form of symbolic grandstanding symbolism that sees the outcome of the race and the incongruity of such a surreal event as an end in itself. This sense of displacement is further exacerbated by the fact that those Afghans who are allowed to speak do so at a local and seemingly inconsequential level, the old man escorting Nafas across the border under the pretext that she is his wife tells her not to shame him, Nafas's 12 year old guide is seen

constantly trying to sell her a ring, and a young man who agrees to take her to Kandahar but who is more concerned with selling a pair of artificial legs. It is left to the 'foreigners' to comment on the 'real' issuses, Nafas tells of her sister's oppression under the Taliban, the American tells of the inadequacy of healthcare and education. However, if Makhmalbaf's project is to move people to action "by the general shame of the collective human condition" (Nouraei, 2001: 21) the means by which this is to be done also seems confused.

The film highlights the ineffectiveness of international agencies such as the UN, as seen in the scene when the old man and his family who take Nafas across the border are given a UN flag with the words "this will protect you", only to be robbed of all their possessions shortly afterwards by tribal militiamen. The same sense of hopelessness pervades the scene where the efforts of the Red Cross are seen to be limited and inconsequential. Indeed, Makhmalbaf (2001: 23-26) has stated that he believes that international organisations can only "remedy the deep and extensive wounds of this nation in a limited way and nothing more" and that the only solution for Afghanistan lies in a "rigorous scientific identification of its problems and presentation of real images of a nation that has remained obscure and imageless". However, in this instance the images lack depth and meaning beyond the level of polemic and sloganeering.

The Importance of the Local

Kandahar forms part of a body of recent Iranian cinema, including films such as Hassan Yektapanah's, *Djomeh* (2001) and Abolfazl Jalili's, *Delbaran* (2001), which have

291

attempted to focus on Afghan related issues. However, apart from *Kandahar*, all the other films dealing with Afghan related subjects have tended to do so from within Iran itself. Jalili's film *Delbaran* deals with the plight of a young illegal Afghan refugee trying to make a living in Iran. It is the innate sense of the local culture and the understanding of the complex social and political situation of the local environment which allows the film to demonstrate the struggle and hardship of the everyday from a position of knowledge that enables it to project onto the level of the universal, which in this case speaks volumes on the suffering of Afghanistan and its people but which also allows for the exploration of larger themes such as human compassion and the connectedness of the human race. This *Kandahar* fails to do because it has become detached from its cultural base. As the Iranian cinematographer Ali Reza Zarandas has stated, "the essence of artists from our part of the world is created by our culture, by our environment and our society"[35]. These are the key elements in understanding the artistic development of the Iranian cinema and the local cultural milieu, which it sets out to reflect and that creates and structures its meaning. The prime example of this is the question of humanism.

Long takes, minimal editing and little dialogue, are symptomatic of the current style of Iranian cinema seen in the West. It has been described as humanitarian, realist and as a consequence (mostly due to their popularity abroad) being placed (co-opted) into an art cinema aesthetic. Whilst such undertakings may be seen as attempts to recover the strange as familiar, in essence they frame and relegate the work to the level of ethnographic artefacts. To ignore the contextual framework in which these films are

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[35] "Meridian on Screen", *BBC Radio 4*, 30th May 2001.

produced is to fail to recognise their multi-layered nature and also to close the possibility of problematising and reconstituting terms such as humanism. Such work may not be political in the ideologically engaged sense of *The Hour of the Furnaces* but it is political in the sense that it sets out to examine how human beings interact in their environment and the difficulties they face. Referring to this issue in relation to his own work, Kiarostami has stated that, "if you mean political that you talk about today's human problems then for sure my work is political and even strongly so. When you get involved in someone else's suffering and you try to convey it so that other people can feel and understand it then this is political" (Aufderheide, 1995: 32). It is only when placing his poeticism and humanism within the ideological framework of the Islamic Republic that the full possibilities of humanism as a radical politics of revolt becomes apparent. This is perhaps a practical example and compelling case for the possibilities of third world film practice, which acts "as a transformative prism through which the limitations of mainstream critical theory can be displayed and transformed" (Burton, 1985: 5).

Under an ideological system which postulates God as the agency of all human action, mans relationship to God is one of slavery and the rule of God and the rule of the clerics presuppose one another (and indeed are enshrined in the Constitution), humanism in presenting a secular vision with man responsible for his own actions, life and destiny serves as a huge affront and challenge to the Islamic governments belief system, legitimacy and concept of freedom. However, as seen with *Kandahar* such a notion is only valid when structured within a complete understanding of the local context from

which the artist can then project and explore universal themes. If this is not done, both in theory and practice, then much of the uniqueness of Iranian cinema is lost and it becomes merely another form of European art house cinema at best, or a trite and insulting dislocated message film lacking depth and meaning.

Conclusion

The reformist government of President Khatami has shown itself to be a complex ideological construct that has had mixed blessings for the development of cinmea. As has been shown the division between moderates and conservatives has become more pronounced under his presidency but has served to function as a hegemonic means of retaining power by, on the one hand, promoting the idea of a civil society, and on the other seeking to define and control the developmental basis of this society through a historical reappropriation of the revolutionary foundations of the state i.e. the full implementation of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. However, what has been noted is that the demands for reform have been occurring from outside of the ruling system of governance and what is at present emerging is an opposition movement seeking a formal structure and means of expression. The regime has responded to these voices of discontent by seeking to control and dictate the pace and direction of change through a policy of superficial liberalisation and harsh repression. As a result of the absence of political opposition it is the cultural sphere, particularly the media and intelligentsia, which have led the clamour for reform and set about informing and educating the political consciousness of the people. With regard to the cinema, it has benefited from the relaxation of the censorship laws and has set about articulating ever

more controversial and risqué topics despite continuing government interference and the economic problems experienced by the industry. Despite this it has positioned itself as one of the key elements in defining the terms of the debate in calling for reform of the system and the introduction of a civil society. In doing so it has sought to articulate the position of the individual and his/her role in society through a recourse to indigenous cultural forms that stand in contradistincton to the Islamic state's desired image of the individual submitting oneself to the will of God as communicated by the *velayat-e faqih*. Makhmalbaf has attempted to define this relationship between art and the state and the way in which the former can be an active element in illuminating the possibilities of change in society: "A totalitarian regime takes charge of the individual entirely... Political or religious totalitarianism deprives us of a sense of responsibility because it deprives us of the freedom of imagination. I believe that our liberty will triumph through the voice of art...for the simple reason that it is art, and art alone, that permits freedom of imagination and originality" (Rava, 1998).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has set out to examine the development of the post revolutionary state in Iran and the position of cinema within it. By presenting the Islamic Republic as a cultural and ideologically defined entity (Fischer, 1980, Mansoor, 1993, Abrahamian, 1993, Brumberg, 2001) it has been shown that cinema has been conditioned, defined and responsive to the vacillations of the state. However, as chapter 1 makes clear, this is not a situation that is unique to the post-1979 regime. Rather, the history of cinema in Iran under both the autocratic Pahlavi regime (Issari, 1989) and the theocracy of clerical rule (Naficy, 1996) have shown marked similarities; censorship, the struggle between an official cinema and filmmakers attempts to articulate social concerns and criticisms in the absence of a public sphere of debate. The core issue here has been the highly centralised and repressive nature of the state which has sought to politicise and control both public and private space in promoting a particular view of Iranian culture, which was designed to perpetuate and consolidate the position of power through a socialisation of the populace. In this respect cultural products, and elements of civil society, such as the press and cinema were forced to operate and adapt, in the absence of a civil society, to a new ideologically reconstituted state (Haghayeghi, 1993).

Chapter 2 has illustrated the theoretical basis of this new society by arguing that it was derived from a number of competing ideological strands (Bazargan, Motahhari, Shariati, Safavi), their employment as expediency dictated by Ayatollah Khomeini and their institutionalisation in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. The terms of debate

structuring these developments revolved around the complex interaction and ambiguity of the notions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' (Halliday, 1988, Mirsepassi, 2000). One of the key elements in negotiating this relationship was the media through its use in the promotion of a retraditionalised Islam operating from within modernity. Towards this end the 'prostitution' cinema of Shah's regime was reconfigured as an 'Islamic' cinema that would serve in the promotion of Islam and the revolution in Islamicising the nation. Thus from the outset this 'new' cinema, and the industry as a whole, was built on something of a paradox; the desire to promote a traditional religious message, which itself was built on shifting ideological subsystems, through a medium that was seen as symptomatic of the evils of the previous regime. Furthermore, given the centralised nature of the Iranian state, and the almost total collapse of the cinema industry after the revolution, it was only through the efforts of the state that the industry would be revived.

Chapter 3 examined the emergence of the 'new' cinema and the use of culture as a tool of the political system (Graham, 1978, Siavoshi, 1996) by placing it within the framework of the historical development of Islamic art (Burckhardt, 1976, Ettinghausen, 1979) and its unique Persian manifestation (Wilber, 1978, Khazaie, 1999) as well as its role forming part of new regime's drive to Islamicise society. The cinema became part of an ideological campaign that sought to accelerate the cultural dimension of the revolution through a restructuring of history and a redefining of all aspects of society in Islamic terms. In order to undertake such a programme the cinema was brought under strict government control through the establishment of institutions such as the Farabi Cinema Foundation and the efforts of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance as well as the

implementation of strict guidelines for the production, supervision and censorship of all films. However, the claims that this 'Islamic cinema' was a unique cultural form chronicling a glorious moment (Kalhor, 1982) are somewhat difficult to sustain. More accurately this type of cinema could be described as an 'Islamicised' cinema, which, it has been argued, functions in the propagating of official ideology and is defined by an adherence to a strict moral code. In this respect it bears many of the hallmarks of a didactic cinema defined by that which it is not allowed to show. Also, by this stage the Islamic regime had succeeded in establishing the basis of a reconstituted cinema industry. However, as has been shown, even at this early stage a certain amount of contradictions were evident. The attempt by the regime to tightly control and use the cinema as a form of official socialisation meant that the medium was highly sensitive to the needs and nuances of changing social and political circumstances. Furthermore, the creation of a cinema that was defined by absence held within it the possibility of, and laid the foundations for, forms of alternative expression and criticism, which stretched the boundaries of the permissible. This was very much the basis on which I have tried to situate and examine the development of the cinema through the decade of war and revolution and into the eras of reconstruction and reform.

Chapter 4 examines the changing ideological orientation of the state in the face of mounting social problems arising from the eight-year war with Iraq and the increasing tension between an official state film industry and artists attempting to articulate their concerns on a whole host of difficulties besetting the country. Indeed, the changed ideological orientation revolved around the split between moderates and radicals in the

ruling elite (Rahnema & Behdad, 1996) and the debate over the interests of the nation versus the interests of Islam (Menashri, 1990, Hiro, 1991), all of which were brought into sharp focus by the war. Similarly, the cinema was influenced and defined by these divisions. On the one hand the medium was mobilised to serve the immediate needs of the state, the promotion of the war effort through the 'Cinema of the Sacred Defence', whilst on the other hand there began to emerge the first tentative signs of certain filmmakers willing to critically engage with certain social issues. Once again politics and art are shown to be closely entwined as this cinematic split can be understood as a cultural manifestation the wider divisions occurring within the ruling elite. The voicing of criticism was permissible due to the relaxation of censorship laws in the 1985-1990 period but was only allowed to operate within strictly controlled parameters i.e. criticism of Islam or the Islamic Republic was strictly forbidden. The rationale behind this change in orientation was a realisation that the Islamicisation process and the incessant sermonising were producing negative results, and poor quality art, and that the revolutionary rhetoric had to be accommodated to the realities of running a modern state. Indeed, by taking Makhmalbaf's *mostaz'efin* as an illustrative case in point it is clear that social criticism that did emerge during this period was still very much situated within the ideological framework/rhetoric of the revolutionary state i.e. criticisms of the evils of capitalism and concern for the plight of the poor. Nevertheless, it marked the beginning of an increased orientation towards issues of social concern, which was to increase in the post-Khomeini era as the political landscape was restructured to meet the demands of reconstructing a war shattered country.

Chapter 5 looked at the development of the cinema during the tenure of President Rafsanjani. This was the period when the cinema reached an artistic and thematic maturity and made its appearance on the international stage. Once again these changes must be viewed within the context of the changed ideological orientation of the state in the face of new political challenges. The new government sought to legitimise its claim to power and secure its position through a series of Constitutional amendments and an interpretation of Khomeini's legacy (Ansari, 2000, Brumberg, 2001) that were directed towards the immediate needs of the country, which necessitated the movement of society towards a form of liberalisation and an openness to the outside world. The cinema was to be at the forefront of what promised to be a radical departure from the insularity, dogmatism and rhetoric of the previous decade. The government sought to increase its investment in the cinema industry with the aim of producing 'quality' films that were aggressively marketed abroad. This was a reflection of the new governments desire to culturally 'export the revolution' abroad and present a picture of a moderate state, a prerequisite that was necessary in attracting foreign capital in funding the economic reconstruction programmes (Ehteshami, 1995). In this way the focus could be seen to have shifted from the use of officially sanctioned propaganda, i.e. Islamic cinema, to the work of 'non-believing' filmmakers (Golmakani, 1999) as the means by which the regime sought to promote and legitimate its changed ideological and political orientation. However, the volatility of this position became evident when the conservative elements within the government set about quashing what they perceived to be nefarious liberal onslaught. Thus, cinema, and indeed other cultural forms were the basis for a broader debate over the extent and limits of freedom of expression and criticism that would be

tolerated by the authorities. This led to the imposition of repressive measures and ever harsher forms of censorship by the government in an attempt to stifle debate and root out what it saw as 'social corruption'. However, buoyed up by the increasing frustration of the people the cultural battle showed no signs of abating with artists, having been allowed a voice, now being prepared to use it more vocally. It was the cultural arena, be it the cinema tackling ever more risque subjects or newspapers openly criticising the government, which actively attempted to articulate the discontent of society and the clamour for reform and which was instrumental in ushering in the Khatami presidency in 1997.

The search for reform through the establishment of a civil society as orchestrated and voiced through the cultural realm was the main focus of chapter 6. The assertion put forward in this chapter is that the Khatami administration is a form of hegemonic control that is unable or unwilling to instigate the demands for reform coming from outside the system, and expressed through the realm of culture, due to the institutional and ideological factors that form the structural essence of the Islamic state. In the case of the cinema the articulation of these calls for change have been predicated on an increasingly esoteric search for the self and a meditation on his/her place in society, e.g. Makhmalbaf's *The Silence*, in contrast to the depersonalised servant of Islam promoted by the state, i.e. the 'Islamic man' referred to in chapter 3, as well as the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers, particularly women, who have found in the new 'liberal' atmosphere the ability and means of expressing specific, and until know silent, social concerns. In this way the cinema has functioned as one of the elements in calling for the

introduction of a civil society but at the same time has functioned as a representative form of civil society in absentia. What this point illustrates, and it is one that has been made throughout this thesis, is the fact that given the structural make-up of the Islamic Republic, it is the cultural realm that forms the means of analysing and articulating the problems of society and is therefore at its best and most potent when it is directed to, derived from and understood, first and foremost, from within the localised social and political context.

Part of the problem in approaching such an understanding is the lack of an established, relevant and workable framework of analysis that goes beyond the solely textual as well as the difficulty that most critics have in approaching and locating Iranian cinema. This difficulty is derived from the fact at that one level this cinema is easily knowable and recognisable as bearing the hallmarks of a neo-realist aesthetic, which tends to elide and ignore the complex socio-cultural factors that have constructed and at the same time problematised this aesthetic frame of analysis. One effective way in which such problems can be overcome is by placing these films within a frame of reference that takes account of the unique socio-cultural and political system from which they have emerged.

The Third Cinema theoretical framework has been postulated in this thesis as a means of critically engaging with and approaching an understanding of cinema in the Islamic Republic due to its ability to present a historically anlaytic yet culturally specific mode of cinematic discourse born from and located within the interaction of politics and cinema. Such a process has involved a historical reappraisal and critique of the notion of a Third

Cinema and the location of Iranian cinema (with Makhmalbaf as an illustrative case study) within the former's varying theoretical strands in order to arrive at a theory that seeks to understand the latter from a distinct perspective. This perspective has been based on an examination of its location within: a dialectical cinematic and social historicity; a sense of political engagement where cinema is the reflection and reflector of the social context from which it emerges; a critical commitment to the cinematic medium in affecting social change; and a cultural specificity that is characterised by (and indeed can only be understood from) an intimacy and familiarity with indigenous cultural forms, and their expression, as a site of struggle and contested meanings. It is also to this model that we must turn to in order to evaluate, locate and assess the medium's development in Iran since the revolution.

The Development of a Third Cinema

The idea of a Third Cinema emerged from the revolutionary fervour of the late 1960s as a form of liberating cultural practice aligned to the language of populist socialist rebellion, which called for an extension of political revolution into the social and cultural realms. The most important aspects of the early manifestoes was their commitment to issues of social and political concern articulated through open ended and flexible structures of representation that were rooted in the immediacy of the national and indigenous cultural experience that recognised the complexity, diversity and multi-layeredness of specific cultural-historical formations. Such an undertaking seeks to locate the national as the starting point for an interrogation that attempts to reorganise the internal dynamics and practices of life towards a committed "poetics of the transformation of reality" (Wayne,

2001: 58). Furthermore, it is this fluidity of categorisation that has seen attempts to redefine the original militant didacticism of the Latin American manifestoes towards First and Second Cinema by seeing the Third Cinema as a means through which to transform and expand the possibilities and positive critical attributes of these forms of cinema by relocating them in broader social struggles.

Despite the, at times, problematic and contradictory development of the notion of a Third Cinema a number of core points remain crucial, and have remained constant elements throughout its theoretical development: the centrality of linking theory and practice, an artform derived from and intervening in the social and the political, the awareness of a social and cultural historiography, an artform that is critical and experimental in nature and exhibits a cultural specificity that is derived from and speaks to the local but is capable of projecting to the universal. It is from these perspectives, devoid of its original ideological underpinnings of Fanonism and Guevarism, that we have sought to locate and understand Iranian cinema and Mohsen Makhmalbaf's position within it, acting as a chronological template for its development since 1979.

Historicity
The Third Cinema aims to intervene in and approach history as a contradictory and changing process that exhibits a myriad of conflicting voices. Such a committed approach requires a deep understanding of the cultural and political nuances of a country but must also be aware of, and located within, the cinematic progression that has developed in attempting to represent social change through the moment of self-realisation (Burton

1985) by challenging the truth claims of the official historical narrative. This is a particularly ardent undertaking in the Iranian context given the contested nature and abuse of history as a form of ideological interpellation allied through the use of culture as a means of legitimating and consolidating political power.

It has been argued that the roots of the current resurgence in Iranian cinema can be seen to lie, both artistically, and to a certain extent intellectually, in the unfinished New Wave movement of the 1960s and 1970s. These films were experimental in form and politically engaged but also must be seen, within their own cinematic historiography, as a reaction to the trite, low quality, melodrama of the indigenous popular commercial cinema that became known as Film Farsi. The new 'quality' cinema thus emerged under a contradictory system of official (financial) support and restriction and attempted to articulate and intervene culturally in the rapid pace of change taking place in the country throughout this period.

This was an important undertaking and reflects the traditional position of the artist in Iran, who, whether he/she likes it or not, in the absence of voices of political opposition and the existence of a civil society, sees their work placed into a framework that seeks to articulate and communicate with the conscience and thoughts of the people. Films such as *Siavosh at Persepolsis* (1965), *Gav* (1968), *The Mongols* (1973), and *Prince Ehtejab* (1975), in their self-reflexivity and mixing of cultural codes attempted to engage with modernity and at the same time problematise its formal undertakings by looking to the past in creating a symbiotic relationship with the present, in order to reflect the complex

combination of historical elements that lie beneath cultural forms. Such a process calls into question the monolithic pervasiveness of official ideology and opens a fractured space for conflictual debate. These developments were prematurely swept away with the advent of the 1979 revolution where cinema returned to year zero and was to be reconstituted under new ideological circumstances.

As a consequence of this ideological restructuring the arena of debate in the Islamic Republic has been strictly controlled and harshly stifled as a result of repressive official policies, not just in relation to the media but in all areas of society, but perhaps most damagingly by the attempt to completely constrain and suppress the intellectual development of an entire generation. For the cinema this has meant a rupturing of the pre-revolutionary era of development in its attempts to articulate deeply committed and politically engaged works that sought, through the confluence and interaction of different artistic modes such as poetry, theatre, writing, to transform and develop the medium and act as critical commentators of their society. These developments and the intellectual preoccupations with which they were engaged - the nature of Iranianness, the position of Islam, the influence of artistic tradition and modes of expression, the position of art as an instrument of change, the influence of the West - came to an end with the revolution and the changed ideological atmosphere, but far from being fragments of a distant unfinished project they remain relevant and in continued need of debate. What has happened is that the legacy and achievements of the 1960s and 1970s have been arrested and have failed to be, or were prevented from being, a process of continual development. The filmmakers

of the current era have attempted to pick up these unravelled strands and remake the cinema anew.

By being denied, in a sense, its artistic heritage, the 'intellectual' development of an 'artistic' cinema in the post-revolutionary period has seen cinema develop and emerge from a different template that would have us believe that cinema only truly began in Iran after the revolution, and has therefore emerged in a different and unique format. However, the truth behind the rhetoric is the fact that the ghosts of the past continue to hover around and the present manifestation of the 'new' cinematic owes much to the influence of filmmakers such as Sales and Naderi, but it does so on the purely functional level – slow, meditative, contemplative realist works which lack, for the most part, the subtle depth and critical engagement of the earlier works. The new cinema is a shadow, a simulacrum that is searching to fully grasp the means of critical engagement. The institutional structure of the Islamic regime forces cinema into the realm of the political, which necessitates that the medium can only be properly understood by examination and engagement with the system from which it emerges and from within which it has been created.

It has been shown that the legacy of the context under which the pre-revolutionary films functioned serves as a template for the development of the post-revolutionary cinema: censorship, the uneasy relationship with the State, the fact that these films were more popular abroad and used as an ideological tool by the regime to promote the illusion of a culturally vibrant and liberal society advocating free speech and freedom of expression,

and formally through the emphasis on realism and the focus on the everyday. This template has been clearly evident in the post-revolutionary era through the examination of Makhmalbaf's cinema which has occupied both the position of insider and outsider. From his early adherence to, and promotion of, the virtues of the new regime under the guise of an 'Islamic cinema', as shown in chapter 3, through his disillusionment and critique of the failings of the revolution as articulated in his *mostaz'efin* trilogy, to the eventual castigation and censorship of his work by the authorities, chapter 5, his films have at all times been deeply engaged with and influenced by the historical development of the state. Through a variety of cinematic formats he has attempted to examine pertinent issues, such as the nature of God, from the dogmatic pedanticism of *Nassouh's Repentance* (1982), to the Sufi inspired contemplation of *The Silence* (1998), or the failure of the revolution to deliver on its promises, as evidenced in films such as *The Peddler* (1989) or *Nights on Zayandeh Rud* (1991), which are specifically relevant under the changed ideological circumstances. In this sense Makhmalbaf's cinema can lay claim to the intellectual legacy of the pre-revolutionary filmakers, most vividly evidenced in the meta-cinematic form of *Once Upon a Time Cinema* (1992), in the socially and politically committed nature of his work. However, his work differs from the former in that the complexity of much of the New Wave films has been replaced by an immediate engagement with the historical moment, a cinema of reaction very much located in and directed towards an understanding of the present.

Politicisation

The clerical regime that emerged after revolution attempted to reconstitute a shattered

film industry as an essential part of their drive to Islamicise/culturally politicise all

aspects of society by creating an 'Islamic cinema' that would perform the same function

of the mosque in "proclaiming the message of the revolution in cinematic form" (Kalhor

1982: 11-13). Cinema became inextricably entwined with the efforts of the new regime to

politicise the consciousness of the masses. In this sense it has been shown to bear a

certain resemblance to the cultural undertakings of other revolutionary Third World

States, such as Cinema Moudjahid in Algeria, or the Cuban efforts to fuse art and

revolution into a cinematic form that would be educational and socialising in nature.

However, the new 'Islamic cinema' that emerged in Iran was one that was marked by

poor quality films given to sloganeering and anti-intellectualism, reflecting the

righteousness of the Islamic male and the Islamic Republic standing firm against

corruption and infidels (particularly within the context of the nationalist zeal engendered

by the eight year war with Iraq). In essence, it is perhaps more accurate to describe this

type of cinema, due to its dogmatism and strict enforcement of a moral code, shaped

through harsh censorship laws, as an Islamicised cinema, which formed a part of the

regimes overall drive to enforce Islam into all aspects of life.

However, as has been demonstrated, this desire to create an official 'Islamic cinema'

paradoxically succeeded in creating a cultural form that was defined not by Islam but by

absence. This arose from the fact that this new cinematic form was defined by the

absence of what it could not show and the unnatural restrictions of intra-filmic

relationships that this created within the films as well as the unbalanced and unidimensional view of Iranian culture that they presented, through the Islamicisation process and the institutionalisation of cinema as shown in chapters 2 and 3. Furthermore, this had led to a situation where much of Iranian cinema could be said to be the absolute antithesis of the cultural form desired by the regime. This has as much to do with artists willing to stretch the boundaries of the permissible in exploring a wider range of 'controversial' themes e.g. Makhmalbaf's *Time of Love* (1991), as well as the adaptability of the Islamic state to changing conditions and their recognition of the failure of the Islamicisation programme. The post-Khomeini period saw the consolidation of the ideological drift, which had begun over the course of the eight-year war with Iraq, which increasingly placed the needs of the state over those of Islam. The Rafsanjani government, as stated in chapter 5, reconfigured the ideological and judicial basis of the Islamic state in order to facilitate their reconstruction programme. Such a change also resulted in the establishment of a new relationship between cinema and politics. Whilst the government sought to loosen some of the restrictions on filmmakers they also sought to use the cinema as a means of presenting a new image and ideological orientation of the Islamic state to the outside world. Paradoxically, it was this desire to export the revolution in cultural terms, through the means of international film festivals, which can be seen as one of the main factors contributing to the development and maturation of Iranian cinema. This was achieved through increased government investment and promotion as well as a loosening of certain restrictions, which allowed filmmakers to engage with controversial topics. Despite the fact that these works were subject to severe censorship and recriminations domestically, due to the power struggle that ensued during

Rafsanjani's second term, they nevertheless set a precedent for the development of a cinema denoted by its critical social engagement. This was a tendency that was to increase under the reformist tendencies of the Khatami regime where cinema became a benchmark and a key element in documenting the progress and power struggle to establish elements of a civil society, as argued in chapter 6. In this sense, the development of the cinema in Iran has been inextricably bound to the ideological contradictions that underpin the Islamic state and the pressures exerted on them from within the ruling elite and society at large. It is within these contradictions and gaps that certain spaces have emerged that allow for the engagement and questioning of the culture and politics of representation. This is a factor evidenced in the obsessive self-reflexivity and conflation of fact and fiction seen as the leading hall mark of much post-revolutionary cinema e.g. Makhmalbaf's *Salaam Cinema* (1995), *A Moment of Innocence* (1996).

Critical Engagement

In one sense the 'Islamic cinema' can be seen to function in the same way as the Film Farsi in providing the antithetical basis for the development of a 'quality' cinema, rather than the 'pariahs' of First and Second Cinema as articulated by the original Third Cinema manifestos. Furthermore, the critical engagement of this new cinema, which in the spirit of the Third Cinema seeks to engage with the cognitive and intellectual powers of the spectator in effecting change, must be seen within the context of, and became particularly pertinent within, the context of the post 1989 social and political changes that occurred in Iran. This saw the emergence of a cinema operating in an Era of Reconstruction, one that

was critically engaged in political and social problems of the country but also questioned its own formal structures and methods of engagement.

One of the central tenets here is the theme of search, a dominant theme in Iranian cinema and a key notion in the advancement of the idea of the Third Cinema. This sees cinema function as a means and a stage in opening a space for debate and forming the basis of future debates that are aimed both within and beyond the cinematic spectacle. In the case of Iranian cinema the theme of search is predicated on trying to find a space in which art can operate in an engagement with, and reflection of, the complexities of social realities without coming to a neat synthesis. In this respect it opens up the possibility of an open ended and porous state of struggle in conflict with the certainties of official grand narratives. It has been show how this critically engaged search has progressed from the search for a better economic and social life and a reappraisal of the promises of the revolution (1985-92), to a search for new political solutions (1992-97), to a search for greater freedom and a civil society through the exigencies of culture, particularly with the emergence of female filmmakers such as Bani-Etemad and Milani and their articulation of gender issues (1997-present).

These debates however have operated within the strictly controlled parameters of what is permissible, forcing filmmakers to operate somewhere between poetry and censorship in attempting to stretch the boundaries in exploring issues outside officially sanctioned norms. This urgent social agenda is derived from a passionate commitment to art and its power to communicate and articulate the problems and frustrations of the people, and a

realisation that the cause and solution to the problems besetting Iran have traditionally

been cultural in nature. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic's removal of all forms of

opposition and the projection of the political into the public realm has meant that any

forms of criticism would only arise from within the system or through the medium of art.

As has been shown, the cinema was, and continues to be one of the main actors in both

promoting and challenging the official ideological programme designed to legislate for

all aspects of life.

The formal cinematic language for the articulation of these social concerns constitutes a

site of mixed codes comprised primarily of a humanism and politics of the everyday that

is manifested through a documentary/realist lens, which serve to highlight the importance

of a contextual understanding embedded in the local. The realist question is a central

aspect of the Third Cinema both from an economic perspective - a practical necessity

given the scarcity of resources - and as a politically subversive act that sets out to reclaim

an indigenous space from imposed meanings. These elements have combined with

documentary elements and its ability to engage with the here and now, not like the formal

undertakings of the Cubans who used the strategy as a pedagogical tool, but in the sense

of a self-reflexivity that seeks to surpass the fact/fiction split by conflating the division

and operating within a system where the two notions co-exist seamlessly, derived from

and critically engaged in problematising one another and by extension the very notion of

representation. In doing so filmmakers are showing the process of cultural creation and

attempting to create "a portrait of the audience which views the text and encourages the

viewer to consider their own act of looking" (Dabashi 1999: 96). It is its operating within

the margins, gaps and interstices of these divisions that Iranian cinema takes the step in politicising its audience through an experimental cultural tradition, which attempts to articulate "a rebellious stance framed by such seemingly discordant ideals as, the vision of an egalitarian future, a greater artistic freedom and an undertone of nostalgia all clad in an esoteric language at odds with objectivity" (Hakkak, 1985: 59).

The recourse to the local context illuminates the limitations of mainstream theory and shows the action of the "poetics of the transformation of reality". Indeed, by "filming everyday life as it is lived and experienced by the masses, by using their language and cultural forms…is already a defeat for cultural colonialism" (Salmane 1976: 41), in this sense the internal colonialism of official state ideology. This is not to infer that there is a complete absence of religious mores in Iranian cinema but rather that the authoritarian dogmatism of neo-Shiism has been replaced by a more contemplative and spiritual interpretation that is thoughtful, moral and meditative on the poetic rhythms of everyday life. Furthermore, this emphasis on the poetry of everyday life is very close to Jorge Sanjines categorisation of "revolutionary art", which is defined by "what it shows of a people's way of being, and the spirit of popular cultures which embraces whole communities of people with their own particular ways of thinking, of conceiving reality and of loving life" (King 1990: 66). In this sense Iranian cinema is 'political' in the broadest sense. This has given rise to an Iranian cinema where filmmakers are striving to combine their own interests and aspirations with a popular discontent whilst at the same time questioning film's ability to give voice to such expression. These are attributes that

allow Iranian cinema to project from the local to the universal in approaching an original form of "critical internationalism".

Cultural Specificity

The Third Cinema in its political and socio-historical project is firmly rooted in an "intimacy and familiarity with culture, both in the specific sense of cultural production and in the broader sense of the nuances of the everyday living" (Wayne 2001: 22). This is part of an attempt to give voice to the subaltern in order to give substantive intellectual meaning to the reclaiming and restoration of things to their place in the poetics of transformation. However, the recourse to and recognition of indigenous cultural forms and specificities is not calling for a return to nativism and cultural essentialism but an interrogation, recognition and reclaiming of a complex and fractured site of political struggle that encompasses a multitude of different narratives.

In the Iranian context the site of conflict exists over the interpretation of specific cultural and historical facts that form part of the entire cultural make up of the country and the way in which they are used and interpreted to stand in a 'false' and manufactured way for the whole e.g. the Pahlavi's emphasis on the glories of pre-Islamic history, the Islamic Republic's use of Shia symbolism. It is the conflict between the Persian and Islamic aspects of Iranian culture that forms the intellectual programme of Iranian cinema. The reconfiguring of this duality can be seen to rest on the influence of Persian poetry in its "ability to universalise everyday experience and relate it to an unending search for the reality of God" (Mackey 1998). Such an undertaking recognises the fact that Persia and

315

Islam are not mutually exclusive parts of the Iranian cultural whole and continues the idea of search, not within the constraints of official dogma, but within the freedom of a personal union with God through individual spirituality and mysticism e.g. *The Silence* (1998). This has seen the development of a form of cinema attuned to the dangers of didacticism and blind faith in grand ideological themes that projects the micro level of individual responses and dilemmas at their most personal and emotional, and firmly located in a specific cultural context, onto a grand scale. In this sense it can be seen to bear similarities to Garcia Espinosa's idea of an "imperfect cinema", with its location in reality and desire to "present a plurality of non-judgemental, non-prescriptive expositions of the problems faced by 'people who struggle' as a process" (Davies 1997). This factor has perhaps been best illustrated in the drive to produce a cinema that seeks to represent and reflect the multi-culural and multi-ethnic composition of the country and in the process question and problematise the notion of the Iranian nation. Indeed, it has been shown in this thesis that from the outset the cinema of the post-revolutionary era has been defined, and can only be fully understood by, recourse to indigenous cultural factors; from the dogmatic neo-Shiism of the early 'Islamic cinema' to a more Sufi inspired poeticism of a personal mystical union of the individual with God. With regard to the work of Makhmalbaf, God and man's relationship with Him has been a constant element of his work but one that has evolved from the pedagogical to the personal.

Recent trends in Iranian cinema have seen it articulate a more representative and 'realist' picture of the varied ethnic, language and cultural identities that exist within the country e.g. *Blackboard* (2000), *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), *Jom'eh* (2000), *Delbaran*

(2001). Once again this serves as an affront to the homogeneity of official discourse which seeks to elide any sense of difference, by highlighting "the ambivalent unities…and emergent and oppositional discourses that cohabit the national space, thereby setting in motion a de-totalising dialectic (Dissanayake 1994: xvi).

These are and most likely will continue to be the urgent undertakings of Iranian cinema and they need to be understood within the framework that the Third Cinema provides. If not they risk being co-opted into a Western art cinema aesthetic and frame of reference which depoliticises their content and meaning. Indeed, this has become an all to self-evident problem as Iranian cinema has entered the international stage.

Makhmalbaf's Cinema

It has been shown that Makhmalbaf's cinema stands as a perfect reflection of the interactional and symbiotic development of an artist and the society from which he emerges. His is a political cinema heavily entwined with the historical development of the Islamic Republic and its cultural representation structured by the thematics of search and belief. His initial work was religiously and politically dogmatic in tone with the individual being subsumed in the belief of grand ideological claims. This gave way to a search for justice and the questioning of belief in absolutes contained within a debate centred on the failures of the revolution to deliver on its promises by one who still believed in its ideals. This doubt was transformed into a desire to use art as a means of reflecting and examining the harsher elements of social reality through a dissection of the means of artistic representation. His most recent films have almost seen him come full

317

circle. However, this time it is the search for the individual, his sense of self and a personal spiritual union with God to which the ideological and the political are subsumed. In this sense his films have been ardent attempts to document the nation, its evolution and his own artistic development within that process. Whilst these attempts at times lack subtlety they none the less do act as chronicles or indices of Iran's social and political fabric. Located firmly within the complexities of modern Iran they represent an artist's honest, if not always successful, attempt to bear witness to his age.

Future Trends

The future development of the Iranian cinema is dependent on a number of interrelated factors. If it continues in its present vein it will most likely seek to further highlight its imbrication within the context of immediate social and the political concerns. Emanating from a long history of actors and intellectuals in all cultural fields that have sought to play an active social role in 'influencing their society and reaching to it, sometimes being lead by it but always engaged in a passionate and constructive dialogue and interaction with it' (Rahnema, 1999: 127), the cinema will continue to search for, and has been shown to be at its best when it is engaged in, a discourse with the political. This is not a revolutionary call for the camera to act like a gun, as in the Third Cinema manifestoes of the late 1960s, but for it to function as a means of creating a 'non-neutral environment in which a [repressive] society can be discussed' (Downing, 1987: 16).

If Iranian cinema is to continue to develop meaningfully along its current lines it will have to remain engaged with the local as a cinema of struggle and becoming and must

continue to operate in the spaces where conflicting elements coexist. It must continue the theme of search acting as the "anxious eye" of society constantly questioning not only the problems and injustices that beset the people but also the means by which to represent it in an acknowledgement of the limitations, the artifice and qualifications in the language used to transmit its message. This will necessitate the interrogation of totalising ideologies and histories and the undertaking of an attempt to reflect and accommodate the Persian and Islamic elements of Iranian culture in a constructive dialogue in order to highlight and intervene in the contradictions inherent in the system created by the Islamic Republic. Culture acts as the legitimator and consolidator of those in power but it also acts as the means of questioning ideological manipulation.

This is the ardent course that the Iranian cinema now seems likely to follow because as history has shown, Iran is at its most creative and productive when it combines the various elements from its cultural traditions in a critical dialogue with the fragility of social stability. Indeed this thesis has postulated throughout that the cinema in Iran is conditioned by and responsive to the changes occurring within society. This should be the basis on which future research should be conducted. At present, the cinema like the country is in a period of transition. There is increasing frustration and disillusionment among the population[1] with the slow pace of change occurring under the Khatami government. Allied to this is the fact that there are a whole host of economic and social problems, from rates of unemployment running at between 14 – 20%, to drug addiction and prostitution, the effects of which are felt primarily by the young and women who face

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[1] A recent survey found that 94% of people felt that the country was in urgent need of reform. See, Tim Judah, "A Revolution Crumbles", *The Guardian*, 5th October, 2002, pp. 90-96.

319

the greatest restrictions in society. In the midst of these developments we are seeing the emergence of a new movement in Iranian cinema composed of women and a younger generation of filmmakers (the grandchildren of the revolution) who are attempting to articulate the problems faced by these specific groups in society. Once again these undertakings are reflective of and influenced by the immediate social environment but they also take into consideration other issues such as gender relations and the impact of global influences, which provide additional lines of theoretical investigation that can expand on and develop the analytical framework put forward in this thesis. Indeed, it is the interaction of Iranian cinema with the increased encroachment of globalisation that will frame the future of cultural debate in the country. The Islamic regime has attempted to define itself and create a society based on the foundations of an indigenous culture (Shia Islam) that has proved itself extremely hostile to all forms of foreign cultural influence. However, as has been made clear, in the absence of political opposition it is popular cultural forms that provide the points of resistance and challenge to the ruling power structures. This is a point that is becoming more evident as Iran becomes increasingly immersed with the global world. The new generation is being formally socialised through an Islamic education but informally educated through the global media via satellite television and internet penetration. It remains to be seen how Iranian cinema, and the Islamic Republic itself, will react to the new social, political and cultural challenges that will emerge in the era of globalisation.

FILMOGRAPHY

Feature Films:

Tobeh-Nassouh (Nassouh's Repentance)
Scriptwriter and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ebrahim Ghazizadeh.
Sound Recorder: Es-hagh Khanzadi.
Music: Hesam-e-ddin Seraj Anousheh.
Editor: Iraj Emami.
Still Photographer: Ahmad Talayi.
Cast: Farajolah Salahshour, Mohammad Kasebi, Esmat Jampour, Behzad Behzadniya.
1982, Colour, 35 mm, 100 mins.

Do Chashme Bisou (Two Sightless Eyes)
Scriptwriter and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ebrahim Ghazizadeh.
Editor: Iraj Golafshan.
Music: Hesameddin Seraj.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Dubbing: Iraj Nazeriyan.
Cast: Mohammad Kasebi, Majid Majidi, Reza Cheraghi, Habib Valinezhad, Ghasem
Kharrazani, Esmat Makhmalbaf, Fatemeh Meshkini, Hamid Derakshan, Behzad
Behzadpour, Hossein Sabri, Ebrahim Majidi.
1983, Colour, 35mm, 102 mins.

Este'azeh (Fleeing from Evil to God)
Scriptwriter and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ebrahim Ghazizadeh.
Editor: Iraj Golafshan.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Dubbing: Iraj Nazeriyan.
Cast: Mohammad Kasebi, Majid Majidi, Morteza Masaehi, Ali Derakhshi, Mohammad
Takhtkeshiyan, Massoud Ghandi.
1984, Colour, Cinemascope, 89 mins.

Baykot (Boycott)
Scriptwriter and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Faraj Haydari, Ebrahim Ghazizadeh.
Editor: Roubik Mansouri.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Set Design: Masoud Ghandi, Mohammad-Bagher Ashtiyani.
Dubbing: Manoucher Esmaeeli.
Special Effects: Ali Rastger, Morteza Rastgar, Hassan Saberi.

Cast: Majid Majidi, Mohammad Kasebi, Zohreh Sarmadi, Ardalan Shoja-Kaveh, Saeed Kashan-Fallah, Esmaeel Soltaniyan, Bahman Rouzbehani, Ali-Akbar Yeganeh, Reza Cheraghi, Irandokht Dowlatshahi,
Ali Hesami, Naser Forough, Ali Tavakkoli, Massoud Nabavi, Ali Shirazi, Esmak Makhmalbaf, Ebrahim Abadi.
1985, Colour, 35 mm, 85 mins.

Dasforush **(The Peddler)**
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Music: Majid Entezami.
Dubbing: Manoucher Esmaeeli.

First Episode – *Bacheye Khoshbakht* (The Happy Child)
Director of Photography: Homayoun Payvar.
Make-up: Fatemeh Ardakani.
Cast: Zohreh Sarmadi, Esmaeel Soltaniyan, Mohammad Talaie, Somayyeh Ebrahimi, Maryam Schirazi, Esmat Makhmalbaf, Ali Tavakkoli, Kamran Nowrouz, Azam Bahrami, Ali Schirazi.

Second Episode – *Tavallode Yek Pirzan* (Birth of an Old Woman)
Director of Photography: Mehrdad Fakhimi.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Set Design: Hassam Farsi.
Cast: Morteza Zarrabi, Mahmoud Basiri, Moharram Zeinalzadeh, Davoud Ghanbari, Naser Forough, Mohsen Derakhshani, Mohammad-Reza Bagheri, Rasoul Ahadi, Rasoul Ahadi.

Third Episode – *Dastforush* (The Peddler)
Director of Photography: Ali-Reza Zarrindest.
Make-up: Abdolhamid Ghadirian.
Set Design: Hossein Khosrojerdi.
Special Effects: Reza Fatehi.
Cast: Behzad Behzadpour, Jafar Delghan, Farid Kashan-Fallah, Mohammad-Ali Mozhdehi, Davoud Rahmati, Hossein Gorouhi, Kamal Abbasi, Ahmad Khayyatbashi, Mohammad Alaghband, Habib Haddad.
1987, Colour, 35 mm, 90 mins.

Baicykelran **(The Cyclist)**
Scriptwriter, Set Designer, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ali-Reza Zarrindast.
Music: Majid Entezami.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Dubbing: Manoucher Esmaeeli.

Cast: Moharram Zeinalzadeh, Esmaeel Soltaniyan, Samira Makhmalbaf, Mahsid Afsharzadeh, Hossein Haj-jar, Firouz Kiyani, Mohammad-Reza Maleki, Shahnaz Babaieyan, Mansour Farma, Mohammad Doulatabadi.
1989, Colour, 35 mm, 83 mins.

Arusi-e Khuban (Marriage of the Blessed)
Scriptwriter, Set Designer, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ali-Reza Zarrindast.
Music: Babak Bayat.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Dubbing: Manoucher Esmaeeli.
Special Effects: Reza Shrafoddin.
Cast: Mahmoud Bigham, Roya Nownahali, Mohsen Zehtab, hossein Moslemi, Ebrahim Abadi, Iraj Saghiri, Esmat Makhmalbaf, Hosssein Hosseinkhani, Ameneh Kholdebarin, Karim Zargar.
1989, Colour and B/W, 70 mins.

Nobat-e Asheghi (Time of Love)
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Mahmoud Kalari.
Sound Jahangir Mirshekari.
Set Design: Mohammad Nasrollahi.
Cast: Shiva Gerede, Abdolrahman Palay, Manderes Samanjihar, Aken Tunj, Jalal Khosrowshahi.
1991, Colour, 35 mm, 70 mins.

Shab-hay-e Zayandeh Rud (Nights on Zayandeh Rud)
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ali-Reza Zarrindast.
Sound: Jahangir Mirshekari, Sassan Bagherpour.
Make-up: Majid Eskandari, Afteh Razavi.
Song: Iraj Saeed Eftekhari.
Assistant Director: Morteza Masaeli, Mohammad Nasrollahi, Siamak Alagheband, Hossein Ardakestani.
Cast: Manoucher Esmaeeli, Mozhgan Naderi, Parvaneh Gouharani, Zeinab Rahdari, Mehrdad Farid, Mohsen Ghasemi, Afsaneh Heidariyan, Nahid Rashidi, Maryam Naghib.
1991, Colour, 35 mm, 75 mins.

Nasseredin Shah Actor-e Cinema (Once Upon a Time, Cinema)
Scriptwriter, and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Faraj Haydari.
Editor: Davud Yusafian.
Music: Majid Entezami.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Set Design: Hassan Farsi.
Sound: Ahmad Askari.

Cast: Ezzatollah Entezami, Mehdi Hashemi, Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz, Akbar Abdi, Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, Dariush Arjmand, Mahaya Petrsiyan, Jahangir Forouhar, Morteza Ahmadi, Saeed Amirsoleimani, Moharram Zeinalzadeh, Parvaneh Massouri.
1992, Colour and B/W, 35 mm, 92 mins.

Honarpisheh (The Actor)
Scripwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Aziz Sa'ati.
Music: Ahmad Pezhman.
Make-up: Abdollah Eskandari.
Set Design: Reza Alaghemand.
Sound: Jahangir Mirshekari, Sasan Baghenpour.
Cast: Akbar Abdi, Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, Mahaya Petrosiyan, Hamideh Kheirabadi, Parvin Soleimani, Hossein Panali, Mohammad-Reza Sharifinia, Hossein Shamlou.
1993, Colour, 35 mm, 86 mins.

Salaam Cinema
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsn Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Mahmoud Kalari.
Sound: Nezameddin Kiaee.
Cast: Azadeh Zangeneh, Maryam Keihan, Feizollah Gheshlaghi, Hamid Gheshlaghi, Hamid Gheshlaghi, Hamed Gheshlaghi, Shaghayegh Jowdat, Mohammad-Hadi Mokhtariyan, Nader Fazhi, Maziyar Alipour, Arezou Ghanbari.
1995, Colour, 35 mm, 89 mins.

Noon-o Goldoun (A Moment of Innocence)
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Sound: Nezameddin Kiaee.
Music: Majid Entezami.
Set Design: Reza Alghemand.
Cast: Mirhadi Tayyebi, Ali Bakhshi, Ammar Tafti, Maryam Mohammad-Amini, Moharram Zeinalzadeh, Fariba Faghiri, Lotfollah Gheshtagi, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Hana Makhmalbaf.
1996, Colour, 35 mm, 78 mins.

Gabbeh
Scriptwriter, Set Designer, Editor, Sound Designer and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Mahmoud Kalari.
Sound: Mojtaba Mirtahmasb.
Executive Manager and Still Photographer: Mohammad Ahmadi.
Music: Hossein Alizadeh.
Cast: Abbas Sayyahi, Shaghayegh Djodat, Hossein Moharrami, Roghayyeh Moharrami, Parvaneh Ghalandari.
1996, Colour, 35 mm, 72 mins.

Sokut (The Silence)
Scriptwriter, Set Designer, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ebrahim Ghafouri.
Executive Manager: Mohammad Ahmadi.
Assistant Directors: Samira Makhmalbaf, Marziyeh Meshkini, Akbar Meshkini.
Sound: Behrouz Shahamat.
Cast: Tahmineh Normat Ova, Nadereh Abdollah Yeva.
Production: Makhmalbaf Film House, MK2.
1998, Colour, 35 mm,

Safar-e Qandehar (Kandahar)
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Ebrahim Ghafouri.
Assistant Directors of Photography: Hossein Amiri, Hashem Gerami.
Original Music: Mohammad Reza Darvishi.
Sound: Behrouz Shahamat, Faroukh Fadai.
Assistant Directors: M. Mintahmaseb, Kaveh Gerami.
International Affairs: Mohammad Reza Safiri.
Set Design: Akbar Meshkini.
Still Photographer: M.R. Sharifiniya.
Production Manager: Siamak Alagheband.
Production Assistant: Abbas Sagharisaz.
Producer: Makhmalbaf Film House (Iran), Bac Films (France).
World Sales: Wild Bunch.
2001, Colour, 35mm, 85 mins.

Short Films:

Images from the Qajar Dynasty
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Aziz Salati.
Music: Ahmad Pezhman.
Sound: Ahmad Kalantari.
1993, Colour and B/W, 18 mins.

Sang va Sheesheh (Stone and Glass)
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Aziz Salati.
Narrator: Parviz Bahram.
1993, Colour, Video, 20 mins.

Madreseh-i keh Bad Bord (The School that was Blown Away)
Scriptwriter, Editor and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Mahmoud Kalari.
Music: Hossein Alizadeh.
Sound: Mojtaba Mirtahmasb.

Still Photographer: Mohammad Ahmadi.
Cast: Abbas Sayyahi, Mohammad-Hassan Karami, Abdollah Jahanpour, Tahmineh Jahanpour, Maryam Jahanpour, Marziyeh Jahanpour, Zahra Jahanpour, Afrasiab Jahanpour.
1997, Colour, 35 mm, 8 mins.

Dar (The Door)
Scriptwriter and Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
Editor: Maysam Makhmalbaf.
Director of Photography: Mohammad Ahmadi.
Sound: Neyam Kiaee.
Cast: Mohammad Nabhan, Nourieh Mahigiran.
Producer: Kish Island.
1999 (Part of *Kish Tales*), Colour, 35 mm.

Test-e Demokrasi (Testing Democracy)
Directors: Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Shahabeddin Farokhyar.
Assistant Director: Najmeddin Farokhyar.
Sound: Behrouz Shahamat, Hassan Serajiyau.
Still Photographer: Mohsen Rastani.
Producer: Kish Isand.
2000, Colour, Video, 40 mins.

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