

Representation of Women in Persian Visual Media: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract – The content of media products is not only a subject of sociocultural analysis, but also a battleground for symbolic meanings of representation, including the symbolic meanings of gender. The representation of gender, particularly of women, in mass media has been a topic for academic research since the late 1960s. Media products have been taken as a site where the position of women and the conceptions towards gender in society can be studied and analyzed. Language plays a significant role in the study of the representation of women, as well as the power relations within the society, which are manifested by the discourse in the media. However, there has not been enough research regarding the representation of women in Iranian media. The main purpose of the current study was to identify how Iranian visual media depict women's expanding social roles on contemporary trends. For the purpose of this study, 3 Iranian films were selected as the sample based on their female-centered themes. The analytic method adopted for the analysis of the verbal and written texts was based primarily on Foucault's discursive approach. The results indicated that the representation of women in the visual media in Iran was still stereotypical and subordinate to their male counterparts; however, there were signs of women's expanding social roles by the way they are depicted in the studied form of media.

Keywords: media, discourse analysis, representation of women

1. INTRODUCTION

The representation of gender, particularly women, in the mass media has been a topic for academic research since the late 1970s (e.g., Courtney & Whipple, 1983, Katzman, 1972, Tuchman, 1978). Print and visual advertisements, women's and men's magazines, newspaper contents, movies, television coverage in different genres like soap operas, family series, talk shows, and films, all provide materials for the analysis of gender representation from various theoretical and methodological perspectives. Media products have been used as a site where the position of women and the ideas about gender in different societies can be studied and analyzed. However, generally speaking, the study of media has been largely neglected by researchers. Reviewing some available studies in the field of media and social theories (i.e., Curran & Park 2000; Garnham 2000; Özcan, 2009) shows that they attempt to use sociological and communication approaches to understand the effects of mass media and the society on each other.

In the field of TEFL, there have been many books and studies on the structure of the language, the surface of it, and how it can be thought. Those forms of research usually follow the structuralism approach of linguistics and therefore, teaching. With their focus on the grammatical and formal structures of the language, those can be guidelines to better ways of teaching the form. However, when it comes to the use of language, what can be said and cannot be said in a certain situation, and how are these unwritten rules formed and how can they be detected? That is where discourse analysis, and studies related to it, can be of great help. This study focuses on discourse analysis, and it can help to understand the underlying mechanisms of language better. Therefore, two research questions of the study are:

1. How are females represented in the modern Persian visual media?
2. How does this representation relate to the different political affiliations and sociocultural standpoints of the Iranian society?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is no denying the significant role of women in every aspect of modern life, the long list of unjust treatment they receive seems never-ending. There have been many movements in order to improve the women's situation in economic, political, cultural, and social aspects. In this attempt, the mass media have an essential role reporting wrongdoings as well as influencing public opinion, cause social change and highlighting positive movements or changes. One can witness the outline of values in a society through the looking glass of its mass media and communication. The way subjects dealing with women are treated largely indicated the prevailing attitude of the society towards women. In this regard, the constant developments in communication have made way for new opportunities of hastening and enhancing the media representation of women. However, if it remains unsupervised and unrestrained, this revolution will even slow down the process and it will have unfavorable effects on the lives of women. Hence, it is worthwhile to understand the way in which women are reflected in the print and visual media in the country and the subsequent influence of this portrayal on the viewer's perception and the empowerment of women in the society.

2.1. Language

Language can be defined as the main medium with which humans communicate. However, this is the most basic form of definition one can provide to define the term. For example; it makes it possible for the researchers to write the present study and for others to read and understand its meaning. However, the fascinating thing is the process of how different meanings are shaped through the usage of language. Language operates as a representational system, which includes signs and symbols (Hall, 1997, p. 1). This definition provides a good insight on language in general, and why it is important.

Therefore, it can be said that language, as the final product, does not belong to the person who is using it to convey the meaning, or the person who is inferring the conveyed

meaning. It is merely a common ground “in which the production of meaning through language—that is, representation—takes place” (Hall, 1997, p. 10).

In analyzing a text and the meaning its language represents, or tries to represent, there are two main approaches. The first is identified as Saussure’s semiotic approach and the second is Foucault’s discursive approach (Hall, 1997, p. 15). The second approach is reflected upon in more detail regarding its importance for this study.

2.2. Discourse and Foucault’s Approach

The discursive approach is not focused as much on the semiotics, language side of things. Instead, it pays attention to the construction of comprehension and meaning. This approach owes its existence to Michel Foucault for the most part, and is essentially different from Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic approach (Hall, 1997, p. 16). Discourse covers a wider range of concepts in comparison to semiotic approach because it attempts to take elements like power into account, and studies the connection between the formed meaning and the inferred meaning, in the context of history and historical events (Hall, 1997, p. 51). Discourse itself is a very complicated notion with numerous definitions. However, there is a definition by Hall (1997), which may help grasping the idea of discourse, and therefore, the discursive approach. In the sense that it is not all about examining the words and surface structures, but their underlying functions: “Since we can only have knowledge of things if they have a meaning, it is discourse—not the things-in-themselves—which produces knowledge. Subjects like madness, punishment and lives “only exist meaningfully within the discourses about them” (Hall, 1997, p. 45).

2.3. Gender and Representation of Gender

Gender can be defined in two ways: gender in biological view and in social or cultural view. Gayle Rubin (1975) believes that gender as a whole concept, is consisted of two parts; sex and gender, and the social aspect and meaning of gender, adds to the biological concept of gender, and together they form the complete idea of gender. Here is where the concept of “Power” comes to attention, since it has an essential role in the gender system and concept. In this system, male, is the dominant and the “normal” form, which makes the female the inferior gender (Månsson, 2010; Miegel & Johansson, 2002). Gender theory states that the qualities and traits that we deem feminine or masculine are the result of social contexts, and these ideas and concepts are subject to change during time. The woman is always the one who needs to be rescued, while the man always rescues others, especially women (Bell et al., 1995). In this study, the important concept concerning is the socially constructed aspect of gender.

Kitch (1997) made a generalization of previous academic works done in this area and stated that there are four major categories of scholarship: (1) the stereotypes approach in which researchers look at how images of women are stereotyped in the media and contend that such images reflect real options for women; (2) the search for alternative mass-media representations of women and womanhood images of unusual women inside and outside

mainstream media; (3) examinations of the function of media imagery within cultural and political ideology; and (4) semiotic analysis of media representations of women as texts.

According to the considerable amount of research on this topic the problem with the representation of women in the media is not only that they are misrepresented but that they are also not represented enough in the media, the phenomenon which Tuchman (1978) calls the symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media.

The studies conducted on American films show how women have been portrayed traditionally and what has changed during the years, as well as what has not changed (Benshoff & Griffin 2004).

The literature on women and visual media is rather broad and is focused on a diverse range of visual media forms, from prime-time television shows, to movies, animations, music, video games and the newest forms of media such as internet have been under the microscope during the past. However, movies have not been investigated as much as television programs, or advertisements, whereas there has been a significant growth in research focused on movies (Carter & Steiner, 2004; Gauntlett, 2008). Moreover, an extensive variety of methods have been utilized in these studies; nevertheless, the most regular methods used are the quantitative methods and discourse analysis (Carter & Steiner 2004; Collins, 2011; Gauntlett, 2008; Rudy et al., 2010).

2.4. Representation of Women in Middle Eastern and Iranian Visual Media

During the recent years, few researchers have concentrated on visual media demonstrations of Muslim and Middle Eastern women (Akram, 2002; Ali Muscati, 2002; Merskin, 2004; Wilkins & Downing, 2002). Since the Middle Eastern region is the subject of media's attention, especially after the attack of September 11th 2001 which made the world to wake up and realize the fact that the affairs around the world, can have an impact on the other parts. The date is considered by many professionals to be one that has put its mark on the world of media and media coverage, and consequently on the opinions of viewers. Therefore, most of the above-mentioned studies mostly focus on the western media's representations of Muslim and Middle Eastern women, especially after the attacks of September 11. For example, Akram believes that the western media try to demonize the Middle Eastern people, and that this demonization started even before the September 11 attacks. He mentions, "It can be traced to deliberate myth making by film and visual media stereotyping as part of conscious strategy of 'experts.' and polemicists on the Middle East, the selling of a foreign policy agenda by US government officials and groups seeking to affect that agenda, and a public susceptible to images identifying the unwelcome 'other' in its midst" (p. 61). Similarly, Naomi Sakr (2008) argues that in fact, media's concentration on women's problems started long before September 11th 2001. She believes it was a result of a remarkable transformation in the Middle Eastern media itself, which has been happening from a decade before September 11th and allowed women and their advocates' opinions, to be heard more than before.

According to a study carried out in 2005 by the Global Media Monitoring Project, which studied a few countries including the Middle East, "only 21% of news subjects—the people who

are interviewed or whom the news is about—are female. However, there has been an increase since 1995, when 17% of those heard and seen in the news were women” (Al-Ariqi, 2009). The report puts the results in these words: “The world we see in the news is a world in which women are virtually invisible.” The condition continues to be dreadful in the first five years of 2000s. The ratio of females seen or heard in the news to males is one to five.

When searching for previous research from Iran focusing on gender and movies, very few works can be found. A number of important films directed by celebrated Iranian directors were examined by Sadr (2006), regarding their themes, motifs, and portrayals, which can be used as indicators of the political and social context and backgrounds of their time. As per Iranian pre-revolution cinema, a study was conducted by Ejlali (2005), which puts every single Iranian movie since the beginning of movie making in the country until the revolution under investigation, and studies the form and underlying concepts of them. He analyzes the Iranian movies during the changes throughout history and emphasizes on the constancy of Iranian culture and society, which according to him, has gone through few alterations through the time under investigation. He makes the point that movies can be the mirror of specific social and ideological meanings and receptions for spectators in each particular point in time. He has reflected on cultural factors and the changes in social status and norms. He attempted to explore the content of those movies giving most of his attention to ideological and cultural identity of Iranian society.

Nafici (1995) on the other hand, studied the Iranian film industry under the Islamic republic. He argued that the Iranian cinema has been under the influence of Islamic values after the revolution. He divided the Iranian cinema of the period into two categories. The first one is the mainstream cinema, which portrayed post-revolutionary ethics and ideas through its storylines, topics, portrayals, human relationships and representations of women, and the other one is the artistic, deep, and intellectual cinema, which takes on those ideals and attempts to analyze and even pass judgment on the social situation under the Islamic government. He makes the observation that starting from a decade after revolution, women’s illustrations on the screen has seen increasingly leading, powerful characters and the amount of dynamic women professionals who work in the film industry behind has been much more than before.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Materials

The images of females illustrated in Persian visual media are the main concern of the study. Therefore, from the whole universe of visuals depicting gender in Persian visual media, a sufficient sample needs to be drawn to explore the field and to see how females are visually and verbally depicted in different media available on the Iranian media market. For the purpose of this study, the researchers chose three Persian films. The selected films are *Sara* (1993), *Two Women* (1999), and *A Separation* (2011). These three films are selected as examples of visual media in Persian language, with themes related to women’s issues. As per answering the question of what is the rationale behind choosing these particular movies, three points can be made. The first is the theme of the movies, which are all women-centered or related to women’s

issues. Secondly and more importantly, the selected movies are from the best-selling as well as award-winning and celebrated films of their time, and have been well-received by both the public and the film critics. And thirdly, the films represent three different eras in the Iranian Post-Revolution history; *Sara* (1993) was made during the postwar period, commonly known as the Reconstruction period, *Two Women* (1999) in the period known as the Reform era, and *A Separation* in middle of the Fundamentalism, or Principalism era. This criteria, also makes them suitable representatives of their period.

3.2. Procedure

The present research is qualitative in its nature and it could be considered as a descriptive analytical study attempting to analyze the films in relation to their portrayal of women within the framework generated through the study.

The researchers carefully watched each selected theatrical release (film) back and forth. The researchers did not fully transcribe the films, since the focus of the study was on the sentences, which showed the themes and ideas of interest in the present study. Therefore, only those sentences were carefully, and not randomly, selected and transcribed so that the researchers can read over the verbal texts, dig deep into the data, and then describe and interpret. The external validity of the research may be put into question, taking into account that the samples are not selected randomly; rather the researchers chose the scenes and dialogues that she deemed related to the study, which depicted women in some form, therefore, could be considered as gender representation. It is possible that if other researchers choose to replicate the present study, they decide to use different scenes. However, our research does not jeopardize the ecological validity, since the movies are constant and do not change their behavior due to us observing (Bryman, 2008).

The transcriptions were done in Persian and then translated into English in a way that the text, forms, and meanings will remain as close as possible to their original Persian counterparts. Because the study aims to reveal the discursive construction of women, special attention will be paid to their speech styles and contents, interactions between the female and male, and discourses pertaining to themes about women's rights, social status, and roles. For the multimodal analysis, the researcher tried to describe the television and film texts as truthful as possible and based the analysis on them. Then, the transcriptions were analyzed based on their linguistic and social features in relation together to form the meaning.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The Movie *Sara*

Released in 1993, *Sara* is a movie about a housewife who is oppressed both by the society and her husband. Sara, the main character of the movie, is a beautiful and educated woman who is in love with her husband. She seems to be the filmmaker's depiction of a perfect, noble, appropriate wife, who has all the qualities that can be asked for in a wife. She is shown to be a perfect combination of modernity and traditional values, which however, remains

unappreciated by her husband. She dresses herself with Chador, which bears highly ideological implications. She is mostly shown carrying shopping bags, doing the house chores, or serving food to her family, or attending to their other wishes, all of these are culturally and traditionally accepted roles for women.

Hesam is Sara's husband, who has been ill for a long time, and as he is getting better, he is moving ahead in his professional life. He sometimes seems to be torn between traditional and modern values of society regarding his wife, but nonetheless he remains a demanding, husband who expects a lot from his wife without doing much in return.

Goshtasb is Hesam's colleague. He has a more or less friendly relationship with him, but not very close. He does not seem treating or a source of trouble at the beginning. But as the events unfold, he starts to show another side.

4.1.1 Themes and Analysis

The themes concerning Sara are again hegemony, inequality of women in the society, under appreciation or overlooking women, seeing women as only suitable for performing traditional roles, and expecting much else from them, and the male- dominant, yet loving relationship. Sara is, and feels, ignored throughout her life; and regarding the fact that she loves her husband, the overlooking becomes more unbearable for her. Her ideas were not heard, and her identity has not been recognized. The marginalization imposed on her by the society is manifested through her own words in this monologue:

Sara (to Hesam): It's been four or five years that we haven't spoken a single serious word...I am oppressed Hesam, do you understand that? First my father, then you. None of you counted me in as a human being... in my father's house I should have said everything he said. If I had an opinion of my own, I had to just shut my mouth and said nothing. Dad didn't like anyone who had a different opinion than him. Then all of a sudden, I was thrown into this house with you. Here I was again the miserable little lady who could say nothing and should be put right and learn to shut up.

In this scene, in Sara's words, it is shown that different men have denied her rights in her life. The traditional belief that the man should make the decisions and the woman should follow them, is an underlying theme hidden in the words. Words like *shut up* and *shut her mouth*, are offensive words in nature, and they show that she takes this prevention of her speaking her mind was a kind of insult to her identity as human being. In addition, the word *lady*, although is usually considered a polite word for referring to women, here is used to show the limitations the society and traditional beliefs attach to this word, and what unjust actions must be endured and come with being a lady. The words *thrown*, and *all of a sudden*, manifest the forced and somehow clueless marriage imposed on Sara, and implicitly show that it may not have been her decision, but rather her father's, Hesam, or others. Despite the sentences declarative nature and appearance, she is trying to get Hesam's sympathy or agreement. Therefore, Hesam still has the dominant role in the conversation, even though he utters fewer words.

Another theme present throughout the movie, is the inequality for women, and that male and masculine values are pre-determined, and appreciated far more than the female and feminine ones. An example can be seen as Sara utters this line to her female friend, Sima:

Sara: Most nights I just imprison myself in this room and just sew. The more you sew the more money you get. You can finish a three-day job in one day! You just have to sew and sew and sew. Sima you don't know how it feels to make money out of my sweat and hard work! Just like a man!

Explicitly, Sara mentions that making money is something that exclusively and typically belongs to men, and that she feels great that she can be their equal now that she is working and earning money. Implicitly, it can be inferred that is not yet equal to men, since the jobs available for women, usually do not pay as much as those available for men. She just has to *sew and sew and sew*, and finish a three- day job in one, in order to be paid enough.

Traditional definitions of a proper woman and wife, and that the majority of society accepts them, are a present theme throughout the movie. In the following scene, Sara and Sima are in the kitchen, and Hesam joins them and ask for something to drink:

Hesam: God it's so damn hot! Sara give me something to drink for God's sake

He expects his wife to prepare something to ease the hotness of weather, and to help his thirst. The sentence is imperative, which shows again that he reserves the right to demand things because it his right as a husband, and this is accepted as a fact by the society. A few minutes later when everything is ready and Sara is serving them:

Sima: See what your wife has done! She has done a marvelous job!

Hesam: Yeah that's the only luck I have had in my life!

Here, Hesam states that he accepts the traditional definition of a proper wife, who should be able to serve her husband and the guests perfectly. The sentences are exclamatory and the imply evaluation of Sara through her housewife duties, by both Hesam and Sima. Even Sara is shown content from the compliment, which further demonstrates that these frames and definitions are accepted by the society, even females. Using the word luck here shows that Hesam deems the quality of being a perfect servant to the guests as a positive one, and he regards it as his fortune.

4.2. The Movie *Two Women*

Released in 1999, *Two Women* is the story of Fereshteh, the main character in the movie, a girl from a traditional family who comes to Tehran after being accepted in the university entrance exam. She is shown to be an independent, smart, and kind woman, while being feminine and

believing in family values. She tries to defeat the hegemonic situation of the society and thrive against all odds. However, with the people and the society surrounding her, she cannot do much. In the end, despite her potential; she is a failure, although she has hope for the future.

Roya is Fereshteh's best friend and private pupil at the beginning, which is independent and smart, although not as much as Fereshteh. Her family is wealthy unlike Fereshteh's family and the two have strong relationship. However, she is eventually shown to be much more successful since she has better luck with the society, her family, her marriage and husband.

Ahmad is Fereshteh's controlling husband who largely restricts her and stops her from achieving her goals. He is the symbol of the male – dominant ideology that does not recognize women's individual identity, apart from her husband or family, and tries to control her.

4.2.1 Themes and Analysis

The themes concerning Fereshteh are hegemony, marginalization of women, and the male-dominant, love-free relationship. Fereshteh is forced to obey her husband in different situation and she has to answer to him for her actions, which is an unbearable thing to do for a woman like her. An example can be seen in the following dialogue:

Ahmad: Who were you talking to?
Fereshteh: Roya
Ahmad: You're lying!
Fereshteh: Lying? What does that mean?
Ahmad: You SHOULD tell me who you were talking to!
Fereshteh: I just did! You can believe it or not.
Ahmad: You have no right to talk to me with that tone!

In the above scene, Ahmad believes that the fact that he is a man and a husband gives him the right to talk with any tone, and ask any questions and expecting answers. This is while he does not give the same rights to his wife. The number of the sentences he utters shows Ahmad's dominant role in the dialogue. He produces 28 sentences, almost as twice the number of Fereshteh's sentences, which are only 15. His sentences are interrogative, and imperative. Which again implies the right that he preserves for himself as the husband, to demand answers from his wife.

Ahmad manifests another example of such marginalization, in the following dialogue:

Ahmad: You can't step a foot outside of this house! I won't allow you.

Here, he preserves the right to allow his wife to go out of the house for himself, and tries to control her. The words and phrases step a foot, can't, and allow, show this kind of controlling, self-righteous tone.

The concept that women are marginalized and are not heard as much as their male counterparts is present throughout the movie. An example can be the following scene in the court, while Fereshteh is trying to prove to the judge that she has been treated unfairly.

Fereshteh: Your honor please look at me, I'm a human being, I want to live like a human being...how could you think that a man who doesn't pay alimony is a bad one, but a man who insults my humanity, who diminishes my identity, is not?

She tries to use an imperative to get the judge's attention, which shows that she does not have his attention to begin with. Then at the end, she uses a rhetorical question, in order to get the judge's agreement, in a matter that seems obvious but is neglected, perhaps deliberately. In this scene, she tries to explain that she has been treated unfairly as a human being, not just as a woman who does not get money from her husband. Of course, her plea does not get her any results, which is meant to further demonstrate that the women's voices and true wishes are not heard.

4.3. The Movie *A Separation*

Released in 2011 and recognized world-wide as a cinematic achievement, the movie has strong and complex characters in its center. Simin is a modern woman living in modern Tehran with her husband and only child, Termeh. She is a modern woman with modern beliefs; however, she has learned to be compromising in dealing with the society who does not recognize her rights as a woman. She sees her only way out is to leave the country, but she loves her daughter and husband, so she tries to pursue her husband to leave with her. When he disagrees, she files for divorce, which in the movie is shown as more of act of threat to her husband, rather than being her true desire. Particularly the law does not grant her full custody of her daughter in case of their divorce. She is modern woman, but not a fighter.

Nader is a sensible and very responsible man. He takes responsibility for his actions, he believes in moral values, and believes that things should be fixed, rather than left the way they are. He disagrees with his wife, but is also broken inside when she files for divorce. He wants her back, but is too proud, and their subject of disagreement is too important for him, to give in to her demands. He seems to treat women fairly, but when he gets angry he says things that may come as a shock.

Razieh is a woman from the lower class of the society. Her husband is out of job and is greatly aggressive towards her and other, so she does not consult him in most of issues. She is deeply religious and traditional, which makes her very different form, if not the opposite, of Simin. She seems stressful and unhappy most of the time.

Hojjat is Razieh's husband, who is a short-tempered, violent and rude, and strictly religious man. His unemployment has made his mental situation and behavior worse than before, and he shows more hostility towards his wife.

4.3.1 Themes and Analysis

The themes concerning women in movie can be pointed out as the contrast between the ways they are treated, as well as the contrast in their beliefs and dealing with situations. Even Nader and Simin, who seem to be from a similar social class and school of thought, have fundamental disagreements regarding important issues. Another theme is how women are faced a battle

between them and their ideas, and the dominant ideas and discourses governing the society, and that the women are bound to lose. An example of such claim is seen at the beginning of the movie, in the court:

Simin: What do you mean small issue? My problem isn't small, it's about my daughter!

Judge: I am the judge here, and what I see is that you have a small issue.

In the aforementioned dialogue, the judge is the representative of the dominant cultural and ideological beliefs in the society, and Simin has no power to resist them or turn them back. She cannot gain the full custody of her child, and the society along with the superior powers, support her husband and not her. He uses the declarative sentence 'I am the judge here', in order to show his dominance, and to establish the fact that he knows better and the ability to judge is preserved for him. In the course of the dialogue, a total number of 33 words is uttered by Simin, in comparison with the 45 uttered by the judge, which again, can show the dominant party in the conversation.

Although Nader is a modern, moral, and rational man, sometimes he seems to show signs of the male- dominant culture he was raised in. In one scene, he is arguing with Simin about Razieh, who has asked them money:

Nader: Who gave you the permission to give her money?

Here, Nader implies that her wife should have *permission* to interfere with the matter. He uses a rhetorical question, which implies that it is a well-accepted fact that permission needs to be asked from him.

An additional theme in the movie is the perception of society, and its behavior towards women. The judgments passed on the women is harsh, and unfair, and this is shown through a dialogue, that Hojjat, says to Termeh's female school teacher, Miss Ghahraei, who has testified in Nader's favor in the manslaughter case which puts Nader against Razieh and Hojjat:

Hojjat (shouting at Miss Ghahraei: I don't have anything else to do...I'm standing in front of this school, day and night, until you come out. Either you go to the court and say that you have lied, or I will figure out what's the deal with you and this lady's husband.

Here, obviously Hojjat is trying to imply that the teacher and Nader are having an affair, or else she would not have defended him or testify in his favor. The term the deal with you and her husband, clearly points to the affair. By this, Hojjat is trying to accuse the teacher of something that cannot be proven wrong, and that is a dangerous accusation for a woman in society, both legally and socially. He makes the accusations at her work place, to even further jeopardize her reputation. As can be seen, Nader is not as shaken or threatened by the accusations, since his position in the society as a man, makes people and the law to go easier

on him regarding the affair. Here, Hojjat uses an imperative structure—either you go to the court—to impose his power on Miss Ghahraei and demand what he wants. However, Miss Ghahraei is said to have gone to the court, and take back her testimony in the following scenes, which shows that she also, has surrendered to the higher power of the society's dominant discourse.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Iranian cinema, as it is the case with any form of social art, has been a mirror image of the social, political, and cultural events in its place of origin, and it has manifested them as well as being influenced by them. The aim of this study was to examine the changes of the representation of women in popular cinema after the revolution.

The present study set out to investigate what visual media and in particular, movies represent about women, and how much that representation is related to the underlying hegemonic, ideologically, historically and culturally dominant ideas in the society.

As per the present study's relevance to TEFL, it can provide a different perspective on language, other than the usual formal and structural studies. That does not mean, obviously, that grammatical and communicative approaches to teaching have different goals; as Widdowson (1979) points out, "both types of syllabus recognize that the learner's goal should be the ability to communicate; rather they differ in their premises about "what needs to be actually taught for this ability to be acquired" (p.248).

Moreover, the ability to understand the mechanisms that shape the meaning, and the mechanisms that shape the form to support that meaning, can be extremely helpful for a language learner and a teacher, therefore, this study aimed to pursue that perspective.

This study has shown how female representation in films can promote particular behavioral patterns as well as demonstrating them. For that reason, it can function as a device to create norms and exercise power.

As for the answer of the first research question, it can be said that despite the significant improvement in the portrayals of women in terms of being truthful and unbiased or indiscriminating, the representation of women in the media is still stereotypical, showing them as passive, subordinate, dependent or unable to decide for themselves. However, demonstration of their problems, injustice towards them, as well as women's struggle to fight them, is a sign of hope for the future. The way women talk in films, or are talked about, has not been changed significantly, but signs of improvement are evident. For instance, in the most recent studied film, *A Separation*, which is made during the 2010s, one of the passive female characters Razieh, stands up to her husband in the end to protect her beliefs, and she succeeds, which can be a sign of change for the better.

To answer the second question, the findings show that the representation of women is heavily influenced by the social norms, and male- dominant beliefs, words like *honor—aberoo—jealousy—gheirat—customs—orf or lady*, bear significance and carry a huge amount of underlying power and ideology implications which impose themselves on the texts, and on

women's lives. In *A Separation*, Hojjat uses words like honor and religion, to prevent his wife from working, although it is not a religious rule for the woman not to work. He does it to prevent himself from looking bad, since he is out of job. Women were marginalized due to the dominant ideological powers hidden behind the words. In earlier movies, women, are categorized into "good woman" who is at home as a housewife or a mother, and "bad woman" who is working outside and probably single. It can be a policy to restore women to the private area. However, in the recent film, the lines between the two were more distorted and blurred, and definitions were not as cut-clear as before.

The present study was faced with the limitation of the lack any reliable source to compare the views form the researcher with. Although as mentioned in chapter three, this research is a qualitative one, and being subjective is one the inevitable parts of a descriptive and qualitative approach, it is always faced with the risk of the researcher's opinion to be not reliable enough. If a reliable outside source was available to get the information from, this limitation would decrease to a great degree.

In addition, since the study attempted to use the English translations of the sentences uttered in the movies in the present text, she had to translate them themselves. That was due to the fact that the films were not officially translated in English, and the translations found on the World Wide Web could not be trusted or relied on by the researcher. Any shortcomings resulted from the translation of the sentences in therefore through this limitation.

The current study focused on the representation of women in visual media through discourse analysis, further research could concentrate on other forms of media, such as print media, or other forms of visual media, such as prime- time TV shows, soap operas, advertisements, and so on. Moreover, future studies can focus on other groups of society and their depiction in the media, such as minorities, ethnical groups, a specific age group, and so on. further studies can be carried out in different social and cultural contexts, and study the effect of different ideologies present in those contexts on the representations of the media. Depending on the geographical, historical, and other differences, the factors could be changed to Christianity, capitalism, or other ideological factors, or even political situations in a certain point of time. Moreover, it might be even more desirable to study a larger number of films, and have a larger pool of data to choose and reflect upon. It would probably make generalization and conclusions more reliable, and far easier. In addition, a comparative research could be carried out between media representations from two or more different languages or cultural backgrounds, and different countries; it would make a basis for comparison and for discovering the differences and similarities in their discourses regarding a certain subject.

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