

REPRESENTATION OF THE LOWER CLASS IN IRANIAN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATION OF THE LOWER CLASS IN IRANIAN CINEMA

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This study analyzes the representation of the lower class in the selected Iranian films produced by some of the most prominent Iranian filmmakers. It argues that there is a shift in the representation of the lower class throughout time in a way that, in recent films produced by filmmakers who have social concerns, they have been represented in a pessimistic point of view, showing them as culturally and physically isolated with no hope of improving their living circumstances. Considering the economic and sociopolitical changes in Iran, the living conditions of the people have also been affected. As the filmmakers who choose poverty as one of the main themes of their films try to reflect aspects of the realities in the society, by analyzing the representation of the lower class in selected Iranian films, this thesis attempts to show how these changes have affected the living conditions of the poor. To this end, a qualitative approach was used to carry out the research. First, a thematic analysis was done to identify the ways class relations and space have been used to portray the poor. Second, a visual analysis was carried out to illustrate how the lower class have been visually represented within the identified themes. It was concluded that besides being physically and culturally isolated, the poor are represented as sophisticated

people, who, unlike the older representations, can make immoral choices and are doomed to suffer from poverty for the rest of their lives.

Keywords: Representation, Iranian Cinema, Lower class, Poverty.



ÖZ

İRAN SINEMASINDA ALT SINIFIN TEMSİLİ

Bonyadi Babae, Minoo

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Kültürel Çalışmalar Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, en önde gelen İranlı film yapımcılarından bazılarının ürettiği seçilmiş İran filmlerinde alt sınıfın temsilini analiz etmektedir. Alt sınıfın temsilinde zaman içinde bir değişim olduğunu, sosyal kaygıları olan film yapımcıları tarafından üretilen son filmlerde, alt sınıfın kötümser bir bakış açısıyla temsil edildiğini, yaşam koşullarını iyileştirme umudu olmadan kültürel ve fiziksel olarak izole edildiğini savunmaktadır. İran'daki ekonomik ve sosyopolitik değişiklikler göz önüne alındığında, insanların yaşam koşulları da etkilenmiştir. Filmlerinin ana temalarından biri olarak yoksulluğu seçen film yapımcıları, toplumdaki gerçekliklerin yönlerini yansıtmaya çalışırken, seçilmiş İran filmlerinde alt sınıfın temsilini analiz ederek, bu tez bu değişikliklerin yoksulların yaşam koşullarını nasıl etkilediğini göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Bu amaçla, araştırmayı yürütmek için nitel bir yaklaşım kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak, sınıf ilişkilerinin ve mekanın yoksulları tasvir etmek için kullanılma biçimlerini belirlemek için tematik bir analiz yapılmıştır. İkinci olarak, alt sınıfın belirlenen temalar içinde görsel olarak nasıl temsil edildiğini göstermek için görsel bir analiz yapılmıştır. Yoksulların, fiziksel ve kültürel olarak izole olmalarının yanı sıra, daha eski temsillerden farklı olarak ahlaksız seçimler yapabilen ve yaşamlarının

geri kalanında yoksulluk çekmeye mahkûm, gelişmiş insanlar olarak temsil edildiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Temsil, İran Sineması, Alt Sınıf, Yoksulluk.





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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG)



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

One of the most important ways to examine social changes and developments is to study the cultural products of a society, such as music and visual arts. Among other forms of media, cinema is considered to be more influential due to its ability to represent audio and visual elements that can create and reproduce cultural signs. Cinema is not only a reflection of social structures but is an influential medium for shaping cultural perceptions and addressing sociocultural issues. It is a field where power relations, class dynamics, and sociocultural norms are negotiated (Bourdieu, 1993). Moreover, it captures the complexities of social dynamics, portraying marginalized groups and sociocultural inequalities such as poverty and class relations.

Iranian cinema, especially after the revolution, has long been recognized for its critical examination of social issues through the use of a neorealist style, portraying poverty and class inequalities to challenge dominant narratives. These films, which are broadly referred to as “social films,” tackle social issues, including poverty, the gender gap, addiction, and other social issues. Periods of change and social upheaval often lead to the emergence of highly creative filmmakers and cinematic movements, which suggests that the 1979 revolution in Iran, along with its precursor events, likely contributed to the development of a new wave of cinema featuring a distinct industrial and financial framework along with its own unique ideological, thematic, and production characteristics. That’s why during the last decades, the socio-cultural space of Iranian society has been exposed to profound changes. After the Islamic Revolution, population growth, social mobility, and urbanization growth,

transformed the social system of Iran; so that the form and class relations in the current Iranian society have changed from a few decades ago in terms of formality, internal divisions, and current relations (Fouzi & Ramazani, 2009). Accordingly, it can be claimed that in the social space of Iranian society, in parallel with the expansion of urbanization, urban relations have been formed, and other long-standing conflicts such as landlord-peasant have not had much of a place in the center of class and strata relations of Iranian society (according to statistics from the National Center for Statistics of Iran, the rate of urban population is approximately seventy percent compared to the rate of urbanization of 47 percent in 1976). In addition, in line with the emerging developments in the context of Iranian society, relations and class conflicts have also taken on a different form and content.

Iranian directors have employed minimalist aesthetics, location shooting, and non-professional actors to construct authentic portrayals of poverty and class inequalities (Rahimieh, 2015; Sadr, 2006). Iranian cinema is uniquely positioned within world cinema as a site of both resistance and compliance with state ideologies, navigating the complexities of censorship while addressing themes of socioeconomic struggle (Naficy, 2011). Given the socioeconomic situation of Iranian society marked by economic sanctions, films play a significant role in criticizing poverty.

As Iranian society has been going through economic, social and political changes after the revolution, so have its films changed in the portrayal of the society, specifically in addressing class relations and poverty. The present study aims to find out how some of the films produced by a number of the most prominent Iranian filmmakers have reflected these changes concerning the representation of the poor to provide a nuanced portrayal of the lower class in Iranian society and their everyday lives. This study argues that there has been a shift in the portrayal of the poor in a way that, by the time, since 1997 until present, the poor have been represented from a more pessimistic point of view, showcasing that not only are they marginalized physically and culturally, but they also lack any means to improve their lives. In other words, it argues that, unlike earlier films, recently produced films represent the lower class as people who have no way to improve their living circumstances and poverty seems to be always a part of their lives. By integrating these perspectives,

the research seeks to uncover how films not only reflect but also shape societal understandings of poverty, revealing the ways in which economic disparities are visually and narratively constructed. For this purpose, a number of Iranian films produced by some of the prominent filmmakers were textually and visually analyzed to identify the prominent themes and pinpoint similarities and differences among them. Therefore, the present thesis aims to answer the following research questions.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How is poverty depicted in Iranian cinema, particularly in relation to social and spatial relations?
2. What themes and cinematic techniques are employed to convey class hierarchies and cultural divides?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The present study is significant for several reasons. To begin with, cinema and film have the ability to mediate our understanding of society and its developments and as a socio-cultural element can take us to the depths of our social life and provide a relatively deep understanding of the situation of these reflected groups and their contemporary social conditions in society. For this reason, this study would provide a view of the lives of the Iranian lower class after the Islamic revolution to highlight that poverty is not merely an economic condition but also has profound cultural and social dimensions.

Furthermore, while poverty is a global issue, its representation in Iranian cinema is unique due to censorship laws, cultural narratives, and socio-political transformations. Unlike many cinematic traditions that explicitly critique economic disparities, Iranian filmmakers often rely on symbolism, allegory, and spatial storytelling to navigate restrictions while addressing issues of class struggle and marginalization. Therefore, this research sheds light on how filmmakers navigate state-imposed restrictions while portraying the struggles of the lower class by using cinematic techniques.

In addition, studies that focus on the portrayal of the lower class in Iranian cinema are relatively rare, despite the significant role that poverty, class struggles, and economic marginalization play in Iranian society. While scholarly attention has been given to themes such as gender, politics, and censorship in Iranian cinema, the representation of the lower class remains an underexplored yet critical area of study. Moreover, by analyzing *mise-en-scène*, spatial hierarchies, and cinematic narratives, this study explores how poverty is visually constructed and the ways in which it intersects with social exclusion, morality, and resistance. Given that existing research on Iranian cinema has largely focused on the middle class, this study fills a critical gap by centering the experiences of the economically marginalized and examining how poverty has been framed over the past three decades. Moreover, it is important to note that most of the literature on the representation of poverty and classes in Iranian cinema is written in Persian and is published in Iranian journals in Iran. These studies mostly focus on the middle class and are characterized by limited criticism of the system causing economic hardships to specific groups of people (for being able to get published and avoid security concerns) and mainly focus on only globally well-known Iranian films. In addition, the studies have predominantly focused on language and discourse, often employing textual and narrative analysis by exploring dialogues, and character interactions conveyed through speech and storytelling, rather than engaging with the visual aspects of film. In the present research, different sections of these studies were translated and discussed throughout the chapters. Moreover, the majority of the existing texts available in English about Iranian cinema are books that have been published in previous decades and provide a general overview of Iranian society and cinema. By addressing this gap in the literature, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Iranian cinema engages with issues of class, poverty, and social injustice adding depth to the literature.

Moreover, this research contributes to broader discussions in film studies, cultural studies, and sociology by demonstrating how cinema serves as both a mirror and a mediator of social reality. It provides insight into how spatial representations of class reinforce or challenge systemic inequalities, making it relevant not only to scholars of Iranian cinema but also to those interested in the relationship between film, society, and power structures.

In this study, after delving into the previous studies on the representation of poverty and social classes in the global and Iranian cinematic context in chapter two, the identified themes extracted from the selected films on the representation of class relations are discussed and analyzed in chapter three. Next, chapter four scrutinizes the ways the lower class has been culturally and physically marginalized in the analyzed Iranian films and lastly, a visual analysis of the selected significant scenes is presented to reveal the visual techniques that have been used by the filmmakers to reinforce the intended themes.

1.4. Methodology Overview

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the representation of poverty, class, and spatial dynamics in some of the Iranian films produced by a number of prominent filmmakers after the revolution. The research investigates how the cinematic narratives of some of the Iranian films that focus on social issues represent poverty and the lower class. The reason why the films produced after the Iranian Revolution are selected is that before the Islamic Revolution, Iranian cinema was largely dominated by Film Farsi, a commercial film industry characterized by melodramatic plots, action sequences, song-and-dance routines, and escapist entertainment. These films were heavily influenced by Hollywood and Bollywood and often lacked serious social or political critique (Naficy, 2011). Moreover, the majority of the films avoided politically sensitive subjects such as poverty, class struggle, and political oppression except for Ebrahim Golestan's *The Brick and the Mirror* (1965) and Masoud Kimiai's *Gheysar* (1969), which introduced themes of moral decay and social justice but remained outside the mainstream (Naficy, 2011). Furthermore, under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, the government encouraged Westernization and modernization, which influenced cinema often depicting Western-style entertainment and glamorous lifestyles at the expense of the representation of the working class. It was only in the 1970s that some directors like Dariush Mehrjui, Sohrab Shahid-Saless, and Bahram Beyzai began challenging the Film Farsi industry with socially conscious films. Nevertheless, after the revolution, Iranian cinema underwent a metamorphosis, adapting to new ideological frameworks and censorship regulations. In this period Western-style commercial films were

banned, and filmmakers had to align with Islamic and revolutionary values, leading to a surge in socially conscious storytelling (Tapper, 2002).

As for the sampling, a non-probability purposive sampling method was adopted to ensure the selection of films that meaningfully engage with the research themes. For this purpose, first, a list of the most renowned Iranian filmmakers and their works produced after the Islamic Revolution was compiled. Each film was reviewed to assess its thematic relevance. Next, films that explicitly addressed issues of poverty and class dynamics were selected based on predetermined criteria, including their thematic focus, and portrayal of socioeconomic structures such as class relations, class encounters and economic marginalization in Iranian society.

A total of twelve films were selected for the analysis. These films provide diverse perspectives on the lived experiences of the economically marginalized, offering insights into how cinematic narratives and visual aesthetics engage with themes of community, class disparity, and spatial distance. Table 1 illustrates the selected filmmakers and their films for the analysis of the present study.

As for the visual analysis, a theoretical sampling was used to select and identify a number of scenes from each film. This method enabled a selection from the scenes that best reflected the themes retrieved in the third and fourth chapters. For this purpose, the screen shot of the scenes from the films were taken and the analysis focused on key *mise-en-scène* elements, including composition and framing, lighting, costume and props, performance (actors' expressions and movement), setting, and specific camera angles by drawing on Nichols's (2010) categorization of *mise-en-scène* elements.

After selecting and analyzing the scenes, a systematic coding process was used to quantify the occurrence of visual elements across the films. Each identified *mise-en-scène* element was categorized and coded based on its frequency of occurrence within the selected scenes. The coded data were then compiled into a frequency table, presenting the number of occurrences and percentage distribution of each visual element across the analyzed films.

Table 1. Selected Filmmakers and their Films

Name of the director	Selected films/ year
Majid Majidi	1. Children of Heaven/1997 2. The Song of Sparrows/2008 3. Sun Children/2020
Asghar Farhadi	1. Fireworks Wednesday/2006 2. A Separation/2011 3. A Hero/2021
Jafar Panahi	1.Crimson Gold/2003
Dariush Mehrjui	1.Mum's Guest/2004
Rakhshān Banietemad	1. The Blue-Veiled/1995 2. Under the Skin of the City/2001
Saeed Roustayi	1. Life and a Day/2016 2. Leila's Brothers/2022

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW ON REPRESENTATIONS OF POVERTY IN GLOBAL AND IRANIAN CINEMA

2.1. Representation of Poverty in Global Cinema

Representation links meaning and language with culture. Representational codes are used to produce text, that is, messages with independent existence. Representations can be based on a text consisting of iconic or symbolic signs and even language or verbal photography (Fiske, 2002). Hall (1997) believes that representation combines meaning and language within a culture, playing a crucial role in how meaning is created and shared among members of a culture. Moreover, he states that the depiction of social class in films is not a simple reflection of reality but rather a complex process of encoding and decoding meaning. Films act as a form of language, using symbols and narratives to represent social class. These representations are not fixed but are constructed through the interplay of cultural codes, audience interpretations, and the filmmaker's intentions. Films can both reproduce and challenge existing stereotypes and ideologies about social class, shaping the way viewers understand and relate to different class identities. The relationship between representation of social class in films, therefore, is a dynamic one, shaped by the cultural and historical context in which the film is produced and consumed. The cultural studies approach to research seeks to examine the politics of representation and therefore the present study is aiming at looking into the ways poverty is represented in the selected Iranian films.

Before delving deep into the representation of poverty in cinema, it is important to understand the way poverty and class have been conceptualized. Poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that has been defined and interpreted in

various ways across disciplines. Traditionally, income-based definitions focus on financial deprivation and the inability to meet basic needs, often measured through poverty lines. However, this approach has been criticized for oversimplifying poverty and ignoring social and structural factors. More recent perspectives recognize poverty as socially constructed, shaped by political, economic, and cultural structures, leading to a multi-dimensional approach that considers factors such as social exclusion and systemic inequalities.

Similarly, the study of class and social stratification in cinema provides a critical lens for analyzing how films reflect and critique societal hierarchies. Drawing from Marxist and Weberian theories, cinematic narratives expose economic and social inequalities through visual storytelling, spatial metaphors, and character dynamics. While Marx emphasizes class struggle based on ownership of production, Bourdieu further extends this by linking class to cultural consumption and social capital.

Given its comprehensive framework, this study adopts the multi-dimensional approach to poverty and Marxist analysis and Bourdieu's approach towards class as the researcher views class as a product of structural inequalities and power relations shaped by capitalism which is socially constructed, moralized, and embedded in cultural narratives

Poverty has long been a recurring theme in global cinema, reflecting how various societies confront economic disparities and social hierarchies. Iconic movements like Italian Neorealism set a benchmark for depicting the struggles of the poor with unflinching realism and profound empathy. Films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Rome, Open City* (1945) employed authentic settings, non-professional actors, and minimalist storytelling to portray the everyday hardships of the working class. These films captured the resilience of individuals facing systemic challenges, creating a universal cinematic language that resonated deeply across cultures.

In modern global cinema, the focus on poverty often shifts to urban contexts, exploring the lives of marginalized communities in sprawling metropolises. For instance, Brazilian films like *City of God* (2002) delve into the intersection of

poverty and crime in favelas (Nagib, 2007), while Indian cinema, exemplified by *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), juxtaposes the harsh realities of poverty with narratives of hope and survival (Dwyer, 2010). Kenyan cinema, with films like *Rafiki* (2018), explores the intersection of economic marginalization and other social challenges, such as LGBTQ+ identity in restrictive cultural contexts (Van de Peer, 2020). Similarly, South Korean films like *Parasite* (2019) provide a darkly satirical lens on class disparity and economic struggles, using visual metaphors and contrasting spatial elements to highlight the stark divide between rich and poor (Cho, 2020).

Clawson (2021) examines the power of visual representation in shaping collective understandings of poverty. The authors highlight how visual imagery (i.e. photographs, documentaries, and film) constructs narratives about poverty through selective framing. The choice of environment, subjects, and perspective often emphasizes emotional responses, which can either humanize or stigmatize the poor (Campbell, 2018). This study underscores the ethical responsibilities of visual media in avoiding exploitative portrayals.

Similarly, cinema often constructs an "Us vs. Them" dynamic to highlight socioeconomic disparities and cultural divides. This binary perspective portrays distinct boundaries between privileged and marginalized groups, emphasizing the tension between inclusion and exclusion. In global cinema, this dynamic is often represented through narrative, character interactions, and spatial contrasts. For instance, South Korean films such as *Parasite* (2019) utilize physical space as a metaphor for class disparity, with the vertical hierarchy of the Kim family's basement home and the Park family's luxurious mansion symbolizing socio-economic segregation (Cho, 2020). Similarly, in Brazilian cinema, *City of God* (2002) contrasts the favelas' chaotic, overcrowded streets with the distant affluent neighbourhoods, emphasizing the marginalization of poverty-stricken communities (Nagib, 2007).

The "Us vs. Them" dynamic is not limited to economic disparities but extends to cultural identity and power dynamics. In postcolonial films like *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), the colonized and colonizers are depicted in stark opposition, with the

Casbah representing the resilience of the oppressed and the European quarters symbolizing colonial authority (Solanas & Getino, 1969). This spatial and cultural divide underscores the broader socio-political struggle, making the "Us vs. Them" dynamic a powerful cinematic tool for addressing inequality and injustice.

Iranian cinema shares similarities with these global representations in its focus on the humanity and resilience of the poor. Nevertheless, it sets itself apart through its unique cultural and narrative intricacies. While movements such as Italian Neorealism often highlight the collective challenges faced by impoverished communities, Iranian films tend to focus more on individual and familial narratives, frequently interweaving these stories with moral and spiritual themes (Naficy, 2011). Additionally, Iranian filmmakers often utilize metaphors and poetic visual elements to express the psychological and emotional burdens associated with poverty, thereby creating a distinctive aesthetic that differentiates their work. At the same time, key differences emerge in the ways Iranian cinema addresses poverty. Unlike many global films that often place poverty in the context of systemic critique or overt political commentary, Iranian cinema frequently explores the intimate and interpersonal dimensions of poverty (Tapper, 2002). Through its restrained narratives and emphasis on everyday life, it captures the struggles of marginalized individuals, often leaving broader socio-political critiques implicit. This subtlety reflects the unique socio-political constraints and cultural contexts within which Iranian filmmakers operate, resulting in a body of work that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.

2.2. Iranian Cinema as Social Commentary

Pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema was characterized by two dominant strands: Film Farsi and the Iranian New Wave. Film Farsi focused on melodramatic and escapist narratives, often portraying poverty superficially as a backdrop for individual moral or romantic struggles. These films presented binary class representations, with poverty tied to virtue and wealth to corruption, and typically lacked critical engagement with systemic issues.

In contrast, the Iranian New Wave introduced social realism, using minimalist aesthetics, non-professional actors, and real locations to authentically depict societal struggles, including poverty. New Wave filmmakers critically examined themes of modernization, rural-urban divides, and systemic inequality while navigating censorship through allegory and symbolism. Films such as *The Cow* (1969) and *Tranquility in the Presence of Others* (1972) offered nuanced portrayals of marginalized communities and systemic critiques of economic and social policies. These innovations laid the groundwork for the socially conscious cinema that emerged after the revolution. The New Wave's engagement with poverty extended beyond rural contexts, increasingly addressing the challenges of urbanization and the displacement of traditional communities. Ebrahim Golestan's *Brick and Mirror* (1965) explored the alienation and moral ambiguities faced by individuals navigating an urbanizing society. These films often depicted poverty not merely as an economic condition but as a symptom of deeper societal ruptures, such as the erosion of communal bonds and the rise of capitalist individualism.

Post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, in particular, marked a significant shift in themes, aesthetic styles, and narrative focus. The 1979 Islamic Revolution ushered in a new era for Iranian cinema. The revolution's socio-political upheaval and its emphasis on cultural authenticity significantly influenced the country's cinematic landscape. Filmmakers began to adopt social realist approaches, focusing on the struggles of ordinary people and engaging with themes such as poverty, inequality, and social justice. This shift was partly driven by state policies encouraging culturally and morally conscious filmmaking, as well as the unique socio-political circumstances of post-revolutionary Iran (Naficy, 2011).

Social realism in Iranian cinema is characterized by its minimalist aesthetic, non-professional actors, and the use of real locations to create an authentic portrayal of societal issues. Films such as *The Runner* (1984) by Amir Naderi and *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987) by Abbas Kiarostami reflect this approach, showcasing the daily struggles of working-class and rural communities. Naderi's *The Runner*, for instance, captures the resilience and aspirations of a young boy living in abject poverty, offering a poignant critique of systemic inequality (Tapper, 2002). These

films not only brought attention to marginalized voices but also aligned Iranian cinema with global movements of social realism, echoing the traditions of Italian Neorealism and Indian Parallel Cinema.

Moreover, the use of children as protagonists in post-revolutionary cinema became a hallmark of social realism. According to Dabashi (2001), this narrative strategy allowed filmmakers to navigate censorship restrictions while addressing sensitive social issues. Films such as *Children of Heaven* (1997) by Majid Majidi employ the innocence and resilience of children to highlight the moral and material challenges faced by impoverished families. This approach humanizes the struggles of poverty and frames it within the broader context of familial and community dynamics.

Nevertheless, especially after the revolution, censorship has always been a barrier in representation of social realities in Iranian cinema. Filmmakers are required to comply with strict regulations designed to align their work with Islamic values, cultural norms, and state ideology. Overseen by entities like the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) and its Cinema Organization of Iran, censorship begins at the scriptwriting stage, where content is scrutinized for compliance with approved themes. Directors and producers must obtain production licenses, and their completed films undergo further evaluation before public screening is permitted. This multi-tiered process ensures that no work overtly challenges the state's narrative or religious principles.

Historically, censorship in Iranian cinema has evolved alongside the nation's political changes. During the pre-revolutionary period, censorship focused on suppressing anti-monarchy sentiments and promoting secular modernization. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the focus shifted toward enforcing Islamic values and restricting content perceived as morally or ideologically inappropriate. Ahmadgoli and Yazdanjoo (2020) note that these shifts have compelled filmmakers to develop sophisticated narrative techniques to navigate the changing landscape, turning restrictions into opportunities for creative innovation.

Organizations like the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for Public Screening Licenses reinforce these censorship practices by setting

ideological and cultural guidelines. These bodies ensure that films align with broader state policies and reflect the values of the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), which oversees television and radio, extends censorship beyond the silver screen by regulating the broadcast of films. Collectively, these institutions act as gatekeepers, closely monitoring all stages of production and distribution to maintain cultural conformity.

The implementation of censorship has shaped both the content and the form of Iranian cinema. Filmmakers are discouraged from explicitly addressing topics such as political dissent, religious critique, or sexuality. To navigate these constraints, directors employ creative techniques, including symbolism, metaphor, and layered storytelling, to address sensitive subjects indirectly. However, some directors refuse to comply with the censorship rules resulting in a ban on being broadcasted in Iran. For example, *Leila's Brothers* (2022), directed by Roustaei, was banned in Iran primarily due to its critical depiction of socio-economic struggles and political themes that the Iranian authorities found problematic. Other films, such as Jafar Panahi's and Mohammad Rasoulof's works, have faced similar restrictions for their critical perspectives on Iranian society. This underscores the political sensitivity of poverty in Iranian cinema, making its portrayal a vital lens for understanding both social struggles and the limits of artistic expression.

2.3. Impact of Political and Economic Changes on Cinematic Themes

Political and economic changes in Iran have profoundly influenced the themes and representations of poverty in Iranian cinema. Indeed, poverty is a complicated issue in Iran, not because the country is not prepared for development but because poverty is one of the grounds on which the current regime has been built on. The lower class in Iran is considered one of the most influential classes in contemporary history. This class played an effective role in the Islamic revolution to the extent that some people even called the Islamic revolution the revolution of the deprived. Iran's leader himself attributed inequality and wealth accumulation to tyrants and preferred the poor to the wealthy. In other words, being poor in the first decade of the revolution not only was not a bad quality but a preferred one. This situation was aggravated

during the Iran-Iraq war as qualities like a simple lifestyle and being less engaged with money and status were the qualities that were glorified. After the revolution, the lower class still supported the discourse of ideological traditionalism; however, with the Iran-Iraq war ending, Iran started falling into the process of modernization and as a result, the social status of this class was affected and gradually the discourse on poverty in politics changed and wealth turned into a positive thing. Therefore, the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iran- Iraq War (1980–1988), followed by the imposition of international sanctions, changed the socio-political landscape of the country, creating new challenges for filmmakers. Post-revolutionary cinema often adopted a more moralistic tone, with films like *The Runner* (1984) by Amir Naderi portraying poverty through themes of resilience and national identity.

But the reformist period in Iran, especially during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005), had a significant impact on Iranian cinema, generally, and the representation of marginalized groups, including the poor. This is because in this era, a greater emphasis was put on civil society, cultural openness, and intellectual freedoms, which allowed filmmakers to focus on previously sensitive topics, including poverty, systemic inequality, and class conflict, with greater detail.

Reformist policies encouraged a more open dialogue about social justice and economic challenges, which filmmakers reflected in their works. Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and Jafar Panahi are among the film makers who benefitted from this cultural expansion to reflect reformist ideals of confronting injustice. However, after the reformist era, due to the return of the conservative leadership the political and economic landscape of Iran became increasingly challenging exacerbated by the escalating international sanctions after 2005, leading to rising inflation, unemployment, and social unrest. These developments were represented in Iranian films, which began reflecting a more sombre and critical tone in depicting poverty (*A Seperation* (2011), *Just 6.5* (2029), *Sheeple* (2018))

2.4. Previous Studies on Poverty in Iranian Cinema

The cinema of Iran has faced significant challenges and transformations. Over the years, Iranian cinema has been either rejected by Muslim clerics who regarded it as a

corrupting tool originating from the West, or it has been used by clerics for propaganda. Despite these obstacles, Iranian filmmakers today mostly have to conform to the imposed restrictions by Islamic jurisprudence (feqh), while still finding ways to overcome these boundaries by using symbolism and realism. Sharing resemblances to the Italian Neo-Realism thematically and stylistically, "Iranian Neo-Realism" is a term mainly used to point out to emerging films from Iran. Similarities between the film industries influenced by communism and war in Italy during the 1940s, and the present Iranian cinema, underline similar challenges encountered by post-revolutionary nations in handling complex interactions between religion and politics.

In Iran, Ejlali (2004), in a sociological study on Iranian cinema examines the relationship between cinematic themes and the social and class transformations within Iranian society. The study provides a sociological analysis of the films, suggesting that they played a key role in mirroring societal shifts, including changes in class structures and political ideologies. By analyzing the films of this period, it demonstrated how cinema served as a tool for social commentary, reflecting the anxieties, aspirations, and dynamics of Iranian society as it underwent modernization and political upheaval.

In another study, Jafari and Mozafari (2013) provide a class-based analysis of Farhadi's film *A Separation* and argue that it offers a nuanced portrayal of Iran's urban middle class, highlighting their moral struggles, social responsibilities, and the tensions they face in a divided society. Through Farhadi's use of mise-en-scène, character development, and realistic dialogue, the film illustrates class conflict, particularly between the middle and working classes.

Rezai et al (2014) also analyze *A Separation* and employed a semiotic analysis to study the representation of Iran's middle class. They argued two primary social classes depicted in the film: the modern, Western-oriented yet unsettled middle class, and the underprivileged lower class characterized by traditional and religious lifestyles showing how the film depicts deepening social divide and ideological tensions between these classes, illustrating how class identities are constructed and maintained through differentiation.

Talebi and Shojaei-Baghini (2014), in another study, use a Foucauldian genealogy approach and discourse analysis to examine six films by Masoud Kimiai prior to the revolution, introducing three dominant discourses in these films: protest, tragedy, and epic. In 2018, Nomani and Aghababaei interpreted the constructed relationship between class and its socio-political context. Amiri, and Moridi (2019), in another article, explored the positioning of the poor in the new consumerist society. Furthermore, Mahmoudi (2020), in another study titled *The Representation of Suffering in Iranian Cinema*, examines the mindset of three generations of Iranian filmmakers in their portrayal of Tehran.

Regarding the lives of Iranian impoverished individuals, Sadeghi (2020), in his book *Everyday Life of Urban Poor*, attempts to view the lives of the urban poor in connection with broader structures and the socio-economic trends of their time. However, Mahmoudi and Kazemi (2021) argue that this book has not gone beyond its primary model, *Street-Level Politics*. Finally, Goudarzi et al (2022), in an article somewhat similar to the present study, investigate the representation of the lower class in Iranian cinema, focusing on the film *The Red Suitcase* using semiotic analysis.

Also, several studies have focused on the everyday lives of the Iranian middle class. Kashani (2012) in an article entitled *Middle class and Iranian Cinema* deals with the concept of class and the representation of the new middle class in Iranian cinema. His article shows that in recent decades, potential audiences of the cinema were mainly the members of the new middle class. This issue has inevitably affected the content of the cinematographic works, and as a result, the frequency of films concerning the preferences and lifestyles of this class has increased.

Also, Kamali (2012) believes that in the Iranian cinema in the seventies and eighties, many films were made about the middle class in society. The amount of attention paid to this group in Iranian cinema in these decades, in terms of quantity and even quality, is not comparable to any other period in Iranian cinema. He asserts that in the 1970s, a flood of political and social demands was reflected in the cinema. On one hand, the modern demands of middle-class urban dwellers such as individual

freedom, women's rights, and social freedoms were depicted, and on the other hand, the economic and cultural gap between the lower classes and the middle class was portrayed. But in the 1980s, the dominant image of the middle groups in the cinema is people suffering from moral crisis and secrecy. The author also explains that the middle class is productive and creative in planning and popularizing modern values such as individualism, minority rights, women, and individual and social freedoms, but these characteristics are not necessarily represented in Iranian cinema. This representation, in this way, has neglected to depict the difficulties of being middle class in Iran and has ignored the relationship of this group with culture, and economic and political dangers that threaten them.

Moreover, Rezaei et al. (2013) by looking into the film *The Separation* investigated the relations between the two middle and lower classes (workers). The results showed that the middle class in this film, in terms of identity, is a modern class inclined towards the West, but chaotic and disorganized. The lower class is represented as a class in distress having a traditional and religious approach to life. According to this article, the class confrontations represented in the film are narratives of separatism and wide gaps at different levels of Iranian society, which the members of the classes reproduce in the form of their differences from the other.

In another study, Talebi and Shujaee (2013) used critical analysis to study six films directed by Masoud Kimiaei. The findings of the article looked into the gradual evolution of three types of discourses including protest, tragic and epic-revolutionary. The findings showed that the way the lower class is represented in the films take advantage of the constructive power of the existing discourse to create revolutionary subjects.

Aghababayi et al (2008) focused on the semiotics of Hamon's film, and examined the image of a middle-class intellectual in this text. The study showed that the middle-class intellectual realizes a subordinate position in confrontation with the upper class. This class is not willing to accept the existing situation, so it tries to free itself from the prevailing relations by committing suicide.

In addition, Hoseinifar (2013) Analyzed Farhadi's *Fireworks Wednesday, About Eli* and *A Separation* by using narrative analysis and Strauss's dual contrast and concluded that confrontations between the middle class and the lower class provide a negative view of the middle class in contrast to the relatively positive view of the lower class. He also explains that the purity of the lower class shows itself in opposition to the negative characteristics of the middle class. Moreover, it depicts familial relationships of the upper class as cold, harsh and skeptical in contrast to respectful, obedient, loving and trusting relationships among the lower class. Also, the middle class represented in these works suffer from fragmentation and are involved in crises and conflicts within themselves.

In another study by Jafari and Mozzafari (2013) representation of the middle class as depicted in *The Separation* was analyzed. Using Strauss' dual contrast they concluded that the middle class, a pessimistic class, was represented and faced with contradictions and dualities. Also, this film differentiates between different classes by using superior/inferior polarization and relying on cultural and religious capital.

In a more recent study conducted by Amiri and Moridi (2018) who used a semiotic analysis to analyze the image of the poor in Saeed Rousayee's film, it was concluded that an image of "destined to be poor", "exiled poor", and "culpable poor" is created, which, by taking advantage of the mechanisms of dehistoricization, shifting symbols of inequality with inherent abilities, presents the image of immutable myths of poverty; an image that tries to reproduce cultural stereotypes of poverty to preserve the class order and normalize poverty in society ultimately.

In a recent study, Heydari et al. (2023) analyzed the narrative mechanisms of the so-called "Social Genre" in Iranian cinema by looking into a number of Iranian films produced after 2011 and compared their representation with the portrayal of the lower class in Iranian news. They concluded that since the second half of the 2010s, Iranian cinema's depiction of the urban poor has shifted significantly. Earlier films tended to "sanctify" impoverished individuals, but this approach has evolved into "condemning" and eventually "criminalizing" their way of life. This transformation reflects a deliberate effort by filmmakers to present a distorted, sensationalized

portrayal of poverty, resulting in a discourse that further marginalizes the poor. Additionally, the characterization of these individuals increasingly emphasizes deformities in speech, physical appearance, and makeup, reinforcing negative stereotypes and deepening their marginalization.

As the presented review of the literature indicates, the number of studies with respect to the representation of poverty in Iranian cinema discursively and visually is rather limited. Moreover, most of the studies have focused on cinematic representation of the middle class, and the poor have not been studied in a detailed manner. In addition, no studies have so far visually analyzed Iranian films in relation to poverty. For this reason, this study will be looking into the cinematic representation of poverty in the selected Iranian films to present a perspective of the multifaceted dimensions of poverty within Iranian society.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

This literature review has provided a comprehensive exploration of the representation of poverty and class in cinema, particularly within the Iranian context. It has examined how global cinematic traditions, such as Italian Neorealism and social realism, have shaped the portrayal of economic hardship and how Iranian cinema, while sharing thematic similarities, has developed a distinctive aesthetic and narrative approach due to socio-political constraints. Moreover, it touched upon the ways political and social changes in Iranian society have affected the cinematic themes used in Iranian films, specifically social films that primarily focus on social issues including class relations and poverty.

This chapter also revealed that previous studies on the representation of poverty and lower class in Iranian films are dominantly in Persian, are limited in focus to either one or two films or films of a single director, and are published in Journals in Iran. So it could be concluded that the present study will fill a gap in the literature by providing an analysis in English and therefore serving a broader audience.

CHAPTER 3

CLASS RELATIONS IN IRANIAN CINEMA

This chapter explores the evolving depiction of social relations and class dynamics in Iranian cinema, focusing on the complex experiences of the poor. As Iranian society has undergone transformations, so too have cinematic representations of economically marginalized communities. These portrayals highlight deep social fractures, reflecting broader societal concerns around isolation and disconnection.

The analysis centers on four key themes— loss of community, familial and social support, loss of moralities, and erosion of hope. Together, these themes reveal how poverty disrupts not only material conditions but also essential social and cultural bonds. The poor are shown as not just economically deprived but as individuals increasingly distanced from the values, traditions, and moral frameworks that once defined their place in society. This cultural distance emphasizes the growing gap between social classes, where the economically marginalized are often depicted as being alienated from the cultural life of the broader community.

3.1. Loss of Community, Familial and Social Support

One of the most prominent themes observed in the analyzed films is the presence—and subsequent absence—of community, familial and social support. Notably, films produced in the early 2000s depict a strong sense of community and support from neighbours and family members, whereas films from the late 2000s and beyond reflect a marked decline in these forms of social cohesion.

Instances of this diminishing sense of community are evident in Majidi's films across different periods. In *Children of Heaven*, Ali is portrayed within a loving and

supportive family environment, whereas in *The Sun Children*, the character of Ali is depicted without clear connections to a stable home or family, highlighting his isolation. In *Children of Heaven*, Ali benefits from a warm familial structure (he lives in a cozy small traditional house), but in *The Sun Children*, he engages in illegal activities to secure his mother's release from the hospital and provide her with a safe home. Similarly, in *The Song of Sparrows*, the family is sustained through mutual assistance with neighbours, working together for tasks like harvesting and food preparation, whereas in *The Sun Children*, no community members come forward to help raise funds to keep the school open. Karim in *The Song of Sparrows* is even generous enough to share the only ostrich egg he receives after losing his job with his neighbours, while the children in *The Sun Children* are left without any form of communal support. Ali in *The Sun Children* receives some sort of institutional support to be given a chance to join a competition for being able to win a pair of shoes, but in *The Sun Children*, although a student is found to be talented in football and the audience are shown that he would be receiving special training from a professional trainer, the school is eventually closed due to lack of budget and the fate of the student remains unknown.

Portrayals of supportive communities and families are evident in *Mom's Guest*, *Blue Veiled* and *Under the Skin of the City* as well. In *Mom's Guest*, the family is in despair because they have guests over for dinner, but they do not have anything to prepare food for them. Nevertheless, the neighbours come together; each providing different ingredients to help the family cook dinner for the guests and save face. Similarly, in *Blue Veiled* we witness how Kabootar and Senobar help each other to sort things out or how the members of the village take care of Senobar's grandmother. Likewise, Tooba in *Under the Skin of the City* offers her neighbour to hold her daughter's wedding in her house and shares her leftover pizza with her co-workers at the factory. Abbas rents the wedding dress for the neighbor's daughter and Mahboubeh and Masoumeh maintain a supportive relationship with each other both as a neighbor and friend. In *Under the Skin of the City*, there is a reference to the organization of students and people to gather support for the reformists in Iran for the presidential election in 1997. This is evident from the beginning scene of the film in which Ali (Abbas' brother) joins the protests or the ending of the film where

Tooba talks to the camera regarding her responsibility as a person in the society to create a ground for change. Thus, in all the above-mentioned films, families not only care about their own family members, but they also care about and are cared for by their community.

Unlike the families in *Under the Skin of the City*, *Mom's Guest*, *Blue Veiled*, and *The Song of Sparrows* which are located within a supportive community and caring family members, in *Leila's Brothers* and *Life and a Day* it is not known where the family is located, or in which district they live. The neighbours do not simply care about each other and are passive regarding other people's lives. This is evident in the quarrel between Morteza and Mohsen with Amir's friend on the street, where no one intervenes to solve the issue, as it seems that they live in a forgotten place where only drug dealers live.

Moreover, within the family, the atmosphere is chaotic and full of tension. Parents in both films not only do not provide any kind of support, but they are old, sick and stubborn, creating barriers to their children's lives. In *Leila's Brothers*, the mother is always sick and nagging about her life, not having a role in the house as a parent. She goes to the neighbour's house with her little son to retrieve the package of drugs belonging to "Mohsen" that "Morteza" threw on the roof of their house out of fear of the police to, in her own words, "assist him in earning money"! Similarly, Leila's father's stubbornness to become a family patriarch and her mother's indifferent manner in supporting her children make the lives of their children even harder. This is in total contrast with Karim and his wife (*The Song of Sparrows*), Tooba (*Under the Skin of the City*), Ali's parents (*Children of Heaven*), Effat and her husband (*Mom's Guest*) who work hard to overcome their financial difficulties. In addition, the siblings seem to focus mainly on their own interests and care less about the well-being of the entire family. Morteza (*Life and a Day*) seems to have received money from a wealthy Afghan family for forcing Somayeh to marry their son in return. Mohsen and other family members do not want Somayeh to leave the house as she is the only one doing all the chores. Siblings harshly criticize each other and put the blame of their situation on others. Morteza blames Mohsen for their horrid situation

and Mohsen accuses Morteza of being selfish and spending their family's money on his personal issues.

In a similar manner, *Leila's Brothers* show the disintegration of the family in the best possible way, and to a large extent, the burden of this responsibility has been put on the shoulders of Leila's character by making fun of her mother for getting pregnant before marriage, ignoring the pain and illness of the parents and not taking them to a doctor, taking a single photo of the father for his obituary announcement without expressing sadness, slapping the father on his face, and finally the faint laughter at the end of the film after realizing the father's death. In other words, in *Leila's Brothers* and *Life and a Day*, not only is there financial pressure from society, but their situation seems to be aggravated because of the lack of bond and support within the family.

When comparing the main characters of the two films, Somayeh and Leila, it can be concluded that this lack of bond is aggravated in *Leila's Brothers*, Roustayee's most recent film, than *Life and a Day* because Somayeh had a lovable personality that drew the attention of the audience. Despite all her misfortunes, she cared deeply about her family and sacrificed her own fate for them. Somayeh tried to keep the family together, while for Leila, family relations were more complex, and she had contradictory reactions against her family members. On one hand, she slaps her irresponsible father, and on the other, she sheds tears for her brother, who has committed fraud and helps plan his escape.

Although the lack of social and familial support is evident in recent films, it cannot be concluded that it is fully missing. Rather, the nature of this support has changed, and it has become transactional and dysfunctional. Although the siblings come together and open a Falafel shop in *Life and a Day*, because the shop is run by Morteza (who allegedly sold Somayeh to an Afghan man), the character is not trusted to share the benefit of the shop with the family. Similarly, when the mother uses her youngest son to get back her addicted son's drugs from the neighbour to support him, it will not necessarily help him improve his situation. Likewise, in *Leila's Brothers*, despite Leila's efforts to align her siblings to invest money, the

investment is on buying the WC of a shopping mall, which does not seem promising to either viewers or characters.

This transactional and dysfunctional support is also evident in Farhadi's *A Hero*. In this film, community and social support are portrayed in a complex and often ambiguous manner. Farhadi depicts social support as being mainly driven by self-interest or a desire for social validation. Other characters help Rahim not merely out of benevolence but rather because his story improves their own image and fulfills social expectations. For example, the charity that initially supports Rahim is eager to publicize his story, using it as a means to showcase their goodwill. However, when doubts start to rise about the accuracy of his statements, the community that once supported him turns against him, not only withdrawing their support but also finding a way to deny the fact that they supported him. For example, the authority who was working in the prison and was one of Rahim's biggest supporters, tried to use Rahim's disabled son (by asking him to cry before the camera and trigger public emotions), only to prove that he himself did not make any mistakes by supporting him. In the end, *A Hero* reveals how genuine, unconditional support is rare in a society where reputation matters more than reality, and individuals are left to navigate their struggles alone as public opinion quickly shifts from praise to condemnation.

In a similar manner, Ali in *The Sun Children* was partially successful in uniting a number of his friends to dig the ground to find a treasure; nevertheless, not only did we witness that day by day his fellow friends left the project of digging due to external reasons and thus leaving Ali alone, we also understand that the promised treasure ends up to be a pack of drugs showcasing that hope for a better future is an illusion, as even the pursuit of a dream is tainted by the harsh realities of exploitation, further emphasizing the futility of their efforts and the dysfunctionality of the social system surrounding them.

It could thus be concluded that earlier films such as *Children of Heaven*, *Mom's Guest*, and *Under the Skin of the City* depict strong social bonds, mutual support, and a sense of community solidarity in the face of economic hardship. These

portrayals emphasize the importance of familial and neighbourly relationships in mitigating the challenges of poverty. However, a marked change is observed in later films like *The Sun Children*, *Life and a Day*, and *Leila's Brothers*. These more recent works present a stark contrast because not only the community and familial ties are eroded and individuals are isolated within their social context, but any attempt for support results to be dysfunctional.

This change not only points out the shift in cinematic narrative, but also highlights the society's landscape in families become more fragmented and isolated, and the social safety nets, whether familial or communal, are no longer reliable.

3.2. Loss of Moralities

The analysis of the films examined in this research reveals a shift in the portrayal of the lower class, increasingly depicting them as individuals who experience a deterioration in moral values. While earlier films depict the lower class as having strict and pure moral characters, this portrayal gradually evolves, revealing an erosion of these values over time. By the mid-2000s, films depicted characters from the lower class as largely deprived of ethical foundations. This trend in Iranian cinema offers a window into broader social attitudes and how they've evolved over the years.

Indeed, in earlier films, we have moral characters who are depicted with dignity and resilience. For example, characters like Effat and her neighbours in *Mom's Guest* are kind enough to help each other prepare a meal. The son of the family does not rub chicken and fish from the cutlery shop that belongs to his friend's father, but rather tells him sincerely that he will pay him. Similarly, in *A Separation*, there is a moral, religious character like Hojjat who feels extremely guilty and angry when he understands that there is a possibility that his wife may have mistakenly accused Nader of his wife's miscarriage. Similarly, we have Ali in *Children of Heaven*, who tries hard to win a running competition to be awarded a pair of shoes for his sister and his father, who is portrayed as a resilient and moral character who tries to make ends meet by working hard. His moral character is emphasized when he refuses to

take one of the sweets he was preparing for the mosque because they were bought by mosque members only to be used in prayers. Likewise, Nobar in the *Blue Veiled* works diligently on farms to support her family. She is loyal to her moral values by refusing to engage in a relationship with Rasoul before marriage. She is compassionate towards her friend Kaboutar and supports her in many ways.

In the above-mentioned films, characters are depicted to be moral despite harsh circumstances in their lives. Nevertheless, as we pass the first years of the 2000s, we can see a shift from purely moral characters to people for whom morality is complex and fluid based on the circumstances. To begin with, Ali in *Children of Heaven*, tries hard to win a running competition to be able to be awarded a pair of shoes for his sister. But Ali in the *Sun Children* steals and lies to maintain his life. The former Ali retains his innocence and moral compass. For example, he is not a skilled liar and cannot convince his schoolmaster to run late to school. Or he and his sister feel bad to ask Zahra's friend to give her pen back when they both realize her father is blind and can barely make ends meet. While the latter has lost its innocence due to the harsh realities of a merciless life and challenging living conditions. He skillfully unites some other children to dig the underground of the school and lies skillfully to the schoolmaster to be registered at school. Despite his young age, he is no longer a child as he deals with dangerous fraudsters and is trying to survive like an adult. It is important to note that Ali in the *Sun Children* is not immoral per se; he is forced to steal or lie because of his living conditions. The former Ali is only after a pair of shoes; the latter is trying to make ends meet. He cares about the Afghan girl selling hair clips in the metro and puts himself in danger to save his friends. This is evident in scenes in which he buys a hair clip for the Afghan girl or when he assists her in running away from the police. Likewise, when Ali and his friends are caught stealing tires to sell for money, they are confronted by a local gang leader who controls the black market. Ali steps in to protect his friends, taking the brunt of the leader's anger and putting himself at risk of physical harm. He tries to negotiate with the gang leader to avoid further danger for his friends, showing his willingness to face violent consequences.

Likewise, characters like Tooba and her son Abbas work hard to earn a living for their family without being indulged in acts of dishonesty in *Under the Sin of City*.

However, when the company with which Abbas paid and signed a contract for securing a visa for him defrauded him, he found no other way than to get engaged in carrying drugs. Abbas is not an immoral character, he keeps telling her family that he will save them from poverty, he buys new things for all of his family members and works hard to make ends meet, but he is in the end forced to get engaged with a criminal act. Similarly, Karim in *Songs of Sparrows* is portrayed with dignity and resilience by taking on various odd jobs, such as working as a motorcycle taxi driver, to support his family. He feels guilty when a passenger pays him more and is portrayed as a believer who says his prayers on time even if he is on the street. Nevertheless, we can see the changes that this character goes through regarding his moral decisions. As he starts working in the city, he becomes prone to giving away his moral character. For example, despite being hesitant at first, he sold the fridge which he could not deliver to his owner to another person. Unlike Karim in the beginning of the film who shares the only ostrich egg he had with other neighbours, the character refuses to share an old door with their neighbour near the end of the film because he thinks that he could one day repair and sell it in the city. He, like other city dwellers he encountered, started to believe that one must think about his own profit, and seek comfort and peace only for oneself and his family, without caring about others.

In the same manner, Rahim in *A Hero* is depicted as a morally ambiguous character as he is caught between personal principles and external expectations. While he is initially celebrated for returning a bag of gold coins, the deeper layers of his motivations soon come to light. He tries to maintain good intentions and save his reputation at the same time, but he seems to have no other way to resort to deception at one point. This reveals the difficult moral decisions he is faced with under public pressure. The film thus portrays social morality as something fragile that could be affected by the way others perceive each individual. Once Rahim's lies are exposed, the same society that once praised him quickly abandons him.

Likewise, in *Crimson Gold*, Hossein is a character who is in a moral dilemma mainly shaped by his feelings of alienation and social injustice. He is a war veteran, and his job as a pizza deliveryman makes him aware of the divide between the rich and the

working class. Although his choices are morally questionable, they are represented as an attempt to regain a sense of self-worth and dignity in a society where he is marginalized. In this way, Hossein's character is deeply tragic, as his moral downfall reflects not just personal failings but the broader societal conditions that push him toward making such choices.

The above-mentioned films depict how characters' moral decisions may change regarding their social circumstances. Nevertheless, shared ethical principles such as solidarity, responsibility, and empathy play an important role in the way the characters deal with challenges. However, in *Life and a Day* and *Leila's Brothers*, the characters' moral decisions are primarily based on self-interest and survival, often at the expense of family unity. In *Life and a Day*, although it may seem that Morteza is trying to open a falafel shop to save the family, we can see that he is too selfish to share the benefit with his family and he accepts money in exchange for arranging his sister's marriage to a wealthy Afghan man, prioritizing financial gain over her well-being. He does not care about the medical needs of his mother and fails to care for her younger sister. He even reports his brother to the police to arrest him. His decision is motivated by personal gain, showing how individual interests are prioritized over collective family values. Despite Somayeh's evident reluctance, her autonomy is undermined by Morteza's imposing behaviour, showing the deterioration of a breakdown in moral values of the family members. Likewise, Mohsen deals with addiction and joblessness and engages in criminal activities, contributing to the family's deteriorating moral fabric. He consistently asks Somayeh not to leave the house, as she is the only one in the family who takes care of family members and the house, creating a question in the audience about whether he wants Somayeh for herself or for the support she provides for all the family members.

Similarly, In *Leila's Brothers*, Leila tries to persuade her siblings to invest in a business enterprise, but their motivations are self-serving, and they fail to become united for the collective good. The siblings constantly argue and undermine each other, showing the collapse of familial and collective morality. The son-in-law of the family even dares to steal sausage and groceries from the in-law's refrigerator, pointing out to this specific theme.

Even the teenage character is in total contrast with the portrayal of teenagers in previous films like *The Sun Children*. Somayeh's teenage cousin, Amir Ali, not only inflicts harm on himself just to prove to his peers that he is a lout, but he also hits his cousin (Morteza) and disrespects his mother. Not only is there no trace of innocence in him, but we are also shown that, unlike Ali in *The Sun Children*, who gets involved with Gangsters to save money to be able to discharge his mother from the hospital, Amir does not care about his family members and his mother.

In summary, it could be stated that the way morality is portrayed in Iranian cinema has evolved in a way that there is a clear difference between earlier depictions of ethical values and the more complex, morally ambiguous characters in later films. Earlier films like *Children of Heaven* and *Mom's Guest* depicted individuals who, despite facing hardships, managed to maintain their moral values, often prioritizing the well-being of family and community over personal interests. However, in more recent films such as *Life and a Day* and *Leila's Brothers*, the characters are focused on individual survival and self-interest, resulting in fragmented family relationships and loss of morality. This shift can mirror a change in society where economic challenges force individuals to prioritize personal interest over communal goals as a way to guarantee survival. Characters such as Ali in *Sun Children* and Rahim in *A Hero* exemplify this shift, showing how difficult circumstances can force individuals to make morally complex choices. By examining these portrayals, Iranian cinema provides a powerful reflection on the tension between morality and survival in a rapidly changing society.

3.3. Erosion of Hope

One of the prominent themes which was identified after analyzing the selected films was the erosion of hope for a better life and change in social status. It was evident that over time, films have shifted from stories of resilience and positivity to a more pessimistic perspective on societal structures and individual agency observing a change in the portrayal of hope, concerning the lower class.

In earlier films like *Children of Heaven*, hope plays a pivotal role. The young character, Ali, remains hopeful despite the financial struggles his family faces. His

determination to win a running event to get a new pair of shoes for his sister showcases a spirit of hope and resilience. This sense of optimism is bolstered by Ali's strong familial ties and the film's overarching atmosphere, which emphasizes the significance of small victories amid a challenging socio-economic landscape. This sense of hope is evident even when Ali and his father travel to the city with a bicycle and they are shown to be enjoying each other's companion despite facing difficulties and challenges in the city.

In a similar manner, in *Mom's Guest*, hope is portrayed through themes of solidarity, kindness, and collective effort. In the film, the community members and neighbours unite to offer their contributions, showcasing a shared sense of duty and kindness. This collective effort toward a common purpose, even amidst financial challenges, underscores a kind of hope that is rooted in human connection and mutual support. Although the characters endure economic struggles and difficulties, the film indicates that hope can be maintained through collective action, compassion, and ethical values, a theme that becomes less common in Iranian cinema as societal challenges and financial circumstances escalate over time.

Interestingly, *Songs of the Sparrows* showcases how an initially hopeful character, loses hope in the face of financial difficulties and is dragged into immoralities, but finally manages to retrieve his hope for a happy life, having a supportive family and neighbours. Hope initially emerges through Karim's attempts to support his family following losing his job. His sense of morality remains strong, and his positivity is evident in his readiness to take on various low-paying jobs. However, as he becomes increasingly immersed in urban life and faces material temptations, hope for a better life starts to deteriorate. We witness how Karim is little by little engaging in more and more immoral actions to the extent that he gets involved in stealing and is no longer able to see the sacrifices of his children, harshly punishing them with cruelty and is unable to enjoy the pure love of his wife. However, this cycle breaks with an accident happened to him in which the urban waste he collected at his home collapsed on him. It was after the accident that he realized that he is surrounded by a lovely family and that he managed to retrieve back a hope for life despite harsh economic problems. It is important to note the second narrative of the film which

narrates a similar story to Karim's character. Karim's son and his friends are looking for happiness in the mud of the reservoir. This is similar to the father's struggle in the urban society to get more income. The children try hard for many days to clean the mud during which they are hit and reprimanded by Karim. They lose hope for some time, but then find a way to earn money and buy fish for the reservoir. Nevertheless, they lose all the fish while carrying them to the reservoir and become hopeless again. Eventually, they manage to save one of the fish, clean the reservoir and release the goldfish there. In fact, when we look at Majidi's *Songs of Sparrows* and *Children of Heaven* we see that characters are in favor of a simple life and always adhere to certain moral principles or eventually turn to those principles. They see the beauty and truth of life not in luxurious mansions above the city, but in the lower part of the city, in poor areas or villages and areas away from noise and urban luxuries.

In contrast, *Sun Children* presents a more complex view of hope, reflecting the harsh realities of urban poverty and systemic failure. Although Ali sets out on a quest for treasure with hopes of bettering his situation, his adventure is tainted by deception, exploitation, and threats. Unlike the enduring hope seen in *Children of Heaven*, *Sun Children* conveys a more realistic outlook on survival. The hidden treasure that spurs Ali and his friends ends up being a packet of drugs, representing the illusory promises that society often presents to the poor. Ali's agency is limited by external factors, including corrupt adults and an educational system that takes advantage of child labour. In the end, the film depicts a waning sense of hope, showcasing characters who, despite their resilience are unable to break free from the cycles of poverty and struggle.

In *Blue Veiled*, Nobar is represented as an innocent resilient girl who only hopes for a life with Rasoul and does not wish for his money and status. Her main aspiration for marrying Rasoul is her love for him. Although her drive for agency stems from a sense of morality and responsibility, it is ultimately restricted by her lower-class position and gender. While there is a flicker of hope in her connection with Rasoul, it is subdued by societal expectations that limit her choices, rendering her dreams unachievable in the larger social framework. Nobar is not after escaping poverty or social class mobility rather, her hope is rooted in personal yearnings, but it remains

shackled by external constraints outside her influence. In contrast, the erosion of hope is more evident in *Under the Skin of the City*. Abbas starts the film with aspirations of escaping poverty through lawful means, such as obtaining a visa to leave Iran. However, after being deceived by the company he trusted, Abbas turns to drug trafficking—a clear indication of how aspirations for a better future can be systematically shattered. Although Abbas is not depicted as immoral, his shift toward illegal activities signifies the breakdown of moral agency under societal pressures. When we compare the beginning of the film with its ending scene we can clearly see how Abbas' hope for a better life shatters through the film. He was an energetic resilient guy who hoped to buy a house and build a better life for his family by leaving Iran and working in Japan, yet he turned to a guy carrying drugs just to save their only possession (the house); an attempt which failed. The film underscores how the existing social and economic systems leave little space for hope or genuine upward mobility. Abbas's narrative serves as a broader commentary on the hopelessness faced by many in Iran's working class, where even dedication and determination often lead to dead ends. When comparing the *Blue Veiled* and *Under the Skin of the City*, we can see that, unlike Nobar who did not have an intention of social mobility, Abbas and Tooba worked hard to improve their economic situation and build better life conditions. Tooba votes in the hope of a better country, yet she keeps asking the cameraman who films her "Who will watch or hear what I'm saying anyways?" noting the failure of reformists to fulfill their promises.

In *Crimson Gold*, the theme of despair is profoundly expressed through Hossein, a war veteran turned pizza delivery man, whose growing awareness of the societal inequalities around him leads to a tragic unravelling. The film portrays Hossein's increasing hopelessness and disenchantment through a series of powerful scenes that illustrate his mental decline. The progression of events throughout the film gradually erodes Hossein's hope, ultimately leading him to take his own life. The jeweller's dismissive and patronizing treatment towards him and not even letting him enter the store, his disappointment when realizing the fall of values promised during the war in his encounter with his ex-commander, his realization of class differences in face of the deliveries he takes to affluent costumers all give way to Hussain losing his hope and indulging in the act of self-effacement. Hossein's engagements with his fellow

delivery workers highlight his feelings of alienation. While his coworkers occasionally discuss their ambitions and dreams, Hossein's outlook is much more resigned. His dialogues display a deep sense of being trapped as he begins to believe that the only escape from his hopeless life is through radical action. The film's tragic ending, where Hossein takes his own life during a botched robbery, emphasizes the grim reality of his situation. He sees no way forward, no spark of hope, and his last action becomes a commentary on the dehumanizing impacts of poverty and societal neglect.

A critical view of social structures that affect the agency of the character leading to a hopeless future is also evident in *A Hero*. The film examines how Rahim's efforts to reclaim his dignity and independence are constantly undermined by societal norms and systemic limitations. While Rahim initially strives to do the right thing by returning the bag of gold coins, his situation compels him to compromise his principles to satisfy both the authorities and the public. The inflexible social systems surrounding him—especially the fixation on honor and reputation—restrict his ability to exercise genuine agency. For instance, Rahim's attempts to redeem himself are influenced not solely by his own choices but by the impact of media, popular opinion, and institutional authority. As Rahim maneuvers through this complex societal landscape, his optimism for a brighter future dwindles. Even those who first rally around him, like charities and local leaders, eventually withdraw their support, highlighting the temporary nature of their help. This conditional assistance mirrors a social system where collective endorsement is crucial, forcing individuals to relinquish their autonomy to preserve public approval. The film's depiction of Rahim's plight illustrates a grim perspective on agency, implying that in such a confining social environment, hope is inevitably diminished by forces beyond personal control.

3.4. Concluding Remarks and Discussion

The present chapter attempted to analyze the selected Iranian films representing poverty to explore how these films have portrayed class relations and the social fabric of Iranian society. After an in-depth analysis, three main themes were

retrieved; each showcasing how the films produced in different timelines develop each theme.

Based on the analysis, it could be concluded that earlier films depict the lower class as characters who enjoy social and familial support; overcoming difficulties together through mutual assistance (*Children of Heaven*, *Under the Skin of the City*, *Mom's Guest*, *Blue Veiled*, and *The Song of Sparrows*). This aligns with findings from Ejlali (2004) and Goudarzi et al. (2022), who noted that pre-2000s Iranian films often positioned poverty within a moral and supportive social structure, where hardship was mitigated through communal resilience. Nevertheless, more recent films (*The Sun Children*, *Life and a Day*, and *Leila's Brothers*) highlight a significant difference as both community and family bonds deteriorate, leaving individuals feeling isolated within their social environment. Additionally, any efforts for support end up being ineffective. This shift reflects what Heydari et al. (2023) describe as the progressive disintegration of the lower-class community, where isolation replaces mutual assistance, and individuals are left to navigate hardships alone.

Moreover, earlier films often illustrate the lower class as having strict and virtuous moral standards, but this representation eventually changes, showing a decline in these values over time. By the mid-2000s, films began to portray lower-class characters as largely lacking ethical principles. This trend provides insight into wider societal attitudes and their evolution throughout the years. In fact, this finding is consistent with Amiri and Moridi 's study (2018), who observed that recent Iranian films have shifted from idealized representations of poverty to portrayals of the poor who are forced into, deception, or moral ambiguity. This shift also aligns with the study done by Heydari et al. (2023), who argue that Iranian cinema has increasingly begun to criminalize and stigmatize the poor, stripping them of earlier moral idealism and depicting them as desperate individuals with limited ethical choices.

In addition, over the years, the analyzed films have significantly transformed the representation of hope and resilience in stories centered on the lower class. Earlier films frequently featured characters from underprivileged backgrounds who, despite encountering systemic obstacles, maintained a resilient spirit, suggesting that

determination and moral actions could ultimately lead to a better future. These narratives conveyed a sense of optimism, where the notion of change, although distant, was grounded in individual will. This optimism is also reflected in Sadeghi's analysis (2020), which argued that Iranian cinema in the 1990s often depicted poverty as a challenge that could be overcome through hard work and perseverance. In contrast, contemporary films provide a bleaker view, typically depicting societal structures as overwhelmingly repressive, leaving little opportunity for individual actions to bring about substantial change. This finding is in line with Amiri and Moridi's study (2018), which found the following themes by looking into the films produced in the past decade: "deterministic poor", "exiled poor", and "culpable poor". The lower class is illustrated as trapped in cycles of poverty and marginalization, where characters' attempts to improve their situation are frequently hindered by fixed social hierarchies and economic disparity. Hope is no longer viewed as a probable outcome but rather as a progressively rare and even naive concept. This evolution signifies a growing pessimism within the cinematic narrative, where characters not only fight with their immediate realities but also battle against an inflexible social system that restricts their agency.

CHAPTER 4

SPATIAL AND CULTURAL DISTANCE: US/THEM

This chapter analyzes the depiction of cultural and spatial distance by examining how these factors influence the "Us/Them" dynamic among different social classes and the ways spatial hierarchies reflect and reinforce class inequalities. The analysis will explore how cinematic depictions of urban and domestic environments serve as a medium for expressing social relations, highlighting the confinement and marginalization of the poor. Additionally, it will examine how economic forces shape spatial divisions, privileging wealthier areas while restricting access to resources for lower-class communities. For this purpose, the selected Iranian films are analyzed to illustrate how various spatial elements—such as roads, stairs, apartments, elevators, and motorbikes—act as symbols of cultural divides and established hierarchies. By exploring the intricate relationships among space, culture, and class, this chapter seeks to illuminate how some of the leading Iranian filmmakers express and critique societal inequalities, demonstrating the subtle ways in which space becomes a site for identity, agency, and power struggles.

4.1. Space and Poverty

In recent years, a variety of studies examining "urban poverty" have emerged, each from distinct angles. Most of these investigations consider urban poverty primarily as an economic problem. Conversely, building on the spatial theories of Lefebvre (1991) and de Certeau (1984), there are also studies that tackle the issue from social and cultural viewpoints. As poverty continues to deepen and spread globally, the political aspects of the problem have gained significance as a research focus. Regardless of their varying approaches and the conclusions they draw, the unifying concept linking these studies remains "space." When it comes to urban poverty, one

of the fundamental questions is where the poor live. In almost all of the films analyzed in this study, the poor were shown to be physically away from the city. This physical distance was evident across all the films and was utilized to represent social hierarchy in various ways. The following sections will outline how this physical distance has been represented in the analyzed films to display social hierarchy in Iranian society.

4.1.1. Roads

One of the most common strategies used by the selected filmmakers was using roads to portray different social classes. From a total of 11 analyzed films, 7 depicted roads to emphasize the physical distance and the characters of 4 (*Crimson Gold*, *Under the Skin of City*, *The Song of Sparrows*) commute a long way from home to the city or their workplace to represent class differences in Iranian society, especially Tehran. In other words, characters are in a constant state of going up and down.



Figure 1. Valiasr Street

This constant state of being on the move has been reinforced by showing characters on a motorbike or a bicycle in Tehran's Valiasr Street as a significant symbolism. Valiasr Street is an 18-kilometre street in Tehran and is considered the longest street in the Middle East (Figure 1). It starts from Rah Ahan Square (literally meaning *Railway Square*) populated by the working class and ends with Tajrish in which the

most expensive houses and facilities are located. If one starts a journey from Rahanahn Street, he could see how the face of the city and people gradually changes as getting closer to Tajrish. In other words, Tajrish (north of Tehran) and Rahahan (south) are two extreme points with the working class residing in the latter, the well-off (owners of the capital) living in the former, and the middle class living in between. Simply put, the street is the symbol of class hierarchy in Iranian society.

Crimson Gold and *Under the Skin of City* (Figures 2 and 4), have managed to masterfully depict the journey of the working class every morning from the North to the South where they work for the well-off. Using motorbikes, and bicycles (*Children of Heaven*) has facilitated this depiction. In *Crimson Gold*, by taking the viewer with Hossain on his motorbike, we become part of his life during his commute every day from his house to other people from the upper classes to whom he delivers pizza and thus we can relate to his thoughts. (Figures 2 and 3)

Similarly, we join the daily journey of Abbas when he takes his bike and moves around the city, making us witness how the appearance of the city and the people change as he moves around the city. As evident in the shot below, to be able to take his family to a restaurant, they have to travel from the rural area around Tehran where their house is located to the northern part of the city (Figure 4).



Figure 2. *Crimson Gold*/ Hossein in front of his own house



Figure 3. Crimson Gold/Hossein in front of the wealthy customer's house



Figure 4. Under the Skin of the City- Abbas taking his family to a restaurant from home

The film emphasizes movement from North to South in its opening scene, depicting Abbas taking his brother home via Navab Street. This visual choice is significant because it symbolizes the socioeconomic gap in Tehran, where the northern and southern regions represent different social classes. Navab Street itself is a testament to this divide. Built to connect the northern and southern parts of the city, Navab Street came at a significant cost to the residents. According to the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development and reports from the Etemad news agency, many residents were unaware that their homes would be demolished to make way for commercial complexes. These residents were quickly compensated by the municipality, but the

compensation was insufficient to allow them to remain in the area, forcing them to relocate to more distant and less desirable neighborhoods. (Figure 25)

In *The Song of Sparrows*, Karim and his family live in a rural area outside the city of Tehran and they struggle with economic hardship. When Karim loses his job on the ostrich farm, he starts working in the city as a delivery man, entering an urban environment that is completely foreign to him. He is shown multiple times on the road with his motorcycle moving from his village to the city to hunt material from the unused stuff dumped by the city dwellers in the hope of selling them. Karim's rural life seems disconnected from the progress of the city, and he becomes a symbolic figure of the rural poor, whose lives are shaped by the demands of the city but remain outside its development.

In *Blue Veiled*, roads have been used to emphasize on class differences between Nobar and Rasool. Depictions of her daily travel with an old minibus from home to work, or scenes displaying their closeness to the railway (as a symbol of distance from the city center) are in contrast with Rasool and his family's way of travelling around the city via their own car. These scenes represent the way roads have been utilized to show hierarchy. (Figures 5 and 23)



Figure 5. Blue Veiled/ Nobar coming home from work via an old minibus

In *Fireworks Wednesday*, the subtle use of space effectively shows class disparities and social distance, despite limited emphasis on spatial displacement. The

positioning of Roohi's home in a mountainous area far from the city center serves as a metaphor for her social standing, with the physical distance reflecting social stratification. (Figure 6) This spatial arrangement not only points out the phenomenon of lower-income populations being pushed to urban outskirts but also creates a visual contrast that underscores class divisions. Roohi's dialogue about the lack of taxis in her area and the lack of lights on the road leading to their house highlights how infrastructure disparities reinforce economic inequality.



Figure 6. Fireworks Wednesday/the couple on their way toward the city

Unlike the above-mentioned films where physical distance is often conveyed through scenes of commuting on roads, in more recent films this depiction has been limited to emphasize the isolation of the lower class. In *Life and a Day*, for example, the place where the family lives seems to be unknown. The audience only sees that they are in a wrecked house. There is only one scene throughout the film that shows the road the family takes to go to their sister's house which is outside of the city; referring to the Mehr housing project. In fact, it could be concluded that the film intends to emphasize the extent to which the family, as a single representation of the lower class, feels alienated from the rest of the city. The characters do not have any interactions with anyone from the upper class as their daily lives do not necessitate such interaction. Therefore, they are depicted as people who live in a forgotten place far from the rest of the city.

Similar to *Life and a Day*, we have a family in *Leila's Brothers* whose location is unknown. The audience does not know in which district of Tehran the family lives.

In this film, there is only one scene in which physical distance and its disadvantages are brought up. This distance is represented by Manoochehr's house. He has bought a house in the city margins, but is underdeveloped and is not only built illegally, but it does not have gas or in-house documentation. In a dialogue, he keeps saying that the house is located on the upper side of the city, but the family's son-in-law emphasizes that the apartment is on the outskirts of the city and the boundary of the city's upper side concludes just two blocks further down.

Likewise, in *The Sun Children*, the children's school is located in an underprivileged neighborhood, showing the division between the urban middle and upper classes. The children only move in the underprivileged parts of the city and there is no intention or need to get in touch with the wealthier parts of the city. The children were only once shown in a shopping center which was for the intention of stealing from the well-off. The children's attempt to dig a tunnel underground in search of the hidden treasure represents their desire to rise above their situation. However, this quest leads them deeper into the earth, reflecting their limited opportunities for advancement. Their interactions with other underprivileged workers further emphasize their entrapment within a certain socio-economic group, separated from the wealthier society that lies just out of reach. In this regard, the children's physical movements, concentrated in impoverished areas, portray a life constrained by the physical and social limitations of poverty.

The displacement presented through the characters' constant commute between home and work or between different parts of the city in the above-mentioned films can be a reflection of the broader class differences in Iranian society. These long commutes serve as a metaphor for the class encounters experienced by the working class where moving from south to north (and vice versa) is not just a geographic shift but a commentary on the realities of social inequality. Nevertheless, limited scenes depicting this movement in recent films indicate that the lower class have been isolated in society to the extent that the interaction between the lower and the upper class has been minimized. Those in less privileged positions are portrayed as being restricted to certain marginalized areas and disconnected from meaningful relationships with wealthier circles. This change suggests a deepening physical and

social segregation over time, creating a symbolic sense of "invisibility" for the lower class. They live in forgotten corners of the city, lacking any chance of having access to better living conditions or even involvement in society. This separation not only reinforces their marginalization but also hints at a collapse of social unity, with the gap between classes widening to the point where mutual acknowledgment is nearly absent. As a result, the lower class is depicted as residing in a completely different realm, where their hardships, identities, and even dreams remain overlooked and unrecognized by those in authority.

4.1.2. Stairs, Apartments, and Elevators

The motif of moving up and down is not only conveyed through the physical journey across streets but is also symbolized by the characters' use of elevators, apartments and stairs. In *Under the Skin of the City*, for example, Abbas is shown multiple times ascending to the company that allures him to cooperate with them by offering a huge amount of money. Moreover, his lover works in this company, and he dreams of marrying her once he could get a visa to Japan. When he ascends, he is metaphorically reaching for his dreams, seeking love and a better life. However, the descent back down symbolizes his return to the harsh realities of his life, grounded in the socioeconomic challenges he faces. This upward and downward motion reflects the tension between hope and reality, ambition and limitation (Figure 26). Similarly, in *Crimson Gold*, this idea is reinforced through scenes involving stairs and elevators. For instance, when Hossein takes the stairs to deliver pizza to his former commander, it's not just a physical going up, but that scene is laden with the weight of his past and the significant contrast between his current life and the one he once knew. The long shot emphasizes the emotional and social distance he feels as he climbs (Figure 12). Another significant moment occurs when Hossein climbs up the stairs in the wealthy customer's home, but only to use the toilet a metaphorical reference to his restricted access to the luxury and comfort that the upstairs represents.

Another significant scene which stresses the up/down hierarchy is the scene in which Hossein is waiting in front of the apartment where a party is being held, and the

police refuse to let him deliver their pizza. In this scene, we see a teenage soldier holding a gun and constantly looking up at the floor on which the party is being held with curiosity (Figure 11). He is looking at people dancing with each other, and when Hossein asks him if he had fun so far, he answers (in a heavy Turkish accent) that he has not and he does not know what they do. There are two main points hidden in this scene. First, the fact that he is a 15-year-old soldier gives reference to the Iranian regime taking advantage of teenage boys from the lower classes to fulfill their aims and second, the naivety and curiosity of the boy who himself does not know why he is there.

In *Leila's Brothers*, this vertical movement has been used to refer to social climbing. In this film, Manoochehr has bought a house in a remote place built illegally and installed an insecure lift to enter his apartment as he has no access to the stairs. The scene in which Leila is asked to go to Manoocher's apartment using the elevator also depicts this notion of up and down (Figure 34). When Leila enters the lift to go up to and enter the apartment, she feels unsafe and worried. This scene is followed by the scene in which the brothers take a luxurious elevator in bewilderment and amazement to a meeting with a fraudster. Their venture into a high-rise building metaphorically reflects their hopes for a better life. But as they rise, we feel their unease. It's as if the very act of going up makes them acutely aware of being an outsider or feeling how out of place they are. The movie suggests that for those struggling with poverty, the idea of "moving up" (climbing the social ladder) in society is both alluring and unsettling. The brothers' awe when entering the luxurious building and its fancy elevators, allure them to initially accept the offer put forth by the fraudster. In the end, the film implies that for many, the promise of rising above one's circumstances is a false promise with the ever-present risk of falling back down.

4.1.3. Motorbikes

Motorcycles have been frequently used to show how they are used by a specific class in society (*Song of Sparrows*, *Crimson Gold*, *Under the Skin of the City*, *Mom's Guest*, *Fireworks Wednesday*). These vehicles are mainly portrayed as the representation of

despair and are not simply used as personal transportation but rather are oddly used as a means of earning money. In *Songs of Sparrows*, we can see that a huge number of motorcycle owners, including the film's main character, carry heavy household appliances as a means of earning extra money. Or they are used like taxis to carry people around. These scenes are very common to see in Tehran's streets on a daily basis. Figures 7 and 8 below taken from Irna news and Tehran Picture Agency depict how these representations are in line with the everyday lives of the Iranian lower class who have no other means of earning an income except their motorbike.



Figure 7. Tehran/Iran

In fact, as depicted in *Songs of Sparrows*, these riders are used by the companies unofficially, without even having to have an ID card or any type of insurance. Moreover, no regulations exist for riders who use their motorbikes to transport others. In other words, these people are very vulnerable to any physical and financial risks as they work under insecure conditions without any regulations securing their rights in society. This is evident when Karim in the *Songs of Sparrows* discovers that riders in Tehran use their bikes as a means of earning money by carrying people around (Figures 9 and 10). We can see that no fixed price is determined by law for the passengers and no regulations regulate any station for these riders to officially work. Similarly, this lack of security was also noted in *Crimson Gold*, when Hossein's co-worker loses his life in a motorbike accident.



Figure 8. Tehran/Iran



Figure 9. The Song of Sparrows



Figure 10. Karim/The Song of Sparrows

4.2. Cultural distance: Us/Them

Building on the spatial markers of poverty, this section reveals how the very spaces that denote economic hardship transform into stages for cultural exclusion and the deepening of the "Us/Them" divide. Considering the timeline during which the analyzed films were produced, it was revealed that they have increasingly focused on class and cultural divides. Earlier films, such as *Children of Heaven* and *The Blue Veiled*, portray characters who exhibit a naive wonder regarding the upper class, often limited to fleeting interactions. In contrast, later works like *A Separation*, *Crimson Gold*, and *Leila's Brothers* portray these class divisions as more established and unbridgeable, reflecting a shift toward a more critical perspective on the social and economic barriers present in Iranian society.

For instance, in *Children of Heaven*, Ali's father's difficulty with language highlights the power dynamics inherent in linguistic and cultural markers. His Turkish accent acts as a reminder of his working-class background and his inability to speak Farsi formally to people from the upper class as they travel with Ali to find a job in affluent parts of the city signifies his linguistic poverty creating an immediate "us versus them" barrier that heightens his anxiety when interacting with the affluent and thus preventing him from interacting comfortably with the upper class. Similarly, in *Under the Skin of the City* Abbas's parents' lack of familiarity with pizza (The father asks for a piece of bread to eat pizza with because he thinks the pizza will not make him feel full and the mother does not know how a pizza can have different types) highlights a significant cultural gap, illustrating how seemingly trivial traditions can expose wider societal divisions.

The Song of Sparrows presents Karim's encounter with cultural distance as he ventures into the city to work as a motorcycle taxi driver. Accustomed to his rural life, Karim finds himself in awe of the urban lifestyle, where he is drawn to the affluence and consumerism of his city-dwelling clients. In one scene, he observes a customer's home filled with opulent items and is stunned by the luxury and excess. Later, as he starts gathering discarded goods to sell, Karim gradually becomes entangled in a consumer mindset himself, leading him to briefly abandon his rural values.

Similarly, In *The Blue Veiled*, the cultural and class gap is illustrated in the relationship between Nobar, a farmworker, and Rasoul, a wealthy landowner. The biggest obstacle between Rasoul and Nobar was Rasoul's daughters and his family because they did not see Nobar as one of them due to being a farmworker and belonging to the lower class. They see her as a gold digger who plans to take Rasoul's money and humiliate her throughout the film. For example, when Rasoul was hospitalized due to a heart attack, her daughter visited Nobar and offered her money to leave her father. She belittled her and reminded her of her rural roots to emphasize that she is not qualified enough to be one of them.

In the above-discussed films, although encounters with the upper classes are limited and despite presenting cultural distance, the Us/Them dichotomy is not very deep when compared to the more recent films. For example, the prevailing dichotomy of 'we' and 'they' and not wanting/ being able to be like one of them is illustrated in *Crimson Gold* and *A Separation* as well in a more poignant manner. What makes these two films different in us/them dichotomy from the above analyzed films is that two classes are actively engaged with each other throughout the film and unlike the other films, their encounter is not limited to a single scene as their plots are arranged in a way that the characters have no other choice but to step into each other's lives. In *Blue Veiled* for example, although the main plot is about the hardships of Nobar and Rasoul's relationship, Nobar never tries to step into Rasoul's life, and she maintains distance from his lifestyle. But in *Crimson Gold* and *A Separation*, we are faced with a character who has entered the discourse field of the middle class from the lower class. In *A Separation*, Hojjat doesn't want to be like them, but in *Crimson Gold*, although Hossein makes an effort to act like the upper class (the scene in the jewelry store in which they wear formal dresses and tries to act like one of "them"), he fails to do so because his taste and the discourse still belonged to the lower class. Moreover, Hossein's experiences in the homes of rich clients heightened his sense of inadequacy and unfulfilled longing.

In *A Separation*, the lower class and the middle class start stepping into each other's lives. In one of the scenes, Hojjat tells Nader: "How dare you touch my wife [Namus]?" and then he turns to the investigator: "If these issues are not important to

THEM, they are important to ME." Also in another scene, to prove his claim in court, Nader says to the investigator: "Do I have to swear?" to which Hojjat replies: "As if you believe in God and his Prophet!!" and in return, Nader states: "No, God and his prophet are only believed in by you". Hojjat fiercely challenges the middle-class family and the teacher who questioned his daughter about her drawing, suggesting it implied that her father had beaten her mother. He demands an explanation, asking, "Why did you interpret a child's drawing to insinuate that her father caused her mother to lose the baby? Do you believe we treat our families like animals? I swear on the Quran, we are human beings, just like you." His questions address the severe accusations levelled against him and Razieh. Through these dialogues between Hojjat and the middle-class family, the film emphasizes on the dichotomy of us/them.

A significant shift can be seen in *Life and a Day* and *Leila's Brothers*. In *Leila's Brothers*, the family only sees the upper class in the city from a distance (the scenes in which the brothers look with awe and jealousy at the well-dressed women getting out of luxurious cars) or only see the entrance of a luxurious building with an aw. They do not even get the chance to meet people from the upper classes and start a dialogue with them. This issue is even more aggravated in *Life and a Day* where there is no single scene in which two classes are confronted. The family does not even know how more affluent people live and where they go. This visual and narrative separation indicated that the lower class is becoming more socially and geographically distanced from the realities of the wealthy. In contrast to earlier films where there were brief interactions providing insights into the lives of the upper class, *Life and a Day* and *Leila's Brothers* stress a significant sense of alienation, demonstrating how the chances for upward mobility and meaningful social engagement with the affluent have nearly vanished. This absence of interaction serves as a striking reflection on the intensifying socio-economic divide, depicting a society where the trajectories of different classes no longer converge, thereby deepening feelings of despair and confinement within one's own social circle.

4.3. Concluding Remarks and Discussion

The present chapter attempted to explore how spatial and cultural distance has been used in some of the Iranian films produced by a number of prominent Iranian

filmmakers to reflect class divides and economic disparity. The analysis reveals an evolving portrayal of poverty and class relations, highlighting a shift from earlier films that emphasized communal solidarity and resilience to more recent films that portray isolation, alienation, and despair among the lower class. These results align with and expand upon the findings of earlier studies while also offering new insights into the deepening socio-economic and cultural divides in contemporary Iranian society.

The analysis of the earlier films scrutinized in this study, such as *Children of Heaven*, *Under the Skin of the City*, and *The Song of Sparrows*, are in line with Ejlali (2004) and Sadeghi's findings which both emphasized on a period in Iranian cinema when poverty was depicted through a lens of moral integrity and familial solidarity with resilience and community ties being present in everyday lives of the urban poor.

In addition, this chapter complements the study of Tapper (2002), who looked into the way post-revolutionary Iranian cinema reflected political, social, and cultural identity shifts. Tapper concluded that Iranian filmmakers frequently use subtle symbolism and allegory to criticize social inequalities while overcoming censorship. Their finding is in line with the findings of this chapter which revealed that spatial metaphors such as roads, elevators, and stairs are used to represent class hierarchies and social exclusion. However, this study expanded Tapper's analysis by highlighting how these symbolic representations have changed over time. In Earlier films space was as a site of potential mobility and interaction, whereas more recent narratives represent space as a marker of social immobility, where characters remain confined to marginal environments with little hope of escape.

Compared to Jafari and Mozafari's (2013) analysis of the representation of middle-class life in Iranian cinema in *A Separation*, some similarities emerge. Their study focused on the tensions between the middle and lower classes, exploring on the way class distinctions are manifested through language, cultural practices, and social norms. They concluded that the representation of the middle class is explained through the polarization between the lower / upper classes, revealing itself through cultural and ideological capital. The present study also found that in *A Separation*,

the lower and middle classes encounter each other through shared spaces, and conflicts are created. However, this study extends their analysis by finding out that more recent films, such as *Leila's Brothers* and *Life and a Day*, push this division further by eliminating nearly all direct interactions between social classes. In this portrayal, there is no engagement with other classes, nor can they effectively challenge the socio-economic structures that confine them. The elimination of any interaction between the lower class and the middle class could be associated with the weakening of the middle class in Iran due to rising inflation and deteriorating economic conditions. As a result, many individuals who were previously categorized within the middle class are now being merged with the lower class, which contributes to the erosion of the middle class (Alaedini & Ashrafzadeh, 2016; Nomani & Behdad, 2008).

Furthermore, Amiri and Moridi (2020), by doing a semiotic analysis of the poverty in the Iranian cinema, argued that Iranian cinema has shifted from idealized portrayals of poverty to narratives marked by stigmatization and marginalization. The findings from this chapter complement their argument by showing how spatial metaphors increasingly reflect societal exclusion.

In contrast to earlier portrayals of hope, which were also noted in Sadeghi (2020) and Tapper's (2002) analysis of post-revolutionary cinema, recent narratives convey an increasing sense of despair. The use of dilapidated physical spaces and marginal urban neighbourhoods reinforces a sense of despair experienced by the lower class. This can be a reflection of broader societal anxieties in contemporary Iran, where economic problems and political repression have led to growing feelings of hopelessness among the working poor.

CHAPTER 5

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED IRANIAN FILMS

In chapters 3 and 4 the content of the films was analyzed; nevertheless, given the inherently visual nature of films, it is essential to examine how cinematographic techniques, particularly mise-en-scène and camera work, are employed to depict representations of the lower class. Before analyzing the selected films, it is important to understand what mise-en-scène is and how the previous studies have analyzed it. Therefore, in this chapter, first, a short discussion on mise-en-scène and its related studies will be provided, next, the analysis section devoted to the films selected for this study will be presented.

5.1. Mise-en-scène and Related Studies

Brian Henderson (1976) points out the difficulty of defining mise-en-scène and considers it as the “grand undefined term” in cinema. However, he asserts that it generally consists of the art of image, actors, decor and background, lighting and camera movements, which are studied in relation to themselves and each other. In the same vein, Nichols (2010), in his book *Engaging Cinema*, points out to mise-en-scène as the composition of an image and defines it in the following manner:

Mise-en-scène is a French term that means "put in the scene." The term derives from theatrical use, where it refers to all the elements of stage design (walls, windows, furniture, props, and so on). In cinema, the term refers to the arrangement of what appears in front of the camera. It can include set design, lighting, costumes, props, character placement, and movement. (p.60)

Mise-en-scène has been explored by theoreticians like André Bazin, who emphasize on realism in (contrast to montage and expressionist style). Bazin (2004) believes

that today “the director writes in the film”. Meaning that as the image today (i.e., plastic composition and the way it takes place in time) is based more on realism, it has more tools to influence reality and change it from the inside. He states that now, the filmmaker is not competing with the painter and the playwright, but finally the filmmaker is the counterpart of the novelist.

In this line, Cook (2016) points out to the significance of Bazin’s point regarding mise-en-scène and asserts that, following Andre Bazin, critics of Cahiers du cinéma rejected the aesthetics of montage in favour of mise-en-scène, which meant structuring the film by finding the place of the camera and movement, designing the dramatic movement, managing the actors, etc., or in other words, the prediction of any event that happens before the compilation process. He states that the complete definition of mise-en-scène is based on the principle that it should not be just an intellectual or rational experience, but at the same time, it should be an emotional and psychological experience as well. Thus, mise-en-scène plays a significant role in shaping the visual and emotional experience of any visual production. For this reason, some studies have focused on analyzing mise-en-scène elements of films to scrutinize how they have been manipulated to create a specific atmosphere or meaning in a film. The most recent research papers on this issue are reviewed.

A number of studies have focused on analyzing the mise-en-scène elements in films. For example, Radinger Field (2024) analyzes two modernist films, *Jeanne Dielman* and *Exhibition*, emphasizing the subtle yet powerful role of domestic spaces in portraying character interiority. Field highlights how these films challenge traditional mise-en-scène criticism by focusing on indirect visual storytelling, rejecting overt symbolism for a modernist aesthetic that invites interpretative depth. In another study Song (2023) compared Disney’s Pinocchio adaptations (1940 and 2022), revealing how mise-en-scène evolves with audience expectations. The 1940 version relies on consistent high-key lighting and standard camera angles to create a whimsical feel for children, while the 2022 version integrates dynamic lighting (both high and low-key), varied camera angles, and detailed props (e.g., Geppetto’s clocks) to appeal to a broader, multi-generational audience. This highlights the transformative role of mise-en-scène in updating a classic tale for contemporary viewers.

In the analysis of Usman and Harini (2023), the study underscores the role of mise-en-scène in enhancing realism. The setting (everyday rural Indonesia), costumes, and the dominating performance of the character Bu Tejo are key to making the narrative relatable. The deliberate simplicity in cinematography juxtaposes with nuanced acting and scene design, crafting a layered narrative that engages viewers emotionally and socially. Some scholars have specifically scrutinized the mise-en-scène elements in films in relation to social class. For instance, Panjaitan et al. (2024) explore social class and discrimination in the film *Saltburn* (2023). Using Max Weber's and Theodorson's theories, the study highlights upper and middle-class distinctions in lifestyle and position as portrayed through mise-en-scène and narrative elements, alongside instances of verbal discrimination. Similarly, using Roland Barthes' semiotics, Anjani and Junaedi (2022) investigate social class representation in the film *Heidi*. The study explores how social class is depicted through differences in housing, fashion, food, and activities, and how lower-class characters are integrated into upper-class worlds through hegemonic structures. Despite the depiction of social inequality, the film presents the upper class in a largely positive light, emphasizing their benevolence and leadership in fostering relationships across class boundaries. Moreover, Aulia and Aviandy (2022) examine social class inequality in the Russian film *Serebryanye Konki* (Silver Skates) using Hall's representation theory. Through the analysis of six scenes, they highlight stark disparities between the upper and lower classes, focusing on indicators of power, privilege, and prestige. The study shows how the upper class dominates through wealth and influence, while the lower class faces systemic marginalization, experiencing violence, discrimination, and lifestyle disparities. Using visual and narrative elements like costumes, settings, and character behavior, the film critiques social stratification and its real-world consequences, emphasizing the impact of one's social position on their life experiences.

Regarding previous studies on elements of mise-en-scène in Iranian films, there are rather few researches that have focused on this matter. For example, Malekpour (2021) investigated the portrayal of the mother figure in Iranian cinema after the Islamic Revolution, focusing on the shift from pre-revolutionary freedom to a more patriarchal representation. The analysis focused on the symbolic use of colour and

the interaction of the elements of the mise-en-scène of *Gilaneh*, directed by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and Mohsen Abdolvahab in 2005, to analyze the beautification, spiritualization, and idolization of martyrdom and motherhood concepts. The study examined the depiction of maternal agency and the use of colours to understand the ways the post-Iran–Iraq War and its impact on social, economic, and political reform has been depicted.

As evident in the above-mentioned literature review, there is a scarcity of studies examining the cinematic representation of poverty in the Iranian context, particularly through the lens of mise-en-scène elements. To address this gap, in this chapter, by drawing on Nichols’ (2010) categorization of mise-en-scène elements, the following elements—composition and Framing, Lighting, Costume and Props, Performance (Actor’s Expression and Movement), and Setting—and the specific camera angle are analyzed. For this purpose, a number of shots are selected from each film and are analyzed subsequently. This analysis will not only provide an insight into how some of the most prominent Iranian filmmakers use visual language to convey power dynamics and highlight social hierarchies, but in the context of Iranian cinema, where direct political critique is often restricted, they allow filmmakers to represent poverty and social inequality symbolically and metaphorically, despite the censorship.

5.2. Analysis of Mise-en-scène and the Camera Work of the Selected Films

Crimson Gold

Scene 1



Figure 11. *Crimson Gold*/ The teenage soldier

One of the most important scenes from the movie is when Hossein waits outside an apartment hosting a party, only to be stopped by the police from delivering their pizza (Figure 11). In this scene, a young teenage soldier, armed with a gun, repeatedly glances up at the party floor with curiosity. He watches people dancing together, and when Hossein asks if he has ever been to a party like that, the boy replies (in a strong Turkish accent) that he hasn't and doesn't even know what they are doing. It is evident both from the appearance and the accent of the teenage soldier that he has a rural background and has not experienced spending leisure time in the modern world, but has been exploited by the authorities to achieve their goals because of coming from a marginalized background. The composition and framing of this scene also serves the themes it aims to convey. The soldier is shown looking upward visually highlighting his lower-class status and exclusion from the privileged world above. The lighting isolates the soldier in the dimly lit exterior, contrasting with the brighter, inviting light of the party above, symbolizing the stark divide between the two worlds. His costume and props, a uniform and gun, emphasize his role in a system that exploits young boys from lower classes. The performance of the actor, including his curious glances and hesitant responses, shows his naivety and lack of understanding of his role. Additionally, the image shows a low-angle close-up of the soldier gazing upward, emphasizing themes of class hierarchy and alienation. This choice of camera angle visually represents the metaphorical gap between the soldier's social standing and the privilege enjoyed by the partygoers above.

Scene 2



Figure 12. Crimson Gold/Hossein delivering pizza to his commander

Figure 12 is another significant shot from the film in which Hossein delivers pizza to his ex-commander. In this long shot, the camera work conveys themes of social and emotional distance. To begin with, the frame is dominated by the staircase and cuts diagonally across the composition which symbolizes a rigid societal hierarchy and the physical and metaphorical struggle of Hossein climbing it. Hossein's effort to climb the stairs emphasizes an aspiration to rise above his circumstances, but his small figure dwarfed by the structure around him highlights his insignificance and struggle within a system that confines him.

Also, the lightening is dim and somber casting shadows across the scene and isolating the character in the frame. Unlike the shadowy and cold environment of the staircase, the interior spaces are brightly lit and warm. This visual divide highlights the character's detachment from the comforts and opportunities of the world he observes but cannot access.

In order to intensify the emotional and physical distance by positioning the character within a vast architectural space a long shot has been used. Moreover, the neutral camera angle that gives the audience a scene at eye level, conveys a sense of detachment, reflecting the societal indifference to his struggles. Also the depth of the frame, with the staircase receding into the background, further emphasizes the arduousness of his journey. Table 2 summarizes the analysis of the two important shots from the film.

Table 2. Summary of the Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in *Crimson Gold*

Element	First Scene	Second Scene
Composition	Close-up, upward gaze	Long shot, staircase dominates
Lighting	Dim vs. bright contrast	Shadows vs. illuminated interiors
Setting	Isolation from privilege	Staircase as Societal Barrier
Character positioning	Curious, detached soldier	Climbing, struggling figure
Camera angle	Low-angle close-up	Neutral long shot

Children of Heaven

Scene 1



Figure 13. Children of Heaven/ Ali and his father on their way to the city

Scene 2



Figure 14. Children of Heaven/ Ali waiting for his sister

In this scene from *Children of Heaven* (Figure 13), Ali and his father are shown riding a bicycle on a highway filled with cars, emphasizing their "otherness" within an urban, modern environment. The vast highways, high towers and are in contrast with Ali and his father who are on a simple bicycle appearing small and out of place;

visually portraying their marginalization in a world that moves faster and is more affluent. The high-angle wide shot looks down on the characters, diminishing their presence and reinforcing their insignificance within the larger societal framework. The lightening is natural but at the same time harsh which gives the audience an idea of how tiring could riding a bicycle be in a highway which adds to the realism of the scene.

Overall, it could be concluded that by using a juxtaposition of Ali and his father with the highways and cars effectively conveys social hierarchy and marginalization in which imagery of elevated roads above serves as a metaphor for the societal divide.

As seen in Figure 14, Ali is waiting for his sister to return from the school so that he can wear his shoes. The composition of the scene centers Ali within a narrow, confining alleyway, which visually represents his constrained circumstances and the hardships he faces. The aged and dirty walls give a sense of poverty and struggle, yet the narrow path at the end of he which the name of the 11th is captured by the camera also suggests a progression with divine presence and faith.

This contrast between the bleak environment and the hope given by the religious aligns with the father's belief that "Allah buyuk" (God is great) despite their material struggles.

By illuminating the wall and inscription with a subtle natural light as Ali is waiting at the end of the alley, the lightening of the scene further represents its theme of hope and a journey towards a better future.

The camera angle also serves the main themes of the film by a static mid-shot framing in which Ali's solitude and smallness captures his physical isolation but also his resilience in the face of overwhelming odds. By keeping the Prophet's name prominently visible in the background, the camera underscores the connection between Ali's struggles and the spiritual hope that sustains him and his family.

Scene 3



Figure 15. Children of Heaven/ Ali sitting around the pool

This is the ending of the film with Ali sitting around the pool being sad about not winning the shoes despite becoming first in the running competition (Figure 15). The small circular pond, with goldfish swimming inside symbolizes purity and hope. Ali, sitting around the pond with his feed inside the water surrounded by gold fish, is framed in a calm solitude. He is surrounded by potted flowers which add warmth and tranquility to the scene, evoking a sense of domesticity and a humble lifestyle. Moreover, the natural sunlight that reflects off the water creates sparkling highlights which further reinforces innocence and optimism despite hardship. The overhead camera angle shows the audience an intimate and personal moment that reflects the modest aspirations of him and his connection to his surroundings. Table 3 summarizes the findings.

Table 3. Summary of the Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Three Major Scenes in Children of Heaven

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3
Composition	Wide shot, highway dominance	Narrow alley, religious wall	Close-up, centered on child and pool, emphasizing solitude
Setting	Urban, cars vs. bicycle	Poverty, faith symbol	Domestic, humble courtyard with pond and flowers

Table 3. (continued)

Lighting	Bright, exposes struggle	Light at end, symbolizes hope	Natural sunlight reflecting off water, highlighting innocence
Character Positioning	Isolated, dwarfed by cars	Alone, between shadow and light	Kneeling beside the pond, suggesting introspection and loss
Camera Angle	High-angle wide shot	Static mid-shot	Overhead, tight framing focusing on intimacy and solitude
Themes	Marginalization, hierarchy	Faith, hope, perseverance	Innocence, disappointment, quiet resilience

The Song of Sparrows

Scene 1



Figure 16. The Song of Sparrows/Karim on his way to the city for work

The film includes numerous scenes in which Karim is on the move toward the city. In this scene (Figure 16), he is carrying her hard-of-hearing daughter to school. The composition centers on a wide, expansive rural setting, with Karim riding his motorbike along a narrow dirt path. The green and open space around him shows the beauty and untouched view of his village, but at the same time highlights a detachment from modernity and the city. The character's positioning, small and distant in the frame, symbolizes his insignificance and invisibility within the larger societal and economic framework dominated by urban progress.

The natural lighting creates a calm and picturesque atmosphere, referring to the authenticity of Karim's rural life. The camera angle is set at a wide and distant shot to highlight the vastness of the rural landscape. By placing the character at the center but in a small scale, the shot conveys his physical and metaphorical distance from the city.

Scene 2



Figure 17. The Song of Sparrows/Karim moving old stuff with his motorcycle

In the film, Karim wanders around the city looking for unused items and carries them to house in the hope of using them one day in the future. In this scene (Figure 17), he is carrying old stuff from the city to the village he lives in. As for the composition Karim is centered on the back view of riding his motorcycle on an empty rural road. The motorcycle is overloaded with bulky, useless items collected from the city. This portrayal aligns with the film's exploration of how the poor adapt their limited resources to make ends meet. The vast, barren landscape surrounding Karim contrasts sharply with the loaded motorcycle, symbolizing the emptiness and hardship of his environment, as well as the weight of his economic struggles.

Unlike the previous scene (Figure 16) in which the lightning was natural and serene, the natural lighting in the scene is harsh and unfiltered, showing Karim's struggle in life to provide for his family. Moreover, he is all alone on the road, which adds further to his isolation as he travels for miles from home to the city.

The camera angle uses a rear tracking shot to capture Karim from behind so that a sense of movement and continuity is created while maintaining the focus on the burdens he carries, both literally and figuratively. By not showing Karim’s face, the scene universalizes his experience, making him a stand-in for countless others in similar situations. The long road ahead represents physical and metaphorical challenges and uncertainties of his journey. Table 4 summarizes the findings.

Table 4. Summary of the Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in The Songs of Sparrows

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Wide, rural path, small figure	Rear view, overloaded motorcycle
Setting	Lush, rural, disconnected	Barren, desolate, hardship
Lighting	Bright, harsh ,natural,	Stark, flat, austere
Character	Isolated, dwarfed by nature	Back view, burden-focused
Positioning		
Camera Angle	Wide shot, isolation	Rear tracking shot, movement
Themes	Simplicity, isolation	Despair, resilience

The Sun Children

Scene 1



Figure 18. Sun children/ Children in a pool of a park.

Interestingly, the film opens with a similar pool scene that was the ending of the film *Children of Heaven* (Figure 18). Nevertheless, there are sharp contrasts. The second scene from *Sun Children* uses a similar circular pond but conveys a very different tone and context. Here, four boys are sprawled out in the water, their positioning forming a symmetrical and balanced composition that symbolizes unity and shared struggle. Unlike Ali in *Children of Heaven*, who was sitting around their pool at home in a cozy environment surrounded by goldfish and flower pots, this circular pond is situated in a park, reflecting a harsher and more impersonal reality. The bright natural light fills the frame, but it lacks the reflective sparkle seen in the last scene of *Children of Heaven*, giving the moment a sense of rawness and exposure. The overhead camera angle, combined with a wider framing, shifts the focus from individual contemplation to collective experience. This scene is a moment of escape for the boys, as they find a fleeting sense of peace amidst their chaotic life.

These scenes (Figures 15 and 18) show Majidi's ability to use similar visual elements to convey vastly different themes. While the scene in *Children of Heaven* focuses on individual innocence, purity, and modest aspirations, the second emphasizes on collective struggle, and defiance. The contrast between the warm, intimate rural setting of *Children of Heaven* and the urban, institutional backdrop of *Sun Children* reflects the distinct societal challenges faced by children at different times in the Iranian society.

Scene 2



Figure 19. *Sun Children*/ Ali digging the tunnel alone

This scene which is shown towards the end of the film, shows Ali digging the tunnel alone (his friends abandoned him) to find a treasure after the school is shut down (Figure 19). The composition is dominated by darkness, with the characters silhouetted against the faint light coming from the tunnel's exit. This use of darkness conveys a sense of confinement and hopelessness. The tight framing of the scene gives the audience a claustrophobic feeling, reinforcing the character's both physical and social entrapment. The lighting is minimal caused by Ali's small flashlight serving as a probable hope for finding a treasure. Ali's flashlight can also symbolize the faint possibility of escape or redemption against the suffocating reality of their circumstances in which children are left alone without any support mechanisms. The camera angle is in a low shot from within the tunnel which places the audience in the same confined space as the characters, creating an intimate yet unsettling perspective. In this way, the audience experience the same feelings with Ali as he digs the tunnel in despair, deals with obstacles and loses his hope as he digs more.

By comparing the beginning and the ending of the film it could be concluded that the film not only depicts the difficulties faced by children in a harsh environment it also depicts Ali's journey who starts the digging project with his friends but ends up being alone and losing his only social support. Table 5 summarizes the above-discussed analysis.

Table 5. Summary of the Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in The Sun Children

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	boys lying symmetrically, unity.	Dark, confined tunnel, silhouettes, isolation.
Setting	Urban space, shared experience.	Cramped, claustrophobic, bleak environment.
Lighting	Bright, harsh, natural light, playful atmosphere.	Dim, synthetic light, faint hope against darkness.
Character Positioning	Balanced and open, collective camaraderie.	Tight, enclosed, isolated figures in shadow.
Camera Angle	Overhead, wide shot emphasizing space and unity.	Low angle, tight framing, emphasizing entrapment.
Themes	Unity, shared struggle, fleeting escape.	Loss of community, moral erosion, fading hope.

Fireworks Wednesday



Figure 20. Fireworks Wednesday/Roohi and her husband going back home

Figure 20 is the scene shown in the ending in which Roohi joins her husband after working in Morteza and Mojdeh's house, witnessing the familial tension and infidelity of Morteza. She is welcomed warmly by her husband, and they drive over the motorbike toward darkness. They are the ones carrying light and chatting, and laughing together as they drive through the dark road. They are driving far away from the crowded, restless city with people to whom Roohi does not feel close. Roohi and her husband, riding a motorbike through a dark, isolated road, carry the only source of light, which symbolizes hope and unity in contrast to the darkness that surrounds them. The motorbike signifies their humble lifestyle, and their joy and friendly exchanges reveal an emotional intimacy which is in contrast contrasts with the troubled relationships Roohi witnessed in Morteza and Mojdeh's home. The spatial dynamics in this scene play a critical role in illustrating class disparity. Roohi's home, is situated in a mountainous area far from the city center reflecting social stratification, where physical distance mirrors economic and societal inequalities. Earlier in the films, she keeps talking about a lack of infrastructure, such as taxis or proper lighting, which are systemic inequities that marginalize lower-income populations. The vast, open darkness surrounding the couple as they ride away visually contrasts with the crowded, restless city in which Roohi felt

uncomfortable, symbolizing her emotional and moral departure from a life she finds distant and alienating.

A sequence of tracking wide shots following the motorbike has been used to emphasize the motorbike in the expansive darkness to create a sense of continuity, drawing attention to the couple’s bond as they move forward together and to emphasize their liberation from societal chaos. Table 6 summarizes the findings.

Table 6. Summary of the Mise-en-Scène and Camera Angle of a Scene in Fireworks Wednesday

Element	Description
Composition	Motorbike centered in frame emphasizes unity; open road suggests vast isolation.
Setting	Mountain home symbolizes class disparity; the road signifies freedom from urban tension.
Lighting	Motorbike light symbolizes hope and unity; the surrounding darkness represents societal chaos.
Character Positioning	Roohi and her husband positioned closely together, highlighting emotional intimacy and unity.
Camera Angle	Wide shots emphasize isolation; tracking shots underscore their bond; close-ups reveal intimacy.
Theme	Emotional liberation, hope, and unity amidst societal and class-based isolation.

The Separation

Scene 1



Figure 21. The Separation/ Hojjat visiting Nader in the Bank

Figure 21 is the initial encounter between Hojjat and Nader in the bank. As shown in the figure, Hojjat is trying to communicate with Nader through a glass, which symbolizes the physical and metaphorical barrier between them. The glass barrier between them visually divides the frame, symbolizing the disconnect between their worlds—Hojjat representing the working class and Nader the middle class. This barrier not only blocks sound, causing difficulties in communication, but it also highlights the difficulty in understanding between them.

The lighting is soft and natural, and the camera focuses on Hojjat's face so that the audience can see his efforts for communication despite the glass and the crowded surroundings. This struggle for communication could also be a metaphor for his marginalized position in society and his struggle to be heard. The camera positions the audience near Nader, creating a feeling of discomfort and separation from Hojjat, whose voice is obscured by the glass.

Scene 2



Figure 22. The Separation/ Nader's house; recreating the incident on the staircase with Hojjat

Figure 22 is a shot that illustrates how the families and the police work together to reconstruct the event that occurred in Nader's home, shifting the focus to the escalating tension and moral complexity of the situation. The mise-en-scène

highlights the crowded and tense atmosphere of the space, with Nader partially obscured by Hojjat in the foreground. This framing is done in such a way that the audience is also part of this judgement, looking to both characters behind Hojjat and yet have a hard time seeing Nader and the arguments he sets forth. The juxtaposition of the characters in the tight space reflects the claustrophobia and emotional intensity of the situation, as the families attempt to reconcile their conflicting narratives.

The lighting is somewhat more flat, giving space for an accelerated emotional tension and the stark realities they are all confronting. The camera employs a medium shot that centers Nader while keeping Hojjat blurred in the foreground, creating a layered visual effect. This viewpoint reflects the conflicting perspectives and obscured truths of both characters.

In both scene, characters' inability to completely comprehend each other is shown through close-ups and blocked views: the glass barrier in the first scene and the physical crowding in the second serve as visual metaphors for the societal and personal barriers that separate these families. Table 7 summarizes the analysis.

Table 7. Summary of the Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in The Separation

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Glass barrier divides frame, visual separation.	Tight space, characters crowded, partial views.
Setting	Nader's workplace, mundane and tense.	Nader's home, tense and emotionally charged.
Lighting	Soft, natural, mundane reality.	Harsher, emphasizing strain and conflict.
Character Positioning	Hojjat in focus	Nader is partially obscured by Hojtt
Camera Angle	Close-up of Nader, viewer in his perspective.	Medium shot, layered perspectives.
Themes	Class divide, communication barriers.	Tension, conflicting narratives, moral ambiguity.

The Blue veiled

Scene 1



Figure 23. Blue Veiled/Nobar and his siblings on their way leaving their house

Figure 23 is the scene the audience sees towards the end of the film in which Nobar and her siblings are on their way to join Rasul, who abandoned his family to be able to marry Nobar. This scene emphasizes the characters' marginalization through the symbolic use of the railway and the surrounding landscape. As for the composition, Nobar and her siblings are shown to be walking along a desolate railway track in a way that their small figures are juxtaposed against the vast, barren environment. The endlessly extended railway symbolizes their physical and metaphorical distance from the city center and the privileges of urban life. The train approaching in the background highlights the contrast between their limited mobility on foot and the swift, industrial nature of the train, which represents a level of access and progress that remains out of their reach.

The setting reinforces the sense of isolation and exclusion. The desolate and vast landscape, lacking any urban indicators, visually represents their marginalized existence. The family's modest clothes and the weight of their bags highlight their economic struggles, emphasizing the difficulties they face on their journey. Nobar's dark veil (chador) represents the traditional and restricted societal expectations placed upon her, contrasting sharply with the implied wealth of Rasool and his family, who effortlessly navigate the city in their car.

The lighting and the camera angle both work together to emphasize the toughness of their situation. The lightning, although natural, is harsh and exposes the desolate nature of their surroundings, offering no comfort or sense of hope but instead emphasizing the vastness of the journey ahead. As evident in Figure 30, the camera uses a wide shot to capture the landscape, showing both the characters and reinforcing their vulnerability and struggle. Positioned slightly behind and at a distance, the camera encourages the audience to observe the family in relation to their challenging surroundings.

Scene 2



Figure 24. The Blue Veiled/ Nobar leaving her village to live in another house with Rasoul

In Figure 24, Nobar is leaving her village to live in another house with Rasoul. She receives the assistance of her community, supporting her in helping her move her stuff and saying farewell to her. The mise-en-scène emphasizes the strong sense of community and support surrounding her departure. The setting is her village, where other villagers assist Nobar in moving her belongings, highlighting the collective effort and communal bonds. The costumes also enhance the emotional and cultural backdrop; Nobar and the villagers are dressed in traditional clothing, which visually anchors the scene in its cultural essence. The earthy colour palette underscores the natural environment, creating a blend of harmony and bitter sweetness that highlights the emotional weight of the occasion.

The scene's lighting probably utilizes natural or soft light, enhancing the realism and authenticity of the rural environment. This technique helps to evoke an atmosphere that

is both warm and bittersweet, capturing the complex feelings of farewell and support. In terms of composition, Nobar is positioned centrally, with villagers in the background, which highlights her while also showcasing the communal effort of her neighbours.

As for the camera angle, a wide shot is used to capture Nobar, her neighbors and the environment of the village to show their support. There is an intimate tone to this and the consequent shots of Nobar leaving her village. The scene delicately illustrates the themes of change and connection by providing a visual representation of transition, unity, and support. Table 8 summarizes the findings.

Table 8. Summary of the Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in The Blue Veiled

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Small figures, vast landscape, vulnerability	Central framing, community focus, emotional depth
Setting	Barren, desolate, isolating	Rural, natural, supportive
Lightening	Harsh, bright, stark	Soft, warm, bittersweet
Character	Dwarfed, distant, exposed	Central, surrounded by villagers
Positioning		
Camera Angle	Wide, distant, behind	Wide, close-ups, tracking
Themes	Marginalization, hardship, exclusion	Transition, support, belonging

Under the Skin of the City

Scene 1



Figure 25. Under the Skin of City-Navab Street

Figure 25 is the opening scene of the film in which Abbas takes his brother home via Navab Street. Abbas and his brother are framed as small, transient figures going through Navab Street. The street is vast and it seems like the cold imposing high-rise buildings loom over them pointing out to their vulnerability among urban structures. The camera follows the motorbike with tracking shots, emphasizing their insignificance in relation to the overwhelming urban landscape. Moreover, the street's straight, endless trajectory into the horizon creates a sense of inevitability showing the limited choices available to those displaced by urban development including the family.

The harsh and unpolished reality of the surroundings is revealed by the natural yet harsh lighting. The motorbike and the characters are illuminated by the harsh sunlight, which also emphasizes the lifeless, industrial aspect of the street and the negative effects of fast urbanization. Additionally, the motorbike's sense of speed contrasts with the static buildings, highlighting the conflict between structural forces and individual agency.

Scene 2



Figure 26. Under the Skin of the City/Abbas taking the elevator

In this scene (Figure 26) the motif of upward and downward motion as a reflection of Abbas's aspirations and realities is emphasize through camera work and mise-en-scène. As Abbas ascends in the elevator, the elevated perspective grants him a view

of the sprawling urban landscape, symbolizing his longing for something greater—whether it is love, socioeconomic progress, or escape from his current struggles. The way Abbas is framed with his back to the camera, gazing out of the elevator window, establishes an emotional distance that encourages the audience to empathize with him and strengthens the reflection associated with his goals.

The tension between hope and harsh reality is further expressed by the *mise-en-scène*. The view of the city shown from the elevator is crowded with tall skyscrapers standing side by side with older houses highlighting the socioeconomic divide in Tehran. From Abbas's viewpoint, the stark landscape serves as a reminder of the barriers that keep his dreams distant from his current reality.

Regarding the lightening of the scene, it could be seen the natural light filtering through the elevator's glass further isolates Abbas from the outside world. This visual barrier underscores how unattainable his aspirations appear to be. As he travels up and down, the movement of the elevator creates a slight shift in the lighting, symbolizing the transient of his optimism.

The camera angle is, positioned slightly behind Abbas capturing his silhouette against the cityscape which reinforcing his role as an observer of his own aspirations. His loneliness and the emotional burden of his inner conflicts are highlighted by this angle choice. As the elevator descends, the change in perspective mirrors his return to the confines of his reality, a descent into the limitations imposed by his socioeconomic circumstances. Table 9 summarizes the analysis.

Table 9. Summary of The *Mise-en-scène* and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in *Under The Skin Of the City*

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Small figures, towering buildings, wide street	Silhouette, cityscape, introspection
Setting	Navab Street, urban transition, disparity	Elevator, aspirations, uneven cityscape
Lighting	Harsh, raw, exposed	Filtered, separation, inaccessible

Table 9. (continued)

Character Positioning	Transient, navigating, vulnerable	Back to camera, reflective, longing
Camera Angle	Tracking, wide, scale	Behind, silhouette, isolation
Themes	Displacement, divide, marginalization	Ambition, limitation, conflict

A Hero

Scene 1



Figure 27. A Hero/ Rahim taking the stairs to visit his sister's husband working in a restoration project

Figure 27 is the opening of the film in which, upon taking a leave from the prison, Rahim visits to see his sister's husband who works in restoration of an archeological site. The long shot captures him stepping into a world that appears open but remains restrictive, as represented by the intricate scaffolding structure. This scaffolding visually mirrors his entrapment within societal and economic constraints, even outside of prison. The metal bars and mesh netting form a rigid framework around him, reinforcing the theme of confinement despite the illusion of freedom. The vastness of the structure dwarfs Rahim, symbolizing the institutional and social forces that limit his mobility. The restoration setting serves as a metaphor for Rahim's attempt to rebuild his own fractured life and reputation. However, just like the fragile ruins being restored, his efforts rest on an unstable foundation, foreshadowing his impending struggles. The natural daylight casts sharp shadows,

emphasizing the harsh scrutiny he will face. His position within the towering scaffolding isolates him, with his movements appearing constrained, highlighting his lack of agency. The long shot, which distances the viewer from Rahim, reinforces his insignificance within the grander social and institutional structures that govern his fate.

Scene 2



Figure 28. A Hero/ Rahim looking out from inside the prison

Figure 28 is the film's ending scene, which shows Rahim at the entry of prison when he is forced to return to prison because he could not pay his debt. The composition is symmetrical, with Rahim being seated in the middle of the shot. The poles are shown in a way that the focus is entirely on Rahim. He is staring at the released detainee who is rejoined with his wife. The corner of the wall cuts the frame vertically, splitting the background into two planes—one with chairs and silence, the other leading into the dimly lit prison interior behind iron bars. The camera angle is at eye level, which adds to the realism of the scene. The static shot allows the space to speak for itself, pointing to Rahim's unsuccessful attempt to pay his debt and his hopeless return to prison.

A low-key lighting has been used in a way that it is minimal and ambient, casting shadows across the room, especially on the left, with only faint vertical glimmers of light in the background prison gate. This emphasizes not only the physical bleakness of the space but also Rahim's psychological state (hopelessness and powerlessness). His utilitarian costumes show his simplicity and lack of privilege. He is seated

slightly hunched with clasped hands and drawn-in shoulders, visually showing his resignation. He is looking with a longing eyes to the couple who join together and leave the prison in happiness. Table 10 summarizes the analysis.

Table 10.Summary of The Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in A Hero

Element	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Long shot, scaffolding, confinement	Centered, no escape
Setting	Archaeological site, fragile rebuilding	Prison entryway; institutional interior with barred gate in background
Lighting	Harsh daylight, scrutiny	Low-key, ambient lighting with shadows and faint bars of light
Character Positioning	Rahim small, trapped	Alone, centered
Camera Angle	Long shot, alienation	Static, eye-level
Themes	Illusion of freedom, social constraints	Hopelessness, entrapment, resignation

Mom's guest

Scene 1



Figure 29. Mom's guest/ neighbors gathering together to help preparing the meal.

This scene (Figure 29) is a shot taken from the time when all neighbors have come together to help the mother of the family cook dinner, each bringing what they have

at hand. The gathering of neighbors around the mother as they bring items from their homes creates a dynamic and intimate composition that visually conveys the collective effort. The arrangement of the characters in close quarters, creating a semi-circle, provides the feeling of togetherness and cooperation. Each person is actively involved in the process of cooking, whether they are handing items over, observing, or preparing supplies, which reinforces the shared commitment and mutual support within the community. The setting is the modest shared yard that embodies simplicity and familiarity, creating an environment that feels relatable. As shown in the picture, each person is holding everyday items, such as bowls, plastic bags, and household goods, which adds a sense of authenticity and represents the neighbors' resourcefulness. This setting reinforces the idea that even within modest means, the community can come together to support one another. The lighting is soft which creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere that complements the theme of social cohesion. No harsh shadows or dramatic contrasts were used which ensures that the focus is on the collective action among the characters. The warm lighting also symbolizes the care that the neighbors bring. The camera angle is at mid-level and slightly wide that captures all the individuals within the frame, ensuring that no single person is emphasized over the others. This egalitarian framing highlights the collective nature of their endeavor, emphasizing on a cohesive unit rather than isolating any one person. The shot's slight intimacy brings the audience into the scene, allowing them to feel like they are also participants in the support.

Scene 2



Figure 30. Mom's guest/ the carriage moving above the characters' house

In the film a carriage suspended above the characters' home and loaded with building materials is often shown as a visual metaphor for the impending threat of urbanization and its disruptive effects on the family's tight-knit lives (Figure 30). The setting highlights the disparity between the traditional, shared household and the contemporary apartment construction. The carriage is moving above the head of the characters and in the night sky, giving it a dominating presence. This elevation visually differentiates the old home from the carriage, symbolizing the increasing divide between the traditional lifestyle and the modern urban landscape.

The lighting plays a crucial role in this scene. The carriage is lit by a big artificial light, creating a contrast with the dimly lit surroundings of the shared house. This artificial illumination casts shadows and creates a feeling of discomfort, highlighting the unavoidable changes in their neighborhood and the potential solitude in the future.

The camera angle, which captures the carriage from a low perspective through the trees, presents the carriage as an imposing factor looming over the family's home. The inclusion of branches and leaves in the foreground gives a feeling of being enclosed, further emphasizing on the family's probable isolation. The distant view of the carriage, rather than a close-up, depersonalizes the construction process, representing it as an impersonal and unavoidable force that overlooks the lives of those impacted. The following table summarized the analysis of the scenes.

Table 11. Summary of The Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in Mom's Guest

Aspect	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Close-knit group, semi-circle, collaborative action, shared effort	Elevated carriage, looming, materials in transit, nature vs. construction
Setting	Modest courtyard, familiar, everyday resourcefulness	Old shared house, urban development, encroaching apartments
Lighting	Soft, natural, welcoming	Artificial light, stark contrast, shadows, unease
Character Positioning	Proximity, actively engaged, collective focus	House below carriage, nature enclosing, isolated

Table 11. (continued)

Camera Angle Themes	Mid-level, wide, inclusive, community-centered Community, social support, collaboration, resourcefulness	Low angle, through trees, imposing, distant framing Modernization, isolation, tradition vs. urbanization
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Life and a Day

Scene 1



Figure 31. Life and a Day/ sisters after Morteza and Mohsen's argument

In this scene (Figure 31) which is shown towards the end of the film, sisters cry after Morteza and Mohsen fight over money and Morteza hits his brother. The setting is in harmony with the scene's emotional atmosphere. The house is dilapidated with cracked walls, exposed plaster, and an untidy courtyard visually symbolizes the family's declining connections and financial hardships. The setting acts as a metaphor for the disrepair within the family dynamic, highlighting the breakdown of their unity and shared values. The composition places the characters apart, highlighting both their physical and emotional separation. Morteza's hostile demeanor towards Mohsen intensifies the tension present in the scene.

The visual separation of the characters is particularly striking as each person occupies their own area within the frame, further emphasizing on the fractured relationship within the family. The lighting remains flat and natural, revealing the setting's flaws without any adornment. This choice enhances the sense of realism and highlights the harshness of the situation. The absence of warmth in the lighting reflects the lack of warmth in the family relationships.

The camera angle is static and slightly distant, allowing the viewer to observe the characters and their interactions without aligning with any particular perspective. This impartial framing fosters a sense of detachment, prompting the audience to critically evaluate the dynamics at play rather than emotionally connect with one character more than another. The wide shot captures the entire scene, ensuring that both the shabby home and the characters' physical placements are essential to the narrative.

Scene 2



Figure 32. Life and a Day/ the family is traveling to the sister's house outside the city

In this scene (Figure 32), the family is traveling to the sister's house, which is located far from the city in Mehr housing, to discuss her son Amir's self-harm incident. As shown in the figure, on one hand we can see some barren and desolate surroundings with the unpaved dirt road beneath the bridge, and on the other there is a well-structured highway above and the distant urban housing developments. The physical and symbolic distance between the family and the city center is depicted by this contrast, which also represents the division between the privileged and the marginalized. The surrounding is desolated and we can see that the houses are located far away which gives a sense of neglect and loneliness. Moreover, the bridge itself functions as a visual representation of that division. There is an elevated highway which denotes access to opportunities and progress, but the family's journey below bridge denotes the family's lack of access to those opportunities.

The scene lacks vibrant colors and the lightening is natural with muted notes. This colorlessness emphasizes the lifelessness of the setting. Furthermore, the cold lightening is in line with the somber mood of the family’s struggles and their suffrage while dealing with the realities of life. The entire bridge, the dirt road, and the barren landscape are captured by the wide, far-off camera angle. This framing highlights the family's vulnerability and insignificance within the greater societal structure by positioning their car as a tiny, nearly inconsequential element within the vast, empty space. Their marginalized status is visually reinforced by the car's low placement in the frame, which represents their place in the socioeconomic hierarchy. Table 12 summarizes the findings.

Table 12. Summary of The Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in Life and a Day

Aspect	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Dilapidated house, separated characters, tension	Car below bridge, barren landscape, distant city
Setting	Old, shabby, neglected courtyard, financial struggles	Isolated housing, under bridge, unpaved roads, distant urban areas
Lighting	Flat, natural, muted, emphasizes harshness	Natural, cold, muted, bleak
Character Positioning	Dispersed, emotionally distant, lack of unity	Small car, low in frame, overshadowed by bridge
Camera Angle	Static, wide, detached, captures disconnection	Wide, distant, highlights insignificance and isolation
Themes	Poverty, family disintegration, emotional tension	Marginalization, inequality, disconnection, systemic neglect

Leila’s Brothers

Scene 1



Figure 33. Leila's Brothers/ Farhad in the shopping mall

Figure 33 is a shot from the scene in which brothers visit the shopping mall to inspect other shops. The brothers, including Farhad, unable to buy anything look at the stores and people spending money with awe and desperation. The colorful setting of the store caused by vibrant items is in contrast with Farhad's somber weary expression. The abundance and privileges of wealth, which are still beyond his reach, are also symbolized by this well-lit background full of new items. The siblings are physically present in an affluent setting, but they are spectators rather than participants, which serves to further emphasize the sense of separation. Happy customers in the foreground and vibrant goods in the background highlight this isolation.

The character is centered in the frame by the camera angle, and his eyes are focused on something he is unable to reach (the figures in the foreground are counting a pack of money to pay for their purchase). His face is captured with a medium close-up, which blurs the consumerist surroundings around him while capturing the feelings of frustration and resignation. His emotional detachment is further highlighted by this framing, which produces a moving contrast between his inner turmoil and the abundant outside world.

Scene 2



Figure 34. Leila's Brothers/Leila feeling insecure in the lift as she ascends Manoochehr's apartment

Leila's discomfort on illegally constructed lift of Manochehr's house which is located in a dark, remote area serves as a visual metaphor for the precarious situation faced by the family (Figure 34). The lighting is dim and shadows dominate the composition to the extent that Leila's face could be barely seen. The cold tones in the background lighting contribute to the scene's unsettling mood, reinforcing the feeling of insecurity and unease. As evident in the figure, Leila's awkwardness and vulnerability are further highlighted by the way she is positioned in the picture. Her face is visibly worried and uneasy, and she is shown in a medium close-up with her head slightly bowed. She appears hesitant and uneasy about using the elevator, as evidenced by her hunched shoulders and downward gaze. By putting the viewer in close proximity to her anxiety and uncertainty, this framing highlights her emotional state. Moreover, the camera angle focuses on Leila as the central figure and thus is static and intimate. The tight framing also confines her within the scene, reflecting the restrictive and unsafe conditions of her environment. Table 13 summarizes the findings.

Table 13. Summary of The Mise-en-scène and Camera Angle of Two Major Scenes in Leila's Brothers

Aspect	Scene 1	Scene 2
Composition	Vibrant goods, muted figure, consumerism vs. exclusion	Confined, isolated, unsafe environment, makeshift lift
Setting	Shopping mall, wealth, economic disparity	Remote area, insecure lift, instability
Lighting	Bright, artificial, contrasts wealth and exclusion	Dim, muted, shadows, cold tones, unease
Character Positioning	Still, weary, disengaged amidst abundance	Hunched, vulnerable, hesitant, emotional isolation
Camera Angle	Medium close-up, blurred background, focus on detachment	Static, intimate, tight framing, emphasizes insecurity
Themes	Exclusion, inequality, consumerism, marginalization	Insecurity, inequality, instability, socioeconomic divide

5.3. Concluding Remarks and Discussion

The data provided in this chapter need further analysis to understand what they signify regarding the representation of poverty in the selected films by some of the

most prominent Iranian filmmakers. For this purpose, the following table (Table 14) is prepared to provide a holistic understanding on the retrieved data.

As presented in Table 14, one of the most frequent ways that was used to position characters in urban or rural landscapes was the use of wide shots (66.7%). The reason why this technique has been used frequently is that it emphasizes on the insignificance of the characters within larger social structure to demonstrate how poverty isolates individuals. In a similar manner, high-angle shots (58.3%) were often used to portray the powerlessness of the characters as well making characters seem small; lacking control over their economic conditions.

Another prevalent cinematographic choice is the stark contrast between bright and dim lighting (75%). Filmmakers have used brightness to both how harshness of the circumstances (41.7 % /*The Blue Veiled, Life and a Day, Under the Skin of the City, The Sun Children*) and naturalness of the situation or spaces of privilege, while dim or shadowed environments reflect economic hardship. For example, in *Crimson Gold*, the protagonist is frequently shown in dimly lit settings, pointing out to his exclusion from wealthier spaces. Meanwhile, *A Hero* uses similar lighting contrasts to emphasize on the protagonist's despair.

Themes of marginalization are present in almost all films (91.7%), emphasizing that poverty is not merely an individual challenge but a widespread societal concern. Only 4 films (33.3) showed a hopeful lower class having a supportive community and the rest portrayed characters as victims of a class hierarchy who are unable to escape their circumstances. This is especially evident in *Leila's Brothers*, where the financial struggles of the family are shown as generational struggles. In addition, marginalization (91.7%) and isolation (83.3%) are two recurring themes as characters are often depicted as distanced from urban places or confined in cramped, limited spaces.

The community support theme appears only in 33.33% of the films and mainly in older films such as *Mom's Guest, The Blue Veiled, and Children of Heaven*. This data is in line with the findings of chapter 4 where it was concluded that films that

older films emphasize on hope and support within the community while in contrast, more recent films like *A Hero* and *Leila's Brothers* adopt a more individualistic perspective, portraying poverty as an isolating and support structures are eroding over time. Modern films present a harsher reality where poverty is inescapable and stemmed from social structures rather than a lack of personal perseverance. The frequent use of claustrophobic framing, muted lighting, and restricted spaces in contemporary films further emphasizes this trend.

Table 14. Frequency and Percentage of Visual Element

Element	Freq.	Percentage	Films
Close-up framing	6	50	Crimson Gold, The Separation, The Sun Children, Leila's Brothers
Wide shots	8	66.7	Children of Heaven, The Song of Sparrows, Fireworks Wednesday, Mom's Guest, A Hero
Low-angle shots	5	41.7	Crimson Gold, A Hero, Life and a Day
High-angle shots	7	58.3	Children of Heaven, The Blue Veiled, The Separation, Under the Skin of the City
Overhead shots	4	33.3	The Sun Children, Mom's Guest, The Separation
Bright vs. dim lighting	9	75	Crimson Gold, Children of Heaven, The Sun Children, The Blue Veiled, A Hero, Leila's Brothers
Harsh lighting	5	41.7	The Song of Sparrows, The Blue Veiled, Life and a Day, Under the Skin of the City
Soft/Natural lighting	6	50	Children of Heaven, The Sun Children, Fireworks Wednesday, The Separation, Mom's Guest
Artificial lighting	4	33.3	Under the Skin of the City, Leila's Brothers, A Hero, Crimson Gold
Isolation in setting	10	83.3	Crimson Gold, The Song of Sparrows, Life and a Day, The Blue Veiled, Fireworks Wednesday, Leila's Brothers
Urban displacement	7	58.3	Children of Heaven, Under the Skin of the City, A Hero, The Blue Veiled
Marginalization themes	11	91.7	Crimson Gold, The Separation, Life and a Day, A Hero, The Sun Children, Leila's Brothers

Table 14. (continued)

Hope and Community support	4	33.3	Mom's Guest, The Blue Veiled, The Song of Sparrows, Children of Heaven, Under the Skin of the City
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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The present study was an attempt to analyze the representation of poverty in several Iranian films produced after the Islamic Revolution by some of the most prominent Iranian filmmakers to demonstrate how films reflect and shape societal understandings of poverty, revealing how economically marginalized groups are visually and narratively constructed. The main argument of the study was that there is a shift in the representation of the lower class. For this purpose, the study was organized into three chapters to explore the proposed argument.

After a discussion on the representation of poverty in global and Iranian contexts, along with a brief reference to sociopolitical changes in Iran after the revolution, in chapter 3, the selected Iranian films were analyzed to understand how poverty and class have been represented. It was concluded that, unlike the films produced earlier in which the poor were depicted as moral and hopeful individuals who had the support of their community and family, the more recent films provide a despairing view of the poor who are deprived of any communal and social support and are morally corrupt. Moreover, they have been portrayed in a way that there is no hope for them to improve their living condition. These findings are in line with the previous studies. For example, Ejlali (2004) and Goudarzi et al. (2022), concluded that Iranian films produced before the 2000s often portrayed poverty within a moral and supportive social structure, where communal support mitigated economic hardships. Nevertheless, Heydari et al. (2023) also noted a shift in the portrayal of more recent films where the lower class are disintegrated from society and isolated within society and even their community.

The findings are also in line with the study of Amiri and Aqababae (2019) who argue that earlier post-revolutionary films tended to portray poverty in an idealized

way, often aligning with revolutionary values that associated the lower class with resilience, morality, and national identity. However, their study slightly diverges from this paper in their assessment of the moral transformation of lower-class characters over time. While Amiri and Aqababae (2019) recognize the increasing marginalization of the lower class in narratives, they argue that this shift primarily reflects a loss of their revolutionary status and ideological significance in post-2000 Iranian cinema. In contrast, this study finds that the change in moral characterization—from virtuous and principled to ethically compromised—signals a broader cultural and social shift rather than just a state-related official ideological one. More recent films, as observed in this study, suggest that economic struggle has forced lower-class individuals to adopt morally ambiguous survival strategies, a trend that was not as prominent in earlier cinematic narratives.

In Chapter 4, the analysis of the selected Iranian films was focused on physical and cultural distance. It was revealed that, physically speaking, almost all of the analyzed films used physical spaces, including apartments, roads, stairs, elevators and motorbikes to show that the lower class are marginalized. However, this marginalization was not just physical but cultural as well. While both earlier and recent depictions portrayed the dichotomy of Us/ Them, in more recent films this exclusion was aggravated by limiting/excluding any encounter between the poor and the upper class; reflecting the erosion of the middle class in the society where many individuals who were previously categorized within the middle class becoming merged with the lower class due to inflation and economic difficulties (Alaedini & Ashrafzadeh, 2016; Nomani & Behdad, 2008).

Finally, in chapter 5, selected shots from the analyzed films were visually scrutinized by focusing on *mise-en-scène* elements and camera angles. It was revealed that wide shots and high angles were used most frequently by the filmmakers to signify the insignificance and lack of control of the poor. Moreover, regarding the use of light, it was concluded that extremely bright lighting was used to emphasize on the harshness of the circumstances and dim lighting was used to refer to hopelessness and harsh economic situation. In addition, the most frequent themes in the selected shots were isolation and marginalization of the characters, which is in line with the findings of

the previous chapter. Also, another important finding was that the theme of social support was visible only in 41.7% of the films, which further fortified the findings of chapter 3.

Overall, it could be concluded a gradual shift in the representation of the lower class could be traced in the selected Iranian films with respect to the representation of poverty and the lower class where the poor are not only socially and physically marginalized, but are immoral characters who live without any support and seem to be doomed to be poor without a hope of improvement in their lives. This change in the representation acts as a mirror to societal transformations, depicting a growing sense of alienation and despair among the economically marginalized, hinting at a future where any chance for improvement for the lower class is increasingly restricted. This portrayal could also indicate that the promises regarding a better life given by the Iranian authorities have not been fulfilled, and the living conditions of the lower class have been deteriorating over time.

Moreover, this portrayal could be an indication of an indirect critique of the unfulfilled promises given by Iranian authorities about economic progress and social justice. Depicting poverty as an enduring and worsening condition refers to a growing disillusionment with state narratives, which previously placed the lower class as a pivotal component of national identity and progress. Instead, these films suggest that living conditions for the lower class have consistently deteriorated and are aggravated by inflation and economic mismanagement.

In addition, it is important to consider the views of filmmakers while making their films. Based on the analysis, it could be deduced that the filmmakers not only mirrored the condition of the lower class in Iranian society, but the films in which poverty is shown to be an everlasting situation reflect the filmmaker's own disbelief of a possible improvement in the society. In other words, this transformation implies a broader sense of societal disillusionment, where even filmmakers, who historically played a role in advocating for social change, appear to have lost faith in the possibility of progress.

It is worth highlighting that the aforementioned shift in the representation of the lower class in the selected Iranian films is not limited to the Iranian context. Indeed, Erdogan (2023) points to a similar change in the portrayal of the poor in Turkish cinema, specifically the filmography of Zeki Demirkubuz. He states that by looking into the films made between 1990-2010, a shift could be seen from the moral lower class to the poor who are malicious, insidious and immoral characters. He adds that in his cinema “the poverty of the poor and the filmmaker’s disbelief in a change are intertwined together” (p.193). These similar analyses can be an indication of a broader impact of economic policies and cultural changes that affect the living conditions of the lower class and their lifestyle.

Nevertheless, the present study has its own limitations. To begin with, the analysis was restricted to six prominent Iranian filmmakers and their films. Therefore, considering the limited number of filmmakers and the analyzed films, the findings could not be generalized to other Iranian films including the films created by filmmakers working outside of Iran. In addition, the study focuses on textual analysis of the films and does not explore how audiences perceive and interpret these representations. Further analysis is required to understand how different segments in the society perceive this portrayal for a comprehensive analysis. Also, another layer could be added to this study by examining how industry dynamics such as funding sources, international festival influence, and production constraints shape these representations as they may affect the mindset of the filmmakers. The study could also be backed up by quantitative economic data and interdisciplinary approaches to substantiate claims about class erosion and poverty trends. In addition, the study primarily examines past and recent trends but does not predict how these portrayals might continue to evolve. Given the shifting political and economic climate in Iran, future films may adopt different approaches to representing class and poverty. Longitudinal studies that track these changes over a longer period could provide a more comprehensive picture. Lastly, a comparative analysis between Iranian cinema and other national film industries (e.g. African, Indian, or Latin American) could add strength to the argument by positioning Iran’s cinematic portrayal within a global context.

Considering the findings of the study, there is an important issue that plays a significant role in helping us foresee a landscape of the future of Iranian films, specifically social films, which are the dynamics of viewership and production. Iranian cinema has undergone shifts in audience composition: Before the revolution, Iranian cinema was class-based. Meaning that the upper class preferred Western films while the lower class preferred Iranian/Indian melodramas. But after the revolution, because of increased censorship and reduced access to CDs the main audience of the films was the young, urban, educated middle class. Indeed, social films were liked by the middle class as they resonated with their lives. However, on one hand, the middle class has been shrinking in Iran due to inflation, economic instability, and political repression, and on the other, the Iranian regime has been pulling the ropes of censorship tighter. These two incidents resulted in two main issues: due to the censorship making social films have been harder and harder for filmmakers to produce, and the shrinking middle class who has been their primary audience, is becoming more and more exhausted audience, meaning that due to economic, social and political tensions they cannot tolerate to watch tragedy and harsh social and economic realities and prefer escapist comedy to ease the tension they go on an everyday basis.

Based on the findings of this study and the broader trends discussed, the future landscape of Iranian cinema appears precarious yet complex. If current patterns persist, marked by intensified censorship, economic collapse, and audience exhaustion, then films centered on social realism and class critique may become increasingly rare, both in terms of production and consumption. Filmmakers may either be pushed into silence or forced to use even more symbolism and allegory to evade censorship and express themselves.

On the other hand, a likely shift toward comedy, or fantasy genres may dominate mainstream cinema as a means of offering psychological relief. In fact, this increase is already evident as the production of the comedy genre has increased by approximately 87 percent since the 2000s (Iran Daily, Naficy). At the same time, this pivot could also create a deeper disconnect between lived realities and their cinematic representations, further silencing the struggles that some of the Iranian

filmmakers once gave voice to. In this sense, this study not only maps a shift in how poverty and class are portrayed but also opens a window into a rapidly changing cultural ecosystem, which needs further analysis.

When looking at the bigger picture, i.e. the Iranian cinema, it is also worth looking into the characteristics that make the Iranian cinema unique and worth analysis. There may be many ways to answer this question, but I believe that one of the most significant reasons that sets Iranian cinema apart is the relationship between Persian literature, culture, collective thought, and Iranian cinema, especially social films. Of course, the influence of literature, especially poetry and philosophical writing, is not unique to Iranian cinema. Many national cinemas, including French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, Japanese cinema, Latin American Third Cinema, etc. Have been influenced by literature and philosophy. Directors like Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Andrei Tarkovsky all brought literary sensibilities into film.

However, one of the most significant features of Persian literature is its devotion to social problems. Although the language of many of these texts is symbolic, mystical, or literary, their concepts are deeply connected to people's lives, power, justice, morality, and social destiny. This literature has always carried social, moral, political, and philosophical concerns in its essence, but the intensity and type of this approach have changed in different historical periods. For example, during the classical period (from the 4th to the 8th century AH), despite the literature being more court-oriented, Ferdowsi, in the *Shahnameh*, presents an epic portrait of Iranian history and national identity, and addresses the struggle against oppression, tyranny, and historical forgetfulness. Similarly, Hafez, in his romantic and mystical language, repeatedly points out hypocrisy, religious corruption, social injustice, and human suffering within structures of power. This social concern continues in later mystical literature such as the works of Rumi, Attar, Sana'i which focus on man and his relationship with meaning and freedom from hypocrisy and hypocrisy, which is also a kind of social criticism. During the constitutional and 20th century literature addressing social issues reached its peak with the emergence of Dehkhoda, Bahar, Farrokhi Yazdi, Sadegh Hedayat, Jalal Al-Ahmad, Forugh and others. In this period, literature directly entered the criticism of inequality, tyranny, poverty, and social

backwardness. This devotion continued in Contemporary literature after the revolution in both poetry and fiction, where social themes, discrimination, immigration, war, and gender have played a central role with authors like Mahmoud Dolatabadi, Ahmad Shamloo, Simin Daneshvar, and so on.

Moreover, the relationship of the Iranian people with literature, especially verse literature, is not only historical and profound, but also lived and experiential. Unlike many societies where literature often remains at the elite level, in Iran, literature—especially poetry—has always been a part of the people’s daily lives, cultural memory, and collective rituals. This connection has been formed not only through study, but more so through oral traditions and collective performance.

One of the most important manifestations of this connection is naqqali—a form of oral storytelling performed in coffeehouses, squares, and public spaces. Using epic voices, body movements, and instruments, naqqals would tell stories from Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* or religious and historical narratives to the people. In naqqali, literature became a performance; the audience was not just a listener, but also part of the narrative experience. This tradition made people, even illiterate, acquainted with and identified with concepts such as heroism, oppression, justice, sacrifice, and destiny.

Alongside naqqali, traditions such as reciting Hafez, *Shahnameh*, *Ta’ziyeh*, and even the widespread use of Sa’di and Hafez’s poems in everyday speech, proverbs, and cultural rituals (from weddings and Nowruz to mourning and death) have made literature an integral part of the sociocultural fabric of the people. Poetry has been the primary medium for thought, emotion, and the transmission of experience. People have thought, criticized, loved, and even protested through poetry—the language of poetry has been the language of expressing truth, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly.

In such a context, Iranian social cinema—especially after the 1979 revolution—is also considered a direct heir to this literary tradition. In other words, Iranian cinema is born from the womb of Persian literature. The Iranian audience, due to its cultural

familiarity with the tradition of classical literature and symbolic thought, also understands and connects with this cinematic language well. Therefore, Iranian social cinema can be considered a natural extension of the Persian literary tradition in the context of images, a cinema that is both reflective of social issues and faithful to the metaphorical and philosophical aesthetics of Iranian culture. And this is what makes Iranian cinema unique and fascinating for audiences around the world. Of course, the extent to which these characteristics are similar and different from cinemas of other nationalities is a topic of scrutiny for further research.



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APPENDICES

A. ICONIC DIRECTORS AND POVERTY

Iranian cinema's ability to depict poverty as a multifaceted social issue owes much to its iconic directors, who have masterfully woven themes of economic deprivation, class disparity, and resilience into their narratives. This section explores the contributions of key selected filmmakers for this study.

Jafar Panahi

Jafar Panahi's cinematic language is recognized through his minimalist scenery of socio-economic realities. In films such as *Crimson Gold* (2003), Panahi uses realism to illustrate structural inequality and the psychological consequences of systemic poverty. By combining the linear forms of documentary and narrative film languages, he both utilizes reflexivity and self-performance through the language of the cinematic imagery. Panahi doesn't hesitate to use actors outside of the industry and interact with the camera directly while creating a unique relationship between personal space and cinematic settings. This allows him to create both political and artistic commentary (Pioldner, 2018). His narratives broaden the aesthetics of resistance distinctively by picturing the struggle of creative reflections under oppressive situations. (Strohmaier, 2016). His interactive narrative techniques through self-portrayal and direct interaction with the camera layer a reflexive imagery, particularly designed to invite the audience to question the language of the filmmaking itself. (Pioldner, 2018)

Majid Majidi

Majid Majidi always contains emotional depth and moral sensitivity simultaneously through the structure of the storyline in his cinematic language while portraying the

economic hardship through a child's gaze. In his film, *Children of Heaven* (1997), he achieves this through a modest story of a boy who loses his sister's shoes while representing the dynamics of family relationships at the same time. Majidi's use of child gaze allows him to mediate major societal themes such as poverty and familial love, while he peculiarly makes the experience universally relatable, he influences the spectators by reflecting the protagonists' innocence and resilience against the material struggle.

In *The Color of Paradise* (1999), Majidi again highlights the conditions of poverty and disability by drawing a familiar relationship of material incapacities that affects an individual's fragile social reality. The setting, which takes place in the rural area of Iran, powerfully projects the poetic scenery of natural landscapes while overlapping the material conditions surrounding the characters with incapacities. Use of cinematic language between the natural scenery and harsh material realities contrast-wise projects both a poetic element of emotional scenery to provide a space of time and an unearthly feeling of spacelessness by the subjects and the framing. (Tapper, 2002). This contrast, combined with poetic realism and child gaze, describes poverty uniquely, both stimulating and tearing the audience.

Overall, the narrative structures of Majidi reflect the exiled individuals from the material reality through combining beauty and misfortune. (Pittman, 2011 and Zargar, 2016). The enriched motives of religious allegories and spirituality that are embodied by the characters enrich the intensity of the film. (Zargar, 2016). Majidi also prefers the actors from outside the film industry to emphasize a more solid directorial approach while layering the visual language of authenticity through colourful cinematographic framing to establish a deeper emotional connection with the visual narration. (Pittman, 2011 and Zargar, 2016).

He also prefers using extended shots and open and ambiguous conclusions that challenge audiences to contemplate on characters' experiences and the wider social issues they signify (Zargar, 2016). However, while Majidi's works celebrate the beauty that emerges from suffering, some critics contend that this depiction may

idealize hardship, which could distract from the pressing need for social reform in modern Iran (Zargar, 2016).

Asgar Farhadi

Asgar Farhadi reflects more complex aspects of poverty and different political constraints of social tensions in his cinematic narration. In *A Separation* (2011), where Farhadi demonstrates both the struggle of working-class families and the political tension of post-revolution conditions, the complex narrative structure shows the way conditions of poverty influence parental decisions. In this manner, he manifests the concept of poverty as an intertwined condition with morality and justice under the class disparity, more than a singular material conception. (Rahimieh, 2015).

Another broader societal struggle is given in *The Salesman* (2016), where Farhadi highlights the way individual responses towards trauma are shaped by the financial instability through using the apartment as a setting through the narrative to reflect a wider social struggle. A very detailed, precisely tailored conceptualization of the story arc and the compelling structure of the narrative impacts the audience in both emotional and ethical dimensions towards material struggles, while the sense of immediacy embodies the realism that reflects the political and societal exposé.

Farhadi conceptually prefers a non-linear storytelling format where exposition of the central conflict is not mediated through the visual narration directly, but with the amplified suspense that disperses between character-wise conflicts, building an emotional environment. (Serrano, 2020).

Farhadi frequently presents various viewpoints to illustrate a deeper insight into the core conflicts of characters (Rugo, 2016). Key themes such as family conflicts that are centred around the tension of modernity and tradition, that is portrayed via everyday scenarios, are essential in his stories. (Sehat & Jahantigh, 2018); such as in *A Separation*, where he utilizes the interaction of the gender roles and class structures to reflect a broader political challenge (Ahmadgoli & Yazdanjoo, 2020).

Dariush Mehrjui

Dariush Mehrjui is one of the most foundational figures in Iranian Cinema since, as a pioneer of the Iranian New Wave movement, he frequently intervened with both social constraints and personal struggles while introducing realism and symbolic depth concurrently to cover broad issues holistically. In his debut film, *The Cow* (1969), Mehrjui presents rural poverty to the audience by following the story of a villager who is deeply attached to a cow. Mehrjui uses this symbolism to reflect the relationship between the material possessions and the identity of village life. By adapting the elements of psychological realism, Mehrjui also criticizes the socio-economically marginalized rural communities of Iran while utilize allegories to overcome the political thresholds of pre-revolutionary conditions of Iranian Cinema. (Tapper, 2002).

He follows this symbolic realist tradition in his film *The Cycle* (1978) by narration the story of Ali, who gets involved in a cycle of exploitation to help his father survive through his medical state. Mehrjui, while reflecting the institutional corruption and moral decay in the narrative structure, he also symbolically maintains the conditions of inequality through the story arc, significantly related to the landscape of socio-economic problems reflected through Iranian cinema. (Naficy, 2011).

Rakhshān Banietamad

Rakhshān Banietamad, often referred to as the “First Lady of Iranian Cinema,” is known for her empathetic portrayals of working-class families, particularly women navigating poverty in patriarchal systems. Banietamad’s storytelling often tackles pressing social issues, such as war, poverty, and domestic abuse, making her films relevant and thought-provoking (Armatage & Khosroshahi, 2017).

In *Tales* (2014), Banietamad presents interconnected stories of individuals who struggle with poverty, addiction, and political disillusionment. Her focus on marginalized voices and her documentary-style realism make her films among the most influential works on poverty and social issues.

Saeed Roustayi

As a contemporary filmmaker, Saeed Roustayi is renowned by his unflinching portrayals of urban poverty. In his films, he touches upon poverty, addiction, child labour, systematic neglect and socio-economic despair. He uses fast-paced narratives in his films and uses the urban environment to highlight the economic disparities of the lower class. His films have received global attention for criticizing modern Iran's socio-economic challenges. His well-known films are *Life and a Day* (2016), *Just 6.5* (2019), *Sheeple* (2018), *In Leila's Brothers* (2022).



B. SUMMARY OF THE SELECTED FILMS

Crimson Gold (2003)

The film explores themes of social inequality, alienation, and moral decay. The film follows Hossein, a pizza deliveryman and war soldier dealing with social injustice and economic hardship, who is consistently humiliated by the wealthy and ignored by society. His delivery job grants him entry into the lives of the affluent, but he becomes increasingly aware of his own lack of agency.

Hossein was a soldier in the Iran-Iraq war when the government valued a simple, religious and modest lifestyle; nevertheless, he witnessed how those values were not adhered to by his encounters with people years after the war including his ex-commander to whom he delivered pizza finding him throwing a party and enjoying an extravagant life.

The film begins with a chilling sequence: Hussein attempts to rob a jewelry store. The heist quickly spirals out of control when the jeweler locks him inside. Trapped, Hussein, overwhelmed by desperation and rage, kills the jeweler before taking his own life. The narrative then moves backward, introducing Hossein in his everyday life.

The film then develops through five main encounters. First, Hossein and his fiancé's brother try to enter a jewelry store where he is humiliated by the owner Mr. Vaziri. Due to Hossein Agha's simple, working-class appearance (which openly reflects his social class), he is not even allowed to enter the jewelry store and is turned away behind the door. Second, the meeting between the former soldier and his commander is renewed in a situation where the commander is enjoying himself at a mixed-gender party, while his wounded soldier struggles for a meagre amount of money. In another sequence where government patrols are taking action to arrest people at a night party, we see a wireless Haji with a bad attitude who has come to put an end to the

nighttime corruption of the youth. He does not hesitate to do anything to achieve his goal (which is to arrest everyone at the party); for example, he is willing to keep his forces hungry and tired until 4 am, to violate and insult the rights of others who have no role in the "corruption", and also to mistreats the main suspects.

The fourth scene is Hossein's second attempt to enter the jewelry shop. This time, Hossein, in a clever move, adorned himself and his wife with an "upper-class" appearance so that he could enter the jewelry store. Hossein Agha had understood that, in the first place, for these bourgeois people, it is appearance and clothing that are decisive. But no matter how much he adorned his appearance, he could not hide his low-class and uncivilized behaviour. So, he had taken the first step in putting on a good appearance, but he was unable to take the second step to penetrate the circle of nobles. In the end, his attempt to have a peaceful encounter reached a dead end, adding to his frustration. The last encounter is with a young man who has just arrived from the USA and lives alone in a luxurious palace. Poorang's behaviour and thinking, in addition to belonging to the wealthy and aristocratic class of society, are also influenced by American culture. And this is what makes the confrontation between these two people, who are from two completely different classes (lower, upper) and two completely different societies (Iran, USA), doubly attractive.

Children of Heaven (1997)

Children of Heaven is a story of Ali and Zahra, two siblings who belong to a poor family in Tehran. The film begins with Ali losing Zahra's only pair of shoes accidentally while taking them to get them repaired. Fearing their parents' reaction, Ali and Zahra decide not to tell them about the lost shoes. Instead, they come up with a plan to share Ali's sneakers. Zahra wears the sneakers to school in the morning and rushes back to give them to Ali for his afternoon classes.

Although the plan is simple, it has its challenges and tensions between the two because Zahra and Ali usually arrive late to school because of waiting for one another to take their turn to wear the shoe. Despite this, the siblings manage to keep a good relationship with each other.

Meanwhile, Ali learns that there will be a citywide running race whose runners will be selected by the school. This race offered various prizes, including sneakers for the third-place winner. Ali joins the selections and manages to be selected for the race with diligence and determination. He secretly enters the race, not to win but to secure the sneakers for Zahra. On the day of the race, Ali puts in an extraordinary effort, finishing in first place unintentionally and thus failing to win the sneakers, which were awarded to the third place. He turns back home, finding Zahra waiting for his good news in their yard. Giving her the bad news, Ali is shown sitting around a pool with blistered feet surrounded by the golden fish and pots of flowers. However, the film closes on a tender note as their bond remains strong, and Ali's unwavering love for his sister shines through. The film ends with their father carrying a pair of shoes for each sibling on his way home.

The Song of Sparrows (2008)

The film shows the life of Karim, who is a hardworking father of a family that live in a rural village on the outskirts of Tehran. He lives a modest life by working on an ostrich farm, but once one of the ostriches escapes, he is blamed for the loss and is fired from work. Having no steady income, he sets out to Tehran with his motorbike to find work. On one of his trips to the city, he discovers an opportunity to earn money by using his old motorbike to transport goods and passengers.

Initially, the journey to the city was for earning money to support the family, but gradually, the hustle and bustle of the city started to change him. He encounters different people in the city who show the disparity between the simple rural life and the chaotic urban life. By the time he becomes consumed by material pursuits and his desire to earn more money, leading to moral and emotional conflicts. Nevertheless, as a result of a series of moments of reflection and misfortunes, he ultimately reevaluates his priorities. In the end, Karim reconnects with his family and the values that once defined him, finding peace in humility and simplicity.

The film uses the same metaphor for the goldfish, which was used in the *Children of Heaven* when Karim's son tries to revive a water reservoir with his friends and to use

it as a place to reproduce the fish. A plan which was partially successful after ups and downs.

Sun Children (2020)

Sun Children tells the story of Ali, a 12-year-old boy living in Tehran, and his group of friends, all of whom are street children struggling to survive through odd jobs and petty crime. Alihard, working and resourceful, is hired by a local crime boss to recover hidden treasure rumoured to be buried underneath a charity-run school for underprivileged children. Intrigued by the prospect of wealth, which he hopes will help his sick mother and lift his family out of poverty, Ali enrolls in the school designated for working children along with his friends to gain access to the underground tunnels.

At the Sun School, Ali and his friends are exposed to a context which is new for them. A school filled with teachers and staff who genuinely care about the education and well-being of the disadvantaged children. Despite their initial difficulty and tension to get registered (due to late school entry), they gradually develop bonds both with the teachers, staff and their class mates rooting the possibility of a brighter future through education in their minds.

However, the boys remain torn between their loyalty to the criminal boss and their newfound opportunities as the school is closed due to a lack of receiving foundation and the promises of the criminal boss and the idea of a brighter future after finding a treasure. As they dig through the tunnels under the school, they face numerous physical and emotional challenges. The film ends with the school being shut down due to a lack of funds, and Ali digging the tunnel alone, finding out that the hidden treasure was simply a bag of drugs.

Fireworks Wednesday (2006)

The film passes in Chaharshanbe Suri (Fireworks Wednesday), which is the last Wednesday of the Persian calendar, celebrated with fireworks. The story is about

Rouhi, a young, soon-to-be-married woman, who takes on a temporary job as a house cleaner for a middle-class couple in Tehran. She unwillingly becomes involved in the life of the couple as she starts working for them.

The wife, Mojdeh, is suspicious of her husband, Morteza, as she believes that he is having an affair with their divorced neighbour, Simin. The audience is kept in doubt about the affair until the end of the film. While trying to do her job, Rouhi becomes a silent observer and sometimes an unwilling participant in the couple's escalating arguments and emotional turmoil. Rouhi, naive and idealistic about love and marriage, tries to find a common ground between the couple, sometimes even by lying as she thinks it may not be possible for the husband to have an affair. But she eventually finds out about the affair between Morteza and Simin and leaves their house with her husband perplexed by the complexity of the life of the middle-class family.

A Separation (2011)

The film is the story of a couple Simin and Nader who argue over migration. Simin wants to leave the country to build a better life for their daughter, Termeh, but Nader feels obligated to stay and care for his father, who suffers from advanced Alzheimer's disease. Therefore, Simin files for divorce, but the court denied her request. As a result, Simin moved out, leaving Termeh with her father.

To help care for his ailing father, Nader hires Razieh, a deeply religious and financially struggling young woman, who secretly takes the job without informing her hot-tempered traditional husband, Hojjat. One day, due to an issue with the sick father Nader and Razieh argue and a confrontation arises between them leads to a physical altercation that results in Razieh's miscarriage. Nader is accused of causing her miscarriage, and the legal procedures for showing the innocence of Nader creates feelings of mistrust, and moral dilemmas. In the end, it is revealed that Razieh was forced to lie about Nader causing her miscarriage as she had lied to her husband about working in Nader's house. The film ends with Termeh deciding on her custody in the court.

A Hero (2021)

A Hero tells the story of Rahim, a man imprisoned in Shiraz, Iran, for failing to repay a debt to his creditor, Bahram. During a two-day leave from prison, Rahim finds out that his girlfriend, Farkhondeh, found a bag full of coins. Initially, they planned to sell the coins to pay part of his debt, but Rahim changed his mind and decided to return the bag to its owner. This act of honesty turns him into a local hero, gaining media attention and sympathy from the public.

However, it turns out the woman to whom they returned the gold was not the owner of the golden coins. The family then has to lie about the owner so that he would not lose his public image as this heroic image was about to help him pay his debt through charity. Nevertheless, their attempts to lie fail and Rahim is forced to return to prison upon failing to repay his debt. In the film's climax, Rahim faces a lot of pressure to prove his honesty and ultimately decides to prioritize his integrity over his reputation. He refuses to fabricate further lies to gain public sympathy or financial help.

Mom's Guest (2004)

The film is a family comedy based on a book of the same name by Iranian author Houshang Moradi Kermani. It is about a poor family who live in an old traditional shared house and are preparing to host an important guest. However, they struggle to prepare a meal for the guests due to financial difficulties in buying the necessary groceries.

The mother's frantic efforts to host an unexpected dinner for her nephew and his bride, despite her family's financial struggles, are shown to the audience. When Mom (played by Golab Adineh) learns of the visit, she panics, as there's no food to serve. With the help of her family and neighbours, she scrambles to gather ingredients, borrowing supplies and navigating comical yet stressful situations.

Her husband, Yadollah, complicates matters with his inappropriate storytelling and insistence that the guests stay overnight, despite not having any food to eat. The

family members struggle to find ingredients for the dinner, including the son Amir, who attempts to secretly procure food but fails. Their addicted neighbour, Yousef, eventually helps by raiding his family's refrigerator despite his marital issues. Other neighbours pitch in, and finally, the dinner comes together just as another neighbour's father delivers chicken and fish in a gesture of reconciliation.

The evening ends in chaos when Mom faints from exhaustion. After a doctor prescribes rest, the guests leave, the family settles in, and Mom, satisfied with preserving her dignity despite the challenges, finally rests. The film captures themes of hospitality, community, and resilience with humour and warmth.

The Blue-Veiled (1995)

The story of the film revolves around a middle-aged tomato paste factory owner and farm owner named Rasoul Rahmani, who lives in isolation after the death of his wife. His daughters visit him occasionally. On his farm works a young woman named Nobar Kordani, who shoulders the responsibility of taking care of her addicted mother, a delinquent teenage brother, and her younger sister. Due to certain events, Rasoul becomes interested in Nobar. Initially, he tries to provide her with shelter and a decent livelihood, but gradually, he falls in love with her. Eventually, he marries her temporarily and secretly. Meanwhile, Nobar's mother is imprisoned for drug-related charges, and Rasoul also takes responsibility for Nobar's teenage brother.

Eventually, Rasoul's two daughters find out about the relationship, and they perceive it as a scandal. So they use threats and bribes against Nobar to make her give up on Rasoul and gather family elders to confront Rasoul. However, despite suffering a heart attack from the stress caused by their actions, Rasoul abandons his home, wealth, and previous life, and chooses to live with Nobar instead. This decision, however, does not promise a secure or certain future for him due to the class differences between him and Nobar.

Under the Skin of the City (2001)

The film shows the struggles of a working-class family in Tehran amidst societal and political tensions. Tuba is the mother of the family who works in a factory and takes

care of his family and his sick husband. Her younger son, Ali, who teaches her to read and write, is deeply involved in the political events surrounding the sixth parliamentary elections in Iran and actively participates in election campaigns of the reformists, leading to occasional detentions by the police.

The oldest son, Abbas, dreams of travelling to Japan and works in a clothing workshop and falls in love with a girl. In need of money to secure the plan, Abbas and his father decide to sell the house without telling Tuba. Meanwhile, Tuba's eldest daughter, who is pregnant, returns to her mother's home with her young daughter after being beaten by her husband but later goes back to her husband following Tuba's mediation.

As their neighbour and co-worker at the factory, Maryam prepares for her daughter Somayeh's wedding, her younger daughter Masoumeh runs away from home after being beaten by her brother for coming home late. Mahbubeh, Tuba's youngest daughter and Masoumeh's friend, meets her in Mellat Park but is arrested by the police and taken to the station. Tuba, who tries to use the house deed as collateral to secure her daughter's release, discovers that the deed is no longer in the house. Eventually, Mahbubeh is released and brought back home.

Abbas's plan of migrating to Japan fails when the visa company he trusted turns out to be fraudulent, forcing him into the illegal trade of smuggling, as the family has also lost their house. He takes on a mission to smuggle drugs hidden in clothes to Urmia, suggested by his employer. Ali secretly hides in the back of Abbas's van and discovers the smuggling operation, throwing the clothes out of the van to save his brother, which leads to tension between them as well.

Tuba visits Abbas at his hideout, as his employer arrives looking for him. With Tuba's help, Abbas escapes. The film ends with Tuba speaking in front of a television camera on election day, delivering a powerful statement that they should film the depths of her heart instead of merely focusing on the surface.

Life and a Day (2016)

The story is about a poor and troubled family living in the south of Tehran. The film starts with arguments about Somayeh's marriage. Somayeh is seen as the most

promising member of the family, and her mother and siblings hope that her marriage to an Afghan man, who promises financial security, will improve their living circumstances. However, she is half-hearted about this marriage as she is a key member of the family, taking care of their ill mother, youngest brother, doing chores and keeping the family together. This marriage was arranged by the older brother who turns out to be in return for money in the end of the film.

Each sibling faces their own challenges: one sister, already married with a problematic son, Amir, who indulges in the act of self-harm, and is caught in an abusive relationship, while another brother, Morteza, is preoccupied with trying to make a quick profit by agreeing with an Afghan man to marry his sister in return of money. The other brother, Mohsen, is an addict who escaped from the addiction treatment center and is currently selling and using drugs. Their mother is sick, and the siblings, especially Somayeh, have to take care of her.

The climax of the film is an intense and emotional confrontation between Mohsen and Somayeh. Mohsen, deeply regretful about how his addiction has affected his family, tries to dissuade Somayeh from going through with the marriage, begging her to stay and claiming he will change for the better. His desperation highlights his love for his sister, but it also underscores the cycle of broken promises and unfulfilled potential that has plagued the family for years. Somayeh eventually leaves the house to get married to the Afghan man, but the film ends with Somayeh returning home early in the morning, turning on the lights in silence while everyone is asleep.

In the film, behavioural and physical violence is prevalent among the siblings and family members.

Leila's Brothers (2022)

The film is about Leila and her financially struggling family. Leila, a forty-year-old single woman, and works in the administrative office of a shopping center and is the sole provider of a stable income for her family. Esmail, the father of the family, is an elderly opium addict who, after the death of the family patriarch, Haj Gholam, is

desperate to become his successor and gain the respect and status that comes with the position.

Alireza, the most reasonable and grounded of the siblings, worked in a factory but has recently become unemployed due to the factory's closure. Parviz, the son-in-law of the family works in the same shopping center as Leila, collecting restroom fees. Manouchehr, a scheming and deceitful brother, persuades his siblings to engage in a Ponzi-like scam involving upfront payments for cars, and Farhad, who has no steady job, occasionally drives a taxi and spends most of his time bodybuilding.

In their extended family, there is a tradition where the family patriarch must give the largest monetary gift at a relative's wedding. Esmaeil's cousin's son, Bayram, informs him that he can take on the role of family elder if he offers the most generous wedding gift at Bayram's son's upcoming marriage. Despite the family's dire financial struggles, Esmaeil has secretly saved several gold coins for this purpose.

On the other hand, Leila has proposed a solution to their financial problems: she suggests that they buy the restroom unit in the shopping center where she works, which is told to be soon turned into a commercial store. She believes that the gold coins saved by the father would be enough to buy the restrooms. This plan causes disputes and disagreements among the siblings and family members. The film concludes with an ambiguous note in which Leila's dreams for a "better life" are shattered, the familial bonds are broken and the consequences of Esmaeil's actions and the futility of his pursuit of status.

C. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Mevcut çalışma, İslam Devrimi'nden sonra en önde gelen İranlı film yapımcılarından bazılarının ürettiği çeşitli İran filmlerinde yoksulluğun temsilini analiz etme girişimiydi; filmlerin yoksulluğun toplumsal anlayışlarını nasıl yansıttığını ve şekillendirdiğini göstermek, ekonomik olarak dışlanmış grupların görsel ve anlatsal olarak nasıl inşa edildiğini ortaya koymaktı. Çalışmanın temel argümanı, alt sınıfın temsilinde bir değişim olduğudur. Bu amaçla, önerilen argümanı incelemek için çalışma üç bölüme ayrılmıştır.

Küresel ve İran bağlamlarında yoksulluğun temsili üzerine bir tartışmanın ardından, devrimden sonra İran'daki sosyopolitik değişikliklere kısa bir atıf yapıldıktan sonra, 3. bölümde, yoksulluğun ve sınıfın nasıl temsil edildiğini anlamak için seçilen İran filmleri analiz edildi. Daha önce fakirlerin toplumlarının ve ailelerinin desteğine sahip ahlaki ve umutlu bireyler olarak tasvir edildiği filmlerin aksine, daha yeni filmlerin herhangi bir toplumsal ve sosyal destekten yoksun ve ahlaki olarak yozlaşmış fakirlere dair umutsuz bir bakış açısı sunduğu sonucuna varıldı. Dahası, yaşam koşullarını iyileştirmeleri için hiçbir umut olmadığı bir şekilde tasvir edilmişlerdir. Bu bulgular önceki çalışmalarla uyumludur. Örneğin, Ejlali (2004) ve Goudarzi vd. (2022), 2000'lerden önce üretilen İran filmlerinin genellikle toplumsal desteğin ekonomik zorlukları hafiflettiği ahlaki ve destekleyici bir sosyal yapı içinde yoksulluğu tasvir ettiği sonucuna varmıştır. Bununla birlikte, Heydari vd. (2023) ayrıca alt sınıfın toplumdan parçalandığı ve toplum içinde ve hatta kendi toplulukları içinde izole edildiği daha yeni filmlerin tasvirinde bir değişim olduğunu belirtmiştir.

Bulgular ayrıca, daha önceki devrim sonrası filmlerin yoksulluğu idealize edilmiş bir şekilde tasvir etme eğiliminde olduğunu, genellikle alt sınıfı dayanıklılık, ahlak ve ulusal kimlikle ilişkilendiren devrimci değerlerle uyumlu olduğunu savunan Amiri ve Aqababae'nin (2019) çalışmasıyla da uyumludur. Ancak, çalışmaları alt sınıf karakterlerin zaman içindeki ahlaki dönüşümüne ilişkin değerlendirmelerinde bu

makaleden biraz ayrılmaktadır. Amiri ve Aqababae (2019) anlatılarda alt sınıfın giderek artan marjinalleşmesini kabul ederken, bu değişimin öncelikle 2000 sonrası İran sinemasında devrimci statülerinin ve ideolojik önemlerinin kaybını yansıttığını savunuyorlar. Buna karşılık, bu çalışma ahlaki karakterizasyondaki değişimin - erdemli ve ilkeliden etik açıdan taviz verene- sadece devletle ilgili resmi bir ideolojik değişimden ziyade daha geniş bir kültürel ve sosyal değişime işaret ettiğini buluyor. Bu çalışmada gözlemlendiği gibi, daha yeni filmler ekonomik mücadelenin alt sınıf bireyleri ahlaki açıdan belirsiz hayatta kalma stratejileri benimsemeye zorladığını öne sürüyor; bu eğilim daha önceki sinematik anlatılarda o kadar belirgin değildi.

4. Bölümde, seçilen İran filmlerinin analizi fiziksel ve kültürel mesafeye odaklandı. Fiziksel olarak konuşursak, analiz edilen filmlerin hemen hemen hepsinin alt sınıfın marjinalleştiğini göstermek için apartmanlar, yollar, merdivenler, asansörler ve motosikletler dahil olmak üzere fiziksel alanları kullandığı ortaya çıktı. Ancak, bu marjinalleşme sadece fiziksel değil, aynı zamanda kültürel idi. Hem daha önceki hem de yakın tarihli tasvirler Biz/Onlar ikiliğini tasvir ederken, daha yakın tarihli filmlerde bu dışlama, yoksullar ile üst sınıf arasındaki herhangi bir karşılaşmanın sınırlandırılması/dışlanmasıyla daha da kötüleştirildi; bu, daha önce orta sınıf içinde kategorize edilen birçok bireyin enflasyon ve ekonomik zorluklar nedeniyle alt sınıfla birleştiği toplumdaki orta sınıfın aşınmasını yansıtıyordu (Alaedini & Ashrafzadeh, 2016; Nomani & Behdad, 2008).

Son olarak, 5. bölümde, analiz edilen filmlerden seçilen çekimler, mizansen unsurlarına ve kamera açılarına odaklanılarak görsel olarak incelendi. Geniş çekimlerin ve yüksek açıların, film yapımcıları tarafından yoksulların önemsizliğini ve kontrol eksikliğini belirtmek için en sık kullanıldığı ortaya çıktı. Ayrıca, ışık kullanımıyla ilgili olarak, son derece parlak aydınlatmanın koşulların sertliğini vurgulamak için, loş aydınlatmanın ise umutsuzluk ve zor ekonomik duruma atıfta bulunmak için kullanıldığı sonucuna varıldı. Ayrıca, seçilen sahnelerde en sık görülen temalar, karakterlerin izolasyonu ve marjinalleştirilmesiydi ki bu, önceki bölümün bulgularıyla uyumludur. Ayrıca, bir diğer önemli bulgu, sosyal destek temasının filmlerin yalnızca %41,7'sinde görünür olmasıydı ki bu, 3. bölümün bulgularını daha da güçlendirdi.

Genel olarak, yoksulluğun ve alt sınıfın temsili açısından, yoksulların yalnızca sosyal ve fiziksel olarak dışlanmadığı, aynı zamanda hiçbir destek olmadan yaşayan ve hayatlarında bir iyileşme umudu olmadan yoksul olmaya mahkum görünen ahlaksız karakterler olduğu seçilmiş İran filmlerinde alt sınıfın temsilinde kademeli bir değişimin izlenebileceği sonucuna varılabilir. Temsildeki bu değişim, toplumsal dönüşümlere bir ayna görevi görerek, ekonomik olarak dışlanmışlar arasında artan bir yabancılaşma ve umutsuzluk duygusunu tasvir ediyor ve alt sınıf için herhangi bir iyileşme şansının giderek kısıtlandığı bir geleceğe işaret ediyor. Bu tasvir, İran yetkilileri tarafından verilen daha iyi bir yaşamla ilgili vaatlerin yerine getirilmediğini ve alt sınıfın yaşam koşullarının zamanla kötüleştiğini de gösterebilir.

Dahası, bu tasvir, İran yetkilileri tarafından ekonomik ilerleme ve sosyal adalet konusunda verilen yerine getirilmemiş vaatlere yönelik dolaylı bir eleştirinin göstergesi olabilir. Yoksulluğu kalıcı ve kötüleşen bir durum olarak tasvir etmek, daha önce alt sınıfı ulusal kimliğin ve ilerlemenin temel bir bileşeni olarak konumlandıran devlet anlatılarına karşı büyüyen bir hayal kırıklığına işaret ediyor. Bunun yerine, bu filmler alt sınıfın yaşam koşullarının sürekli olarak kötüleştiğini ve enflasyon ve ekonomik kötü yönetim tarafından daha da kötüleştirildiğini öne sürüyor.

Ayrıca, filmlerini yaparken film yapımcılarının görüşlerini dikkate almak önemlidir. Analize dayanarak, film yapımcılarının yalnızca İran toplumundaki alt sınıfın durumunu yansıtmakla kalmayıp, yoksulluğun sonsuz bir durum olarak gösterildiği filmlerin, film yapımcısının toplumda olası bir iyileşmeye olan kendi inançsızlığını yansıttığı sonucuna varılabilir. Başka bir deyişle, bu dönüşüm, tarihsel olarak toplumsal değişimi savunmada rol oynayan film yapımcılarının bile ilerleme olasılığına olan inançlarını kaybetmiş gibi görüldüğü daha geniş bir toplumsal hayal kırıklığı duygusunu ima ediyor.

Seçilmiş İran filmlerinde alt sınıfın temsilindeki yukarıda belirtilen değişimin İran bağlamıyla sınırlı olmadığını vurgulamakta fayda var. Gerçekten de Erdoğan (2023), Türk sinemasında, özellikle Zeki Demirkubuz'un filmografisinde yoksulların tasvirinde benzer bir değişime işaret ediyor. 1990-2010 yılları arasında yapılan

filmlere bakıldığında, ahlaki alt sınıftan kötü niyetli, sinsi ve ahlaksız karakterler olan yoksullara doğru bir değişim görülebileceğini belirtiyor. Sinemasında "yoksulların yoksulluğu ve film yapımcısının bir değişime inanmaması birbirine iç içe geçmiştir" (s.193) diye ekliyor. Bu benzer analizler, alt sınıfın yaşam koşullarını ve yaşam tarzlarını etkileyen ekonomik politikaların ve kültürel değişimlerin daha geniş bir etkisinin göstergesi olabilir.

Bununla birlikte, mevcut çalışmanın kendi sınırlamaları vardır. Başlangıç olarak, analiz altı önemli İranlı film yapımcısı ve filmleriyle sınırlıydı. Bu nedenle, sınırlı sayıda film yapımcısı ve analiz edilen filmler göz önüne alındığında, bulgular İran dışında çalışan film yapımcıları tarafından yaratılan filmler de dahil olmak üzere diğer İran filmlerine genelleştirilemez. Ek olarak, çalışma filmlerin metinsel analizine odaklanmakta ve izleyicilerin bu temsilleri nasıl algıladığını ve yorumladığını araştırmamaktadır. Kapsamlı bir analiz için toplumdaki farklı kesimlerin bu tasviri nasıl algıladığını anlamak için daha fazla analiz gerekmektedir. Ayrıca, fon kaynakları, uluslararası festival etkisi ve yapım kısıtlamaları gibi endüstri dinamiklerinin film yapımcılarının zihniyetini etkileyebileceği şekilde bu temsilleri nasıl şekillendirdiğini inceleyerek bu çalışmaya başka bir katman eklenebilir. Çalışma ayrıca sınıf aşınması ve yoksulluk eğilimleri hakkındaki iddiaları doğrulamak için nicel ekonomik veriler ve disiplinler arası yaklaşımlarla da desteklenebilir. Ek olarak, çalışma öncelikle geçmiş ve yakın eğilimleri inceliyor ancak bu tasvirlerin nasıl gelişmeye devam edebileceğini öngörmüyor. İran'daki değişen siyasi ve ekonomik iklim göz önüne alındığında, gelecekteki filmler sınıf ve yoksulluğu temsil etmede farklı yaklaşımlar benimseyebilir. Bu değişiklikleri daha uzun bir süre boyunca izleyen uzunlamasına çalışmalar daha kapsamlı bir resim sağlayabilir. Son olarak, İran sineması ile diğer ulusal film endüstrileri (örneğin Afrika, Hint veya Latin Amerika) arasında karşılaştırmalı bir analiz, İran'ın sinematik tasvirini küresel bir bağlamda konumlandırarak argümanı güçlendirebilir.

Çalışmanın bulguları göz önüne alındığında, İran filmlerinin, özellikle de izleyici ve yapım dinamikleri olan toplumsal filmlerin geleceğini öngörmemize yardımcı olmada önemli bir rol oynayan önemli bir konu var. İran sineması izleyici kompozisyonunda değişimler geçirdi: Devrimden önce İran sineması sınıf temelliydi.

Yani üst sınıf Batı filmlerini tercih ederken, alt sınıf İran/Hint melodramlarını tercih ediyordu. Ancak devrimden sonra artan sansür ve CD'lere erişimin azalması nedeniyle filmlerin ana izleyicisi genç, kentli, eğitilmiş orta sınıftı. Gerçekten de toplumsal filmler orta sınıf tarafından seviliyordu çünkü onların hayatlarıyla örtüşüyordu. Ancak bir yandan enflasyon, ekonomik istikrarsızlık ve siyasi baskı nedeniyle İran'da orta sınıf küçülürken, diğer yandan İran rejimi sansürün iplerini daha da sıkılaştırıyordu. Bu iki olay iki ana soruna yol açtı: sansür nedeniyle sosyal filmler yapmak film yapımcıları için giderek zorlaştı ve birincil izleyici kitlesi olan daralan orta sınıf giderek daha yorgun bir izleyici kitlesi haline geliyor, bu da ekonomik, sosyal ve politik gerginlikler nedeniyle trajedileri ve sert sosyal ve ekonomik gerçeklikleri izlemeye tahammül edemedikleri ve günlük hayatta yaşadıkları gerginliği azaltmak için kaçışçı komediyi tercih ettikleri anlamına geliyor.

Bu çalışmanın bulgularına ve tartışılan daha geniş eğilimlere dayanarak, İran sinemasının gelecekteki manzarası güvencesiz ancak karmaşık görünüyor. Yoğunlaşan sansür, ekonomik çöküş ve izleyici yorgunluğuyla işaretlenen mevcut kalıplar devam ederse, sosyal gerçekçilik ve sınıf eleştirisine odaklanan filmler hem üretim hem de tüketim açısından giderek daha nadir hale gelebilir. Film yapımcıları ya sessizliğe itilebilir ya da sansürden kaçınmak ve kendilerini ifade etmek için daha fazla sembolizm ve alegori kullanmaya zorlanabilir.

Öte yandan, komedi veya fantezi türlerine doğru olası bir kayma, psikolojik rahatlama sağlamanın bir yolu olarak ana akım sinemaya hakim olabilir. Aslında, bu artış zaten açıkça ortadadır çünkü komedi türünün üretimi 2000'lerden bu yana yaklaşık %87 oranında artmıştır (Iran Daily, Naficy). Aynı zamanda, bu eksen kayması yaşanmış gerçeklikler ile sinematik temsilleri arasında daha derin bir kopukluk yaratabilir ve bir zamanlar bazı İranlı film yapımcılarının seslendirdiği mücadeleleri daha da susturabilir. Bu anlamda, bu çalışma yalnızca yoksulluk ve sınıfın nasıl tasvir edildiğine dair bir değişimi haritalamakla kalmıyor, aynı zamanda daha fazla analiz gerektiren hızla değişen bir kültürel ekosisteme de bir pencere açıyor.

Daha büyük resme, yani İran sinemasına bakıldığında, İran sinemasını benzersiz ve analiz edilmeye değer kılan özelliklere de bakmakta fayda var. Bu soruyu cevaplamanın birçok yolu olabilir, ancak İran sinemasını farklı kılan en önemli nedenlerden birinin Fars edebiyatı, kültürü, kolektif düşüncesi ve İran sineması, özellikle toplumsal filmler arasındaki ilişki olduğuna inanıyorum. Elbette edebiyatın, özellikle şiirin ve felsefi yazının etkisi yalnızca İran sinemasına özgü değildir. Fransız Yeni Dalgası, İtalyan Yeni Gerçekçiliği, Japon sineması, Latin Amerika Üçüncü Sineması vb. dahil olmak üzere birçok ulusal sinema edebiyattan ve felsefeden etkilenmiştir. Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini ve Andrei Tarkovsky gibi yönetmenlerin hepsi edebi duyarlılıkları filme taşımıştır.

Ancak, Fars edebiyatının en önemli özelliklerinden biri toplumsal sorunlara olan bağlılığıdır. Bu metinlerin çoğunun dili sembolik, mistik veya edebi olsa da, kavramları insanların yaşamları, güç, adalet, ahlak ve toplumsal kaderle derinden bağlantılıdır. Bu edebiyat özünde her zaman toplumsal, ahlaki, politik ve felsefi kaygılar taşımıştır, ancak bu yaklaşımın yoğunluğu ve türü farklı tarihsel dönemlerde değişmiştir. Örneğin klasik dönemde (Hicri 4. yüzyıldan Hicri 8. yüzyıla kadar) edebiyat daha çok saray odaklı olmasına rağmen, Firdevsi, Şehname'de İran tarihi ve ulusal kimliğinin destansı bir portresini sunar ve baskıya, tiranlığa ve tarihsel unutkanlığa karşı mücadeleyi ele alır. Benzer şekilde, Hafız, romantik ve mistik dilinde, iktidar yapıları içindeki ikiyüzlülüğe, dini yozlaşmaya, toplumsal adaletsizliğe ve insan acısına tekrar tekrar işaret eder. Bu toplumsal kaygı, insana ve onun anlamla ilişkisine ve ikiyüzlülük ve ikiyüzlülüğten özgürlüğe odaklanan Mevlana, Attar, Sana'i'nin eserleri gibi daha sonraki mistik edebiyatta da devam eder ve bu da bir tür toplumsal eleştiridir. Anayasa ve 20. yüzyılda sosyal meseleleri ele alan edebiyat, Dehkhoda, Bahar, Farrokhi Yazdi, Sadegh Hedayat, Jalal Al-Ahmad, Forugh ve diğerlerinin ortaya çıkmasıyla zirveye ulaştı. Bu dönemde edebiyat doğrudan eşitsizlik, tiranlık, yoksulluk ve sosyal geri kalmışlığın eleştirisine girdi. Bu bağlılık, devrimden sonra Çağdaş edebiyatta hem şiirde hem de kurguda devam etti; burada sosyal temalar, ayrımcılık, göç, savaş ve cinsiyet, Mahmoud Dolatabadi, Ahmad Shamloo, Simin Daneshvar vb. gibi yazarlarla merkezi bir rol oynadı.

Dahası, İran halkının edebiyatla, özellikle de şiir edebiyatıyla ilişkisi yalnızca tarihsel ve derin değil, aynı zamanda yaşanmış ve deneyimseldir. Edebiyatın

genellikle elit düzeyde kaldığı birçok toplumun aksine, İran'da edebiyat -özellikle şiir- her zaman insanların günlük yaşamlarının, kültürel hafızalarının ve kolektif ritüellerinin bir parçası olmuştur. Bu bağlantı yalnızca çalışma yoluyla değil, daha çok sözlü gelenekler ve kolektif performans yoluyla oluşturulmuştur.

Bu bağlantının en önemli tezahürlerinden biri, kahvehanelerde, meydanlarda ve kamusal alanlarda gerçekleştirilen bir sözlü hikaye anlatımı biçimi olan naqqali'dir. Destansı sesler, vücut hareketleri ve enstrümanlar kullanarak, naqqallar halka Ferdowsi'nin Şehname'sinden veya dini ve tarihi anlatılardan hikayeler anlatırdı. Naqqali'de edebiyat bir performans haline geldi; izleyici sadece bir dinleyici değil, aynı zamanda anlatı deneyiminin bir parçasıydı. Bu gelenek, okuma yazma bilmeyen insanları bile kahramanlık, baskı, adalet, fedakarlık ve kader gibi kavramlarla tanıştırdı ve özdeşleştirdi. Naqqali'nin yanı sıra, Hafız, Şehname, Ta'ziye gibi gelenekler ve hatta Sa'di ve Hafız'ın şiirlerinin günlük konuşmada, atasözlerinde ve kültürel ritüellerde (düğünlerden ve Nevruz'dan yas ve ölüme kadar) yaygın olarak kullanılması, edebiyatı halkın sosyokültürel yapısının ayrılmaz bir parçası haline getirmiştir. Şiir, düşünce, duygu ve deneyim aktarımı için birincil ortam olmuştur. İnsanlar şiir yoluyla düşünmüş, eleştirmiş, sevmiş ve hatta protesto etmiştir; şiirin dili, bazen açıkça, bazen örtük olarak gerçeği ifade etmenin dili olmuştur.

Böyle bir bağlamda, İran toplumsal sineması -özellikle 1979 devriminden sonra- bu edebi geleneğin doğrudan mirasçısı olarak kabul edilir. Başka bir deyişle, İran sineması Fars edebiyatının rahminden doğmuştur. İran izleyicisi, klasik edebiyat geleneği ve sembolik düşünceyle olan kültürel aşinalığı nedeniyle, bu sinematik dili de iyi anlar ve onunla bağlantı kurar. Bu nedenle, İran toplumsal sineması, imgeler bağlamında Fars edebiyat geleneğinin doğal bir uzantısı olarak düşünülebilir; hem toplumsal sorunları yansıtan hem de İran kültürünün metaforik ve felsefi estetiğine sadık bir sinema. Ve bu, İran sinemasını dünya çapındaki izleyiciler için benzersiz ve büyüleyici kılan şeydir. Elbette, bu özelliklerin diğer ulusların sinemalarından ne ölçüde benzer ve farklı olduğu, daha fazla araştırma için bir inceleme konusudur.

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