

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS AND  
LOCAL FORMS OF COLONIALISM

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## ABSTRACT

### INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS AND LOCAL FORMS OF COLONIALISM

Batik, Ebru

M.S., Department of Sociology

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This study is an attempt to understand the politics of international film festivals and how it translates into local forms of colonialism. Theroretical review of this study focuses around the politics of festivals particularly through Iranian Cinema in the international frame. Inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms of film festivals, the notion of national geographic effect and how they formed the canonization of Iranian cinema will be discussed. The thesis has also analyzed an Iranian film *Kandahar* as a case study with the notion of Orientalism to demonstrate how colonizing gaze organized in festival circuit has been internalized by a national filmmaker.

Keywords: Interntional Film Festivals, “National Geographic” Effect, Iranian Cinema, Orientalism

## ÖZ

### ULUSLARASI FİLM FESTİVALLERİ VE YEREL SÖMÜRGEÇİLİK

Batık, Ebru

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Sosyoloji Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, uluslararası film festivallerinin bir çeşit yerel sömürgeçiliğe nasıl dönüşebildiğini anlamlandırma çabasından ibarettir. Film festivallerinin politikaları özellikle İran sineması ve onun uluslararası arenadaki duruşu üzerinden tartışılmıştır. Festivallerin kabul ve dışlama mekanizmaları, “National Geographic” etkisi ve tüm bunların İran sinemasını nasıl şekillendirdikleri bu tartışmanın temel noktalarıdır. Ayrıca, bir İran filmi olan *Kandahar*, oryantalizm tartışmaları ışığında analiz edilmiştir. Buradaki amaç, uluslararası film festivallerinde örgütlenebilen, yerelliğe ve onun bu yönde sömürsüne yönelik oryantalist bakışın ulusal bir sinemacı tarafından nasıl içselleştirildiğini göstermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası Film Festivalleri, “National Geographic” Etkisi, İran Sineması, Oryantalizm

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

When one talks of cinema, one talks of American cinema. The influence of cinema is the influence of American cinema, which is the most aggressive and widespread aspect of American culture throughout the world...for this reason, every discussion of cinema made outside Hollywood must begin with Hollywood.

Glauber Rocha

It is argued that the origin of film festivals can be traced to the rise of film societies and cine-clubs, which sprang up in various countries during the 1920s. Film festivals are often seen as a reaction to the dominance of the powerful Hollywood film industry over the cinemas of less well-endowed nations and over non-commercial movements devoted to such causes as documentary and avant-garde film. Such clubs and societies are considered as to flourish in countries such as France where they fostered the emergence of the historically important impressionist and surrealist cinemas, and as Brazil where they provided the only consistent outlet for domestically produced movies. Although most film clubs and societies were in Western Europe, some international festivals were established in Latin America and the United States as well. It is possible to say that as such groups grew and spread, they started to arrange international conclaves where their members could share ideas and inspirations without regard to national borders.

The first film festival in Venice emerged as a direct result of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's (1883–1945) enthusiasm for motion pictures as a tool for political public relations and propaganda, to spur the development of state-run Italian cinema in the face of competition from Hollywood. At that time period, for example, production



of Nazi Germany; *Olympia* which celebrated Aryan supremacy shared the highest prize (the Mussolini Cup) in 1938 with an Italian drama about a fascist soldier in the Ethiopian campaign. Afterwards, French participants in the festival protested the Mussolini Cup decisions and expressed anger over the 1937 veto by festival authorities of a top prize for Jean Renoir's war drama *La grande illusion* (*The Grand Illusion*, 1937). This is argued as to be an unofficial first step toward the establishment of a French film festival designed to overshadow its Italian counterpart which was seen as to be politically and morally tainted. The French government declared its willingness to provide necessary funding, and a few months later the Riviera city of Cannes started planning a *state-of-the-art Palais des Festivals* to house the new event.

In 1951, the Berlin International Film Festival was established presenting itself as a geographical and artistic meeting ground between East and West when the Cold War climbed into high gear. Socialist nations of the Eastern bloc did not participate officially until 1975, although individual films did represent such countries in the program from time to time.

The New York Film Festival, founded in 1963 at Lincoln Center, one of the city's leading cultural venues. New York festival is considered to take advantage of Lincoln Center's enormous prestige in the artistic community to underwrite the aesthetic pedigree of the art films, avant-garde works, and documentaries that dominated its programs. It is possible to say that such films found an enthusiastic audience who were receptive to innovative foreign movies (from Europe and Japan especially) presented in their original languages with subtitles.

The 1976 was the debut of the Toronto International Film Festival in Canada, and also in 1989 actor Robert Redford had established Sundance Film Festival to foster the growth of "indie" filmmaking outside the Hollywood system. Major festivals also exist outside the United States and Europe, such as the Ouagadougou Festival in the African nation of Burkina Faso and the Shanghai and Tokyo festivals in Asia.

It is argued that in considering all festivals, politics played a far smaller role in the later phase of festival history than when the Venice and Cannes festivals were founded, but political considerations did not entirely vanish from the scene. It is hard to find academic studies that subjects film festivals until 1990s. Earlier studies on film festivals are argued to focus on major film festivals in Europe discussing the relations between European and Hollywood cinema in the Euro-American context. However after 1990s, when the global spread of film festivals became increasingly visible, film critics recognized that film festivals have provided opportunities to experience new cinemas originating from regions conceptualized as the “Other” (Young: 2006). Afterwards, international film festivals have emerged often focusing on the notion of “discovery of new cinemas”. In his article, *Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film festival Circuit* (1994) Bill Nichols studies national cinemas in the festival circuit and states that film festivals becomes a crucial means of mediation through which new cinemas are encountered. For him, film festivals enable the cultural reception of an alien culture in which discovery processes are operated. As Nichols, Julian Stringer defines international film festivals as “situated sites”, where festival films are developed as a new genre to be prepared for Western spectator. Dudley Andrew conceptualizes the notion of new genre/new cinema as a desire to satisfy the needs of international film festivals that sought to define new trends in cinema.

This study is an attempt to understand the politics of international film festivals and how it translates into local forms of colonialism. In the first chapter, international film festivals and their inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms are studied through Iranian cinema’s visibility and success. In the second chapter, an Iranian film *Kandahar* is analyzed as a case study with the notion of Orientalism to demonstrate how colonizing gaze organized in festival circuit has been internalized by a national filmmaker.

First chapter mainly consists of two parts; the politics of festivals in general and touristic, commoditized aesthetics through the emergence of national geographic effect. In the first part, film festival circuit is discussed as a situational site where

parliament of national films is constructed. Does a common ground exist for all national cinemas, if it is so, how the exclusion or inclusion mechanisms function in these festivals? These are the main arguments of the first part. Second part of the first chapter focuses on the canonization of national cinemas through the politics of festivals. How a national cinema not only reveals but also reconstructs itself? Why all the films are supposed to be the representative of their originating country? Why certain film industries and filmmakers, mainly in non-Western countries, have been accused of targeting films to the festivals? Do film festivals lead to the establishment of a touristic and commodified aesthetics? These questions are examined through the organization of colonial gaze and its reflections of filmmaking styles of national cinemas. Ethnographic filmmaking or called as the national geographic effect constructs the main argument of this part. Second part of the first chapter focuses on the presence of Iranian cinema in the international frame. The canonization of Iranian cinema is studied through its main characteristics and the positioning of women and children. In this part, Iranian economical and political role in the international frame as well as Iranian history of cinema are examined.

In the second chapter, Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* is analyzed with the notion of Orientalism. What are the main codes of Orientalism and how they are constructed through colonial films are discussed. In addition to gender tones, cultural differentiations of Orientalism are considered. What is fetishistic/voyeuristic gaze and how it works in the formation of objectified other? Is it possible to argue the act of sexual domination upon fetishistic/voyeuristic male gaze with the efforts of European colonial imperialism to subjugate the Orient? Why do things so often turn out badly for colonial identities in novels and films? These are some of the arguments discussed in the second chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS

It is considered that film industries in many part of the world today remain national in character but the business of filmmaking and film watching have equally been transnational. In many cases, it is possible to say that deciding where exactly a film is from and to who it is addressed has been increasingly problematic. Today the term *world cinema* is used to this transnational position of cinema. World cinema is a term which has gained currency in recent years although its usage and meaning is arguable. Many film theorists consider world cinemas as to depend on the interplays within national, regional and global levels of cinema since film today, plays a significant role in articulating and perpetuating what might be called global mythologies, ideological discourses about the world and cultures (Chaudhuri: 2005).

Film festivals are supposed to be important considerations of world cinema as they facilitate cultural exchange between different national cinemas and provide an alternative global distribution network. Different from film festivals, the Academy Awards Ceremony is not conceptualized within the concept of world cinema; however, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam consider Best Foreign Film category as “another realm in which works of world cinema can break though internationally” since the Oscars ceremony become significant for the profile of world cinema by offering a film or a filmmaker as successful enough to win or be nominated (Shohat&Stam, 1994). In all these respects Best Foreign Film Category within Academy Awards might also be conceptualized in the festival frame. It is no coincidence that most of the discussions on film festivals include also national policies while the history of each festival is taken into consideration. It is supposed that Venice film festival was organized in 1932 as an explicit propaganda aimed at legitimizing and promoting Mussolini’s fascist state on the world stage while Berlin

film festival in 1950s, closely tied to the spectacle of German reconstruction and democratization after the fall of Hitler. Film festivals particularly the ones established after war period are considered to be closely related to the issues of national identity since they provide a focus for the convergence of issues concerning the relation of cultural production to cultural policy. Film theorists agree in the idea that all the major festivals established in the immediate post war period closely aligned with the aims of particular national governments, to perpetuate the continuation of nation systems. It is also argued that although politics played a far smaller role in the later phase of festival history than when the Venice and Cannes festivals were founded, political considerations never entirely vanish from the scene. In this part of the study, the politics of festivals today will be discussed.

## **2.1. Politics of Festivals**

“Is pure aesthetic possible?” Discussions on film festivals related with politics often begin with that question. This poses another question: is neutral back ground before watching a film is possible? Because in order to constitute a pure of aesthetic contemplation neutral back ground is considered as obligatory. Some film theorists believe in the possibility of pure aesthetics of cinema but many of them are contrast to that idea. C. Baundry is among the first theorists to suggest that cinema and its technology has an ideological effect upon the spectator. For him, the cinematic apparatus purports to set before the eye and eye’s realistic images, thus sounds and the technology disguises how that reality is put together frame by frame. Besides, cinema might provide the illusion of perspectival space and real time duration. In considering all these respects, he defines cinema as an ideological construction, an idealistic reality. Boundry is claimed to pose a new dimension to cinema by revealing its ideological aspect as well as its aesthetics. His argument has been developed by many film theorist, feminist film studies focus on how patriarchy is perpetuated through the codes of mainstream cinema (Mulvey: 1975) while state policies use cinema as an ideological apparatus to construct a national identity. However, all studies on cinema have originated from the argument that it is an

ideological construction. At this point, it might be asked, in considering international festivals, how this ideological aspect of a national cinema not only reveals but also reconstructs itself? Does a common ground exist for all national cinemas, if it is so, how the exclusion or inclusion mechanisms function?

For the film theorist, Thomas Ellaesser, international film festival circuit has constituted as a kind of parliament of national cinemas, as a network of official diplomacy implicated in the institutional policies of host and participant nations (Ellaesser: 1996). As Ellaesser, Julian Stringer (2001) links the festival circuit with politics. In acclaiming that non-Western cinemas do not count historically until they have been recognized by the international media power located at film festivals, Stringer defines the constructions of national cinemas from various countries compelling in festivals as an alternative social object for the Western spectator. Stringer uses the term festival circuit as to suggest the existence of socially produced space, a unique cultural arena that acts as a contact place for the working through of unevenly differentiated power relationships. For her, festival circuit exists as an allegorization of space and its power relations since it operates through the transfer of value between and within distinct geographic localities. As she points out, most well-known, high profile international film festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin and Toronto play a large role in national and international film culture by bringing concentrated from press, industry, and the public to indigenous and foreign films. National selections and programmes of those festivals are significant in the formation of that countries national cinema as well as its reception and reputation abroad (2001: 78).

National cinemas contesting in the festivals are seen as body of great works by extraordinary filmmakers and they are often associated with auteur theory of filmmaking which means the screen writer, producer and director of the film is the same person. For Neale, the concept of “auteur” should not be merely understand in the genius or masterpiece tradition, rather the director is originator of the film, screenwriter and financier rolled into one, which enables films more political and cheaper (Neale, cited in Chaudhuri: 2005). Neale acknowledges that auteur filmmaking style in art cinema is a mode of production as well as a mode of

consumption; it is an international market commodity where the director becomes a brand name that sells the film. In art cinema, experimental techniques and narratives have been developed. Some theorists define art cinema as a counter cinema to Hollywood, but others believe that although it has a different narrative from Hollywood, art cinema is not intentionally devised as a counter to Hollywood cinema (Hayward: 2006).

According to Hayward, art cinema produces low to mid budget films, attempts to address the aesthetics of cinema and cinematic practices. In general, art cinema is characterized by the absence of cause effect storyline, and the absence of heroes. Social realism is represented by the character in relation to those events and subjectivity is often made uncertain. Although art cinema is considered primarily a European cinema, certain Japanese, Canadian and Latin American filmmakers are also included in this canon. In considering such films, film festivals are argued to provide an important site to help shape and confirm as well as contest the canon.

It is possible to say that the formation of canon necessitates a series of exclusionary practices. Festival circuit and festival screening are claimed to function to gather potential critical, public and scholarly attention for individual films and directors. Stringer conceptualizes this attention as the term “critical capital”. In considering Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural capital she uses the term critical capital refers to the value that a film access through its success in the festival circuit. For Stringer a film’s critical capital depends on the status of festivals in which it is screened, the critics who review it, and the responses it receives. For example the awarding of a Palme d’Or in Cannes does not promise box office success, but it signals crucial critical capital that might aid a film’s entry into the canon.

In considering film critics, Atom Egoyan suggests that:

We do not compete each other over box office share, gigantic fees or star treatment, because it is simply not an issue. This is both a blessing and a curse. As artists, it means that our survival is not need to set by public taste, but by the opinion of our peers, festival programmers, art council juries. (Toronto Film Festival, 2002)

What Stringer defines as a critical capital has played an important role in the distribution and importation of Iranian films. In Iran, Ministry of Culture classifies films into four groups from A to D on the basis of their perceived quality which is determined by ambiguous categories such as its content, aesthetical value and technical components. Later, film critics' and spectators' evaluations are included as determinant of quality of films. The A and B films receive greater distribution support, so they can command higher box office prices and their producers receive priority for further filmmaking. On the other hand, C and D rated films receive far less support and their filmmakers must struggle harder to make another film. It might be said that this evaluation system provides Iranian filmmakers with critical capital experience what predispositions and doubts loom foremost in spectators' mind inside Iran and the festival goers' as well (Farahmend, 2002:114).

In studying canonization of Canadian films, Janet Staiger focuses on the politics of canons through festivals (Staiger: 1997). As she states, politics of selection engages with various discourses of value, art and exemplary works to inform decisions related to canon figuration. It is important to say that, for Staiger, the establishing of a canon is not necessarily a bad thing, in Canada, for example, the delineation of a canon is seen as proof-positive that Canada had a national cinema through festivals. In agree with Staiger, international film festival programmer, scholar and critic, Ruby Rich suggests that selecting films for a national spotlight is highly politicized because of the fraught notion of the nation and the imagined community that it must service. For him, film in national spotlight program is often seen as conforming to a political or national agenda and thus as being judged not solely on the merits of quality, but it is not a bad thing, rather it is what it is supposed to be. As he acknowledges, films selected for inclusion in a program are seen as been selected because they are 'representative' and adhere to a political agenda (1997: 84). Ultimately, it is possible to say that the taste of the programmer as well as the spectator can never be extinguished and this taste is often perceived as subsumed by politics. As Bourdieu points out, politics are never removed from the question of taste because we can ever escape taste and all matters of taste have political dimensions and consequences.



It is argued that the importance of film festivals has increased over particularly the past two decades. Until 1990s, academic studies that subject film festivals were limited within the Euro-American context merely discussing European cinema in contrast to Hollywood. However, when film festivals became globally and increasingly visible, including various national cinemas, film critics recognized that film festivals make possible to experience new cinemas originating from many regions. Afterwards, film festivals re-emerged by emphasizing the notion of discovery of new cinemas.

In addition to their function as a space of mediation, a cultural matrix, a place for the establishment and maintenance of cross-cultural looking relations, festivals also bring visitors to cities, revenue to national film industries and national film cultures into the world cinema system. Stringer believes that film festivals may be taken into either two ways; positively, the established festival image engage with global/local dynamics that suggests the international dimensions of local film cultures and might produce a city identity based around a shared sense of cinephilia and an engagement with dynamic processes of cultural exchange. On the other hand, all of this might lead to the establishment of a touristic and commodified aesthetics. For her, this is the vital but under-explored aspect of such festivals. Why all the films are supposed to be the representative of their originating nation? Why certain film industries and filmmakers, mainly in non-Western countries, have been accused of targeting films to the festivals? What Stringer defines as under-explored aspect constitutes the main argument of this part in the study.

## **2.2. Commoditized Aesthetics: Emergence of National Geographic Effect**

Bill Nichols (1994) suggests that film festivals have become crucial means of mediation through which ‘new cinemas’ are encountered. What he defines as ‘new cinemas’ is constructed by films from various nations that receive praise for their ability to transcend local issue and provincial tastes. Nichols believes that, by those

films, the spectator is invited to receive artistic maturity work that remains distinct from Hollywood-based norms both in style and theme. Simultaneously, for Nichols, those films also provide a window onto different cultures and enable the cultural reception of an 'alien culture' in which discovery processes are operated. It might be claimed that encountering with the unfamiliar, the experience of something strange, the discovery of new voices and visions are the major drives of festivalgoer. Nichols associates this fascination of festival films with the possibility of losing oneself. For him, the international film festival- and also the new directors and the new visions offered by it- affords by ideal opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of film's imaginary signifiers. As he acknowledges, by those signifiers festivalgoer receives encouragement to make the strange familiar, to recover difference as similarity, another form of pleasure residence in the experience of strangeness itself. Unlike the hegemonic codes of Hollywood cinema, for Nichols, this experience of strangeness places within the international film festival and the participation in this realm qualifies the spectator as citizens of a global but still far from homogeneous culture. At this point it is possible to ask, how does the spectator enter into such experience? What processes govern it? What the film festivalgoer is looking for?

What the film festivalgoer is looking for is 'back region' according to Dean McCannell (McCannell: 1976). He believes that, like the tourists, the spectator hope to behind the appearances, to grasp the meaning of things, more intimate more authentic form of experience. Therefore, ultimate knowledge and authenticity is illusory for the notion of 'back region' as he points out. Like museums and tourist sites which foster and accommodate such desires, McCannell defines festivals as to allow a 'back region' glimpse into another culture through the filmmakers. For him, festivals are significant since 'back region' is significant in constructing self, conception of state, culture and aesthetics. Thus, it is not limited to film watching; rather it is more to do with institutionalization as he suggests, because the hunger of those events necessitates institutions that provide the commodities imperfectly and temporarily satisfy it. As he states, 'back region' produces a historically specific sense of self as well as a distinct type of consumer.

Renato Rosaldo understands the festivalgoers' fascination with the notion of 'imperialist nostalgia' which he associates with colonialism. For him, the object of nostalgia is an order prior to which colonialism is responsible for eradicating the traditional culture and life ways of indigenous societies. "This is mourning" he states "mourning stems precisely from the capitalist First World who is guilty for the economic, social and cultural havoc" (1989: 69).

As he claims, the imaginary world prior to capitalist modernity is the object of this nostalgia apparent in the films such as the unspoiled natural environment, aboriginal societies and religious systems. Therefore, watching such films enables the spectator to mourn what capitalism has destroyed while at the same time absolving themselves of any responsibility for it. In his article, Martin Roberts (1998) also reads this fascination with colonialism by focusing on ethnographic characteristics of national films in festivals. He takes our attention to the postcolonial global changes. For him, one of the consequences of those global changes within the ex-colonial but still capitalist First world is the 'ethnographization' of mass consumption. He believes that parallel to anthropology, ethnography itself has been undergoing a process of popularization and commoditization across the spectrum of cultural industries. Roberts defines global culture industry as being in the form of ethno-tourism in which First world spectator is armed with its fantasies more than any other time in the history of cinema. He states that:

For consumers in such cities, going to the movies and eating out have become more or less equivalent activities, with choosing a movie like choosing a restaurant, it is a matter of selecting repertoire of ethnic options (1998: 65).

In acclaiming that the audience of these multicultural cinemas is in large part white and middle class looking for exoticism, for Roberts, watching a film is a way of reconnecting one's own culture as of indulging a touristic curiosity about someone else.

As a film theorist, Yingjin Zhan analyzes Western influence on Chinese cinema and observes that favorable reviews at international film festivals lead to the production of ethnographic films. He states that;

Wide distribution of such films is translated into their availability for classroom use and therefore influences the status of these films as a dominant genre and asks that discovery by the West of a national cinema that has reached so called 'artistic maturity', or it is rather the successful achievement of another refined type of ethnographic approach? (Cited in SooJeong Ahn, 2008: 53).

As Zhan, Dabashi also accuses well-known directors of Iranian cinema of being not aware of this ethnographic approach which he calls 'national geographic' effect. This is not unique for Chinese or Iranian cinema; instead it is valid for all national cinemas which compete in film festivals. In agree with Zhan and Dabashi, many critics think that the choices of subject matter style and the visual imaginary in those films cater to Western international film festival tastes by packaging Third World cultures in Orientalist and 'tourist friendly' ways.

Nichols understand the festivalgoer's fascination with unfamiliarity, the experience of something strange, the discovery of new voices and visions, while McCannell poses the term 'back region' to explain the spectator's hope to behind the appearances, to grasp the meaning of things which is a more intimate, more authentic form of experience. For Rosato, watching such films enables the spectator to mourn what capitalism has destroyed and Roberts believes that through international film festivals the notion of world cinema enables the West to re-perceive its own cultural positioning as well as discovering alternatives. All the discussions above might be read with Orientalism since discursive constitution of otherness is achieved simultaneously cultural as well as sexual modes of differentiation. Since Orientalism is defined as to be employed by the Western gaze to know and represent the Orient, this gaze also aims to grasp what is behind the appearance, what is defined as unseen in a more authentic and nostalgic form. In all these respects, the festivalgoer's fascination of national films which are the representative of their originating country

reveals how colonial gaze is organized through the international film festivals by emphasizing the cultural differentiations.

The notion of 'discovery of cultural differentiations' often takes part in the discussions on international film festivals. Since the notion of 'discoverer perspective' could be mostly enhanced in an ethnographic film, it is considered as the most suitable film genre to apply Orientalism by which the spectator is provided with panoramic view, temporal voyeurism and a sense of ethnographic work. By this way, through cinema, the festival spectator is argued to identify with the gaze of the West comes to master over the codes of this foreign culture. 1960s were considered as a turning point when independence movements and anti-colonial struggles challenged both the philosophical basis and on the ground reality of Western power which necessitated the Third World cultures to be redefined. Within this redefinition process towards Orient, 1960s was also the time when ethnographic filmmaking is supposed to be gain importance with celebration of cultural diversity.

Celebration of global cultural diversity is often a discussed matter while national cinema in the international framework is taken into consideration. The notion of cultural diversity on cinema is conceptualized as to affirm a commonality transcends cultural difference. It is argued that making an emphasis on cultural diversity necessitates documentary filming style due to its authentic and realistic characteristics. Bill Nichols distinguishes between two types of documentary; they are historiographic and ethnographic documentary. For him, the first exemplified by political documentary whereas ethnographic documentary has historically concerned itself with documenting so-called vanishing societies threatened by global modernity. Ethnographic documentary is related with national geographic effect which signifies the films that are more concerned with the aesthetic or emotional impact of its subjects than with the global political, economic conditions which account for them. This is assumed to construct its picture of the world through non-linear, collage structure, a radical de-contextualization of its subjects.

National geographic effect has taken its name from the magazine *National Geographic* that is published in America. Jane Collins and Catherine Lutz (1993)

suggest that National Geographic provides its readers with “what they want to know about the world”. The beginning of National Geographic was accompanied with the historical trends converging at the end of 19th century. These trends might be conceptualized as mass journalism, development of photography, scientific specialization and most importantly the awakening of American interest in the rest of the world. It is claimed that the convergence of these trends created the space for an organization that would affectively operate on the boundary between science and entertainment and whose subject matter as America’s place on the world. Since the National Geographic means much more than a magazine, it is possible to talk about a national geographic society which is constructed through the developments of history and science. Parallel to the existing policies, anthropology of the late 19th century is considered to dedicate itself to the search for evidence of the evolutionary backwardness of the subaltern people. Besides, by the first and second decades of the 20th century psychologists and biologists attempted to link evolutionary schemes with the unilinear measures of development such as IQ. Therefore, it is assumed that in the midst of this concept the national geographic society emerged and positioned itself as a key actor in the presentation of ‘backward’ people. As Collins and Lutz suggest; “National Geographic reinforced America’s vision of its newly ascendant place in the world by showing how far we have come” (1993: 132).

According to James Clifford, collecting and display are the crucial processes of Western identity formation. (Clifford cited in Collins and Lutz, 1993) He defines Western cultural description is a form of collecting that selectively accords ‘authenticity’ to human groups, their institutions and practices. Clifford believes that National geographic took images of Africa, Asia and Latin America from their historical contexts and arranged them in ways that addresses contemporary Western preoccupations. Within that process, the systems of classification or explanation are significant, as he claims, since they were chosen to provide an illusion of adequate representation and an opportunity for certain institutions of mass culture to construct stories about otherness. In addition to authenticity, the notion of ‘real condition’ is also seen inevitable in considering national geographic effect. It is possible to say that what is perceived as real is created by the illusion that the objects presented occurred in nature in the ways they are screened. As Clifford points out,

photographers or generally visual artists are not viewed as metaphors of experience but rather as sections of reality itself. (p. 138)

Panoramas, which means bird eye view, is used to enhance such an effect. It is argued that during the 19th century panoramas and related visual illusionism became an early form of entertainment in Europe and America since it makes the world visible to those unable to travel to distant locations. Panoramic view is often related with exoticism, experiencing distant and exotic cultures. In addition to panoramic view, location shooting, naturalistic performance styles with unknown or non-professional actors and low budget (documentary) visual styles are conceptualized with national geographic effect in cinema all of which are also used to emphasize authenticity and realism.

In considering national films at the international festivals, it is possible to say that ethnographic filmmaking style, or called as national geographic effect, arouses the Western curiosity to the diverse cultures but at the same time Western curiosity to the diverse cultures perpetuates this type of films in festivals. This might refer to how canon is formed not only for the films contesting in festivals but also for the festival itself. Besides, canonization means politics as well. As Rich suggests, selecting films for a national spotlight is highly politicized because of the fraught notion of the nation and the imagined community that it must service. It is argued that films in the festivals are judged not solely on the merits of quality, instead for inclusion in a program, they are selected because they are 'representative' and adhere to a political agenda. In order to understand the politics of festivals and their effects to a national cinema in a more detailed way, Western fascination of Iranian cinema will be studied in the second part of this chapter. In addition to economical and political aspects, the canonization of New Iranian Cinema and how it turns into local forms of colonialism will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 3

### NEW IRANIAN CINEMA: HOW IT IS CANONIZED THROUGH FESTIVALS

It is argued that international presence of Iranian cinema has accelerated particularly after 1990s when the global spread of film festivals became increasingly visible. Many film theorist agree in idea that Iranian cinema have been achieved a considerable visibility and success in the international frame work. In analyzing post-revolutionary Iranian films at Toronto Film Festival, Bill Nichols states that:

Films from foreign nations not previously regarded as prominent film producing countries receive precise for their ability to transcend local issues and provincial tastes while simultaneously providing a window onto a different culture. We are invited to receive such films as evidence of artistic maturity...work that remains distinct from Hollywood based norms both in style and theme. (1994)

As Dabashi points out, Iranian cinema is widely recognized not merely as a distinctive national cinema but as one of the most innovative and exciting cinema in the world that films from Iranian directors are screened to increasing acclaim in international festivals and thus, the directors came back to Iran with various awards. Mohsen Makhmalbaf (*Kandahar*, Ecumenical Prize at 2001 Cannes Film Festival, Federico Fellini Price at 2001 Venice Film Festival), Abbas Kiorastami (*Taste of Cherry*-Palme d'Or at 1997 Cannes Film Festival), Majid Majidi (*Children of Heaven*-Academy Award Nominee for Best Foreign Language film in 1998), and Samira Makhmalbaf (*The Blackboard*, Unesco Award of Venice Film Festival in 2001) are some of the those well-known directors of Iranian cinema.

The achievement of many awards and numerous nominees from Cannes, Venice and Toronto film festivals also supports the visibility and success of Iranian cinema.



According to Serpil Kirel, such a success is not coincidence for Iranian cinema while its permanent production for many years is taken into consideration. Moreover, the various awards achieved by many Iranian filmmakers prove that Iranian cinematic narrative is more than the characteristics of a national cinema; instead, it transcends local issues and provincial tastes (2007: 356). However, it is possible to say that sui generis narrative of Iranian cinema partly explains its visibility and success in the international frame. In order to understand its prestige, Iranian cinema should be considered within the politics of those festivals.

In this part of the study, the canonization of Iranian cinema through the politics of festivals is examined with the notion of Orientalism. Since 'New Iranian Cinema' is the visible face of Iranian cinema, films belong to Iranian popular film genre are out of consideration. In addition to the canonization of Iranian cinema, economical enterprizes of festivals and the politics between Iran and the West is discussed as well.

### **3.1. Canonization of Iranian Cinema through Film Festivals**

Iran has no direct experience of colonization but during the Pahlavi Dynasty it is argued that Iran became an arena of neocolonial struggle. The year 1908 (when the year oil in Iran's borders was discovered) is supposed to be the beginning of intense imperialist interest on Iran approximately 8 years after the first Iranian documentary was filmed. In Iran, the first public theatre opened in 1904 and the first feature film was released in 1930. (Naficy: 1995) Naficy believes that despite the late start, Iranian feature film industry caught up in the 1960s and 1970s during the reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi. 1969 is defined as the birth of the Iranian art cinema which is called 'Iranian New Wave'. That period is identified with Daryush Mehrjui's price winning *The Cow* and Massaud Kimiai's *Quesar*, because through these films Iranian cinema became known internationally for the first time. (Tapper: 2002) In *New Iranian Cinema*, Richard Tapper writes;

1970 is the appearance of new Iranian cinema...created by a fairly heterogeneous group of young intellectuals, many of them foreign educated and receiving some support from the Ministry of Culture and the State television service. (2002:4)

Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad poses the term *Westoxication* to define that period of Iranian cinema. For Ahmad, Westoxication characterizes Iranian history is one of Westernization, means a fascination with the West as a disease. (Cited in Dabashi: 2001) Not only Jalal Al-e Ahmad, for many Islamists cinema was viewed as one of the ideological apparatuses morted from West by the Pahlavi regimes However, it is possible to say that the 1979 revolution has changed the social structure of Iran and the perception of cinema in Iran as well. As Naficy argues, before the revolution cinema was considered as a work and influence in the context of the overdetermination of Westernization in Iran by the Islamists, but just after the revolution Islamists recognized the usefulness of media and they had to deal with the issue of cinema (Tapper: 2002). According to Tapper, by realizing its power, “Islamists could no longer ignore it but decided to bring it under proper control and use it for proper political purposes”. (2002: 5) In a speech, Khomeini says:

We are not opposed to cinema or radio or television...the cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating people, but as you know it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is the misuse of cinema that we are opposed to. (Iran, 1979)

In acclaiming that cinema is seen to employ as an ideological apparatus to combat Western culture, Naficy believes that cinema, being rejected in the past as part of the frivolous superstructure, has been accepted as a part of the necessary infrastructure of the Islamist culture under the name of Islamic art. Islamic art is characterized by Islamists as to depend on traditionalism, monotheism, theocracy and anti-imperialism. Khomeini's authority is claimed to reverse Pahlavi policy by restricting Western imports. Pre-revolutionary films were re-edited and retitled; images of

unveiled women were censored by applying black ink directly to the frames. (Naficy: 1995).

In *New Iranian Cinema* (2002) Dabashi acknowledges states:

From colonized India to colonizing Hollywood, the world of cinema was our window to a modernity we experienced only vicariously. The intersection of art and modernity has made aspects of Iranian cinema signify something beyond itself. (Dabashi, 2002: 118)

In Iran today, mainly two types of cinemas are considered; they are *Film Farsi* and *New Iranian Cinema*. By acknowledging that “from colonized India to colonizing Hollywood”, Dabashi implies that these two genres have developed side by side within Iran. India is argued as significant as Hollywood within the construction of Iranian cinema. *Film Farsi* genre of Iranian cinema is considered to be imported from India’s cinema tradition. The term *Film Farsi* refers to Iranian native melodramas and often defined as popular, commercial film making style of Iranian cinema. On the other hand, although it accounts for only 15 percent of Iran’s total annual film output, New Iranian Cinema is argued to be the visible face of Iran in the international framework.

Some critics uses New Iranian cinema instead of Iranian New Wave but for other critics New Iranian cinema was preceded by Iranian New Wave but they do not posses same characteristics, because post-revolutionary films demonstrate a repressive Islamic republic existing in a relative cultural isolation which often reveals itself on the depiction of women. (Chaudhuri, 2005: 71)

In general, New Iranian cinema is characterized by natural locations, non-professional actors (especially children in the 1990s), the blurring of documentary and fiction, a meandering journey, approximately real-time duration and a repetitive or cyclical structure (symbols inspired by Persian culture) some of which might be read within ethnographic filmmaking or named as national geographic effect.

In her article, *Location and Cultural Identity in Iranian Films* (2002), Mihrnaz Saeed Vafa analyses those particular characteristics (the use of actual locations rather than studio sites, working with non-professional actors and adopting a documentary visual style) of Iranian cinema. For her, the use of actual locations is significant because as she argues, portraying actual locations rather than a studio fascinates Western spectator. Firstly, using actual locations seems different from the mainstream storytelling of Hollywood, and secondly-probably the more important one- by doing so, the global audiences not only have invited to a tour on various locations of Iran safely, they also have a chance of mapping Iranian cultural heritage through the screen. According to Saeed Vafa, in the international film festivals, foreigners expect to see the exotic; the mystery and misery and thus, they celebrate such films.

In the notion of location, it might be argued that where the director prefers to locate the film is unconsciously or consciously political. In a sense, the location reveals the ideological implications of the director towards not only his identity but also the hegemonic cultural codes, because through his/her choices the director constructs the language of the film. Naficy argues that the preference of outdoor shots is mostly due to the censorship in Iran that banned the screening of woman unveiled at home. On the other hand, Saeed Vafa takes attention to the increase in outdoor shoots related to Western curiosity towards Iran particularly after the Islamic Revolution (2002: 255).

In addition to natural location, working with non-professional actors and adopting a documentary visual style are considerable characteristics in Iranian filmmaking and also take part in the discussions of national geographic effect. For Saeed Vafa, global audiences seek to believe in the reality of what he/she is watching and thus, working with non-professional actors and using documentary visual style provides the Western audiences with more reality rather than a fiction film. As N. O'Brien acknowledges, the ideology of Orientalism hardly adapted to the fiction film, rather ethnographic films reproduce Orientalism with all the prestige and authority that an ethnographer possesses.

On the other hand, what Saeed Vafa acknowledges does not completely explain the Western fascination of Iranian cinema, although all the characteristics she points out reciprocates the national geographic effect. Firstly, it is hard to conceptualize all rewarded Iranian films as internalizing those characteristics, since some of Iranian films keep close themselves to the mainstream film codes as a part of popular entertainment while others might be defined as an art film. For example, the early films of Kiarostami are argued to rely on the aesthetics of uncertainty and curiosity rather than ethnographic filmmaking style (Mulvey: 2002). As Mulvey suggests, the most well-known Iranian filmmaker Kiarostami's cinematic understanding has emerged in a cultural whirlpool and so, he prefers uncertainties unlike Majid Majidi or Mohsen Makhmalbaf who constructs his works through faith and certainties (2002: 325). However, at this point it should be underlined that what national geographic effect has originated and what the most celebrated director Kiarostami has used is the same: Western curiosity towards the Orient.

Secondly, as Mulvey acknowledges, exoticism is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition for a national film in the international framework. In other words, the exotic characteristic cannot keep a new cinema afloat alone; rather long term fascination is possible only through the fusion of politics with aesthetics (2002: 230). For Iranian case, it is argued that since the revolution, Western critics' accelerating interest to the Iranian cinema has been enhanced by Iranian filmmakers who highlight national politics of Iran which reflects itself on the depiction of children and women on the screen.

It is argued that international film festivals acclaimed a kind of new wave; its devotees were accustomed to films that would be non-commercial with a new form and vision (Sadr: 2002). In the article, *Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When We Were Children*, Hamid Reza Sadr studies the depiction of children in New Iranian cinema and its political implications as well. For him, the main features including the drop of the majority of actors and actresses from the pre-revolutionary

industry, the banning of sex, singing and dancing have caused children to have been cast as majestic statues of man and women, and sometimes everyone's alter egos. He states that:

Accordingly, Iranian films constitute a fascinating reflection of these regulations and limitations, but they are close to a faithful reflection of social reality. (p.228)

The late 1980s are considered to be the period when many celebrated films based on children come to screen. However, as Sadr points out, children did appear in films as a unique tradition of filmmaking in Iran in 1960s as well. For Sadr, although the children were used in films before, this trend of filmmaking was reinforced by Kiorastami's *Where is the Friend's House* (1987) and Beyzai's *Bashu: Little Stranger* (1988) which gained a success outside Iran and considered as among the classics of contemporary Iranian cinema. In considering children in Iranian cinema, the important point is how they are depicted. According to Sadr, innocent, hardworking children have often been used to metaphorize Iran in order to change its image in the international frame. Whether in a war period or not, these children are far away from their home and being depicting within a journey to be in deep waters. They look at the camera directly to emphasize the notion of 'intimacy' and 'innocence' which is considered as vanished in the capitalist world (Sadr: 230). As Sadr concludes, the more deprived their family portrayed, the more affected the Western critics become.

Like the depiction of children, the depiction of women also increased after 1990s, as Shahla Lahiji points out, Iranian cinema come into a decade that one of the current criteria for evaluating a cinematographic piece of work is the filmmaker's attitude to women. (Lahiji: 2002) As mentioned before, until 1960s, the dominant film genre in Iranian cinema is *film farsi*. In *film farsi*, women were portrayed as sexy appealing dancing women or what Lahiji calls 'unchaste dolls'. The term 'unchaste-doll' means a faithless treacherous hussy with no faith in religion or revolution. For Lahiji, those

women are pictured as selfish, illogical, domineering, highly emotional and jealous. During the 60s, a series of films with names such as *The Dancer*, *The Cocotte* and *The Shamed Woman* were screened. In this way, “unchaste dolls” came to dominate the screen. Lahiji suggest that:

Sole cinematic representation of Iranian women and Iranian films in that era served for fantasy of the most vulgar type with no sign of aesthetic appeal (2002: 219).

On the other hand, Iranian New Wave films of the late 1960’s are being assumed of a posture of confronting vulgarity which threw women off the cabaret stage into the attic. (Lahiji: 220) Hereafter, there was portrayal of a good woman who was a faceless unexciting figure, wearing traditional costume and stayed in the background (Tapper: 2002). These good women might be defined as the crude prototypes of ‘chaste dolls’ of cinema and television (Lahiji: 222) According to Lahiji, under the pretence of foregrounding indigenous Iranian cultural attributes against what they called imported Western values, filmmakers came to exalt the barren and partly forgotten conventions of the past. It is possible to claim that because of the dominant political atmosphere, Iranian intellectuals approved of this cultural forgery as a sign of opposition to values promoted by the ruling regime. Lahiji writes:

Woman became ‘the good’ who was a submissive, long suffering, kitchen-bound creature, ever ready to unquestionably sacrifice everything for her male superiors (2002: 221).

Even progressive directors as Massoud Kimia’i (*Qeysar*, 1969) is supposed to present women as a battleground for honour in which a girl’s virginity is violated by a ruffian and she has no choice but to kill herself (Lahiji: 2002). Lahiji believes that the idea of chaste dolls which are concocted by pre-revolutionary progressive cinema, would die hard, it was continue into the postrevolutionary cinema as the lacklustre yet predominant image of women, so faceless, unexciting figure is considered to remain as all-too-common features of Iranian cinema (2002: 222)

Chaudhuri understands such positioning of women in Iranian cinema with complicated censorship rules which forbid cross gender contact between actors who are unrelated. Besides, those rules forces women wear a scarf, wig or hat on screen all the times, even at home, where most Iranian women are argued not to veil themselves.

On the other hand, it is significant that the changing figure of women in Iranian cinema parallels with women figure in oriental art which has changed over time as well. After the 1960s, in relation with the Western policy toward Orient, Oriental men have begun to be portrayed as kidnappers, terrorists, and hijackers while Oriental women became silent, faceless, oppressed (Tania Kamal El-Din: 1997). Mohanty reads the depiction Muslim women as silent, repressed, victimized with ‘Western rescue fantasy’ and claims that this type of representation is closely connected with colonial rule, because the colonial rule consolidates itself as a specific notion of the universal ruler as a white, masculine, self-disciplined protector of women and morals. (Mohanty; 2003:16) In acknowledging that the greatest flowering of orientalist art coincided with the expansion of European power in the Muslim East, for Kalmar, it becomes easier to link relevant visual texts to the contemporary cultural politics that recognized both women and members of the Orient as inferior to the Western male and consequently subject to his domination. Ultimately, Kalmar asserts, “In orientalist art, sexism and imperialism go hand in hand” (Kalmar, cited in Kamal El-Din, 1997).

Agreed with Kalmar, Syrian intellectual Mohja Kahf links the Western representations of Muslim women’s changing images to the changes in European relations with Islam, and she considers changing gender dynamics within the West as well (Kahf: 1999). In her study, Kahf displays the process through which the ‘termagant’ became an ‘odalisque’ in Western representations of Muslim women. Within Kahf’s study; odalisque can be defined as veiled, secluded; submissive and oppressed. On the other hand, termagant signifies the forceful queens of wanton and intimidating sexuality. Termagant is the image that European writers portrayed



Muslim women until the Enlightenment of 18th century. (Kahf: 1999) As she reveals, in the medieval era, when Islam is considered to be unknown, mystic and dangerous, the Muslim women is represented as a black magician, foulmouthed, rivalry, dangerous but also attractive, in European literature texts. The only thing which makes possible her to be civilized is the love that she feels with European warrior. However, changes of Enlightenment and modernization also brought changes to the representation of Muslim women in European literature. Agreed with Kahf, Leila Ahmed points out that the issue of Muslim women only emerged as the centerpiece of Western narrative of Islam when Europeans established colonial power in Muslim countries. (Leila Ahmed, 1992, cited in Kahf: 1999)

It is argued that the rise of the subjugated Muslim women concurred with the build up of British and French empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kahf reads this oppression, obedience and disobedience by sexuality. She defines this sexuality as being formed especially for the Western heterosexual male pleasure which is used to rationalize and justify the Western interest to the Oriental world. (Kahf: 218) Kahf's definition of 'termagant' is almost the same characteristics with the term 'unchaste dolls' which is defined by Lahiji for women in pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema, while the term 'odalisque' reminds 'chaste dolls' as well. At this point, it is possible to say that Muslim women image, represented as veiled, oppressed, waiting to be rescued, is formed through the Western fantasies of colonialism.

Especially the films shown at the festivals are argued to be derived from the struggle between the sexes and exaggeration women's lives which imposed itself on the audience irrespective of the underlying motivation or investigation. According to Lahiji, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, works by several female filmmakers aroused the curiosity and sometimes the admiration of international critics. Due to their attempts, debate on the subject of the image of women in Iranian cinema which had been introduced but remain unsolved, resumed in a wider spectrum. (Lahiji: 2002) This new approach is argued to allow Iranian women to challenge representations of their place in society. As Lahiji emphasizes, women directors

challenged the role hitherto allocated to them in film and in society in such films as Rakhshan Bani Etemad's *Nargess* (1992), *The Blue Scarf* (1994) and *The May Lady* (1998) and Tahmineh Milani's *Two Women* (1999). Moreover, male directors followed suite by centralizing women in their films: *Sara* (Dariush Mehrju'i, 1992) and *Zinat* (Ebrahim Mokhtari, 1994). Even Kiarostami who simply avoided women, turned to them in his later films. Mehrju'i sets a childless woman in *Leyla* (1997) to find a second wife for her husband. In *Tootia* (Iraj Qaderi, 1998) a working woman neglects her duties to her family. Consequently, it is argued that the representation of women as faceless, silent, and oppressed in Iranian cinema would die hard, considered to be remain as all-too common features of Iranian cinema as it parallels with the Western fascination.

The natural location, working with non-professional actors and adopting a documentary visual style are considerable characteristics of the Iranian cinema which are argued as to provide more reality rather than a fiction film. Besides, the depiction of children and women take their toll of the discussions on the realism of Iranian cinema. But how this 'reality' of Iranian cinema is constructed, and how the claim of realism might be associated with colonialism?

It is possible to say that the 'constructed reality' through films is not merely limited to the characteristics of ethnographic filmmaking style. In other words, it does not merely depend on non-professional actors or natural location shooting. As Hamid Rıza Sadr points out, it is hard to define a concrete reality since the term reality is a fluid one, it always includes subjectivity. In a sense, although all the Iranian filmmakers are depicted as 'realistic' in the international frame, their 'reality' has never been pure, devoid of any ideology. (Sadr: 2002) For him, their films on the one hand, provides an escape from the real life, on the other hand, they emerged as claiming to reflect the Iranian reality to the screen. This is a problematic within Iranian cinema. Moreover, this 'reality' is always open to changes and variations since what is defined as the 'reality' of Iran might be sometimes constructed by the existence of production/co-production companies (refers to European partners) or the

understanding of cinema is an apparatus of educating society (refers to the films of Majdi or Makhmalbaf etc.) or merely desire of the director to develop his art (refers to the films of Kiorastami) (2002: 289).

It is also possible to say that the existence of global spectator has changed the Iranian filmmakers 'reality' by turning the particular of director's native location into the global parameters of an emancipating rereading of reality. (Dabashi: 2001) Dabashi analyzes Kiarostami *The Wind Will Carry Us Away*, and states that Kiorastami fails in this film because; "he ceases to universalize this particular Iranian village, Kiorastami thinks is his nation, but it is not and what he did is mutating his ego in the collective psyche" (2001: 254). What Dabashi observed through Kiorastami might be considered as relevant for Makhmalbaf case as well. In an interview for *The Guardian*, Makhmalbaf frequently states that Afghanistan is a nation without a picture because it does not get a chance to be seen (*by whom?*). He says that since Makhmalbaf himself is out of shame for the world's ignorance towards Afghanistan, he makes Kandahar to provide the world with a chance to see the troubles in Afghanistan (Interview in *Guardian*, 2001).

It is possible to say that some of the Third World directors who internalizes this colonizing gaze are argued to carry the gaze of the first at the third world, of the powerful at the powerless, of the center at the periphery, of the metropolitan at the colonized, all of which might be conceptualized as what Dabashi suggests that "imitating the Europeans at the height of colonialism behind the screen" (2001: 256). According to Dabashi, this internalization of the colonizing gaze is a result of global attention to Iranian cinema which distorts the director's concentration by confusing about their audience and causes a local form of colonialism.

In all these respects, it might be claimed that international film festivals enable an interaction between the global audience and Iranian filmmakers which also helps to the canonization of Iranian cinema as well as the festival aura. In the era of celebrating cultural differences, what defined as the characteristics of traditional

Iranian cinema such as natural location shooting, using non-professional actors and documentary visual style has aroused the fascination of Iranian cinema by creating a national geographic effect for the Western spectator and critics as well. Not only national geographic effect, what Kiarostami does to arouse curiosity or just the political position of Iran against West also have enhanced the Western fascination of Iranian cinema. As Bill Nichols suggests;

This is a distinctive pleasure. It accompanies the discovery that the unknown is not entirely unknowable. Iranian cinema is no longer mysterious but still less than fully known (1994:18).

In a sense, the world of cinema as the window to modernity for Iran also has become as the window to Iran for the West. This fascination of Iranian cinema in the international frame in the long run determines what is expected from an Iranian film and to satisfy these expectations Iranian filmmakers carry on making such films, even emphasize the celebrated characteristics, that is why 'Kiarostami style of filmmaking' or 'Makhmalbaf's film tradition' has been emerged in Iran. By this way, the canonization of Iranian cinema is being formed through the festival politics.

Dabashi suggests that understanding Iranian cinema requires range of perspectives such as media studies and film criticism, literature, anthropology, sociology, economics and politics. By following Dabashi's statement, the economic enterprise of international film festivals and the politics between Iran and the West will also be discussed in the following part.

### **3.2. Economical and Political role of Iranian Cinema in International Frame**

It is not the imperialist countries which aid the Third World, but the Third World which aid imperialism

Pierre Jalée

According to Shohini Chaudhuri, because for filmmakers and national film establishments, festivals are a means of gaining international visibility, filmmakers often take their films to festivals in the hope of attracting distributors although 85 percent of films shown at festivals never reach commercial screens beyond the festival circuit (2005:4). Many film critics support the Chaudhuri's statement by suggesting that being survive within the festival circuit is claimed to be a strategic necessity for raising production funds which are difficult to be obtained at home.

In her influential essay; *Perspectives of Recent Iranian Cinema* (2002) Azadeh Farahmand analyzes international consequence of censorship, how it interacts with film festivals to encourage and promote particular film styles, subjects and directors and to exclude others. According to Farahmand, cinema is realized in a web of relations between international and Iranian national politics and economics as well. As she states, the international presence of Iranian cinema is supposed to have been increased during the 1990s. Farahmand relates this phenomenon is to the ongoing and increasing economic crisis that has led to the deterioration of local filmmaking in Iran. She acknowledges that amidst this crisis, international markets have become viable arenas for increasing film revenue and supplementing the likelihood of future production of funding, as she states, Iranian cinema has been rediscovered within the global economy in the name of art. (2002: 87) In considering the increase of film revenue and the likelihood of future production of funding for Iranian directors, she writes:

The international popularity of Iranian films resulting from their festival screenings has not only brought an expanded market for film exhibition and therefore a higher financial return for filmmakers, but has also increased the chance of foreign investment in local film production...In Kiarostami's case, for example, the popularity among French spectators of his *Where is the Friend's House?* (1987) enabled him to make his subsequent films with partial or full French financial support (2002: 94).

However, this is the only one side of a coin. Other side of the same coin reveals the economic enterprise of the co-production European partners who distribute Iranian films internationally. As Chaudhuri claims, international co-productions have been

used to combat Hollywood dominance by enabling partners to pool financial and other resources to produce works with greater international appeal. However, by doing so, co-productions also contribute to uneven power relations because it work such a censorship mechanism through which mainstream local production of Middle Eastern films often remains unseen by foreign audience. (Chaudhuri: 3) The notion of Co-production is considered to include different categories, that is, full co-productions which involves all processes of filmmaking and co-financing productions whose role is limited to investment. Within Europe, the main co-producers are considered as France, Spain and Germany. Middle Eastern filmmakers often participate in co-productions with especially French partners.

Mojdeh Famili notes that welcoming Iranian cinema by French partners is a smart attitude economically. (Famili: 1996) An Iranian Journalist, Mojdeh Famili writes for French Media. She studies French production and distribution companies such as MK2 and CB2000, both of which especially interested in Iranian films. She reveals that “Because of inflation and the drop in the value of the rial, investment in Iranian films by European companies has indeed proved rather lucrative” (Cited in *The New Iranian Cinema*, 2002: 94). Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s *Gabbeh* (1996) might be seen as one of these examples since *Gabbeh* costs to make a 15-minute film in France, but it was produced such a feature film which has exhibited worldwide. Thus, it is possible to say that MK2 who funds *Gabbeh* and owns its rights, has proved lucrative due to this investment (Famili: 1996). In considering high budget Hollywood productions, their low budget might be seen as the main motive which drives producers to fund and distribute such films. For Farahmand, this point demystifies film festivals as the profit motive driving European festival programmers and film distributors is brought to the foreground. She acknowledges:

While European festival programmers and film distributors can pride themselves on the discovery of other cinemas, they have also benefited from the cultural and economic returns of the films they promote...several people associated with European film festivals visit Iran’s annual Fajr Film Festival in order to choose films to screen in international festivals. Some of them have direct involvement with production or distribution interest to the publicity and support films and film projects gain through festivals (2002: 94).

In addition to economic enterprise of film festivals over Iranian films, the growing attention given to Iranian cinema in the West is also be linked to recent attempts to develop diplomatic ties and promote cultural exchange between Iran and the West.

As Hamid Reza Sadr points out, the history of Iranian cinema in the 1980s and 1990s has been radically marked by social and political events such as, the revolution, the occupation of US embassy and the war with Iraq. Each of these events is argued to have a profound impact of the way that cinema has developed in Iran with respect to Islamic rules, anti-Western attitudes and propaganda aims. However, it is possible to say that the entrance of Iran to the international frame was supported by cinema. Farahmand believes that it is cultural exchange which can provide a neutral ground and therefore a suitable first step to embark on further diplomatic relations. According to Farahmand, while Iran and the US still have many issues to resolve, recent diplomatic and cultural activities among them is worth contemplating. As she writes:

Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1997, the year that Khatami was elected Iran's president, his image as a moderate leader circulating in the Western media. In 1998, the Iranian soccer team played the US team at the World Cup in France, and a former US hostage met his Iranian captor in Paris. That was also the year when US restlers visited Iran amidst the most hospitable of environments, and when Khatami spoke before UN, calling for cultural exchange, dialogue and people to people relationship between Iran and the West (2002: 95).

Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven* (1998) which is the first Iranian film competing for the American Academy Awards and the *White Balloon* (Jafar Panahi, 1995) which had the highest commercial gross among Iranian films distributed in US are noteworthy in considering the development of relations on cinema. Farahmand sees activities of *Search For Common Ground* (SFCG) as an organized negotiation between Iran and the West through cinema. SFCG was founded in 1984 in Washington DC. in order to cooperate with European Center for Common Ground (ECFCG). Both of them is supposed to have been implemented extensive policies and programmes aimed at the resolution of conflict and call for a dialogue. As

Farahmand points out, in conjunction with the Gulf 2000 project, SFCG organized a meeting to plan the US-Iran cinema exchange that took place in Cannes 1998. According to the SFCG report, “what is new is that a window of opportunity is now open, making possible cinema activities of much higher impact” (Mohsen Beig-Agha, *Deep Waters: Iranian Cinema*, 1996, pp.110) SFCG report also includes the exchange of US and Iranian directors to participate in their film programmes and festivals, an exchange of film critics. Farahmand believes that exchanges over cinema are symptoms of a need, or simply timely tools for easing tension and bringing Iran-US contact to the surface through this “neutral” and “cultured” medium. (2002:97)

At this point, it should be noted that while cinema can be used to facilitate to replace the Iranian image of the US as ‘Great Satan’ with one as patriotic fighter, or the American image of Iran as ‘hostage-takers’ with one as humanists and artists, there is also a censorship mechanism occurs in this interaction over cinematic activities. In considering that only a few selected films have endorsed for entry in international film festivals, Farahmand emphasizes the fact that others whose work is equally compelling are excluded. The Iranian media themselves is supposed to open to raising such questions and concerns as well. A report in *Film International* explores that in 16<sup>th</sup> Turin International Film Festival (1998) screened Samira Makhmalbaf’s *Apple* with the last moment change in festival program but cancels Beyzai’s attendance as a jury member for unknown reasons (Farahmand, 2002: 98).

In all these respects, it is possible to argue that the sudden turn towards export of films is related to Iran’s shift to foreign policy which opens foreign investments in order to become visible and positively presented in the world. This also supports the existence and significance of national/international politics within the festival frame.

To sum up this chapter, it is possible to say that whether it is unfamiliarity, the experience of something strange, the discovery of new voices and visions or grasp the meaning of things behind the appearances, the fascination of festivalgoer might be read with Orientalism. Thus, it is no coincidence that some of the Third World filmmakers are accused of packaging their cultures into a tourist friendly, Orientalist



ways for festival taste. In considering the politics of festivals, it is argued that politics played a far smaller role in the later phase of festival history than when the Venice and Cannes festivals were founded, but political considerations did not entirely vanish from the scene. Since political considerations of festivals today might be defined as to emphasize the celebration of cultural differences, the ethnographic filmmaking or named as national geographic gain importance in those festivals. National geographic effect emerges from the Western curiosity to the diverse cultures and has become an important criterion within the festival frame. National geographic effect is highly political because films in the festivals are judged not solely on the merits of quality, instead for inclusion in a program, they are selected because they are 'representative' and adhere to a political agenda. At this point, positively it is argued that international film festivals enable an interaction between the global audience and national filmmakers as well as the canonization of national cinema named as 'new cinemas'. One of these new cinemas is New Iranian cinema which is characterized as natural location shooting, using non-professional actors and documentary visual style. Through its filmmaking style, Iranian cinema is considered to arouse the Western fascination by creating a national geographic effect. Although national geographic effect is considered a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition for such a visibility and success in the international framework.

In following Mulvey's statement that long term fascination of a national cinema is possible only through the fusion of politics with aesthetics (2002: 230), it is possible to say that Western critics' accelerating interest to the Iranian cinema has also been enhanced by Iranian filmmakers who highlight national politics of Iran. These politics are argued as to be often carried out through the depiction of children and women on the screen which might be read with Western rescue fantasy of colonizing gaze. Since this fascination of Iranian cinema in the international frame in the long run determines what is expected from an Iranian film, to satisfy these expectations Iranian filmmakers carry on making such films, even emphasize the celebrated characteristics, that is why 'Kiarostami style of filmmaking' or 'Makhmalbaf's film tradition' has been emerged in Iran. Not only canonization of films, but also colonial gaze is organized through the festival circuit. In order to reveal the internalization of colonizing gaze, Makhmalbaf's film *Kandahar* will be analyzed as a case study. In

the following chapter, Kandahar will be studied with Western desire and its colonial implications to demonstrate that how international film festivals translate into a local form of colonialism. In considering Western desire and colonialism, the notion of Orientalism and how it is constructed through cinema will be the main arguments of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### KANDAHAR: AS A LOCAL FORM OF COLONIALISM

Makhmalbaf is supposed to achieve big international success with *Kandahar* which is produced by *Makhmalbaf's Productions* with French Companies; *Bac Films* and *Studio Canal*. *Kandahar* premiered at Cannes Film Festival in 2001, the winner of *Federico Fellini Price* from *Venice* was watched by crowds in Europe and the USA in the immediate aftermath of September 11, before USA was preparing to go to war towards Afghan locations like Kandahar. Moreover, *The Times* celebrated *Kandahar* as one of the best 100 films has ever been done before.

*Kandahar* is Makhmalbaf's fourteenth film directed in 2001. Before *Kandahar*, Makhmalbaf was known through his films; *The Bicyclist* (1987), *Time of Love* (1990) and *Gabbeh* (1995). Makhmalbaf's body of work is assumed to be filled with abrupt changes in style, tone and ideology. At the beginning of his career, his defined his work as to be dedicated to the Islamic revolution. From the mid to late 80s he made social-realist films, in the 90s his ideological convictions is argued to turn into more poetic and self-reflexive films. Today, his name is assumed to be one of the most notable figures of the New Iranian Cinema with *Abbas Kiarostami*, *Jafar Panahi*, *Majid Majidi*, *Khosrow Sinai*, *Sohrab Shahid-Saless*, *Parviz Kimiavi*, *Samira Makhmalbaf*, *Amir Naderi*, and *Abolfazl Jalili*.

Makhmalbaf calls himself as an Islamist-Revolutionist within the Islamic Art. Makhmalbaf defines the color and flavor of his work as to be native to Iran, but its contents are not. For him, their contents are often related with life and humanity which are the most essential things of humanity. In considering Iran, Makhmalbaf suggests that:

World moved on from the classical era but Iranians did not progress rather, they are still in a state preceding humanism, much less modernism and realism (Cited in Dabashi, 2001: 196).

Like Iran, he believes, Afghanistan is in an extreme irrationality, being drown in savagery and violence and his film *Kandahar* aims to demonstrate this surreality to the world. This chapter is an attempt to read Makhmalbaf's film *Kandahar* with the Orientalist reflections on cinema.

It is possible to say that Orientalism, in many aspects, serves for West and its desires. Orientalism is argued as to rely on binary oppositions and these oppositions, consciously or unconsciously, have been constituted by Western male desire revealing its sexual and colonial implications. In Orientalism, West is defined as to take on the role of male and the Orient is represented as its female sexual conquest. Since Orientalism is a way of understanding functions in a complex but a systematic way, all its gender and racial correlaries are argued to be found in and also constructed by the materials of narrative and visual art, one of which is cinema. Reading cinema with Orientalism is possible through analyzing Western male gaze and its reflections on cinema, because it might be claimed that the positioning of female (both woman in Orient and Western woman) and the positioning of unknown continent is constituted by this gaze. Therefore, in the following part of this study, the fetishistic and voyeuristic characteristics of Western male gaze will be discussed to demonstrate how patriarchy and colonialism functions hand in hand within the mainstream film codes. Moreover, the depiction of exotic settings, its erotic dimensions, how and why exotic experience later turn out to be a nightmare for the colonizer subject will also be studied. The notion of chaos, savagery, backwardness identified with the Oriental continent, and the notion of harem, polygamy, veil, and oppression identified with Oriental woman and all their implications will come into question. Because it is hard to dissociate, the discussions on women and the discussions on continent (Orient) has usually telescoped each other within the study.

#### 4.1. West as ideal ego and the East as the Other

The Orient was reinvented for the Westerners (Bernstein; 1997:103).

According to Ella Shohat, Hollywood narrative of the Orient is considered to not only as a colonialist imagination but also a product of the (Western) male gaze<sup>(1)</sup>, which reflects symbiotic relations between patriarchy and colonialism in articulating female/male, East/West differences. (Shohat, 1997) At this point, it might be asked: what is male gaze and how it reflects symbiotic relations between patriarchy and colonialism on articulations of female/male, East/West differences?

Male gaze is argued as the predominant gaze of Hollywood cinema. By deconstructing mainstream film codes, Mulvey argues that the existing active/passive heterosexual division of labor within the patriarchal society is also controlled by visual narrative of Hollywood cinema in which active male gaze/ passive female gaze dichotomy exists. (Mulvey: 1975) In considering male gaze, it is possible to say that such a type of Hollywood narrative firstly prevents the male figure from the burden of objectification. Since men make things happen, they are active and they forward the story.

Moreover men control the film fantasy because they are argued as the representative of power and as the bearer of the look or the one carries this look behind the screen into the film (Mulvey: 1975). By following Mulvey's statement, it might be claimed that such a gaze (male gaze) enables identification that is considered to make ideal ego construction possible for the spectator.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, rather than a geographical location, Western gaze is analyzed in relation with colonialism and its power relations.

The discussions on psychological and psychoanalytical theories of identification had occurred mostly in the 1970s and 1980s when film studies are argued to be in acceleration. These studies were mostly gathered on the application of psychoanalytical interpretation to the productions of Hollywood cinema. (Lapsey&Westlake, 1988: 67).

Many film studies begin with focusing on the controlling effect of camera (gaze) and its relation to power since camera is seen as to give power to the spectator and by this way enables identification. One of them is Mulvey's study that is claimed to be significant in 1980s when film studies within feminism have gained attention. Mulvey defines identification as the tension between image and self-image in the process of recognition for cinema audience. By following Lacan's mirror stage, she acknowledges that cinema plays a function for the spectator similar to the joyous encounter of an infant with his/her image in the mirror. Since the ego in the mirror is not the real but an ideal one, it is possible to say that screen has the same effect as the mirror for the spectator. (Mulvey: 1975) Throughout her study, Mulvey underlines the fact that identification of the viewer with an image on the screen is not limited to the idea that men identify with male characters and women identify with female characters. Rather, she defines identification as being more to do with ego and energy (1975:62). In other words, the spectator identifies himself with male protagonist on the screen because identification enables him to enjoy the controlling power of male performer and by this way, ideal ego is constructed. Besides, ideal ego is constructed on the screen in a more powerful way than it is in the mirror phase. As Mulvey states (1975:145), because camera technology including deep focus, unobtrusive movements and editing might be specifically used to enhance this controlling gaze of male spectator. At this point, it is possible to say that the identification process for the spectator is in relation to power, to the controlling power over the screen. This type of power relation reveals itself in *Kandahar* as well. Since *Kandahar* is the story of an Afghan born Canadian Journalist Nafas, Nafas might be considered as the one whom forwards the story, as the 'bearer of the look' of the film. In the first screen, Nafas comes to Afghanistan by a UN helicopter and from the helicopter window she watches people running towards the helicopter to get what helicopter throws for them. This enables Nafas to have a panoramic view over

the territory and controls what the spectator can see and what cannot. In a sense, she implies for the spectator that she herself is the male protagonist enjoying the controlling power. As mentioned before, the notion of panoramic view is often associated with Orientalist films through which Western spectator is initiated into an unknown culture as an ethnographic tour.

Moreover, in the movie, Nafas who is portrayed as an Afghan born Canadian journalist, records what she has experienced in that unknown territory; in a sense, she is the narrator of the story. It is considered that Orientalist topos within visual arts describes contemporary Orientalist artist describes often as a journalist, anthropologist and scientist. Therefore, the fact that Makhmalbaf portrays Nafas as a (Western) journalist might be considerable in revealing the Orientalist implications of *Kandahar*. On the other hand, in the following scenes of the film, Nafas become an object by the camera which focuses on her face, eyes and lips. However, ‘the bearer of the look’ has never objectified such a way within mainstream film codes (Cowie, 1997: 11). Besides, unlike the male protagonist, Nafas gets sick and is argued to lose her controlling power over the Orient. By following these assumptions, it might be said that the actual bearer of this Western controlling gaze is Makhmalbaf-director of the film- who ‘carries this look behind the screen into the film’. In acknowledging that “wanting to film the starving Afghans” (The Land without A Face, Interview, 2001), Makhmalbaf sees himself the one who allows the world to see the troubles in Afghanistan (Film Review by John Demetry, 2007) and it is no accident that he portrays a Western journalist speaking in English to represent this reporter mission. As it is argued, mainstream film codes provide spectator with the ideal ego figure who has the controlling power (whether this figure is the heroic character of the movie or the director himself) to be identified with, but identification process is claimed to be completed only in the case that “an objectified other” exists. (Mulvey: 1975). Mulvey and the other film theorists agree that the notion of objectified other is defined to be formed through fetishistic and voyeuristic characteristics of Western gaze. But, what is fetishistic/voyeuristic gaze and how it works in the formation of objectified other?

In feminist film studies, fetishistic/voyeuristic gaze is conceptualized as to emphasize on women's physical beauty which becomes something satisfying itself. Besides, in fetishistic gaze, by fragmenting her woman is claimed to be separated from her body and thus she becomes depersonalized and turns into a part of visual pleasure (Mulvey: 1975). Deep focus of camera partly on women's legs, breasts or eyes are seen as the reflections of this fragmenting process. As mentioned before male body is usually not presented in this way because in the mainstream film codes the predominant gaze is male (Cowie, 1997: 11). While fetishistic gaze depersonalizes women, voyeuristic gaze is supposed to be also required for demystification. Neale agrees with Mulvey in the sense that within the mainstream film codes masculinity is an ideal, but femininity is such a mystery that its voyeuristic desire has to decipher. For Neale, in cinema males are tested through identification while women are investigated through voyeuristic male gaze (Neale: 1983).

It is considered that the notion of voyeuristic gaze is often marked by the distance between the seer and the seen. In other words, voyeuristic gaze might give way to sadistic tendencies or acts because it provides the spectator with power, means the spectator has always power over the seen (Mulvey: 1975). In considering the configurations of power in cinema, it might be asked; how this fetishistic/voyeuristic gaze functions within colonialism? Is it possible to argue the act of sexual domination upon fetishistic/voyeuristic male gaze with the efforts of European colonial imperialism to subjugate the Orient?

As Jenna Judd states, the sexual objectification of the female body by the voyeuristic and controlling gaze of the male artist might be seen as a reflection of an imperial discourse (Jenna Judd, *White-skinned Odalisques: The Residue of Patriarchy; The Means to Subvert It*, 2003). For Judd, Europe is defined as to take on the role of the empowered male, while the Orient is conceived of his female sexual conquest and the metaphor of the exploitative sexual relationship between the male (Europe) and female (the Orient) at work might be understand with orientalist scholar's conceived relationship with his native informant (Judd, 2003: 4).



Shohat agrees with Judd in acclaiming that the positioning of different regions (East/West) are closely connected with sexual terms (female/male) by which Western representations of 'otherized' territories serves diacritically to define the 'West' itself. (1994: 20) In cinema, this colonial implication is considered to reveal itself in the construction of West as ideal ego and the East as the Other (Shohat: 1994), as the Other/Orient which is conceived as the object of study and spectacle (Yeğenoğlu: 1998) as well. According to Shohat, first world cinema narrates European penetration into the third world through the figure of 'discoverer', therefore, most of western films about the colonies are quite literally the explorer's perspective. As Shohat states;

The notion of discovery has always a gender overtone that is; the unveiling of the mysteries of an unknown space becomes *a rite de passage* which allegorizes the Western achievement of virile heroic statue (1995: 27).

She analyses some of Western adventure films which schematize Christopher Columbus and other discoverers on the one hand; new land, 'natives' and their 'discovered' position on the other.

Consequently, Shohat poses that the discourse on nature as feminine (virgin/naked feminine) has clear geopolitical implications within the colonial context since the Western masculinist desire of mastering a new land is linked to colonial history which reveals itself on geography. Such a type of 'discoverer' perspective might be found in *Kandahar* as well. Since colonial films are claimed to initiate the Western spectator into an unknown culture (Shohat, 1994: 33) Nafas' journey to Kandahar is also presented as a mystery, a dangerous journey to an unknown territory. At that point, the notions of 'mystery' and 'dangerous' are considerable because as Deborah Root claims, within the colonialist construct of Orientalism, the Orient exists as the terrain where a particular kind of experience is available to the Western subject; that is an experience at once mysterious, dangerous and compelling (Root: 1998).

It is possible to say that in *Kandahar*, through Nafas, spectator has a chance to take a voyage towards Afghanistan, actually the territory which is depicted as Afghanistan. In a sense, Nafas enables the spectator to view a desert, to enter a Taliban school or a tent that is used as a hospital room, and finally to discover what is under burqa. By this way, all mysteries of Orient which becomes the object of study and spectacle are inserted into a demystification process by Makhmalbaf's voyeuristic camera. *Kandahar* might be understood with Shohat's assumption that Orientalist films can be defined as an ethnographic tour of a 'celluloid preserved' culture (Shohat: 1997). For her, many films which are called as Orientalist often begins in the city centre (where European civilization has already tamed the East) but withhold the most dramatic conflicts for the desert, the unknown parts of the territory. (1997: 169). The same is true for Nafas' journey which begins in the city center and finishes in the middle of the desert with a dramatic end. Desert landscape is claimed to be frequently verbal and visual motif in Oriental films as an enduring feature of 'Western canon of exotica' (Root: 1998) and it is usually accompanied by the romance of the camel nomad. In considering Orientalism within cinema, desert setting is claimed to demonstrate considerable implications since it provides an erotic dimension, while barren land and the blazing sands metaphorize the exposed, unrepressed 'hot' uncensored passions of the Orient (Shohat& Stam, 1994:148).

In agree with the statement that desert is a frequent motif in Orientalist works, McKenzie claims that with the industrialization period, reactions to the Middle East become complex and often contradictory, actually the desert view implies admiration for the peasant or desert life rather than a humiliation or an erotic dimension. For him, desert refers to a consequent rejection of the urban turn into a norm increasingly; therefore, the central point about the desert is that the desert is perceived as morally and physically clean, spiritual renewal, the restoration of courage and purpose, the desert he believes that, "represents a great purifying force" (1995: 59). It is possible to argue that while identifying the notions of 'clean' and 'purify' or 'renewal' with the desert, McKenzie misses the point that all he argues might be considered as to serve for Western fantasy which feds up with urbanization and its norms, regulations, on the other hand, desires barren lands with uncensored passions. In other words, even through he positions himself against Shohat,

McKenzie also support the idea that desert landscape that is most often encountered in Orientalist films has dimensions that serve for Western fantasy.

In considering *Kandahar*, it is possible to say that some scenes within the movie are especially formed to emphasize the Oriental experience of being in a desert. In the first of these desert scenes; we see Nafas in a barren land, being lost in blazing sands. She has walked through the desert then she realizes that she is lost. In order to find her guide, Nafas starts to run in the hot, immense desert, the sands are flitting and her clothes are flitting under the sun, this scene might be seen as metaphorizing the exposed, unrepressed 'hot' uncensored passions of the Orient. In the other desert scene, camera only frames head and shoulders of Nafas while she is traveling on a horse car. In considering the desert view gliding behind her, this type of camera treatment makes an effect that she is flying over the desert. She again wears burqa but different from previous ones, at this time and probably the first time, she does not open her veil. There are camels passing behind her and an ethnic music accompanies this scene. In the final desert scene- probably the most influential one- Nafas has joined a wedding procession in order to pass border to go Kandahar. Wedding procession consists of only women (at least it seems like that they are all women). Women are wearing different colored burqas, carrying baskets on their heads and singing as well, they look like the colorful dancer girls singing in the desert. All the figures discussed above might be supposed to enhance desert's fantastic/erotic dimensions implicit in Western colonial praxis.

In addition to its erotic dimension, as Shohat states, desert setting in Oriental films is also used to reinforce the Western construction of Third World region as undeveloped. It is possible to say that the construction of Third World is undeveloped, with a technical backwardness because it makes way for the projection of Europe's civilizing mission in the Third world (Shohat: 1994). As Shohat acknowledges, this civilizing mission linked to 19th century Westward expansionism depended on the discourse that primitive landscapes (desert & jungle) were tamed and 'shrew' people were domesticated thanks to the infusion of Western enlightenment (1994: 21) and now colonial films take the spectator into a new, unknown culture, represented with terrifying land in a pre-historical time. In

following the Shohat's argument of 'Europe's civilizing mission', *Kandahar* might be read as one of these colonial films, because in *Kandahar*, "the only modern thing is the gun" as African-American doctor states during the movie. In that scene, African American village doctor-actually he is not a medical doctor- communicates with female patients through a hole in the sheet. Not letting them to die, he gives bread to his patients instead of medical drugs and he advises them to eat the bread at three times a day. For the village doctor, to cure the natives he needs not to be a medical doctor, because "the natives are far away from the most basic medical knowledge; they died from malaria, high fever or even hunger" as he suggests.

In addition to the extreme poverty; irrationality, savagery and chaos are also identified with Orient in colonial films, as in *The Sheltering Sky* Paul Bowles writes, "Irrationality, savagery, violence, chaos and death: the "native" man is supposed to bring" (1949), and in *Kandahar*, Nafas records: "Here, everything is fight against everything; dogs against dogs, birds against birds and people against people." In analyzing Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), Root acknowledges that Orientalist topos is refigured through the landscape of the desert in which vastness of the landscape has exercised as the sick at heart, and it appears as a place where no questions are asked, and time is in suspension (Root: 1998).

At this point, it is possible to say that as Paul Bowles, Makhmalbaf represented East as the locus of irrational primitivism and uncontrollable instincts to be developed and tamed. This might be argued to serve for European civilizing mission and be derived from 'Western rescue fantasy' (Shohat: 1990). For Shohat, the notion of 'Western rescue fantasy' might be defined as to depend on the articulation of sexual difference which constructs the Female/East as Other and the Male/West as ideal ego, and as he states, this articulation of difference metaphorically renders the Orient as a female, who should be saved from her own destructiveness.

In considering the notion of 'rescue fantasy', probably the most affective scene of the film is needed to be pointed out. In that scene, Makhmalbaf portrays school children as a "humanitarian cry for help" (Demetry, Film Reviews). Makhmalbaf depicts refugee families, who have migrated from Iran to Afghanistan, to be gathered in a

school garden because the small girls are taking a course on how to avoid landmines with toy dolls strewn on the ground as models. Camera mostly focuses on girls' wounded faces, unhappy looks and flies flitting around their eyes which arouse Western rescue fantasy. It is no accident that the Makhmalbaf uses this type of camera treatment for the small veiled girls (in the following parts, we will also come across with this type of camera treatment to the one-legged men - victims of landmines) while the screening the film in international film festivals is taken into consideration. In the following scene we hear that an instructor tells school girls to imagine themselves as an ant when they feel themselves miserable. He says:

When you feel miserable, imagine yourself as an ant, so your home seems to you as the whole world, but remember, no matter how high the walls are, sky is always higher than the walls. One day, the world will see your troubles and come to your aid.

As mentioned before, mainstream film codes are argued as the products of Western male gaze and through colonial films it portrays West as ideal ego (male) and the East as the Other (female) to be rescued, which serves Western rescue fantasy. In considering the notion of rescue fantasy, Makhmalbaf's film might be considered as a good example since it was watched by crowds in Europe and the USA after September 11 and just before US army was preparing to enter Afghan locations like Kandahar in order to rescue Afghans. It is not a concern of this study whether West save Afghans or not, however, in the movie *Nafas* could not succeed in rescuing her sister because first she gets sick, loses her way in the desert and finally she is captured. In considering the mainstream film codes, why such a journey always ends up with captivity is in relation to other codes, implications and mostly gender relations which will be discussed in the following chapter.

#### **4.2. Why Things Turn out to be so bad? Identities are Questioned, Women are punished**

According to Root, when the colonizer ventures into the desert, several bad things happen to him/her. (Root: 1998) In considering *Kandahar*, it is possible to say that same is true for Nafas. Just after she has arrived from the city centre, Nafas and the refugee family which she is traveling with are robbed by Taliban soldiers. Because of robbery, refugee family decides to go back to Iran but Nafas insists on to continue her journey towards Kandahar. In order to find her way Nafas employs a little boy; Khak as her guide but first Nafas gets sick and afterwards she loses her way in the desert and finally being captured. But why do things so often turn out badly for such people in novels and films?

Root points out that the reasons for this danger are never addressed explicitly in the story, but would seem to have to do with the way in which difference puts the (colonialist) identities of the characters into question. For her, the notion of danger marks these identities profound alienation from each other and from culture itself. Since this alienation is not situational, rather becomes an ontological state, there is no escape from it. In considering the notion of foreign culture and its cultural codes, Shohat acknowledges that not only the colonizer but also the spectator who is identified with the gaze of the West, comes to a master over the codes of a foreign culture that is presented as simple, unself-conscious and susceptible to facile apprehension (Shohat: 1995) Root takes this statement one step beyond by claiming that the codes of a foreign culture- although it is presented as simple and unself-conscious -put the identities of the characters into question.

As Root states, the characters' in *The Sheltering Sky*, desire to seek a certain kind of movement across a colonized space, an unknown territory, a movement whereby they are able to operate as 'free', 'sovereign' subjects but to do so they also require their identities are taken into question by a foreign culture and its codes. Neale acknowledges that males are tested, women are investigated in cinema, in a sense, (complex, three dimensional) colonial identities are tested, while (simple, one dimensional) 'native' figures are investigated in Orientalist films. It might be argued

that Makhmalbaf portrays Nafas in the same way as the colonial characters in *The Sheltering Sky*. At the beginning of the film, Nafas is depicted as overbold journalist who come to Afghanistan alone, not only overbold, she is recalcitrant as well. Nafas makes her own rules; she does not obey the Uzbek man who tells her not to open her burqa or she does not accept the money that UN officer offers. When they are robbed the refugee family advises her to go back but Nafas insists on to continue her journey. However, in the following scenes of the movie, Nafas gets sick unexpectedly. To the tape recorder she notes that: "I am sick. I am getting worse day by day and I do not know why."

Shohat acknowledges that any possibility of dialogic interaction and of a dialogic representation of the East/West relation is excluded, by this way, colonialist mechanism are reproduced which render the Orient as devoid of any active historical or narrative role (1994: 33) and so Orient becomes the object of study and spectacle. In contrast to Shohat, for Root, such a type of interaction between East and West exists inevitably. As she states, in the Oriental text the difference between the 'native' and the colonizer must be produced and also maintained through a range of colonialist constructs. These constructs are considered to be formed through the contacts between the colonizer and the 'native', because, the colonialist desire is structured in the text as the ability to stand above the 'native' culture.

Like the female character in *The Sheltering Sky* who falls in love with a 'native' man, Nafas also gets in contact with the 'natives'. One of them is Khak, a small boy guiding Nafas, and the other is Hayat who accompanies her to go Kandahar. However, in considering the relationship between Nafas and African American doctor or Nafas and Red Cross volunteers, it is possible to say that Nafas' contacts with the people considered as natives are much more facile, devoid of trust and confidence. Whereas Nafas' approaches to Khak or Hayat with full of suspicion, she entrusts herself to the village doctor the time when she realized that he is African American. It might be said that Nafas becomes ally with the village doctor who represents West as her. In the movie, both of them are portrayed as alienated from the territory and culture of Afghanistan because they believe and imply that they have come from a more civilized world. Therefore, it is no accident that at the

moment they come across, they become friends. Throughout the movie, they do not only criticize the existing conditions of Afghanistan but also they understand and help each other which reveals their alienation from the culture and positioning as to be stand above the culture. In his under-equipped room, doctor communicates with Nafas through a hole in the sheet and then he heard Nafas speaks in English, he requests her to carry on. Doctor says: “Please speak in English. It has been a long time that I heard someone speaking in English”. In considering Nafas, Deborah Young states that;

English speaking heroine of the movie presents the unspeakable tragedy engulfing the country from a knowledgeable outsider's point of view (2001).

As Young, Magnolia Dargis points out the different positioning of Nafas that in contrast to all other women in the movie who are portrayed as a part of a herd, a homogeneous group. Women in movie, walk together, make up together, wash the clothes together, and even cry together. It is hard to differentiate of from the other. On the other hand, Nafas is portrayed as a sovereign subject, making her own rules. The positioning of Nafas supports Root’s statement that colonialist desire is structured in the text as the ability to stand above the ‘native’ culture. But why the African-American doctor or Nafas came to Afghanistan, came to this ‘undeveloped’ territory? What they are looking for?

These questions might be answered by through the attraction of authentic experience. As Root points out, cultural difference provides authentic experience functions for the Western colonialist subject. For her, the experience is presented as something that can (appear to) cure the Western disease of alienation and ennui. It is possible to read *Kandahar* through the light of Root’s observations, since during her journey, Nafas says: “I gave my soul to this journey. All I do is to provide my life with a meaning.”



Actually rather than Nafas, African American doctor (actually not a medical doctor) constitutes a better example. In *Kandahar*, Doctor Sayid tells Nafas that why he is in Afghanistan:

Actually, I am American...I am here because I look out for God. I have not found yet but I am still searching. I am not a medical doctor. I came to Afghanistan in order to fight with Afghans against Russians. Afterwards, I fought with Pestugs against Tajiks and then with Tajiks against Pestugs. Tajicks say that God is on their side and also Pestugs believes that God is on their side. One day, I saw two children on a path; one of them is Tajik and the other is Pestug, both of them were almost died. At that moment, I realized that the search for God is helping these people.

According to Root, attraction of authentic experience lies in the way that experience itself is commoditized and made to seem available to the colonist (Root: 1998). For Root, within this construct the notion of experience itself appears as a priori, a kind of template within which various experiences will be made to adapt and to assimilate and the experiences sought by the ones hoping to escape Western culture are wrapped up and presented as items to be consumed by properly sophisticated palates. Thus, the desire for the 'exotic' remains superficial and dilettantish, and there is no room for nuances, or rather blindness to nuances. (Root: 1998) This refers to an "Aristocratic moment, where experience is something to be sampled like fine wine", as Root acknowledges.

It might be argued that since it is commoditized, the authentic experience must bring in something to the colonizer. As Root claims, achieving a particular type of authentic, intense experience from a contact with 'different' changes the colonizer. In a sense, the radical difference between the colonizers and the people they encounter is assumed to make the colonizers' identity into question, gives their lives with a meaning. Considering Nafas, this transformation process can be observed through what she notes on her tape recorder. After she sees one-legged, one-armed victims of landmines, for her sister Nafas records:

I departed the ways as I have never gone before. For you; for telling you what hope means, I have passed an immense desert with strangers. Thereby, I have discovered the hope in their dreams and now, I am coming to you with thousands of reasons to live. Anyhow, I believe that if one-leg person does not run for being a champion, this is completely his fault.

Consequently, it is possible to say that the Oriental experience causes a transformation process by which colonizers' identity is questioned. Therefore, Western subject reconstruct itself through the Orient, through the Oriental experience that is commoditized. At this point, it is possible to say that as a colonialist subject Nafas also reconstructs her identity as a over the authentic experience, she gets adopted to Afghanistan, Afghans, she has remembered her childhood memories, afterwards, she does not open her burqa anymore. However, all those things do not save her from being captured; in other words, do not save her from being punished by Makhmalbaf's camera, because she is a woman.

Camilla Paglia, who is a feminist scholar working on cinema, analysis punishment mechanisms for female figures within mainstream Hollywood cinema. She sees Hitchcock's *Birds* (1963) as a considerable example through which the spectator witnesses the fall of free, sovereign female character. *The Birds* (as in *Kandahar*) begins with Melanie Daniels' journey to a small costal village, Bodega Bay and ends up with a tragedy. During the journey, Melanie who is portrayed as a crazy, defiant character gets hurt by a seagull, and then she is captured in a telephone box and in a house as well, finally she is attacked by so many birds due to which she has almost die. In brief, Paglia believes that as Melanie Daniels (portrayed as a free, sovereign object) most of the women characters who venture to make a dangerous journey towards an unknown place have been punished through the mainstream narrative of Western male gaze. (Paglia, *The Birds*; 1998)

In following the statement that the construction of women, of her image and of her desire is always for the masculine spectator, Cowie agrees with Paglia in the notion

that free, sovereign female character is often punished within mainstream narrative of Hollywood cinema (1997: 11). As she states, this is mostly due to the fact that women is considered as a threat for the masculine spectator. Mulvey goes one step beyond by posing *phallogentrism* in order to explain why female image is perceived as a threat for the masculine spectator (Mulvey: 1975).

In general, *phallogentrism* is defined as the privileging of masculine (the phallus) in understanding meaning of social relations. Feminist studies often use the term *phallogentrism* in order to illustrate how all Western languages, in all their features, are utterly and irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated. At this point, it should be underlined that from the point of view of psychoanalysis, the female figure is presented in images as a lack of phallus which relies upon the image of the castrated women. Because the woman signifies lack and poses a threat of castration, female image causes anxiety for men; that is the anxiety of castration. According to Mulvey, to cope with this trauma, cinema provides men with a respond by punishing or saving the 'guilty' object who is woman.

Some feminist film studies argue that female character is firstly turned into a fetish by fetishistic male gaze. Since fetishistic gaze works hand in hand with the voyeuristic gaze in emphasizing the physical beauty, woman turns into a part of visual pleasure. Woman is argued to be fragmented by fetishistic/voyeuristic gaze and deep focuses of camera merely on women's legs, breasts or eyes are seen as the reflections of this fragmenting process. This type of camera treatment might be found in *Kandahar* as well. Makhmalbaf's camera enables spectator to see Nafas' eyes, ears, lips and also white shining teeth through a hole in the sheet while she is in the doctor's tent. Such a gaze often found in mainstream film codes depends on Western male pleasure. On the other hand, fetishistic/voyeuristic gaze might be considered to function for woman depicted as Western and for woman depicted as Oriental in different ways. It is possible to say that while it punishes Western woman (who is defined as 'free, sovereign subject'), for non-Western woman (who is defined as 'oppressed and victimized') it works as to focus on the notion of saving her, both of which serves for Western male fantasy.

According to Shohat, the predominant trope of ‘rescue’ in colonial discourse forms the crucial site of the battle over representation, this not only includes the Western imaginary metaphorically rendered the colonized land as a female to be saved from her destructiveness, it has also projected the narratives of rescue non-Western women from native man (Shohat: 1997). In following Shohat’s argument, it might be said that Western rescue fantasy reveals itself through *Kandahar*. In order to define *Kandahar*, it is possible to say that:

Nafas returns to her homeland to rescue her sister who will commit suicide at the time of the next solar eclipse because of not only being injured by a landmine but also due to her despair over the Taliban’s systematic oppression of women (Quoted from blurb of *Kandahar*, 2001).

In the movie, Nafas’ disabled sister might represent the Afghan woman figure that should be saved from native man and his oppression by Nafas or in general by the West. *Kandahar* begins with a close up towards Nafas’ face, and then to the camera she says: “So far I have escaped from prisons where Afghan women live, but now I am a captive in all these prisons only for you my sister”.

It is not only for the Afghan case, as Ahmed Shafey acknowledges, the notion of imprisonment for women in Orient is supposed to be a prominent feature of many Orientalist novels and travelogues (Shafey: 2002).

According to Shafey, the ‘imprisonment’ is seen as cruel and tyrannical while simultaneously being enticing to the Western reader. He states that through the concept of prison; women are kept at a distance and seemed to be within the reach of Western travelers who one day would rescue them from the backward and oppressive culture that holds them captive.

It is possible to say that the notion of imprisonment in a backward and oppressive culture is often discussed in relation with veil/veiling for the Muslim women. According to Fernea, since wearing veil provided a way of cultural difference, it frequently associated with Muslim women such as oppression, hiding behind, imprisonment and living in a backwards society (1998: 92) and by doing so, the life of Muslim women is represented as totally determined by religion, implying that the

liberation comes in the form of unveiling (Khan, 1995:151). In following these arguments, it is no coincidence that in *Kandahar*, African-American doctor defines hope for Afghan woman is the day she is unveiled.

In the article, *the War for Women's Freedom* (2001), Faize Hirji implies that in the case of Afghanistan, the depiction of victimized Muslim women depends on the idea of Muslim women as veiled, hidden and submissive awaiting rescue from a heroic non-Muslim man and thus, burqa is often presented as a symbol of oppression. Moreover, Shafey points out that *burqa* have become a popular discourse especially after the September 11 attack. Shafey takes our attention to the fact that in America, stories about the burqa could be seen on every major television station, be read in every newspaper and became dinner conversation material for people who, three months earlier were unaware of its existence and cultural significance.

For his study, Shafey investigates *The Globe and Mail* which is a newspaper in US, and reveals the following;

The *Globe and Mail* mentions the burqa 119 times in the 3-month period after the World Trade Center attacks. All of the commitments on burqa depend on oppression and imprisonment of Afghan women. He acknowledges that 18 of the 43 articles discussing the burqa between September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002 relied on wire service such as the two previously mentioned along with *Express NP*, *Agence France-Press*, and *Cox News Service* (Shafey: 2002).

This fascination with burqa might be seen as the prime determinant of oppression harkens back to the Western obsession with icons that signify the exotic other (Hirji: 2008) through which uncensored emotions reveal themselves (Shohat, 1994: 33). For Shohat, Orient is considered as the 'world of the out-of-control id', as a metaphor for sexuality that is encapsulated by the figure of veiled women. He acknowledges that figure of a veiled woman might be seen as a metaphor for the mystery of the Orient itself. This explains why Western anxiety toward the veil as

Nafas records on to the tape recorder that: “I am mostly worried about reactions of women. It is impossible to estimate how they feel under their burqas.”

According to Yeğenoğlu, the veil is one these tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration are achieved fantasmically. Since veiled woman signifies the mysteries of Orient and access to the interiority of the other, veiled woman is made such a case which constitutes objects for a branch of knowledge and hold for a branch of power. In the notion of power on veiled woman, Shohat acknowledges that, the veiled woman becomes a metaphor for her land which becomes available for Western penetration and domination. (Shohat: 1995) According to Shohat, denuding veiled woman literally might be argued as to allegorize the power of Western men to possess her mostly due to the fact that veil seems to place her body out of the reach of the Western gaze and desire, since “it functions as a barrier” as Yeğenoğlu suggests (Yeğenoğlu: 1998).

Consequently, because she signifies inaccessibility, veiled woman is turned out to be a fetish for the Western male, and that is why Shohat states that “in Orientalist paintings, photographs and films expose more flesh than they conceal it” (1994: 33).

Moreover, Clerembault and Deleuze consider the veil as to provide a unique form of perception of a world of figures devoid of objects (Cited in Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 42). This assumption finds its reflection in *Kandahar* as well. During her journey, Nafas looks at the women under their burqas and as a reporter she notes on tape recorder that: “Here, women have no name, no image, because all of them are totally veiled. That is why they are called ‘siyasar’ which means black head.”

In the movie, veiled women, named as siyasar, are considered as a homogenous group devoid of any other characteristics. They walk together, wash the clothes together, make up together and even cry together. It is impossible to talk about any unique veiled woman figure in the movie. When the first Afghan woman seems on the screen, she is presented as one of the wives. In that screen, Nafas is watching refugee families who make their photo taken for bureaucratic processes. This scene might be considerable since in the movie, each Afghan family is portrayed as being

consist of a husband and his three wives at least. Just after that we see a UN officer who is making an agreement with an Uzbek man. In order to take Nafas to Kandahar, officer asks:

-If I gave you 100 dollars would you take this blackhead (*signifying Nafas*) to Kandahar? In case someone asks you, you will say that she is your fourth wife, OK?

-Why will I say something like that? I have two Hazarian wives and one Uzbek. I had one more wife, a Tajik, but she has died. Do I have to marry with all Afghanistan?

Polygamy in relation with the harem is argued as being the locus of an exotic and abnormal sexuality facilitated by Westerners from the earliest encounters till the present (Melman: 59). For Shohat, harem arouses the Western fantasies, fantasies of polygamy. Since it offers a forbidden world, the harem dream is considered to reflect a masculinist utopia of sexual omnipotence through which Western masculinist fulfillment is constituted (Shohat, 1994: 161). The notion of harem is argued to be a part of Western masculinist fulfillment because the notion of harem provides what is absent in the sociopolitical status quo of the West. As Shohat, Ruth Bernard Yeazell understands Orientalist representations of harem as manifestations of outlets for a Western male sexual fantasy. For Yeazell, the notion of sexual fantasy is characterized by an expression of exploitative male sexual power inherent in the prohibited and secret trespass of the harem upon its oblivious and consequently disempowered female occupants. According to her, for Western men the notion of harem very quickly emerged as a sexualized place in which the husband has sexual access to limitless women in conditions of absolute despotic power. In the context of Yeazell's understanding, harem scenes is an escape from socially acceptable forms of sexual interaction which is the result of monogamous relationship under the institution of marriage. As she points out, it is no coincidence that representations of the fantasy harem are most prevalent during the late seventeenth to early 20th centuries; when the Occident is argued to be most committed to affective monogamy.

For Yeazell, harem is conceptualized as the sexual prison, baric and uncivilized. Yeğenoğlu acknowledges that;

By being frustrated with the invisibility and inaccessibility of this mysterious, fantasmatic figure of women, and being disappointed with the veiled figures refusal to be gazed at, Western gaze subjects to a relentless investigation (1998: 40).

The notion of relentless investigation might be considered to functions in the harem, because its sexual dimension not only includes unusual sexual interaction and its characteristics of baric and uncivilized, it is argued that harem is also constructed as to provide the Western spectator with authorizing a voyeuristic entrance into an inaccessible private space (Shohat: 1994).

In following Shohat's statement that a voyeuristic entrance into an inaccessible private space is enabled by the notion of harem, delivery car travel scene of the movie might be considered as the same effect for the Western male spectator. In that scene, all wives of the Uzbek man, their children and Nafas are sitting on the backside of a delivery car where they are chatting as well. In the movie, delivery car's backside is located as a peculiar place for women where no one is able to see them (except the spectator).

All of his wives (except Nafas) are making up beneath their burqas. It is possible to say that it reminds the Orientalist paintings which display a preparation ceremony of the odalisques in the harem who share make up equipments as well as their one husband. While women slip one another make up and mirrors under their coverings a rhythmic song is playing at the background. This is my assumption that the voyeuristic entrance into an inaccessible private space is applicable to this scene; in which representations of harem are typically constructed to make the viewer feel as though they were privy to the viewing of a secret place, a ceremony which is an effect that maximizes the Oriental voyeurism associated to the Western male gaze (Yeazell: 27).



As mentioned above, *Nafas* does not involve this preparation ceremony which emphasizes her different positioning from Afghan women within the movie. According to Dargis, women in the movie are nearly all anonymous, nameless, wordless specks in the sand, and almost always on the move such as toward a wedding, away from the war (2001:3). In considering *Nafas* she states that; “The only one to emerge from anonymity is a journalist played by Nelofer Pazira, an Afghan refugee who, as a teenager, immigrated to Canada.” This different positioning of *Nafas* might reveal itself in that back of the delivery car scene where *Nafas* and other women are being together at the first probably the last time. Why such an articulation of differences between *Nafas* and Afghan women is required? In considering the gender tones in mainstream film codes, why *Nafas* is treated in a different way from her fellows?

According to Shohat, such a different positioning between woman from the West and women in Orient are formed, because Western women occupy a relatively powerful position on the surface of the text, means she is the bearers of a gaze more colonial than sexual. In a sense, the national identity of the white female character is relatively privileged over the sexual identity in colonial films (Shohat, 1994: 166).

Except *Nafas*, the women in the movie might be argued as to be nearly all anonymous, nameless and wordless who have no image. As in *Kandahar*, victimized-silent-oppressed image is argued to be often encountered in the Western representation of Muslim women. Mohanty reads the Muslim women image as silent, repressed, victimized with ‘Western rescue fantasy’ and claims that this type of representation is closely connected with colonial rule, because the colonial rule consolidates itself as a specific notion of the universal ruler as a white, masculine, self-disciplined protector of women and morals (Mohanty; 2003:16). As Mohanty, Syrian intellectual Mohja Kahf analyses the representations of Muslim women image, she studies the process through which the ‘termagant’(forceful queens of wanton and intimidating sexuality) became an ‘odalisque’ (veiled, secluded; submissive and oppressed) for being rescued. For Kahf, Muslim woman image always positioned to signify as ‘the Other’ of Western woman and at the same time to serve for Western male fantasies. According to Kahf, termagant is the image that European writers portrayed Muslim women until the Enlightenment of 18th century

(Kahf: 1999). As she reveals, in the medieval era, when Islam is considered to be unknown, mystic and dangerous, the Muslim woman is represented as a black magician, foulmouthed, rivalry, dangerous but also attractive, in European literature texts. The only thing which makes possible her to be civilized is the love that she feels with European warrior. However, changes of Enlightenment and modernization also brought changes to the representation of Muslim women in European literature, as Kahf points out. Afterwards, the issue of Muslim women emerged as the centerpiece of Western narrative. It is argued that the focus on Muslim woman is associated with the build up of British and French empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, when Europeans established colonial power in Muslim countries, Muslim woman image has turned into be presented with oppression, obedience and victimization (Ahmed 1992, cited in Kahf 1999). At this point it should be underlined that whether she is portrayed as termagant or odalisque, Muslim woman in both occasions is portrayed as through the Western male figure; whether he is the European warrior save her from the barbaric culture, or the male protector save her from the oppression implicit in the culture itself. Kahf concludes that Western policies towards Orient have been changed and by these policies Muslim women figures have been changed, however, the positioning of Muslim women always relies on Western male sexuality, Western interest to the Oriental world (Kahf: 218).

To sum up this part, since mainstream film codes are constructed by Western male gaze, it reflects symbiotic relations between patriarchy and colonialism that reveals itself in East/West, Female/male differentiations. This differentiation is used for ideal ego formation through identification with the male protagonist and also investigation of 'the Other' through the controlling effect of camera.

It is possible to claim that *Kandahar* includes implicitly many codes that are often identified with colonial films. At first, through *Kandahar*, the director might be supposed to invite the spectator to an ethnographic tour to celluloid territory devoid of any historical, cultural aspect. This makes a 'depersonalized woman' effect for the Afghan territory since it is encapsulated in one dimensional figuration. As a prominent feature of many Orientalist novels and travelogues, desert view is presented in the movie. It might be assumed that by the desert setting, the director provides his movie with an erotic dimension, as well as emphasizing the territory's

backwardness. Moreover, savagery, chaos, irrationality and violence are identified as 'the Other' of the film in contrast to the West which enhances the perception of Western civilization as standing above the native culture. In considering *Kandahar*, Nafas's journey might be claimed as a colicky progress that the colonial identity reconstructs itself over that authentic experience. In following the Neale's statement that males are tested, women are investigated in cinema, it might be argued that, (complex, three dimensional) colonial identities are tested, while (simple, one dimensional) 'native' figures are investigated in such colonial films. By doing so, Orient becomes the object of study and spectacle through which Western subject defines himself. It should be underlined that the positioning of women is no less different from the positioning of the territory. They, both women and Orient, are conceptualized so the same aspects that sometimes they telescope each other.

The notion of backwardness, oppression is also considered for women and often identified with veil/veiling. In considering Yeğenoğlu's argument, it is possible to say that since it is a barrier that signifies inaccessibility of the Western male, veiled woman becomes a fetish for the Westerner. Not only veiled woman but also harem notion is serves for Western male fantasy. The notion of Harem is claimed to be required for the Western masculinist fulfillment because it provides what is absent in the sociopolitical status quo of the West. Besides, harem signifies a voyeuristic entrance into an inaccessible private space which satisfies voyeuristic male pleasure as well. All the discussions above take us to the Shohat's statement that for the Western gaze, Orient is the world of the out of control of id where every fantasy is able to be played out.

Consequently, construction of Orient as uncensored and uncivilized is supposed to reveal both the patriarchal and colonial implications of the Western gaze on cinema. In this study the notion Western gaze is conceptualized as much more to do with power relation rather than a geographical location, therefore, Iranian director Makhmalbaf's film *Kandahar* is preferred to be analyzed in order to demonstrate how a Islamic-revolutionary filmmaker Makhmalbaf internalizes the colonizing gaze of the First at the Third World (Dabashi: 2001). It is possible to say that internalization of the colonizing gaze is not peculiar to *Kandahar* or Makhmalbaf's

case; rather it is about some directors in Iranian cinema who are being confused about their concentration due to the existence of their global audience.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

Film festivals are often seen as a reaction to the dominance of the powerful Hollywood film industry as well as to construct a national identity in the post-war period. Although politics is argued to play a far smaller role in the later phase of festival history than when the Venice and Cannes festivals were founded, political considerations never vanish from the scene. It is considered that the discussion on film festivals limited to the Euro-American context by focusing on the difference between European art cinema and high-budget Hollywood productions. However after 1990s, when the global spread of film festivals became increasingly visible, film critics have begun to discuss the concept of 'new cinemas' originating from regions conceptualized as 'the Other'. Today, international film festivals are considered as situated sites where a kind of parliament of national cinemas is constructed. Positively, film festivals function as a space of mediation, a cultural matrix, a place for the establishment and maintenance of cross-cultural looking relations; they bring national film industries and national film cultures into the world cinema system. However, festivals are also political consideration as well as cultural assumptions and thus they have exclusionary mechanisms. In a way, films selected for inclusion in a program are selected because they are representative and adhere to a political agenda and this political agenda is formed by global policies as well as the national ones. In considering the celebration of cultural differences, it is also possible to talk about the ethnographization of these festivals. In a sense, they have become a part of global ethno-tourism that watching a festival film is a way of reconnecting with one's own culture as of indulging a touristic curiosity. In all these respects, it is no accident that film festivals are argued to lead to the establishment of a touristic and commoditized aesthetics.

The discovery of cultural differentiations often takes part in the discussions on international film festivals with the notion of ethnographic filmmaking or called as national geographic effect. National geographic effect has taken its name from the magazine *National Geographic* and often defined by emphasis on the aesthetic or emotional impact of its subjects more than the global political, economic conditions which account for them. 'Authenticity', 'backwardness of Third World cultures' and 'panoramic view' are some of its characteristics which are presented as the notion of 'real condition'. National geographic effect which has accompanied with mass journalism, development of photography, scientific specialization and most importantly the awakening of American interest in the rest of the world, is also created in the international festival frame that some of the Third World filmmakers are accused of packaging their cultures in a touristic, Orientalist way for the Western taste. Since Orientalism is achieved cultural modes of differentiation, the colonial gaze also aims to grasp what is behind the appearance, what is defined as unseen in a more authentic and nostalgic form. Thus the festivalgoer's fascination of national films opens a path through reading of international film festivals with Orientalism. In considering Western curiosity behind its fascination, national geographic effect is significant since it arouses the Western curiosity to the diverse cultures but at the same time Western curiosity to the diverse cultures perpetuates this type of films in festivals. By this way, canon is formed not only for the films contesting in festivals but also for the festival taste itself.

In order to understand the politic of festivals and its effect on the canonization of a national cinema, Western fascination of Iranian cinema was studied in the second part of first chapter. Economical and political role of Iranian cinema was examined in addition to its canonization. In the era of celebrating cultural differences, it is possible to say that what defined as the characteristics of traditional Iranian cinema (such as natural location shooting, using non-professional actors and documentary visual style) has aroused the fascination of Iranian cinema by creating such a national geographic effect for the Western spectator and critics as well. Since it is hard to conceptualize all rewarded Iranian films as internalizing those characteristics, national geographic effect partly explains the Western fascination of Iranian cinema. Not only national geographic effect, what Kiarostami does to arouse curiosity or just

the political position of Iran against West also have enhanced the Western fascination of Iranian cinema. Besides, the depiction of children as a hardworking, innocent to metaphorize Iran and the depiction of women as silent, oppressed and faceless have significant roles within this fascination because all of those images arouse Western rescue fantasy. In considering Iranian films, Bill Nichols suggests that:

Iranian films for example, usher us into a world of wind, sand and dust, of veiled women and stocky men, of unusual tempos and foreign rhythms (Toronto Film Festival, 2002).

In the long run such expectations from Iranian film forms the canonization of Iranian cinema since in order to satisfy these expectations Iranian filmmakers carry on making such films which explains the emergence of different filmmaking style cater to the festival taste such as; Kiarostami style of filmmaking or Makhmalbaf's film house production etc. Besides, global attention to Iranian cinema is considered as to result into a distortion in the director's concentration by confusing them about their audience. They are argued to internalize the colonizing gaze as well as representing their culture in a touristic and Orientalist way which might be defined as a form of local colonialism. In addition to the economic enterprise gained by European co-production companies over the distribution of Iranian films, the national/international politics are argued to be affective within this fascination of Iranian cinema. It is possible to say that the sudden turn towards export of films is related to Iran's shift to foreign policy which opens foreign investments in order to become visible and positively presented in the world. This also supports the existence and significance of national/international politics within the festival frame.

In the second chapter, Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* was analyzed since it is a good example in order to reveal the politics of festivals. In addition to many awards gained from various festivals, *Kandahar* was watched by crowds in Europe and the USA in the immediate aftermath of September 11, before USA was preparing to go to war towards Afghan locations like Kandahar. It is possible to claim that *Kandahar*

includes implicitly many codes that are often identified with colonial films. At first, through *Kandahar*, the director invites the spectator to an ethnographic tour to the Afghan territory. As a prominent feature of many Orientalist novels and travelogues, desert view is presented in the movie to provide his an erotic dimension, as well as emphasizing the territory's backwardness. Moreover, savagery, chaos, irrationality and violence are identified as the "other" of the film in contrast to the West. This enhances the perception of Western civilization as standing above the native culture. In considering *Kandahar*, Nafas's journey might be claimed as a colicky progress that the colonial identity reconstructs itself over that authentic experience. It is possible to claim that in *Kandahar*, colonial identities (complex, three dimensional) are tested, while (simple, one dimensional) 'native' figures are investigated as many other colonial films. By doing so, Orient becomes the object of study and spectacle through which Western subject defines himself through it. It should be underlined that the positioning of women is no less different from the positioning of the territory in same aspects that sometimes they telescope each other.

To sum up, as well as cultural assumptions, film festivals are political considerations whose exclusionary mechanisms are formed through the global politics. In the era of celebrating cultural differences, it is no coincidence that film festivals are highly ethnographized. This ethnographization is provided by ethnographic filmmaking which creates national geographic effect for the festivals' spectator and critics. Positive responses from the festivals motive filmmakers to make such films, and thus canonization of national films occur through the festivals critics. Not only canonization of films, but also colonial gaze is organized through the festival circuit which depicts the territory as well as the women in Orientalist way. *Kandahar* is one of examples to demonstrate that how international film festivals translate into a local form of colonialism.



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