Cinema as an Alternative Media: Offside by Jafar Panahi

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Abstract

This study inquires whether cinema is an alternative media or not. In our age, when the mainstream media is dominating the entire world, new types of media such as the internet can alternatively serve beyond the traditional mass media .Where does the cinema, the seventh art, stand against the existing order and status quo? To what extent is it an alternative means of showing the condition of the minorities in a society? This study addresses to the status of women, who are condemned to a secondary status in Iran and who can be categorized as a minority, through the film Offside by Jafar Panahi (Offside, 2006), emphasizing the fact that minority media reflects the status of political – social minorities. Offside by Panahi is an alternative voice of women in Iran, and considered a milestone in Iran's minority media as women are seen as a minority in Iran**.**

 Keywords: Alternative media, Minority media, Women as minority; Alternative cinema

Introduction

Mass media influences the lives of people, creating special worlds of information, emotions, thoughts, entertainment, curiosity, excitement and many other elements. These dream worlds created by the mass media, develop in parallel with the spirit of capitalism. Media creates its own majority and minorities, making the masses get used to it. Trying to see the situation in a country through the images of mass media and the pictures which are most likely nothing like the truth, people are led to think that those shown as the majority by the media are indeed the majority and those looked down upon and denigrated by the media are the minority.This study focuses on the representation of women as a minority in Iranian society through the film *Offside* by Jafar Panahi (2006), considers how the minority's media is shaped and ruled by broadcast policies. Although Islam and Islamic dynasties have played a determining role in the traditional socio-cultural texture of Iran, a 150 year period under the influence of westernization and modernization accelerated with the

constitutional revolution[1] has caused serious gaps in the social life governed by the Islamic rules. Although the relationship between the "modern-secular Iran" image which strengthened following the World War II and the women's issue (which had differentiations on the basis of class) evolved into another stage when political Islam virtually declared its victory by suppressing women as the relatively free female profile (which was the product of such image) was repressed by the Islamic Revolution of 1979[2]. This study sheds light

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[1]The economic and political challenges of the European powers had caused popular protests, reforms, and modernization programs as early as the 1830s; reform was hampered in part, however, by the monarch's arbitrary power. Religious leaders, laborers, liberal-minded reformers, students, secret-society members, merchants, and traders came together in the Constitutional Revolution in 1906 to fight against foreign pressures and a weak government in a bid to supplant arbitrary rule with the rule of law. Tehran and other large cities were the main sites of this revolution, which resulted in the establishment of a constitution and a parliament. Economic decline and World War I, however, limited the effectiveness of the revolution and its new institutions (For more information: Ahmad Kasravi, History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution: Tarikh-e Mashrute-ye Iran, Volume I, translated into English by Evan Siegel, Mazda Publications, Costa Mesa, California, 2006).

[2]Iran's revolution began with a popular democracy movement and ended with the establishment of the world's first Islamic state. The revolution turned Iranian society upside down and became one of the defining moments of the 20th Century. Before the

revolution Iran was ruled by Shah Reza Pahlavi. Power was clustered among a close network of the Shah's relations and friends. During the 1970s the gap between Iran's rich and poor grew. Distrust of the Shah's economic policy and resentment of his autocratic style fuelled dissent against his regime. Opposition voices rallied round Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a shia cleric living in exile in Paris. Promising social and economic reform, the ayatollah prescribed a return to traditional religious values, which struck a chord with many Iranians. As the 1970s drew to a close, a series of large-scale, increasingly violent anti-Shah protests swept Iran. Instability, including a wave of general strikes, continued throughout the year, crippling the country's economy. In January 1979, the Shah left Tehran for an "extended vacation". He was never to return. All over Iran statues of the Shah were torn down by Khomeini supporters. In his final act before fleeing, the Shah appointed Prime Minister Shahpur Bakhtiar as head of a regency council to run the country in his absence. Mr Bakhtiar tried to stave off the growing tide of opposition. He refused to allow Ayatollah Khomeini to form a new government. On 1 February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini made a dramatic return from exile. Political and social instability increased. Street battles raged in towns and provinces between pro-Khomeini demonstrators and police and security officers, and supporters of the imperial regime. On the 11 February, tanks rumbled through the streets of Tehran amid rumours of an impending military coup. However as the day wore on it became apparent that the army had little appetite for seizing power. Revolutionaries stormed Tehran's main radio station and declared: "This is the voice of the revolution of the Iranian people!" Prime Minister Bakhtiar resigned. Two months later Ayatollah Khomeini won a landslide victory in a national referendum. He declared an Islamic

upon the "status of women" issue in Iran, departing from the fact that Islamic culture adds a unique yet deep dimension to the universal issues of womanhood. It also focuses on the position of women in the Iranian society, their status in the public sphere and the representation of the Iranian women through a film, associating this problem with Islam.

This study answers to these questions through Panahi's *Offside*:

➢ How is cinema used as an alternative media?

➢ How are women represented as a minority in a film?

➢ How does a film become an alternative media to show the status of minorities?

In Iran, religion is the main influential element of the political, social and daily life. Religion also serves the interests of authority, which prioritize men or women in both public and private spheres. It pushes women aside, affording them an unequal status. For the common opinion of society, women are prevented from acting freely, especially in public areas. Such situations are examined by Iranian directors such as Ashgar Farhadi, Abbas Kiyarüstami, Mohammed Şirvani and Jafar Panahi.

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republic, and was appointed Iran's political and religious leader for life (For more information: Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979, Charles Kurzman, American Sociological Review, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Feb., 1996), pp. 153-170).

Alternative Media or Non Dominant Media

Alternative media, in its briefest definition, is the media that is not "dominant". Alternative media is the media that positions itself as distant from any power relationship (Köse, 2007:58) Opposition to the mainstream media and the prevailing order makes it necessary to use the media networks in different manners and with different methods. Alternative media is also defined as a form of mass media that clearly challenges (the) established and institutionalized politics, social change and criticizes traditional values. . It is (also) defined as: "radical" or "underground" means of communication and position itself opposite traditional media by representing political and social teachings outside the rigid borders of parliamentary consensus and discussion (Mutlu, 1998:48)Communication studies have focused on mainstream media institutions and (their) products for a long time (Fenton, 2006: 305) yet have not considered media and products outside the mainstream. In academic literature, studies addressing alternative media have been classified diversely on different levels. Comprehensive studies attempt to explain alternative media in detail inquiring into its roots, economic sources and program types, enabling us to see it as a communicational phenomenon. The second group of studies, on the other hand, explain the importance of the alternative media within communicational process and democracy. Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpantier (2008) explain alternative media through the concepts of diversity and relevance in their classifications. Expressing that different

theoretical frameworks emphasize different aspects of alternative media, Bailey et al (2008) stated four different points of view related to alternative media:

1) Serving the community,

2) Alternative media as an alternative to the mainstream media,

3) Linking alternative media to civil society, and

4) Alternative media as rhizome

Most of the studies focus on the difference of alternative media from the mainstream. Alternative media is generally identified with ensuring the representation of opponents who are generally not represented by the media and by its advocacy of social and political reforms (Haas, 2004: 115) John Downing's *Radical Media* (1984) is considered a milestone for theoretical studies concerning to alternative media. In this study, Downing represents radical media as the institutions of counter information and as the actors of (the) developmental force (as mentioned in Haas, 2004: 116) In the 1984 edition of *Radical Media*, Downing's analysis of alternative media is limited to published and printed products. According to Downing (1984), what makes the radical media alternative is its potential for social and political change. The main relevance of Downing's perspective is its focus on radical media's potential for joint action and political awareness. He defines alternative media: "Radical Media must encourage its participants to emphasize multiple reality of social life. It may be biased, but it should not be a member of elite minority or political parties. Its sociality and creativity have to be over these establishments" (1984: 17)

Alankuş emphasizes that alternative media are given many names and discusses alternative media based on the global media atmosphere[3]. She emphasizes that the alternative media, which she conceptualizes under the name "the other media", is the "fifth power" which is essential for those who do not settle with the liberal democracy concept and seek another understanding of democracy. She discusses the "other media" within its relationships with counter publics, radical democracy and new social movements, within its boundaries and opportunities. To sum up again, the "other media" has a role to ensure that democracy extends and deepens to the extent that it questions all the unequal relationships of the daily life and ensures an extension in the realm of politics. By nature or due to their own claim, 'other media' is especially functional in marking the boundaries of the realm of politics by an urge from upside down to ensure that those who

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[3] The aim of new media companies is conveying their products to the wide masses. There is an expansionist trend, and this trend works for building visual/audio places and markets. The breaking down of the national communities is an obligation, and it is seen as an irrational obstacle in front of reorganizing the commercial strategy. Free and abled circulations of imported programmes are the biggest ideal of new media system. This is a system which achieves global programmes and global markets. In the present day, there are lots of global companies trying to make this ideal true we see. The new media system has become a global system (For further information, please take a look at Robins & Morley. 1995).

do not make themselves heard, are heard equivalently and thus communicate and understand with each other and the hegemonic majority (2008:12)

Minority Media within Alternative Media

Minority is a sub-group integrated within a larger group (normally the society) through bonds specific to themselves (Türkdoğan, 1999: 21) Capotorti (1979: 1-4) defines minority as a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State whose members, – being nationals of the State, – possess ethnic, gender, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population and who, if only implicitly, maintain a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion and/or language (mentioned in Simon: 2000; Çavuşoğlu, 2001: 35-36) Jules Deschênes (1986: 255) adds having the collective will to maintain existence and to have the purpose of being equal in legal and actual terms with the majority to this definition.Minority rights, on the other hand, are defined as "human rights especially granted by the state to the individuals of a minority living in a country, which can be exercised collectively (as a group)" (Oran, 2004: 22) As also mentioned by Çavuşoğlu (2001: 129-158), "What really matters in terms of the theory of (d)emocracy is that the dominant majority respects their essential rights, avoiding any practices to suppress them". Attempts have been made to secure the rights of the minorities through a series of international conventions and other documents. Also,

inspection mechanisms have been created for protective purposes (2001: 129-158)

Mass media has become important with the opportunity to accelerate or channel change and to preserve the relationships and structural integrity among the elements of the social structure in a society, such as economic and political institutions, faiths or religions, or customs and traditions. These functions of the mass media are more important for the minority media, especially if most of the members of such minority group have not been able to integrate with the local community that they live in for long years and have populated in certain regions of their country due to their own social and psychological needs, isolating themselves from the rest of the society. The mass media aimed at such minorities are especially important. Studies have revealed that communication among people is influential in changing attitudes, while mass media is influential in communicating information (Rogers, 1973) Jaffrelot (1998) emphasizes that with the development of means of communication and transport, various groups to make their members more aware of their differences from others, with the opportunity for enhanced cultural awareness (as cited in Bilgin, 1994: 83)Many social movements that took place around the end of the 20th century led to the creation of alternative media. To address the issues important for them, minorities built their own minority alternative media. This was intended to enable them to develop their own identities and communities and to allow their voice to be heard.

None of these social movements have been nourished, initiated or popular in the public sphere. As also mentioned by Hartley and McKee (2000: 33), these movements have also been described as doubtful by the mainstream media have described these movements as doubtful.

Minority media is perceived negatively as disturbing and disrupting the general society in terms of adaptation of the minorities to the society. As also mentioned by Tufte and Riis (2001: 341), minority groups may prefer minority media, and overconsumption of minority media may have a negative impact on the adaptation process. If an ethnically homogeneous nation state and unifying national identity are taken as the reference framework, this assertion is considered as logical (Tufte and Riis, 2001: 3) When viewed from a community perspective, it is possible to see that the minority media are described as special areas constantly building and redesigning the boundaries for communities of identity and ethnicity (Mandeville, 2001: 169) Minority media may also become a connection between the new and old media by making use of language and cultural sources (Georgiou, 2001) Moreover, it is also possible to say that the minority media are the only connection for the second and third generations with the world as well as a valuable source for building and maintaining the ethical of the ethnical identity (Pietikäinen et al., 2006)Minority media also have an important status in terms of expressing self among alternative representations. They constitute an important tool in terms of

articulating the rights and problems of the minorities (Alia, 1999; Roth, 2000) Minority media also contribute to the survival and development of the community languages (Cormack, 2005; Dufva and Pietikäinen, 2006)

Cinema as an Alternative Media

There are at least two general definitions of alternative media. In its most expansive and popular use, the term "alternative media" includes all media that are somehow opposed to or in tension with mainstream media. James Hamilton (2000: 358) argues that most definitions of alternative media casts mainstream media as "…maximizing audiences by appealing to safe, conventional formulas, and [alternative media] foregoing the comfortable, depoliticizing formulas to advocate programs of social change." Hamilton and others have suggested this dichotomy is oversimplified.Chris Atton (2002: 4) argues: "Alternative media…are crucially about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production". Similarly, Hamilton synthesizes a number of theoretical threads in the following: "Alternative media's collective value is in their exploration of new forms of organizing more participatory techniques of media and more inclusive, democratic forms of communication (2000: 373) According to this definition, alternative media allow those who are most often under- or misrepresented in mainstream media to tell their own stories through their own media. According to Atton (2002: 27), this media democratization

process is indicated by several qualities, including non-commercial sites for distribution; transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities; and transformed communication processes.

This study proposes a theory of alternative cinema. Alternative cinema, just as the alternative media does, challenges mainstream assumptions and rearranges social relationships and social representations, often placing them consciously or by default under the rubric of progressive politics. At the same time, the mainstream cinema in Iran encounteres an innovative form of cinema. Alternative cinema is a political cinema that develops its symbolic language due to a long history of censorship in Iran as exhibited in the film *Offside*. This cinema is very different from those in Latin America, Africa or any developing countries[4] with its social-historical contexts. Broadly speaking, alternative cinema counters mainstream representations and assumptions. More specifically, alternative cinema suggests democratized media production that tends

towards the non-commercial, the community based, and the marginalized. Moreover, alternative cinema can be described as extraordinary, irregular and cinema for minorities within the status quo.

Discussing alternative cinema through the film *Offside*

After describing what alternative media and alternative cinema, it is important to what alternative cinema represents to mention through the film *Offside* exactly. This study uses sociological film interpretation method. The method of sociological film interpretation allows comparative analysis of film content of a large sample in terms of the films' social reference. Films are viewed for social context and in terms of their date of origin. Cognitive interest focuses on the relation of film content and social reality. What is meant here by "society," is the entire environment surrounding the film, including the production conditions, financing, politics, etc., of the film. From this arises the issue of the ideological positioning of a film's content (Flicker, 2003; (Faulstich, 1989) Questioned are the messages and biases of a film. Films are investigated in terms of their reality content and their positioning in terms of relations of power and authority, problematic themes, peripheral groups, etc. The analysis of the content of a film begins at the manifest, explicit level. The significance of the film requires the working out of latent, implicit constructions of meaning. Sociological film interpretation is mainly relevant for large samples that work systematically with focused

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[4] These cinemas are named as Third Cinema, and even though alternative cinema is similar with the features such as struggling and becoming of the voice of the public, still there are differences among them. Some of the filmmakers of that period were forced to leave the country for political and cultural circumstances. Those who stayed challenged the new fashion of religious and moral censorship of art and culture. It should also be noted that the attractive Iranian cinema of today is the outcome of a tradition developed in the pre-revolution era.

lines of questioning (e.g., certain epochs, occupations, political themes, etc.) (Flicker, 2003: 309) The film *Offside* is analyzed by the sociological film interpretation method. Sociological research method is a part of cultural history. The key of sociological research method is society; therefore *Offside* can be analyzed based on society in detailed with sociological film interpretation method. Thus the social meaning of the movies, minorities in society, social class, and social role are questioned. *Offside* is analyzed and searched based on the reflect of the reality of the era with the reflect sociological film interpretation method. The key of this method is not the profile of the director or "tradition", on the other hand the main thing is "society".

This study will join together typical issues of sociological film interpretation:
➢ The situation of women
➢ Islamic faith
➢ Mass media in Iran
➢ Ideology & Hegemony
➢ Alternative voice for minority
➢ Daily life imagery

The plot of the film *Offside*

Offside is about a group of Iranian girls who attempts to enter Tehran's Azadi Stadium dressed as boys in order to watch a big football match but some get caught and arrested. The film begins with a girl, who disguises herself as a boy, sitting on a bus with some men going to see the 2006 World Cup qualifying match between Ian and Bahrain. During her journey to the stadium, some notice her gender, but do not

tell anyone. In June 2005, the Iran's national soccer team has an important game against Bahrain in the Azadi Stadium for the qualification of the World Cup. A group of Iranian girls and lovers of soccer dresses like boys and unsuccessfully attempts to enter in the stadium being arrested. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, women are not allowed to enter the stadiums. The film ends the image of the city of Tehran explodes with festivity, and the bus becomes caught in a traffic jam as a spontaneous street party begins. Borrowing seven sparklers from the boy with the fireworks, the women and the soldiers leave the bus and join the party, holding the sparklers above them.

The film *Offside* as an alternative media

Alternative media are the nemesis of mass media refusing or challenging established and institutionalized politics. In this sense, Panahi's cinema narrative and language is an alternative film within Iranian cinema. Panahi criticizes the status quo within the Iranian state and society and creates an alternative voice for the status quo by the issues he addresses.

The films of Jafar Panahi stand in a unique place with their symbolic and thematic structure and hermeneutic approach to socio-political debates in Iran. Inheriting a gift of lyricism prevalent in Farsi poetic tradition, these filmmakers of the new cinema in Iran are the visual poets of their nation using the poesies of cinema wrapped in a neo-realistic documentary mode. "Through a process of cultural negotiation and haggling- not just

hailing and interpellation" (Naficy, 1995: 551) post-revolution cinema in Iran is characterised by narratives that are locally contingent but aim to create a universal and experimental cinematic language. *Offside* can be discussed as an *alternative cinema* within the context of different themes as below:

The situation of women

The use of space specifically by women has historically been marked by an anxious limitation conventionally imposed by repressive regimes. Prior to the restrictions introduced by the 1979 Revolution, there was no objection to women watching football matches in Iran. After those restrictions, the matches have become completely male-dominant, extremely chauvinistic and vulgar. The use of swearing and slang is used as the reason for not allowing women to see football matches, the defenders arguing that women should not be subjected to such behaviour. This is demonstrated with examples in nearly all the scenes in the film, such as the scenes in which the soldiers argue with the girls when the girls talk among themselves, and the scene of the old man calling his daughter and narrating the phone call to the taxi driver.

These scenes can also exemplify the idea that women cannot be at football matches or in any public sphere where naked arms and legs are displayed. The girls who are arrested and put behind the iron bars ask the soldiers: "*Why is this prohibited to us? Why can't we watch the match?*"

Their answer is: "*Because this is how it has to be. Women are not allowed to football matches because, while they play, men swear and say things you shouldn't hear, and because they wear shorts or short-sleeved shirts. Do you want to see naked male arms and legs?*"

The film shows that women do not have a place in the public sphere in Iran. It also shows that the women are not allowed to a social activity in the public sphere (and), moreover, they are put behind the iron bars, waiting for punishment under the supervision of the soldiers only because they wanted to watch the football match live in a football stadium. The film seriously refers to the means of communication and new reporting in Iran. The urban girl with the most masculine demeanour questions the case, and the dialogue between her and the soldier with the highest rank proceeds as follows:

"*Why are you doing this?*"

"*This is how it should be.*"

"*Don't spin a yarn to me. This is not the local radio, don't give me that nonsense.*"

The film shows that the women are unequal in the public sphere even when they want to meet their basic needs. When one of the arrested girls wants to go to the toilet, the soldier says,

"*Have you been possessed by Satan? One wants to go to the toilet. The other wants to be a soldier,*" indirectly expressing that the women/girls do not have the right to do these in the society, that they have to live with what is offered to them as he has been taught.

Raymond Williams (1980), a Welsh cultural theorist, points out to the importance of social practices and defines culture as "whole way of

life". He states that mass media, on the other hand, are the realm of conflict of interests for different social groups (cultural activities) and that different social class contribute to the "common culture", helping the society to advance in this process of struggle (Williams, 1980) At this point, the mass media, on the other hand, are seen as the arenas reflecting the conflicts of the groups attempting to make their cultural existence acknowledged. Instead of evaluating the communication process in a directly cause and effect mechanism, Birmingham School theorists focuses on the ideological effects of media rather than its contribution to ensuring consensus in a society divided inti different groups and social classes, and see media as an expression of wider political and social powers with indirect and even hard to grasp influences. In this respect, Panahi's film *Offside* can be described as a tool for minority group[5] as it allows women to be heard.

Islamic faith

Restrictions affect people from different classes and social layers. Panahi shows in the film that religion underlies the problems faced by people from different classes manifesting as into sanctions. In fact, in Iranian society, most of the prohobitions and sanctions are related to religious beliefs. In their desire to participate in social event (such as this football match), women and girls express themselves in the

public sphere risking serious sanctions instigated by religious belief. And thus everybody, both male and female, start displaying extreme behaviours in the public sphere. In the film, Panahi makes one of the arrested girls wear chador[6] after a certain time. By this, the director actually explains through the film that such problems can happen not only to people without much faith but, on the contrary, to devout people as well, and that a religious problem underlies this issue. It is very common to use the masks in the Iranian films. The use of masks actually has many meanings and messages, and this upsets the authorities. In fact, masks are used on TV as well. It is not a matter of whether or not authorities enjoy the messages in the first place, but preventing the problems that may arise from their use. The position of the women, their status in the society and their desire to attend a match are intolerable for the authorities. And the film uses masks, as it is generally believed that wearing a mask refers to isolation from the realities. A good example of this is seen in the scene when the soldier makes the girl wear a mask taking her to the toilet, and tries to prevent her from reading the male writings in the toilet.

Mass media in Iran

Traber argues that the conventions of mass media marginalize the role of the 'simple man and woman', emphasizing instead the rich,

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[5] Here minorities refer to women.

[6] Chador is an outer garment or open cloak worn by many Iranian women and female teenagers in public spaces

the powerful and the glamorous. The former are regarded only as observers or marginal commentators on events; they achieve prominence only when they are the actors in a situation that is bounded by values based on, for instance, conflict or the bizarre. He divides alternative media into two sectors: advocacy media and grassroots media[7]. The alternative advocacy media adopt very different news values from the mass media, introducing 'alternative social actors such as the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised and indeed the ordinary manual labourer, woman, youth and child as the main subjects of their news and features' (Traber, 1985: 2) For O'Sullivan, alternative media argue for social change, seek to involve people (citizens, not elites) in their processes and are committed to innovation in form and content. This set of aims takes into account not only content, but presentation and organizational procedures. It defines alternative media positively and usefully. With these considerations in mind, we can consider Michael Traber's notion of alternative media where: the aim is to change towards a more equitable social, cultural and economic whole in which the individual is not reduced to an object (of the media or the political powers) but is able

to find fulfilment as a total human being (Traber, 1985: 3)

While no prior censorship of nonfiction exists, any published book that is considered un-Islamic can be confiscated, and both the author and the publisher are liable for attempting to offend public morals or Islam. Private publishing companies thus tend to restrict their titles to subjects that will not arouse official ire. Numerous new books in history, science, geography, and classical poetry and literature have been published since 1987, including many manuscripts that had been banned under the Shah. Virtually no new works of contemporary fiction, however, have appeared in print. All radio and television broadcasting is government controlled with stations in Tehran and the major provincial cities[8]. In this sense, in the film, one of the girls says,

"*Don't spin a yarn to me. This is not the local radio, don't give me that nonsense*."

This sentence indirectly shows that the mass media in Iran are a part of the status quo serving directly the government. Another conversation between the soldiers themselves, reveals that the women wearing turban are not arrested because there are many members of *the world press* in Iran to watch the match, and it would not be proper to let the world know that women are arrested, further depicting media as a tool of the government.

Ideology & Hegemony

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[7] Grassroots media is focused more specifically on media making by and for the local community that it serves making the discussion more narrow and precise It is essentially a subset focusing on small scale media projects which aim to bring different visions and perspectives to the "codes" that are so easily embedded in the social psyche (Riismandel, About Grassroots and Community Media, 1996)

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[8] For more details:

http://countrystudies.us/iran/98.htm

Having stood out in the 1970's with influential work on media, Gramsci explains the dominance of one social class over another through the concept of cultural hegemony and hegemony. Gramsci's concept of hegemony does not only imply political and economic meanings. It also includes the ability of the dominant class to impose their own ideology as a general truth on the lower classes. Here, cultural dependence and hegemony is addressed as parts of dynamic relationship. Pointing out the voluntariness in the relationships in this realm, where the actors of the class struggle to put forth their persuasiveness, he emphasizes that the lower classes and ethnic groups should consent in an orderly fashion to an ideology dominated by the upper classes to become hegemonic. Pointing out the constantly changing public nature,, Gramsci sees ideological hegemony as the basic factor of the radical changes and, within this framework, considers the mass media means as an arena of ideological struggle. Gramsci's emphasis on superstructure and culture in social change and his concept of hegemony has influenced many media theorists inclined to see the media as a part of cultural practice within a system of values and meanings. Within this context, Panahi's film *Offside* can be interpreted as a means of ideological struggle as it reflects the existing order and conveys messages to change what is out there.

Alternative voice for minority

Minority media is also important for self-expression and alternative representations.

It constitutes an important means for the minorities to express their rights and problems (Alia, 1999; Roth, 2000) In addition, minority media contribute to the survival and development of community languages (Cormack, 2005; Dufva and Pietikäinen, 2006) Thomas of Aquino (2000: 105) said: "Being is worthy as a Being and can be referred to as a being only when understood". This emphasizes that a Being should be understood in order to have a place, meaning and worth in the universe. Understanding a Being depends on whether the knowledge directly containing the qualities of such Being is included in the human mental capacity and accumulation (Cereci, 2009:97) The concepts of majority and minority are not included in the social daily life where people want to understand each other and make an effort to get to know each other; where everybody respects one another through humane approaches. In many countries, the concepts of majority and minority become concepts defining the most important internal problems. It is possible to see Panahi's film *Offside* as an alternative instrument of communication as it voices the problems of women in the society and acts so against the mainstream media when it is considered as minority media. The film shows the problems of the women, oppressed and denied a place in the sun in the isolated society of Iran who can be considered as a type of minority, from the beginning to the end. The characters in *Offside* challenge the sexual discrimination of the Islamist regime in Iran by disguising themselves. Young football fan girls disguise themselves as men and make their way

to the stadium as women are not allowed into stadiums in Iran. Panahi reflects on screen the difficulties of being a woman in Iran in a humorous language through the story of these women, who are football fanatics. The young girls, who wear military uniforms to watch their favourite footballers and who introduce themselves as the "queen of discipline," take their places among the notable women disguised as men in cinema. And Panahi reflects the continuing process in Iran on screen, using his film as an alternative means of media.

Daily life imagery

Football is a very important branch of sports and entertainment in Iran as it is in many countries, even though audience is faced with certain restrictions and regulations. People can shout, be comfortable and spend their energy by jumping up and down the match coincides with a show followed by the majority of Iranians, and the entire show becomes more intense, just as it is the case with the film *Offside.* And in the film, Panahi provides realistic cross-sections from the daily lives of the people in Iran. In the first scene of the film, an old man on a bus argues with a young boy. During their conversation, once the tension eases, the elder tells the youngerthat he especially likes football as he can comfortably shout and move around on a match day. In one of his interviews, Panahi (2007) says;

There is a problem in Iran because the barrier between what is permitted and forbidden isn't always very clear. If, for example, music is banned, you can be sure that people will listen

to it even more. Also, those who are there to enforce the laws have their own personal interpretations of them. For this reason, we never really know if we are dealing with an actual law or someone's interpretation of it. The police have to make sure people respect the law, but people will always try to do what they want anyway. Regarding football, the ambience inside a stadium is highly virile and masculine. Men in this context are prone to becoming rowdy and insulting each other, and this fuels the debate, as certain conservative people think that women should not be exposed to such behaviour. From the beginning to the end, the film questions what is forbidden and what is legal. Right from the start of the film, it is said that women/girls are not allowed to go to football matches and that women/girls going to football matches are destined for prison. However, no one rejects or even *can* reject this that imposed these rules, or questions the purpose. The film actually reflects the common attitude in the society which proposes that each individual in the society socializes in the way "it should be", and no one questions the case or considers about alternatives. In interview, Panahi (2007) says;

Military service in Iran is mandatory, they are not civil servants. These guys come from normal families; they are just like everybody else. So they can easily relate to the urges and desires of their generation. These soldiers are there to pose restrictions, but they don't always feel comfortable with what they're doing. And then you have the elderly, with their more traditional views. The traditionalists represent

nearly ten percent of the population, and they have the power. And there is of course, a clash between these two generations" This determination by Panahi is also shown in the film. The soldiers in the film, who watch over the girls and who come from the village, match the military men's profile as described by Panahi. Each of the soldiers represented in the film_comes from normal families. In other words, they are like everybody else therefore, sanctions and governments can comfortably direct and manipulate these normal soldiers. In the film, these militias try to restrict and limit the society to a uniform stereotype. However, the soldiers in the film unwillingly do what they do knowing that all pervasive "prohibitions" actually have nothing to do with logic but this is how rules are. Many conversations between the highest rank soldier from the village, who keeps the girls behind the bars, and the girls themselves also exemplify this situation

Drawing on all of these findings, it can be claimed that the film *Offside* carryies the characteristics of alternative and minority media. Reflecting on women's issues in the Iranian society, criticisms of the *status quo* and mainstream media in governance are the basic elements of the film which refer to alternative and minority media. Panahi's film *Offside* creates an alternative language and discourse opposed to mainstream and to the pro-government media discourse, reflecting the problems in the society accurately they are and constituting the alternative media for minorities in Iranian society, namely women.

Conclusion

Iranian cinema handles social subjects, and Panahi especially examines social problems, and wants to present the audience more realistic scenes and accurate aesthetics of the situation. Panahi addresses the humanitarian aspects of issues, and he knows that it arouses sympathy in the audience. He purposefully uses simple events which are actually very deep and suggestive in life. He has a poetic and artistic. In the world where films are made with millions of dollars (in the billion-dollar film industry) he made a film about a little girl who wants to buy a fish for less than a dollar (in *The White Balloon*) or the girls trying to watch a live football match (in *Offisde*[9]) This is what he (and other Iranian directors) attempt to show.

In Iran, the cinema discourse supports films and producers that do not oppose the policies and prohibits anti-goverment productions. This hegemony within the cultural realm is the main pattern of the adventure of cinema in Iran. Despite being oppressed by the government, the Iranian cinema maintains its existence due to the efforts of creative directors and the existence of different factions within the political mechanism. Panahi, with his realistic films, can be included within this group of directors. He displays that regarding the Iran's questionable social structure, the existence of women and the new social formation, whose creation has been attempted since after the revolution, is matched in his cinema. The female image, whose display

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[9] The budget of *Offside* is estimated 2.500 $. This shows that the budget is not important for alternative cinema like alternative media is.

was prohibited after the revolution, became more freely processed starting from the second half of the 1990s with reformers having partial control over the governmental mechanism. This development allowed the prohibitions on women to be reflected on the screen. The stories about women narrated in films make this intimate side of the suppressed society visible, and question the identity stratification of the Iranian women. However, the revolutionary laws, which are still in force in Iran, make it more difficult to transform the identity of women. Cinema preserves its importance today as a cultural realm, where discourses outside this realm of power can be voiced. Thus, the film *Offside* is a great example for alternative and minority media to reflect the troubles of women as a minority and the limitations of mainstream media in the Iranian society. The film becomes a voice for women and criticizes the national and local media in Iran. It communicates with its viewers and creates an impact on society. Panahi's resistance demonstrates itself in the film. The film does not only address issues of women, it also presents a resistance the *status quo* and the people in this system. As an alternative cinema, *Offside*, generally operate under a mandate rather than the profit motive, and it aims to provide a range of ideas and opinions that are not readily available in the corporate press, to serve the particular group or community that is poorly represented in major commercial media outlets. To avoid the influence of commercial concerns, they are generally independently owned and operate on a co-operative or non-profit basis. They strive to better reflect the needs and interests of their readers and audiences. Alternative cinema (*Offside*), therefore, offers a different focus or perspective on events. Briefly alternative cinema can be described as extraordinary, irregular and cinema of minorities within the status quo as well as the film *offside*.

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