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The LGBTQ question in Iranian cinema: A proxy discourse?

by

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Abstract: The morality code that limits Iranian cinema does not hinder the local filmmakers' attempt at portraying social, cultural, political issues in contrast to the values proposed by the Islamic Republic. In spite of censorship, in the last three decades Iranian cinema has produced a large number of films that are a (not so) veiled critique of the social-political arena. The women's issue, for example, is well represented by a variety of films known under the name "filmha-ye zananeh" (women's films); however, the female gender is not the only one to raise the Iranian audience's interest, at least by judging to the increasing number of films dealing with gender identities produced in Iran (and by Iranian filmmakers in the diaspora) in recent years. Even though the official narrative on the local LGBT community shifts from negation to harsh punishment, its presence is vibrant and undeniable and increasing in cinema as well. Besides, and paradoxically, the Islamic Republic's moralistic stance and its forbidding any possible contacts between the two sexes on the screen has encouraged a production of art films in which cross-dressing and queer situations are normally staged as a substitution of "normal" relations between men and women. The paper examines some of these ambiguities and paradoxes related to gender in post Revolutionary Iranian cinema.

The morality code that limits Iranian cinema does not hinder local filmmakers' attempts to portray social, cultural, political issues in contrast to the values proposed by the Islamic Republic (IRI). In spite of censorship, in the last three decades Iranian cinema has produced a large number of films that are a (not so) veiled critique of the social-political arena. The women's issue, for example, is well represented by a variety of films known under the name *filmhā-ye zanāneh* (women's films);[1] however, the female gender is not the only one to raise the Iranian audience's interest, at least by judging from the increasing number of films dealing with gender identities produced both in Iran and by the Iranian filmmakers of the diaspora in the last years. Even though the official narrative on the local LGBT community shifts from negation to harsh punishment, its presence is vibrant, undeniable and increasing in cinema as well. Besides, and paradoxically, the Islamic mor-

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[1] The paper adopts a simplified transliteration from Persian and leaves names as they are commonly known in Western sources (web, etc.)

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

alistic stance and its forbidding any possible contacts between the two sexes on the screen have encouraged a production of art films in which cross-dressing and queer situations are normally staged as a substitution of "normal" relations between men and women. In this intricate setting, questions of gender and class intermingle thus creating a rich and complex visual text whose multiple meanings are not always clear to the Western audience.

The paper examines some of these ambiguities and paradoxes related to "other" genders in post Revolutionary Iranian cinema.

The beginnings

Persian art in general has always been a site of ambiguity: since the very beginning, its highest expression, i.e., love poetry, has concealed the identity of the beloved thanks to the absence of grammatical gender in Persian. This grammatical structure has provoked a great deal of word plays, but it has also allowed poets to hide the real target of their lyrics. If many mystics (*sufi*) have addressed God as He were an earthly lover, for sure many poets have also disguised their prohibited lovers (either a "he" or a "she") thanks to Persian's favorable grammatical features. Protected by this ambiguity, poets have been able to express their longing for the absent idol (Idol/male, idol/male, idol/female); their happiness for dancing with Love (male/female companion); and they have been able to glorify the aspect of beardless young men while claiming to describe divine perfect Beauty.

This peculiarity is confirmed, among other issues, by Persianate[2] figurative arts, especially those produced from the 16th to the late 19th century, when the aesthetic standards required an overlapping of male and female characteristics, with the result that in some paintings it is difficult to distinguish men from women. Persian miniatures represent people dressed in unisex clothes that do not reveal their owners' sex and whose faces are characterized by attributes common to both men and women, such as the shape of their eyes and mouth, the arched eyebrows crossing on the lower part of the forehead and the same curls framing the visage. In addition, both men's and women's facial contours are often represented as covered by a thin layer of hair.

The advent of photography and, soon after, of cinema compelled Iranian artists to become more faithful to reality. However, more often than not, actresses would represent not real characters but rather stereotypes, and women were confined to play either sexy dolls or, vice versa, the roles or wicked witches.

However, the advent of the Islamic Revolution dashed everything away. The Islamic regime brought a wave of puritanism which, though it did not manage to wipe out Iranian cinema, at least heavily hindered women's presence from the screen. Women virtually disappeared from the plots or could act only as devoted mothers, sisters or daughters. Slowly, children arrived to replace the need to represent love between the two sexes, and male children, considered sexually innocent,

[2] The term "Persianate" applies to forms of arts and culture matured not only in the geo-political boundaries of past and contemporary Iran, but also in those societies deeply influenced by Persian language and culture, such as those that flourished in the Indian sub-continent.

were employed as substitutes to convey feelings considered prohibited, such as the love between husband and wife. This is the case of *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, directed by Bahram Beizai in 1986, in which the little protagonist, Bashu, an orphan who is hosted by Nai, a woman whose husband is temporarily away, acts as the "gendered male" actor until the very end of the movie, when Nai's husband returns home.[3] With the advent of Mohammad Khatami first to head the Ministry of Culture (1982-1992) and later the Presidency of the Republic (1997-2005), things changed and the country experienced a period of relative freedom from cultural censorship. Khatami himself was a film-lover and a staunch promoter of Iranian cinema industry. Under his mandate a number of film directors dared to expose unspeakable social problems such as the abuse of drugs, prostitution, temporary marriage, divorce, social injustice and also mundane love, though of course avoiding showing any direct contact between men and women.

Nevertheless, the more "real life" and sentiments found their way on the screen, the more film directors felt the need to express different nuances of love, including the forbidden ones, i.e., non-matrimonial love and even non-heterosexual love. The obstacles were (and still are) almost insurmountable, as after the Revolution the authorities classified all the individuals who had real difficulty in conforming to heteronormative codes of gender as cases of sexual and moral perversion (انحراف جنسي و اخلاقي *enharāf-e jensī va akhlāqī*), and often render them subject to persecution and/or criminalization. However, as from 1986, when the government first time gave t permission to a trans to proceed with surgery, a new religious and official discourse has been slowly emerging (Raha Bahreini 2008: 3). I am fully aware that both this religious discourse and the consequent State policy on transsexuality are highly contested, as they do not try to dismantle the present restrictive politics on gender. According to the promoters of this critique, in fact, the Islamic Republic continues to implement heteronormative moral codes and to confine non-heterosexual individuals to the arena of pathologies (بیماران *bīmārān*) or disorders (اختلال *ekhtalāl*).[4] What I am interested in examining here is the slow but constant and conspicuous presence of issues related to "gender troubles" in Iranian cinema and its possible interpretations. Does this phenomenon indicate that the New Iranian Cinema has become a site for contestation of the IRI and its repressive gender politics? Does cinema reflect a debate on gender queerness that is possibly taking place inside Iranian society? Or is this wave of "gender cinema" just a way of conquering the Western market and its insatiable hunger for "Oriental/Persian" erotic fantasies?

The 2000s

The first Iranian films to stage gender queerness were produced in the year 2000. In an ideal trio, I place *A girl named Tondar (Dokhtar i be nām-e Tondar*, directed by Hamid Reza Ashtianpur); *Daughters of the Sun* (*Dokhtarān- e*

[3] Bashu is a clear sample of the "flexibility" of Iranian filmic text, as it can be read according to multiple keys of interpretation. See for example Rahimieh 2002.
[4] Among the others, see M. Ali Abdi 2011.

khorshīd, by Mariam Shahriar); and *Baran* (*Bārān*, by Majid Majidi, 2001). The first film is slightly different from the other two, as it is the story of a girl who would like to be a man because of the greater freedom enjoyed by males. She acts in a manly way, for example, by mischievously riding a cross motorbike, while she daydreams about being an ancient heroine/hero who saves her tribe. However, eventually, love for a man will resolve her presumed ambiguity. Though the film is more a cry for woman's emancipation in line with the developments of Iranian society in a historical moment in which women were daily and successfully fighting for their increasing visibility, it contains a cross-dressing component that cannot be underestimated. Thanks to her almost constant male camouflage, the protagonist can overcome the limits of modesty imposed by the strict censorship and exercise the power of her direct gaze upon anyone, including men. However, Tondar barely challenges the status quo; besides, there is no gender drama as everything is (re)solved into the celebration of heterosexual love. Tondar acts *comme un garçon* for a while, but she never contests the place and authority of the masculine position; rather, she emphasizes that, in the binary relation between the sexes, it is the masculine one who has the real power. Therefore, the film does not challenge the heteronormative norms; quite the contrary, it reinforces them.

Mariam Shahriar and her *Daughters of the Sun* are more courageous as in this case cross-dressing implies issues of gender identity and it challenges the heteronormative canon. In a rural area, a father disguises his a poor girl as a boy in order to find a job in a carpet factory. The girl must have both her hair and the name cut, which from the original "Amangol" becomes "Aman". The factory owner is a tyrant who mistreats his workers, most of whom are girls: one of them, Bilghis, falls in love with Aman and begs her/him to marry her in order to be saved from an arranged marriage with a much older man. Aman is caught in a painful dilemma, and delays her answer until one day, the desperate Bilghis hangs herself. Aman, exasperated by both her friend's death and the owner's oppression, resolves the situation in a cathartic way, by burning down the factory and running away.

In the course of the story, the emotional tension between the two protagonists is palpable and evident through the glances they exchange. It is true that Bilghis does not know (or does she?) that Aman is a girl, but Aman is well aware of being a girl: or isn't s/he? Cross-dressing, in this case, opens a window onto gender ambiguity, as it allows the film to suggest that "other" ways of love are also possible. While protesting against the injustices of life (such as the poor conditions faced by rural people; social iniquities; the abuse of power; prevarication and violence against women and children; the exploitation of young people's work etc.), the film creates a space for non-heteronormative codes, a site of gender and sexual transgression that takes advantage of the incumbent silence (dialogues are rare and laconic) to cry out for justice, including gender justice. *Daughters of the Sun* challenges the *status quo* and becomes a form of political opposition. It stages a queer situation in that it acts against the normative institutionalism and the roles determined by the hegemonic culture.

Baran, the third film that ideally belongs to this group, is also set among the wretched of the earth, i.e., the community of Afghans exiled in Iran who are condemned to the worst jobs in order to survive. Like Amangol, the young Afghan

girl, Baran, works in a construction site disguised as a boy under the name of Rahmat. Baran/Rahmat is too weak to lift the bags full of bricks, therefore the master builder decides to appoint her/him as cafeteria attendant, thus depriving of this chore Latif, who now has to lift heavy weights instead of preparing tea for the workers is angry and starts bullying Baran/Rahmat, until one day, he happens to see Baran in hiding while combing her long hair. Latif is shocked, suddenly falls in love with Baran/Rahmat and becomes her protector. Now gender trespass becomes the protagonist of the plot and enables the director to narrate a story of love between the two teens (whose sexual identity is blurred) with both tact and passion. It underlines the director's choice to set the fiction in the Afghan community as a way of dislocating the burning issue of gender identity. Thus, the gender ambiguity of this love is separated from the core of "Iranian" society as if it were a problem that does not concern it. Gender ambiguity is displaced in a Persianate subaltern society, among people who, generally speaking, Iranians consider inferior. As a result, this "sub-setting" allows not only a reflection on gender(s), but also a socio-cultural critique on the ways Afghan refugees are (ill)treated in Iran.[5] Like *Daughters of the Sun*, *Baran* also aims not only to address queer questions, but also to give voice to the marginalized groups. In this way it becomes an allegorical agent for the representation of power and its abuses.

From allegory to realism

In the following years, the representation of gender transgression became less allegorical and more realistic, thanks to the flood of films about Iranian transgenders. Imam Khomeini's *fatwa* making these operations religiously and legally licit is resumed by another cleric, the *hojatoleslam*[6] Kariminia, whose deep research on the subject brings to both a proliferation of sex reassignment surgeries and to a wide debate in Iranian society. Among the results, we have seen a diffusion of documentaries that claim to portray Iranian transgenders' real lives, or, rather, their troubles. Iranian female film directors seem to be more receptive to this discourse, and most documentaries on this topic have been made by women such as: Mitra Farahani (*Juste une femme*, 2001, Iran, 30'); Negin Kianfar and Daisy Mohr (*Birthday*, 2006, Netherlands, 82'); Zohreh Sheyasteh (*Inside Out*, 2006, Iran, 39'); Tanaz Eshaghian (*Be like others*, 2008, Canada, 74').

Some male directors follow suit, such as Kouross Esmaeli (*Legacy of the Imam*, 2006, Iran, 14'); and Peyam Khosravi with Babak Yousefi (*I know that I am*, 2006, Canada, 70'). All these docufilms seem similar, as they follow the same pattern by showing the lives of trans waiting to have the operation or soon after it.

Sex is my Life, a catchy title but with nothing to do with the original *Khastegī* (Tedium) signed by Bahman Mo'tamedian (Iran, 2008, 76') is slightly different. It is a film that is delicate, thoughtful, introspective, dramatic and less stereotyped than its predecessors in representing the Iranian LGBTQ.

[5] On the situations of Afghans in Iran, see the issue of *Iranian Studies* 40(2) 2007.

[6] A title for Shi'a clerics.

The above documentaries follow real people who narrate themselves while opening queer windows onto Iranian society. There is no plot as the movie whirls around the protagonists' lives, and the predominant role played by certain situations concerning sex and gender.

In the same line we can also place the feature film, *Cul de sac*, directed in 2007 by Ramin Houdarzi Nejad (GB, 98'), although it also contains a touch of contestation against the West and its false claim of being "the land of opportunity" for everybody, including non-hetero people. The plot is inspired by the true story of Kiana Firouz, an Iranian lesbian who used to be a filmmaker and activist for the Iranian homosexual women's rights and who eventually managed to leave the country and take refuge in the UK.

In the film, Kiana comes to know a journalist, Sayeh, a human rights activist whose expertise is focused on the Iranian society. It takes time for Kiana to trust Sayeh but a friendship between the two slowly builds up. One day Kiana discovers that the security service is after her; consequently she makes an application for asylum in the UK, but the British authorities paradoxically turn her application down. Despite all evidence, her appeal against this decision gets no chance to be allowed. She is about to be deported from the UK back to Iran where she risks to be incarcerated, but finally Sayeh helps her out of this situation. The film is an act of accusation not only against the Iranian government but also against all the governments that pretend to be less biased than the Iranian, but behave in the same way, unless a huge opinion movement is raised against their hypocritical decisions.

From realism back to melodrama: the importance of Western reception

Most of the cited films have been shot outside Iran, and only some of the interviews are conducted there; in addition, they prevalently target a transnational audience, including the Iranian diaspora abroad. This international aim is evident from the common frame in which the films are cast, which portrays Iranian homosexuals and trans as victims of their native "culture" that is juxtaposed to the (supposedly) free queer scene in the West. As, apparently, the Western public is obsessed with the representation of Iranian sexuality, especially in its queer manifestations, this wave of docs and films on Iranian transgenders therefore nurtures the Orientalist *topos* of Iran as the site of unrestrained sexual pleasure (especially in its homosexual form), formerly immortalized in 19th and early 20th century travelogues. This erotic/exotic image has been more recently rekindled by journalists (but also, unfortunately, by some "native informers") who have filled pages by narrating the "sex&drug&rock&roll" life of young and less young Iranians in spite of (or, rather, because of) the harsh restriction preached by the authorities.

An interesting case in point is the film *Circumstance*, shot by Maryam Keshavarz in 2011, which tells the story of two girls' rebellion and of the love between them. The film has attracted a wide international audience, but has been criticized by some Iranians for its lack of authenticity. Among the various critiques, it has been observed (Houshyar, 2013) that the actors speak Persian with a heavy American accent (for most of them grew up in the US). Also, being shot in Lebanon, there are many discrepancies in the natural and urban scenes, in the charac-

ters' costumes and house decorations; besides, there are many instances of disconnection between what the movie portrays and the reality of Iranian life. In addition to the critique of its many technical mistakes, Iranian lesbians and feminists have also added that the movie is extremely shallow and offers a stereotypical exotic fantasy rather than showing angles of real lesbian life in Iran.

Circumstance is far from the depth of feelings shown in *Daughters of the Sun*; the protagonists are beautiful also according to Western standards and open to the voyeuristic gaze. The (male) audience's pleasure is satisfied by uncountable love scenes to the detriment of the development of the protagonists' characters.

As a matter of fact, the film turns into an act of cinematic voyeurism that perpetuates the fantasies nurtured by many Europeans who in the past came into contact with the Middle East about the "behind the veil" life in the Oriental harem, a notorious *topos* which has come to symbolize the hidden sexual lives of Middle Eastern women. Other than this, *Circumstance* seems to be shot under an Orientalist gaze that objectifies women's bodies, i.e., those of the protagonists, Atafeh and Shirin, who are screened as performing erotic belly-dancing, drinking alcohol, consuming drug and attending sex-filled underground Tehrani parties. Atafeh and Shirin are transgressors who cross the boundaries of gender by a life of excess, thus becoming exceptional. Their homosexuality is not considered a "normal" situation, a possibility, but again as a representation of women's bodies who titillate an audience.

Of course the Western spectators sympathize with Atafeh and Shirin who are the perfect protagonists of the fantasies casting Iranian youth and their protest in the simplified formula of a "lipstick jihad". At the same time, *Circumstance* offers another pillar to the campaign launched in post 9/11 West in order to "save" Muslim women who are, as the film promo states "struggling with their desires and the boundaries placed upon them by the world they were born into". [7]

The film also serves the didactic purpose to show that Iran is not a "country for women" and for other genders except the masculine one. Interestingly, the only male protagonist, Mehran (Atafeh's brother) is represented as the quintessence of Evil. He is not only a drug addict, but also a "fundamentalist" who pretends to judge his sister's immoral behavior while, at the same time, he is attracted by her homoerotic performances with her friend Shirin. The character played by Mehran dramatically, or, rather, preposterously, embodies the arrogance of the "Islamic man" contrasted to the legitimate aspiration of (homosexual) women. Therefore, stereotypes on LGBT are apparently revised but, as compensation, those regarding (Iranian, Middle Eastern) race and (Muslim) religion are reinforced.

An oblique social critique

Though, as mentioned, this cinema production mainly addresses the West, it is also available in Iran through unofficial channels, where it is mainly received and perceived as both a sign of Western hegemony and of the missionary stance of

[7] http://www.metacritic.com/movie/circumstance/trailers/2129281, accessed 26th February 2014.

Western gay imperialism (of the type so well-stigmatized by Joseph Massad, 2002). However, in contemporary Iran the discourse on sexuality, trans-sexuality, queerness and so on, is spread at multiple levels, and cinema can constitute a crucial space of negotiation.

A good sample of this attitude is represented by the film *Facing Mirror* (*Āynehā-ye ruberu*, 2011) and its aftermath. Directed by Negar Azarbayjani, the film narrates of the unusual friendship that develops between Rana, a traditional wife and mother who is forced to drive a cab to pay off the debt that keeps her husband in prison, and trans Adineh/Edi who is desperately awaiting a passport to leave the country to escape an arranged marriage engineered by her father, and to get a transsexual operation. When Rana discovers that Edi is a transgender, initially she has a hysterical reaction and rejects what she considers to be an almost demoniac creature. However, soon Rana experiences Edi's gentle nature, and a close friendship develops between the two.

The film exhibits some didactic moments, i.e., when Edi explains that it is legal to have a sex change operation in Iran and loans are available for it, but that the procedure is not likely to meet widespread approval from society in general or from the individual's family in particular; this is the reason why Edi is trying to migrate to Germany. Perhaps, this might be the director's *escamotage* to counteract the plethora of documentaries built for a foreign audience that demonize Iran.

The sexual ambiguity of the actress chosen to embody Edi, i.e. Shayesteh Irani, is perfect. As a matter of fact, she had already performed an ambiguous character in *Offside*, the film by the celebrated director Jafar Panahi (2006), featuring a group of girls disguised as boys desperately trying to get access into a stadium in order to watch an international match played by the Iranian national soccer team. Panahi's film mainly addresses issues of women's freedom, as women in Iran are still hindered from watching a men's soccer match in a stadium. In *Offside* Shayesteh Irani stretches the limit of the cross-dressing game played by the other girls, because her real sexual nature is so ambiguous that even the soldiers in charge of checking the girls and holding them doubt about her identity. And when she is directly questioned if she is a boy or a girl she brazenly answers: "What do you prefer?".

The major weakness of *Facing Mirror* is*,* in my opinion, that Edi is represented as totally positive hero/heroine, resolute, unbiased, generous, unselfish, a positive stereotype that aims to counteract the trite descriptions about the LGBT people, and to establish their new image. Though the operation is genuine and understandable, the risk is to switch from one stereotype to another. However, though recurring to some stereotypes, *Facing Mirror* is not stereotyped and constitutes, so far the best Iranian film on LGBTQ issues.

In *Facing Mirror*, besides the central theme of transsexuality, other essential issues are on the stage, such as those related to class. Rana and Edi belong to two very different strata of the population, i.e. respectively, the low and poor and the middle and well off.[8] The film, therefore, underlines the contradiction of a society

[8] The relationship between homosexuality and class in Iranian cinema needs to be further analyzed. I would like to mention, for example, how Mania Akbari, one of the more experimental Iranian film directors, deals with lesbianism. While in her *20 Fingers* (*Bist angosht*, 2004) one of the protagonists challenges her husband by evoking her allegedly homosexual affair, thus using homosexuality as a

in which a family struggles to make ends meet, while another lives in a luxurious apartment with several cars at their disposal. We are far from the rural, almost ghostly atmosphere of *Daughters of the Sun* or similar settings. Here we are in the urban context in which seven out of ten Iranians normally reside; this is the life most Iranians live and each of them could meet an Edi round the corner. In the previous films, cross-dressing was more often than not a strategy, a device in order to feature love stories that could not be narrated otherwise, thus bypassing the problem of the veil that is mandatory for the actresses even when they embody women acting in their domestic sphere (in which no Iranian woman would wear a veil!).

In *Facing Mirror*, cross-dressing is non pivotal, as the possibility to change sex in reality allows a representation of queerness at the light of the ongoing social transformations. Edi's situation is a pretext to talk about issues such as the need to change not so much Iranian laws but, rather, Iranian society itself. In fact, the movie underlines how, even if it is possible to change sex legally, the real problem is the family's reaction to this event and the societal disapproval. However, family can also represent a valid help, and, as a matter of fact, Edi will be saved from an unwanted marriage thanks to her brother's help.

The film also shows women's responsibility in the slow process of changing mentality, as many of them are conservatives and reluctant to change the status quo (see, for example, Rana's first reaction to Edi's gender identity). The film denounces how women's solidarity is often an empty word. When Rana asks two apparently modern girls who sit in her taxi not to smoke, their reaction is harsh, and the young women not only refuse to put out their cigarettes, but mock Rana by telling her that it would be better to have her husband as taxi driver. Here the issue of a still-undigested modernity (represented by the two girls who wear heavy make-up and pretend to act provocatively, but, in reality, consider taxi-driving as a male job) comes to the fore, though it is set in a queer context. Therefore, the film offers a variety of queer situations, not only or not necessarily connected to non-heterosexual situations. In this respect, I argue that this film represents Iranian contradictions and queerness.

It is also interesting that, in its dialogic process, the film has opened a space for discussion and negotiation that was greatly desired in Iran, so much so that it triggered a discussion about transgenderism held at the Mofid University in the ultra-conservative town of Qom, a meeting that hosted as key speakers, hojatoleslam Kariminia, Negar Azarbayjani and members of the cast. This is proof that cinema can be a suitable space for both conflict and negotiation, and that the two can be rearranged in the site of civil society.

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provocation, a way to push boundaries, in *From Tehran to London* (*Az Tehran ta Landan*, 2012) the relationship between a bored bourgeois woman, Ava, and her maid Maryam hints to a replica of the "harem" liaison, thus proposing issues of hierarchy and power structure in (homosexual) relations.

Final remarks

In the last decade, LGBTQ issues have become more and more present in Iranian cinema and themes related to the lives of homosexuals and transgenders have been examined in both documentaries and fiction films. Part of this production certainly aims at a Western audience (as well as at the Iranian diaspora), since directors have experienced that LGBTQ themes attract attention and prizes. *Circumstance* has so far been awarded fourteen prizes from international festivals (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1684628/awards); and documentaries such as *Be like others*, have also collected, in addition to several prizes, positive reviews and enthusiastic reception in the most important LGBTQ film festivals. However, it is undeniable that Iranian cinema produced also to be consumed domestically presents an evolution of LGBTQ representation.

New Iranian cinema has multiple functions. One of the most important is its being a site of contestation of the IRI and its restrictive socio- and cultural policies, including those related to sex and gender. In this respect, cinema has become a lively arena in which gender intersects with other identities such as class, race and sexuality. In addition, this new cinema stimulates a debate that is becoming wider and wider, as is proved by its reaching the traditional sanctuaries of the universities located in the religious conservatives' stronghold of Qom. The LGBTQ question is only one of the controversial issues debated inside Iranian society and sometimes it is a pretext to make people reflect and discuss other encompassing topics such as the position of women; the level of freedom of Iranian society; the contrast between modernity and tradition; the role of the family, and, last but not least, class struggle. At present, Iran is the site of contradictions *par excellence*, and its cinema stages the tension among the country's different souls. Its performing queer situations constitutes, as a matter of fact, a wider and deeper representation of the general queerness Iran and its society are experiencing.

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