
February 2020

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Recommended Citation

Karami, Ronak (2020). “Men Should Stay Out and Women Should Pack the Bags at Home” : The City of Mice and Gender Practice in Iran. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(1), 359-373.
Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss1/27>

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“Men Should Stay Out and Women Should Pack the Bags at Home”¹: *The City of Mice* and Gender Practice in Iran

By Ronak Karami²

Abstract

The 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War that began in 1980 have played an effective role in reconstructing contemporary Iranian culture, history, and politics. The war was beneficial to Ayatollah Khomeini and his new regime in defining themselves and their ideas and suppressing opposition, so he refused to end the war for eight years until 1988. However, by the end of the war, neither Iran nor Iraq had achieved their aims: Iraq's attempts to bring down the revolutionary government in Iran failed, and Iran could not provoke a revolution in Iraq. The Islamic Revolution and the war imposed new kinds of restrictions on women in all social domains, including cinema. Since the new regime regarded women as the ones to blame for the corruptions of the Pahlavi era, they censored women's bodies and intimacy between women and men. Additionally, revolutionary ideological codes shaped gender representations in media and close-up shots of females were banned in the cinema. This article focuses on a well-known live-action puppet movie for children, *The City of Mice* (1985), and its sequel, which were directed by a female Iranian director, Marzieh Boroumand. It aims first to depict the way *The City of Mice* represents gender to its audience (mainly children) based on socially-constructed notions of gender within Islamic discourse and Islamic ideology during the Iran-Iraq War in Iran, and second, to study the way gender practice changed thirty years later within *The City of Mice 2* (2014). To do so, the essay provides a brief introduction and a summary of both movies' stories, then analyzes the costumes, characters, actions, dialogue, objects, and camera work to respond to the statement of the problem.

Keywords: Iran-Iraq War, Iranian women, Post-revolutionary Cinema, Gender Practice, The City of Mice, Ideological Codes

Introduction

Problem Statement and Study Significance

It was in the throes of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran that Iraq planned to attack its neighbor, hoping that it would be a short, victorious war against Iran. The war has played an effective role in reconstructing contemporary Iranian culture, history, and politics (Ghandeharion and Tekiyeh, 2019, 150). It is known as one of the longest and costliest conventional wars of the twentieth century, lasting eight years and leaving the two countries with serious damage that affected their societies and shaped new ideologies. Both sides achieved nothing but preserving their own regimes. Media was one of the most important domains that was affected by the new

¹ Boroumand, 1985, 00:11:24

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ideology during this time in Iran: “Khomeini declared his support for a positive and educational cinema that would shape the new Islamic identity” (Naficy, 2012, 3: 13-15). The dominant views portrayed in the Iranian film world belong to the ruling party, because they control the main sources of funding and got to define film regulations. Under these new rules, the presence of women in movies became strictly controlled (Naficy, 2012, 3: 36). The new regime established limitations not only on women's presence in media (e.g. visual representations in publications, advertisements, and cinema) but also in other parts of society. Yet Iranian women forged their own paths in many social realms, including cinema.

The City of Mice (Shahr-e-Mooshha) is a notable live-action puppet movie for children which was first released in 1985. Further, the director, Marzieh Boroumand, cooperated with a new team to produce the sequel, *The City of Mice 2*, in 2014. The first live-action puppet movie is notable for demonstrating the dominant ideologies of its time to a great extent. However, the second movie came as a surprise because the society it portrayed was markedly different from the actual Iranian society in 2014. This article aims, first, to depict the way *The City of Mice* represents gender to its audience (mainly children) based on socially-constructed notions of gender within Islamic discourse and Islamic ideology³ during the Iran-Iraq War in Iran, and second, to study the way gender practice changed thirty years later in *The City of Mice 2*. It should be noted that here gender is defined as either man or woman because other possibilities are known as taboos in Iran and they are not allowed to be represented. Because the movie became one of the most popular TV shows ever created for children in Iran after the 1979 Revolution, affecting its generation with its ideological codes, it requires detailed examination. Yet, there has not been a significant or valid study about it.

This essay aims at illustrating the extent to which both films are affected by the dominant ideologies in society and the manner in which they demonstrate and transfer those ideologies to the audience. The significance of this study lays in the way it breaks down the ideological codes of the time that have been presented to the audience through dialogue, actions, dress and makeup, setting, camera work, objects, and characters in order to show in what way gender is being practiced in Iran during the war and thirty years after. In doing so, addressing the topics of patriarchal ideology and discourse that are visually depicted allows readers to identify and clarify important ideological issues, as well as reveal hidden ideologies. For this purpose, the paper first introduces the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War in brief, and then studies how it affected media and women's presence in society and in cinema. Further, the essay prepares a brief introduction to the live-action puppet movies and their female director, Marzieh Boroumand. Finally, it studies both movies' ideological codes in detail in order to illuminate the manner in which gender practice is presented in the movies compared with the realities of the time.

The Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established “on a theocratic theory that is very narrowly interpreted to favor a small group among the Shi'a Muslims and in particular one group of the Shi'a clergy” (Naficy, 2012, 3: 105). It should be mentioned that there is a close relationship between the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war. Saddam Hussein thought that he would succeed in Iran since Iran was dealing with the problems of the revolution: “The revolution

³ There is discussion within the Islamic world about the interpretation of Islamic views. In this article, every time phrases such as Islamic ideologies or values are mentioned, it refers to the Islamic views that have been defined and interpreted by Shi'ism and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

in Iran upset the balance in two ways: first militarily, by replacing the Shah's army with what looked like a revolutionary rabble; and second politically, by making a conservative and satisfied Iran into a revolutionary power intent on a quasi-universal mission of spreading its version of true Islam and hence destabilizing its neighbors” (Karsh, 1989, 13). Although the two countries had previous disputes, the war happened due to “a new kind of total warfare with a strong ideological component” (Potter and Sick, 2004, 2). Additionally, the war was dominated by intense personal hostility between Khomeini and Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq (Potter and Sick, 2004, 2). Saddam Hussein thought that he would succeed in Iran since Iran was dealing with problems of the revolution; hence, he instigated the war in 1980 with Western powers' support: “He believed Iran's position was weakened with the fall of the Shah and laid claims to some disputed border regions.” (Naficy, 2012, 3: 15). Yet it soon became apparent that Hussein’s estimations were a mistake of historic proportions (Potter and Sick, 2004, 2). In response, “Iranians rallied behind their leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and repelled the Iraqi invaders in 1982” (Potter and Sick, 2004, 2). As a result, the war settled into a bloody scene between Iraq and Iran, which was criticized by the world but sustained by ideological zeal within the two countries (Karsh, 1989, 26-7). Khomeini refused to end the war for eight years, until 1988, mainly because it helped him, and his new regime define themselves and their ideals and suppress opposition (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 15). However, “a few years after the war ended, the Iranian state ideology of Shi’a Islam could no longer fully produce a dominant way of thinking” (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 16). Islamic views (as defined by the state) “were unable to maintain a hegemonic conception of the world that was implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activities, and in all manifestations of individual and collective life” (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 16).

By the end of the war, “neither side had achieved its war aims and each felt that outside powers had cheated it out of victory” (Potter and Sick, 2004, 2). That is, Iraq’s attempts to bring down the revolutionary government in Iran failed, and Iran could not provoke a revolution in Iraq. The Islamic Republic of Iran, “which challenged the prevailing international system and seemed bent on reversing it, appeared implacable in purpose and insensitive to pressures, threats, and punishment” (Karsh, 1989, 13). The number of victims is still in dispute, “with an estimated 400,000 killed and perhaps 700,000 wounded on both sides” (Potter and Sick, 2004, 2). Besides the military encounter, the two countries conducted a serious struggle on the ideological front: “They invoked several broad themes: Arab against Persian, Sunni against Shi’i, and pan-Arabism against pan-Islam. The region has lived with the tensions arising from these differences for more than a millennium” (Potter and Sick, 2004, 4). Even though these ideologies did not cause the war, they served to strengthen the mutual hostility between Iran and Iraq (Potter and Sick, 2004, 4). Finally, the war ended one month short of its eighth anniversary and “had become part of the political and strategic landscape of the Middle East throughout the decade” (Karsh, 1989, 13).

Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

After the Islamic Revolution, the state started to reflect its perspectives and values in cultural productions such as publications and cinema, which led to limited freedom of expression (Naficy, 2012, 3: 2). For this purpose, “one of the first iconoclastic processes during the revolutionary period was to rid society of undesirable Western and Pahlavi features” (Naficy, 2012, 3: 14). The term “purification” (*paksazi*) was widely used in Iran and “was applied not only to the film industry, but also to all social, educational, mass media, industrial, and bureaucratic institutions” (Naficy, 2012, 3: 14). According to these values, people should follow “the religious

Shi'ite beliefs that the state promotes in the context of an Iranian style, religious modernity that incorporates technological accomplishments" (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 41). Iranian men should regard Imam Hossein (the grandson of the prophet Mohammad) as their role model and Iranian women should follow Fatima's lifestyle (Mohammad's daughter). To follow the tenets of the 1979 Revolution, all citizens' language and behavior should "comply with and promote the Islamic moral guidelines of the state" (Naficy, 2012, 3: 40).

Unlike some rigid clerics who made incendiary proclamations against all cinema, Khomeini understood and used the power of cinema and culture so that he would be able to form a new system of thought. Thus, he showed conditional support for the film industry (Naficy, 2012, 3: 13): "He differentiated a moral, Islamic cinema from a Westernized and corrupt cinema that had existed during the Shah's regime" (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 13). Attempting to make Islam the dominant discourse of the Iranian nation, the state has supported locally produced films since the early days after the 1979 Revolution. The claim was that the regime would enact strict Islamic moral guidelines for these productions (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 13). Hamid Naficy (2012) notes that post-revolutionary cinema was not Islamic cinema, which is "about the religion of Islam and its tenets, characters, and stories," but rather Islamicate cinema, which is "cinema that is made in a predominantly Muslim country, such as Iran" (3:8).

Filmmakers in Iran have limited and shaped their subjects and styles due to the state supervision of various phases of funding, production, and especially broadcast and distribution: "Regulations determine music, taboo themes, male and female behavior and their appearance on the screen" (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 1). Additionally, "inaccessibility and censorship conferred value and sometimes the restrictions were due to the film's critical intelligence" (Naficy, 2012, 4:2). Films and television programs were supposed to reflect only revolutionary ideals, which resulted in the emergence of certain film genres. Among all genres, adventure, war, comedy, and family melodrama were the most popular (Naficy, 2012, 3:174-5). The themes the post-revolution films embodied "indicate social tensions, the way Islamicate values were playing out on the screen to create an overall Islamicate cinema" (Naficy, 2012, 3:174-5). However, these revolutionary values evolved and even disappeared when the circumstances in Iran began to change (Naficy, 2012, 3:11-15). On the other hand, "the European and American festival coordinators and media buyers usually prefer to see films from Iran that confront and challenge the Islamic Republic's limitations" (Naficy, 2012, 3:32). Today, the world pays attention to taboo topics that are considered red lines in Iran such as gender-based identities, problems in the Muslim world, poverty, or representations of the revolution (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 46). In Iran itself, however, "many filmmakers avoid these topics altogether or use an allegorical and indirect approach to deflect criticism. Filmmakers often choose to exercise self-censorship when they conceive, plan, and execute their films" (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 47).

Iranian Women in Cinema and Society since 1979

The issues Iranian women face in a patriarchal society have had a long history in the country and did not start exclusively after the Islamic Revolution (Naficy, 2012, 4: 93). From the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, all visual representations of women comply with the strict rules and follow the rigid regulations that had been established by Ayatollah Khomeini (Shirazi, 2010, 109). As Naficy (2012) notes, "The imposition of the veil was anti-modern in that it collectivized women and robbed them of individuality, choice, and many rights; however, women's adoption of the veil did not foreclose their becoming modern" (4: 94). On March 8, 1979,

International Women's Day, Iranian women protested against the imposition of the veil. Though their only concern was the limitations imposed on them, the new regime called them anti-revolutionary monarchists (Naficy, 2012, 3: 107). Therefore, those who could not deal with the new situation or accept the segregation and inequality between women and men as a norm would be suppressed. Despite the fact that the new Islamic regime "guaranteed the equality of all humans regardless of color, race, language, and ethnicity before God Almighty," there seemed to be no sign of equality between women and men as a fundamental principle (Naficy, 2012, 4: 102). The public image of Iranian women gained extraordinary importance for the new regime. In this sense, even posters and banners instructed women in appropriate social and ethical behaviors defined by the state. According to Shirazi (2010), "over time, political and religious events gave rise to the creation of high-quality graphic arts, and ultimately, Iran's artists found increasingly innovative ways to represent the ideal Iranian woman." (109).

Iranian women's suppression has a long historical background: their "absence during the Qajar era, their sexualized presence during the Pahlavis, and their desexualized and veiled presence under the Islamic Republic gave Iranian cinema some of its national and stylistic particularity" (Naficy, 2012, 4: 93). Although Iranian women were socially present and highly effective in the revolution's victory in 1979, "the initial post-revolution documentary cinema was entirely dominated by male directors" (Naficy, 2012, 4: 106). The state censored women's bodies and intimacy between women and men, and close-up shots of females were banned. Accordingly, in the early days after the revolution, filmmakers chose not to include women in leading roles in order to avoid any potential problems (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 48). During the Iran-Iraq War, the regime relied heavily on media to encourage people to cooperate with its values: "All women, therefore, are represented as mothers sacrificing their children to the front lines of war. All women are the dutiful daughters, bidding good-bye to their revolutionary fathers who, despite advanced age, volunteer to fight for Islam" (Shirazi, 2010, 111). These women portrayed the ideal Iranian woman in a sense that "the traditionalist model of womanhood became the dominant state-supported model" (Shirazi, 2010, 112). The purity and goodness of a woman's character tangled with the extent she was dependent on the men, i.e. independent women were portrayed as bad and whore-like through media (Naficy, 2012, 4: 127-8). This is also the case among female mice in *The City of Mice*.

Marzieh Boroumand and The City of Mice

Iranian women have made their way to cinema and literature even though there have been severe limitations for them either behind or in front of the camera since the 1979 Revolution. Marzieh Boroumand is one of the distinguished Iranian puppeteers and directors who also had many experiences in theater and cinema as an actress and screenwriter. Boroumand is one of the female directors who were active during the Iran-Iraq War. Although she has been involved in numerous notable TV series and movies, she is widely known for the famous live-action puppet TV series *The School of Mice* (1981), which was produced to encourage children to attend school. Further, Boroumand directed another live-action puppet movie with the same characters of the TV show, named *The City of Mice* (1985). The film turned out to be a huge success right after it was released. Thirty years later, the female director produced *The City of Mice 2* (2014) which was welcomed mainly by adults who had memories of *The City of Mice* (1985).

The following sections will examine both movies and break down those ideological codes related to gender practice. They also investigate the extent to which these codes are in harmony

with the way gender was being practiced at the time. To do so, the analytical part is divided into two halves: the first half concentrates on *The City of Mice* and the second half works on *The City of Mice 2*. Each half provides a brief introduction and summary of the story, then it analyzes the costumes, characters, actions, dialogues, objects, and camera work of the film.



Figure 1: *The City of Mice* (1985)

The City of Mice (1985) and Gender Practice

A Brief Introduction and Summary

The City of Mice corresponds to its social context to a large degree in a sense that, it depicts a generation's exile and their struggle to destroy the enemy. The film was produced by Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF), which was established in 1983 as a private organization, though it still followed the principles of the new regime. *The City of Mice* embodies the notion of exile that could be interpreted as depicting the situation of the Jews (and many other non-Muslims) who had to leave Iran as the Islamic Republic had inflicted many pressures on them. The poster of *The City of Mice* corresponds to the social situation of Iran at the time: it demonstrates the homeless mice as miserable, exhausted, and wounded with a black background which consolidates the gloomy atmosphere. The struggle between the mice and the cat can be regarded as Iranians vs. Saddam Hussein. In this sense, similar to other Iranian movies of the time, the movie introduces the Iraqi enemy "as incompetent, venal, and heretical, while their Iranian counterparts are represented as devout, idealistic, and heroic" (Naficy, 2012, 4: 24).

The City of Mice begins in a classroom where the young mice pups are memorizing the multiplication table with their teacher. Meanwhile, the town crier blows a huge trumpet to grab the mice's attention and asks them to gather in the town square as he has important news. Consequently, the teacher dismisses the class and leaves along with other mice in the city to find out what is going on. When they all arrive at the square, the town crier warns them about the giant cat that intends to attack their city. The mice refer to the cat as "Do not say its name" since they are too scared to say its actual name. Accordingly, the mice decide to abandon their current town and leave for the famous utopia, the city of mice, in which there is eternal happiness. It seems that the city of mice is being built by other mice and that it is going to be a place where there would be

no sickness, no misery, and no fear of “Do not say its name.” As the teacher declares: “You all remember that our fathers wished to build a magnificent city in a very nice place with the most pleasant weather, where there would be no ‘Do not say its name’” (Boroumand, 1985, 00:10:00). Although the path might not be safe, and the journey could be treacherous, the mice decide to do as the teacher says and leave their current city for the Promised Land.

On the first night of the journey, the male mice leaders estimate that it would be too risky to take the children on the mountain trail because they might not be able to survive. Therefore, they agree to divide into two groups: one would be the adults, who take the mountain pass, and the other would be the pups together with the teacher and the cook, who take the jungle route. In the meantime, finding the town vacant, the giant cat, or “Do not say its name,” tracks the mice so that it would catch them somewhere on their way. After the mice split into two groups, the movie concentrates on the pups and the difficulties they go through along their way. The story combines misery with many jokes and happy moments to ensure that the audience would not feel depressed. The pups pass their way without getting harmed; however, on the last day of the journey, “Do not say its name” finds them and tries to kill them. Even though the little mice are petrified, they defeat “Do not say its name” using explosive that they brought from their previous town. The story ends when everyone arrives at the city of mice safe and sound while dancing and cheering.

Music, Costume, and Setting

Regarding the social context of the live-action puppet movie and the year it was produced and released, *The City of Mice* represents many of the problems of its time in Iran. For instance, the music of the movie is heroic, similar to the music that had been created for the 1979 Revolution. The form of the city and houses at the beginning of the movie is very similar to the traditional Iranian architecture. Since the main purpose of this paper is to depict how gender is being represented to children, it will focus on the costumes in this part. As John Fisk notes in his essay *Television Culture*, “the physical differences in the social codes of setting and dress are bearers of the ideological codes of heroism, of morality and of attractiveness” (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998, 1092). As mentioned earlier, the state obliged women to wear a veil and cover their body after the 1979 Revolution. In addition, the filmmakers avoided including women in their movies as main characters to evade problems with the new regime. This was not an exception for children’s programs as well. Nevertheless, *The City of Mice* demonstrates a kind of objection to these rules and regulations: while the female mice wear veils on their heads, their hair has not been totally covered. In fact, their long hair is more visible than covered. On the other hand, the female pups do not have veils on their heads. While they are bald, the audience can recognize their sex by their costumes and their soft voices. Though the movie does not display the female mice completely covered, it still transfers ideological codes about the way a woman must look: the female mice need to have long black hair (and sometimes wearing makeup) to be considered attractive, while the male mice are bald and simpler in costumes.

Another element in the film which distinguishes females and males is the outfits that each sex wears. The females mainly wear long floral dresses or skirts and the males wear more simple clothes or striped ones. However, the colors of the garments have not been used to discriminate the sexes, e.g. both sexes wear both light and dark color clothes. The use of colorful clothes for women is, in fact, another item that is not in harmony with the way Iranian women were forced to dress in public. In order not to arouse any feelings in men, Iranian women were ordered to cover themselves with dark colored clothes such as brown or black. While the color of the clothes is not gendered in the film, the style of them is: female mice wear skirts or long dresses and male mice use trousers. Since the hijab became a symbol of the chastity and piety of Iranian women after the

Islamic Revolution, “every social sphere and every artistic expression were gendered and segregated by some sort of veil or barrier inscribing the fundamental separation and inequality of the sexes” (Naficy, 2012, 4: 102). Consequently, the form of female and male mice costumes functions to separate both genders and confine them to their places, i.e. females should be depicted as subordinate and males as dominant.

Characters, Actions, and Dialogue

In the live-action puppet movie *The City of Mice*, the characters, as well as their actions and dialogue, play an important role in presenting gender practice to the audience. Overall, the male characters appear more often than female characters, and some settings reflect male-only spaces. During the opening credits, only the male pups are shown playing next to piles of walnuts. While there are female pups in the movie as well, the viewer would not know whether they go to the school or if they have a separate female teacher of their own since the movie only depicts the male pups’ school and their male teacher as the wise leader. The viewers would immediately notice from the beginning that male mice are the leaders who handle the situation and plan the journey while female mice take no part in decision making. Additionally, the main characters of *The City of Mice* are males, e.g. the teacher whom everyone trusts and consults. Even among the pups, those who grab the spectator’s attention are males, such as Kopol, an overweight mouse who is always eating. Thus, the audience of *The City of Mice* will assume men to be leaders and women to be followers. This is in congruence with the situation of both sexes in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War: men would go to war and fight in the field, whereas women would stay home, raise their kids, and obey their husbands as the leaders of the family.

Dialogue in the movie is sometimes used to arouse the audience’s sympathy, but more importantly, it is also used to reveal the dominance of one character or a group of characters over the others (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998, 1094). In general, in *The City of Mice*, the male mice have more dialogue than the females, which represents the males’ dominance over the females. It is not until seven minutes into the film that female mice first speak and the very first lines of dialogue that one would hear from female mice is when the town crier is blowing his trumpet: one female mouse sticks her head out of the window and asks another, “What is going on, neighbor?” and the other answers, “I guess a messenger has come” (Boroumand, 1985, 00:07:38). This dialogue might strengthen the assumption that women were spending most of their time at home. After the teacher suggests to the other mice that they should abandon the town, one of the male mice, whose chest hair is completely visible as a sign of his masculinity, shouts: “This is a great idea. Men should stay here and women better go and pack the bags” (Boroumand, 1985, 00:11:24). Therefore, the duties of each sex become clear through this line of dialogue: men are not responsible for any kind of work inside the house; on the contrary, women cannot function properly outside the house. This idea coincides with the picture of the ideal woman after the Islamic Revolution. Further, the viewer would notice that each time female pups talk to each other they use kind words such as “dear” and they stretch out their words in order to sound affectionate and feminine. When two of the female pups meet each other, one of them says: “How beautiful you are today!” (Boroumand, 1985, 00:12:43). This may highlight the idea that females are delicate, sentimental, and too into their looks. Another remarkable moment in the movie is when one of the female pups, Narenji, is frightened by one of the male pup’s tail (for his tail is too long and it hits Narenji’s face). Although male mice, regardless of their age, become scared as well from time to time during the story, when Narenji seems terrified, other male mice start to laugh at her and call her “wimp.” It seems that things that male mice are afraid of, such as “Do not say its name,” are serious matters which are

normal for a mouse to be scared of without being called wimp; on the contrary, those things that might scare a female mouse are not serious enough. Thus, they are pictured as more timid than the men.

The actions of the mice are significant as they normalize the men's executive role of instigators and the women's passive role as obedient companions. In the first quarter of the movie when the mice decide to leave their town, there is a scene in which a mice couple are trying to wake up their son, who enjoys sleeping a lot, so that they can depart together. The mother caresses the sleeping son and asks him gently to get up, but it does not work (Boroumand, 1985, 00:13:16). Then the father comes and wakes him up forcefully. This action might confirm the impression that men are more tough and serious and that each member of the family will obey them. Afterward, when the parents are saying goodbye to their children in order to depart through the mountain trail, the mothers hug their kids, kiss them, gently offer words of advice, and pack their bags with provisions. On the other hand, the fathers only say goodbye without showing any emotion. Even when Narenji hugs her mother and cries, Narenji's father scolds his wife for spoiling Narenji with hugging her (Boroumand, 1985, 00:22:16). According to these actions, the potential audience will learn that a man is by nature firm; consequently, if one man reveals his emotions he would be called a "sisi." In contrast, since a woman by nature is tender and full of emotions, she is not able to be firm when necessary. Even though the female mice help a lot during the journey, when "Do not say its name" finds the pups, it is the male mice who use the explosives and make the giant cat escape. Hence, female mice seem not to be strong enough to touch the explosives.

Objects

The City of Mice uses many objects as symbols and three of them are studied in this section as gendered objects. Holding a ball in his hand, during the 29th minute, one of the male pups asks the other pups to play. However, those who accept and go with him are male pups. Thus, a ball is introduced as a boyish object. On the contrary, while the female pups sit and chat after having lunch, one of them holds a doll in her hand which she later loses in the jungle. Apparently, this will highlight the indication that men are more active, and women are more passive. In addition, women seem to be more into chit-chat. Another object in the live-action puppet movie which is related to masculinity is the explosives; in a sense that, using these kinds of material is a man's job. As mentioned earlier, the Iran-Iraq War was patriarchal: men were the fighters and commanders, whereas women stayed at home. Reflecting those gender roles, in *The City of Mice* it is the two male leaders who carry the box of explosives. In the end, only male pups touch these explosives, ignite them, and use them. Consequently, a girl watching the film would understand that she is not responsible for this kind of work and she must have a man to take care of her in dangerous situations.

Camera Work

In every film, the camera is used, through various angles and foci, to provide the spectator with a complete view of the scene, since much of the pleasure of film and television comes from the sense of omniscience that it gives the audience (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998, 1090). As Fiske asserts, "the normal camera distance in television is mid-shot to close-up, which brings the viewer into an intimate, comfortable relationship with the characters on the screen." (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998, 1090). In *The City of Mice*, there are numerous close-ups of male mice, whereas the number of close-ups of female mice can be counted on one hand and are usually shorter in length than the close-ups of male mice. This allows the observers to sympathize with the male mice more than

female mice. Moreover, avoiding showing female mice's bodies or faces closely is in harmony with the way women were presented in cinema during the first years after the revolution.

Closure

The way *The City of Mice* represents gender is very close to the way gender was being practiced during the years after the revolution (regardless of whether it was being practiced willingly or reluctantly). Not covering the hair completely is not an adequate reason to consider the female characters free from male dominance. The lesser amount of dialogue for female mice, their stereotypically obedient character, and the fewer number of their close-ups confirm their subordination. Women's subordination and male dominance is the ideal condition that the Islamic regime propagates in cinema. In spite of the fact that *The City of Mice* was supported by a private organization, it still followed the rules and regulations of the new state to a large extent.



Figure 2: *The City of Mice 2* (2014)

The City of Mice 2 (2014) and Gender Practice

A Brief Introduction and Summary

The City of Mice 2, which was first released in 2014 (about 30 years after *The City of Mice* in 1985), had remarkable differences with the previous live-action puppet movie. Similar to the first movie, *The City of Mice 2* was directed by Marzieh Boroumand; however, it was supported by a different organization, the private international business company Hamvata Ariya. Comparable to the 1985 movie, *The City of Mice 2* embodies the notion of exile and it partly presents the life of Moses. Overall, the second movie does not have the same Iranian authenticity as the previous movie did. The poster of *The City of Mice 2* seems much happier and more colorful, which might be partly because it had been released during a time that there were no issues such as war or revolution. Yet it had been produced at a time in which Iranian people still dealt with the after effects of the 1979 Revolution, such as the country's economic problems, the imposition of hijab, gender identity term, and the regime's hostility towards some of the developed countries

(like the USA). These problems affected the second movie to some degree, which are going to be discussed in this section.

In the second film, the mice who were pups in the first film have grown to adulthood; they have gotten married, have kids of their own, and are living in a utopia where there is no sign of misery. *The City of Mice 2* begins while the new pups are playing musical instruments and performing in front of their parents and teachers. Kopol and Narenji got married and have a daughter and a son: Souraty and Kopolak. The pups are not allowed to go out of the city as it is not safe and “Do not say its name” might find them. However, one of the male pups, Meshki, takes a walk outside the city from time to time. During one of his walks outside the city together with Kopolak and Sourati, he finds a basket on the river. When they open the basket, they find a white kitten and a note inside. The note says: “Whoever finds this basket should know that my baby is not to blame” (Boroumand, 2014, 00:20:07). Then, the three pups decide to keep the kitten safe; hence, they hide it in a tunnel underground so that it will be safe, and they can visit it any time they want. Soon, a mole finds out about the kitten and the pups’ plan and he promises them to take care of the kitten in their absence. In the meantime, two black cats similar to “Do not say its name” show up looking for the white kitten in order to kill it. The reason for antagonism between the white and the black cats is not clear. When the mole finds out about the black cats, he takes the kitten into the utopia of mice and delivers it to the pups.

Despite the pups’ struggle to keep the kitten’s presence in their city a secret, everyone finds out about it soon. On the other side of the walls, the two cats who captured the mole on his way back from the city, threaten the mice that if they do not deliver the kitten, they will attack their city. Since the mice do not want to jeopardize their lives for a second time, they ask the pups to deliver the kitten. To save their city, the pups decide to fight the black cats, which are three in number now, instead of delivering the kitten. It seems that the third cat who has joined the other two is “Do not say its name.” Once again, they use their school’s laboratory to produce explosives. Using some tricks along with the explosives, the pups kill the three black cats and free their city. In the end, they deliver the white kitten to its mother and they celebrate their victory.

Music, Costume, and Setting

Though the main concern of this part is the costumes and the way they present gender to the spectators, a brief study of the music and setting would be helpful to understand the whole analysis. The music, costume, and setting of *The City of Mice 2* are significantly different from the previous movie. It seems that the mice’s way of life is closer to French culture, which was practiced during Pahlavi era in Iran. That is, the mice’s dinner parties, their names, their music, and their food do not present the Iranian way of life in 2014. For instance, in the first scene of the movie when pups are performing and singing, they play jazz and guitar (Boroumand, 2014, 00:02:00). In the 7th minute, while mice are having dinner at Kopol’s restaurant, the music instructor plays the piano for the guests. Whereas the structure of the city is similar to the traditional Iranian cities, the layout of the classrooms or inside the houses are westernized to a great extent. In reality, most of the schools in Iran still are as plain as the one in *The City of Mice* (1985), not equipped with projector screen or sophisticated laboratories. Accordingly, this kind of setting is not in harmony with Iran’s actual lifestyle in 2014.

Even though Iranian women are still obliged to follow “rules of modesty in architecture, dress, behavior, voice, touch, eye contact, and relations with men” (Naficy, 2012, 4:102), *The City of Mice 2* presents them in a different way. In the second movie, the female mice (regardless of their age) do not cover their hair, which is not in harmony with the situation of Iranian women in

the society. The female mice have hair and do not wear any veil in public places. Their costumes are similar to Iranian women's outfits during the Pahlavi era, which makes them the object of the male gaze. The female mice wear heavy makeup or seem to have had plastic surgery on their faces to be more attractive (such as Narenji). The presence of female mice without veils in their society and on the screen can be due to "Western-influenced views, which were residual views from the Shah's reign, or emergent ones, brought on by the Internet and globalization, inspire the youth and intellectuals to resist the narrow scope conservatives in the ruling block" (Sadegh-Vaziri, 2015, 37). Therefore, the struggles between the Islamic regime and Western ideologies which animate the Iranian social and cultural spheres might have inspired the crew of *The City of Mice 2* to liberate themselves artistically through the movie. Contrary to *The City of Mice* (1985), the male mice are not bald, but they all have mustaches and short hair. Whereas the female mice wear hats and accessories to look attractive and feminine, the male mice are simpler in appearance. Although *The City of Mice 2* does not show female mice with the Hijab, it represents femininity with pre-revolutionary era ideologies that sexualized women and made them the object of the male gaze.

Characters, Actions, and Dialogue

In contrast with the previous movie, *The City of Mice 2* involves female characters more in the story. While the young teacher, who has been recently substituted the old teacher in the previous movie, is male, the school principal and the music instructor are female. In addition, Sourati (Narenji and Kopol's daughter) is a female pup who is involved in taking care of the kitten together with two other male pups which is in contrast to the first film that did not have female pups taking an active role. On the other hand, there are other female mice in the film, such as Narenji, who need to be taking care of. In fact, Narenji is too into her looks and she seems dull most of the time. Although the film tried to include female mice more than the previous episode, it still highlights female mice's subordination through their outfits, makeup, actions, and dialogue. The bulk of the ideological codes related to gender practices of the time in *The City of Mice 2* lays in the actions and dialogues. Through their actions, the male mice are presented as calmer and more patient while female mice restlessly criticize every detail of their actions. In the 7th minute, when Kopol invites everyone to his restaurant for dinner, Narenji complains about the extent of his generosity. Nonetheless, Kopol tries to calm her by saying: "Do not be bitter, my sweet Narenji; they are our friends" (Boroumand, 2014, 00:07:24). Having dinner at Kopol's restaurant, one of the female mice mentions that she is freezing, and her husband offers her his coat (Boroumand, 2014, 00:9:56). This might strengthen the idea that there should always be a man to support the woman. The act of gossiping is depicted as something that women do or are more eager to do than men. For instance, after the night party at Kopol's restaurant, rubbing night cream on her face in front of the mirror, Narenji gossips about people at the dinner table: "Big fat hideous thing with his long useless tail! He thinks he is cool with that wife of his who doesn't even wear a nice dress" (Boroumand, 2014, 00:11:55). She also insists that Kopol must be on a diet as he does not care about his body (Boroumand, 2014, 00:13:10). Therefore, each gender's concerns are demonstrated to the viewer through these actions and dialogues. Even though other female characters, such as the music instructor, do not show these kinds of attitude, the way they dress proves that they are very careful about their appearance. Generally, portraying female characters as those who gossip and criticize or as those who are emotional by nature with less insight, acts as a counterpart to the state's definition in Iran.

Colors and Objects

Colors are used to specify gender in numerous movies (especially in children's programs); e.g. pink represents femininity while blue signifies masculinity. *The City of Mice 2* is one of those movies which uses colors to distinguish gender. Narenji and Kopol's girl is called Sourati, which means "pink" in English. Like her name, Surati's hair is pink and her costumes are pink as well. It should be noted that she is one of the central female characters who convince the grownups to be kind to the white kitten. Thus, through Surati's appearance, children will notice that pink is a girly color and that it is not suitable for boys. On the contrary, Surati's male friend, who is taking care of the kitten as well and will be the most influential pup whom other pups will follow, is called Meshki, which means "black" in English. As a result, gender discrimination is reflected to the audience via colors.

While both genders work together to destroy the enemy during the final moments of the film, it is again only the male mice who use the explosives and confront "Do not say its name." Both movies include explosives that are only used by the male mice. Similar to the first live-action puppet movie, the female pups remained inside the underground tunnels to support the male pups, who were fighting with the black cats. This act supports the idea that women are too tender to use explosives or face an enemy and that they should play the role of the "ideal woman" who support their husbands, fathers, or brothers.

Camera Work

Fiske asserts that there are two sources which manage the meaning generated by the code of camera distance: the social code of interpersonal distance and the technical codes (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998, 1091). The first source means that if the camera gets close to a character it might illustrate moments of televisual intimacy or hostility. The second source demonstrates that seeing closely means seeing better. That is, the viewer can see into the main characters and see through their worlds (Rivkin and Ryan, 1998, 1091). In contrast with *The City of Mice* (1985), which did not show female mice in close-ups, the second movie shows almost equal close-ups of both sexes. The camera spreads sympathy on both sexes to represent equality. Yet, the dominance of the male mice is clear from other aspects, which has been studied in this article.

Closure

To conclude, although *The City of Mice 2* tried not to portray its female characters subordinated, it failed to a large extent. The contradictory image of the female characters of the film is due to Iranian women's lost identity. Working in social institutions or not wearing veil does not free women from being an "other." In fact, issues concerning gender identity in *The City of Mice 2* are related to Iranians' actual situation. Since the state forces women to wear veils, and forces both sexes to follow a fixed gender practice as being either man or woman, Iranians have lost their gender identity. Their way of life is affected by the ideologies of both the Islamic regime and Western culture while they are obliged to follow Shi'i's rules and regulations. Consequently, the contradictory ideas which have been presented in *The City of Mice 2* can be regarded as the contradictory ideologies that Iranians deal with at the time.

Conclusion

The 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War were two major historical events that affected gender practice in Iran and reconstructed contemporary Iranian culture, history, and politics. The media then became one of the most significant domains that were used during this time in Iran to

promote the dominant ideology. Since the new Islamic Regime regarded women as the provocateurs of corruption during Pahlavi era, it imposed restrictions on the presence of women not only in cinema but also in all other social domains. Filmmakers avoided choosing women as main characters to avoid trouble because the ruling party controlled the main sources of funding and possessed the dominant views in cinema. Hence, women's presence was constrained both before and behind the camera. Nevertheless, Iranian women did not stop working in social institutions, including the cinema.

This essay aims at studying the way gender practice is being demonstrated to children via the well-known Iranian live-action puppet movie, *The City of Mice*, released during the time of Iran-Iraq War (1985), and its sequel thirty years later (2014). In this sense, it intends to depict the extent to which the two installments of *The City of Mice* illustrate the dominant gender ideologies of their time. Both movies were directed by Marzieh Boroumand, who, despite the limitations after the 1979 Revolution, was and still is an active female artist in Iranian cinema. *The City of Mice* is one of the most notable works that has ever been produced for children after the Islamic Revolution; yet, there has not been a considerable study on it. The importance of this study lies in the way it breaks down the ideological codes that have been epitomized to the audience by means of dialogue, dress and makeup, setting, camera work, objects, and characters in order to show how gender was practiced in Iran during the war and thirty years later. This research might be a great help to understand Iran's culture better, as it provides the two films as examples to support its claim. In addition, the paper attracts attention to Iranian children's programs after the 1979 Revolution, which have been neglected to a large degree, and the way they present ideologies.

The two live-action puppet movies both comply with and challenge the dominant gender practices of their time. It should be noted that here gender is defined as either man or woman because other possibilities are known as taboos in Iran and they are not allowed to be represented. *The City of Mice* (1985), centers around the male mice and those female mice who are included in the story exist to complete the male mice roles: they help the male mice, they obey the male mice, and they fortify the males' dominance. Even though the female mice do not cover their hair as completely as Iranian women did in 1985, their subordination is evident through the dialogue, actions, objects, and camera work.

While *The City of Mice* (1985) shows many ideological aspects of its time and has Iranian authenticity, *The City of Mice 2* (2014) embodies many contradictions. The contradictory image of the female characters in the movie might be a result of Iranian women's lost identity. The way the matter of gender is pictured in *The City of Mice 2* might be because of the actual situation of Iranians. On one hand, the Islamic regime forces women to wear veils and obliges both sexes to follow fixed gender practices as being either man or woman; on the other hand, Western views, which were introduced by the Internet and globalization, inspire the youth and intellectuals to resist the radical rules and regulations that the ruling party imposes on them. Hence, the struggles between the Islamic regime and Western ideologies might have inspired the crew of *The City of Mice 2* to release themselves artistically and present these contradictions in the movie.

The City of Mice and its sequel require further study not only in gender issues but also in other domains, such as religion. One of the significant elements in both movies is that it includes stories about Moses and the Israelites' exile. In addition, using mice for the main characters in these movies and not any other kind of animal requires further investigations. Accordingly, one would analyze the live-action puppet movie based on religious views and study the reasons that these stories have been mentioned in *The City of Mice* and its sequel regarding the time of their release in Iran.

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