

For in and out, above, about, below,
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show
Played in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,
Round which we Phantom figures come and go.

[In charkh O' falak keh ma dar an hayranim
Fanus-e Khial az an mesali danim
Khorshid cheraghdan o 'alam fanus
Ma chon sovarim kandarū heiranim.]

—*Omar Khayyam*

INTRODUCTION

National Cinema, Modernity, and Iranian National Identity

Vision, visuality, and theatricality have a long history in Iranian culture and arts and in the works of visionary philosophers and poets, like the great eleventh-century mathematician, astronomer, and poet Omar Khayyam. His quatrain above uses a predecessor of the zoetrope, or magic lantern, as an analogy for the ephemeral human presence on an earth that revolves around the sun. Cinema, too, has a long history in Iran, one more political than philosophical. The medium served as both a metaphor and an embodiment of modernity. From its introduction in 1900, the cinema favored nationalism, cultural modernity, and Westernization (for the present study, modernity and Westernization are treated as similar but not as identical, allowing for alternative, non-Western modernities to exist). Westernization intensified during the nineteenth century and became part of Iranians' political unconscious by

what Michel Foucault has described as a “network of relations” that in constant tension fosters modernity (1979:26). This study situates Iranian cinema within these ad hoc networks of power and knowledge relations whose dynamic intermingling at microphysical levels gave it its distinct characteristics. So this is not just a textual study of Iranian cinema featuring close readings of specific film texts; or an auteurist study of great masters; or a historical look at precedents and trajectories. The current work engages film texts, film authors, and film history and theory, but in the context of the microphysics of both national cinema and modernity.

Not all these formations and components coexisted simultaneously or contributed equally to the emergence of modernity and a national cinema. Nevertheless, two formations—the Iranian state and the Hollywood cinema machine—set the terms of the struggle and tended to act hegemonically. But networks of forces, dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, and techniques mobilized by the film industry and its individual filmmakers, spectators, and internal and external social forces allowed filmmakers to both use and go beyond the Iranian state and the Hollywood system to create other moments of partial hegemony, which were temporary but nevertheless sufficiently real. The development of indigenous genres, such as dandy movies, stewpot movies, tough-guy films, War films, and Internet films, as well as the auteurist new-wave cinema during the Pahlavi period and the art cinema and women’s cinema during the Islamic Republic period are examples of such moments of partial hegemony.

By thus contextualizing it, the book argues that Iranian cinema (and Iranian modernity) was not a preplanned Western project imposed on or (to use a favorite term of some Iranian intellectuals) “injected” from outside or from above. Rather, cinema (and modernity) was overdetermined in complicated ways by these microphysical forces and dispositions. Modernity was not a linear or preordained process; it meandered and insinuated itself sometimes in a circuitous and contradictory fashion: Iranians resisted, rejected, accommodated, and selectively adapted and celebrated modernity and its features. Much to and fro, even circularity, characterized this process. Iranian cinema also constituted no “contract” with which the West and the Hollywood film industry—or the Iranian government, commercial entrepreneurs, and the elite—either effectuated or regulated the ideological conquest or “corruption” of Iran. Nor was it a “privilege” that these entities possessed alone. Rather, cinema was a site of unequal but perpetual ferocious struggle.

Yet there was a historical trajectory and evolution to the play of these forces. If during the Qajar and early Pahlavi periods the flow occurred into Iran from

the West, in the 1970s with the new-wave films and in the 1980s with the art-cinema films it became a two-way exchange of cinematic relations (Naficy 2002a). Although these exchange relations were strongest with Western cinemas, they also included key regional cinemas of the Middle East (Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq), Southeast Asia (India) and North Africa (Egypt). In a way, the history of Iranian cinema is the history of cinematic exchange relations with the world. At the same time, immigrants into Iran, Iranian émigrés abroad, and Iranian ethnoreligious minorities brought with them both universality and particularities that shaped Iranian cinema. As such, this study considers Iranian cinema as simultaneously local, national, transnational, and interethnic. It goes beyond a purely structuralist conception of modernism driven by a binary construction of self and Other and East and West, to embrace post-colonial and postmodern conceptions: multilateralism, interstitiality, relationality, and intersectionality.

Problematizing National Cinema Theory

The study of national cinemas used to focus on the textual analysis of a group of movies, often art-house films, produced within the geographic boundaries of nation-states. Yet since the mid-1980s, ethnic wars and the emergence of social revolutions (such as the 1978–79 Iranian Revolution), religious fundamentalisms including Islamism, and environmental and economic degradations have caused massive displacements and dispersions of populations within and across borders. The rise of global, capitalist economies, the changes in Western immigration policies, the fear of ascendant global terrorism, and the unprecedented technological developments and consolidation in computer, media, entertainment, and security industries have caused deep ruptures in social and national fabrics. All these developments have thrown into question any static and totalizing notions of what constitutes a nation. Since the mid-1980s, ideas about how nations are invented and defined by acts of imagination and mediation, representation and counterrepresentation, and by selective remembering and repressing in mass media and pop culture have further destabilized coherent conceptions of nation and national identity (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Smith 1991; Hutchinson 1994; Rosen 2001).

Likewise, the concept of national cinema has undergone radical modification. Indeed, because of the constructedness of nations—their historical variability, contingency, and cultural hybridity—Stephen Crofts has proposed the

concept of a “nation-state cinema,” instead of a “national cinema” (2000). The American studio system and the Hollywood cinema, against which all other national cinemas have been defined, themselves underwent major changes in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944, which made capitalism and private enterprise global and ensured their hegemony by creating two global institutions dominated by the United States, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Classic Hollywood industrial production faded away, giving way to the so-called New Hollywood cinema’s postindustrial mode. Here, the global acquisition, distribution, and marketing of films and related merchandise and services form the heart of the business. This change entailed both a vast vertical integration and a widening horizontal integration worldwide, one involving massive corporate mergers (Schatz 1993; Miller et al. 2001). Movie production and distribution, broadcast television, cable television, “foreign” television, satellite television, video distribution, radio broadcasting, film library acquisition, books, music, video games, publication and distribution of periodicals, Internet services, theme parks, sports teams, and merchandising and retailing of movie-related items could all be handled by a single entity. Undergirded by worldwide privatization, synergistic convergence and diversification, deregulation, and digitization, this post–Cold War trend resulted in nearly a dozen globalized “colossal conglomerates,” primarily in the United States and in Europe, that worked like cartels to maintain their dominance of world cultural agendas, narratives, and markets (Stille 1995). In this process, American cinema and media conglomerates, whose global rhizomatic networks trounced, absorbed, co-opted, overshadowed, or deeply influenced most of the national cinemas of the world, remained triumphant. They also dominated most of the world’s cinema screens, garnering a staggeringly high percentage in the 1990s of the European Union’s box office (77.4 percent) and the British box office (89 percent) (Hill 1994:59). This deep penetration made it possible for Jeffrey Berg, the chairman and CEO of International Creative Management, to state, “Hollywood has no address” (Berg 2006). It is therefore possible to claim that all national cinemas, including that of Iran, are at once both national and (partly) American. The dominance of American cinema’s total asymmetry is demonstrated by the fact that currently Hollywood movies account for 85 percent of the movie tickets sold internationally, while only 1 percent of the movies screened in the United States originate outside the country (Riding 2005).

The status of movies and their spectators, too, underwent a major shift in the twentieth century. In the classical studio era, average films were autonomous ninety-minute products made by industrial movie studios, screened ac-

ording to predetermined schedules to groups of people gathered in darkened movie theaters. In this postindustrial era, on the other hand, movies have become intertextual products, franchises, or software, nourishing the insatiable appetite of the colossal multimedia conglomerates—from video games to blockbuster movies, from comic books to TV series, and from soundtracks to theme parks. By the early twenty-first century, the world was witnessing the emergence of a fourth screen: there were movie screens, television screens, computer screens, and smart-phone screens. The length of the movies also changed, varying drastically, from many hours, such as Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half-hour film, *Shoah* (1985), to so-called short shorts, films only a few minutes long, such as those posted to YouTube and other social networking Websites. Spectators, now more properly called “consumers,” watch these products on television sets, computer screens, mobile handsets like iPad, and cell phones at home, at work, in cars, or on giant movie screens in bars, movie houses and other public places. They could watch them alone or in groups according to predetermined schedules set by distributors, exhibitors, broadcasters, and podcasters, or they could watch them according to their own wishes, by using video players, video-on-demand services, Internet download services, or video-sharing Websites.

The act of watching has also changed from a passive viewing of the movie screens to a more engaged interaction. It has gone from a meandering grazing across channels to a distracted, glance-driven televisual viewing to synesthetic and interactive relationships with electronic screens and their worlds and avatars. Furthermore, viewers and consumers are no longer shoe-horned into a single typical and general profile or into a few homogeneous demographic blocs. Rather, they are regarded as multiple, diverse, and fragmented groups, distinguished by their media, venues, and habits of consumption and by their socioeconomic characteristics of ethnicity, race, gender, class, generation, taste culture, sexual preference, and religious, political, and national affiliations. This plurality, diversity, and fragmentation of the media and of audiences undergird the structural integration and accumulation of capital by the postindustrial entertainment conglomerates.

Plurality, diversity, and segmentation are not only characteristics of the postindustrial media and their audiences but also of filmmakers' practices, influencing their choices of stories and their manners of telling them. As Thomas Schatz observed, if the vertical integration of classical Hollywood ensured a closed industrial system and coherent narratives, the vertical and horizontal integration of the New Hollywood favored texts that are strategically “open” to multiple readings and multimedia and consumer-industry reitera-

tion (1993:34). This openness resulted in a plethora of derivative and reiterative productions consisting of sequels, prequels, remakes, spinoffs, knockoffs, revivals, and made-for-TV films, as well as serialized, colorized, restored, preserved, and director's-cut versions.

Many of these globalizing transformations engulfed not only American cinema but also the cinemas of other regions and nations. During the decolonizing, countercultural, and anti-Vietnam War movements of the 1960s, a regional Latin American cinema of resistance—the Third Cinema—was envisaged in contradistinction both to Hollywood-style commercial cinema (first cinema) and to European-style art cinema (second cinema) (Solanas and Getino 1997). Radical alternative cinemas, such as Third Cinema, the “cinema of hunger,” and “imperfect cinema,” were inspired by, and drew on, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Italian neorealist film aesthetics, British social documentary style, and Marxist analysis. Many of these developments declared their presence forcefully, often in the form of political manifestos (see Martin 1997a; Gabriel 1982). Their impact, however, went well beyond Latin America. It continues to reverberate today in the aesthetics of some national cinemas and film authors, including those of Iran. By the 1980s, the Latin American regional cinema of resistance had become the New Latin America Cinema (Martin 1997a, 1997b; Burton 1990; King 1990; Pick 1993; King, López, and Alvarado 1993). At the same time, many European governments and transnational television and media agencies attempted through protectionism and subsidies to limit Hollywood's impact, to strengthen their national cinemas, and to create a pan-European, postnational cinema and television (Sorlin 1991; Drummond, Patterson, and Willis 1993; Petrie 1992; Lev 1993; Vincendeau 1996; Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham 1996; Forbes and Street 2000). Alternative European film such as *Dogma* also emerged, which cut across national cinema boundaries (Hjort 2005, Hjort and MacKenzie 2003). Yet both the Latin American and European regional, postnational, and transnational cinemas became highly contested categories as reawakened nationalism, massive immigrations, and contentious identity politics, as well as new scholarship and film practices, resulted in the formulation of a variety of national, subnational, and transnational ethnic, diasporic, and exilic cinemas. These ranged from “black” film and video collectives in the United Kingdom to *beur* films made by North African and Arabs in France and from Asian American, Chicano/a, and African diaspora cinemas in the United States to various exilic and diasporic cinemas worldwide, something I have called “accented cinema” (These and Ambrosi 1991; Noriega 1992; Diawara 1993; Newman 1993; Pick 1993; Dowmunt 1993; Goldberg 1993; Mercer 1994; Martin

1995; Gillespie 1995; Noriega 1996; Sherzer 1996; Foster 1997; Konstantarakos 2000; Naficy 2001; Feng 2002a, 2002b; Tarr 2005). Iranian émigré filmmakers, among the most active accented filmmakers worldwide, produced a lively and extensive deterritorialized cinema and television outside Iran (Naficy 1993a, 2001, 2002c). These filmmakers took influences from multiple sources: the national cinemas of their homeland Iran, their countries of residence, and transnational film movements.

Responding to growing international movie markets and to national import restrictions, Hollywood studios adopted a new strategy. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, they began to engage in what is called “local-language productions” for major world markets such as India, China, Brazil, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Mexico. For example, Warner Bros. produced or coproduced thirty foreign-language films for these markets, while Sony produced or coproduced twenty-seven such films. Sony made eight in China, four in Hong Kong and Taiwan, fourteen in the United Kingdom and Europe, and one in Mexico (Holson 2006).

These social and technological transformations mean that national cinemas can no longer be limited to what national subjects produce within the borders of nation-states, or to that which is produced in contradistinction to the dominant global cinema, Hollywood cinema.

Defining Iranian National Cinema and Modernity

Iran has maintained its core territorial and linguistic integrity and its basic ethnic, religious, and cultural composition for many centuries, despite wars, invasions, conquests, and internal evolutions and revolutions, and contemporary Iranians maintain an active relationship with their long history and artistic traditions. Daily invocations of the distant past and recitations of ancient proverbs, aphorisms, and poetry make the copresence of past and present an attribute both of Iranian nationalism and of modernity. This continuity, driven primarily by that of the Persian language (Farsi), literature, and poetry—what Michael Axworthy rightfully calls an “empire of the mind” (2008)—has proved key to softening the blows of various historical ruptures, including those of modernity. Iranian national cinema, too, is partly constituted by the cognitive map and the copresence of past and present in the consciousness of filmmakers and spectators. Because such factors of cultural continuity as the Persian language and Iranian cultural, mythological, historical, religious, literary, artistic, and performance traditions have undergirded Iranian cinema

from its inception, one can speak of it as a national cinema, or a nation-state cinema. Nevertheless, this book is highly sensitive to, and problematizes, both the coherence and inherited aspects and the heterogeneity and constructedness of the two concepts of Iranian nation and Iranian national cinema.

National cinemas may be distinguished from one another based on seven key characteristics or *formations*: sociopolitical, industrial, cultural, ideological, spectatorial, textual, and authorial.¹ As a temporal concept, modernity can be said to have started in Europe in the seventeenth century and lasted through the first half of the twentieth century. Today, we live in late modernity, which some prefer to call the postmodern period. Geographically, modernity was not confined to Europe, for it extended to the New World and the Old World. As a result, the larger world has existed in a state of asynchronous, asymmetrical, and partial modernity, even during the current globalization with its compelling synchronizing tendencies and totalizing structuration. Furthermore, recent scholarship has theorized not a single monolithic, Eurocentric modernity, but alternative modernities inflected by local traditions, which tend to destabilize the universalist ethos of modernity, pluralize the experience of modernity, and situate modernity historically, geographically, and culturally (Gilroy 1993; Shohat and Stam 1994; Bhabha 1994; Wilson and Dissanayake 1996; Appadurai 1996; Mirsepassi 2000; Gaonkar 2001). Modernity came to Iran, part of the Old World, in the early nineteenth century, with the first programmatic travels of Iranians to Europe for education, military training, and business. It took an Iranian form with the Constitutional Revolution in the 1900s, which itself evolved with the rise of the Pahlavi state in the 1920s and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in the 1980s (Shadman 1948/1326; Al-e Ahmad 1961/1340; Naraqı 1974/1353; Shayegan 1992, 1977/2536; Dabashi 1993; Boroujerdi 1996; Gheissari 1998; Vahdat 2002; Nabavi 2003b; Jahanbegloo 2004; Milani 2004; Kamrava 2008).

There are many components to modernity; the salient ones for this work are six: modernization and Westernization, rationality and rationalization, sociological disruption and displacement, mobility and circulation, individualism and humanism, and sensory complexity and intensity.² These components of modernity were necessary for cinema's emergence and institutionalization. In turn, all formations of national cinema mentioned above were involved in ushering in and overdetermining modernity in Iran. Modernity has been associated with cinema from the beginning, and much has been written about cinema as both a component and an expression of modernity (Kraus 1985; Huyssen 1986; Baker 1987; Berman 1988; Teitelbaum 1992; Orr 1993; Friedberg 1993; Charney and Schwartz 1995; Hansen 1999; Brans-

ton 2000; Orr and Taxidou 2001; Lau 2003; Stewart 2005; Shaw and Dennison 2005; Pomerance 2006; Gunning 2006; Shaka 2004; Whissel 2008). In what follows I offer a schematic presentation of the combined salient features both of national cinema and of modernity as they cross-fertilized one another in the Iranian context. Modernity affected the film industry structurally by modernizing its mode of production and reception. It affected the movies textually by inscribing modernity as content and style, and as sensorium. Finally, it transformed filmmakers and spectators by turning them into modern individual subjects whose wishes and desires it manipulated and fulfilled.

The Sociopolitical Formation of Cinema and Modernization

Iran is a multiethnic, multilingual, tribally based country with a current population of nearly 70 million people, whose politics in the twentieth century underwent vast upheavals with national and international repercussions. Two major revolutions bookended this period. One was the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11, which ushered in a form of parliamentary monarchy and modernity, during which the first lasting public cinemas and artisanal filmmaking surfaced. The other was the 1978–79 revolution, which installed the Islamic Republic, a sort of parliamentary theocracy that at first seemed to be antagonistic to cinema and modernity but that ultimately championed Iranian filmmaking to wide international recognition. Between these two points, three regime changes occurred. The Qajar dynasty, which had ruled Iran since 1796 as an absolute monarchy, and ineffectually since the Constitutional Revolution, was replaced in 1925 by the Pahlavi dynasty, whose two modernist shahs ruled over the parliamentary monarchy with autocratic zeal (constituting the first and second Pahlavi periods) until the authoritarian Islamic regime took over in 1979.

I have chosen to present the sociopolitical formation of Iranian cinema in four chronological volumes that coincide with these transformative regime changes. This periodization allows us to account for both the ruptures and anomalies and the continuities and regularities of film industry practices, structures, products, and personnel. Each volume is, in turn, divided into multiple chapters that deal with various aspects of the seven formations that shaped both Iranian national cinema and modernity.

From a film industry viewpoint, a major structural shift occurred in the mid-twentieth century, which could provide another principle of division for the historiography of Iranian cinema. In the Qajar and the first Pahlavi pe-

riods, during the entire silent and early sound eras, the premodern artisanal mode of production ruled; in the second Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic periods, a modern hybridized mode of production emerged. The ideal division for the book would have been this industrial and structural division. Yet because that division would have produced very uneven volumes in terms of size, I chose the segmentation by chronology. Thus volume 1 deals with the artisanal Qajar and first Pahlavi eras' silent and sound cinemas, volume 2 with the second Pahlavi era's popular and new-wave cinemas, which were increasingly modernized and industrialized, volume 3 with the massive transformation of the film industry after the Islamic Revolution, and volume 4 with the revival of cinema as a major ideological state apparatus and art form under the Islamic Republic.

Modernization consisted of the emergence of mature capitalism, organized entrepreneurial investment, centralized and industrialized manufacturing, free market competition, and extensive import and export across national borders. The rise of nationalism and nation-states with systematized legal systems and institutions, as well as rapid and massive population growth, urbanization, and migration were other features of modernization. Modernization also involved the explosive growth of means of transportation, communication, entertainment, and consumption. The shift from local, family-oriented, and artisanal workshops, producing goods for necessary consumption, to national, labor-intensive factories manufacturing goods for surplus consumption also characterized modernization. Some inchoate forms of modernization emerged during the Qajar era (urbanization, population displacement, travel abroad, and the press). Yet only in the Pahlavi periods did modernization become widespread and take root. Many of the Pahlavi periods' reforms were congruent with this description of modernization—from the development of a nationalist ideology to that of a standing army, from the creation of a nationwide rail system to the introduction of broadcasting, from massive urbanism to industrial production, and from sartorial reforms to widespread consumerism.

Each of the three periods was marked by increased modernization through which the state became stronger, more centralized, and more authoritarian. Its role in shaping both the nationalist consciousness and national cinema also became more pronounced and complex. In the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic periods, the state had a determining function both through the institutionalization and subvention of cinema and through intervention into and censorship of the medium. The industrial and technological formation, enabling the production of films that satisfied the needs and desires of a pay-

ing national mass public, clearly depended on the structural transformations of modernization. Both modernization and Westernization in the society at large and industrial and technological formations in cinema emerged gradually, feeding one another. Thematically, both commercial cinema and art cinema dealt with the process of modernization. Many movies were set in urban centers peopled with poor migrants from villages. Interestingly, this same group of migrants also made up a good portion of the movies' spectators.

The Technological Formation of Cinema and Industrial Rationalization

Sociopolitical transformations did not constitute the only forces in national cinema formations. Entrepreneurs and middlemen; importers and exporters; film pioneers, artisans, and freelance tinkerers; as well as modernists of all sorts played significant roles. The interaction between the state and private enterprise led to a unique kind of Iranian film production. This book identifies and theorizes the mode of production, import and export, distribution, exhibition, and consumption (shortened to "mode of production") as a chief engine of Iranian cinema, which underwent rationalization as it modernized. The epitome of both rational thinking and industrial rationalization in cinema is the classic American studio system, with its specialization of labor, central control, mass production, and the standardization and variation of products.

During the Qajar period, cinema's production mode remained entirely artisanal, driven by multifunctional entrepreneurial middlemen and modernists, ethnic minorities who, supported by the court and the elites, imported films, film equipment, and other Western technologies. The film industry was really a cottage industry, limited to importing and exhibiting foreign films and to producing and exhibiting locally made nonfiction films, chiefly actualities and newsreels.

Unlike the Hollywood system, Iranian cinema did not model itself after the Ford automobile factory where Taylorist assembly-line operations ruled. Instead, it followed the workflow in traditional local artisans' workshops, where master craftsmen and apprentices thrived. Its mode of production was primarily artisanal, not industrial. The first Pahlavi period, under the strong and autocratic leadership of Reza Shah, saw the production of the first fiction sound movies both in the country and by an expatriate Iranian in India. The volume of fiction film production in this period remained very low (only nine movies were made), but that of pro-government documentaries and newsreels

was higher. Although the cinematic mode of production remained basically artisanal, certain inchoate industrial practices, such as rudimentary film studios, film training schools, and film laboratories, emerged.

During the second Pahlavi period under Mohammad Reza Shah, true to form for a society in rapid transition to modernity, the mode of production became hybridized, simultaneously exhibiting characteristics both of artisanal and of modern, industrialized production. This hybridity paralleled the mode of economic production in the society at large, which tended toward assembling products made or designed in the West. During this time, an advertising-driven star system developed and popular movies became commodities, feeding the dynamic pop-culture and entertainment industries that cross-fertilized each other, including through movies, music, radio, television, and the press. A smaller, state-supported, parallel cinema called the new wave also emerged whose products garnered respect both nationally and internationally.

Because of the iconoclastic destruction of cinematic infrastructures during the anti-Shah revolution of 1978–79 and the Islamist regime’s “purification” of the industry of undesirable elements and practices, it took several years for cinema and the film industry to recover. When it did, the state resurfaced in a determining role. The state monopoly of television became an important source of war images and war movies, for example. In time, however, the private sector reemerged as a contender in cinema, and the outflow of films to the world brought not only international recognition but also, for the first time, substantial extraterritorial income to the directors of art cinema. This third source of income made these directors somewhat independent of the Iranian government and the domestic private sector—again, a new phenomenon in Iranian cinema.

Thematically, the movies treated the technological and industrial formations in the world as both alluring and alienating, for according to Iranian movies, these turned people either into inauthentic and unhappy subjects or into happy-go-lucky, shallow Westernized dandies. Nostalgia for an Iranian or Islamic spirituality, for mysticism, and for authenticity drove the narratives of both popular cinema movies and the art-cinema films before and after the revolution of 1978–79.

The Cultural Formation of Cinema and Disruption

With modernity and modernization came sociocultural mobility, disruption of traditions, sensory overload, and anomie. Indeed, as Marshall Berman

noted, to be modern was “to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration” (1988:345). The traditional, rooted categories of belonging, village, tribe, and extended family, as well as of work, such as family apprenticeship and lifelong employment in artisanal workshops, were disrupted. In their place rose displacement, migration, and alienated labor in cities. The gradual shift from feudal relations to urban capitalism contributed to these disruptions. The desire for higher education and the rising expectations of the educated drove emigration into the cities both at home and abroad. These forms of capital, social, and physical mobility were undergirded by modern roads and transportation systems and by mass media and advertising—all of which developed on a large scale under the Pahlavis and the Islamic Republic. Mobility and circulation shrunk space and accelerated time, resulting in psychological compression and capital accumulation. Time, temporality, continuity, and discontinuity became experiential, psychological, philosophical, and technological, and commercial categories and cinema began to participate in the structuring of these categories in capitalist modernity (Doane 2002).

In addition to these forms of mobility and discontinuity, the rise of skepticism, rationality, and secularism created religious uncertainty, philosophical reflexivity, and self-doubt—both at personal and national levels. Throughout the over one century that is under investigation here, Shiite Islam was the official religion of the country, written into the constitutions that resulted from both the 1905–11 and the 1978–79 revolutions. Both the official and the vernacular versions of Shiite Islam were generally antagonistic to cinema, hampering the institutionalization of the film industry and discouraging the practice of moviegoing. While religious minorities faced continual prejudice and periodic pogroms, they nonetheless thrived, especially in cinema. Particularly those entrepreneurs with deep historical roots, transnational connections, and business and foreign-language skills, such as Armenians and Jews, flourished, contributing greatly to the film industry’s formation and transformation. Their contributions, however, were not based on religious but on professional and commercial grounds. As a result, Iranian cinema throughout its history remained a secular if moralistic one. The disproportionate influence of ethnic and religious minorities on cinema is complex and undeniable, but it is understudied and undertheorized, a situation that I have tried to rectify.

In today’s globalized media environment, Iranian national cinema, like all national cinemas, must include not only what Iranians and Iranian subnational and ethnoreligious minorities create within the country but also what Iranian nationals, exiles, expatriates, transnationals, and émigrés produce in

diaspora. In addition, national cinema involves not only Iranians' movie *production* but also their movie *reception* and their *exchange relations* with other cinemas. It is this nexus of relationships that constitutes national cinema for the purpose of this study.

Centrally, modernity gendered all personal, social, and cultural spheres and their artistic expressions. As Afsaneh Najmabadi shows, in the Qajar era male-to-male homosociality and sexuality were the order of the day, an order gradually reversed as backward and unnatural because of two traumatic experiences. One involved Iranian travelers' disturbing encounters with modern gender relations in Europe, particularly the sight of clean-shaven young men—resembling the pubescent men with faint mustaches (*amard*, *ghelman*) with whom they had friendly and sexual relations in Iran—mixing freely with coquettish, unveiled, and unrelated women in public places. The other involved the disdainful accounts of European travelers to Iran who interpreted Iranian homosocial relations only in terms of deviancy. To counter the sense of inferiority, by the turn of the twentieth century—coinciding with the birth of cinema—Iranian modernist discourse had “marked heterosexuality as natural and homosexuality as unnatural. Yet the unnatural at once built its own home as a masquerade of the natural” (2005:39). The telltale sign of this masquerade was the faint suggestion of a mustache that many women grew well into the twentieth century. Yet soon modernity's total association with heterosexuality required the eradication of the masquerade and the closeting of homosocial and homosexual desires and practices. These desires and acts were henceforth blamed on the unavailability of women due to their veiling and segregation. Since no repression is hermetic or permanent, however, the expression of these denigrated practices bubbled to the surface in various disguised, displaced, and excessive forms, affecting individual subjectivity and national identity (ideological formation), cinemas and cinemagoing (spectatorial formation), film stories, plots, and characters (textual formations), and film production (authorial formation). The excess and inappropriateness that escaped the heteronormalization of modernity found its expression in several liminal social figures and film characters that were marked by excess and inappropriateness of gender, sexuality, and identity, such as the lascivious haji, the Westernized dandy (male and female), and the *luti* tough guy, who were either not sufficiently manly or too much so, not sufficiently feminine or too effeminate, or either not sufficiently or too Western or native. The real drama lay in watching how these hybridized figures negotiated premodernity and homosociality, on the one hand, and modernity and heterosociality, on the other. Because each of these characters carried the wounds and fears of repressed

and conflicting desires, they often appeared in filmic comedy. Several chapters in the current work deal with these characters and the issues they brought to the surface.

The first apparent instance of film censorship occurred in 1904 by a leading cleric, Shaikh Fazlollah Nuri, over the screening of films showing unveiled Western women. Much controversy and social hailing and haggling ensued during the Qajar and the first Pahlavi periods to bring women into the public sphere as citizens and spectators and onto public screens as actors and directors. While women were fully accepted as spectators and actors during the second Pahlavi period, they ironically only came to their own as film directors during the Islamic Republic period, when women faced the suppression of their rights and the imposition of the veil.

During the second Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic periods, a dynamic film culture evolved consisting of film periodicals, film reviews, the publication and translation of books about cinema, university film classes and degrees, independent film clubs, and numerous film festivals.

As Miriam Bratu Hansen has rightly observed, cinema was not only constitutive of modernity and of its disruptions but also, and most important, “the single most inclusive, cultural horizon in which the traumatic effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or disavowed, transmuted and negotiated” (1999:68). Cinema also formed part of the new connective tissue and the structure of mobility and circulation that bound the people of the world. As commodities, films traveled the globe, feeding the circulation and accumulation of capital and ideas, as well as national identities and representations. Iranian movies inscribed disruption and mobility in their narratives in the form of village-versus-city stories, social mobility themes, foreign bride and foreign travel movies, and the dandy genre. Both melodrama feature movies and social problem documentaries examined the pleasures and freedoms as well as the pains and costs of modernity and urbanity. Significantly, the narratives of many of the features were driven by a nostalgia for the stable categories and rooted times and places before modernity’s commencement.

The Ideological Formation of Cinema and the Politics of Representation in Mediawork

Movies are important causes, effects, and instruments of modernity. Every movie is at once an individual expression and a collective one. As a result, movies are potent currency in ideological battles, affecting both modern in-

dividual subjectivities and collective national identities. The politics of Iranian modernity has always involved the politics of filmic perception, representation, and counterrepresentation. As theorized in chapter 3, Iranians' first contact with Western mediawork—consisting of the combined operations of media and conscious-shaping industries, including the movies—during the Qajar period provided initial instances in which both individual psychological self-consciousness and doubt and collective national consciousness and ambivalence surfaced among the viewing public.

From then on, Westernized Iranians, educated elites, government officials, and clerics saw their images distorted in the mirrors of foreign movies. European and American movies and television circulated representations of Iran that tended to be Orientalist and stereotypical. During the century of cinema's existence, these representations changed from quaintly underdeveloped to ethnographically exotic and from geopolitically modern to Islamically backward and violent, often in service to Western governments and corporations (Naficy 1995, 1984f). Iranians, in turn, often sought to define and project themselves by means of the cinema, either according or in contradistinction to these othering Western mediaworks. Historically, as Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi shows (2001), as much as the West needed to construct its own identity by positing an Orientalist Eastern Other, Iranians needed the West for their own self-awareness, self-representation, and self-fashioning. The West, in Stuart Hall's words, needed "the Rest" (non-Western societies and its own internal others) to come into its own and to declare itself the pinnacle of human achievement and history (1996). To fashion themselves as modern, Iranians thus needed to create their own Occidental stereotypes of the West. In the realm of cinema, this happened particularly in foreign bride movies, foreign travel movies, and in dandy films.

Many Iranian critics blamed Western movies for the disruptions of modernity. Some considered them a contagion and the vanguard both of Western cultural imperialism and of the country's moral corruption. Some took offense at the movies' representations, others reacted defensively and sought to counter them by public criticism, and officials protested against them diplomatically, censored them, and funded the production of self-serving counterrepresentations. As discussed in later chapters, these defensive strategies provide instances for Frantz Fanon's and Teshome Gabriel's theorizations of the roles of cinema and the media in creating a "national culture" for the oppressed and for developing nations (Fanon 1963; Gabriel 1989).

Overall, in their cultural politics of identity, a majority of the filmmakers (as well as the elite, government officials, and the Pahlavi shahs) took an es-

sentialist turn. They sought Iranian identity in a homogenous, preexisting, authentic, and essential collectivity before the disruptions both of Muslim Arab invasion in the seventh century and of modernity since the eighteenth century. On the other hand, Islamic filmmakers in the Islamic Republic invoked the inaugural period of Islam and Shiism as the originary moment of identity. These essentialist approaches imposed, in the words of Hall, an “imaginary coherence” on the disrupted historical experiences and identities of Iranians, positing an ancient treasured collective to be discovered and re-lived (1994:394).

Only gradually, toward the end of the twentieth century, would an approach emerge that was focused less on *being* than on *becoming*. Through social conflict and exile the best Iranian filmmakers and intellectuals came to the view that a coherent, essentialized culture and identity transcending time were not tenable. Rather, Iranian identity was subject to the continuous play of history and power relations. As a result, if cinema initially constituted a source of self-othering for Iranians, making them see themselves through the eyes of the others, it changed gradually with the industrialization of cinema and the production of domestic and exilic films to become an agent of selfing and of modernity. By becoming subjects of the movies—as spectators, diegetic characters, and makers of films—Iranians also became subjects in and agents of world history and modernity.

National cinemas are not only what is produced; they are also what is seen on national screens. That is why this study takes into consideration the hitherto understudied impact of foreign films exhibited not only by commercial agents but also by foreign governments’ cultural attachés, television networks, religious missionaries, oil companies, art historians, ethnographers, and freelance documentarians, travelers, and journalists. The book also looks at the consequences of entering Iranian movies in international film festivals and of exporting them to foreign countries. All these types and venues of exhibition would profoundly affect audiences (spectatorial formation) and future filmmakers (authorial formation).

The Spectatorial Formation of Cinema and Individualism

Much of the controversy surrounding cinema concerned not only content but also viewing context. During the early Qajar period, film exhibition was private, limited to the royal court, upper-class homes, and elite parties. Soon, however, it became public in Christian missionary schools, in modern hotels,

and in theaters, which brought with them film censorship. Female spectators in public cinemas were controversial. Religious leaders disapproved, but film exhibitors bent on increasing their box-office revenues employed a variety of strategies to attract women. During the Pahlavi period, particularly the second Pahlavi Shah, because of the interests both the Iranian and foreign governments had in ideological inculcation, audiences were sought not only in commercial movie houses but also in noncommercial venues such as public auditoriums, foreign embassies, foreign cultural societies, primary schools, independent film clubs, universities, and military barracks. Portable screens were brought to villages throughout the nation.

Film reception involved many fascinating translational, hailing, and counterhailing practices that facilitated or complicated film intelligibility and spectatorial subjectivity. Live film translators (*dilmaj*) described, explained, interpreted, or performed aspects of the movies for spectators, most of whom initially could not read the intertitles of silent films or the subtitles of the sound movies. The widespread dubbing of foreign movies served a similar function, with fascinating consequences for cultural and political accommodations to make the films intelligible and culturally acceptable, including censorship. The emergence of a Pahlavi-era middle class expanded leisure activities such as moviegoing, and the massive influx of villagers to urban centers because of modernization increased the audience for commercial cinemas. During the anti-Shah revolution in 1978–79, movie houses (along with banks and liquor stores) became targets of mob wrath because they symbolized corrupting Western cultural imperialism. Over a third of the movie houses were destroyed, and in one exceptional, criminal, and dastardly instance, nearly four hundred spectators were burnt to death in a fire set deliberately by Islamist arsonists in the Rex Cinema in Abadan. Under the Islamic Republic, moviegoing (particularly for women) was again contested. Soon, however, mixed-gender spectatorship in commercial cinemas resumed, thanks to the “purification” of the film industry and the reimposition of the veil. Home viewing on clandestine video and satellite television also recommenced, turning homes into private film festivals. I analyze these spectatorial trends in light of statistics and audience ethnography throughout the present book.

Modernity placed individuals at the center of the universe, decentering God and religion and eroding the divinely determined hierarchical collective. Humanism regarded people as sovereign, autonomous individuals with internal subjectivities and desires who are largely the architects of their own destinies. This idea drove the emergence of democratic systems, individual rights, private property, and meritocracy. Descent relations (tribe, family, and com-

munity) became less important than consent relations driven by individual choice and contract. Individuals became potentially the owners of their own labor. Professional and “objective” relations with coworkers, guided by laws and protected by collective bargaining and union representation, gradually came to the fore. Traditionalists and religious leaders, including Nuri in the early 1900s, fought the encroachment of humanism into Iranian consciousness. As a result, the move from theocracy and collectivism toward humanism and individualism proved difficult and uneven for most of the century. Iranian society and its individual citizens lived in a state of asynchronous duality, shuttling between premodern collectivism and modern individualism.

Jonathan Friedman observes that modernism is not a fixed entity but “a continuous process of accumulation of self” (1988:448). Ideally, modern individuals are never complete or finished but palimpsestically becoming. And this is true both of spectators and filmmakers. With the gradual entrenchment of modernity, the notion of film viewers evolved. A collective “audience” became an individually addressed “spectator,” construed to be “a singular, unified but potentially universal category.” This shift facilitated the interpellation of spectators as a classless mass audience (Hansen 1991:84–85). With modernization and the industrialization of leisure, spectators became “consumers.” Modern, often secular public places of entertainment, such as hotels, cafés, parks, and malls, where movies and related consumer goods were offered, became hubs of modernity and consumption. People could see and be seen, and loitering and spectating became an important pastime. For the first time, the relation between cinema and consumerism is theorized in this book for the Iranian context.

Intimately tied to modernization and the resultant spatial compression and temporal acceleration is the intensification of the experience of urban living. The noise of traffic and manufacturing, the acceleration of transport and communication, and the visual and aural clutter of signs and media created a complex, intense experience—the shock of modernity. As Lucy Fischer shows, electrification, electric illumination, and urbanization were intimately tied together and to the shock of modernity and cinema (2006). The ceaseless change brought on by modernity increased sensory complexity. Modernity has been a chief reorganizer of the human sensorium and of the mass production of senses. Travel diaries testify that movement, speed, clamor, and brightness destabilized and overloaded some Iranians in Europe, where they found full modernity rather than inchoate elements of it.

Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, on his third trip to Europe, which began in March 1889, records remarkable testimonials of this overload. On the train to Kas-

sel, Germany, he writes, “This train travels very fast and gives one vertigo, resulting in one falling to the ground. A person cannot stick out his head from the window. This is the busiest heart of Europe [bohbuheh-ye farangestan]” (1990/1369:237). While visiting an electric power plant, what he finds most interesting are the turning wheels and moving machinery, the electrically lit panorama, and the shiny electric lights that are so “bright as to hurt the eyes” (235–36). He complains of incessant noise at night, disturbing his sleep: “I must try to sleep during all the noises from wagons, gun carriages, horse-drawn carts, dogs, horns, and hubbub. These noises persist until four hours past midnight. Then they go silent, may God keep them silent forever. I don’t know when these people sleep” (241).

In Iran, as modernity took root, some cosmopolitan dandies, tough guys, and flâneurs roaming the streets in search of the new sought speed, movement, noise, and brightness; in the process they created new social relations that exceeded family and workplace relations. Others condemned these, and sought refuge in rooted philosophies and places. Still others focused on the pathologies that speed, movement, and the “machine age” were inflicting on peoples’ bodies and psychic lives (Schayegh 2005).

Cinema engages in what Hansen calls “the mass production of senses,” both by its sensational effects and by the emotions they inspire. But as she notes, the cinema went beyond the mass production of the senses, providing “an aesthetic horizon for the experience of industrial mass society” (1999:69). Even silent films reorganized the sensorium: a silent, gray representation of the noisy, colored world seemed most peculiar. In his account of his first film viewing in 1896 at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair, Maxim Gorky eloquently expresses this sensorial reorganization: “Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows. If only you knew how strange it is to be there. It is a world without sound, without colour. Everything there—the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air—is dipped in monotonous grey. Grey rays of the sun across the grey sky, grey eyes in grey faces, and the leaves of the trees are ashen grey. It is not life, but its shadow, it is not motion but its soundless spectre” (quoted in Leyda 1983:407).

Technological improvements in production and exhibition intensified the experience of film. Genres such as musicals and spectacles intensified the phenomenological experiences of moviegoing and expanded spectatorship—with Abdolhosain Sepanta and Ardeshir Irani’s *The Lor Girl* (*Dokhtar-e Lor*, 1934) being the first Persian-language example. An extensive menu of snacks and refreshments in the cinemas, including hot food, compounded sensations, enhancing synesthesia. In the ethnographic descriptions of film

spectatorship during each film period, I examine all these dimensions of moviegoing.

Film not only recorded movement and speed but also produced the sensation of speed by particular ways of framing, filming, and editing. The rate of editing fluctuated during the twentieth century, but as Barry Salt reports, the average shot length (ASL) of films steadily decreased, which means shots became shorter, driving up the cutting rate. By the end of the silent period, the ASL had gone down to 4.8 seconds for American and to 6.6 seconds for European movies (1992:174). The introduction of sound inflated the ASL, but then it again decreased progressively, so that by the mid-1970s it had reached 6 seconds, with an ASL of four seconds or less “now fairly common” (283). Such an increasing rate of cutting, which would jump far higher in exciting scenes, along with the enlargement of image size and the closer photography of subjects served to enhance the sensation of movement and speed while watching films, thereby consolidating modernity’s sensorial reorganization. Such speed and dynamism facilitated the narrative flow and comprehension obtained by the gradual development of the conventions of the invisible style. Tom Gunning rightly calls this the “dialectical structure of shock and flow” (2006).

The conflicts that individualism and humanistic values brought about in a traditional, patriarchal, and religiously dominated society became the subjects of many popular movies and art-house films. Melodramas focused on family tensions, arranged marriages, generational conflicts, and class divisions, and popular films dealt with themes of modernity, modernization, and displacement. The tensions of individuality and collectivity became increasingly condensed in the presence of the stranger, the outsider, the foreigner, the alienated, the dandy, and the disabled. Georg Simmel identified the encounter with the stranger in the metropolis as a key feature of modernity (1971).

The Textual Formation of Cinema and Oral Tradition

Iranian cinema’s hybrid mode of production, with its vestiges of artisanal multifunctionality, spontaneity, and improvisation, inflected the textual practices of popular filmmakers in fascinating ways that are theorized in these pages. Iranian oral traditions, popular romances, folktales, modernist literature and poetry, and a rich tradition of visual, musical, and performing arts also served as sources for film texts.

Despite the fast-paced surface adoptions of modernity and Westernization, which were all too visible in the emergence of tall buildings and traffic-choked streets, the social and psychic transition from premodernity to modernity happened gradually. Iranian aesthetics retained peculiar features of collectivism and of oral traditions, as well as, strikingly, a certain classicism and conservatism. As Michael Hillman has aptly noted, one of the keys to Persian aesthetics is its “enduring classicism, exhibited through the adherence to convention in terms of subject and manner of treatment and through the emphasis on generalized, typical, almost impersonal experiences as opposed to romantic or modernist lyric statements that emphasize individuality, reality, subjectivity, and uniqueness” (1990:72). Typecasting in miniature paintings and movies bore this out. In the latter, this became evident in binary types, such as whores and hurries (angelic women) for women and tough guys and dandies for men, characters without subjectivity and individuality simply performing their fate or their type. Typicality was also encouraged by a typecasting star system, which in turn influenced styles of filming and acting, resulting in the persistence of frontal shots and of actors performing in tableaux for a collectively constructed audience.

Iranian oral traditions, the Shiite religious performances of *taziye*, curtain-reciting and other vernacular theatrical performances, and the artisanal production mode contributed further “collective” features to cinema, leading to narratives with temporal and spatial discontinuities, visual chaos, autonomous song-and-dance segments unrelated to plots, oratorical dialogues, and didactic and moralistic stories. The pleasure derived from these film narratives was therefore more ethical or didactic, than visual or sensorial, compared to that theorized for Western movies.

Yet film also introduced the radical and destabilizing force of motion, which, as Gunning notes, undermined “centuries of practice in which the tableau signified a static composition, a frozen moment, if not utterly an image of repose. An image in motion reintroduced temporal transformation into the field of visual representation, not simply implying it (as did the contorted figures of baroque art [or for that matter as did the contorted figures in Persian miniatures and curtain-reciting paintings]), but allowing it to unfold” (2006:300). The juxtaposition of Iranian classicism (static or contorted tableaux) and Western modernity’s mobility and speed gave the Iranian films their textual specificity and uniqueness.

During the Pahlavis and Islamic Republic periods, both fiction films and documentaries proliferated, the latter thanks to massive government subvention and intervention, resulting in many high-quality, counterhegemonic

films and several film types and movements. The most influential was an official pro-Shah and pro-Westernization documentary style, institutionalized in the 1950s thanks to copious film production and screenings in Iran by the United States Information Agency (USIA). Later, the anti-Shah revolution and the subsequent eight-year war with Iraq also brought another official documentary film style, which concentrated on covering the war front and on extolling Islamist ideals and Islamicate values, among them acts of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. However, because of their commitment to representing “reality” and the material world, the documentaries used far fewer classic conservative features than the fiction movies did. Animated films, particularly those produced by the Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (CIDCYA), are also notable culturally and artistically.

Modernism as a style entered both documentary and fiction films, often as a discontinuity of time, space, and causality, as self-reflexivity (incorporating the filming process into the narrative), self-inscription (of the director), and skepticism concerning its own ontology. The earliest modernist fiction film is Ovanes Ohanians’s *Mr. Haji, the Movie Actor* (*Haji Aqa, Aktor-e Sinema*, 1933), while the most notable early modernist documentary is Kamran Shirdel’s *The Night It Rained . . . or the Epic of a Gorgan Village Boy* (*Unshab keh Barun Umad . . . Ya Hamaseh-ye Rustazadeh-ye Gorgani*, 1967).

The Authorial Formation of Cinema and Social Commitment

Less analyzed in the formation of national cinemas are the roles of individuals in the larger national enterprise. Modern individuals are significant agents in the formation of their own identities, as well as in the particularity of each national cinema. Whether they were pioneer artisans who introduced cinema, ethnic middlemen and entrepreneurs who facilitated cinema’s growth, commercial producers who created an industry, hybridized dandies who negotiated native and foreign cultures, or auteurist filmmakers who elevated the medium, individuals served significant and signifying functions. Many Qajar-era film pioneers were self-made and multifunctional artisanal entrepreneurs with mobile, layered identities. Even when the industrialized hybrid production mode began its ascendancy, individual film entrepreneurs continued to play a major role. Because rooted categories of identity dwindled in the face of individuality, particularly during the Pahlavi period, auteur directors emerged. Because of discrimination, which closed off some of the legitimate businesses to religious minorities and immigrants, members of these groups

found the fields of entertainment, including cinema, reviled by the Muslim majority, both receptive and fertile to their contribution.

During the Islamic Republic, on the other hand, when economic and social uncertainties, labor costs, and censorship increased, when the Western embargo of Iran reduced exchanges, and when the Islamists fanned exclusivist politics and interethnic hostility, some aspects of collective, family-oriented filmmaking resurfaced, both to save money and to ensure control and security. Dariush Mehrjui, Bahram Baizai, Rakhshan Banietemad, Abbas Kiarostami, Kumars Purahmad, and the Makhmalbaf family were among the filmmakers who employed family members as crew or cast. A new form of collective production, the “family production mode,” may be theorized for the postrevolution movies. In the latter periods, the film industry developed professional and labor unions to protect, represent, and sometimes suppress the interests of their members both in the marketplace and with the government.

Directing films, like watching them, is an inherently modernizing activity, involving industrialization, rationalization, disruption, gender reconfiguration, dynamism, sensory overload, representation, and individuality. The dynamism and sensory engagement of cinema is particularly addictive. Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s explanation is to the point: “I love filmmaking because there is motion in it. I couldn’t go to a certain location and work in the same place every day. My entire life is caught up in motion and constant change” (quoted in Dabashi 2001:195).

During the two most active periods of cinema, when hybrid industrialization ruled, two parallel cinemas became dominant. Popular cinema captured the box office, while state-supported art cinema captured the imagination and political discourse of the public. Critics wrote off the commercial filmmakers as crass entertainers while expecting the art-cinema directors to act as “politically committed” (*motoaahed*) or “religiously committed” (*motoddayen*) public intellectuals and members of the loyal opposition. This public expectation of commitment torqued Iranian authorial cinema in specific ways (literature too). It forced auteur directors to make films in which the stories of private individuals were almost always read as the stories of the public, for each film served as a “national allegory” (Jameson 1986). Despite Jameson’s gross generalization in this essay, and Aijaz Ahmad’s astute critique of it (1994), it remains true that the relation between the libidinal and the political, at least in Iranian intellectual literature and cinema, was such that libidinal investment was encoded by filmmakers and decoded by spectators, primarily in political and social terms. In the modern West, on the other hand, the private and public worlds—in both lives and works—are kept apart by a seemingly

unbridgeable divide. Iranians were still in transition from premodern collective identity and had not yet fully achieved individualized modern subjectivity. But the best auteurs adopted attributes of the Third Cinema: historically conscious, politically engaged, socially relevant, and artistically critical (Willemen 1989). The majority acted less as independent public intellectuals than as mouthpieces for political causes. Furthermore, like many third world intellectuals and artists, Iranian art-cinema authors occupied a unique social position. As Roy Armes described it, these intellectuals and artists were “often at odds with the ruling members of the elite to which they belong[ed] by virtue of their education”; yet they felt “equally cut off from the mass of the people” by the literary forms and cinematic language they employed (1987:24). As a result, they remained in a tenuous position vis-à-vis both the state, which they opposed, and the public, which they wished to represent but from which they stood apart.

The filmmakers’ biographies and upbringing often prove influential in their choice of topics, their generic preferences, and the film styles they employ, as well as in their business practices, politics of identity, and public status, particularly in authoritarian states like Iran, where every film acquires a political aura and meaning, even if it does not concern politics per se. I deal with many of the key filmmakers’ authorial histories, social functions, textual strategies, business practices, and individual struggles to come into representation and political agency during all three periods under discussion here.

Thus historicized, contextualized, and theorized, Iranian cinema will be seen as simultaneously subnational, national, transnational, and international. It will emerge as a dynamic organism, a network of relations, in diachronical dialogue with the Iranian past and present while projecting a vision of the future. At the same time, it will be seen in a synchronic dialogue with the peoples, cultures, and cinemas of the world, from which it borrows and to which it contributes. Thus it simultaneously constitutes an Iranian cinema and a cinema of the Other. These diachronic, synchronic, and transverse dialogic relationships make Iranian cinema both reflect modernity and act as an agent of modernity and of national identity.