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*Elnaz NASEHI, Nurten KARA*

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# Buttressing Strategy: A Theory to Understand the Neopatriarchal Unconscious of Iranian Society / Cinema

Elnaz NASEHI<sup>1</sup>, Nurten KARA<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Patriarchy is the dominant structure in most societies. However, in real life, its application is not universal but diverse and particular, depending on the different ideologies they are rooted in. Acknowledging the specificity of Iranian society and Iranian cinema, this research embarks on developing a contextual-bound theory to understand and analyze the ideological representation of women in Iranian cinema. Questioning the ahistoricity of Mulvey's psychoanalytic theory of film studies, the current research endeavors to discuss neopatriarchy in Iranian society and theorize the "buttressing strategy" as the neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society, and also to offer a qualitative analysis of films to shed light on the way buttressing strategy finds its way to Iranian cinema. As exemplary films which attempted to depict the empowerment of women on the screen, two of Asghar Farhadi's films are selected; *About Elly* (2009) and *A separation* (2011). The two films are analyzed in order to discuss the way buttressing strategy negotiate with the empowered female characters in the level of narrative. The films are analyzed in the level of narrative from feminist perspective. The analysis shows that Asghar Farhadi's films have some subversive aspects. However, his confrontation with the patriarchal paradigm does not transgress the very root of it subversively and fails to dislodge it transgressively due to his ambivalent narrative.

*Keywords:* buttressing strategy, patriarchal unconscious, neopatriarchy, representation of women, Iranian cinema, Asghar Farhadi.

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- 1 Near East University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Filmmaking, Nicosia NORTH CYPRUS; Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, NORTH CYPRUS.  
E- mail: elnaz.nasehi@neu.edu.tr
- 2 Eastern Mediterranean University, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Department of New Media and Journalism, Famagusta, NORTH CYPRUS.  
E-mail: nurten.kara@emu.edu.tr

## Introduction

Patriarchy seems to be sustainable in different forms. Enloe argues patriarchy is not a static system but is dynamically updated and modernized and therefore “it is useful [...] to talk about patriarchy as ‘sustainable’” (Franz-Balsen, 2014: 16). This sustainability leads into the formation of what Sharabi called neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1988). Although originally being developed in the context of Arab society by Sharabi, the concept of neopatriarchy seems to be relevant to the new situation of ambiguity in regard to the presence of empowered women in Iranian society, and consequently in Iranian cinema. Iranian society has experienced constant political and social disruptions during the last two centuries. Through all these upheavals, Iranian women’s body and sexuality has persistently been the site of struggle. Despite all restrictions and suppressions, Iranian women have managed to get empowered in the society. However, the approach toward empowered women under the Islamic Republic has always been ambivalent; while “the state defines women as mothers and considers motherhood the basis of their dignity and value in Islamic society [...] it refuses to grant them the right to keep and raise their children in the absence of the father” (Sadr, 2006: 264); while after the revolution, the education of women continued to be encouraged and in 2001, for the first time, female students outnumbered male student, new rules in more than 30 universities banned female students from almost 80 different degree courses in 2011 (Sahraei, 2012); and Morality Police is still patrolling the streets to repressively impose dressing codes of modesty, arresting women for violating the Islamic attire.

Neopatriarchy shapes in Iran within the ambivalent interaction of tradition and modernity, and has been reinforced by the emergence of new generation of youth in Iranian society. Talattof calls this society as “*modernoid*”; “a society that resembles a modern one in some areas but lacks other essential modern structures” (2011: 21); the situation which seems to be inevitably hybridized through intertwining modern and traditional elements. The abovementioned ambiguity in regard to the presence of empowered women in the Iranian society have found its way to the silver screen and led into ambivalent representation of empowered women in Iranian cinema; the ambivalence which is derived from what Zeiny (2013) called “neopatriarchal Iranian cinema”.

Feminist contribution to the studies of film is rooted in the feminist concerns with the cinematic reproduction of sexual ideologies. In her groundbreaking article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey raises the question of why filmic images reinforce the “socially established interpretations of sexual differences” (1990: 28). Drawing on Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Mulvey describes the contemporary patriarchal unconscious and the way it is inscribed into the silver screen. What all the different feminist theories and approaches to film have in common is their concern about the way men and women are not represented

equally. The current research shares the same concern with other feminist film researches, and addresses the representation of women in Iranian cinema.

While patriarchy is the dominant structure of most societies, its manifestations are not universal but diverse and particular, depending on the different ideologies they are rooted in; the ideologies which are materialistically shape and reshape social relations. Acknowledging the specificity of Iranian society and Iranian cinema, this research seeks to develop a contextual-bound theory to understand and analyze the ideological representation of women in Iranian cinema.

Questioning the ahistoricity of Mulvey's psychoanalytic theory of film studies, the current research endeavors to theorize the "buttressing strategy" as the neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society and its impact on Iranian cinema in the level of narrative. For, this unconscious has shaped the neopatriarchal ambiguous representation of empowered women in Iranian cinema, and has reinforced conscious and unconscious choices of Iranian filmmakers in constructing their own subjective version of Iranian women's life and reality.

## Material and Method

This research aims to explore the neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society and cinema. In order to reach this objective, the significant transformation of gender and sexuality in post-revolutionary Iranian society and cinema is discussed in the first section and then, the "buttressing strategy" is introduced as the neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society. In the last section, the way this neopatriarchal unconscious shape unconscious of Iranian cinema is discussed. As exemplary films which tries to depict the empowered women on the screen, two of Asghar Farhadi's films are selected; *About Elly* and *A separation*. The list of the awards for these two films is available in Table 1. The films are analyzed in the level of narrative from feminist perspective.

It needs to be mentioned that the first reason to choose Farhadi's cinema is that his cinematic and socio-political views are significance and influential as evidenced by the large number of viewer, Iranian and non-Iranian people. In addition, Asghar Farhadi's cinema has dealt exclusively with the private sphere of home, domestic themes, and family relationships in the contemporary Iranian society in which dialectical coexistence of tradition and modernity constructs and reconstructs the social values and family relationships constantly. Therefore, it provides perfect example for the purpose of this research through depicting empowered/unveiled female characters. The third reason to choose his cinema is his controversial claims of 'reflecting the reality' and 'multiplicity of voices'. In an interview with *Evene*, Farhadi claims: "...in all my films, I have tried to multiply the points of view, rather than imposing my own, to enable the viewer to have different angles of the story. It is not difficult to agree that cinema, in essence, is a dictatorial art, where the director dictates what the spectator must

see. It is exactly that attitude which I fight against...I hope in all cases that it is a democratic cinema!" (Burke, 2011).

Farhadi's claim about 'multiplicity of voices' raises question on the presence of female characters and gender-related concerns in his films among many other issues. As a male director in a male-dominated society, are his 'unconscious choices' complicit with 'unconscious of patriarchal society' - to draw on Mulvey - or he moves beyond the society's unconscious to terminate/change the male desire in constructing his filmic representation? Based on the social constructionism, which is the methodological paradigm of the current research, Farhadi's films are analyzed not as the reflection of the self-present reality of the Iranian society but as a cultural product which is constructed through the cinematic conscious/unconscious choices of the filmmaker; the choices which are shaped and mutually shape the unconscious of Iranian society.

Table 1. The list of the awards for the two analyzed films

|   |      |   |
|---|------|---|
| About Elly<br>(Darbareye Elly)            | 2009 | Asia Pacific Film Festival: Best Screen Play and Jury Special Award.<br>Berlin Film Festival: Silver Bear for Best Director.<br>Brisbane International Film Festival : Netpac Award.<br>Tribeca Film Festival : Best Narrative Feature.<br>International Film Festival of Kerala: Golden Crow Pheasant.<br>Tehran International Farj Festival: Crystal Simorgh for Best Director, and Audience Award.   |
| A Separation<br>(Jodaeiye Nader az Simin) | 2012 | Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.<br>Asia Pacific Screen Award: Best film and best screen play.<br>Asian film award: Best Director and best screen play.<br>Berlin International Film Festival: Golden Bear for best film.<br>Durban International Film Award: Best Film and Best Screenplay.<br>Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film.<br>Sydney Film Festival: Official Competition Award for Best Film<br>Tehran International Farj Festival: Crystal Simorgh for best film, best director and best screen play. |

### *Desexualized Sign of Sexual Desire*

The removal of Pahlavi dynasty and the establishment of post-revolutionary government have brought significant transformation of gender and sexuality into Iranian society. While rejecting the pro-Western policy of Pahlavi era, Islamic government has hegemonically launched the project of “Islamisation” as its main axis in redefining the cultural codes and values (Naficy, 1998; Naficy, 2011). Cinema, which has initially encountered hostile rejection by the Islamic clergy, soon has been considered as a powerful ideological tool, and it has been adapted through the project of Islamisation- although vaguely defined (Zeydabadi- Nejad, 2010) - in order to impose Islamic codes of modesty and heterosexual relationship (Tapper, 2002). Therefore, the Ministry of Culture and Art was replaced by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, with the main mission of Islamizing all kinds of art and cultural activities (Mir-Hosseini, 2003). On one hand, it is true to note that technologically fostered media, as an active arm of capitalist economy, has objectified woman image as an object of desire (Isikoren & Kalkan, 2017) yet on the other hand, extreme codes of modesty were introduced in Iran as tools for purifying the Western-oriented cinema which was believed to be the source of corruption and objectification of women in the society.

The new post-revolutionary regulations tried to redefine the film industry in a way to abide by ‘the rule of modesty’ (Mottahedeh, 2006). These codes of modesty encompasses Islamic dressing codes, and behavioral codes according to which women should avoid the activities which demonstrate their bodies erotically, and should have no direct physical contact with men, and men-women mutual look shouldn’t demonstrate sexual desire. The rules of modesty also restricted cinematic techniques such as close-ups of a woman’s face or body which was considered as a tool for objectification of women’s body, and point-of-view shots in a male-female scene, which have the potential to construct the gaze of an unrelated man through the gaze of the camera.

As a result of the mentioned codes of modesty, the image of women on screen has been desexualized and female figures have been no longer objectified through the mechanism of scopophilic gaze. This raises the question that if the elimination of limited iconic role of women as erotic object has led into formation of a feminist counter-cinema which is able to deconstruct the language of classic cinema. In her afterword to *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, Laura Mulvey recognizes the above-mentioned potential introduced by new Iranian cinema for the purpose of feminist concerns. She writes: “Islamic censorship reflects a social subordination of women and, particularly, an anxiety about female sexuality. But it then produces, as a result, a ‘difficulty’ with the representation of women on the screen which has some – unexpected – coincidence with the problems feminists have raised about the representation of women in the cinema” (Mulvey, 2002: 258).

As Mulvey argued, her polemic on the aesthetics of spectatorship in Hollywood Cinema, and the way it constructs female image as the object of the gaze of the assumed male spectator, provides a ground to envision the counter cinema, “iconoclasm from below”, to draw on her own word. Iranian post-revolutionary censorial system, as Mulvey argues, generates the same counter “negative aesthetics” in contrast to Hollywood cinema as a “regulation from above”. According to Mulvey, the common concern of feminism and the Islamic censorial system is their wariness of “the overt sexualization of femininity associated with Hollywood” (Mulvey, 2002: 258). Similarly, Mottahedeh argues that “it was in its attempt to purge technology from imperialist and capitalist forces, that the post-Revolutionary Iranian film industry came to produce a cinema that is, in my view, the apotheosis of 1970s European feminist gaze theory and a surprising expression of the feminist avant-garde’s stance against the voyeurism of Hollywood melodrama” (Mottahedeh, 2009: 533).

In this regard, the Iranian new censorial system which necessitates the questioning of usual well-established conventions of classic cinema in order to alter the dominant form of representation of sexuality in cinema and its signification processes, has led into discovering a new “visibility”, as Mulvey puts it, and changes the characteristics of cinema: “The characteristic film of the Iranian New Wave shrinks in scope and expands in time, moving away from dramatic plot, action or romance into scaled-down events and location-based stories of great simplicity. With a shooting style that tends to avoid close-ups or shot-counters hot, the camera takes on an equivalently greater importance, and its relationship to what it sees enters into the picture, breaking down the cinema’s conventional transparency. The collapse of cinematic narrative convention opens up a space and a pace in which the elements of cinematic form acquire visibility in their own right” (Mulvey, 2002: 259).

Despite the above-discussed arguments, the desexualization of body, although hinders the erotic objectification of female figures, still constructs women as sign of “sexual desire”. Female figure as a desexualized sign of sexual desire should be controlled and veiled for the purpose of disarming its putative threat. This threat is still rooted in the fear of the different “other” whose empowerment is considered as a threat to patriarchal phalocentric power and domination. However, the putative threat of women in Iranian society and cinema differs from Western feminist discussion about castration anxiety, and is rooted in the buttressing strategy of Iranian neopatriarchy which keeps control and deals with the putative threat of female figure. Before going further to discuss the neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society, it is necessary to elaborate more on two mutually related concepts of “veiling” and “empowered woman”. As it has been discussed, the concept of “veiling” is crucial in understanding the patriarchal unconscious of Iranian society and cinema. Chehabi writes “hijab refers not merely to the piece of clothing that protects women from the gaze of men, but also to the proper mode of interaction between the sexes, which aims at minimizing contact between unrelated men and

women and has visual, acoustic and behavioral dimensions (Chehabi, 2003: 203). He insightfully distinguishes between “veiling” as “sartorial practices that derive from hijab”, and “purdah” as “the segregation of the sexes” (Chehabi, 2003).

Accordingly, this research considers three different functions for veiling; first, sartorial practices (also being referred as dressing codes of modesty); second, behavioral codes of modesty; and third, sex-segregation. It needs to be mentioned that these functions are being introduced as the aesthetic aspects of veiling in Iranian cinema and not necessarily as universal functions of veiling. This research does not draw on the social and religious aspects of hijab, and it also rejects the monolithic perspective on this issue. The researcher obliges herself to discuss that obligatory hijab which is coerced on Iranian women in contemporary Iran is unfounded in Islamic Sharia, and the practice of veiling is a personal religious choice. This is an important issue because these two understandings of hijab, one as a personal choice of an individual, and one as a coerced rule of the society that need to be exercised through moral police patrolling and interference, each generates different assumptions, attributions and influences in the society in regard to the issue of hijab. Also it must be mentioned that while Hijab might be a sign of oppression of women in one context, it might be the sign of resistance, agency and identity in another. Thirteen veiled American Muslim women share their definitions of Hijab in Droogsma’s research (Droogsma, 2007). These women claim that hijab functions to define their Muslim identity, performs a behavior check, resists sexual objectification, affords more respect, preserves intimate relationships, and provides freedom. Also after the banning of the wearing of the Islamic veil in French public schools (Law 228, 2004) many women have resisted the French law. Croucher interviews forty-two Muslim women in France about their practices of Hijab and concludes “the hijab is a vehicle through which many French-Muslim women assert aspects of their identity” (2008: 210). These French-Muslim women identified four functions/reasons for wearing Hijab in France: to blend their French, Muslim and North-African identities; to help them feel comfortable or secure in their bodies while out in public; to aid in feeling a closeness to the Prophet Muhammad and to the Muslim community; and to provide a silent way to protest and identify themselves as Muslims to others. Therefore, the functions of veiling which have been discussed in Iranian cinema do not offer an ahistorical perspective on veiling, and are contextual-bound.

What all these functions of veiling have in common is a form of barrier, a curtain which is erected to hide, segregate, and buttress. The uncontained, unconfined and empowered woman, even if she is practicing the sartorial aspect of veiling, as in the case of Iranian cinema in which hijab is obligatory, is “unveiled” and empowered. The image of this empowered woman, who breaks the rules of modesty in two aspects of behavioral function, and the sex segregation, encounters ambiguous representation in Iranian cinema.



## The Neopatriarchal Unconscious of Iranian Society

Under the obligatory wearing of hijab, veiling is coerced through what I prefer to call “buttressing strategy” which is used to justify the existence of veil as a protector of society from corruption. The putative threat of women is rooted in this strategy according to which a woman as a necessary “other” to define the “self” of a patriarchal society is believed to be in need of protection through the mechanism of veil with all its three functions, which are all justified under the “buttressing strategy”.

The buttressing strategy, rooted in institutionalized practice of veiling, is evident in the most repeated promoting mottos in Iran; “hijab is like an oyster around the pearl” or “hijab is immunity-not limitation”. Figure one and two juxtapose women in hijab (sartorial function of veiling) with the image of a pearl in an oyster. Hijab is represented as a protective oyster around the pearl of the women’s essence; their precious hidden self.



Figure 1. “Hijab, an oyster around the pearl of essence”

Note: The photo is taken from the website of Cultural and Religious Base of Women and War (<http://jangvazan.blogfa.com/author-jangvazan.aspx?p=4>).



Figure 2. Book cover, Women and Islamic Perspective on Hijab (Mohammad Taghi Seifi, 2012)

The underlying assumption of the above-mentioned mottos and justification of veiling is that core value, the interior meaning, and the hidden aspect of the self are highly valued and need to be protected. This culturally well-rooted belief is discussed by Naficy in his important article, *The Averted Gaze in Iranian Postrevolutionary Cinema* (1991), in which he theorizes the manner in which the rule of modesty is inscribed in the system of looking in Iranian post revolutionary cinema.

Naficy argued that in Iranian psychology, the self is constituted as dual, both private and public. According to Naficy, “the self is thought of as familial and communal rather than fully autonomous and individuated. There is also a clear demarcation between an inner core, or private self, and an outer shell, or public self—both of each are available simultaneously” (Naficy, 1991: 30). This simultaneous duality necessitates the existence of an “amorphous” boundary or veil, separating interior from exterior. “Veiling and the codes of modesty that attend it, therefore, are operative within the self and are pervasive within the culture” (Naficy, 1991: 30). Psychological and cultural veiling is not a new phenomenon in Iranian society. It is rooted in Iranian visual art, poetry, and religious believes. Naficy mentions

some of the examples of instances of veiling: “The inner sanctum hides the family, the veil hides the women, high walls separate and conceal private space from public space, the exoteric meanings of religious texts hide the esoteric meanings, and the perspectiveless miniature paintings convey their messages in layers instead of organizing a unified vision for a centered viewer” (Naficy, 1991: 30).

Iranian subjects, therefore, need constant interpretive activities in order to discover the inner meanings while interacting with others and also to camouflage their own inner intentions. “This is because Iranian hermeneutics is based on the primacy of hiding the core values (that is, veiling), and of distrusting manifest meanings (that is, vision)” (Naficy, 1991: 31). While in the first two figures, women’s essence is highly valued through being equalized with pearl, the third and fourth figures more explicitly reveal the ideological assumption hidden in these mottos about femininity; the image of a veiled and an unveiled woman are juxtaposed respectively with covered and uncovered chocolate while flies are gathered around the uncovered chocolate, and there is one dead fly next to the uncovered one.



Figure 3. “Hijab is Immunity”, a promoting billboard



Figure 4. “Immunity or...?”

Note: The photo is taken from a blog Chastity and Hijab (<http://www.dokhtarannoor.blogfa.com>)

This juxtaposition implies that women are prone to commit sin, become corrupted, and consequently corrupt the whole society if they are not veiled. Veil is the buttress to prevent women from falling down. The manipulative masculine ideology, therefore, utilizes the practice of hijab and veiling to justify the relegation of women to silence, absence and inferiority in the society. Hamid Naficy argued that “the Islamic system of looking and the semiotic of veiling and unveiling” are based on three suppositions; first, “eyes are active, even invasive organs, whose gaze is also constructed to be inherently aggressive”; “second, women’s sexuality is thought to be so excessive and powerful that if it is uncontained... it is supposed to lead inevitably to the wholesale moral corruption of men and of society as a whole”; and “third, men are considered to be nothing but weaklings in the face of women’s powerful sexual force, and the effect of looking on the men is clearly posited to be direct and unmediated” (1991: 33-34).

Based on the above arguments, buttressing strategy is not a mere protective strategy of the inner valuable essence of women but it is to protect the patriarchal power and sovereignty through buttressing the posited threatening women’s

corrupted-to-be self. For, it is assumed that when an “unveiled” woman –read as empowered and unconfined- unavoidably transgresses the boundaries and falls down, the whole structure of male-dominated family and society would fall down and become morally corrupted. This neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society finds its way to the silver screen and shapes neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian cinema in regard to the representation of empowered women.

## Discussion

According to Western feminist film studies, the image of women is ambiguous as it signifies desire and threat; the threat of castration. In Iranian new cinema, image of women signifies the duality of desire and threat as well. However, its threat is not a threat of castration but the threat of humiliation and corruption. As it has been discussed, while Western mainstream cinema deals with women’s putative threat through the mechanism of voyeurism/sadistic voyeurism and fetishism/fetishistic scopophilia (Mulvey, [1975]1990; Hollinger, 2012; Walters, 1995), Iranian cinema utilizes the strategy of buttressing as a tool to deal with women’s threat in the level of narrative; the threat which is historically rooted in buttressing perspective on femininity.

Buttressing strategy as the neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian cinema, therefore, functions in two parts in the level of narrative; first, it necessitates the depiction of female characters as the source of disequilibrium. The empowered/unveiled woman is the one who tries to break through the confines of patriarchal structure. “She” is the one who breaks the initial state of equilibrium and her presence and demands entails catastrophe. In this regard, her picture is depicted as an empowered/unveiled character. Second, while the narrative moves toward the state of reparation and the new state of orders is established, the female empowered characters are buttressed, controlled and suffer from the consequence of their rebellious/empowering desires. Two films directed by Asghar Farhadi, the only Oscar-winner Iranian filmmaker, are selected to be analyzed to find out how they are dealing with the buttressing strategy of Iranian society/cinema; the question is if Farhadi, as a male director in a male-dominated society, succeeds to move beyond the neopatriarchal unconscious of his society to terminate/change the male desire in constructing his filmic representation.

### *About Elly: Narrative*

About Elly narrates the story of a group of middle-class friends who travel to the north of Iran for their three-day vacation by the Caspian Sea. Sepideh (Golshifteh Farahani) arranges the trip and invites her daughter’s kindergarten teacher, Elly (Taraneh Alidoosti), to be with them with the hope of making her match with her recently-divorced friend, Ahmad (Shahab Hosseini) who is visiting Iran for a

short time from Germany. They all have wonderful dreamy vacation till one of the children is found floating in the sea and Elly disappears. The child is resuscitated. However, they are not sure whether Elly has drowned while saving the child or she has decided to go back to Tehran. For, she was insisting the night before to go back to Tehran and Sepideh didn't let her go. The police launch investigation and the group starts to blame each other for their misbehavior in regard to Elly. However, soon it turns out that Sepideh and Elly were telling lie and hiding certain truth; Elly was engaged to an aggressive man and planning to break up with him. Therefore, Sepideh asked her to come on this trip and meet with Ahmad. Elly, as an engaged woman, initially refused the invitation but agreed to go eventually as Sepideh insisted. Alireza (Saber Abar), Elly's husband, arrives from Tehran and confronts Ahmad. Finally, he asks whether Elly mentioned about her engagement and refused Sepideh's invitation to go on holiday. Sepideh under the pressure from the rest of the group, who feel threatend by Alireza, lies about Elly and confirms that Elly accepted her invitation without mentioning the truth. Elly's dead body was found and recognized by Alireza.

### *A Separation: Narrative*

*A Separation* tells the story of Nader (Peyman Moaadi) and Simin (Leila Hatami), a couple on the verge of divorce. Simin, an English language teacher, endeavors to immigrate abroad in spite of her husband's disagreement. For, Nader's elderly father suffers from Alzheimer disease. When Simin's divorce justification was rejected in the court, she leaves her husband and 11-year-old daughter, Termeh (Sarina Farhadi) and goes back to her parents.

Razieh (Sareh Bayat), an extremely religious woman, is hired by Nader to take care of his father. However, as the elderly man is incontinent, the job gets overwhelming for pregnant Razieh, and she prefers to substitute her husband, who was unaware of her work previously. Hodjat (Shahab Hosseini), the indebted unemployed husband, is arrested for his debt and therefore, Razieh has to go back to work again. That day, when Nader and his daughter arrive home they find the grandfather alone, unconscious on the floor with his arm tied to the bed. Nader accuses Razieh of neglecting his father. Nader shoves Razieh out of the apartment. That night Razieh suffers a miscarriage. Hodjat accuses Nader of being responsible for Razieh's miscarriage. Nader claims that he wasn't aware of Razieh's pregnancy duo to her all-covering attire of chador. In order to resolve the conflict, Simin makes an informal financial deal with Hodjat and Razieh. Finally, Nader asks Razieh to swear on the Qur'an that he was responsible for her miscarriage. Despite her husband's insistence, Razieh doesn't take an oath because she was not sure about the reason. For, while looking for Nader's father in the street she had a car accident the day before the incident. In the last scene, Nader and Simin are dressed in black as a sign of mourning for the death of the

father, waiting in the hallway of the court for their daughter, Termeh, to decide with whom she is going to stay after divorce.

### ***Let's Buttress the Empowered Threat!***

The main female characters of the two analyzed films are depicted as the source of disequilibrium. In *A Separation*, the main female character appears as a rebellion against her positioning as marginal and tries to find her 'subjectivity' and pursue her own desire. Simin is the one who insist on immigration and ask for divorce. All the problematic situations commence after she left the house. Her demands and desire lead into catastrophe. Also Razieh starts the job without informing her bad-tempered husband and hides the incident of her car accident. Despite the fact that she is a deeply religious woman from a lower-class in the society, she subjectively tries to alter the condition of her family. However, in a similar way, her endeavor leads into destruction and catastrophe.

In *About Elly*, although being depicted as a shy and quiet girl, Elly breaks through confines of her marital life and pursues her desires by employing a false identity. At the beginning, a dreamy world of Elly's subjectivity is emphasized through the choice of dreamy location. As a group of friends leave the city, they get far from materiality of urban area. Through this choice of setting, the film provides an apt metaphorical setting for Eli's dreamy subjectivity. Extreme long shots represent liberation. Unreality of the space fosters their departure from social obligations. However, still the social structures keep threatening her. The disturbance of this equilibrium starts by disappearance of Elly and they had to return to the crowded urban area as if they are summoned back from an unreal dream-like world.

In contrast to Elly who is represented as a quiet and shy girl, Sepideh is outspoken, rebellious wife who is trying to make herself heard. Her speech functions against the comfort of her husband and breaks the equilibrium of her marital life. Sepideh and Elly are both rebellious although employing different weapons; silence for Elly and talk for Sepideh function as disguise and weapon.

According to the above-mentioned discussion, Farhadi's female characters are portrayed as empowered/unveiled women. In this regard, he breaks the confines of patriarchal discourse. How these empowered characters being treated within the diegetic world of the film is an important dimension in regard to buttressing strategy. As we discussed, according to buttressing strategy, while the narrative moves toward the state of reparation and the new state of orders is established, the female empowered characters are buttressed, controlled and suffer from the consequence of their rebellious/empowering desires. Although none of the analyzed films ends with reassuring closure, the female character still pay off for their actions.

Despite the fact that Simin doesn't file her divorce to actually separate from her husband but with the hope of convincing him to immigrate, she is finally dragged

into an irresolvable problem with her family. In *A Separation* Simin launches her rebellion with the hope of reconciliation and peace. However, she is destined to be destroyed and lose her family and her desires all together. In the same way, Razieh is the one to blame for the challenges that both family went through as she hides the truth. All her efforts to alter the financial condition of her family are doomed to failure.

Elly, who can only pursue her desire through utilizing mistaken identity, is punished at the end; she not only lost her existence but also her honesty and reputation. When Elli disappears, the male-dominated investigation launches. Men take leading position as problem-solvers in a masculine aggressive and manipulative way. Attempting to resolve problem, they create their own truth and forcefully dragged Sepideh to complicit with their traditional notion of narrative to provide ending and warp the story up. Not surprisingly, Sepideh doesn't leave their phalocentric discourse and at the end she complies with their rules of the game.

## Conclusion

Asghar Farhadi's films have some subversive aspects; first, in destruction of ideal sentimental image of women; second, in destruction of male protagonist; and third, in deconstruction of ideal nuclear family. Farhadi's portrayal of patriarchy is pervasive insomuch that he succeed to address the complex network of dominative mechanisms of patriarchy in the economic, and political levels and in this sense, patriarchy is not a general shapeless concepts in his film.

Farhadi's confrontation with the patriarchal paradigm, however, does not transgress the very root of it subversively and fails to dislodge it transgressively due to his ambivalent narrative. There is no transgressive suggestion in his cinema and all transgressive actions of female characters are doomed to failure. Therefore, his narratives suggest impossibility in breaking through the hard situations. The desire of Farhadi to move beyond patriarchy fails to reach its object of desire and reproduces its very core of criticism within in accordance to symbolic culture and the sustainable neopatriarchal unconscious of Iranian society/cinema.

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