



Woman in Culture and Arts

Feminist Components in Award-Winning Films by Three Generations of Iranian Female Filmmakers at International Film Festivals

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 13 November 2024 Received in revised form: 2 September 2025 Accepted: 4 April 2026 Published online: 1 July 2026</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Iranian Women's Cinema, Feminist Components, Waves of Feminism.</i></p>	<p>Introduction Views on gender have been transformed by theoretical advancements in the field of women's studies. However, such developments are solely in theory as, in practice, statistics reveal women have not yet been able to achieve equal opportunities and resources anywhere in the world, particularly in developing countries. Thus, it is imperative to comprehend the challenges faced by women and the factors that impede their ability to access potential opportunities and resources in society. Concerning this, art can help in learning about women's issues in the society as a source of information on social matters, in the field of women's studies. In comparison to other forms of art, cinema offers a plethora of expressive instruments. Narrative is one of such tools that provides maximum possibility to learn about societal issues. Narrative is utilized in women's cinema to convey the filmmaker's personal experiences as a woman. Therefore, this research aims to find factors behind gender discrimination in Iran's society by analyzing narratives in women's movies. The theoretical foundations of feminism are the basis for the content analysis of women's cinematic narratives. Feminism's components are concepts that aim to eradicate gender discrimination. Connecting themes portrayed in women's cinema to components of feminism can classify these themes and allow for a more precise analysis.</p> <p>Methodology In this qualitative study, the comparative content analysis method and the feminist approach are used. The samples for the case study are deliberately chosen from the exceptional films of Iranian female filmmakers, who have received international prizes. These filmmakers, who have primarily focused on women's issues in their works, include Rakhshan Banietemad, Tahmineh Milani, and Ida Panahandeh. In order to analytically extract the multiple feminist themes from the content of the main narratives and sub-narratives of each film, only films that included sub-narratives in addition to the main narrative were chosen. The selected movies are <i>The Blue-Veiled</i> and <i>The May Lady</i> by Banietemad, <i>The Fifth Reaction</i> and <i>The Unwanted Woman</i> by Milani, and <i>Nahid</i> and <i>Titi</i> by Panahandeh. In the content analysis of the chosen movies, the themes are divided into two categories: main themes and implicit themes. The implicit themes are derived from sub-narratives, whereas the main themes are derived from the primary narrative. To identify the feminist themes of each film, the themes are contrasted to the components of feminism. This comparison can organize the films' dispersed themes, as the components of feminism are specific statements. After identifying the feminist themes in each film, the frequency of these themes across all the movies is calculated to determine which ones were used the most or least frequently.</p> <p>Results At this stage, the movie narratives are analyzed to identify the feminist themes intended by the filmmakers. In <i>The Blue-Veiled</i>, the main feminist theme is a critique of gender stereotypes, with the implicit themes also focusing on challenging these stereotypes. In <i>The May Lady</i>, the primary theme critiques gender stereotypes, while the implicit themes address patriarchy and social inequality. The <i>Fifth Reaction</i>'s primary theme is a critique of patriarchy, with implicit themes that critique the low economic value of women's labor, social inequalities, and gender stereotypes. The primary theme of <i>The Unwanted Woman</i> is a critique of social inequalities, while the implicit themes motivate women to raise awareness,</p>

critique patriarchy, and gender stereotypes. In *Nahid*, the theme derived from the primary narrative, critiques social inequalities, while the sub-narrative focuses on challenging patriarchy. While the primary narrative in *Titi* critiques patriarchy, the sub-narrative emphasizes the resolution of social inequalities. After identifying the feminist themes in the movies, their frequency is calculated.

Conclusion

The women filmmakers, through their unique visual language and narrative style, delve into the complex and multifaceted issues women face in life. Based on the relative frequency of feminist components in the main narrative and subplots of films by Iranian female filmmakers over the past three decades, the challenges and issues faced by women in Iranian society can be prioritized as follows: the harms caused by gender stereotypes, the inequality between the rights of women and men in society, and the prevailing patriarchal and paternalistic spirit in both the public and private spheres of society. The status of women is stagnated by the fact that these three issues are indistinguishable. Additionally, the lesser economic value of women's work in comparison to that of men and the lack of awareness of women's rights are additional factors that perpetuate the status of women as the second sex. In a forward-thinking process, the components of the first and second waves of feminism could be relatively achieved. However, in Iranian women's cinema, a reverse process has resulted in a regression to the ideas of the first wave of feminism. This suggests that women in Iranian society are still grappling with the challenges that the first feminist movements addressed. The results of this research show that the feminist concerns of female filmmakers in Iran are aligned with the first and second waves of feminism. However, the components of the third wave of feminism have not been given attention. The third wave of feminism is theorized to be achieved when the ideas of the first and second waves are somewhat fulfilled in society. This research demonstrates that women and female filmmakers in Iranian society are still striving to realize the ideas of the first and second waves of feminism.

Conflict of Interest

This research has not been published in any publications within or outside the country. It is the outcome of the authors' diligent efforts, all of whom are aware of its publication and have provided their assent. This research has been conducted in accordance with ethical standards and regulations, and it is devoid of plagiarism and violations. The writer is responsible for the potential conflicts of interest report and research sponsors, and they will be held accountable for all of the aforementioned matters.

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