



Woman in Culture and Arts

A Critical Reading of Women's Social Role in Iranian TV Series during the 80s Based on Sturat Hall's Representation Theory (Case Stusy: The TV Series Ra'na)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article Article history: Received: Received in revised form: Accepted: Published online: Keywords: <i>Iranian television series Ra'na, Post-revolutionary Iran (1980s), Stuart Hall, Theory of representation, Women's social roles.</i>	Introduction The 1980s are a critical juncture in the history of contemporary Iran, as they are characterized by the exhaustive national mobilization imposed by the eight-year war with Iraq and the consolidation of the newly developed revolutionary political order. The state was in a pressing need to establish new semantic and normative frameworks during this decade in order to legitimize itself, differentiate its identity from the Pahlavi past, and influence social behavior. The mode of women's presence in society was one of the most contentious normative domains. The revolutionary ideology envisioned women as subjects who were required to be simultaneously compatible with Islamic principles and capable of fulfilling a variety of social functions, including active participation in revolutionary struggles and motherhood. In this context, the portrayal of women in state-controlled media can be interpreted as a deliberate ideological endeavor that is designed to establish the standard woman. Television serials are in a unique position to embed ideological meanings within emotionally resonant stories because of their wide audience and narrative form. Consequently, the primary research question is: What are the implications of the social role of women as it is depicted in the television program Rana, which was transmitted during this decade, and how does this representation relate to the prevailing discourses of the era? The theoretical framework is Stuart Hall's constructionist approach to representation, which asserts that meaning is generated through language and cultural practices within specific historical contexts. Methodology Two narratives are included in Hall's approach: the semiotic, which concentrates on the production of meaning through sign systems, and the discursive, which investigates meaning within regimes of knowledge and power. Through a four-stage methodology, the current investigation implements both. Initially, the textual context of the serial—including dialogues, characterizations, plotlines, and visual symbols—was analyzed as an encoded cultural product. The analysis identified prevalent codes, such as binary oppositions and visual motifs, that structured the narrative's ideological assumptions, in accordance with Hall's encoding/decoding model. Second, Representation Analysis: This stage investigated the representation and interconnection of critical concepts, including woman, man, family, love, struggle, tradition, revolution, truth, and destiny. The analysis concentrated on the manner in which these representations establish and normalize a specific social "reality" of the 1980s in relation to women's roles, with a particular emphasis on the characteristics and agency that are assigned to female characters. Third, Preferred/Hegemonic Reading Analysis: This stage examined the manner in which textual structures direct the audience toward a dominant reading that is consistent with the dominant discourse. The analysis, which drew on Hall's concept of preferred reading, analyzed the narrative mechanisms of reward and punishment. Characters who embody patience and sacrifice are ultimately rewarded, while those who exhibit self-interest are morally condemned. This guidance leads the audience to accept the serial's ideological

propositions as natural.

Fourth, Ideological-Historical Contextual Analysis: Lastly, the extracted representations were positioned within the broader ideological context of the 1980s, with a particular emphasis on the foundational views of Ayatollah Khomeini. This analysis elucidates the serial's role as a cultural instrument that facilitated the stabilization of state-sanctioned gender norms.

Findings

The investigation produced numerous noteworthy discoveries. The serial presents its female characters through strict binary oppositions: truth versus falsehood, patience versus impatience, sacrifice versus self-interest, and heart/love versus prudential reason. Rana, the protagonist, is depicted as a bereaved widow whose son has disappeared. She is depicted as a woman who defied convention by selecting her spouse out of genuine love rather than rational calculation, and who endured immense suffering without remorse. Rana is depicted as a character who possesses steadfastness, dignity, and active patience throughout the serial. Despite the fact that she has lost her spouse, raised her children alone, and is currently facing the loss of her son, her patience is portrayed as productive endurance.

Nevertheless, the results indicate that, despite the fact that Rana and her daughter Tahmineh are formally classified as "norm-breakers," the boundaries of this norm-breaking are rigorously established by the serial's truth-centered discourse. Particularly significant is the fact that this truth is exclusively derived from a masculine source, as exemplified by the male characters Javad, Sohrab, and Rasul. Women are depicted as morally obligated to participate in and advocate for this truth; however, they are never granted the power to establish or develop it. They are not its definers; rather, they serve as soldiers in the conflict between right and wrong. Tahmineh, who was initially a cynical intellectual, progressively abandons cold rationality in favor of truth-seeking, which ultimately results in spiritual peace. Maryam, a passive yet loyal figure, embodies quiet female piety, whereas other women, such as Rana's sisters, are portrayed as a homogeneous, morally dubious mass. In order to establish this gendered ideological message, the strategic deployment of key concepts such as "destiny," "blood/lineage," and "heart/love" is employed. The audience is effectively directed toward the hegemonic reading by the reward/punishment system, which rewards patience and sacrifice while punishing self-interest. The representations also heavily emphasize maternal roles and Zainab-like patience, which are characterized by active endurance and the willing sacrifice of loved ones. This is a direct reflection of the official discourse of the Islamic Republic, which defined the normative woman as a figure who actively supports the front, cares for the wounded, and endures loss with steadfast faith.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the critical analysis of Rana, which is based on Hall's theory, demonstrates that the serial is a potent ideological tool for defining and naturalizing the "normative woman" in complete alignment with the dominant political discourse of the 1980s. Despite the fact that the serial portrays its exemplary women as dynamic and courageous enough to challenge certain antiquated traditions, this apparent dynamism is ultimately subsumed under a higher, predefined, and masculine-defined truth. Women are granted the opportunity to select between truth and falsehood; however, they are never permitted to inquire about or engage in the formulation of that truth. The patriarchal-theological order has established boundaries within which their agency is rigorously exercised, resulting in a delegated and circumscribed role. Consequently, Rana ultimately perpetuates and solidifies the hierarchical gender relations that serve as the foundation of the Islamic state's hegemonic ideology, despite its apparent progressive emphasis on women's social engagement. The representation is not merely a reflection of social reality; it is an active constitutive force in constructing that reality. It acknowledges the critical role of women while subtly circumscribing it within a masculine-dominated universe, thereby reinforcing state-sanctioned social control.