SMPP Studia Migracyjne Przegląd Polonijny

Migration Studies – Review of Polish Diaspora
nr 3 (177)/2020, http://www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Migracyjne/
DOI: 10.4467/25444972SMPP.20.031.12595

Transnational Dimensions of Iranian Cinema: "accented films" by Mohsen Makhmalbaf

ELŻBIETA WIĄCEK[1]
ORCID: 0000-0003-3148-4549
Institute of Intercultural Studies
Jagiellonian University

Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf left Iran in 2005 shortly after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The artist underwent a multiphase evolution away from the supporter of Islamic regime in the early 1980s to cosmopolitan internationally acclaimed *auteur*. Finally, he became not only a dissident filmmaker but also a political dissident in the aftermath of 2009 presidential election. As exile wears on, Makhmalbaf became postnational filmmaker, making a variety of "accented films". Not all the consequences of internationalization are positive – to be successful in transnational environment he has to face much larger competition and the capitalist market. Having in mind the categories of displaced Iranian directors distinguished by Hamid Naficy – exilic, diasporic, émigré, ethnic, cosmopolitan – I would like to find out which one of them applies to Mohsen Makhmalbaf's life and work. I also will focus on the following questions: To what extent the censorship of Makhmalbaf's artistic activity was a reason for his migration? how are migratory experiences expressed in his movies? What features of "the accented cinema" his movies are manifesting? I would argue that the experience of migration and the transnationality was the characteristic feature of Makhmalbaf's his work long before leaving the home country. It can be said that regardless this stylistic diversity, all of Makhmalbaf's movies made abroad can be described as the example of "accented cinema" which comprises different types of cinema made by exilic and diasporic filmmakers who live and work in countries other than their country of origin.

Key words: Iranian cinema, Islam, censorship, migration, cosmopolitan, transnational, Accented Cinema.

Iranian immigration literature identifies two major categories of Iranians – the exiles and immigrants. How are these migratory and exile experiences expressed in arts? To answer this question, I will focus on creative output of Mohsen Makhmalbaf – one

[1] Contact: elzbieta.wiacek@uj.edu.pl

the major figures in Iranian film after the Islamic revolution in 1979. His films have been widely presented, praised and awarded on international stage for the past 30 years. He has received more than 50 international awards from some of the most prestigious film festivals across the world[2]. His film *Kandahar* (*Safar-e Ghandehar* 2001) has been chosen as one of the top 100 best movies in the history of cinema by "Time" magazine. As a writer-director Makhmalbaf has also published more than 30 books, many of which have been translated and published in many languages. In his movies, he has explored a relationship between an individual and a larger social and political environment. The filmmaker's break from the ruling Islamist government Republic's government and ideology was surprising, for he had been an ardent early supporter of the Islamic revolution. Makhmalbaf started his film career in the field of Islamic propaganda and his name was almost synonymous with the rise of postrevolutionary Iranian cinema. However, despite his ideological beginnings, the artist quickly became controversial and his movies became censored or banned. Gradually, Makhmalbaf moved from a mere criticism to actively opposing the regime. In 2005, shortly after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, he and his family left the country and he became an outspoken advocate for change of the regime. Living abroad, Makhmalbaf has kept making movies.

According to Hamid Naficy, a scholar of cultural studies of diaspora, exile, and Middle Eastern Cinema, Iranian films made abroad are part of a new global "accented cinema" created by displaced filmmakers. Despite their many differences, such filmmakers' work shares certain features, which constitute their films' "accent" (Naficy 2001). What Naficy means by the term "accented cinema"? If the dominant cinema in each country and the dominant world cinema, that of Hollywood, are considered universal and without an "accent", then the films produced by displaced directors are considered "accented". The "accent" refers not to the speech of the diegetic characters but to the narrative and stylistic attributes of such films and to their alternative collective modes of production. Writing about the post-revolutionary Iranians filmmakers, Naficy differentiates five types of displaced Iranians to account for the complexity and nuances of their displacement and the variety of the accented films they produce. He distinguishes the following categories of directors: exilic[3], diasporic, émigré, ethnic, cosmopolitan (Naficy 2012: 393). As a result, Iranian accented films can be divided into five overlapping types. The divisions spring from modalities of displacement, placement, and production.

Referring to the described types of accented films I will focus on the following questions:

---

[2] http://www.makhmalbaf.com/?q=mohsen, [Accessed:2.11.2019]

[3] The term exile here refers principally to external exiles: Iranians who voluntarily or involuntarily left their country of origin but who maintained an ambivalent relationship with both their original and adopted homes.

- To what extent the censorship of Makhmalbaf's artistic activity was a reason for his migration?
- Are Makhmalbaf's personal experiences of migration visible in his cienamatographic production? If so, how are these migratory experiences expressed in his movies?
- How does his migration experience reconfigure the professional trajectories of the artist? What features of "the accented cinema" are manifested in his movies?
- Are Makhmalbaf's personal experiences of migration translated into his films?
- Are accented films by Makhmalbaf still the part of the Iranian "national cinema" or do they belong to the phenomena of "transnational cinema"?

I would argue that the experience of migration and the transnationality of Makhmalbaf's work has been the characteristic feature of his work long before he left the home country. First, he was dealing with immigrant life in his movies, then he became immigrant by himself.

First phase: Makhmalbaf as a proponent of the Islamization of the film industry

It is paramount to know Makhmalbaf's biography in order to understand the beginning of his artistic activity. He was born in Tehran in 1957 and grew up in a poor family. As early as the age of eight, Mohsen began to support his single mother by taking any job he could find[4]. When Makhmalbaf was seventeen years old, and a member of an Islamist guerrilla group – Balal-e Habashi[5], he had attacked a policeman guarding a bank. He tried to take his pistol as an expression of the struggle against the Pahlavi regime. The attempt was not successful: Makhmalbaf stabbed the policeman but he was also injured and arrested. Whilst in prison, he was tortured and given a death penalty. However, since he was under the age of 18, his death penalty was changed to 5 years imprisonment. During this time he read around two thousands books and started to write short stories by himself. He was released shortly after the Islamic revolution in 1979 (Naficy 2012: 216). Years later the artist admitted:

> "Having experienced this hardship myself is one of the reasons why throughout my work as a writer and filmmaker, I remember and identify with the people who are suffering as a result of poverty and dictatorship" (Makhmalbaf 2014).

The Islamic Republic has attempted to define all aspect of life in Iran according to the dictates of Islam, including film industry. Because of their roots in secular cinema,

[4] She was divorced before Mohsen was born.

[5] The group was named in honor of the Prophet Mohammad's first muezzin.

the Islamic regime initially viewed the veteran directors with suspicion. Islamic Art and Thought Center at the Islamic Propaganda Organization and a major producer of Iranian war movies defined them by the focus on war's spiritual dimensions. Iranian filmmakers were urged to focus on Iranian – Islamic spirituality, martyrdom and self-sacrifice instead of on military violence, and exciting action typical for Western war films. The Center was looking for religiously committed people, even the amateurs in the field of filmmaking, who had serious intentions to make such films (Naficy 2012: 29).The young and religious Makhmalbaf who publicly announced his adherence to official Islamic values was a perfect candidate to this job, despite the fact that he didn't even have the high school diploma and had no experience in film industry.

During his first phase of "amateur Islamicate filmmaking," Makhmalbaf made several anti-communist movies: *Nasuh's Repentance* (*Towbeh- ye Nasuh*, 1983), *Two Feeble Eyes* (*Do Cheshm-e Bisu*, 1984), and *Boycott* (*Boikot*, 1985). The first movie was made in less than a month, transforming prerevolutionary criminals and rapists into Islamic and nationalist heroes fighting the Iraqis (Dabashi 2001:101). His critics among Iranian exiles argued that these movies of his Islamist phase were so ideologically complicit with the regime that they were required viewing in Iranian prisons to indoctrinate political prisoners (Naficy 2012: 39)[6]. The dissident exile filmmaker Bassir Nassibi, living in Germany at the time, argued that Makhmalbaf's "collaboration" with the Islamist regime was far worse than the collaboration of the infamous filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl with the Nazi regime (Nassibi 2003). Indeed, in an infamous interview in a 1987 issue of "Sorush" magazine (no. 388) Makhmalbaf said: *I would not exchange sweeping the floor of the weakest Muslim director or actor with collaborating with the most important non-Muslim artist* (Naficy 2012: 39).

In this first phase, Makhmalbaf was the best practitioner and theoretician of the Islamicate[7] cinema manifesting deep engagement with the Islamist regime and with Islamicate values.

Second phase: from an advocate of the regime to a socially conscious critical filmmaker

How did Makhmalbaf evolve from faith-based filmmaking into critical filmmaking? The break with Islamist ideology took place with his war movie *Marriage of the Blessed* (*Arusi- ye Khuban*,1988), released in the year that the war with Iraq ended. Movie shows how war trauma is haunting the survivors' soldiers lives, disrupting their thoughts and dreams. The main character, war veteran and a professional photog-

[6] In addition, Makhmalbaf in his first phase was a fierce opponent of prerevolutionary new-wave secular filmmakers, such as Baizai and Kimiai, whom he had labeled as taquti (idolatrous).

[7] Associated with regions in which Muslims are culturally dominant, but not specifically with the religion of Islam.

rapher – Haji (Mahmud Bigham), who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, is released from hospital to the family of his fiancée (Roya Nonahali) for recuperation. Flashbacks of the scenes he has witnessed in the war and television images of famine in Africa haunt him. As Haji is a professional photographer, he is hired as a photojournalist for a newspaper. Magazine refuses to print the grim scenes of poverty, prostitution, and drug abuse that he and his fiancée have documented in their nightly wanderings in the streets of Tehran. On the wedding night, Haji relapses and he is taken back to hospital. There are no glories awaiting the "living martyrs" in this film. In Naficy's opinion, *Marriage of the Blessed* was not so much an antiwar movie as one that finds much wrong with the society that had emerged under the Islamic Republic: "This was the public declaration of the director's break with the regime and with the Islamic Propaganda Office (…) and the beginning of his transformation from an advocate to a critic of the regime" (Naficy 2012: 40).

Iran's war with Iraq (1980–1988) created a massive internal migration of populations, as well as cross-border traffic and migration into neighboring countries of ethnic Kurds, Arabs, and others. Likewise, the Afghans' war against Soviet occupation (1979–1989) displaced more than 6 million of Afghans (one third of the country's pre-war population) who fled to Pakistan and Iran, producing the largest refugee population since 1981 (Goodson 2001:5).

As the Islamic Republic attempted to impose a false image of homogenous Shiite Iranian political nation, at the same time some cultural producers tried to revive a multicultural, and multiethnic nation patterned after the ancient transnational Persian Empire. Makhmalbaf became one of them. *The Cyclist* (*Bysikelran*, 1988), written and directed by him, was one of the earliest films dealing with the presence of Afghan refugees living on the margins of Iranian cities. It is also his first film depicting migratory experience. It tells the story of Nasim, a poor Afghan refugee in Iran, who works as a well-digger. He is in desperate need to pay for the care of his gravely ill wife who is staying in a local hospital. The doctors are asking for more money in order to continue treatment, while Nasim is unable to raise enough funds from his work. He attempts unsuccessfully other ways to get some money, even faking a suicide. Eventually, Nasim attracts the attention of circus' owner who recognizes him as the once Afghan champion of a three-day day bicycle marathon. The man proposes Nasim performing a challenging show: a seven-day marathon. He agrees, desperate to pay for his wife's hospitalization. Afghani cyclist gives a demonstration in the town's square where he rides bicycle without stopping for seven days and seven nights. That's why the movie is often described as a "sport-drama". The film centers on a bicycling marathon, against the backdrop of Afghani involvement in smuggling (the film was partially shot inside Pakistan). Film-director highlights the brutality of the event: Nasim is forced to continue through his exhaustion by means of washing his face with cold water and keeping his eyes open with matchsticks. In the end, even after seven days, Nasim continues to pedal endlessly, too fatigued to hear his son's

and the crowd's pleas to get off his bicycle. Considering this scene it is possible to perceive *The Cyclist* as an allegory which parallels the exploitation that Afghan refugees suffer from in Iran and from which they are unable to escape (Adelkhah, Olszewska 2007: 138). Not only Nasim's behavior but also the very way the last scene is made gives the viewers holistic perspective of the migration and its politics in Iran. At the very end, the rotating camera focused on Nasim is visible. There is also a second camera, recording the first camera record Nasim's efforts as the reporters record Nasim's achievement for television. The rotating shot achieves two purposes. It acts as both a humanising tool (when Nasim becomes an individual) and a dehumanising instrument (where the camera objectifies Nasim). The contesting cameras reflect the condition of the Afghan migrant in Iran and provides self-reflexivity.

In the 1980s nearly 90 percent of the 3 million refugees in Iran were Afghan (Naficy 2012: 234). The next reason for migration from Afghanistan was Taliban control over the region, which started in 1996. They were granted refugee status of religious migrants (*mojaher*), not political refugees. This status allowed them theoretically to stay, work, and benefit from social services in Iran, much like permanent residents. However, they were not treated equally, partly because of their illiteracy, partly because what was to be a temporary stay became an extended or even permanent, and partly because Iran was forced to shoulder the burden of taking care of the displaced population alone. The Afghan refugees congregated in shanty towns on the margins of cities. Their willingness to work cheaply doing menial jobs created massive social problems, wage deflation, and resentments among Iranians, which made the refugees worthy subjects for socially conscious filmmakers.

The Cyclist portraying human despair and exploitation, and resilience marked Makhmalbaf entry into his "socially concerned cinema,"[8] or as he called it, the "anti-capitalist cinema" (quoted in Dabashi 2001:186). In the film, there are multiple scenes of trucks coming to take unemployed Afghan workers outside the city for digging trenches and wells which can be used for irrigation purposes. Iranians were often taking advantage of the migrants, and they are contributing to the country's economy, but the same time they are constantly stigmatized. Makhmalbaf intended to unveil this contradiction in the film. As Nasim pedals, the camera breaks away from the narrative and repeatedly focuses on the Iranians gathered to see this incredible effort. Among them are political agitators, street vendors providing refreshments and fortune tellers offering astrological predictions. They all benefit from Nasim's show which gives them the opportunity to gain political support or to make money.

In late 1990s, some of Iranian art-house filmmakers turned their cameras either inward to make "refugee films" and "ethnic films" or outward to make "transnational films" or "extraterritorial films." In making the latter they focused on neighboring

[8] Social concern can be also found in the less known movie by Makhmalbaf: *The Peddler* (*Dastforush*, 1986).

Muslim countries with Persian cultural and linguistic influences and historical exchanges, where they either filmed Iranians or made films about people in those countries (Naficy 2012: 238). Again, Mohsen Makhmalbaf was a leading figure, making several films in neighboring countries and in different languages: *A Time to Love* (*Nobat- e Asheqi*, 1990), a story about a love triangle, was filmed entirely in Turkey and in Turkish; *Silence* (*Sokut*, 1998) was filmed in Tajikistan, in Persian and Tajik; and *Kandahar* (2001) was shot in Afghanistan, in Persian, English, Pashtu and even… Polish[9]. In the first two movies, the social contexts of these countries were at the service of the narrative, while in *Kandahar*, the reverse was generally the case. The film is based on a partly true, partly fictionalized story of Afghan-Canadian Nelofer Pazira – a successful journalist, director and actress[10]. She grew up in Kabul, Afghanistan, where she lived through ten years of Soviet occupation before escaping with her family to Pakistan. From there, they immigrated to New Brunswick, Canada, in 1990. In 1996, Nelofer attempted to return to Afghanistan (still under Taliban rule) to find a lifelong girl friend who was planning to commit suicide. She did not find her, but the story of her trip inspired Makhmalbaf.

In *Kandahar* Afghan expatriate, Nafas (Nelofer Pazira playing herself), who comes from Canada and secretly goes to Kandahar[11] to search for her roots and to prevent her sister from going through with her planned suicide. *Kandahar* was filmed mostly in Iran, including scenes shot at the Niatak refugee camp but also secretly in Afghanistan itself (Falsetto, Béar 2008: 227). Niatak is situated in Iran's southeastern Sistan and Baluchest, near the Iranian city of Zahedan and close to the Afghan border. In 2001 the camp was described as holding 5,000 refugees[12]. Most people played themselves.

The protagonist Nafas is witnessing the atrocities and ravages of the wars against the Soviet Union and the Taliban. The movie shows the hardships women face; and even more so, how years of war have destroyed Afghan society. While doing so, however, the film aestheticizes Afghanistan in visually stunning and exotic fashion, particularly the women, who wear confining but colorful burkas. Particularly dramatic are scenes showing artificial limbs attached to parachutes being dropped from the sky (from a plane) and disabled men and boys running and limping toward them. Along her journey, Nafas meets an English-speaking village doctor named Tabib Sahid who

---

[9] There is a conversation between two women from Polish Red Cross.

[10] Nelofer holds a degree in Journalism and English Literature from Carleton University (Ottawa), and a master's degree in Anthropology/Sociology and Religion from Concordia University (Montreal). She has also received an honorary doctorate of law from Carleton. Since 2001 she has directed, produced or acted in five films, including award-winning *Return to Kandahar* (2003). Founder of an Afghan women's charity and past-president of PEN Canada, Nelofer contributes to CBC television and radio and writes for Canadian and British media. Her memoir *A Bed of Red Flowers* won the Drainie-Taylor Biography Prize.

[11] The original title of the movie is *Safar-e Ghandehar*, which means "Journey to Kandahar".

[12] "Z Magazine" (2001) volume 14, Institute for Social and Cultural Communications, the University of Michigan, p. 33.

turns out to be an exiled American political activist. An American Dawud Salahuddin[13] who converted to Islam in 1960s (credited in the film as Hassan Tantai) plays here himself. In 1980, after assassinating Ali Akbar Tabatabai, an Iranian diplomat and press attaché to Iran's embassy in Washington, who was an outspoken critic of the Islamic Republic of Iran[14], Salahuddin had fled to the Iran. He has lived there most of the time with short periods spent in other Muslim countries (Trento 2006: 183). Tabib's conversation with Nafas is a fascinating meeting of two people who – for different reasons – migrated in the opposite directions: she escaped from the Middle East to North America, he – vise versa. Talking to the woman Tabib reveals that he has no formal medical training and wears a fake beard. He confides with her that his commitment to Islamic values was genuine but he has become disillusioned with the turn the country has taken under the Taliban. Makhmalbaf stated that Salahuddin "is also a victim – a victim of the ideal he believed in. His humanity, when he opened fire against his ideological enemy, was martyred by his idealism" (Makhmalbaf 2002).

Kandahar was premiered 2001 at Cannes Film Festival the but did not get much attention at first. After 9/11, however, it was widely shown. The huge success of *Kandahar* in the United States around the time of the US military campaign (after the attack on World Trade Centre) on Afghanistan points up the newsworthiness of such films. Only days before the US campaign, in a speech after receiving UNESCO Federico Fellini Prize for making *Kandahar* Makhmalbaf publicly stated:

> "I wish this award were bread that could be distributed among the hungry Afghanis. (…) I wish this award were the breeze of freedom casting away the Afghan women's burka" (Dabashi 2008: 188).

Next year, in 2002, due to the Afghan war against the Soviet Union and the subsequent Taliban reign of terror, Afghani refugee population in Iran grew to nearly 3 million. Next film by Makhmalbaf *Afghan Alphabet* (*Alefba-ye Afghan,* 2002) is a moving documentary about children in a refugee camp near the Afghanistan border. Such children formed a large displaced population in Iran (numbering about 700,000), who were not allowed to attend schools due to their illegal status. Film was commissioned by UNICEF to advertise the schooling project for Afghan children in Iran. Film-director tracks the children, who do not attend school, with his digital camera and investigates the reason. He finds some girls who are afraid to come out of her burka despite the fact that they are far from Taliban reach here. The film seeks the lost key that opens the lock to the cultural problems of Afghanistan. After its release, however, *Afghan Alphabet* and its subject became controversial enough for the

[13] Dawud Salahuddin was born David Theodore Belfield. He credited in the film as Hassan Tantai, because he is also known as Hassan Tantai.

[14] He assassinated him at the behest of the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran's intelligence authorities.

Iranian parliament to approve a bill removing the ban and mandating education for Afghani children. This is one of the rare documentaries leading to legislation improving the cause it espoused (Naficy 2012: 234–235). In 2004 female Iranian director, Fariba Amirabadi, made *The Other Women* (*Zanan-e Digar*), which focuses on the lives of Iranian women who marry men from Afghanistan. The film deals with the plight of the children of such mixed marriages, who because of the current Iranian laws could not bear the names of their Afghan fathers on their birth certificates. Without a legal last name they did not exist.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf went further than merely making movies about the problems of Afghans. He published a book, *The Buddha Was Not Demolished in Afghanistan, It Collapsed from Shame*, (Makhmalbaf 2002). In this publication, he examines the perception of the world community towards Afghanistan and he states that Afganistan is usually portrayed as a drug producing country with rough, aggressive and fundamentalist people. Noticing that the statue of Buddha in Bamian spurred the sympathy of the entire world, filmmaker is asking:

> "But why didn't anybody except the UN High Commissioner Ogata express grief over the pending death of one million Afghans as a result of severe famine? Why doesn't anybody speak of the reasons for this mortality? Why is everyone crying aloud over the demolition of the Buddha statue while nothing is heard about preventing the death of hungry Afghans? Are statues more cherished than humans in the modern-day world?" (Makhmalbaf 2002: 4).

Makhmalbaf have traveled throughout Afghanistan and witnessed the reality of the life of that nation. As a filmmaker he produced two feature films on Afghanistan with a 13-year interval (*The Cyclist* and *Kandahar*). In doing so, he have studied about 10,000 pages of various books and documents to collect data for making the two films. Consequently, he knows of a different image of Afghanistan to what is envisaged by the rest of the world. The artist admits that it is a more complicated, different and tragic picture, yet a sharper more positive and pacific image of the people of Afghanistan emerges (Makhmalbaf 2002: 10).

Having seen that the Iranian people's perception of Afghanistan is based on the same image as that of the American and European counterparts, Makhmalbaf also issued open letters to President Khatami protesting the government's forced repatriation of Afghani refugees after twenty years of "hospitality" and advocating literacy classes for refugee children. Finally, the artist helped set up (with approval from Khatami and Iranian and Afghan bureaucracies) a school in Herat, and established the Afghan Children Education Movement in 2001, promoting literacy and culture in Afghanistan (Naficy 2012: 242).

The Familial Mode of Production – the Makhmalbaf Film House

While the film industry in Iran moved toward industrialized production there was an another development in the 1990s: the emergence of a peculiarly Iranian collective production mode, which we can call the "familial or lineage mode of production" (Naficy 2012: 227). Many prominent art-cinema directors hired their family members as cast and crew. This production mode worked for a transitional society in which premodern social structures like kinship and nepotism were still meaningful. The Makhmalbaf Film House (Mfh), established by Makhmalbaf himself in 1996, constitutes a family production house and film school in which the entire family, including filmmaker's children[15], were taught to make their own movies. Considering Iranian schools and universities inadequate, Makhmalbaf conceived a plan to open a formal film school and hold a nationwide entrance examination to accept one hundred students. When the Ministry of Education denied his application, he opened a small home school at his house with eight family members and friends. Students spent time on a specific cinematic, ethnographic, artistic, historical, and musical topic. During this time many film exercises were conducted and several professional films were made and released.

If the Iranian films of the late 1980s accommodated the rules and aesthetics of veiling and modesty, the films since the mid-1990s used them for more direct sociopolitical criticism, which emerged forcefully after Mohammad Khatami's ascendancy to the presidency in 1997 (and his reelection in 2001) widely supported by women. According to Naficy:

> "These movies were part of an emerging cycle of 'social-problem films' in so far as their narratives tended to be didactic, involving conflicts that went beyond individual characters and entailing social commentary. Directors used the imposition of the veil and other oppressive rules of modesty on women as a form of embodied political critique of the Islamic Republic" (Naficy 2012: 127).

From dogmatism to relativism

The Filmmaker's shift to relativism started with an autobiographical film: *A Moment of Innocence* (*Nun va Goldun*, 1995). Makhmalbaf cast the same policeman he had attacked as a teenager to play his own part. In re-creating that act of revolutionary violence, Makhmalbaf looks at the situation from his changed vantage point, which has discarded religious judgment, and dogmatism in the interest of humanism, relativism, and individual responsibility. The spectators see the different viewpoints of the

[15] In this year his younger daughter Hana was eight, his older daughter Samira around seventeen.

policeman, the teenage Makhmalbaf, and the adult, maturing humanist director. The re-created historical incident from his life, ends with an image of bread and a flower, instead of a gun and attack. Instead of violence the artist sees opportunities for reconciliation. This movie shows the transformation from certainty to doubt, from collective identity to individual subjectivity.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance banned *A Moment of Innocence* demanding to cut out some of the scenes. Faced with the perspective that his work can be destroyed, Makhmalbaf decided to sell the house in which he had lived with his family to pay the film's debt, leaving it banned but intact. Makhmalbaf Film House (MfH) remained a film production house and a virtual house that could be found on the Internet at https://www.makhmalbaf.com/. In other words, MfH, originally situated in physical house, **migrated to the Internet and began its nomadic life in the virtual space.** Since then, MfH acted as and is still active as a film school, a film production house, and as a film distributor. The individual portraits of family members on the MfH's website and the genealogical lines connecting them further emphasis the importance of kinship in the Iranian culture. The film scholar Adrian Danks (2002), states:

> "In the annals of film history, it is difficult to find an equivalent combination of artisan-based filmmaking with a family co-operative, that simultaneously produced such striking and individual works" (Danks 2002: 2–3).

As with any collective production, however, the problem of ascribing credit to members surfaced. Some critics discounted the creativity and directorial authorship of the two female family members, Marziyeh and her stepdaughter Samira. That fact that Mohsen Makhmalbaf is a forceful personality is undeniable, however a closer look at their movies shows the individual authorship of Marziyeh and Samira and their differences from Mohsen. Despite his patriarchal leadership, Mfh productions may be characterized as "feminine." They involved three strong female family members and were collective, meaning that they employed less hierarchical (vertical) and more collaborative (horizontal) practices (Naficy 2012: 36)

The relative openness of the Khatami presidency allowed the Makhmalbaf Film House to produce such openly critical movies as Samira Makhmalbaf's (his older daughter) *The Apple* (*Sib*, 1998) and Marziyeh Meshkini's (Makhmalbaf' wife) *The Day I Became a Woman* (*Ruzi keh Zan Shodam*, 2000). Mohsen Makhmalbaf participated in the writing, producing, and editing of those film. *The Apple*, directed by the teenaged Samira Makhmalbaf (eighteen at the time, born in 1977) is based on a news story. The film is about a father who for eleven years kept his two daughters imprisoned in his house (all playing themselves), until neighbors keeping an eye on the house, informed the social work system which intervenes on behalf of the girls. In showing the father's severe restrictions, Samira Makhmalbaf turned the system

of modesty into an oppressive mise-en-scène: an iron gate closes the girls access to the yard all day long while their father is out. The high walls surrounding the house veil it from the neighbors. Beyond re-telling a real-life story, the film's criticism of the oppressive veiling and seclusion of women is clear. The oppressive social rules imposing the numerous limitations – like ban on bicycling in public[16] – on the girls and women are also powerfully depicted in Meshkini's *Day I Became a Woman*. The film, shot on the Persian Gulf coast, charts women's childhood, adulthood, and old age.

Third phase: from the local to transnational

In postrevolutionary cinema, nonverbal intimacy was removed from the screen for a long time – the lack of any physical contact between the sexes desexualized both women and men. Facing these difficulties, Iranians directors chose to stage their movies outside Iran partly to escape the modesty rules. Makhmalbaf filmed his story of a love triangle *A Time to Love* (1990) entirely in Turkey. This strategy made it possible for him to make his transgressive film, which shows the viewpoints of the three participants in the film's three episodes. This is how Makhmalbaf's shift from the local to transnational started. In the Fajr festival of 1991, for the first time since the revolution, scenes dealing directly with "carnal and earthly love" (Kohlari 1991) were screened: *A Time to Love* and another Makhmalbaf's new film: *Nights on the Zayandehrud* (*Shabha- ye Zayandehrud*, 1991) which provides multiple perspectives on similar situations that occur in different time periods. It seems that the director, who had begun as an Islamically committed filmmaker, had finally crossed the "hair's breadth" of the line separating acceptable from unacceptable. *A Time to Love*, was accused of encouraging "forbidden love", and that *Nights on the Zayandehrud* "insulted" the soldiers and the families of war veterans and martyrs (Kohlari 1991). It seems that the director had finally crossed the "hair's breadth" of the line separating acceptable from unacceptable. Even though he defended himself publicly against a campaign launched in opposition to his new movies, which reached as high as the Majles (the Iranian Parliament), both films were shelved after their festival premieres.

The change in the Makhmalbaf's attitude towards post-revolutionary principles can also be found in his *Naser al- Din Shah, the Movie Actor* (*Naser al- Din Shah, Aktor- e Sinema*, 1991). The film openly comments on the link between the power and censorship and its ending presents many clips from Iranian movies showing people joyously smiling, shaking hands, and hugging one another – all actions prohibited in the cinema of the Islamic Republic. This provocative final resulted in it being banned until 1993.

[16] Bicycling in public by women was banned by the Islamic Republic because of its purported potential to sexually arouse men (as well as the women riders).

Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Hello Cinema* (*Salaam Cinema*, 1995) focused on the Iranian people's passion for the cinema, but also shows the theme of migration in an interesting fashion. The director placed an advertisement in a newspaper in order to hire one hundred actors. In response 5000 people showed up, which shows, that cinema is of vital importance in Iran. This enthusiastic group, who will do anything to get into the movies forced Makhmalbaf to aggressively interrogate, and even harass his prospective cast members. One of the thousands of would-be actors, who responded to the director's casting call in is Shaqayeq Jowdat, was an attractive young woman. She tells Makhmalbaf in the film that she has come for the audition hoping to be cast in the director's next movie. She also hopes the next movie will win awards from major foreign film festivals, causing them to invite her to travel abroad, where she will meet up with the boy she loves (he immigrated to USA). Her confession of love for the boy and her desire to leave the country was what apparently made the censors erase some of her dialogue before releasing *Hello Cinema*. Shaqayeq Jowdat audacious plan to use her love for movie acting to meet her beloved, largely materialized year later. For Makhmalbaf did, indeed, cast Jowdat as the star in his next movie, *Gabbeh* (1996), playing the part of Gabbeh who is in love with a faraway young tribal man on horseback. Her name – *Gabbeh* – is also a name of hand-knotted rugs for centuries made by women in nomadic tribes[17]. These type of rug serves the weavers both as artistic expression and as a record of their lives. *Gabbeh* is a colorful, romantic movie about the lives of nomadic Qashqai tribe and also about beauty, nature, love and art. Mohsen Makhmalbaf traveled to the remote steppes of southeastern Iran to capture how their migratory existence is shaped by the rhythms of nature and their unique culture. Members of the tribe instinctively express joys and sorrows of life through song and weavings. The film marks a transition in Makhmalbaf's artistic development. In this movie, we can see an emergence of poetic and esoteric sensibility. In this movie, the filmmaker transformed his lifelong search for God into a quest for self-knowledge. He approaches the divine through a process of artistic creation that is derived from the essence of God, because he is the Creator.

As Jowdat was hoping, the film *Gabbeh* did, indeed, win international acclaim and awards. It became one of the first Iranian films widely distributed abroad. The movie was released by the European distributor MK2 in 23 cities in France and Switzerland in 1996. It was the first time that a non-French and non-American film received such a wide screening[18]. Despite the success that *Gabbeh* achieved internationally it was initially banned from Iranian screens because of being "subversive".

The next step towards transnational cinema the filmmaker made with his beautiful and poetic movie *Silence* (1998) – set in Tajikistan and internationally co-produced (Iran, Tajikistan, France). Locating the movie in Tajikistan added colorful exoticism.

[17] These type of rug serves the weavers both as artistic expression and as a record of their lives.

[18] Yet Jowdat did not travel abroad to reach her love, for apparently the man returned home where.

The movie is about a little boy who has the task of earning money for himself and his poor mother's family, but is always enchanted and distracted by music. His blindness has given him an amazing skill in tuning musical instruments which gets him a job at an instrument making workshop. His guide is a seeing girl named Nadereh. Perhaps for the first time in postrevolutionary cinema a teenage girl dances in front of the camera. She moves according to the sound of the instruments tuned by a blind boy. The boss who is watching her movements can estimate if the tuning is done properly. Filming and editing, which highlight in extreme close-ups emphasising the beauty of the girl's face, lips, cheeks, ears, turn her into a sensual object. The exploration of the two subtle subversive devices available to artists: colors and aesthetic joy were not without a price, however. The censors noticed this sensuality and made the release of the film dependent on the removal of this fifty-second sequence. Because of Makhmalbaf's refusal, the film remains banned in Iran. The extreme close-up photography is designed to be synesthetic and haptic, to impart the way the blind boy sees the world by touching the texture of things. In doing this, however, the girl's isolated body parts are turned into fetish objects for male scopophilia (Naficy 2012: 126). This creates an ethically ambivalent – and potentially embarrassing situation for a male spectators, especially that they watch a prepubescent girl, not a woman.

Fourth phase: dissident & independent *auteur* film director

With six of his movies banned, gradually Mohsen Makhmalbaf moved beyond mere criticism to actively opposing the regime. No longer able and willing to work in his home country, he decided to leave Iran to live and work abroad. Finally, when in 2005 he and his family left the country, he became an outspoken advocate for regime change, particularly speaking out against Ahmadinejad's government. Since fleeing Iran, Makhmalbaf and his filmmaking family have shuffled around Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Paris, but he said he was driven out of each place because of terrorist plots against him. In the press conference in 2013 director stated:

> "That's when the Iranian government started printing articles against me and my work. They put out a notice saying they would go to any lengths to kill me" (Bronis 2013).

Finally, Makhmalbaf and his family found refuge in London, where they live to this day.

Makhmalbaf always used to write his own screenplays and even to edit most off his films consolidating their authorial control. From this new position, safe from the coercion and censorship of the Islamic Republic, and from self-censorship, filmmaker acquired new platforms both for voicing his opinions and freely distributing his films. He got the chance to become "an auteur", who applies a highly centralized and subjective control to many aspects of a collaborative creative work; in other words,

a person equivalent to an author of a novel or a play (Santas 2002: 18). The term "auteur" commonly refers to film directors with a recognizable style or a thematic preoccupation. The concept of auteurism originated in the French film criticism of the late 1940s and was invented to distinguish French New Wave filmmakers from studio-systems directors that were part of the Hollywood establishment.

Sex and Philosophy (2005) maybe described as a start of Makhmalbaf's transnational career on exile. Film was financed and produced by French company Wild Bunch which was also the producer of *Kandahar.* The profit generated by this film may explain why Wild Bunch financed Makhmalbaf's family later films. *Sex and Philosophy* was shot in Tajikistan with a Tajik cast, but there is a little emphasis on local spaces in the film. It focuses on a dance master Jan (in the midst of a mid-life crisis) who plans a last tango with four of his mistresses. He decides to tell all lovers about each other and to explain his actions, going into details about why he first started his affairs with each of them. In spite of its title *Sex and Philosophy* however, is not a sexy film – it persuades the viewer to think again about the meaning of love and relativity. The central character – Jan – regards love as a phenomenon resulting from his own circumstances. Thus, he regards everything that depends on circumstances as mortal and ephemeral. In one point he says: "loneliness is our fate". The theme of solitude has appeared in other transnational films of Iranian directors who left Iran and made films in other countries, particularly in the work of Shahid Sales and Naderi.

Scream of Ants – the second movie directed by Makhmalbaf since his migration – could be described as Makhmalbaf's philosophies on life, religion and sex set against a series of visual tableaux. The "story" as such concerns a young Iranian couple who have journeyed to India to find a guru called the "The Complete Man", who fobs them off with a message in invisible ink. Even Makhmalbaf 's most loyal supporters refer to the disappointments his films have yielded since he began working outside Iran. Shahab Esfandiary points out that *Scream of Ants* "lacks the visual and formal sophistication of the first, and watching it feels more like attending very long, incoherent and poorly presented theological lecture" (Esfandiary 94). In his book on Makhmalbaf, Hamid Dabashi, only dedicates 4 pages to *Sex and Philosophy* and *Scream of Ants* put together. The author, always sympathetic toward the filmmaker, criticizes his movie made in India without any sentiments:

> "They all fail – Makhmalbaf, his actors, his story […] Judged by this film, here in Paris, or else in India Makhmalbaf did not seem to be at home in his own craft anymore […] his creative courage seemed to have shied away from his worldly whereabouts" (Dabashi 2008: 2016).

While his "escape" abroad was hailed in the Western press as an act of brave defiance against the censorial powers that be in Iran, his work was met with total dissatisfaction of his fans. It almost provokes the question: Did the total freedom from

censorship work well for the Iranian artist? Is the artistic quality always determined by limitations?

In the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election, Makhmalbaf and his daughter, the filmmaker Hana, became (from their base in France) prominent spokespeople for the Green Movement that opposed Ahmadinejad's reelection. The milions of cell-phone, amateur and low-tech videos recorded during the widespread protests against this reelection, were uploaded to Facebook, YouTube and other social networking websites. These were, in turn, picked up by news and broadcast organizations and disseminated throughout the world. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, speaking from his exile, called these amateur videographers "the most honest filmmakers of Iran," stating that "their images are full of reality; there is no artificiality" (quoted in Weiss 2010).

Symbolic Exile – Removal Makhmalbaf's films from Iranian Cinema Museum

The negative critical response to Makhmalbaf new work has changed with *The Gardener* (*Bāghbān*, 2012). The movie, produced by Makhmalbaf Film House has received mostly positive reviews by all critics and holds an 83% rating on Rotten Tomatoes and 64 MetaScore on MetaCritics[19]. *The Gardener* is a poetic film made by using documentary-style techniques through the lens of Mohsen Makhmalbaf and his son Maysam. The father and son travel to Israel to learn about Baha'i religion, which originated in Iran in 19th century but now has a taboo status in this country. Director comments on his artistic initiative:

> "According to Article 18 of the Declaration of Human Rights, each person has the right to choose his or her religion. In spite of the fact that the Iranian government has accepted this, it has deprived hundreds of thousands of Iranians, who have chosen the Baha'i faith as their religion of their rights, including receiving higher education and working in public offices. Their cemeteries are being destroyed, from time to time they are arrested, sent to prison and executed. In spite of all this, Baha'is refuse to abandon their beliefs"[20].

The Gardener is set in the newly recognized UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Baha'i World Center buildings in Haifa, Western Galilee, and in various other religious sites in Jerusalem. Mohsen Makhmalbaf follows a gardener who works at the Baha'i gardens to understand who he is and why he is there. Meanwhile his son Maysam rejects the concept of religion believing that all religions tend to bring about destruction and he chooses to pursue his own path. He goes out to Jerusalem

[19] https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_gardener_2013, [Accessed: 9.10.2019]
[20] https://www.makhmalbaf.com/?q=film/the-gardener, [Accessed: 19.10.2019]

where he comes across the sacred sites of Jews and Christians where he finds many similarities with the Islamic society he grew up in. The film is discursive inquiry into religious belief which questions the necessity of religion in this day and age and raises many questions through the two opposing characters. No specific answers are given. It is left to the audience to think, reflect, search and find a satisfying and personal answer for themselves.

Both official and non-official Iranian media has been following and reporting on the story since Makhmalbaf first announced the film. BBC noted that *The Gardener* is Makhmalbaf's most controversial film to date[21] . For the first time since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 an Iranian filmmaker has shot a movie in Israel, and posed such radical statements about religion. Iranians are not allowed to travel to Israel and thus Makhmalbaf and his team will be automatically sentenced to five years in prison should they ever return to Iran[22]. The filmmaker also talks about a religion that is a taboo subject in Iran and his actions in this regard havet heir own consequences. Press TV, Iran's English channel, first reported the film calling him a "fugitive filmmaker". The president of the Iranian film department Javad Shamaqdari sent a letter to the head of the Iranian film museum requesting to remove all of Makhmalbaf's films from the museum's archives[23]. In addition, Mohsen's decision to present the film at the Jerusalem Film Festival caused some controversy. *Open letter to Filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf: Please be a Messenger of Freedom for Iranian and Palestinian People* published on magazine *Jadaliyya* urging him not to attend[24] was signed by many prominent Iranians, including Ziba Mir-Hosseini – an Iranian-born legal anthropologist (PhD from Cambridge University), specializing in Islamic law.

The Gardener gained worldwide attention and acclaim. The film has been shown in more than 20 film festivals and won the Best Documentary award from Beirut International Film Festival and the special Maverick Award at the Motovun Film Festival in Croatia. The film was selected as "Critic's Pick of the Week" by New York Film Critics Circle (White 2013) "Best of the Fest" at Busan Film Festival by *The Hollywood Reporter*, and "Top Ten Films" at Mumbai Film Festival by *Times of India*, and its script was added to the Library of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences[25].

The President – the next feature film by Makhmalbaf had its World Premier at Venice Film Festival in 2014, opening the festival together with *Birdman* by Alejandro

---

[21] http://www.thegardenerfilm.com/starnews-director-of-gardener-says-iran-movie-industry-is-still-alive/, [Accessed: 28.10.2019].

[22] Nikolas K., *Iran increased jail penalty for travelling to Israel,* November 15, 2011, http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/314441 [Accessed: 19.10.2019].

[23] "Tehran Times" volume 12160, https://web.archive.org/web/20141220062109/http://www.tehrantimes.com/arts-and-culture/109310-iran-cinema-organization-asks-film-museum-to-remove-mohsen-makhmalbaf-memorabilia [Accessed: 12.11.2019].

[24] https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/29064/Open-Letter-to-Filmmaker-Mohsen-Makhmalbaf-Please-Be-a-Messenger-of-Freedom-for-Iranian-and-Palestinian-People, [Accessed: 11.11.2019].

[25] http://www.thegardenerfilm.com/awards/, [Accessed: 10.11.2019].

Iñárritu. The film tells a fictional story and is set in an unknown country (everyone speaks Georgian), where a dictator (Georgian actor Misha Gomiashvili) thinks nothing of approving a teenager's execution in front of his grandson, who looks to be about 5. He then invites the child to play a game: They'll turn the power on and off in the city below the presidential palace. Suddenly, revolution erupts and the deposed dictator is forced go incognito in his own country engulfed by revolution, accompanied by his five-year-old grandson. In order to hide his identity the president uses a wig and a guitar to disguise himself as a gypsy. They must experience poverty and hunger during their journey, and see the effects of the dictatorship on the country. Makhmalbaf first conceived the idea for this story visiting the Darul Aman Palace in Kabul, where Afghanistan's presidents had lived. He wondered how they looked at the city, how they played with their power. He came up with the idea of a dictator turning off the city lights for fun – but realizing something is wrong when they fail to turn on again. This scene, used in the film, signals the start of the coup and the beginning of the end for the once all-mighty hero. Watching in the bloody aftermath of the uprisings of Arab Spring, instead of telling a simplistic tale of how good (the coup) triumphs over bad (the dictator), Makhmalbaf wanted to show how revolutionary violence generates more violence once the revolutionaries are in power. In the press conference at Bushan Film Festival the director explained "Revolutions break the thin ice of society and the violence of our animal nature comes up" (Schilling 2014). Forced to live in exile and faced with attempts on his life for his activism, Makhmalbaf sees cinema as an agent for change: "We need good films to educate people around the world. Not everyone can go to the university. Cinema is the university of people in poor countries." As for his own role as a filmmaker, he states: "When someone dies of political violence, that becomes my business. I can't say 'I'm an artist' when people are killing each other" (Schilling 2014).

Migration issue is the central subject of the next film by the Iranian dissident artist. The short-lenght (20 min) feature film *The Tenant* (2015) became the part of *Beautiful 2015* – the fourth incarnation of the Hong Kong International Film Festival Society's Beautiful series of short films, made in conjunction with Chinese production company Youko. The renowned film-makers from the region – Tsai Ming-liang, Yim Ho and Huang Jianxin and Mohsen Makhmalbaf – presented their cinematic essays, which are not so clearly linked besides their loose geographic connection (now stretching as far as Iran). Each film is a clear stand-out, and could be programmed separately in global short film festivals. *The Tenant* was produced by Makhmalbaf Film House Productions in cooperation with Youku. The film was written by Mohsen Makhmalbaf with Marziyeh Meshkny (who is also the editor), designed by Makhmalbaf's daughter Hana and shot by their son Maysam. It is the story of a desperate asylum seeker from Iran (Amirali Khosrojerdi) who has come to London and has been a tenant of an old lady for the past three months. However, he cannot afford paying his £400 monthly rent and the landlady wants to evict him. He asks for a bit more time from her,

hoping to make some money by guiding two blind people during today's celebration: Queen's Jubilee procession down the Thames. He's also juggling a small dog, blind from diabetes. To keep the wheelchair-bound landlady satisfied, he takes her along to see the celebration with them. Unfortunately, his plan fails. Young Iranian migrant who suffers from an injury to his head from the past, faints twice during the celebration. While passed out he also loses the two blind clients and the dog. Now, the blind boy and girl who have lost their guide keep each other company, and little by little fall in love. As the celebration comes to an end and the crowds return to their homes, the Iranian revives. He searches, for the people and the dog which were under his care but he cannot find them. When they arrive at home the old lady does not allow him in anymore and shuts the door in his face. He sits against the fence of the old lady's house, facing the river and while watching the passing trains over the bridge, he gets lost in the thoughts and sadness of an unclear future ahead of him. Makmalbaf shows how the lack of empathy and understanding by the people in the host country can make the situation even harder for the refugees who are already suffering from a great deal of pain and distress[26].

Makhmalbaf latest film and Italian debut *Marghe and her mother* (2019) had its world premiere at the Icon section (which will showcase master filmmakers' works regardless of their origins) of Busan Film Festival in Korea (October 2019). Director alongside his wife Marziyeh Meshkini, co-writer of the movie, attended the opening ceremony of the festival dressed in Korean traditional costume. Apart from presenting his film, Makhmalbaf was also invited to act as the head of jury for another section of the festival. *Marghe and her mother* is Makhmalbaf's Italian debut. The historic city of Matera in southern Italy was selected as the European Capital of Culture by the European Union for the year 2019[27]. On this occasion, the organising bodies invited Mohsen Makhmalbaf to produce and shoot his new film in this region. The very act of this invitation is meaningful. It shows that the Italian authorities don't mind "Accented Cinema", made by the refugee from Iran, to represent the local culture. The film was shot across five cities of Southern Italy . It was screened for the very first time in September 2019 in Matera, as part of the festivities taking place in connection with the European Cultural Capital of the Year. In *Marge and her mother* the filmmaker again focused on the migration. The movie tells a story of 22 year-old Claudia (Ylenia Galtieri) who is forced to leave her six-year-old daughter behind while she goes in search of a job, the possibility of a better life, and the ever eluding "true love". According to director's view: "Modern life, besides all its possibilities and numerous choices it has offered to the mankind, seems to have jeopardised some of their basic needs. Having a secure and stable job, a trusting friendship, a true

[26] http://www.makhmalbaf.com/?q=film/tenant

[27] The European Capital of Culture is a year-long event that celebrates diversity and culture in Europe and aims to help people discover the richness of the continent.

love or sometimes even their basic human dignity"[28]. However, depicting a struggle of an unemployed single mother, Makhmalbaf refuses to employ the trappings so often associated with stories of the economically downtrodden. Even as his female protagonist is guided through a series of indignities film keeps its sights on something far more unclassifiable: call it *la dolce vita.*

Conclusion

Mohsen Makhmalbaf underwent a multiphased evolution away from his earlier fundamentalist position to cosmopolitan internationally acclaimed *auteur*. In the 1980s, he went from being an **absolutist Islamicate filmmaker** to a **socially critical director**. In the 1990s he evolved again toward a humanist and relativist position. Finally, in the 2000s, he became **not only a dissident filmmaker but also a political dissident** in the aftermath of Ahmadinejad's disputed second presidency (Naficy 2012: 215–216). Moreover, his evolution took place in a full public view: in his movies, interviews, and publications (22 books). As exile wears on, Makhmalbaf becomes postnational filmmaker, making a variety of "accented films". Not all the consequences of internationalization are positive – to be successful in transnational environment he has to face much larger competition and the capitalist market. Moreover, he is on the receiving end of the critique of other displaced Iranians. Critics of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, particularly those in political exile, have, with some justification, pointed to political connections as the reason for the successes of the Mfh and its members. For example – referring to Samira's success in Cannes in 2003, the exiled film critic Bassir Nassibi cynically stated: "Iranian cinema is dynastic and the lucrative situations are divided among the favorites" (2003:3).

Having in mind the categories of displaced Iranian directors distinguished by Naficy exilic, diasporic, émigré, ethnic, cosmopolitan[29], I would like to find out which one of them – exilic, diasporic, émigré, ethnic, cosmopolitan (Naficy 2012: 393) – applies to Mohsen Makhmalbaf's life and work. Obviously, he is not one of ethnic filmmakers because they are the second generation, born to exilic, diasporic, and émigré populations in the adopted countries (Naficy 2012: 396). According to Naficy, Iranian exiles did not return to Iran but their longing for the home country formed a genre of return-to-origins film. In addition to that, the loss of their language, culture, and audience robbed the filmmakers of their natural foundation and tools of expression (Naficy 1993: chap. 1). In regards to critics' negative response to two of his movies made abroad – *Sex and Philosophy* and *Scream of Ants* – in the initial period of his self-imposed exile Makhmalbaf can be labelled as "exilic filmmaker".

[28] https://www.makhmalbaf.com/?q=film/marghe-and-her-mother, [Accessed: 13.11.2019].

[29] Cosmopolitan filmmakers resisted any attachment to place, nation, and roots; instead, they emphasized routes, individualized identities, and auteurist authority.

However, this no longer seems to be his case. His artistic activity, acclaimed at an international stage proves that he is not alienated, deprived of means of production and communication, or excluded from public life. Besides that, in his movies made abroad, there is no expression of any desire to go back to Iran typically seen in return narratives of other exilic directors like Parviz Sayyad.

Unlike exile, which may be individual or collective, diaspora is necessarily collective. Thus the nurturing of a collective memory, often of an idealized homeland, is constitutive of the diasporic identity (Naficy 2012: 395). It is impossible to find these kind of images in Makhmalbaf's movies made after 2005. All of them are located in different countries and none of them is Iran. Diasporic filmmakers may travel to Iran or other sites of the Iranian diaspora to make films, or they may make films about themselves or other Iranian émigrés[30]. Makhmalbaf never made such a sentimental trip – he was banned from Iran already in 2005, when his more than 30 books and films that address Western ideologies of democracy and freedom from religion and authoritarian dictatorship were marked as propaganda and banned by the Iranian government.

Émigré filmmakers, left Iran, though for the purpose of settling in other countries, where after a period of adaptation they eventually became permanent residents and citizens, while also maintaining minor attachments to their home country. The burning desire for an impossible homecoming is much less constitutive of immigrants' lives, for the forces of consent relations with the adopted country attenuated the trauma of displacement (Naficy 2012: 395). Makhmalbaf seems to belong to this category. Away from Iran, he uses his filmmaking as a catalyst to educate Iranian people about democracy: "One million young people graduate university every year in Iran. They don't need atomic bombs; they need freedom and love" (Bronis 2013). However, unlike Makhmalbaf, émigré filmmakers did not generally make accented films; they made other types of independent or mainstream movies. Reza Badiyi has been called the "Godfather of American television". His output is including multiple episodes of the following tv series: *Mortal Combat* (1999), *Baywatch* (1997) *Star Trek* (1994–96) and much more.

I would argue that Mohsen Makhmalbaf gradually became a cosmopolitan filmmaker. A cosmopolitan artists resist any attachment to a place, a nation and roots; instead, they emphasize routes, individualized identities, and auteurist authority (Naficy 2012: 397). They generally do not make films about Iran or Iranians (with the exception of *The Tenant*). On the other hand, Makhmalbaf – like the cosmopolitans – claims universality, and he makes films about the human condition. He doesn't represent Iranian cinema anymore and he is not anymore an artist who cares about national pride. In the interview before his exile he said:

[30] Among them was Babak Shokrian who made feature films dealing with Jewish subjects: *Jewish Iranians: America So Beautiful* (2001) and *Peaceful Sabbath* (1993).

> "My audiences are primarily Iranian. But when non-Iranians see my films, 50 percent of my feelings have to do with how happy my countrymen would feel about foreigners seeing a good picture of our country and taking our art seriously. I feel like a child who leaves the house to bring back glory to his parent"[31].

Facing the fact that the parent – Islamic Republic of Iran – is not proud of its child anymore and it is not willing to welcome the child back, the personal achievements and self-confidence of the artist is more important now.

Despite the individuality of family members and the specificity of their authorial signatures, there is a Makhmalbaf Film House "house style," a collective signature, which Hannah McGill has defined as:

> "The conscious politicisation of personal narratives; a poetic symbolism that privileges fleeting moments and physical details almost to the point of surreal fetishisation; moral, political and narrative ambiguities that demand the spectator's active interpretation; the deployment of non-professional performers" (McGill 2004:34).

How about Mohsen Makhmalbaf's personal style? It is hard to describe his personal style as the artist has worked in several genres, from realist films to fantasy and surrealism, minimalism, and large frescoes of everyday life. In 2014 the filmmaker himself admitted that he has always tried to avoid repetition:

> "In every film I made I have tried to find a new way and form. It has been times that I have made two films in one year but they look very different. (…) Cinema for me is not something that I learn it once and then keep repeating it. Cinema is a constant recreation"[32].

Regardless this stylistic diversity, all of Makhmalbaf's movies made abroad can be described as the example of "accented cinema" which comprises different types of cinema made by exilic and diasporic filmmakers who live and work in countries other than their country of origin (Naficy 2001: 11). What lies at the bottom of all accented films is that they reflect the "double consciousness" (Naficy 2001: 22) of their creators. Accented films are often bi- or multi-lingual and blend aesthetic and stylistic impulses from the cinematic traditions of the filmmakers' home and their adopted countries. Naficy uses the linguistic concept of accent as a trope to highlight that the kind of cinema he identifies as 'different' from the standard, neutral and dominant cinema produced by the society's reigning mode of production. This typifies the classical and the new Hollywood cinema, whose films are intended for entertainment only, and are thus free from an "accent". By that definition, all alternative cinemas are accented, but each is accented in certain specific way that distinguish it from the

[31] The statement made in the documentary movie: *Friendly Persuasion: Iranian Cinema after the 1979 Revolution* (2000) by J. Akrami.

[32] http://www.makhmalbaf.com/?q=article/mohsen-makhmalbaf-note-on-his-life, [Accessed: 9.10.2019]

rest. Accented cinema derives its accent from its artisanal and collective production modes and from the filmmakers' and audiences' deterritorialized locations. Consequently, not all accented films are exilic and diasporic, but all exilic and diasporic films are accented. According to these definition, all Makhmalbaf films made after 2005 could be classified as 'accented cinema' in terms of their aesthetic sensibilities and thematic concerns. They are also part of an evolving global cinema that Naficy have called "multiplex cinema", and others have called "network films". This global phenomenon is driven by the fragmentation of nations and the displacements of people and by worldwide financial and media convergences and digitization. Multiplexed and networked films embed multiplicity in production practices, stylistic features, and filming locations and they benefit from globalized, multiplexed, and networked distribution and exhibition (Kerr 2010). Makhmalbaf is perhaps the most obvious case among Iranian filmmakers, who have largely benefited from the new possibilities brought about by globalization. He has developed a kind of professional film-making, which is apparently not attached to any particular territory.

References

Adelkhah F., Olszewska, Z. (2007), *The Iranian Afghans*, "Iranian Studies", 40 (2): 137–165.

Bronis L. (2013), *In Israel, a banned Iranian director finds echoes of home*, "The Times of Israel", 12 July 2013, https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-israel-a-banned-iranian-director-finds-reminders-of-his-homeland/, [Accessed: 11.11.2019].

Dabashi H. (2008), *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker*, London: I. B. Tauris.

Dabashi H. (2010), *Conversations with Mohsen Makhmalbaf*, New York: Seagull.

Dabashi H. (2008), *Makhmalbaf at Large: The Making of a Rebel Filmmaker*, London: I. B. Tauris.

Dabashi H. (2001), *Close-Up: Iranian Cinema: Past, Present, and Future*, New York: Verso.

Danks, A. (2002), *The House That Mohsen Built: The Films of Samira Makhmalbaf and Marzieh Meshkini*, "Senses of Cinema", no. 22, http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/filmmaker-profiles/makhmalbaf/ [Accessed: 13.11.2019].

Goodson, Larry P. (2001), *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics,and the Rise of Taliban*, University of Washington Press.

Falsetto M., Béar L. (2008), *The Making of Alternative Cinema: Beyond the frame:dialogues with world filmmakers*, Praeger.

Kerr P. (2010), *Babel's Network Narrative: Packaging a Globalized Art Cinema*, "Transnational Cinema" vol. 1, no. 1, p. 37–51.

Kohlari H. (1991), *Az Eshq ta Ebtezal*, "Kayhan Havai", 20 February, p. 21.

Makhmalbaf M. (2014), *Makhmalbaf Notes on His Life*, http://www.makhmalbaf.com/?q=article/mohsen-makhmalbaf-note-on-his-life, [Accessed: 13.11.2019].

Makhmalbaf M., (12 June 2002), *The condemned,* "The Guardian" https://www.theguardian.com/film/2002/jan/11/artsfeatures [Accessed:11.11.2019].

Makhmalbaf M. (2001/1380), *The Buddha Was Not Demolished in Afghanistan, It Collapsed from Shame* Tehran: Tarh-e No.

McGill, H. (2004), *Iranian House Styl*e, "Sight and Sound", April, 32–34.

Naficy H.(1993), *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Naficy H. (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Naficy H. (2009), From Accented Cinema to Multiplex Cinema*, in:* Staiger J. and Hake S. (eds.) *Convergence Media History*, New York: Routledge, pp. 3–13.

Nassibi B. (2003), *Kan-e 2003, Khanevadeh-ye Makhmalbaf va Ijad-e Sinema-ye Golkhanehi-ye Afghanistan*, "Sinema-ye Azad", 11 May, http://kanedohezaroose.blogspot.com/ [Accessed: 11.11.2019]

Santas, C. (2002), *Responding to Film: A Text Guide for Students of Cinema Art,* Rowman & Littlefield.

Schilling M. (2014), *BUSHAN: Iranian Director Makhmalbaf Assesses his "President",* https://variety.com/2014/film/asia/busan-iranian-director-makhmalbaf-assesses-his president-1201323324/, [Accessed: 12.11.2019].

Weiss, B. (2010), *Finding Missing Persians,* "Wall Street Journal", 17 February.

White A. (2013), *Critic's Pick of the Week: "The Gardner" Reviewed by Armond White for CityArts,* http://www.nyfcc.com/2013/08/critics-pick-of-the-week-the-gardener reviewed-by-armond-white-for-cityarts/, [Accessed: 12.11.2019].