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Middle Eastern Trauma in the Globalizing Era: Between Self-Expression and Neo-Orientalism

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Abstract
The author looks at the articulation of traumatic experiences within Iranian cinema, particularly within two recent films, Mohammad Rasoulof's *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* (2024) and Farahnaz Sharifi's *My Stolen Planet* (2024), with a contextualization in the contemporary festival circuit and regimes of visuality afforded by current media practices. A special consideration is granted to women's stories set against Middle Eastern backdrop that are produced and consumed by citizens in Western liberal democracies. Considering the association between wide distribution and formal innovation within familiar conventions, it becomes particularly relevant – given transnational production practices of films set in Iran and the viral global circulation of amateur footage, sparking formal innovation – to look at how traumatic experiences can be expressed audiovisually and often against the restrictive codes of classic narration. While the necessity to appeal to – or at least be understood by – a global audience can lead to neo-Orientalist patterns of articulation, the essay argues that several films have developed quite sophisticated expressive means.

The current configuration of contemporary global cinema favors alterations in genre conventions, which includes innovations in historical films. No longer following great men's biopic formulas, nor centering on events of national importance – since national studios' output dwindled in favor on the international coproduction market – these films are more self-conscious when conveying who is speaking, and to whom. Films by Iranian artists that tackle historical topics usually center on the relationship between Iran and the West throughout the past half-century. They have recently been produced and distributed in the international festival circuit in abundance and within a variety of formal traditions, ranging from the family drama to the elliptic arthouse film and the first-person documentary. Quite often, they explicitly or implicitly refer to an individual's traumatic experience while responding to the pressures of different, sometimes even contradictory, aesthetic conventions. On the one hand, these narratives are anchored in a contained, non-heroic life story that generates an observation of history from the vantage point of the individual and of everyday life. Thus, in a transnational production and distribution context, they are valued for encouraging personal expression denied by authoritarian cultures, and also for fostering empathy within a global audience for underrepresented personal struggles – in the case of Iran, in stark contrast to polarizing portrayals in world news bulletins. On the other hand, the ostensible universalist and depoliticized rhetoric that many of these films assume has been the subject of critique as associated with liberal ideology and Western cultural hegemony. According to stricter assessments, this rhetoric favors a neo-Orientalist[1] interpretative frame where the West becomes the benchmark for personal freedom and respect for human rights, whereas the traumatized Middle Eastern subject – albeit not explicitly connected to political themes – stands as proof of the inferiority of different (or non-Western) cultural configurations. The premise of this essay is that radical adherence or rebuttal of either of these arguments would be dogmatic. Both hold a descriptive value for the globalized cultural infrastructure, and are useful in preventing bombastic assessments of individual films' perils or potentials. By contrast, a more supple critical evaluation of how historical representation through trauma functions in Iranian filmmakers' works can illuminate the expressive possibilities and the soft limitations of the global festival circuit. The article will present a more detailed analysis of two 2024 releases, namely Mohammad Rasoulof's *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* and Farahnaz Sharifi's *My Stolen Planet*. We may categorize both productions as transnational film genres – family drama and essay film, respectively. This should make it easier to speculate on their cultural specificities.

A potentially entangled question to how Iranian history is represented is whether seeking the trauma narratives among recent Iranian films has the potential to generate more nuanced readings that could resist essentialist representations of nations or individuals. The definition of trauma expanded and contracted over a century. However, the model it provided in most cases has been fairly sophisticated: the relationship between large-scale events and individuals' mental health proves more personalized than the assumed monolithic effects of ideological enemies on their subjects' lifestyles (to quote a few clichés: barbaric living in

the European colonies, the mass depersonalization of Soviet Union citizens, or oppression of all women by Islamic traditions).

A further reason to consider trauma as a productive framework for analyzing films that depend on the global arthouse circuit is a purely formal one: stylistic innovation, often tied to – even generated by – the inexpressible nature of the traumatic experience, warrants support in the international festival circuit that fashions itself as the alternative to both commercial cinema (by assuming a more difficult and less immediately rewarding viewing experience) and the mainstream press (by refusing the simplifications and sensationalism often required by the news format). Roger Luckhurst shows that postwar film style is linked to trauma (making Alain Resnais's otherwise cryptic films – from *Hiroshima, mon amour* /1959/ to *La Guerre est finie* /1966/ – easily interpretable from a thematic vantage point in most formal decisions), but also that audiovisual culture as a whole is strongly connected to the psychiatric conceptualization of trauma. For instance, Luckhurst claims that the emphasis on the "flashback"[2] entered the psychiatric lexicon after it had already become conventional in cinematic trauma narratives.[3]

We should ask whether placing trauma at the center of many successful Iranian films necessarily symptomatizes the Western superiority complex – whether the films admitted to major European and North American festivals are favored when they show the bleak picture of a society that emphatically rejects liberal values – or merely aligns with the festival programmers' tastes for challenging films that dominate the entirety of the selection, homogeneously regardless of the country of origin. It might seem plausible to conclude that Iranian-set films that "speak the language" of global arthouse cinema are the ones to find a place in this sphere. Nevertheless, we need to address several caveats – argued by scholars who posit the neo-Orientalism of the global culture industry – before concluding that the festival circuit is a level playing field; if only because these inherent limitations, once acknowledged, have sparked their own creative resolutions.

A mediated horizon: Iran between the human-rights discourse and the "axis of evil"

While the role of Iranian filmmaking in large business festivals is not unique in displaying postcolonial tendencies, it stands out for defying – or at least pushing to their limits – codes of censorship that apply domestically. In certain senses, festival films about Iran are allowed more freedom. Some frequently discussed rules refer to female modesty and behavior. In films produced in Iran, female characters wear the hijab even in domestically set scenes, although this serves as a mere precaution to protect actresses' public image, as Iranian women typically do not wear a veil in the privacy of their homes. In other cases, festivals such as the Berlinale showcase and award the work of banned filmmakers, most notably Jafar Panahi, who self-produces his films despite Iranian officials' interdiction. More generally, the creative freedom permitted by festivals and their international production markets becomes visible in tackling subjects that would

not receive domestic funding,[4] whether they criticize the authorities, decry women's oppression, or show social inequality.

Iran's overwhelmingly negative image in the media constitutes another significant trait of Iranian-set films that sets them apart from small cinematographies dependent on festival support. Largely, the contributors behind it have been US-based trusts that have shaped it ever since the 1979-1981 hostage crisis[5] and continued to the extremely biased representation of the Middle Eastern conflagrations of 2023-2024. To put it plainly, it is often the difference between assuming the international audience's ignorance and its prejudice or hostility regarding the represented culture.

Importantly, much of what festivals present as "Iranian cinema" are more precisely movies by exiled Iranian filmmakers, who thus have both a surplus of creative freedom – as the artists working and living abroad are more personally secure than Iranian residents – and the disadvantage of being suspected of an outsider's gaze and of overrepresenting a personal position with respect to the Iranian state. Hamid Naficy broadly characterizes the exilic filmmakers as follows: *Iranians who voluntarily or involuntarily left their country of origin but who maintained an ambivalent but cathected relationship with both their original and adopted homes. … As exiles, their relationship was with their country and cultures of origin, and with the sights, sites, sounds, taste, and feel of an originary experience elsewhere. … Finally, filmmakers who were forcibly driven away and had entered new lands as political refugees tended to define, at least during the initial liminal period of exile, all things in their lives not only in relationship to the homeland but also in strictly political terms. Because they could not return home, home colonized them and their films all the more; their films were primarily about the politics of homeland and exile*.[6]

To address skepticism about exile filmmakers being easily co-opted into liberal ideology, it seems important to remember that for many filmmakers, leaving their country is an urgent and necessary solution. This is true for the Makhmalbaf family and, more recently, Mohammad Rasoulof. They face no guarantees of having the artistic resources or funding to continue their careers abroad, especially given the importance of outdoor locations for Iran-set films. Nevertheless, to the extent that exile filmmaking does bring forth creative restrictions, artists themselves address these. Two works that I briefly discuss below are suggestive in this respect.

Narges Kalhor's musical mockumentary *Shahid*, which premiered in 2024 at the Berlinale Forum, is an autobiographical movie in the sense that it chronicles Kalhor's struggle to exclude from her German ID the surname "Shahid" ("martyr" in Farsi) while being visibly contrived. A stand-in (Baharak Abdolifard) reenacts her bureaucratic journey. A group of black-clad, bearded men performing an ominous choreography – presumably to suggest the weight of her patriarchal legacy, also synthesized in the militaristic surname that she wishes to renounce – follow her around in the daily meanderings. While familiar in its narrative of the liberation of the Muslim woman in the Western world, the film nevertheless complicates it through formal wit – the fictionalized Narges is perhaps implausibly too eager to become the mediocre Western woman in every life choice. *Shahid* provides a similarly biting satire of German culture –

its repressed Nazi history, Orientalizing tendencies, and bureaucratic intricacies, according to which, for instance, women who marry can easily renounce their lifelong surnames, but the same procedure becomes nearly impossible when performed for any other reason. Further, Kalhor scrutinizes her own vantage point in making this film on the expat Middle Eastern experience – both in recognizing the relative privilege that facilitated her integration in Germany and in questioning her brashness to speak, by virtue of her origins, on behalf of all Iranians in different places and times.

Discussing political persecution in Iran from the safety of his French exile, Mehran Tamadon's *My Worst Enemy* – premiering in the Berlinale Encounters competition in 2023 – is a reunion of state-persecuted Iranians, including internationally famous actress Zar Amir Ebrahimi (multi-awarded for *Holy Spider*, dir. Ali Abbasi, 2022). Although chilling and detailed in its documentation of torture – as several respondents have had gruesome firsthand experiences of political prison – this performative documentary does not intend to shock foreign audiences. Rather, Tamadon undergoes a therapeutic process of making himself vulnerable – while still avoiding a physical return to Iran – by asking his fellow expats to take on the role of jailers. Occasionally, he is truly placed in humiliating positions. Entitled by what she perceives as a streak of hypocrisy in his willing victimization, Ebrahimi boldly assumes the role of the villain. However, the tension in the film derives mainly from a community of traumatized subjects who oscillate between a desire to document inhumane practices and managing their own emotional difficulties in reliving the past.

Both *Shahid* and *My Worst Enemy* tackle cultural trauma in a way that we cannot charge with naïveté or catering to the reassuring cliché of Western culture that alternative social orders are necessarily worse than liberal democracies due to their characteristic lack of personal autonomy. Kalhor and Tamadon have achieved the much-flaunted freedom, and yet their films make it obvious that their individual triumph will not automatically decouple them from Iranians' collective struggles. Formal innovation is an end in itself, though one should cautiously attribute any clear political significance to it. Moreover, this connection between Iranians' tackling of trauma through cinema and seeking formal creativity is not at all recent but already evident in Marjane Satrapi's films. See, for instance, Steven Allen's reading of the coming-of-age story in *Persepolis* (2007) as a trauma narrative that elicits its own formal devices: *In "Persepolis," this return-and-repeat pattern is also significant to both content and form, both trauma and the structure of the film. … Just as trauma memories are shown to be malleable and unstable in the film, so too is the narrative of Iran's history. Thus there is a dual process: Marji/Marjane is traumatised by the official and unofficial rewritings of Iran's history, and Marji/Marjane is compelled, consciously and unconsciously, to rewrite her own history through a reworking of the trauma event.*[7] *… As the film progresses, Marji/Marjane is even seen to repeat the very act of re-narration, revisiting the moment of crisis and repeatedly trying to work through the unfinished business of rewriting.*[8] Allen also pays attention to the "dual national context" of Persepolis, which is set in Iran while appearing in France – both as a graphic novel and an animation co-directed with Vincent Paronnaud – and addressing an international audience.

Similarly, Nima Naghibi identifies an autobiographical streak in and a willingness to share personal and intergenerational trauma in Satrapi's entire work. This openness, taken within the context of diasporic Iranian women writers' *commitment to remember and to learn from the past, not to reject it*, makes the author question the reflex association of trauma and aporia: *The repetition of auto/biographical expression and the reemergence of trauma dovetail in productive ways in Satrapi's works. The site of trauma has been described often – and not without contention – as one of impossible articulation, but* [trauma] *paradoxically produced so much writing and self-expression on the subject (Hesford 2011, 55). Indeed, Satrapi, as serial autobiographer, narrates her stories through the space of revolutionary trauma and loss, telling and retelling the stories of both personal and public traumas mediated through the voice and perspective of her autobiographical avatar, Marji.*[9]

Briefly returning to the festival circuit and its potential commodification of dramatic life stories interlinked with its vocal defense of human rights, Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong builds a systematic approach to "film festivals as public spheres." She notes the economic and international policy underpinnings that provide the framework for which stories get told and to whom: *Randall Halle's analysis of Western financing of non-Western films echoes this extremely complicated situation concerning unequal relations among nations and regions and the neo-Orientalism of who is creating the image of whom. As human rights become a wider global issue, an issue that garners international attention and sometimes international solutions, from the International Court at The Hague to responses from the United Nations, the trajectory for human rights film festivals will be intimately intertwined with the larger global discourse on human rights.*[10]

Hing-Yuk Wong pays special attention to the function of Iranian cinema in West European and North American festivals, given that it exposes the contradictions between cultural and political spheres with more clarity. Especially at festivals like the Berlinale, the constant focus on Iranian films fosters cultural empathy and resistance. Industry celebrities join roundtables on Iran's current events or protest on the red carpet, amplifying the chant *Jin, Jiyan, Azadi* for the international press.[11] However, the multicultural benevolence espoused by film festivals sometimes brutally clashes with state policy. An example may be the US State Department's refusal to grant visas to Iranian filmmakers invited to introduce screenings of their films. This proves that *despite decades of attention to both the art and complex political and cultural issues involved in making films under the regimes of the shah and the subsequent Islamic Revolution*, this does not guarantee a free pass; on the contrary, festivals *were recognized as a potentially dangerous public sphere that celebrates these diverse voices.*[12] Needless to say, this attitude – and the festival censorship according to international relations – intensifies during political crises, for instance, during Israel's invasion of Gaza in October 2023.[13] Politically engaged artists and journalists perceived the 2024 edition of Berlinale as a flipside of the previous year's outspoken solidarity with Iranian citizens. Many saw the Berlinale staff's silence on the war crimes as transparently connected to funding, the German state's refusal to denounce Israel's destruction of Gaza in the UN security council, perhaps the allegiance of powerful individuals who support the festival, and corporate sponsors' eschewing of controversy. This meant, irrevocably,

that sympathy toward victims in Gaza assumed in the name of the festival was violently stifled. Of course, this did not extend to censoring individual guests or influencing the jury. In fact, the Best Documentary award went to a pro-Palestinian film, the collectively directed *No Other Land*. Nevertheless, the festival did filter social media posts and discourage political statements during the ceremonies, which is to say, where the chances of snowballing the message and breaking through festival-formed social bubbles were the highest.

Filmmaking of agony: The affordances of representing violence

The economy of violent image circulation has sparked theoretical approaches throughout the past half-century, and several of them have been skeptical of its potential humanitarian effect. This skepticism is amplified further due to the more recent proliferation of user-produced media, shot and shared using mobile phones, which indicates that an audio-visually saturated public sphere is most often a passive one. Further mediatic factors in the Western depiction of the Middle East only complicate this detachment.

War fatigue has a long-standing (audio-)visual component. Taking the Vietnam-invasion era as a point of origin for the disenchantment with the role of war photography, Luckhurst explores the relationship between photojournalism and trauma, following John Berger and Roland Barthes. Referring to Berger's essay "Photographs of Agony," which reflects on the inadequate psychological effect of Don McCullin's Vietnam photographs, Luckhurst synthesizes his approach: *The shutter isolates the atrocity as discontinuous from everyday experience and as soon as this happens the moment is "effectively depoliticised. The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition" (Berger 2001: 281). Mystification rather than politicization attends the circulation of images of atrocity; this is why they continue to be "published with impunity" in the mainstream press (Berger 2001: 281). Berger's despair was perhaps understandable. Written in 1972, American policy in Vietnam had not changed, despite a large anti-war movement.*[14]

With respect to Barthes's writings, some of his considerations on the medium of photography are adjacent to Berger's conclusions: *"Truly traumatic photographs are rare," Barthes observed as early as 1961, because this would mean all connotation had been destroyed. Even if this could occur "the traumatic photograph" would be "the photograph about which there is nothing to say; the shock-photo is by structure insignificant: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have a hold on the process instituting the signification" … The photograph is intrinsically violent, "not because it shows violent things but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because nothing in it can be refused" (Barthes 2000: 91). In this sense, photojournalism could be seen to overcode an essentially violent form with atrocious content.*[15]

Whether visual or narrative, the representation of violence in the Middle East has often had a different effect. Indeed, sometimes an opposite one, for instance, urging citizens of wealthier states into political action to end its causes. Lila Abu-Lughod's *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (published in book form in 2013) reflects on the instrumentalization of women's rights discourse during

the George W. Bush era to support US military intervention in the Middle East. Among several points, she addresses the double standards of secular democracies that ban Muslim women's headscarves as an unambiguous, unacceptable symbol of oppression but never consider outlawing patriarchal practices prevalent in these same countries. Following Martha Nussbaum's examples, Abu-Lughod refers to plastic surgery, college fraternity rape culture, and the commodification of women in advertising.

With respect to the memoir boom of the same era, Abu-Lughod examines how the structure of these books – some later revealed as fictional or altered despite claiming to be autobiographical – reinforces an Islamophobic worldview. Even when based on true accounts, they use specific literary techniques to achieve this effect: *To the extent that they may reflect real experiences or incidents, they are as disturbing as any incidents of abuse that we read about in our newspapers, legal cases, or psychology case studies of pathological behavior. But the books work hard not to let us make these comparisons. … Without offering a general picture of the communities in which our heroines live, since these are just personal stories, these memoirs cannot give readers any indication that such abuses – whether incest, rape, beatings, or other cruelties – might be exceptional, or might be considered as horrifying in those communities as they would be in ours.*[16]

Abu-Lughod is not the only reader to conclude that certain memoirs of Middle Eastern women prove successful precisely due to their neo-Orientalist perspective. Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) surely allows for speculation that it encourages a polarization between Western culture – which, to her female literature students, proves liberating – and the religious, conservative Iranian culture in the wake of the Islamic Revolution, an oppressive environment that depersonalizes women. Mira Rastegar supports her critique[17] of the memoir genre as "sophisticated entertainment" with her study of the reception of Nafisi's book: *Such memoirs that seek to represent the lives of third world subjects to a Western audience must be understood as being produced in a field constituted by asymmetrical relations of power.*[18] Indeed, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*'s reviewers appreciate or express neo-Orientalist clichés that clearly shape a stance of moral superiority, contrasting an idealized liberal democracy with oppressive Islam.

Aesthetics of the Ouroboros: The challenges of Iranian social critique

The previous points are not meant to function as a blanket dismissal of films made by Iranians, whenever they circulate in subtitled versions, as somehow automatically inauthentic or catering to a restrictive set of rules dictated by Western hegemony over cultural production. Rather, they encourage a more self-reflexive critical approach to the articulation of these limitations within the works themselves, in their production and reception contexts. Being wary of the pitfalls of a neo-Orientalist cultural sphere and the different treatment afforded to what the West considered distant cultures will likely lead to a more knowledgeable and finer appraisal of the individual merits of these works. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is

symptomatic of autobiographies that pander to Western taste and prejudice, and yet it is not unavoidable for an Iranian woman to posit a polarization between the idealized, educated, desirable West and the barbaric Islamic republic when narrating her autobiography. Similarly, using shocking footage – like Iran's violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in 2009 or 2022 – risks reinforcing a fixed media synecdoche of Middle Eastern regime bludgeoning its citizens, further decontextualizing the causes for the social movement. However, found footage need not merely try and fail to jolt the viewers into action.

There already exists a rich body of work around Iranian protest movements, including wide-canvas, minutely edited, and heavily editorialized documentaries such as *The Silent Majority Speaks* (dir. Bani Khoshnoudi, 2010), fiction and theatrical performance hybrids, for example *Green Days* (dir. Hana Makhmalbaf, 2009), or documentary and animation hybrids, for instance *The Green Wave* (dir. Ali Samadi Ahadi, 2010). They all include creative solutions to the saturation of atrocity images that looms heavily over Iran.

Aesthetic innovation and self-reflexivity have been dependable traits of films by Iranians ever since Abbas Kiarostami's *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), made in a propitious moment for Iranian international cultural policy, inaugurated a new era for Iranian films. However, within this benevolence, there are very damaging interpretive reflexes, which often speak more of the critic than of the film: the risk of conflating any new work with canonical arthouse films (which might explain the abundant, well-received Kiarostami imitations), interpreting any Iranian's film as valuable primarily as an act of dissidence, weighing exile and domestic production by the same measure, or naturalizing *the language of universals and the dialects of women's human rights and human development*.[19]

Thus, discussing trauma in the Iranian context constitutes an even more delicate enterprise than in European or North American arthouse films. Assuming the films' earnest intentions to raise awareness of inadequate social protection or human rights violations, one should still keep in mind the limitations of festival practices where, for instance, isolated cases take on ethnographic weight, and bold statements by larger-than-life individuals or caricatures of authoritarian states win favor over complex representations.

In the close readings of *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* and *My Stolen Planet*, I will try to avoid these widespread critical reflexes. Surely, the alternative to cultural essentialism runs its own series of challenges, for example, applying definitions of trauma that developed in the West or posing thematic interpretations of film style that have crystallized through their application in European arthouse films on European topics. Nevertheless, given how quickly and widely these thematic and stylistic tools travel in the globalized cultural sphere, we can assume that Iranian-born artists have them at their disposal. Neither of these two films excludes discussion in familiar terms – for instance, an analysis of the mechanics of an authoritarian state intruding on personal freedom – and yet, they can avoid neo-Orientalist limitations.

The Seed of the Sacred Fig is neither a domestic production nor an exile film. It rather fits at that very sparsely populated intersection – Rasoulof's last work before leaving the country to avoid imprisonment. The filmmaker notes that

the Mahsa Amini-sparked protests had radicalized Iranians to the point where, through a common agreement, they abandoned previous work restrictions (even if this meant that part of the filmmaking team also chose exile). The actresses playing a mother (Soheila Golestani) and her two daughters (Mahsa Rostami and Setareh Maleki) willingly acted their parts without a hijab and, in the girls' case, took to interpreting increasingly politicized characters. One cannot underestimate the shock waves sent throughout society by the fall 2022 protests that led to 500 casualties and 22,000 political prisoners,[20] all of whom are vulnerable to human rights violations at the hands of the Iranian state. Yet, to convey their euphoric and/or dispiriting effect in narrative form takes remarkable formal ingenuity.

The film is narrated mostly in classical film style, with the exception of the amateur footage of 2022 protests that interrupts the fiction at key points in the story and the occasional poetic touches when the camera lingers on an image and the diegetic soundtrack is interrupted. In terms of plot, it follows the dissolution of an initially harmonious, though conservative, middle-class family living in Tehran when the amplification of the anti-state protests throws the father and the daughters, college-age Rezvan and teenager Sana, in opposite ideological directions. The father, Iman, has recently been promoted to investigator by the Islamic Revolutionary Court and hopes to ascend even further in being appointed judge and granted a larger apartment. Initially, he has moral objections when asked to speedily condemn culprits without due process but gradually succumbs either to his personal priorities and family duty or to the threats implicit in taking dissident action in such a high function. When the mother – who acts throughout the film as a go-between – announces Iman's promotion to the daughters, she also emphatically urges them to mind their public image, choose their friends carefully, and hold social respectability as a foremost value so as to honor their father.

As befits a classically narrated film, within days, the daughters inadvertently fail to follow the advice. While caught in the tide of the youth's street protest, authorities hit Rezvan's friend Sadaf with buckshot, which disfigures her. The two sisters surreptitiously shelter Sadaf in their house, and later, when Sadaf is arrested, they try to pull strings to find and release her from prison. Predictably, after witnessing their friend's unfair victimization, the girls – and most vocally Rezvan – turn against the patriarchal order embodied by their father, along with other anonymous workers of the repressive state apparatus. This shift of the viewpoint not only explodes in an argument over allegiances at the dinner table but also soon leads Iman, who mysteriously loses the weapon he got from work, to suspect that one of his daughters hid it to put him in grave peril, knowing that he faces prison if the gun is not found.

The film operates with varying degrees of communicativeness and omniscience in its narration, following each character in their individual plot or their one-on-one secret interactions but omitting crucial story information at other times. Early in the film, we do not know where the street unrest caught Rezvan and Sadaf, nor do we know later where authorities detain Sadaf. Moreover, when Iman's gun disappears, we must guess whether one of the girls took it or if the women rightfully accuse the father of slipping into paranoia. This suggests a deliberately paced, meaning-infused story construction in which

every detail invites interpretation. Notably, Sadaf's injury triggers Rezvan's trauma, as the film sets up an almost textbook definition of it.[21] A violent and sudden event affects her friend while she is a proximate witness, and, thus, the absorption into the coherent official narrative of the incident becomes impossible. Rezvan's traumatic witnessing occasions a permanent break with what her father chooses to believe about the uprising.

At the same time, the television coverage constructs the bigger picture of the protests – sometimes supplemented by phone recordings of street protests and the mother's verbal synopsis, for instance, of what the officials declare to be Mahsa Amini's cause of death. Since this is the more formally sophisticated part of the film, it is worth stressing that Rasoulof and Andrew Bird's editing consistently grants higher credibility to amateur recordings. On one occasion, such a recorded fragment becomes the countershot of a scene where the mother drives to the city and stumbles upon the crowd. Therefore, it momentarily takes over the privileged epistemic role that we have attributed to Rasoulof's mise-en--scène. Moreover, even to the uninformed viewer of *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*, the rhetoric of television commentary raises suspicion: in the first news coverage, the rioters are portrayed as animalistic and destructive, while phone recordings, spreading virally at the same time and entering the family home through Sana's social media, show protesters savagely hit by security forces. What happens slightly later further fuels the doubt: when returning home after driving past the uprising, the mother turns on the television to see reports of what she had just witnessed on the street. However, after zapping through several channels, she quietly concludes that there is a media blackout surrounding the event. This war of representations serves a clear narrative function in the film: TV commentary discredits itself by having official sanction and being all too clear in commentary on an incandescent, amorphous popular movement. In contrast, guerilla filming via mobile phones is credible as a document precisely because of its rawness and grassroots observation. The conflicting narratives foreshadow Rezvan's confrontation with her father, whom she accuses of being complicit with the state and, therefore, unable to see clearly.

The film does not dramatize Rezvan and Sadaf's clash with the riot police – perhaps for pragmatic reasons, as Rasoulof shot the film without permission and with minimal production budget. Nevertheless, the ellipsis also functions to identify them, if only by shared values, with any of the protesters in the footage. Similarly, when Rezvan and Sana watch the security forces' aggression against a young woman who could potentially be Sadaf, the poor visual quality of the video and the generic sight of a black-clad young woman allow them (and us) to project their friend's potential fate on the documentary fragment. This interweaving of authentic footage and fictionally guided cathexis results in an inspired use of violent found footage – which might by itself lack the power to stir emotion in the viewer but gains dramatic significance in the fictional framework. Therefore, *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* is both a classically constructed film – centering on a perhaps all too familiar trauma of a young feminist in the patriarchal state – and simultaneously (and discreetly) a fresh formal approach to representing the *Woman, Life, Freedom* protests fictionalized almost in real time.

In fact, even disregarding the intergenerational conflict that escalates into an action movie in the latter part of the film, the plot is not a mere parenthesis in the historical picture. The family that anchors the fiction also provides the ideally complex observation post for the uprisings. On the one hand, they live in Tehran, in a vital part of the city where they can hear the protests from their window, as they hide behind the curtain so as to witness without participating. On the other hand, the more the wave of protests surrounds them, the more they seek isolation. Given the father's professional duty to indict protesters and the wife's allegiance to the self-made man with whom she built her life, it lies in the parents' interest to deny – or at least mystify – what is right in front of their (and our) eyes. A jolting alternation of tense but quiet moments – in the family home or in the car – and the constant escalation of street events functions in a similar way to isolate the family from the social movement. Meanwhile, the girls are palpably uneasy about having to either betray their parents or their conscience. *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* almost dramatizes the violent image's relationship to trauma – in a political sense, this image is raw, decontextualized, and renders its viewer passive; in the narrative/biographical sense, it persistently intrudes upon the vain attempt to create a coherent narrative.

Aside from its ingenious use of found footage, Rasoulof's film adheres to the restrictive codes of classic film narration that dictate a character's predictability with respect to the plot (the mother's loyalty to the father and to a harmonious and respectable family defines her). Therefore, what a woman of her generation and social status might privately think in watching the news is of secondary importance and outside the narrative's scope. Finally, we must consider how a classic film plot – with active characters and a dramatic resolution – interacts with the historical event in the background. This event is the latest in a series of popular uprisings driven by complex social and economic causes. These uprisings gain spectacular momentum despite the clear risks to protesters' safety and freedom but ultimately fade after prolonged violent repression without achieving their goal. In very basic terms of narration, an aborted revolution makes for an unsatisfactory dramatic ending. *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* solves this by posing the moral triumph of one character above another, while other, less plot-bound cinematic treatments of protests turn to different solutions for saving the participants' courage from its less-than-transformative result.

A first-person documentary such as Farahnaz Sharifi's *My Stolen Planet* responds to different formal pressures than fiction while sharing some of the thematic and even formal characteristics of *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*. It also revolves around the anti-state sentiment ahead of the 2022 protests that becomes most acute in women's refusal to wear the hijab in public. Moreover, it has a central female character – in this case, the filmmaker herself – who obviously does not fit the mold of a very narrow notion of respectability. It incorporates found footage – that partly drives the narrative forward – showing protesters and security forces' unwarranted violence toward them. However, the narration is allowed to meander more freely – given the essayistic format – incorporating personal archives as well as found footage and loosely following years or decades of the author's life in more compressed or extended form. For instance, Farahnaz's in-

terpersonal relationships with her close circle of Tehrani female friends and her mother transpire through her recordings, but generally with considerable ambiguity and open-endedness.

There are two character arcs that display deliberate construction. One is Sharifi's socialization as a woman, starting at the age of seven with her first day at school, and presented in a carefully edited and narrated photo collage; her private and public selves diverge, although going through the same physical changes while growing up, when appearing in a domestic setting without a hijab and in official photos with her hair covered. A rapid edit of diploma photos showing a young woman with a black head scarf makes her appear depersonalized. The other character arc, all the more remarkable in the composition of the film because it exceeds the domestic sphere, is of a newly befriended Iranian-American scholar, Leyla (Rouhi), who reaches out to her due to their shared fascination with archives: as Farahnaz collects Pahlavi-era footage, showing women before the mandatory hijab and before their singing was banned, and Leyla is herself interested in the amassed Super 8 footage. The importance of this friendship between two Iranian women residing in different places and belonging to different generations hints that *My Stolen Planet* is less about Sharifi's biographical account and more about the development of her sensitivity and perception. It even foreshadows, every time parenthetically to the topic at hand, her experience of leaving Iran, as Sharifi's comments on the found home videos and photographs speculate on this spectral aspect. We see past images of a lost country that their subjects had most probably evacuated, as it is very likely that the Iranians who left these traces behind them had migrated after the Revolution. At that point, the authors sold the films, or authorities confiscated them. Similarly, the women who protested on the streets in 1979 against the mandatory hijab had left in the meantime and renounced the direct struggle.

In critical reception, there are often understandable associations between a film's political impact and its mass appeal, the assumption being that reaching a wider audience might make a greater difference. This preconception requires addressing, especially given the neo-Orientalism of the global cultural infrastructure and, more specifically, of the festival circuit. Alisa Lebow's essay "First Person Political"[22] traces the evolution of documentaries' political potential after the grand disillusionment concerning the possibility of collective action. Lebow makes a persuasive argument for the category of films that includes *My Stolen Planet*: *This anxiety can be posed in the form of a question: are first-person films simply a by-product of the failure of the revolutionary movements and the rise of identity politics in the 1970s, only to gain momentum in the neo-liberal 80s and beyond?* [W]*hat remains of politics once the communist and socialist collective aims seem to have collapsed with no viable liberatory alternative to replace them?*[23]

Lebow rigorously tackles the fairness of the assumption that first-person documentaries are the cultural corollary of a neoliberal, individualistic age, and while not entirely excluding that this autoethnographic turn coincides with the retreat of leftist discourse and aspirations, she finds another, more benevolent approach: any first-person filmmaker who is at *once speaking for and about him/herself* [is speaking] *to and with much larger and indeed politically relevant and resonant col-*

lectivities. Moreover, s/he can be said to be addressing an even broader audience with the potential for identification that transcends such particularisms.[24] Furthermore, political stakes may lie elsewhere: *This is obviously the case with first-person films that take as their object directly political aims, however it is not my intention here to confuse the political content of a film (first person or otherwise) with the constitutive political and ideological implications of the modality or mode of address itself. … Yet they, like any other artistic practice, have the potential to create – in Rancière's words, "new forms of perception of the given." As he says, "similar to political action,* [they effectuate] *a change in the distribution of the sensible."* [A]*t its best, first-person film can produce "a conflict between sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it …* [redrawing] *the frame within which common objects are determined." So it is as dissensus, as laid out by Rancière here, that I contend first-person film can enact the political*.[25]

Lebow's point is particularly relevant for *My Stolen Planet*, because the film is not univocally political in the restrictive sense, despite the stirring points concerning human rights and the authoritarian state: the oppression of women through mandatory hijab, regulating leisure activities (dancing, singing), protester repression, economic hardship due to the country's isolation (when COVID vaccines became available during the pandemic, Iran refused to purchase them from the US or UK), the pain and helplessness of exile, and so on. In fact, due to its narrational looseness, *My Stolen Planet* can touch on more causes of the 2022 protests than *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*, and yet its main thread is autobiographical.

In other words, concerning what Lebow classifies as "directly political aims," the political themes of the film are its subject matter and its content rather than its structuring principle. Sharifi seems much more preoccupied with the theme of memory, and her archival mission is a direct confrontation of the politics of institutionalized forgetting, which she attributes to the Islamic Revolution. She is equally invested in developing an idea of private life and a personal identity that transcends not only strict Iranian state regulations and moral codes but also migration and borders in general. This explains why the last part of the film, during which she had moved to Germany – coincidentally, and fortunately for herself, during the most dangerous time to be a nonconforming Iranian woman – has a striking number of parallels to the Iranian segment. The plasticity of her preoccupations and allegiances, the fast circulation of digital footage shot on Iranian streets, and diasporic Iranian solidarity during national turmoil matter more than physical presence in a certain place.

Some segments of her exile are *de rigueur* in an autobiographical documentary: the friends she leaves behind are endangered, and as a filmmaker, she, too, could have easily fallen victim to the authorities' backlash; Mahsa Amini's death sends shockwaves to Iranians across the globe; and Farahnaz's mother's final stages of mental degradation, followed by her death, become all the more painful when the daughter is constrained to fake good humor over video calls and cannot even attend the funeral in person. As Leyla duly warns her upon leaving the country at the start of her German residency, upon moving to Europe, Farahnaz merely discovers a new way of being Iranian.

Labeling *My Stolen Planet* as a traumatic autobiographical account may seem antithetical to Lebow's approach, as it reduces a unique sensibility to a broader category. However, if only for exploring the thematic affinities with *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* and modernist takes on historical representation, let us make a few considerations. Compared to Rezvan's dramatically emphasized shock in the fictional account, for Farahnaz, the traumatic process seems more diffuse, less tied to a particular event, and posessing recognizable causes and symptoms, although the definition of trauma has become charitably elastic in recent decades. Luckhurst suggests a particularly modernist trait of narratives[26] of trauma: *one site … seems to invoke another* [and therefore] *trauma does not only stall narrative but compels narration too, becoming a site for the intensive production of story.* [27]

Sharifi's films also evoke the mutability of perception characteristic of the traumatized subject. Leyla has been living in the US for decades and still feels connected to her Iranian roots. Farahnaz moves to Germany and obsessively watches protest footage and thinks of ways to assimilate them in her work as if compensating for not being present on the street. There is no way of knowing whether the spectral figures in the filmmaker's Pahlavi-era amateur archives share the frame of mind of "being Iranian" in a different place, but the film certainly composes in a meticulous way a notion of diasporic identity that comes full circle. After Farahnaz leaves her home, authorities confiscate her material, which makes her wonder if her estranged audiovisual legacy will someday turn up on somebody else's editing table, recalling her own scrutiny of strangers' videos. In a leisure moment, she listens to Iranian diasporic music with her friends, which in that context seems to be the expression of a kindred spirit unencumbered by the Iranian authorities' restrictions.

Implicitly, after her own relocation during the mass protests, while her filmmaker friends back in Iran are targeted by the state, she seems to benefit from the same freedom as the diasporic Iranian. However, in the moment, it feels more isolating than exhilarating.

With respect to the violent found footage, what seems to distinguish the longest edited segment that shows repression against protesters is that the videos themselves are heterogeneous and polyphonic. They contain the behind-the-camera commentaries of the people recording, who often voiced them before they knew what they (and we) were watching. The most gruesome bit of footage contains an exchange between two young people in a car, recording as they drive through the crowd and commenting on the stray bullets while hoping that their car does not get hit. Before we can even make sense of this setup, a splash of red covers the lens while the camera is dropped, and we see the driver tumbling to the side. Despite being emotionally disturbing, this type of material – framed in the documentary of an Iranian who makes her viewpoint as clear as possible even when abstaining from voiceover comments – also suggests a feeling of helplessness, amplified by physical distance,[28] as if not putting oneself in the direct line of fire brings forth an irrational feeling of guilt. The gender aspect of representing the protests is also worth mentioning. *My Stolen Planet* focuses on and is dedicated to the bravery of defiant women, and several of the street recordings center on young women taking off their hijabs. Yet, it re-

mains equally true that what the film reveals is a broad, heterogeneous, popular movement and that, for instance, a range of vocal tonalities utter the chants of freedom resounding from the found footage.

There is also a more vivacious streak in the found footage, meant perhaps not so much to provide relief from the heavier subject matter as to represent a direct reaction to it. Nurses in full protective equipment dance in front of phone cameras during the peak of the COVID pandemic. In pre-revolutionary times, Iranians danced in front of their cameras, and the traces of their celebrations endured to defy the forgetting imposed by the new political regime. After authorities kill the protesters – dispiritingly, in the hundreds – their families honor their memory with archive recordings of their mourned loved ones in which they are dancing. The film is a chronicle of disillusionment just as much as it is an ode to the vitality that sparked the protest and – as the filmmaker's voiceover comment puts it – to *resistance against the people who steal our lives*.

Conclusions

This overview of films made between 2022 and 2024 by Iranians within or outside the country offers a glimpse into how they approach crucial contemporary or recent events, considering some structural factors that influence their articulation and distribution. One might recall Naghibi's mention of the *need for a willing and empathic witness to render stories of pain and suffering meaningful and potentially productive*, which seems reinforced by how *narratives of trauma and narratives of self-representation dovetail in ways that enable a necessary witnessing to transpire*.[29] Global cinema aims to reach a wide audience without relying on viewers' prior knowledge of local matters. Across formats – genre film, arthouse film, and creative documentary – similar limitations exist, although the ways in which these can be overcome are specific to their respective conventions (as well as the filmmakers' particular ingenious solutions).

Accepting that there are pragmatic reasons for courting an outsider's gaze, a critic should nevertheless resist favoring what Abu-Lughod calls "pulp nonfiction,"[30] synecdochically representing a backward way of living for Western consumers' melodramatic enjoyment. A significant part of neo-Orientalist mechanisms results from reception and is not inherent in the works themselves, although, surely, degrees of sophistication vary. For instance, in *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*, the narrative gradually introduces and reinforces the mechanisms through which the father convinces himself to go to great lengths to defend state rhetoric and oppression as well as uphold his authority in the family. Some are culturally specific – he is religious, and his colleagues act as mouthpieces for a code of hierarchical obedience. Others are likely to be regarded as transcultural – he considers himself to be more mature than his daughters and acts in the interest of the family's well-being.

As for *My Stolen Planet*, while the hijab-as-oppression thread recurs throughout the essay film, it is justified both by its personal importance to the author and by the prominent role of women's renouncing their hijab in the 2022 protests. On the other hand, both the isolated significance of unveiling – as if it

were the first and last obstacle in Muslim women's lives – and what it ostensibly represents to citizens of Western democracies, namely, a form of dogmatic submission that is nowhere in evidence in the filmmaker's or her friend's behavior, are far less blatant than in works designed to strengthen the superiority of audiences in secular liberal states.

While common and helpful in avoiding assumptions of a monolithic cultural difference, using the trauma paradigm for Iranian narratives should not exaggerate the harmful effect – or the universal impact across class differences – of certain social factors. The 1979 Revolution and its ulterior narrowing direction under Islamic rule serve as a convenient example. Mentioned in several memoirs or narratives as a major (and often traumatic) turning point, it was the source of a newly restrictive role for women and, as Sharifi and others argue, the start of institutionalized forgetting of what had happened before. On the other hand, historians mention that, in an impoverished nation with severe class divisions, the ousting of the monarchic regime brought some measures of social support that benefited women. Trauma narratives focusing on individual biographies often overlook these aspects.

In an aesthetic sense, there is some value in discussing non-linear narratives in tandem with psychiatric and legal case history definitions of trauma as it sparks formal creativity in what to show of a violent experience and how to depict it, either in fiction or documentary formats. It highlights the question of identity – an exile's perspective or personal (as opposed to shared / social) values, among other possibilities. As previously mentioned, it also refers to a significant part of the film festival output in recent decades.

I chose to discuss the films and works mentioned in this essay because they represent their respective subgenres and reflect a significant segment of films that relate to Iran and garner international success. Whether these trends will change in direct response to international policy remains an open question – particularly with a military conflagration currently involving several countries of the Middle East. However, ideally, we can count on the long-term commitment on behalf of festival programmers around the world to oppose the more restrictive media depictions and challenge the more reductive tastes dictated by the mass culture market.

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[1] Definitions of "neo-Orientalism" vary among authors based on the updates they make to Edward Said's account of how knowledge about the Orient was produced and used to serve colonial Europe's self-interest. Here is, for instance, Randall Halle's description of how the global arthouse circuit operates, presenting co-productions set in several non-hegemonic countries as national cinemas: *A key aspect of the insights offered by Edward Said's foundational work on Orientalism is that an elaborate set of textual references had developed in Europe by which that which was fundamentally proximate is kept distant. … The ideational distance derives not from a foreclosure of physical access and engagement, rather through the intervention and mediation of a set of cultural texts that speak the truth of the other on behalf of that other*. R. Halle, "Offering Tales They Want to Hear: Transnational European Film Funding as Neo-Orientalism", in: *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, eds. R. Galt, K. Schoonover, Oxford University Press, New York 2010, p. 314.

[2] R. Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, Routledge, London 2008, pp.148-149.

[3] Luckhurst mentions *The Pawnbroker*, dir. Sidney Lumet, 1964, and *Sybil*, dir. Daniel Petrie, 1976.

[4] Clearly, artists from other countries broach difficult topics – lacking their co-nationals' widespread enthusiasm for negative portrayals of the country – exclusively in festival-bound films. By European funding practices, however, they often produce their films with partial national funding and at no personal risk of being imprisoned or forced to leave their homeland.

[5] Naficy argues that taking the US Embassy employees hostage signified a radical break in the US treatment and portrayal of Iran – not just of authorities, but the entire nation: *American neoconservatives … came to regard not only Islamic Iran but also Islam, Islamism, and Islamic terrorism as nemeses against which it constructed its own new, post-bipolar Cold War identity as the sole global superpower in a state of perpetual war*. H. Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4*, Duke University Press, Durham 2011, p. 274. The air time allotted to portraying the crisis is suggestive in itself: the early 1970s saw a few minutes' news coverage per year, and the year of the Revolution, less than an hour. Later, [the 444-day long hostage crisis] *caused the coverage of the Iran story to peak at an all-time high of 381.7 minutes in 1979 and 368.9 in 1980 (Adams and Heyl 1981:9). Nightly news reports on the hostages occupied the largest share of this time*. Ibidem, p. 275.

[6] Ibidem, pp. 393-394.

[7] S. Allen, "*Persepolis*: Telling Tales of Trauma", in: *Scars and Wounds: Film and Legacies of Trauma*, eds. N. Hodgin, A. Thakkar, Springer International Publishing, Cham 2017, p. 274.

[8] Ibidem, p. 276.

[9] N. Naghibi, *Women Write Iran*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2016, p. 105.

[10] C. Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 2011, p. 179.

[11] See the Reuters coverage of the 2023 red carpet happening: J. Imam, "Berlinale Film Stars Show Solidarity with Iran Protesters", *Reuters*, https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/berlinale-film-stars-show-solidarity-with-iran-protesters-2023-02-18/ (accessed: 15.02.2025).

[12] C. Hing-Yuk Wong, op. cit., p. 168.

[13] Here, for instance, is a timely and thorough piece of film journalism that deals with the inadequate response of the 2024 Berlinale to the Israeli atrocities in Gaza: Ö. Sofuoğlu, "The Elephant in the Tiny House", *Fantômas*, https://www.fantomas.be/artikel/the-elephant-in-the-tiny-house/ (accessed: 15.02.2025).

[14] R. Luckhurst, op. cit. pp. 165-166.

[15] Ibidem, pp. 166-167.

[16] L. Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 89.

[17] M. Rastegar, "Reading Nafisi in the West: Authenticity, Orientalism, and 'Liberating' Iranian Women", *Women's Studies Quarterly* 2006, vol. 34, no. 1/2, pp. 108-128, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40004743 (accessed: 15.02.2025).

[18] Ibidem, p. 110.

[19] L. Abu-Lughod, op. cit., p. 87.

[20] Figures quoted by the Associated Press. J. Gambrell, "Iran Is Responsible for the 'Physical Violence' that Killed Mahsa Amini in 2022, UN Probe Finds", *AP News*, https://apnews.com/article/iran-mahsa-amini-protests-un-report-366a199119720e69696a123560ef4018 (accessed: 15.02.2025).

[21] Luckhurst's case history survey includes the game-changing verdict in the trial following the Hillsborough football ground tragedy of 1989, with several hundred victims – when *sixteen claimants* [including relatives of those killed or injured] *brought an action for nervous shock and consequent psychiatric illness. Secondary victim status was strictly applied: hence, the judges thought relationships to spouses, parents and children could be presumed to be a close tie* [but not siblings]. *Questions of proximity were also narrowly invoked. In terms of time, the 'immediate aftermath' was limited to an hour, so that the viewing and identification of the bodies starting eight hours later was deemed to be outside the limit of the event … In terms of space, the necessary proximity ruled out anyone who had seen the event in a mediated way, via television or by any third party report, but also distinguished between different areas inside the football ground*. R. Luckhurst, op. cit., p. 29.

[22] A. Lebow, "First Person Political", in: *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. B. Winston, British Film Institute, London 2013, pp. 257-265.

[23] Ibidem, p. 257.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] Ibidem.

[26] Perhaps it is not coincidental that Luckhurst refers to Atom Egoyan's films (together with Resnais's), and Naficy frequently returns to an

analysis of Egoyan's films in his exploration of "accented cinema." While not primarily preoccupied with the traumatic sensibility, Naficy explores how a certain cultural heritage drives individual filmmakers to look for creative solutions that are both outside the Hollywood norm and atypical for more structured national film industries. See: H. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001.

[27] R. Luckhurst, op. cit., p. 190.

[28] In interviews, Rasoulof frequently mentions that he was imprisoned during the mass protests, thus gaining a particular vantage point on what was going on in the meantime out on Iranian streets, while living among political prisoners. See: D. Wise, "Mohammad Rasoulof Reveals How He Covertly Made *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*, Risking His Life and His Freedom", *Deadline*, https://deadline.com/2024/11/the-seed-of-the-sacred-fig-director-mohammad-rasoulof-interview-1236173070/ (accessed: 26.11.2024).

[29] N. Naghibi, op. cit., p. 9.

[30] This is a concept Abu-Lughod uses especially in Chapter 3 of the book, "Authorizing Moral Crusades." She is skeptical to ostensible emancipatory intentions: *Popular literary representations define views and structure feelings about Muslim women and their rights.* [Memoirs and other forms of pulp nonfiction] *are commercial products that publishers market and readers receive in a very specific political context*. L. Abu-Lughod, op. cit., p. 106.

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Słowa kluczowe:
kino irańskie;
esej filmowy;
trauma;
kino światowe;
dokument polityczny

Abstrakt
Irina Trocan
Bliskowschodnia trauma w erze globalizacji. Między autoekspresją a neoorientalizmem
Autorka przygląda się sposobom wyrażania traumatycznych doświadczeń w kinie irańskim, w szczególności w dwóch najnowszych filmach – *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* (2024) Mohammada Rasoulofa i *My Stolen Planet* (2024) Farahnaz Sharifi – sytuując swe rozważania w kontekście współczesnego obiegu festiwalowego i reżimów wizualności zapewnianych przez obecne praktyki medialne. Szczególną uwagę poświęca historiom kobiet z Bliskiego Wschodu, które są wytwarzane i konsumowane przez obywateli zachodnich demokracji liberalnych. Biorąc pod uwagę związek między szeroką dystrybucją a innowacjami formalnymi w ramach znanych konwencji, szczególnie istotne staje się – zważywszy ponadnarodowe praktyki produkcji filmów osadzonych w Iranie i globalny obieg amatorskich materiałów filmowych, stymulujący innowacje formalne – przyjrzenie się temu, w jaki sposób traumatyczne doświadczenia mogą być wyrażane audiowizualnie i często wbrew restrykcyjnym kodom klasycznej narracji. Autorka dowodzi, że mimo konieczności odwoływania się do globalnej publiczności (lub przynajmniej bycia przez nią zrozumianym), co może prowadzić do neo-orientalistycznych wzorców artykulacji, w kilku filmach zastosowano dość wyrafinowane środki wyrazu.

My Worst Enemy, dir. Mehran Tamadon (2024)