In her fifth and final chapter, "Revolution, Nostalgia, and Memory in Diasporic Iranian Memoirs," Naghibi focuses on Iranian contributions to North American diasporic writing via narratives exclusively about the 1979 Iranian Revolution, its aftermath, and "nostalgic longing" for home (9). Although she evaluates other texts throughout this chapter, Naghibi uses Gelareh Asayesh's *Saffron Sky: A Life Between Iran and America* (1999) and Tara Bahrampour's *To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America* (1999) to delineate Iranian women's reflections on the 1979 revolution and the loss of home. In particular, she discusses the way in which these writers move through their memory and trauma via life writing practices. What will interest life writing scholars in this chapter is Naghibi's diligent incorporation of Gillian Whitlock's *Soft Weapons: Autobiographies in Transit* (2007) to discuss contrasting memoirs that serve as propaganda for neo-imperial interventions in the Middle East. Without specifying it directly, she seems to reference the noted critique of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) by Hamid Dabashi in his piece titled "Native Informers and the Making of Empire" (2006), in which he underscores her sociopolitical exaggerations about Iranian society in postrevolutionary Tehran.[1] Bearing these arguments in mind, Naghibi tactfully acknowledges Dabashi's point before offering an alternative perspective that recuperates such works: instead, they are examples of cultural artifacts displaying nostalgic longing for a prerevolutionary Iran (132). Throughout this chapter, Naghibi argues that a "painful longing" to return to Iran caused by the rupture of the revolution links Iranian diasporic writers, since they cannot help but look back at what once was and, finally, what may never be again.

What I appreciate about Naghibi's meditative study is its focus on nostalgia as a theme that ties together autobiographical works across diverse mediums. Naghibi's arguments are both tactful and clever, particularly in light of the complexity of the works she undertakes. Insightful and knowledgeable, but nevertheless accessible to nonacademic readers, Naghibi's text thoughtfully surveys many Iranian women's life works that previously have been ignored or cast aside. Ultimately, Naghibi concludes with three very pointed questions to her readers: "Which narratives do we choose to engage with? Which narratives do we allow to affect us and which ones do we choose to ignore?" (169). In *Women Write Iran*, Naghibi's analysis allows scholars, Iranians, immigrants, and others to reevaluate their own relationship to home, as they contemplate their positionality in their new host country.

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ReFocus: The Films of Rakhshan Banietemad. Maryam Ghorbankarimi (ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). ISBN 978-1474477635 (eBook), 265 pp.

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Although scholarship on most if not all national film traditions has been auteurist in nature, research on Iranian cinema has been especially focused on the work of a few filmmakers. Unsurprisingly, this literature includes multiple monographs dedicated to Abbas

[1] Though Naghibi does not explicitly mention Dabashi's assessment of Nafisi here, she alludes to it when she mentions how scholars of Iranian studies have critiqued texts (like Nafisi's) that offer a "a Western imperial gaze, by offering readers a glimpse in the presumably" forbidden "world beneath the veil." (Naghibi 131; c.f. Nafisi, Azar. 2003. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. New York: Random House; Dabashi, Hamid. 2006. "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire." *Al-Ahram Weekly*, no. 797, June 1. https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/10542/native-informers-and-the-making-of-the-american).

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Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf, whose work bears much responsibility for stimulating international interest in Iranian film. Although both of their careers have undoubtedly merited this attention and the books have yielded many useful insights, the auteurist bent in Iranian film scholarship has been to the detriment of adequate study of a number of other deserving filmmakers. In *ReFocus: The Films of Rakhshan Banietemad*, editor Maryam Ghorbankarimi and her contributors provide a valuable addition to the literature by offering an in-depth study of one of Iran's most significant living directors. The chapters draw on a range of methodological approaches (gender studies, eco-criticism, and sound studies, to name a few) to offer thoughtful analyses of Rakhshan Banietemad's work.

These analyses are organized into four sections, grouped thematically to address Banietemad's career from a few overarching angles. The first of these opens the collection with an editor's introduction and an interview of Banietemad conducted by Ghorbankarimi. In the second, "Aesthetics, Politics, and Narrative Structure," four chapters discuss political implications of formal choices seen throughout Banietemad's oeuvre. The book's longest section, "Gender, Love, and Sexuality," contains five chapters, each attentive to different facets of Banietemad's representation of romance and gendered expectations of both men and women. Finally, in "Fact, Fiction, and Society," three chapters examine the relationship between reality and artifice in Banietemad's films, as well as their social implications. Although the essays do not claim to make an overarching argument, together they offer irrefutable evidence for Banietemad's position as a vital figure in world cinema.

In the introductory section, Ghorbankarimi elucidates the book's purpose by describing Iranian cinema as "a complex and diverse creative culture that deserves and requires deeper study of its pioneers" (p. 4). Although this study continues the auteurist emphasis in Iranian film scholarship seen in the research on Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf, the focus on Banietemad highlights a contrasting but no less influential cinematic voice, illustrating the diversity Ghorbankarimi identifies. The introduction also lays the framework by introducing some common themes in Banietemad's oeuvre, including attention to social issues, intertextuality, and the representation of women. In the interview, these themes are elaborated in Banietemad's own voice. The conversation also offers greater context for the films by supplying biographical information about the artist's path to becoming a filmmaker. In the chapters that follow, the contributors offer diverse ways of analyzing Banietemad's career.

The first set of contributions focuses on analyses of narrative structure, with attention to its political significance. Michelle Langford considers *Tales* (2014), Banietemad's most recent feature; the other chapters in the section survey several films. Langford describes *Tales* as "a kind of cinematic *divan*," using the term for a poet's collected works in the Persian tradition (p. 58). This structural technique has the poetic resonance Langford describes; it also has the practical effect of allowing Banietemad to skip the typical required process of preproduction approval from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG), as the process is not required for short films (p. 59). Farshad Zahedi shows how politics and structure likewise align in Banietemad's first three feature films, which contended with the even stricter MCIG regulations of the late 1980s. In contrast, Matthias Wittman begins with the feature film that follows the first three, *Nargess* (1992), and shows how it and subsequent films "articulate correspondences between pre- and post-revolutionary experiences and promises" (p. 46). Zahra Khosroshahi highlights the important role of meta-cinematic techniques in such articulations, beginning with *The May Lady* (1998) and continuing through *Tales*. Although meta-cinematic filmmaking has often been described as a key trademark of Iranian cinema, Khosroshahi's illustration of Banietemad's specific use of meta-cinema establishes the value of focusing on the filmmaker in an edited volume.

This becomes especially apparent in the following section, which highlights the significance of gender. Four of the section's chapters examine methods used by Banietemad to depict romantic relationships in manners acceptable to censors. Two contributors analyze the significance of sound, which, as Laudan Nooshin notes, has "been under-theorized

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and often overlooked in the literature on Iranian cinema with its almost exclusive focus on the visual" (p. 116). Nooshin offers a useful exception with a fascinating exploration of the significance of listening to *The May Lady*. Rosa Holman similarly examines the use of sound in *The May Lady*, though she also looks at *Our Times* (2002) and *Gilane* (2005). Asal Bagheri makes innovative use of semiological analysis to call attention to methods of depicting the illicit romance in *The Blue-Veiled* (1995). In contrast, Yunzi Han offers a new perspective on Banietemad's work by comparing *The May Lady* to the Chinese film *Army Nurse* (Mei Hu, 1985), set during China's Cultural Revolution (1966–76), noting that both films are "set in the context of a restricted environment, where the religious or the political takes precedence over individuality, sexuality, and more specifically, sexual desire" (p. 174). Nina Khamsy stays within Iran but likewise breaks ground by focusing on the depiction of male characters in *Tales*, which contrasts with the usual emphasis on representations of women in discussions of gender in Iranian cinema. The analyses of gender and sexuality both call attention to a crucial element of Banietemad's oeuvre and highlight its value for understandings of these topics beyond the particularities of her context.

The final section completes the book's panoptic overview of Banietemad's career through attention to her documentaries. Ghorbankarimi focuses on the importance of social realism to Banietemad's work. Although this quality has been discussed in relation to her feature films, Ghorbankarimi argues for "a thematic and stylistic unity between her documentaries and her fictional work" (p. 191), as seen in the documentaries *Centralization* (1986), *To Whom Do You Show These Films* (1993), and *Under the Skin of the City* (1996). Fatemeh-Mehr Khansalar draws on eco-critical film theory to describe *All My Trees* (2015) as "Tehran ecocinema," which "appropriates cinema as a tool to hold us accountable for our society and environment" (p. 207). In this way the chapter continues the focus on political dimensions of Banietemad's films while highlighting an issue that has received less attention than her interest in women's oppression and poverty. Feminist concerns are at the heart of Bahar Abdi's essay, which draws on James C. Scott's concept of the "hidden transcript" to analyze ways in which *Our Times* (2002) "has subtly managed to give voice and agency to young people, and particularly to female presidential candidates," referring to the many women who ran in the 2001 presidential election prior to being disqualified by the Guardian Council (p. 220). Abdi and the other contributors in these chapters demonstrate that the concerns reflected in Banietemad's features also appear in the documentaries, highlighting their important place in the context of her work.

As a whole, the book contains an enlightening combination of theoretical perspectives, providing unique insights into the career of an important but under-discussed filmmaker. Given the centrality of mothers and maternal themes to Banietemad's films, the collection does leave room for the possibility of future research using theoretical perspectives from the field of maternal studies. Scholars new to this field might consider starting with the recently published *Maternal Theory: The Essential Readings* or *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, both of which provide a variety of excellent entry points.[1] Although nearly all of the contributions in *ReFocus* are attentive to the fundamental and vibrant presence of maternal characters in the films, more perspectives from maternal studies may offer a productive avenue of research.

Nonetheless, the theoretical and methodological perspectives used in *ReFocus* combined with the engaging prose of the contributors provide a provocative and informative exploration of Banietemad's career. Although she has not previously received as much scholarly attention as the most widely discussed Iranian directors, the book establishes the value of her contributions to global filmmaking. Simultaneously, the insights provided throughout *ReFocus* illustrate the potential benefits of auteurist studies, despite their familiar limitations.

[1] Andrea O'Reilly, ed., *Maternal Theory Essential Readings*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2021); D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, Melinda Vandenbeld Giles, and Andrea O'Reilly, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

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I recommend this book to students and scholars of film studies, particularly those with interests in feminist and Middle Eastern cinema, who will benefit from its detailed and insightful examination of Banietemad's films.

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Allegory in Iranian Cinema: The Aesthetics of Poetry and Resistance. Michelle Langford (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). Pp. xiv, 278 (hardcover). ISBN 9781780762982

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Writing in the early 1990s, Bill Nichols observed the ascent of Iranian cinema to the global stage in his landmark article, "Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit" (1994).[1] For a theorist like Nichols, the global rise of Iranian cinema was merely an excuse to reflect on the processes by which international audiences make sense of "new" cinemas, especially when they are discovered, venerated, and made accessible by systems of global distribution like film festivals. Nevertheless, the article has become important to the study of Iranian filmmaking by capturing the moment at which Iranian cinema joined the ranks of world cinema: the darling of international film festivals and a mainstay on university syllabi. At the core of the article are important questions about how Iranian filmmakers have embedded meanings into their films. Nichols proposes that certain universal forms, including allegorical and poetic styles, offer an entry point for global viewers as they wade through strange sights and sounds and seek out those deeper messages teeming beneath the plot.

Although Michelle Langford's *Allegory in Iranian Cinema: The Aesthetics of Poetry and Resistance* does not directly reference Nichols's article, in many respects it picks up where Nichols leaves off. Langford begins her book by explaining that she was "seduced" by Iranian art house films in the 1990s when they "began making their way to international film festivals." She writes, "I couldn't help but feel that they were calling me to engage with them more deeply" (1). Perhaps unknowingly, she replicates the central concerns of Nichols's article by asking how Iranian films attract and sustain global viewership through the promise of hidden meanings. In his article, Nichols suggests that festival audiences make sense of Iranian cinema by capitalizing on their knowledge of the formal strategies of filmmaking to recuperate "the strange as familiar."[2] This understanding of Iranian films is, according to Nichols, necessarily partial, like that of a "satisfied tourist." He writes that lurking "at the boundaries of the film festival experience . . . are those deep structures and thick descriptions that might restore a sense of the particular and local to what we have now recruited to the realm of the global."[3]

In what could be a direct response to Nichols's observation, Langford's eloquent and thoughtful book supplies expert knowledge as the author analyzes an allegorical tradition that has become synonymous with Iranian cinema since its explosion on the international scene. Combining fine-grained analyses of specific films with a wealth of historical and political context, *Allegory in Iranian Cinema* is a welcome addition to Iranian film studies—a field that has grown mightily since Nichols first observed the budding presence of Iranian movies at international film festivals nearly three decades ago.

[1] Bill Nichols, "Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit," *Film Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1994): 16–30.

[2] Nichols, "Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning," 18.

[3] Ibid, 27.