



<Offside>: Minority Group and Alternative Media

Xingru Zhu

Chongqing University, Shapingba, Chongqing, 400030, China

ironmanshelly@163.com

Abstract. The current world situation is turbulent, with numerous issues such as Middle Eastern wars and ethnic conflicts, and the struggle for discourse power has once again attracted attention. The media not only defines the "majority" and "minority", but also guides the public to accept its construction: what is reported is the mainstream, while what is ignored or criticized becomes the "minority". Under this power structure, does film, as the seventh art form, have the ability to compete with the existing order and media status quo? To what extent can the survival status of minority groups be demonstrated? Jafar Panahi's 2006 film "Offside" presents the current situation of Iranian women who are considered socially subordinate, inspiring us to explore the possibility of film as an alternative medium. This article will use the text of the movie "Beyond" to discuss three specific issues: 1) how the movie portrays the "other"; 2) How movies shape the image of women as a minority group; 3) How movies can become an alternative medium for showcasing minority groups.

Keywords: Media Archaeology, Minority Groups, Transcendence, Jaffa Panashi.

1 Introduction

Mass media constantly influences people's lives, shaping a new dreamlike world through mainstream information, emotions, thoughts, and entertainment, which embodies the spirit of mainstream society and capitalist society[1]. To some extent, the media creates its own "majority" and "minority" and guides the public to accept its definition: what is reported by the media is the "mainstream", while what is ignored or criticized by the mainstream media is the "minority". In Iran, religion is the main factor influencing politics, society, and people's daily lives, but religion also submits to authority, and Iran's leadership authority prioritizes men in various fields, thereby pushing women into an unfair and unequal situation - in Iranian society, women are unable to move freely and lack autonomy in decision-making[2]. Therefore, under the hegemony of mass media, how can marginalized groups, especially women, show the world their true situation? How can their voices break through the silence mechanism of mainstream media? As an alternative medium, movies have gradually become an important channel for these groups to express their own justice and demands. Many Iranian directors, such as Asghar Farhadi, Abbas Kiarostami, and Jafar Panahi, have portrayed this

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reality of Iranian society in their films. This article will explore the specific manifestations of adolescent women in Jaffa Panahi's film "Beyond" as a vulnerable and minority group, study how alternative media shapes minority groups, and reveal the social status issues of Iranian women's status, as well as how their subordinate status in Iranian society is portrayed through the medium of film.

2 Alternative Media: The Edge of Non Mainstream Media

Alternative media, in simple terms, refers to media that does not occupy a dominant position, also known as non mainstream media, counter mainstream media, or alternative media[3]. They distance themselves from the power relations represented by mainstream media, maintain distance or even opposition to mainstream values and order, and explicitly challenge established systems and traditional critical values. Alternative media is also considered a "radical" or "underground" means of communication, placing itself in opposition to traditional media and representing the will outside the strict boundaries of the "mainstream"[4].

For a long time, communication studies have mainly focused on mainstream media and their products, neglecting media forms outside the mainstream. There are relatively few studies on alternative media both domestically and internationally, which can be roughly divided into two categories: one is comprehensive research that attempts to explain the definition of "alternative media" and explore its roots, types, and specific examples, so that we can consider it as a communication phenomenon[5]; Another type reveals the importance of alternative media in the dissemination process and explores its significant role in promoting social equality and democracy.

These studies mostly focus on the differences between alternative media and mainstream media, viewing alternative media as a window of expression for those who are not represented by mainstream media, and believing that these social minorities can promote and guide social and political reforms through alternative media channels. Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2008) explain alternative media through the concepts of diversity and relevance, emphasizing their existence from different perspectives using different theoretical frameworks, and proposing four research perspectives related to alternative media: 1) alternative media serving society; 2) Alternative media as the mainstream medium of the 'other'; 3) Alternative media closely connected to society; 4) As an alternative medium for root and stem structure[6].

John Downing's *Radical Media* (1984) is considered a milestone in alternative media research. Tang Ning described radical media as an anti information agency representing a rising emerging force[7]. In the 1984 edition of *Radical Media*, Tang Ning's analysis of alternative media mainly focused on publishing and printing products. He believed that the "alternative" of radical media existed in its potential to cause social and political change[8]. Tang Ning focuses on the alliance of radical media and its awakened political consciousness, and defines it as a form of media that encourages participants to pay attention to the multiple realities of society[8]. It may have certain tendencies or biases, but should not obey the will of a few elites or political parties. The sociality and creativity of alternative media must go beyond domesticated mainstream media.

3 Alternative Movies: Movies as Alternative Media

This article proposes a theory of "alternative cinema". Alternative movies, just like alternative media, challenge mainstream assumptions and rearrange social relationships and representations. Overall, alternative films have a counter mainstream form. More specifically, alternative films tend to reflect the current situation of non capitalist, community-based, socially marginalized groups, depicting the mental states and living conditions of unusual, irregular, non mainstream, and minority groups.

4 Beyond "as an Alternative Film

After explaining the concepts of "alternative media" and "alternative cinema", we will analyze how alternative cinema presents and reflects the social landscape through the Iranian film "Beyond". This article will use sociological interpretation methods to conduct text analysis on the film[10]. Through comparative research between the film text and social samples, the focus will be on exploring the isomorphic relationship between the film plot and social reality. Starting from the perspective of social background and problem origins, the social reality reflected in the film will be revealed.

4.1 The Plot of 'Beyond'

The story of "Beyond" revolves around an Iranian girl attempting to enter a sports stadium to watch a football match, depicting the restricted situation of Iranian women in public spaces. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, women have been prohibited from entering public places such as sports stadiums. "Beyond" tells the story of a group of football loving girls who dress up as boys to try and get through a large football game at Azadi Stadium in Tehran, but are eventually caught.

4.2 The Faith of Islam

Panahi portrayed in the film the restrictions imposed by religious beliefs on people of different social classes and statuses, which stem from the supreme status of Islam in Iranian society. Most bans and sanctions are closely related to religious beliefs. Girls crave to participate in social activities (such as watching football matches), but they must bravely express themselves in the public sphere at the risk of violating religious rules and facing severe punishment. In the film, an arrested girl finally puts on a traditional robe (chador) symbolizing her identity as a Muslim woman, which is used to cover her head and upper body. Through this plot, the director reveals an important issue: resistance and extreme behavior not only occur in people with weak beliefs, but even devout believers can face such difficulties, and religious issues are the root of this phenomenon.

4.3 Transcendence as an Alternative Medium

Alternative media presents social realities that are ignored or rejected by mass media, challenging established social and political rules. From this perspective, Panahi's film narrative and language belong to alternative films in Iranian cinema. He criticizes Iran's social status quo through the film and uses the issues in the film to proclaim another voice of Iran to the world.

Iranian new film directors, represented by Panahi, inherit the lyrical tradition commonly found in Persian poetry. They are Iran's "visual poets" who create contemporary poetry in the form of film using the documentary style of neorealism. They criticize reality through convoluted and in-depth portrayal of 'cultural negotiations', rather than simply calling out and questioning. Iranian post revolutionary films often use accidental events as narrative backgrounds, but their goal is to create an experimental cinematic language. The film 'Beyond' adopts a documentary style filming method, filmed on the day of the competition, and the competition results directly affect the story's direction and ending. This creative technique further enhances the film's sense of reality and urgency.

4.4 The Situation of Women

In Iranian history, the space available for women to use and the allowed ways of use have often been strictly restricted by oppressive regimes, which have led to anxiety and a sense of confinement among women. Prior to the introduction of restrictions during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iranian authorities did not oppose women watching football matches. But with the implementation of these restrictions, sports events gradually evolved into a field completely dominated by men, filled with vulgar male chauvinism. The film 'Beyond' reflects this phenomenon, where soldiers prohibit girls from entering the stadium on the grounds that men may use foul language and girls may be negatively affected. For example, in the film, when the girls who were arrested were discussing football matches and players, soldiers argued with them about it; And when an old man called to search for his daughter who had sneaked away, he cursed loudly at the soldiers. This implies that women in Iranian society do not have the right to freedom of movement and must accept the rules instilled by society and mainstream culture.

Cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1980) emphasized the importance of social practice and defined "culture" as "the entire way of life". He pointed out that mass communication is a field of conflicting interests in cultural activities of different social groups, and different social classes contribute to the "common culture", allowing society to progress in this struggle process. At this point, mass media is seen as a stage for reflecting conflicts between groups attempting to gain recognition for their cultural existence[9]. The theorists of the Birmingham School focused on the ideological effects of media, believing that media is not only a tool for disseminating information, but also a means of expressing political and social rights, with potential and imperceptible influence. At this point, Panahi's 'Beyond' can be seen as a tool of expression for minority groups, as it allows the voices of Iranian women to spread among the public and raises concerns about the status of women.

4.5 Another Voice of Minority Groups

As an alternative medium for minority groups, it plays a crucial role in their self-expression and is an important way for them to fight for their rights and express themselves in the face of problems. In addition, alternative media also provides support for the survival and development of minority groups. Thomas Aquino said, "Existence as existence is valuable, and can only be called existence when understood." (Thomas Aquino, 2000:105) This emphasizes that an existence should be understood, and only the understood existence has position, meaning, and value. People ideally expect a daily social life of mutual understanding and respect, without the concept of majority and minority. However, in reality, one of the main contradictions in many countries is the issue of defining the majority and minority groups. We can view Panahi's 'Beyond' as a communication tool that presents the issues faced by women in Iranian society and serves as a minority medium 'that confronts mainstream media. The film portrays the plight of Iranian women from beginning to end, in this isolated and closed society where they are oppressed and deprived of a place to stand in the public sphere, and are seen as a minority group.

4.6 Islamic Social Landscape

Like many countries, despite certain regulations and restrictions faced by Iranian audiences, football remains an important component of mass sports and entertainment. At the competition venue, people can shout, jump, release emotions, and expend energy. As shown in 'Beyond', although there is no direct footage of the football game in the film, the audience can feel the intense atmosphere of the game through the police's retelling and the audience's shouting.

'Beyond' to some extent depicts a realistic cross-section of daily life in Iran. At the beginning of the movie, an old man is chatting with a little boy on a bus. The old man tells the young man that he particularly likes football because he can shout and run around on match days. Panahi (2007) said in an interview that Iran has a problem where the boundary between "allow" and "prohibit" is not always clear. The film questions from beginning to end what is prohibited and what is legal. At the beginning of the movie, it emphasizes that Iranian women are not allowed to watch football matches, and women who go to watch football matches will be imprisoned. However, no one can oppose these rules and no one has the ability to question or resist them. Based on these analyses, we can say that 'Beyond' has the characteristics of alternative media and minority media. The film not only reflects the problems faced by Iranian women and expresses criticism of the current situation, but also constitutes the core elements of the film. 'Beyond' has created an alternative discourse that is opposed to mainstream and pro government media, accurately reflecting social issues and providing a new medium of expression for the minority group in Iranian society - women.

5 Conclusion

Jaffa Panahi's creations pay special attention to social issues, committed to presenting more realistic scenes and more accurate aesthetic contexts to the audience. He often conveys profound meanings through simple stories, which are actually very profound and inspiring. For example, "The White Balloon" (1995) tells the story of a little girl who wants to buy a fish for less than a dollar, while "Beyond" tells the story of a group of girls who want to watch a football game. These stories may seem ordinary, but they depict the true picture of Iranian society through poetic and humanitarian narratives.

Iran has a strict film censorship system that prohibits anti-government and anti policy creations, while supporting film discourse that upholds mainstream rights. This mechanism is actually a cultural hegemony. However, despite government oppression, Iranian directors' adventurous creativity and expression have elevated Iranian cinema to an important position in the world of cinema. Panasy and his realistic creations also belong to this group of directors. He questioned the unfair structure of Iranian society in the film, truthfully presented the status of women, and innovatively portrayed the resistance of minority groups, allowing discourse outside the center of power to be expressed. Therefore, the movie 'Beyond' is an excellent example of alternative media reflecting the plight of minority groups and the limitations of mainstream media. This film not only became a voice for women, but also criticized Iran's mass media. Both the title and content of the film demonstrate a spirit of rebellion. As an alternative medium, movies demonstrate a tendency towards diversity and liberalism, providing new forces for the struggle of minority and vulnerable groups.

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