

## Vampires, Vigilantes, Activists and Athletes: Feminist Iranian Filmmakers in the 21st Century

Zoe Roberts Churchill

*Newcomb Institute, The United States*

### Abstract

Western feminism suggests that the film industry both perpetuates and dismantles patriarchal ideals. Feminist film critics analyze Western cinema through such lenses as the “Bechdel test” and the “male gaze,” utilizing these concepts to deconstruct deeply engrained misogynistic tropes. In contrast, feminist ideology manifests differently in the Iranian film industry, largely out of necessity due to post-revolution censorship of women’s bodies and political messaging. This paper analyzes how Iranian film directors circumvent censorship to disseminate feminist ideology; how feminist Iranian film directors subvert Western expectations of life for women in Iran; and the political and social impact of feminist filmmaking on Iranian culture and the Iranian diaspora. Research suggests that as Iranian cinema gains greater popularity in the international film industry, feminist Iranian filmmakers face increased oppression from the Iranian government, resulting in the growth of the Iranian diaspora as filmmakers flee to Europe and the United States to continue making political films. However, the celebration of Iranian women directors is largely dependent on their ability to “confirm the general view of Iran,” and subsequently the Western idea of Iran as a homogenous, violent and “backwards” society remains unchallenged (Ghorbankarimi, 5).

**Keywords:** feminist filmmaking; international film industry; iranian cinema; middle eastern feminism; women directors