Staging Iranian Cinema at the Berlinale

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades Doctor of Philosophy/PhD

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Contents

Notes on the Publication and Acknowledgements..........vii

List of Illustrations..........x

Notes on Transliteration and Translation..........xiv

INTRODUCTION: ISLAMIC STUDIES AND THE BERLINALE..........1

Irritations - Iranian Cinema in a Transnational Context - Film Festivals and Representation - The Inherent Logic of Berlin - Staging Iranian Cinema

1. FROM WORLD EXHIBITIONS TO FILM FESTIVALS..........21

1.1 Paris, Berlin: Display and Spectacle in Late 19th Century World Exhibitions..........22

Between Competitive Nation-Branding and Promoting Peace and Progress - Education, Entertainment, and Propaganda - Hyperreality at the Colonial Exhibitions - Aiming for the World Stage: The 1896 Berliner Gewerbeausstellung

1.2 Exhibition Culture and Representation..........46

Achieving Objectness Through Discourse - Reality-Effect and Mythologies - Cultural Studies and Representation - Branding and the Certainty of Representation

1.3 The Emergence of Film Festivals..........63

The Festival as a Performance - The Urban Stage of the Host City - From World Exhibitions to Film Festivals

2. THE BERLINALE'S HISTORY OF STAGING THE POLITICAL..........78

2.1 Conceived in the Blocked City of Berlin..........80

It Began with a Kiss - Schaufenster der Freien Welt - Look at this City! - The Eastward Face of the Showcase

2.2 Forum for Political Turmoil..........102

The Hot Summer of 1970 - Internationales Forum des Jungen Films - The Deer Hunter - The Wind of Freedom

2.3 Eastward Bound..........119

The Concept of National Cinema - Peeking Behind the Iron Curtain - Forum for Soviet Cinema - Hollywood Climbs the Wall - Discovering Three Chinas - Visually Reconciling China and Taiwan

2.4 The Special Berlin-Iran Connection 150

German Dreams of Royalty - Jubelperser and Prügelperser - Chaos im Iran: The Islamic Revolution of 1979

3. THE EMERGENCE OF IRANIAN CINEMA ON THE FESTIVAL STAGES 172

3.1 Glamour and Politics on the Former Death Strip 177

Filling the Death Strip with Cosmopolitan Life - The Largest Audience Festival in the World - Mr. Berlinale - Sex, Politics, and Rock'n'Roll

3.2 Kick-Off: Iran at the 2006 Berlinale 201

Casting Iran - Iranian Winter in Berlin - Football and Gender Politics - Further Insights into Iranian Society

3.3 Iran Settles in at the Berlinale between 2007 and 2010 218

Criticism: A Red Carpet for Ahmadinejad - Villagers and Women - The 2009 Election Protests and the Visual Reconfiguration of the German Image of Iran - Showcasing Angry Young Iranians in 2010

4. JAFAR PANAHI BECOMING THE POSTER BOY OF POLITICAL CINEMA AT THE 2011 BERLINALE 254

4.1 The Significance of the Political 257

From Poverty to the Festivals - Social Filmmaking - Green Ribbons on the Red Carpet - Gold for Iran

4.2. Summoning the Spirit of Freedom 289

The Tears of Juliette Binoche - The Narrative of Imprisonment - Iran as the Larger Prison - "An Attack on the Fundamental Value of Freedom Itself"

5. ONSTAGE ABSENCE, ONSCREEN PRESENCE: THE ROAD TO THE GOLDEN BEAR IN 2015 308

5.1 The Empty Chair and the Staging of Absence 310

Waiting for Panahi - The Object of the Empty Chair - The Berlinale Family Greets its Absent Member

5.2 Emerging From Behind the Curtain 323

Post-Cinema, Non-Cinema, or Performative Cinema? - Setting the Stage for Panahi's Return - Lifting the Curtain - Therapeutic Performance

5.3 With a Taxi to Berlin..346

Collecting Passengers, Picking up Issues - Lectures on Film Regulation in Iran - Performing the Victory over Censorship - Last Stop: Berlin

Concluding Thoughts on the Work of Festival Representation....................373

A Variety of Stages - Disrupting the Protocol, Fueling the Festival Machine - Drawing from the Repertoire of Berlin History - Objections from the Back Seats

List of References

Bibliography...387

Newspapers and Websites...398

Festival Publications..404

Videos and Recordings..406

Filmography..409

Summary of the Dissertation in German and English

Erklärung zur selbständigen Anfertigung der Arbeit

Notes on the Publication and Acknowledgements

In June 2021, when I completed my work on this PhD thesis, many of its research subjects were in a very different state. The Berlinale was reorganizing itself under the new leadership duo of Carlo Chatrian and Mariette Rissenbeek. Jafar Panahi, the Iranian director large portions of this text focus on, was continuing his work as an underground filmmaker, his prison sentence remained suspended. The political situation in Iran was relatively quiet under president Hassan Rouhani.

In the three years that have passed between the completion of this thesis and its publication, these things have changed significantly: The Berlinale is reorganizing itself, again, and the leadership team that was new in 2021 is preparing their exit in 2025, with the festival finding itself in a severe identity (and funding) crisis. The prison sentence against Jafar Panahi was administered in July 2022 for nearly seven months, after he had spoken out against the Iranian government's brutal handling of the mass protests following the death of Mahsa Amini and publicly inquired about the arrest of his colleague Mohammad Rasoulof. These events have changed the world of subversive Iranian cinema dramatically. On a much larger scale, the geopolitical situation and Iran's role in it are changing rapidly, and with unforeseeable consequences.

While all of these developments have significant impacts on the core subject of this research, it has always been a look back at how the Berlinale presented Iranian cinema between 2006 and 2019, which marked Dieter Kosslick's tenure as festival president. Since then, Iran's role on the festival stages has shifted, although films by Panahi and directors close to him, like his son Panah or collaborator Maryam Moqaddam, remain popular. The Berlinale's staging of the political remains the core of its brand, while transforming into a more self-reflective terrain, as the Golden Bear for Mati Diop's *Dahomey* on the (post)colonial provenance of cultural goods, as well as the aftermath of the statements around the situation in Gaza at the 2024 award ceremony, suggest. In the hope that my findings might resonate with ongoing research on film festivals and cultural representation of Muslim societies in Europe, I have consequently decided to publish the text in the state that I have left it three years ago.

With its dual identity between film (festival) and Islamic studies, my research has been highly interdisciplinary from the conception. For interdisciplinarity to become more than a buzzword, especially in highly departmentalized German academia, it needs people who actively empower it. Birgit Krawietz is one of these people. Not only has she been an excellent supervisor, perfectly balancing creative development and strict organization, she has also motivated me to academically pursue my cinematic passions, even they did not fit disciplinary boundaries. The other half of my supervision team, Wendy Shaw, has been a wonderful supplement in this regard, enabling me to perceive the research as a process of almost organic evolution. Personally, she was also a necessary role model in terms of career choices. Both supervisors had a tremendous impact on the five years in which I worked on this thesis, and for this, I remain grateful to this day.

Equally, research needs empowering and open institutions. Since I became a fellow in 2016, I have perceived the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures as exactly that. Not only was my research enabled by a generous grant from the BGSMCS, but both managing directors I have experienced in my time there, Bettina Gräf and Lars Ostermeier, have done more than facilitating an environment in which PhD researchers can thrive - they were also constantly approachable in times of personal need, which for me has been the case time and again. The same goes for many of my fellow PhD researchers at the BGSMCS. Even if I did much of the writing under lockdown conditions, in the basement of what often felt like a haunted house, I have always felt home and part of a community without which I might have quit.

A different but equally important openness I have received from the people and institutions that gave me access to their sources and experiences. Through the archive of the *Deutsche Kinemathek*, I had access to printed program materials going back to 1951, in addition to the excellent online archive of the Berlinale, which contains openly accessible videos and brochures since 2009. In terms of interviews, I am grateful to Mani Haghighi, who took time to share his personal experiences with me. Other people that agreed to give interviews or helped me facilitate them will have to remain anonymous here and in the text, although I learned just as much from these conversations.

More indirect contributions, came from fellow researchers in the fields of Iranian cinema and film festival studies. Both fields are quite narrow, so I

am all the more grateful for the very inspiring and motivating conversations I had at the annual workshops on Iranian cinema at *Universität Basel* between 2016 and 2018 and at the Reframing Film Festivals conference at *Università Ca' Foscari* Venice in 2019.

Later, in the process of writing and proofreading, many friends and family members gave priceless feedback, often on very short notice. And in addition to these intellectual contributions, it was especially in the final stages that two people helped me stay sane with their never ending love, mercy, and music. A heartfelt thanks goes out to all of you.

And, finally, to my children, who spent five years asking me when I would finish my book: Here it is.

Berlin, May 12th 2024

List of Illustrations

0.1 Dieter Kosslick holding up Hana Saeedi. Screenshot from *Red carpet for Taxi,* 2015. Min. 2:25.

1.1 The *Rue de Caire* at the *Exposition Universelle.* Photograph, 1889. Brown University (Public Domain).

1.2 Postcard showing a panoramic view of the *Gewerbeausstellung*, 1896. Listed on https://www.akpool.de/ansichtskarten/27976948-litho-berlin-mitte-gelaende-weltausstellung-1896-gesamtansicht, accessed June 15th, 2021.

1.3 Postcard from the *Kairo* exhibition, 1896. Listed on https://www.diegeschichteberlins.de/geschichteberlins/berlin-abc/stichworteag/975-weltstadt-fuer-einen-sommer-die-berliner-gewerbeausstellung-1896-im-europaeischen-kontext.html, accessed June 15th, 2021.

2 Enhanced version of a map of divided Berlin drawn for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 1945. Library of Congress (Creative Commons).

2.1 West Berliners greeting planes of the Airlift. Photograph, 1948. Henry Ries, United States Air Force Historical Research Agency.

2.2 Label of products made in "the blocked city of Berlin" during the Airlift, 1948. Reprinted in Scherff, 2008. p. 153.

2.3 German poster for *The Big Lift*, 1953. Twentieth Century Fox.

2.4 Gary Cooper in a cabriolet on the *Kurfürstendamm* boulevard. Photograph, 1953. © Heinz Köster, Deutsche Kinemathek, Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin.

2.5 Jean-Luc Godard arriving in Berlin. Photograph, 1961. Heinz Köster, Deutsche Kinemathek, Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin.

2.6 The *Zoo Palast* decorated with flags from the participating nations during the 17th Berlinale. Photograph, 1967. Reprinted in Eue and Baier, 2010. p. 62.

2.7 Posters advertising the Berlinale at the inner-Berlin border. Photograph, 1955. Heinz Köster.

2.8 Jury member Dušan Makavejev declaring his protest against George Steven's plan not to consider *o.k.* for awards. Photograph, 1970. Reprinted in Simbeni and Sannwald, 2018. p. 46.

2.9 Jury president George Stevens protesting Michael Verhoeven's competition film *o.k.* at a jury press conference. Photograph, 1970. Reprinted in Eue and Baier, 2010. p. 117.

2.10 Festival director Wolf Donner selling Berlinale hats and umbrellas in front of the *Zoo Palast* after he relocated the event to February. Photograph, 1977. Mario Mach.

2.11 Soviet filmmaker Elem Klimov, Hollywood producer Jack Valenti, Berlin Cultural Senator Volker Hassemer, and festival director Moritz de Hadeln during the *Berlinale Kamera* ceremony at *Rathaus Schöneberg.* Photograph, 1987. Erika Rabau, Ullstein Bild.

2.12 Julia Roberts and Sally Field standing on the Berlin Wall with two East Berlin policemen. Photograph, 1990. Keystone, Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

2.13 Billy Wilder and Horst Buchholz on the set of *One, Two, Three* before the production was interrupted by the construction of the Wall. Production still, 1961. Deutsche Presse-Agentur, akg images.

2.14 Billy Wilder and Horst Buchholz reunited in front of the *Brandenburger Tor.* Press photo, 1993. Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

2.15 Chinese filmmaker Xie Fei and Taiwanese filmmaker Ang Lee after each won the Golden Bear at the 43rd Berlinale. Photograph, 1993. Patrick Piel, getty images.

2.16 Cover of *Frau im Spiegel*, no. 17, 1958, showing Soraya and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi following their divorce. Funke Mediengruppe.

2.17 An Iranian counter-protester in front of *Rathaus Schöneberg* beating up student protesters during the visit of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Photograph, 1967. Ludwig Binder, Stiftung Haus der Geschichte.

2.18 Cover of *Der Spielgel*, no. 50, 1978, translating "Bloody Weeks in Iran - Dictatorship of the Mullahs?" Spiegel-Verlag Rudolf Augstein.

2.19 Cover of *Der Spielgel*, no. 46, 1979, translating "Chaos in Iran - Khomeini the Fanatic." Spiegel-Verlag Rudolf Augstein.

3.1 The *Todesstreifen* (Death Strip) marking the inner-Berlin border at *Potsdamer Platz.* Aerial photo, 1965. Archiv H.-D. Lahe, Presse- und Informationsamt des Landes Berlin.

3.2 The *Kulturforum* with the *Neue Nationalgalerie*, *Staatsbibliothek*, and *Philharmonie.* Aerial photo 1978. Rolf Koehler, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte (bpk).

3.3 Dieter Kosslick in his festival director outfit. Photograph, 2018. Harald Krichel (Creative Commons).

3.4 Dieter Kosslick holding hands with actress Nicole Kidman. Press photo, 2015. Agence France Presse, picture alliance.

3.5 Film still from *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* used in the program catalogue of the 59th Berlinale, showing Elly and Sepideh arriving at the holiday house. Printed in Katalog, 2009. p. 64.

3.6 Cover of *Der Spiegel* no. 26, 2009 showing two Iranian protesters with the headline translating "Rebellion against the Radicals." Spiegel-Verlag Rudolf Augstein.

3.7 German poster of *Shekarchi* (The Hunter), published under the title *Zeit des Zorns* (Time of Wrath). *good!movies.*

4.1 German film stars rallying on the red carpet protesting against Jafar Panahi's conviction. Photograph, 2011. Published without further credit on https://www.berlinale.de/de/archiv/jahresarchive/2011/05_boulevard_2011/05_boulevard_tage_2011.html#navi=10879&item=11139, accessed June 16th 2021.

4.2 Dieter Kosslick with a poster of *Offside* at the red carpet protest. Photograph, 2011. Published without further credit on https://www.berlinale.de/de/archiv/jahresarchive/2011/05_boulevard_2011/05_boulevard_tage_2011.html#navi=10879&item=11138, accessed June 16th 2021.

4.3 A truck sponsored by the *FriedensFilmPreis* initiative tours the red carpet with a large poster that asks "Where is Jafar Panahi?" Screenshot from *Red carpet for Offside*, 2011. Min 9:20.

4.4 Film still from *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, showing the titular couple in front of the family judge.

4.5-8 Juliette Binoche taking the cardboard sign from Panahi's empty chair and revealing it during her laureate speech. Screenshots from *Closing ceremony of the 63rd Festival de Cannes,* 2010. Min. 19:00, 27:30, 27:45, and 29:00.

4.9 Jafar Panahi's open letter to the Berlinale as presented on the festival website. Screenshot from "*Open Letter from Jafar Panahi,*" 2011.

5.1-2 Press photographers attempting to get a picture of the Golden Bear statue that was awarded to Jafar Panahi. Screenshots from *Press conference for the laureates of the 65th Berlinale,* 2015. Min. 132:30 and 133:15.

5.3–4 The jury of the 61st Berlinale and a close up of the empty spot in their middle. Screenshots from *Press conference of the international jury of the 61st Berlinale,* 2011. Min. 2:25 and 2:30.

5.5–6 Dieter Kosslick with moderator Anke Engelke and a close up of the empty chair standing next to them. Screenshots from *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale,* 2011. Min. 66:25 and 66:45.

5.7 Dieter Kosslick carrying the empty chair. Screenshot from *Closing ceremony of the 61st Berlinale,* 2011. Min. 19:15.

5.8–10 Film stills from *Pardeh*, showing the writer and Pessar sitting in front of the titular curtain, Melika revealing the film posters, and Panahi entering the film.

5.11–12 Film stills from *Taxi*, showing a smiling Panahi behind the driving wheel and the final shot of the film with two men in black clothing breaking into the car and stealing the camera equipment.

5.13 Dieter Kosslick holding up Hana Saeedi. Screenshot from *Red carpet for Taxi,* 2015. Min. 2:25.

5.14 Hana Saeedi with her guest gift from the Berlinale, a teddy bear. Photograph, 2015. Published without further credit on https://www.berlinale.de/de/archiv/jahresarchive/2015/02_programm_2015/02_filmdatenblatt_2015_201511112.html#tab=boulevard&item=43413, accessed June 9th 2021.

5.15–18 Dieter Kosslick taking Hana Saeedi's hand to bring her onstage, Saeedi holding up the Golden Bear, and crying during her laureate speech. Screenshots from *Closing ceremony of the 65th Berlinale,* 2015. Min. 58:40, 58:45, 58:55, and 59:35.

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

In the **transliteration** of Farsi words, I follow the standard of the *International Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES), with the variation of writing short vowels as either *a*, *o*, or *e*. Place names and expressions that have found their way into the IJMES Word List of common terms are given in the form in which they appear in that list. A further exception are personal names, for which I give the fully transliterated version with diacritical marks only at first mention and switch to the standardized English spelling thereafter. Many of the filmmakers that appear in this work are written about in English language media to an extent where it would be irritating to read ʿAbbās Kiyārostamī instead of Abbas Kiarostami or Mānī Haqīqī instead of Mani Haghighi.

Also on the account of readability I give preference to the English **translation** of German or Farsi quotes, followed by the original version in brackets (or in footnotes for longer passages). Certain established phrases that are crucial to the analysis, however, will remain remain untranslated and marked in italics, such as *Luftbrücke* (Berlin Airlift) or *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* (Showcase of the Free World). The same goes for film titles as well as place names like *Potsdamer Platz* or locations like the *Berlinale Palast.*

In the same fashion, I give preference to the untranslated version of **abbreviations** and short forms, leading me to speak of DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik) rather than GDR (German Democratic Republic) or of *Ershād* (*Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmī*) rather than MCIG (Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance). As with personal names, the full form can be found at the first mention.

Introduction: Islamic Studies and the Berlinale

On February 6th 2015, Berlin witnessed a film event of a peculiar kind: During the Berlin International Film Festival (short: Berlinale), Jaʿfar Panāhī's (b. 1960) *Taxi* celebrated its world premiere at the *Berlinale Palast*, the highly glamorous theater palace at the heart of *Potsdamer Platz. Taxi* was one of sixty Iranian films that were screened at the festival between 2006 and 2020, but it stood out from this large batch due to its rich backstory: Panahi had shot the film while driving through Tehran without permission from Iranian authorities and was not allowed to travel to Berlin for the premiere. Instead of the filmmaker, his ten-year old niece Hānā Saʿīdī, who had starred in the film next to her taxi-driving uncle, substituted for him. Festival director Dieter Kosslick (b. 1948) welcomed Saeedi with the informal cordiality he was known for. He gifted the girl a teddy bear and took her by the hand to accompany her on the red carpet. When she was to sign her portrait on the staircase wall of the *Berlinale Palast*, he lifted her up so she could reach it (Picture 0.1). Dieter and Hana, the accommodating man assisting the little Iranian girl, made an extremely photogenic power couple.

When *Taxi* was announced as the winner of the Golden Bear at the same spot eight days later, it was unclear who would accept the award on behalf of

Picture 0.1: Dieter Kosslick lifting up Hana Saeedi so she can reach her festival portrait in the staircase of the *Berlinale Palast* to sign it, a ritual all directors, actresses and actors of competition films pass through.

the absent Panahi. Again it was Kosslick who ran off the stage into the audience and took Saeedi by the hand to drag her into the spotlight. When she had arrived onstage and held up the statue, she finally collapsed under the pressure and burst into tears, unable to hold the spontaneous acceptance speech that was expected of her. In the aftermath, the media accolades on the awards ceremony were as loud as the standing ovations in the *Berlinale Palast*: Taxi was univocally seen as a highly deserving recipient of the festival's main award and the choice was generally read as "a Golden Bear for political courage"[1] and "a signal against the repression of the arts."[2] Saeedi's tears were described as "tears of joy about the world witnessing the fate of her uncle, representative of many other artists threatened by censorship and repression."[3]

Irritations

At the time of *Taxi*'s triumphant run at the 65th Berlinale and the mediatic consensus that it had rightly deserved the top award, I was finishing my M.A. thesis on Iranian cinema in the 1980s and the role that children took in many of the subversive art films that had been produced during that decade. Not only had I found that, for a number of reasons, children's films had often become a refuge for sensitive subjects in the first decade after the Islamic Revolution, but that by the 1990s, their presence in Iranian art films had also become a well-known cliché. By the time that Iranian cinema was being hyped at European film festivals in the mid-1990s, most of the celebrated filmmakers like ʿAbbās Kiyārostamī (1940–2016) had moved well past their phase of working with children. When I saw the images of the little girl holding up the Golden Bear for her uncle, I was rather irritated: Were such appearances of Iranian children on the global film festival stages not a thing of the past? What was the source of this apparently ongoing fascination, and what role did Panahi's niece in particular take at the Berlinale?

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[1] Körte, 2015.

[2] "Regimekritiker Jafar Panahi hat den Hauptpreis der diesjährigen Berlinale gewonnen. Die Jury prämierte seinen Film als Zeichen gegen die Unterdrückung der Kunst." "*Iranischer Film Taxi gewinnt den Goldenen Bären*," 2015.

[3] "Es sind Tränen der Freude, darüber, dass die Welt am Schicksal ihres Onkels teilnimmt, stellvertretend für viele andere von Zensur, Unterdrückung und Repression bedrohte Künstler in Iran und allen anderen Ländern, die Kunst- und Meinungsfreiheit einschränken." Borcholte, 2015.

My irritation was enhanced by the festival's posture of being the savior of repressed Iranian filmmakers, a posture that materialized in Kosslick's gestures of helping and caring for Saeedi while simultaneously dragging her into the spotlight—and receiving unanimous applause for his behavior. I was about to graduate from the Institute of Islamic Studies at *Freie Universität Berlin*, an intellectual environment ripe with ambivalent debates about Edward Said's 1978 diagnose of Orientalism and the epistemic exclusions that came along with colonialism and its ongoing legacy. Against this background, problematic assumptions of Western superiority seemed to be channelled through the representation of Iranian filmmakers' despairs and hopes, symbolized by helpless children who were literally put onto the festival stage in order to be elevated and saved. To me, such gestures at the very least deserved a second look rather than unanimous applause.

The Berlinale was no strange and unrelated institution to me at this point—on the contrary. For nearly a decade, I had immensely enjoyed the rush that the festival injects into the gray desperation of the rough Berlin Februaries, both as a viewer and as an occasional volunteer worker. I had my very first encounter with the festival when I was 17 years old. Coming from East Berlin, where I had grown up, I was strolling past the glass facades of *Potsdamer Platz,* living the dream of the metropolis skyline that suddenly emerged from the otherwise gritty and low-rise cityscape. I walked up to one of the Berlinale ticket booths. Until that point I had only followed the festival in the media—general admission only started with the legal age of 18. I had also heard the rumors of the notoriously hard-to-get tickets and people who would queue up all night, especially for the precious gala and competition films. Not really hoping to achieve anything, I went to the counter and asked for a ticket to the next screening at the *Berlinale Palast*, whichever film. To my surprise, the vendor neither laughed nor asked for my ID, but simply sold me a ticket—and an incredibly cheap one at that, as a student discount and a last-minute-offer reduced the price.

Extremely proud of my conquest, I went to the large glass front of the *Berlinale Palast*, over the red carpet sprawling from the street onto the staircase. To my infinite joy, the guards also let me enter without asking for an ID. I took my place on one of the last seats of the second tier, with the most terrible view imaginable, far too high up, actually having to gaze downwards onto the screen.

But of course I did not care about the view—I was finally in! Nor did I care that *Der Freie Wille* (The Free Will, dir. Matthias Glasner, Germany 2006), my film of "choice", was indeed good proof that limiting the legal age of admission was a reasonable idea: the psychological drama profiles a serial rapist and his unsuccessful attempts at rehabilitation, containing several scenes of explicit sexual violence. The trauma-inducing film, however, was clearly not at the heart of my experience, but the atmosphere: the glamorous theater palace, the crimson fabric of the seats and floors, the long staircase flanked by the large autographed portraits of the visiting film stars, the supposedly very important people sitting down in the parquet, the golden sparks of the festival trailer raining down from the massive screen onto the audience, and ultimately the stumbling back into the reality of a dull February afternoon when the show was over.

For the following decade, this excitement did not fade. Each February, I suppressed the load of end-term exams and papers and went to the festival, reliving the thrill of managing to get a ticket and the joy of being part of a film premiere with all the accompanying pomp. Often enough, the particular film mattered less than the time and place of the screening and the availability of tickets. With about 400 films premiering at the festival every year, the quality was of course a mixed bag. Sometimes, I encountered a rare jewel that made a lasting impression, but disappointment became a far more frequent companion. With time, however, I realized that even in the less enjoyable films, I learned about the countries and social groups that they portrayed. Most of the films in all sections of the Berlinale were structured around the societies in which they are produced, and documentaries as well as narrative features could be watched with a certain ethnographic interest, for which the film festival context is often seen as a particularly rich environment.[4]

The more I sharpened my own perspective, especially on Muslim cultures and societies in the context of my university studies, the more I began to challenge what I saw onscreen and in the way the festival represented the films and filmmakers. The generally heightened interest in all things Islamic in post-9/11-Europe heavily impacted the Berlinale, too. Many of the curated

[4] The increasing number of smaller ethnographic film festivals speaks to the assumption that film is a medium particularly well suited to popular anthropological studies, and that festivals are the favored forum for such films. For a good overview of this phenomenon, see Vallejo and Paz Peirano, 2017.

films were produced in the Middle East or dealt with Islam in one way or another, usually framed around the same questions of the connection of religion and culture with violence, or around human rights issues that determined the Western discourse in general. While the general tenor of the films of course went in a universal and humanist direction that problematized the depiction of Muslims as inherently violent and anti-Western, Islam nevertheless usually entered the festival competition in association with the well-known issues of terrorism (as in Michael Winterbottom's 2006 *Road to Guantanamo* or Rachid Bouchareb's 2009 *London River*) or the clash of a young and liberal middle class with a paternalistic conservative society that offers them no place, of which the competition films *Bizim Buyük Çaresizliğimiz* (Our Grand Despair, dir. Seyfi Teoman, Turkey 2011) and *Nḥabbik Hādī* (I Love You, Hadi, dir. Muḥammad bin ʿAṭṭiyya, Tunisia 2016) are prime examples, in addition to the countless films dealing with the Arab Spring that have been screened in all sections of the festival since 2012. Of all Muslim societies, however, Iran was by far the most curated film industry at the Berlinale during the 2010s, especially in the prominent competition section, where three Iranian films received the Golden Bear in one decade, accompanied by a total of six Silver Bears since 2006. Iran proved to be no exception to the pattern of the films being read along the lines of human rights violations and the mechanisms of repression and censorship against filmmakers.

The attention given to Iran peaked at the 2015 Berlinale; by this time I had developed an increasingly academic interest in Iranian cinema, and my irritation with the phenomenon remained unresolved. In my mind, the hype around Iranian cinema at European festivals was a thing of the 1990s, when dozens of Iranian films had scooped major awards, crowned by the *Palm d'Or* for Abbas Kiarostami's *Ṭaʿm-e Gīlās* (The Taste of Cherry) at the 1997 Festival de Cannes. Even Jafar Panahi himself, who in many ways became the poster boy of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale, had already witnessed a steep career during that boom, receiving the Golden Camera in Cannes in 1994, the Golden Leopard in Locarno in 1997, and the Golden Lion in Venice in 2000. Why then was the Berlinale, one of the few major European film festivals that had sat out this wave in the 1990s, belatedly showcasing Iran in such a prominent fashion? Why was a rogue state like Iran received so enthusiastically in the plush chairs at the *Potsdamer Platz*? And how did this showcasing manifest itself in detail?

Iranian Cinema in a Transnational Context

The first place to go for such an inquiry is the vast corpus of literature on Iranian cinema. Since the hype of the 1990s, it has become one of the best researched non-Western cinemas in film studies. The Iranian film industry indeed makes for a fascinating subject, as the contrast between its reputation for aesthetic and narrative innovation and the many spectacular attempts at state regulation indeed leaves much room for questions and interpretation. In addition, the Islamic revolution of 1979 was very much concerned with—and aided by—audiovisual media and thus acts as a milestone in Iranian film history. Yet, the conflicting dynamic between state funding and censorship can be traced back far into the Pahlavi era. Already in the 1950s, the state had discovered cinema as a potential tool for propaganda and commissioned a number of documentary films to chronicle its modernization efforts, a measure through which many experimental filmmakers kickstarted their early careers. The later cultural impact of poetic documentarians like Ebrāhīm Golestān (b. 1922), Forūgh Farokhzād (1934–1967), and Kāmrān Shīrdel (b. 1938) would be unthinkable without these state-commissioned documentaries. In the 1960s, Shah Moḥammad Reżā Pahlavī's (1919–1980) third wife, Faraḥ Pahlavī (b. 1938), initiated a publicly funded infrastructure of film education and production. The most impactful of these institutions was the Center for the Intellectual Education of Children and Young Adults (*Kānūn-e Parvaresh-e Fekrī-ye Kūdakān va Nūjavānān*, short: *Kānūn*), founded in 1965, where most of the generation of filmmakers decorated internationally in the 1980s and 1990s—including Abbas Kiarostami, Amīr Nāderī (b. 1946), and Ebrāhīm Forūzesh's (b. 1939)—had produced their early films. The *Kānūn* belonged to the public institutions that were adopted by the Islamic Republic after 1979, when its nation-wide network of education programs was continuously expanded. As such, it was also responsible for the training and early careers of the subsequent generation of prolific filmmakers, the generation to which the 1960 born Jafar Panahi belongs.

These measures of public funding laid the foundations for Iran's global reputation of having an extraordinarily innovative cinematic culture. They are, however, counterbalanced by a longstanding tradition of film censorship. Ironically, the same filmmakers educated and supported by the state often became subjects of harassment, a phenomenon that at times was even evident

in the development of a single film. The most prominent example of this is Dāryūsh Mehrjūyī's *Gāv* (The Cow, 1969), which is often seen as the earliest globally successful Iranian art film. While its production was funded by the state, *Gāv* was banned immediately after completion as it was deemed to depict Iran as a rural and regressive society. These discrepancies continued after 1979, when film censorship became even more symbolically charged. Many anecdotes circulate about the assumed iconoclasm of the Islamic revolution, including the arson attacks that destroyed cinema halls in larger cities in 1978,[5] Āyatollāh Khomeynī's condemnation of cinema as a detrimental symptom of the Western "culture of false idols" (*farhang-e ṭāghūt*),[6] and the appointment of a nearly blind man as the first chief censor of the film department of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmī*, short: *Ershād*).[7] Soon after his return to Iran, however, Khomeini changed his mind about cinema, reportedly thanks to discovering the medium's potential after watching Mehrjui's *Gāv*.[8] At his famous 1979 speech at the Tehran cemetery of *Behesht-e Zahrā*, Khomeini already praised cinema as a valuable tool for popular education.[9] Yet the following decades continued to see extensive film censorship managed by the newly founded *Ershād*, which relied on changing and often conflicting guidelines.

Given such ambivalences and longstanding dynamics, as well the symbolic value of the iconoclastic anecdotes noted above, the state regulation of cinema often seems to act as a mirror of Iranian 20th century history. As such, it is not surprising that Iranian cinema has been the subject of a vast corpus of research during the last two decades. The most comprehensive work to date is surely the *Social History of Iranian Cinema* by U.S. based cultural scholar Hamid Naficy.[10] Published in 2011 and 2012, its four volumes offer an extensive compendium on Iranian film history from the late 19th century to the early

[5] The attacks happened in the context of the increasing anti-Pahlavi demonstrations and have often been attributed to violent Islamists. An independent examination, however, was never conducted, and while the extent was catastrophic, claiming hundreds of lives, it remains unclear who is responsible. For a detailed discussion of the fires, see Naficy, 2012a. pp. 1–22.

[6] From the Arabic *ṭāghūt* (transgression), which in the Quranic context is often used as a synonym for idolatry. Badawi and Abdel Haleem, 2013.

[7] An anecdote prominently circulated in Azar Nafisi's infamous 2004 memoir on censorship in Iran. Nafisi, 2004. p. 24.

[8] Wright, 2001.

[9] Khomeini, 1981. p. 258.

[10] Naficy, 2011; 2012a; 2012b.

2000s. In addition to a number of similarly general histories of Iranian cinema,[11] more specialized monographs on the subject have focussed on the role of politics,[12] poetics,[13] philosophy,[14] or spirituality[15] in Iranian films. Most of these works attempt to contextualize certain aesthetic and narrative trends in terms of developments in the political and cultural history of Iran. They are consequently all strongly concerned with the relation between the film industry and the state apparatus, and often examine state regulation in its various forms, from censorship to funding. A laudable exception in this regard is Roxanne Varzi's visual anthropology of martyrdom in post-revolutionary Iran, which goes beyond this dichotomy between state and cinema by analyzing the cultural impact on society of the state-funded attempts to visually document the war with Iraq.[16]

In regard to the question of Iranian cinema's global entanglements, which is crucial to understanding its relation to the Berlinale, the corpus of research is thinner. Although most authors agree that Iranian cinema is best be understood in a transnational framework rather than as a well-defined national cinema, there are few nuanced studies of the particular global contexts in which Iranian films work.[17] Here, a strong division between the domestic and foreign dimensions of the Iranian film industry is usually acknowledged on two different levels: production and reception. Regarding the former, Hamid Naficy has coined the term of the "accented cinema" in his 2001 book of the same title. Naficy argued that, due to the migration of artists in the decades following the Islamic revolution, Iranian cinema was extraordinarily influenced by exilic and diasporic filmmaking. This led him to speak of an "accented cinema," where the lines between the filmmakers' home country and the country their films are produced in have been blurred[18]—a concept that turned out to be influential in film studies in general and has been adopted in other contexts as well.

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[11] Dabashi, 2001; Tapper, 2002; Sadr, 2006; Jāhid, 2012.

[12] Devictor, 2004; Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2008.

[13] Sheibani, 2011.

[14] Erfani, 2012.

[15] Pak-Shiraz, 2011.

[16] Varzi, 2006.

[17] Esfandiary, 2012; Decherney and Atwood, 2015.

[18] Naficy, 2001.

While the transnational entanglements of Iranian film production have been framed in relation to filmmaking in exile, the global dimension of their reception is predominantly discussed in the context film festivals. That Iranian films are released, watched, and understood in a very different way internationally to domestically can hardly be challenged. That film festivals have played a paramount role in their international distribution is also indisputable. The mechanisms of global reception regularly emerge in the corpus of literature on Iranian cinema, but when they do, they are rarely dealt with as a particular research subject. Instead, they emerge as an almost self-evident side note, arguing that certain kind of art cinema, often called the Iranian New Wave, had become extremely successful at international film festivals, but had been much neglected at home, where audiences were more interested in mainstream entertainment films. A brief characterization in Michael Axworthy's *Revolutionary Iran* is paradigmatic of this type of narrative:

> There is a divide in Iranian cinema between sometimes inaccessible high-art films [...], many of them successful in Western film festivals but with limited appeal in ordinary Iranian cinemas, and the thrillers and romantic comedies that such cinemas show as their everyday norm (which seldom get seen outside Iran).[19]

Similar characterizations remain dominant and unchallenged even in more film-focused academic inquiries into the subject. This resonates with popular Iranian debates around the success of films at festivals, which is often brought up as a negative: directors who are awarded abroad are usually discarded as festival filmmakers who strategically cater to the tastes of Western audiences. This festival cinema discourse often has strong nationalist overtones, leading to pejorative labels like "commissioned films" (*fīlmhā-ye sefāreshī*) which imply that some directors, greedy for international success, structure their films completely along the lines of foreign expectations.[20] The trope has even become the subject of a popular comedy, *Farsh-e Qermez* (Red Carpet, dir. Reḍā ʿAṭārān, 2014), in which a disdained Iranian filmmaker travels to Cannes on his own behalf to meet his idol, Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, and finally break through on the global stage—before of course realizing that there is no place like home, to which he returns filled with remorse.

[19] Axworthy, 2013. p. 336.

[20] London-based scholar Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad offers one of the few inquiries into the issue in Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2007.

In a weakened form, this narrative is often adopted in literature on Iranian cinema and its global reception. In a similar fashion, authors tend to focus on certain films' particular characteristics when covering their festival success. Examinations mostly boil down to underlining the difference between domestic and festival filmmakers,[21] or working out the tropes for which poetic Iranian films have been known abroad but mocked at home,[22] or analyzing the "genrefication" of Iranian art cinema as a result of the way it would seek to please Western tastes.[23] Such quests to find the recipes behind successful "festival films" focus almost exclusively on the Iranian side of the relation. Only occasionally can comments from the other side of the equation be found, such as Dabashi's biting remark that festivals "favor aggressive exoticization of the so-called Third World, so that these festivals become the cinematic version of *National Geographic*."[24] Such allegations, however, are rarely backed up or examined in a systematic fashion.

Film Festivals and Representation

From both a cultural studies and an Islamic studies perspective, this neglect of festival mechanisms and the question of representation seems questionable. In the late 1990s, British cultural theorist Stuart Hall conceptualized representation as a signifying practice that is part of the cultural circuit of the representing society and not in any way telling of the signified subjects.[25] In relation to the cultural representation of non-Western societies, Hall famously analyzed the formation of the discourse of "the West and the rest,"[26] which reflects the challenge of post-colonial scholars to the prioritization of Western knowledge and experiences.[27] In the context of Islamic studies, these considerations led to an ongoing engagement with the notion of Orientalism,

[21] In his 2001 book on the history of Iranian cinema, Hamid Dabashi neatly splits contemporary filmmakers from Iran into three groups: those working in Tehran, those working in the U.S. exile, and those presenting their work in Cannes. Dabashi, 2001. pp. 244–82.

[22] Pak-Shiraz, 2011. pp. 35–66.

[23] Farahmand, 2006. pp. 308–63.

[24] Dabashi, 2001. p. 259.

[25] Hall, 1997.

[26] Hall, 1996.

[27] See, for example Bhabha, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2000; Mignolo, 2000.

proposed by Edward Said in his seminal 1978 book of the same title.[28] Given Said's background in literary studies, his concept lends itself well to questions of media representation of Muslim societies in Europe. This has led to an extensive body of research on Orientalist representation in its many forms, especially in visual media, from the depiction of the Middle East in European paintings to the production of anti-Muslim racism in contemporary mass media.[29]

In the light of these assumptions about the asymmetries in cultural representation, a focus on the film festivals' involvement in their relation to Iranian cinema appears to be overdue and missing from the "festival cinema" discourse prevalent in current research on Iranian cinema. First steps in this general direction are being taken in the emerging field of film festival studies. Working from the contention that the festival circuit plays a vital and underestimated role in film reception and distribution, a number of European film scholars have, since the late 2000s, produced a growing number of studies that attempt to both work out a comprehensive historiography of film festivals[30] and theorize them properly.[31] These endeavors were largely initiated around the eminent German film scholar Thomas Elsässer at the University of Amsterdam, who had pointed out the underresearched impact of the festival circuit in a 2005 essay.[32]

While the field of film festival studies has to date not been concerned with Iranian cinema in particular, it was interestingly the very country that kickstarted the academic debate around the impact of the festival circuit on the reception and distribution of films in the first place. The texts often considered as the first inquiries in the particularity of the film festival experience were published by Bill Nichols in 1994. The U.S. film theorist describes his encounter with Iranian cinema through a thematic retrospective at the Toronto film festival. After enthusiastically noting the "arrival" of Iranian cinema,[33]

[28] Said, 1978.

[29] For examinations of the visual representation of Muslims in the German context building on the concept of Orientalism, see for example Attia, 2007; Arigita, Dornhof, and Peter, 2013.

[30] Among these efforts, the project of the Film Festival Yearbooks, edited by Dina Iordanova, as well as Marijke de Valck's book on film festival history stand out. Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009; De Valck, 2007.

[31] De Valck, Kredell, and Loist, 2016.

[32] Elsaesser, 2005.

[33] Nichols, 1994a.

Nichols concludes that the festival had seized "the opportunity to elect Iranian cinema to the ranks of the international art film circuit,"[34] thus for the first time describing the medium's elevating and canonizing mechanisms. Although Nichols also admits that "these issues of crosscultural reading are freighted with specific historical (colonial and postcolonial) hazards,"[35] he never addresses these hazards further. In the broader field of film festival studies, they have also remained largely unattended until today.[36]

My examination of the representation of Iranian films and filmmakers at the Berlinale is situated at the crossroads of the three broader fields of research outlined above: the corpus of film studies literature on Iranian cinema, Islamic studies' inquiries into the representation of Muslim societies in Europe, and the emerging field of film festival studies. All three offer crucial contributions to my analysis while at the same time excluding necessary perspectives; as such, they inform themselves in a manner of mutual complementation. The literature on Iranian cinema offers important groundwork on the context of the Iranian film industry and its relation to the state as well as to foreign festivals, but is too concerned with the examination of films and the contexts of their production to look into the festival mechanisms. The Islamic studies perspective on Western representation, inspired by cultural and postcolonial studies, can offer insights into these mechanisms, as it focuses on the signifying institutions rather than the signified subjects. In terms of films and their reception, however, research remains thin. While contemporary popular culture in the Middle East is increasingly being brought into focus,[37] it is most often examined as a research subject on its own; its perception through Western cultural institutions is rarely considered. This focus on festival representation is provided in particular by the field of film festival studies, which acknowledges the importance of making these institutions subjects of systematic inquiry. While film festival studies offers crucial theoretical and historiographical groundwork, research in this field has to date not examined the role that particular national cinemas play at individual festivals; the focus

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[34] Nichols, 1994b. p. 27.

[35] Ibid. p. 20.

[36] Rachel Johnson's work on the canonization of Italian cinema at major European film festivals is an example of a venture into this particular direction, although her concern lies more in the development of a general theoretical framework for critical studies on the structural hegemony of these festivals. See Johnson, 2019.

[37] El Hamamsy and Soliman, 2013; Sabry and Ftouni, 2017.

has instead been on the general functioning of the festival circuit and its mechanisms. Furthermore, the methodologies used in film festival studies are strongly focused on curation and festival structure, with the question of representation—which is so crucial to my examination—often falling short.

The Inherent Logic of Berlin

For an inquiry into the mechanisms of festival representation situated in this academic context, it would not suffice to analyze only the programmed films, their directors' background, and the festival's strategies of curation. If the question of representation is to be taken seriously, a thorough look at the larger background of the Berlinale is necessary, especially in light of its belated "discovery" of Iranian cinema, which hints at a particularity of the Berlinale in relation to other European festivals. To grasp such particularities, a turn towards urban sociology proves insightful. Martina Löw and Helmuth Berking have introduced the concept of the "inherent logic of cities" in their 2008 volume of the same title, based on "the idea of a locally specific and distinct reality of cities."[38] According to Löw, the concept covers "the permanent dispositions tied to the sociality and materiality of cities and is constituted in a relational system of global, local and national references."[39] A city, according to this argument, can be understood as its own unit of meaning that functions along hermeneutic standards and references particular to itself.

In the case of Berlin and its large array of such references, the need to consider the city's inherent logic seems particularly evident. While Löw's proposition of looking at cities systematically is relatively new, Berlin's distinct spirit has been subject to extensive colloquial observations by philosophers and theorists since the early 20th century—essays by the likes of Georg Simmel,[40] Walter Benjamin,[41] and Siegfried Kracauer[42] attest to this interest. Berlin's inherent logic is informed by a multitude of factors. In terms of the sociality and materiality that Löw underlines, Berlin's rich history—construction booms

[38] "Idee einer lokalspezifischen, eigensinnigen Wirklichkeit von Städten." Berking and Löw, 2008. p. 7.

[39] "Städtische Eigenlogik bezeichnet die dauerhaften Dispositionen, die an die Sozialität und Materialität von Städten gebunden sind und konstituiert sich in einem relationalen System globaler, lokaler und nationaler Bezüge." Ibid. p. 49.

[40] Simmel, 1896.

[41] Benjamin, 1972.

[42] Kracauer, 1964.

in the early 20th century, vast destruction during World War II, subsequent rebuilding as a divided city, and finally transformation after reunification—is deeply inscribed into the cityscape. Löw's call to examine the relational system of references present in a city is also plausible in Berlin's case given its ongoing aspirations to be elevated into the ranks of a *Weltstadt* (world city) like Paris or London, dating back to the late 19th century. Walter Benjamin once described the paradox between the Berliners' constant lamenting and their sprawling self-confidence as "the over-compensation of an inferiority complex"[43]—a diagnosis that is certainly indismissible for understanding the inherent logic of Berlin and its timid aspirations of grandeur.

Deeply inscribed into these layers of Berlin's inherent logic is also a certain brand of liberalism on which the efforts of reconstructing West Berlin after World War II were built. In this regard, the notion of West Berlin as a beacon of Western liberalism and the last bastion of the "Free World" is certainly important to note. Most of my studies, including this work, were enabled by the *Freie Universität*, an institution whose very name alludes to its original function as a liberal counterpoint to the older *Humboldt Universität*, which happened to find itself in East Berlin after the partition. On the university's logo, the Berlin bear holds the beacon of liberalism in its claws[44], enlightening the island of West Berlin and securing its values "against the ongoing menace from the East", as its designer and *Freie Universität* co-founder Edwin Redslob put it.[45] It is in this context that the Berlinale was initiated in 1951, too: the festival's original function—and official motto—was that of a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* (Showcase of the Free World) that was supposed to secure the place of West Berlin on the global stage as well as shine its light into the supposed darkness of East Berlin. Later, with the rebranding of Berlin, the festival also evolved into a bridge between East and West. The Berlinale's relation to Iranian cinema in the 21st century can hardly be understood without keeping in mind these developments that inform the city's dynamic inherent logic.

With these considerations in mind, the first half of my thesis is structured around the larger context in which the Berlinale's relation to Iran is

43 "Überkompensierung eines Minderwertigkeitskomplexes" Benjamin, 1972. p. 538.

44 https://www.fu-berlin.de/presse/service/logo/index.html.

45 "Zum Schutz unseres Landes und seiner Kultur gegen die in der Geschichte so oft wiederkehrende Bedrohung von Osten." Redslob, 1972. p. 324.

embedded. Chapter One begins with an extensive consideration of the tradition of 19th-century world exhibitions as spiritual predecessors of the Berlinale. By highlighting these institutions' strategies of representation (especially regarding non-Western cultures in the context of the Colonial Exhibitions that they often integrated), I propose a strong continuity to the tradition of film festivals as exhibitors of the exotic, forums for international competition, and sites of mass entertainment. Simultaneously, the chapter outlines my methodology, which assumes cultural representation as a performative process in which discourses can be located not only in textual sources but also in images and events. A discussion of cultural theory that has observed world exhibitions and their representational traditions lays the foundations for my subsequent analysis.

Chapter Two focuses on the post-World War II history of Berlin. As I have argued above, the city's partition is deeply inscribed into the development and the practices of the Berlinale. Not only has the partition engrained powerful images into the collective memory, from the *Luftbrücke* (Berlin Air Lift) of 1948/49 to the *Mauerfall* (Fall of the Berlin Wall) of 1989, it has also set the stage on which the festival has operated during its first four decades. The partition was closely intertwined with world politics and perceptions of Berlin being the central junction of the Cold War. As such, I will focus on the Berlinale's relation to the political in particular, a category which became particularly crucial for its later representation of Iranian cinema. Towards the end of Chapter Two, I turn to the German image of Iran, which is again strongly connected to the city of Berlin, where S̲oreyā Esfandyārī Bakhtyārī (1932–2001), Moḥammad Reżā Pahlavī's second wife, grew up, and where the Shah's visit in 1967 marked not only an apparition of royal splendour but more crucially a turning point in the development of the German student protests of the late 1960s. I argue that associations of both companionship and brutal repression prevailed in the German image of Iran throughout the 20th century, and that these associations reemerged when the country entered the festival stage from 2006 onwards.

Chapter Three opens with the commencement of Dieter Kosslick's tenure as festival director and the relocation of the Berlinale to *Potsdamer Platz*, both of which happened in the early 2000s. Martina Löw has proposed the materiality of a city as an important category of analysis; the newly constructed area of *Potsdamer Platz* is so deeply tied to the materiality of Berlin that its

locality on the former *Todesstreifen* (Death Strip) and its role as a fissure connecting the reunited city must be addressed in some detail. This role, after all, illustrates the high expectations placed on the Berlinale to help bring cultural life into its new home. Kosslick was highly engaged in reshaping the Berlinale brand into a glamorous event that combined Hollywood stars and red carpets with a strong dose of politics. It is his rather broad and spectacular understanding of "politics" as a necessary addition to glamour and joy in which the festival's subsequent representation of Iranian cinema was embedded.

Staging Iranian Cinema

The second half of my work is concerned with the role that Iranian films and filmmakers played at the Berlinale from their emergence in 2006 to the end of Dieter Kosslick's tenure in 2019. Before proceeding with an overview of the remainder of Chapters Three as well as Chapters Four and Five, I will in the following paragraphs briefly outline my usage of the term "staging," which emerged as a central concept in my research. As indicated above, a thorough analysis of the Berlinale's representation of Iranian cinema has to embrace more than the curated films and the coverage they receive textually in festival publications and media reports. Festival representation works on many levels, most of which have a prominent performative dimension—red carpets, press conferences, and ceremonies are crucial in this regard. As early as 1955, seminal film theorist André Bazin suggested to consider the institution of the film festival as a religious order.[46] Film festival scholars have later doubled down on this take. Thomas Elsaesser has highlighted "the ritual, religious and quasi-magical elements necessary to make a festival into an 'event'" and argued that it "requires an atmosphere where an almost Eucharistic transubstantiation can take place."[47]

The quasi-religious rituals and sacral atmosphere film festivals aim to produce are crucial to their nature. This is reflected in even my earliest experiences as a 17-year old visiting the Berlinale for the first time and being far more impressed by the ticket purchase, the crimson fabrics of the cinema hall, and the golden rain of the festival trailer than by the film I actually watched. Taking these elements into account, the Berlinale can be

[46] Bazin, 1955.

[47] Elsaesser, 2005. p. 99.

conceptualized as a "secular ritual" as proposed by anthropologists Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff.[48] For my analysis, this leads to an understanding of the festival as a phenomenon that is conveyed through performative as much as a through textual or audiovisual means. Consequently, I embrace the recordings of the festival ceremonies and press conferences as well as my own field notes from the 2016–20 editions to the same degree as the texts published in program catalogs or on the festival website. This follows theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte's call for an "aesthetics of the performative" that suggests a wider consideration of performativity beyond theater studies proper and underlines the broad potential of the discipline's methodological toolkit for wider spectatorial situations.[49]

The centrality of performative elements in the Berlinale's representation of Iranian cinema leads me to understand festival representation as an extended process of staging. This deliberate terminological proclivity might need a bit of cautious explanation—naturally, my use of the term should not be misconstrued as an insinuation that something is being fabricated that does not actually exist, as in the popular association of "staging" with "faking." I rather draw from the theatrical origin of the term, as in "presenting something on stage", which is far closer to the French *mise-en-scène* or the German equivalent, namely *Inszenierung*.[50] This sense of the word encompasses the dimension of the performative, of everything that happens in a live situation and would not be apprehensible through a mere transcript of everything that is said onstage. At which point in the ritualized opening ceremony are particular Iranian films mentioned, and in what way? How are Iranian directors introduced at press conferences? How do female filmmakers from Iran dress on the red carpet, and how do festival officials react to their (non-)different clothing styles, both in comparison to their male Iranian and their female Western counterparts? Without the dimension of the performative, many of these questions and

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[48] In their 1977 edited volume, Moore and Myerhoff proposed the concept for all kinds of public events from political gatherings to sports competitions, aiming to detach ritual theory and the sacred from their previously exclusive association with the realm of the religious. Moore and Myerhoff, 1977.

[49] Fischer-Lichte, 2017.

[50] Fischer-Lichte gives an extensive overview of the etymological evolution of the term and differentiates between *Aufführung* (the actual performance) and *Inszenierung* (the planning and preparation of the performance). As the border between the two is rather blurred in the case of the Berlinale, where it is often unclear to what extent ceremonies are scripted and how much emerges spontaneously, this differentiation seems marginal to my examination. See Ibid. pp. 318–32.

subtleties that are crucial to the nature of festival representation would be impossible to address.

In addition to its popular association with pretense, the term "staging" bears another potential for misunderstanding that needs to be addressed upfront. At first glance, it suggests a vague kind of agency, as if someone is pulling the strings behind the scenes. The question of agency is indeed an interesting one regarding the Berlinale, which can hardly be understood as a singular aesthetic subject that is in meticulous control of the multitude of performances taking place in the festival space. The Berlinale is quite simply too big to assume this kind of agency. As festival director, Dieter Kosslick surely had a strong degree of control, especially over of the large ceremonial events. But even at these carefully planned and ritualized shows, the moderators, invited speakers, and laureates make their own decisions, many of them spontaneously. In press conferences and particular film screenings, Kosslick is mostly not even involved. Furthermore, just like the world exhibitions and other large scale events, the Berlinale is an ephemeral event.[51] It only employs a handful of people year-round; the remaining hundreds of employees, from the organizing committee to the volunteers, work for the festival for only a few weeks or months each year. The same goes for the cinema halls, even for the central venue of the *Berlinale Palast*, which hosts a musical theater for the rest of the year. As such, apart from the festival director and a small number of his colleagues, the Berlinale only exists in a very limited time and space.

Yet, for a few weeks every February, it shapes the cultural life of Berlin like hardly any other event. It certainly carries an artistic signature and thus to some degree does constitute an artistic subject, even if this status lies not in the hands of a single person (not even Kosslick), but in the institution as a whole. While the press conferences are of course not directed by the festival organization and any of the local, national, and international journalists can pose questions on their own terms, they still are part of a distinct event that follows certain unwritten rules and dynamics. The same goes for the red carpets, where filmmakers can walk around and behave in any way they want but are still subject to a particular protocol and shared imaginary trajectories. I

[51] Paul Greenhalgh has introduced the term to describe world exhibitions to underline their floating and limited nature—even the largest of these events often emerged suddenly and, after some months, disappeared again. See Greenhalgh, 1988.

understand all of these events and spaces as stages of the festival that, while not meticulously controlled, are still constituted by the festival—and vice versa: what happens on these stages very much constitutes the Berlinale. Therefore, I rely on the term staging to underscore this particular understanding of the festival as an institution being performatively defined by particular stages and their rituals.

In line with this perspective, after having established the larger context of Berlin's inherent logic into which the Berlinale is embedded, in the second half of my dissertation I examine the staging of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale in detail. The second half of Chapter Three turns to Iran's emergence on the festival stages in 2006 and discusses the different dimensions that influenced the presentation and reception of Iranian films. Most of the paradigms through which they were read later had been established by the late 2000s, so the period from 2006–10 offers a good overview from which my subsequent analysis draws. The demonstrations against the 2009 presidential elections in Iran mark a crucial event in this regard. Their coverage dominated the German media for some weeks during the summer of 2009 and had a lasting influence on the German image of Iran; accordingly, their impact on the Berlinale is addressed in some detail.

Chapters Four and Five turn to the Iranian filmmaker that was arguably staged in the most prominent way at the Berlinale: Jafar Panahi. As the winner of one Golden and two Silver Bears, Panahi was not only the most successful filmmaker at the festival during Kosslick's tenure, his appearances were also the most spectacular. He was invited four times, but physically present only on one occasion: to present his film *Offside* in 2006. In 2010, he was convicted in Iran of shooting a film about the election protests and subjected to a 20-year ban on filmmaking and traveling abroad in his capacity as a director. In reaction to this, the Berlinale invited him to be part of the international jury in 2011. When, as expected, Panahi was unable to take on this role, the whole festival edition was dedicated to him. Chapter Four covers the 2011 Berlinale and examines the different ways in which Panahi was staged as a prisoner of his country and a poster boy for political cinema.

My final chapter takes a detailed look at the relationship between absence and presence that was at play when Panahi's films *Pardeh* (Closed Curtain, 2013) and *Taxi* (2015) premiered at the Berlinale. While in 2011 the

festival had to put up with an empty chair to symbolize Panahi's vacant jury spot, the Berlinale later had two films in which the director appeared as an actor, enabling the festival to work with his presence onscreen. Working with Fischer-Lichte's conceptualization of the performative, I analyze the impact of these absences and their disruption of the ritualized festival performances, which culminated in Hana Saeedi serving as a particular kind of surrogate for her uncle in 2015. Through these appearances, the story of Panahi was staged at the Berlinale like a large episodic theater play. The near complete dramatic arc of this play is highly illustrative of the function of Iranian cinema at the festival as well as of the nature of its representation in Berlin. This harks back to my initial irritations with the Berlinale's belated showcasing of Iran, which ultimately seems to be more influenced by the festival's particular practices and needs than by those of the Iranian films and filmmakers allegedly at the center of its attention.

1. From World Exhibitions to Film Festivals

In a 2017 interview with a Berlin newspaper about the future location of the *Berlinale Palast*, the festival's spotlight venue at *Potsdamer Platz* of which the current leasing agreement would soon run out, festival director Dieter Kosslick enthusiastically proposed one particular alternative site:

> For example a new building next to the Gropius-Building, in the area which is now the parking lot. Until the war, that was where the Ethnographical Museum was housed, of which the Berlinale is the legitimate, living successor![1]

The *Völkerundemuseum* Kosslick is referring to as a legitimate predecessor of the Berlinale was opened in 1886 by Kaiser Wilhelm I. (1797-1888). Exhibiting a collection of items from Prussian *Kunstkammern* (art chambers), the museum became so popular among German visitors, hungry for showcases of exotic treasures, that it was expanded and moved to Dahlem, a suburb in the Berlin south-west, where it was rebranded into the *Ethnologisches Museum* (Ethological Museum). Kosslick's association of the festival with these 19th century strategies of imperial display is surprisingly revealing of his own standards of film exhibition, which have influenced the festival strongly during his tenure. The comparison further is by no means an accidental misstep—earlier in the interview, he is confronted with criticism that compares the Berlinale's supposedly uneven and chaotic program to a "mixed goods store" (*Gemischtwarenladen*). Upon this, Kosslick offers the counter-comparison of a "colonial goods store" (*Kolonialwarenladen*), suggesting that the broad spectrum of the program leads to a diversity of films obtained exclusively by the festival.

While festival director might refer to nostalgic associations with colonial goods stores from his post-war childhood in the Swabian village of Ispringen, his comparison implies a continuity that deserves a second look. 19th century ethnological museums as well as colonial goods stores not only concealed the often violent history of their products' acquisition but also heavily influenced the perception of their exhibits by staging them as exotic attractions. As such, Kosslick's perspective on them being predecessors of the Berlinale might be closer to the truth than he is willing to admit. During his tenure as festival

[1] "Zum Beispiel ein neues Gebäude neben dem Gropius-Bau, wo jetzt der Parkplatz ist. Dort stand bis zum Krieg das Völkerkundemuseum, da ist die Berlinale doch der legitime, lebendige Nachfolger!" Busche and Peitz, 2017.

director from 2001 to 2019, hundreds of films from non-Western countries were screened at the festival, usually proudly presented as the latest acquisitions of Kosslick and his team of curators. With a total of sixty films, Iran was one of the most invited non-Western countries at the Berlinale in this period—and arguably the most successful, winning six Silver and three Golden Bears, the latter all in a single decade. To understand this extensive relationship between Iranian cinema and the Berlinale, Kosslick's remarks indicate that the traditions of display and spectacle that evolved in late 19th century mass exhibition culture might be a reasonable starting point.

1.1 Paris, Berlin: Display and Spectacle at Late 19th Century World Exhibitions

In many ways, the world exhibitions that gained a massive popularity in the second half of the 19th century can be regarded as spiritual predecessors of film festivals. Not only do both of these mass events share the transient character of a limited time frame that nevertheless heavily impacts—and often elevates—their host cities. The first film festival also evolved directly from the world exhibition movement, namely the Venice film festival that first took place in 1932 as the cinematic branch of the Venice Biennale, which in turn had been founded in 1895 as a biannual art exhibition festival modeled after the world exhibition template.[2] To work out the continuities between these historically connected mass exhibition events, especially in regard to their representation of non-Western cultures, I will in the following take an extensive look into the techniques of display that structured the world exhibitions. Subsequently, I will develop the theoretical framework for the analyses of my later chapters. As this framework revolves around questions of representation and performance that much research on Western (world) exhibition culture has been also engaged in, the second half of this chapter is dedicated to this research's contribution, from Cultural Studies to theater studies.

Between Competitive Nation-Branding and Promoting Peace and Progress

The earliest instances of European cultural mass events to exhibit foreign cultures and their products in the manner that Kosslick referred to with much

[2] Tallibert and Wäfler, 2016.

enthusiasm are the world exhibitions, *Expositions Universelles*, or World Fairs, as they became known in the United States.[3] After they emerged on a grand scale in 1850s Europe, they generated vast audiences, popularity and cultural relevance in the following half century (Figure 1). Apart from the spectacular landmarks that continue to shape the look of their respective host cities, like the *Tour Eiffel* in Paris or the *Atomium* in Brussels, the significance of these events as "meta-media"[4] for technological and—more to the concern of my research—cultural and ethnographic discourses is paramount. Contemporary observers attributed a cornerstone quality to these expositions, with one German account calling them "nodal points in the course of history" (*Knotenpunkte des Geschichtsverlaufs*),[5] and indeed the hype went so far as to inspire a whole generation of "imperial pilgrims,"[6] non-professional observers who dedicated their summers to travel to and write about every major exhibition possible—not unlike cinephile film festival enthusiasts of today that recall film theorist André Bazin's comparison of film festivals to a religions order.[7]

It is thus no exaggeration of Paul Greenhalgh, a Manchester-based art historian, to describe them as "the largest gatherings of people—war or peace—of all time" and "ranked amongst the most important events held in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on both a high and a popular level"[8] in his seminal 1988 monograph on the phenomenon. Since the late 1980s, world exhibitions have become popular fields of research that transcend architectural, urban, and industrial histories and inspire sociological, political, and postcolonial studies as well. As my concern is with their heritage in regard to film festivals, I will focus on the expositions' extensive colonial and ethnological dimension as well as their comparatively modest exhibition of cultural products.[9]

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[3] Although a valid tradition of World's Fairs was also established in the United States, I will focus on the European institution here, as the tradition originated and was most significantly shaped in the United Kingdom and France. Also, as my examination heavily tied to Berlin, which understood Paris and London as its direct competitors, a restriction to Europe is reasonable. For the same reason, I will refrain from using the term "fairs", which was common in the United States, and refer to the events as "exhibitions", the British term, and its Francophone version "exposition", in the following.

[4] Geppert, 2010. pp. 3–6.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Hoffenberg, 2001. p. 250.

[7] Bazin, 1955.

[8] Greenhalgh, 1988. p. 3.

[9] For an extensive overview over the state of research, see Geppert, 2010. pp. 9–15.

Exhibition	Location	Year	Thematic Focus
Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerbeausstellung (not listed by the BIE)	Berlin *(Köngliches Zeughaus)*	1844	Crafts and Industry from the German *Zollverein*
Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations	London *(Hyde Park)*	1851	-
Exposition Universelle des produits de l'Agriculture, de l'Industrie et des Beaux-Arts	Paris *(Champs-Élysees)*	1855	Agriculture, Industry, and Arts
International Exhibition	London *(South Kensington)*	1862	-
Exposition Universelle	Paris *(Champ-de-Mars)*	1867	-
Weltausstellung 1873	Vienna *(Prater)*	1873	Culture and Education
Exposition Universelle	Paris *(Champ-de-Mars, Palais du Trocadéro)*	1878	New Technologies
Exposiciő Universal de Barcelona	Barcelona *(Parc de la Ciutadella)*	1888	Fine and Industrial Arts
Exposition Universelle	Paris *(Champs-de-Mars, Tour Eiffel)*	1889	100th anniversary of the French Revolution
Berliner Gewerbeausstellung (not listed by the BIE)	Berlin *(Treptower Park)*	1896	Trade and Industry
Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles	Brussels *(Cinquantenaire)*	1897	Modern Life
Exposition Universelle et Internationale	Liège *(Palais des beaux-arts)*	1905	75th anniversary of Belgian independence
L'Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione	Milan *(Parco Sempione)*	1906	Work and Transportation
Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles	Brussels *(Cinquantenaire)*	1910	–
Exposition Universelle et Internationale	Gant *(Citadelpark)*	1913	Peace, Industry, and Art
British Empire Exhibition (not listed by the BIE)	London *(Wembley Stadium)*	*1924*	*Colonial Exhibition*

Figure 1: World Exhibitions in Europe until 1924 listed by the *Bureau International des Expositions* (BIE).

The internationally competitive, megalomanic and supposedly universal nature for which these events became known for was fleshed out only after the 1851 *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (short: *Great Exhibition*) at the London Hyde Park and found perfection in the last decades of the 19th century on the *Champ de Mars* in Paris, it took its influences of several earlier institutions, a look at which will help to understand its particular characteristics. The formal inspiration for the exhibitions' character of a fair for industrialists to introduce their latest products and inventions to an open audience of flaneurs and hopefully some well-funded potential investors came from market-like conventions in mid 18th century England. In the context of the Industrial Revolution, they offered a forum for producers to offer novelty goods. What was new about that concept was that these conventions, held usually in London, soon developed a window-shopping quality. As technological progress became a worth for itself and the conventions were public, they attracted larger audiences every year, and with them unexpected motivations—most came not to buy, but to watch the latest inventions. In this, Paul Greenhalgh argues, these fairs had the side effect of giving birth to modern flaneur-culture.[10]

On the other side of the Channel, the French economical elite—experiencing their own Industrial Revolution, albeit on a much smaller scale—felt the need to react to these conventions. With the prospect of English products flooding the French market, their economic worries shaped the expositions which were held more and more frequently in Paris and introduced two new dimensions which later became crucial for the world exhibitions: competition and nation-branding. During the first half of the 19th century, these expositions transformed into nationalist displays of France's presumed advanced technological and later cultural status. Public military parades on the *Champ de Mars* completed the spectacle that was designed to convince the national audience of France's superiority.

While English convention organizers began to adapt these elements of international competition, it was not until 1844 that the first European country took the nation-branding to the next level by directing its display to a foreign audience. Curiously, this country was Germany, which later became notorious for never hosting an official international exhibition and which never

[10] Greenhalgh, 1988. pp. 8–9.

developed a respective tradition. The *Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerbeausstellung* (General German Trade Exhibition) in Berlin was a rather small affair, which carefully took care of being directed to its neighboring countries, but not allowing them to participate. The exhibition has to be seen in the context of an inner-German nationalist discourse on unity, which was at a completely different stage as its French and British counterparts and took the exhibition medium as a welcome tool to present itself as a unified entity to the rest of the continent.

After inviting foreign exhibitors to a convention was discussed in the decades before in France and the United Kingdom, this practice was finally established at the *Great Exhibition* which took place in and around the newly erected Crystal Palace in London in 1851. The *Great Exhibition* is usually regarded as the first world exhibition,[11] given that it was the first of its kind to establish the features which would later inspire similar events and eventually became the cornerstones of the exposition tradition, namely an international framework, an inter-urban competition that sparked more and more megalomanic structures built at the venues, and a universal aspiration regarding the exhibited items, products, and institutions. The large constructions at these events, which were usually only built temporarily for this specific purpose, and the effort of performing the spectacle of theatrical ceremonies, parades, fireworks, and human and material showcase came with a significant price tag. The planning and maintenance of a proper exhibition usually cost several millions, with the later and more ambitious peaking at sums like the cost of an estimated 12 million British Pounds for the 1924 *British Empire Exhibition* in Wembley. All this was financed in equal parts by the government and private sponsorship by individuals and exhibition companies of both the host nation and the exhibitors.

Given the enormous cost of a proper world exhibition, the question of these sponsors' motivation is imminent. Paul Greenhalgh distinguishes different layers of roles that were ascribed to the exhibitions by their respective organizers and categorizes them into actual and rhetoric purposes, the latter being more idealist goals communicated to the public.[12] The strongest argument brought up to promote them was the exhibitions' potential to induce peace and

[11] Geppert, 2010. pp. 6–8.

[12] Greenhalgh, 1988. pp. 16–25.

understanding among the nations that were supposed to participate in friendly competition. Though it is true that open conflict between exhibitors rarely overshadowed the events themselves, the histories of their planning and especially their inter-connectedness were often proof of a very tough competition. Driven by simple envy and fear to be ridiculed or overpowered, exhibitions were often secretly pushed or pulled to dates rivaling concurrent ones with the aim of stealing the thunder of equally sized exhibitions or of smaller events being associated with bigger ones by taking place at the same time. Moreover, the megalomanic qualities of late 19th and early 20th century expositions are proof of the organizers constant struggle to claim the title of the most impressive event for their own nation. Prominent examples of this often very unsubtle competition are the many attempts to build ever higher landmarks for the hosts' supreme technical abilities which peaked with the construction of the *Tour Eiffel* as the symbol for the *Exposition Universelle Internationale in Paris* in 1889.

Another motivation that can be traced in the exhibitions' conceptual language is the positivist rhetoric of progress through technological and scientific advance. This rhetoric manifested in a fetishization of machinery and technology that dominated the exhibition grounds themselves, with machine halls usually being the most sizable buildings, the visual presentation and introduction of the inventions. The focus on technological sensationalism was also reflected in the fine arts section at the expositions' peripheries, where paintings, sculptures and photographies of state-of-the-art technology were exhibited—even here, it was less about the aesthetics of the exhibits than about their background. On a conceptual level, this led to the events being promoted as milestones of technological progress, with the exhibitions serving as annual forums for companies to present their latest products in a concentrated atmosphere, bloating their exhibition's importance and attract exhibitors and audiences likewise.

In contrast to these rhetorical ascriptions aimed at the exhibiting and visiting public to promote the expositions, there were of course actual political, economical and ideological motivations that accounted for the longevity and popularity of the world exhibition phenomenon. First among these was the host nations' desire to promote themselves as being both superior to their neighbors and at the center of historical and technological progress, by inviting companies

to present their state-of-the-art inventions and products at their event and none other. This early form of nation-branding, considered crucial at a time when nationalism and the struggle for hegemony on the continent peaked, was a primary political concern for European governments and the world exhibitions, in which they invested large sums of money, were seen at first as instruments to elevate the relative status of they country and later as necessary means to keep pace with the competition. In addition to status and promotion, exhibitors had a very real material interest in trade, commerce and fundraising, for which the events served as a forum.

Education, Entertainment, and Propaganda

Yet it were not only these concerns of blatant national competition that drove the world exhibitions, but also different discourses on mass culture that influenced their representational traditions. Ideas of mass education were virulent in 19th century Europe and manifested in respective movements with aims ranging from reforms of school systems to the distribution of popular encyclopedias or similar collections. This discourse of mass education overlapped with questions on the popular appeal of world exhibitions. Advocators of mass education attributed a pedagogical value to these events, which were widely considered as living archives on the current state of human development in technology and culture. Entrance to the expositions was not limited by social or class boundaries, they were open to anyone who could afford the entrance fee—and given the countless reports of working class families visiting them on a regular basis and the astonishingly large six-figure-numbers of visitors, this does not seem to have been a limitation. The exhibitions' potential as educational mass media was not underestimated by contemporary observers. This dimension was especially developed in the United Kingdom, where utilitarist discourses on mass education were very particularly strong. Here, it developed to a point at which, from the 1890s onwards, publicly accessible academic conferences were integrated into the framework of exhibitions. This role as knowledge-transferring institutions informed their traditions of display to select and arrange items in a manner that made them visually accessible to the public.

Their traditions of display, on the other hand, were heavily influenced by the related discourses on mass entertainment. Entertainment was regarded a

necessary precondition for education, with content believed to be absorbed more easily and with more willingness if it was presented in an entertaining manner—especially if the audience was predominantly composed of uneducated visitors and children. Thus, discourses on mass entertainment were usually linked not only to those on propaganda or amusement, but also to those on mass education. The overwhelming spectacle that was often generated at these events, to first generate audiences and then focus and direct their gazes, was regarded as an ideal method to impart education.

Other contemporary arguments that were brought up concerning mass entertainment were less utilitarist. Discourses on the democratization of culture mobilized the relative accessibility of the expositions to promote not only the general public consuming the pieces of art and technology but also taking part in the spectacle as actors, for example as performers in the historical pageants that became popular in early 20th century British exhibitions. In his book on exhibition culture in the Commonwealth, historian Peter Hoffenberg even uses the term "epic theater" to describe these pageants, recalling Brecht's contemporary attempts to democratize high culture.[13] Albeit the role of world exhibitions as forums of nation-branding and generation of commercial profit was paramount for their investors and organizers, their dimension as media of mass education, entertainment, and even democratization can thus hardly be ignored. Even if, along the lines of Greenhalgh's proposition, these ideological concerns were little more than promotional rhetoric to the organizers, they should not be dismissed as mere "pleasant themes for shrewd politicians."[14] The discourses on mass culture definitely informed the exhibitions' public perception and, more importantly, their representational traditions, which organized them as being publicly accessible universal encyclopedia.

German cultural historian Alexander Geppert worked out the "internal and external traditions" that were established at world exhibitions and argued that they were "result of multifarious inter-urban competition and the widespread, transnational entanglements among the main protagonists in this extensively internationalized field."[15] These traditions, embedded into a context of fierce international and indeed inter-urban competition, reveal the world

[13] Hoffenberg, 2001. p 267.

[14] Greenhalgh, 1988. p. 18.

[15] Geppert, 2010. p. 5.

exhibitions as conceptual and discursive templates of international film festivals —specifically in terms of the expositions' general framework and their portrayal of non-European cultures. The dominant dynamics in the expositions' overall framework become visible in an interrogation of their spatial and temporal dimensions. Both faced clearly defined borders while operating on universalist claims.

Space-wise, the exhibitions took place faced actual physical limitations in the shape of the urban stages they worked on. Although they usually reserved large areas, they never advanced to a national level. Their areas were furthermore not simply located in the boundaries of a city but integrated into the urban structure, and often spread over different quarters. The exchanges between the host city and the exhibition were far reaching and mutual: The exhibitions aimed to change the overall impression of the city, often even permanently, by erecting landmarks visible from outside the exposition grounds, and thus brand it as a modern metropolis. On the other hand, the city was present in the structure of the exposition, which took its name and usually dedicated an area to its history and assumed inherent spirit and character. For the time of the event, the city became the exhibition. Yet while being very much bound and dedicated to the host city, the claim of the exhibitions to be a representation of the world at large very much stood at the center of their appeal, manifesting itself in the naming of most events as either "World" or "Universal" expositions, in the erection of large globes as landmarks, and finally in attempts to painstakingly rebuild villages or urban structures from either the exhibiting nations' colonies or imperial homelands.

Time-wise, a similar dialectic of actual restrictions and universal assertions was at work. Although their durations varied from some weeks to the span of a year, every exhibition had clearly defined starting and finishing dates. This temporal limitation structured the perception and execution of these events to a large degree, making them exclusive and thus must-see attractions- They also stressed the enormous effort of constructing such large structures, only to tear them down after a short time. For Geppert, this notion of impermanence is central enough to conceptualize the exhibitions as "fleeting cities,"[16] while Paul Greenhalgh stresses their ephemeral nature as the defining

[16] Ibid.

characteristic.[17] On the other hand, again, the expositions' longing for universality manifested in a claim to represent as much of human past and future as possible. While the past was the domain of the cultural representations at the exhibitions, which were usually limited to depictions of the exhibiting nations' folklore and the host city's history, the future was reserved for the industrial sections, where latest developments in machinery and manufacture were framed with spectacle as glimpses into the future of human society.

This double-dialectic of limitations in scope and universalities in assertion highlights the basic characteristics of the world exhibitions' conceptual framework. This framework is shared with many of the film festivals that started to emerge in post-World War II Europe, among them the Berlinale, which was founded on the premise of serving as the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* (Showcase of the Free World): A physically limited frame depicting a miniaturized version of the world—or at least the parts of it associated with the Western powers—clearly localized symbolically at the geographical intersection of the two political entities the world was presumably divided into.

These rather abstract assumptions that fed the conceptual framework translated directly into the traditions of staging at the world exhibitions. Most expositions were framed by opening and closing ceremonies, which mirrored both the assumption of the temporal boundaries that were marked by these occasions, and the representational claims of the event at large. The latter often translated into the venues of the ceremonies, usually theaters or representational buildings at the exhibition grounds, being decorated with flags of the participating nations and folkloristic pageants being held by paid actors from the respective countries and sometimes even enthusiastic exhibition visitors, in front of an audience consisting of representatives of the exhibiting nations' governments seated at the galleries above other members of the elite—largely reminiscent of late 20th century Olympic Games' opening ceremonies. Peter Hoffenberg thus describes these ceremonies as "theatres of traditionalism, rituals of education and integration at both the center and the periphery"[18] when examining several of them at different British, Indian and Australian late 19th and early 20th century exhibitions.

[17] Greenhalgh, 1988.

[18] Hoffenberg, 2001. p. 244.

Hyperreality at the Colonial Exhibitions

The opening and closing ceremonies and their performances onstage as well as at the galleries might have had a large cultural impact, but the most influential practices of representation evolved at the exposition grounds over the course of the events. This goes especially for the colonial exhibitions that were often part of the larger event. These sub-events were organized by the respective host nation and served as showcases for its colonies. Like many sections dealing with cultural products, they where received their own a side-stage, playing a role entirely separate from the main attractions of state of the art technology and industrial design. In comparison to the main stages of the world exhibitions, the colonial exhibitions were disproportionately popular with visitors. In addition, they were a central piece of propaganda for the hosting government, which hoped to normalize its colonial possessions for its own citizens and impress the competition at the same time.[19]

Performances at these exhibitions typically consisted of physical reconstructions of colonies inhabited by native workers, shipped in and serving as exhibits in the same way as the often spectacular buildings. Their display was directed at domestic and foreign visitors alike. In the eyes of the visiting national public, the colonies themselves and the very fact of their possession should be naturalized and thus legitimized—a dimension that grew in importance over time, since anti-colonial criticism slowly emerged at the turn of the century. To foreign observers, the host nation should be branded as a strong competitor for political predominance in a climate of international competition which equalled imperial power with wealth and dominance.

The aspect of the human showcases, which exhibited people and their tribal cultural practices in simulations of their native environments, are subject of countless studies in world exhibition research, especially of those that examine the phenomenon from post-colonial perspectives that look into the tradition's obvious racism, which manifested in a vast range of problematic phenomena, from unidirectional gazes and power structures to the horrible living conditions for the exhibited workers.[20] Although their examination is

[19] Greenhalgh, 1988. pp. 105–7.

[20] Paul Greenhalgh, for example devotes a whole chapter to the human showcases in his comprehensive study of the world exhibition movement. Other researchers examine single exhibitions solely through the practice of human showcases, as Nana Badenberg does in her article on the 1896 *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung*. Greenhalgh, 1988. pp. 82–111; Badenberg, 2004.

crucial for the understanding of the world exhibition phenomenon, their continuities with cultural mass events in the second half of the 20th century however are limited. These particularly violent forms of cultural representation ceased to exist from the 1920s onward, when the practice in general became much unpopular due to criticism and was thus less and less considered as an appropriate medium of cultural representation at world exhibitions. Some dimensions continue to inform cultural representation at international film festivals and other institutions, though, like the colonial exhibitions' traditions of display and the link between expositions and knowledge production, which the human showcases emblematically fostered.

The initial motivation to ship natives from colonies to be observed in Europe was anthropological. With the emergence of ethnography as an academic discipline in the late 19th century, it was assumed easier to bring the people—or objects of study, as they were perceived—to European universities than for anthropologists and their students to go through the "effort" of research expeditions. The origins of the human showcases in zoos, wandering circuses, and world exhibitions has to be understood in the context of that research. Especially at world exhibitions, beginning with the 1889 *Exposition Universelle Internationale* in Paris, the showcases were often accompanied by ethnological congresses. As these events and their results were open to the public, this form of anthropological knowledge production was very immediate and certainly had a dimension of public education. The human showcases can thus not only be regarded as bizarre and extreme examples of the imperial displays' underlying racism, but also as emblematic areas of intersection of supremacist propaganda, popular spectacle, and mass education. These three dimensions varied in weight in the different countries—at human showcases in the British Empire for example, imperialist propaganda was at the forefront while the same events stressed the aspect of popular entertainment at French expositions. Their unique blend, however, was particular to the exhibition tradition. The involvement of anthropological research in the colonial exhibitions' framework is a crucial part of their role as institutions of knowledge transfer. Regardless of their sensationalist spectacle, the native villages' educational potential was legitimized by an ethnographic aura.

The dimension of spectacle on the other hand was far more striking in the architectural efforts at the colonial exhibitions than in the human

showcases. The centerpieces of these sub-events usually were grand palaces built in the architectural style of the exhibiting nation's colony in focus, and often surrounded by small botanical gardens filled with local flora or reconstructions of streets. The purpose of these palaces was not only to showcase the exhibitor's ability to orchestrate megalomanic construction projects and their colonial possessions themselves—the palaces were typically filled with precious historical artifacts and pieces of art—but also to recreate the local atmosphere and make the spectators feel as if they were on colonial grounds thousands of kilometers away. As such, they evoked the notion of hyperreality, as proposed by cultural philosopher Jean Baudrillard to describe recreations of a reality that is more "real" than its model.[21]

Their dimension of hyperreality was in fact what the exhibitors were most proud of. It was often stressed by visitors that these representations felt more real than the real thing, an assumption that the organizers gladly used to advertise their events. The official guide to the 1924 *British Empire Exhibition* at Wembley quoted a former British colonial official who had visited the Indian Palace in advance and was left astonished by its level of recreation:

> He had travelled upwards of thirty years along the main roads of Indian administration, seeing much, but inevitably missing more, while at Wembley, all India swam into his gaze....[22]

The presumably authentic visual reconstruction of colonial landscapes thus succeeded in more—or something rather different—than a 1:1 representation: It produced a hyperreal representation of the colony in the spectators' minds that had a life of its own. Instead of mentally transporting them to a particular place in India, it gave them "all India". Middle Eastern Scholar Timothy Mitchell, in his analysis of French *Expositions Universelles* and the effects of their representational strategies on the perception of the colonies,[23] stressed this aspect as a moment of surplus value of the visual representation and connects it to the early modern technique of the panopticon,[24] a theoretical link that speaks to the framing and perception of World Cinema at international film festivals. Here, again, authentic life in the non-West is recreated for the

[21] Baudrillard, 1981.

[22] Quoted in Greenhalgh, 1988. p. 61.

[23] Mitchell, 1988.

[24] Mitchell's use of the term is highly indebted to Michel Foucault's prominent consideration of panopticon as a crucial structuring principle of modern disciplinary societies. Foucault, 1975. pp. 228–64.

spectators' gaze, only this time through the powerful audio-visual means of cinema, which in its affectivity has the potential to create similarly vivid and hyperreal experiences.

The reconstructions that offered Timothy Mitchell the material for his deep analysis are the *Rues de Caire* that were presented at different *Expositions Universelles* in Paris. Due to their influence on other exhibitions, their high popularity and the large organizational effort that went into their construction and maintenance, they deserve a detailed consideration as extraordinary examples of hyperreal spectacle and representation of non-Western cultures in the world exhibition tradition. The first instance of a street setting that aimed to reconstruct of the narrow alleys of the Egyptian city dates back to the 1878 Paris *Exposition Universelle.* Yet, this was merely a modest attempt compared to its versions at the latter's 1889 and 1900 editions, which are deemed as the classical prototypes of the *Rue de Caire* and developed a genuine tradition that can be considered as a genre of its own (Picture 1.1).

Picture 1.1: Photograph of the *Rue de Caire* at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.

The initial motivation can easily be identified in France's colonial aspirations in the Khedivate of Egypt, which in the 1870s struggled for autonomy from the crumbling Ottoman Empire At this, it attracted French attention, mixed with nostalgia to Napoleon's expedition around the turn of the last century. Exposing visitors to the Cairine atmosphere—perceived as hypnotically chaotic and beautiful—aimed to spread these desires to the French public, while to foreign observers, the spectacular effort and large area of the exposition broadcasted the seriousness of the French colonial ambitions in Egypt. However, the organizers over-succeeded with their attempts to create a chaotic miniature cosmos, and the ambitious 1889 *Rue de Caire* became too populated with contracted merchants and actors as well as crowded with visitor. Paul Greenhalgh comments that, at some point, it apparently became impossible to control, leading to the street becoming "an independent force in itself."[25] The organizers' limited loss of control over these areas highlights that they did not work as the intended imperial showcases or educational institutions, but rather as a market with considerable commercial value of its own. The profit generated by souvenir shops, cafés, photographs, and—of course —donkey rides exceeded the organizers' expectations and are likely the reason for their reappearance in 1900 and their replicas at other events, like the 1893 *World's Columbian Exposition* in Chicago.

But besides this surprising economic potential, the particular traditions of representation and spectacle that unleashed this "independent force" are far more relevant for my study. To characterize the *Rues de Caire* as mere audio-visual representations might not do full justice to their sensual dimension. The detail of their buildings' surface of wood, hardened clay or yellow bricks, the hollering of the contracted merchants, the hundreds of donkeys resting in hay and squealing when carrying visitors, and the water pipes and cardamom-induced coffee at the cafés likely led to the streets being strong haptic, acoustic and olfactory experiences as well. Even if not all of these might have been anticipated, like the frequently described smell of the donkeys, the very point of not only reconstructing a street facade but populating it with contracted workers and ascribing genuine functions to the buildings was to produce more than a picture: An all-sensual representation that did not aim to make a foreign place visible, but accessible. This attempt of a holistic representation is an

[25] Greenhalgh, 1988. p. 103.

important distinction to visual exhibitions of photographs, artifacts, handicraft, or even human beings and makes the *Rues de Caire* stand out among other media of cultural representation active at the world exhibitions.

Intriguingly, this level of detail was absent from other physical recreations with similar motivations. Both the "native villages," showing life in the colonies in South America, Africa, Central Asia, and the Arctic, and the "white villages," in which exhibiting nations presented their own history and folklore, were audio-visual recreations in a much stricter sense. The role of the contracted workers that inhabited them was limited to performances in front of an audience with little to no interaction—dancing, singing, or very often simply doing their daily chores. Furthermore, their environments were simply much more controlled, clean and calm than the *Rues de Caire*, as their focus was on broadcasting a clear picture, not on the hyperreal representation of the represented culture's atmosphere. In the native and white villages, the dust of the streets was missing, unlike in the *Rues de Caire*. The latter in contrast became known for a certain untidiness not entirely dissimilar to the expectations of a gritty realism that 20th century World Cinema films are typically confronted with.

Aiming for the World Stage: The 1896 Berliner Gewerbeausstellung

The popularity of the world exhibition phenomenon continued well into the 20th century, prompting the *Bureau International des Expositions* (BIE, founded in Paris in 1928) to issue a convention that introduced standardized regulations and criteria for expositions in an attempt to limit the megalomania and fierce competition that spiraled out of control. Yet, the increasingly violent atmosphere around World War I favored territorial conflicts over mass events of international competition and the enthusiasm had already begun to fade by the time the BIE started its work. With the beginning of World War II in 1939, the peak of the world exhibition movement ended abruptly. Although the phenomenon reappeared in the 1950s, the following exhibition tradition, much

more regulated under the BIE, was no match in frequency, popularity and scope.[26]

Interestingly, the only European empire completely absent from the BIE's retroactively canonic list of expositions is Germany (see figure 1.1 above). The only instance of a large-scale popular exposition that was international in all but its name was the *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung* (Berlin Trade Exhibition) in 1896, which for different reasons was dissociated from the world exhibition movement but very much influenced by its traditions of representation. Arguing for world exhibitions to be spiritual predecessors of international film festivals like the Berlinale, I will in the following take the rough history of the *Gewerbeausstellung* into account, as it significantly shaped Berlin's traditions of colonial display and branding that Dieter Kosslick referenced when contemplating the festival's present and future.

The contested status of the *Gewerbeausstellung* as a world exhibition in all but name and official affiliation[27] is mirrored in the event's troubled history of conception and its connection to the broader German debates on world exhibitions, which were brooding since the 1870s. While German investors and entrepreneurs were demanding an exhibition as an economic forum, parts of the Berlin public hoped for such an event to finally elevate the city to a status of international relevance, to become a *Weltstadt* (world city),[28] eagerly looking to Paris, London, Brussels, and Vienna. Public mass events were becoming more popular in Berlin during the late 19th century in any case, with a changing culture of public performances, evolving from frontal military showcases to

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[26] In the early 21st century, the world exhibition phenomenon apparently has experienced an enthusiastic comeback in Asian countries. The large-scale World Expos in Shanghai (2010), Yeosu (2012), Astana (2017), and Dubai (2021) apparently use their stage for an intriguingly similar kind of nation-branding—although of course under entirely different preconditions that would require a very different analysis.

[27] These disputes, a complex mix of conscious self distinction by the organizers, governmental prohibitions, foreign contestation, criticism of transgression against established traditions, and competitive yearnings of investors and the Berlin public, are dealt with in detail in several studies on the *Gewerbeausstellung*. For an especially comprehensive example see Geppert, 2010. pp. 17–36.

[28] As the term *Weltstadt* is located in the specific German discourse on the status of its capital's status in an increasingly competitive atmosphere of mega-projects of urban development in the late 19th century—experiencing a revival in the last decade of the 20th century—it is translated here simply as "world city." While "metropolis" or "mega-city" fail to grasp the internationally oriented dimension of the word, Saskia Sassen's proposition of the term "Global City" might come closest. Yet, as it was proposed for a late 20th century context of urban development and even then never quite set foot in the German public discourse, I will refrain from using "Global City" and leave *Weltstadt* untranslated in the following. For a further examination of the *Weltstadtfrage* and Sassen's original argument, see Sassen, 2000.

wave of theater foundations and conversions, making what had formerly been perceived as high culture becoming more accessible.[29] For many contemporary German observers, it was becoming less and less comprehensible why the city would not host an exposition.

Yet, the handful of respective campaigns initiated by investors and exhibition organizers during the course of the 1880s and 1890s all failed in the face of fierce opposition from the German parliament and the personal intervention of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941). Two times, in 1882 and 1892, the *Ausstellungsfrage* (the matter of the exhibition), as the topic was termed by contemporary discourse, was debated in the parliament without success for the proponents. The 1892 campaign was even accompanied by a national competition among architects to find a suitable location and layout for the exhibition. While the parliamentary debates' failure was rooted in the government's iron austerity, the 1892 initiative for a *Weltausstellung* in Berlin was additionally stopped by Wilhelm II's apparent personal dislike for the idea. Although he never commented on his veto in public, a letter to his chancellor, Leo Graf von Caprivi (1831–1899), hints at basic sympathy for the idea, but a strong aversion towards the city of Paris as well as skepticism regarding the unforeseeable consequences—and even Berlin's capabilities as a host city:

> The glory of the Parisians keeps the Berliner awake. Berlin is metropolis, *Weltstadt* (perhaps?), so it must have its own world exhibition! [...] Yet, Paris is simply—what Berlin hopefully never will be—the great whorehouse of the world, this is where its attraction comes from, independent from the exposition. In Berlin, there is nothing that keeps the foreigner but the few museums, castles and soldiers; after six days, he has seen everything with the red book [the *Baedeker* travel guide] and, relieved to have done his duty, leaves the city and moves on. The Berliner is not aware of this, and would be sincerely offended if someone told him. But this is simply the obstacle in the way of the exposition. [...] Exposition's off, as my fellow gentlemen in Berlin put it.[30]

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[29] For a pioneering study of structural changes in theatrical spaces and the evolving event culture in *Kaiserzeit* Berlin, see Linhardt, 2008.

[30] "Der Ruhm der Pariser läßt den Berliner nicht schlafen. Berlin ist Großstadt, Weltstadt (vielleicht?), also muß es auch seine Weltausstellung haben! [...] Aber Paris ist nun mal - was Berlin hoffentlich nie wird - das große Hurenhaus der Welt, daher die Anziehung auch außer der Ausstellung. In Berlin ist nichts, was den Fremden festhält als die paar Museen, Schlösser und die Soldaten; in sechs Tagen hat er alles mit dem rothen Buch in der Hand gesehen und zieht dann erleichtert weiter, nachdem er das Gefühl, seine Pflicht getan zu haben, auch gefunden. Das macht sich der Berliner nicht klar und würde es auch gründlich übelnehmen, wenn man es ihm sagte. Aber das ist eben das Hindernis der Ausstellung. [...] Ausstellung is nich, wie meine Herren Berliner sagen." Rich and Frauendienst, 1961. pp. 375–76.

While the specific sensitivities behind that reasoning will remain sources of speculation—his tight grip on his position of authority against a rising urban bourgeoisie organizing a mega event of large cultural influence seems most reasonable—the line of argumentation that the Wilhelm II delivers here is telling of an extremely essentialist understanding of the two cities, which was virulent in debates around world exhibitions and gave birth to a discourse of its own when they reached Berlin: The *Weltstadtfrage* (the matter of being a world city). What dominated these debates was the juxtaposition of the charming and attractive, but ultimately empty and filthy, Paris with the unattractive and matter-of-fact Berlin and its somewhat quixotic self-perception —pointedly described by Walter Benjamin at the time as “the over-compensation of an inferiority complex.”[31] This characterization resurfaced a century later, at the turn of the millennium, when post Cold War urban planning and cultural mega-events like the Berlinale entered the discursive arena and the *Weltstadtfrage* experienced its second coming, this time with Berlin’s grittiness as a proud and straightforward statement, spearheaded by Klaus Wowereit’s *arm aber sexy* (poor but sexy) branding of the early 2000s.

The debates about the *Ausstellungsfrage* did not cease with Wilhelm II’s 1892 decisive veto against an exhibition, but found a new object in the *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung*. The event was organized by a group of private investors and networks of industrials and manufacturers like the *Deutscher Handelstag*—the institution behind the aborted campaigns—as a formal compromise: an informal and privately organized event that remained on a national level, carefully excluding foreign exhibitors, but was still larger and more expensive than most world exhibitions before. A formal dissociation with the exhibition movement was necessary for the aforementioned reasons and even went into the very structure of the event, leading Nana Brandenburg to claim that the *Gewerbeausstellung* was motivated by national protectionism and thus actually the opposite of a world exhibition.[32] Nevertheless, it was planned and constructed along the traditions of display established by the world exhibition movement, which was enough for foreign and domestic visitors and observers to perceive it as a proper *Weltausstellung*.

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[31] “Überkompensierung eines Minderwertigkeitskomplexes” Benjamin, 1972. p. 538.

[32] Badenberg, 2004. p. 192.

This perception was specifically due to the enormous scope of the event: Located in *Treptower Park* south east of the city center, the 3ha exhibition area was bigger than any previous exposition and was completely remodeled with artificial islands and ponds to house large structures and sub-exhibitions (Picture 1.2). From a giant ferris wheel to the native villages of a colonial exhibition to *Alt-Berlin* (Old Berlin), a reconstruction of the host city's 16th century core, the *Gewerbeausstellung* had all a proper world exhibition needed. The megalomania also spread into the performances, which included not only the usual presentations of recent developments in industrial design and folkloristic dance shows, but also demonstrations of the maritime dominance in the form of reenacted sea battles between state of the art cruisers on the narrow river Spree. This maritime display clearly aimed at pointing out the Reich's technological superiority and was one side of the coin of nation-branding that was completed by the nostalgic and traditionalist *Alt-Berlin* area. But besides that, much of the country's image-building was practiced, as in other exhibitions, through the representation of non-European cultures, a strategy was adapted in two ways at the *Gewerbeausstellung.* On one hand, through implicitly broadcasting the image of an universalist exposition, visible for example in the architecture of the *Maschinenhalle* (Industry Building). The centerpiece of the exhibition, which is described as "referenc[ing] an Islamic

Picture 1.2: Postcard showing a panoramic view of the *Gewerbeausstellung* and the remodeled *Treptower Park* along the bank of the river Spree.

Style" and therefore, through associations with a diffuse classical, but non-German architecture, served "as a statement of dehistoricism from the German context," as art historian Dorothy Rowe put it.[33] On the other hand, of course, non-European cultures were explicitly referenced at the colonial displays, which again featured prominently at the *Gewerbeausstellung* and excplicitly imported the French concept of the the *Rues de Caire.*

The *Colonial-Ausstellung* (colonial exhibition) was held in the framework of the main exhibition but charged and organized separately by the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* (German Colonial Society). Not only was it the largest event of that kind ever to be held in the German Reich, it was also reportedly one of the best attended parts of the exhibition. Structurally, the *Colonial-Ausstellung* was divided into two parts: one part was designated to the *Kolonialhalle* (Colonial Hall) near the main building of the *Maschinenhalle*, where colonial goods and artifacts were sold and exhibited. The other part was an area filled with native villages and the obligatory human showcases, placed in the neighborhood of *Alt-Berlin*—a location clearly associating it with an inferior stage of historical development that was very much in line with modern colonialism's insensitivity towards historical difference.[34]

The human showcases and native villages at the *Colonial-Ausstellung* were presented and performed in the tradition established at other colonial exhibitions, with people being shipped from the German colonies to perform rituals and everyday chores in reconstructions they built themselves before the start of the exhibition. The *Colonial-Ausstellung* was furthermore plagued by the same contradictions that organizers and audiences had faced at preceding events. Emblematic for these contradictions was the uneasiness of their "black landsmen" (*schwarze Landsleute*)—Christians from German South West Africa used as living exhibits—to perform pagan rituals despite them pointing out that this would hurt their Christian sensitivities.[35] Of course, the dimension of imperial propaganda was far less developed than at its French or English counterparts, as the German organizers were very much aware that the country's colonial possessions were meager in comparison with their European neighbors and thus not suitable criteria for international competition. Instead,

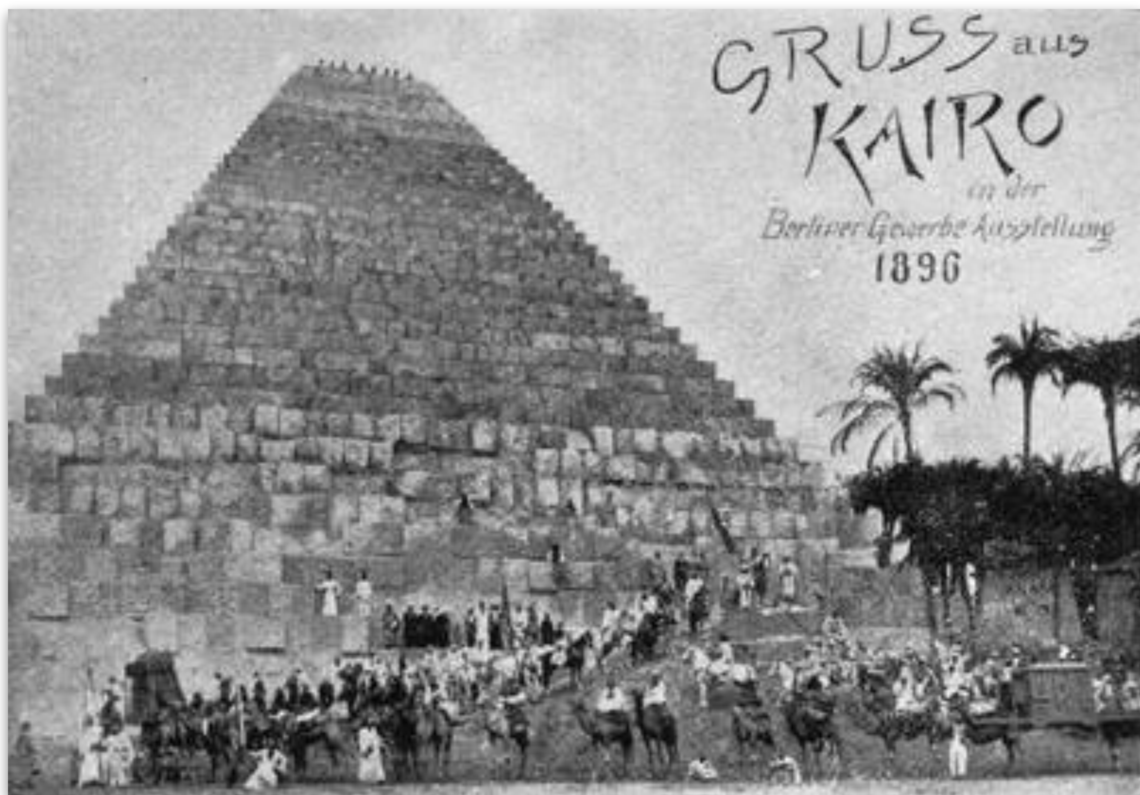
[33] Rowe, 1995. p. 223.

[34] The analyses of both Dipesh Chakrabarty and Walter Mignolo are prominent examples of postcolonial studies' identification of this trope. Chakrabarty, 2000; Mignolo, 2000.

[35] Badenberg, 2004. pp. 193–94.

spectacle and mass education were at the organizers' focus, the latter being supported by extended cooperations with the *Völkerkundemuseum* and ethnologist congresses accompanying the event.

In this fashion of entertainment and education, German Reich's colonial efforts were stressed spectacularly in all areas of the exhibition, even in *Alt-Berlin*, where the director of the Foreign Office's Colonial Department equalled Berlin's foundation with a small and dusty fishing village being colonized by an inherent German-ness (*Deutschthum*).[36] The most prominent case of cultural representation at the *Gewerbeausstellung*, however, was the sub-exhibition *Kairo*. Unapologetically modeled after the *Rue de Caire* at the 1889 Paris *Exposition Universelle* in its basic structures and performances, it offered one of the largest and reportedly most impressive sights of the *Gewerbeausstellung*: a 38m reconstruction of the Great Pyramid of Giza with a platform on top to give visitors an opportunity to see the exhibition in its full scale from above (Picture



Picture 1.3: Postcard from the *Kairo* exhibition, saying "Greetings from Cairo at the Berliner-Gewerbe-Ausstellung 1896."

[36] "The history of Berlin shows how German-ness is able to colonize and how it can transform the sandy soil of the *Mark* and a small fishing village through the prowess of its inhabitants and the care of the *Hohenzollern* tribe." Original: "Die Geschichte Berlins zeigt, wie das Deutschthum zu kolonisieren vermag und was aus dem sandigen Boden der Mark und einem kleinen Fischerdorf durch die Tüchtigkeit der Bewohner unter der Pflege des Hohenzollernstammes werden kann." Quoted in Badenberg, 2004. pp. 191–92.

1.3). At the bottom of the pyramid, pleasures very similar to the Paris *Rues de Caire* were offered to the visitors: 500 contractors, supposedly from Egypt, working at cafés, souvenir shops, hotels, camel rides, and—for the German touch—a *Kairoer Bierstube* (Cairine Beer Kitchen).

Yet, what the germanized version had gained in cost, mass, and size, it seems to have lacked in quality. According to contemporary reports, *Kairo* failed to create an atmosphere of authenticity, seen as one of the most important criteria of the colonial exhibitions. Alexander Geppert underlines this with the anecdotal report of a French journalist who was shocked upon discovering that the supposedly Egyptian contractors were actually from Damascus and—having studied in Beirut—spoke the "purest French".[37] In addition to its failure in giving the spectators an all-sensual experience of the imagined Orient, the bland and obvious replication of the *Rues de Caire* was easily seen through by most foreign and domestic observers as a desperate attempt to outperform the rivals in Paris, leading to unfavorable comparisons and accusation of plagiarism.

Criticism for the lack of ideas of the *Gewerbeausstellung* was directed at other areas of the exhibition, too. While the spatial, architectural and universalist scopes were generally acknowledged, many observers were stunned by the loveless copying of areas from previous exhibitions. The Berlin exhibition apparently left the scent of a hollow reconstruction that looked like a proper world exhibition, but did not feel like one, a comment that was also reflected in the many negative reports by the foreign press. One of the more analytically precise contemporary commentaries of the *Gewerbeausstellung* was published by Georg Simmel in the Austrian newspaper *Die Zeit.* The German urban sociologist focused on the very fact of the exposition's overabundance of attractions that overwhelmed the visitor trying to make sense of the event as a whole:

> Here, the abundance and the divergence of the offerings has only amusement as its final point of unity and characterizing feature. The narrow neighborhood, in which the most heterogeneous industrial products are placed, concludes in a paralysis of perception, a proper hypnosis, in which the single impression barely brushes the upper layers of consciousness and, finally, only the most repeated notion triumphs over the corpses of countless

[37] Geppert, 2010. p. 50.

> worthier—yet fragmented and thus weaker—impressions, in the fight for a place in the mind: the notion that this is a place of amusement.[38]

Although Simmel presents an unclear notion of amusement as the smallest common denominator of the exposition, it is the overabundance of impressions and the resulting properly hypnotic "paralysis of perception" that strikes him most. Putting himself into the position of a visitor, he can hardly overestimate the complete sensual overload that he identifies as a logical consequence of modern societies shortening attention span. In the end, the only factors that are capable of producing an impression of unity are the notion of amusement and the fact that all this is presented in the framework of the same exhibition. Simmel admits that this connecting framework is a pretty simple and obvious but very powerful connector:

> Nevertheless, the unity of it all is carried in a very powerful and interesting way by the idea that all these vast objects are all produced in one city. This origin may not be detectable through a common style or prevailing tendencies, it can develop its psychological force only as an idea floating above—yet, it is undeniable.[39]

The dialectic between the "appeal of quantity" (*Massenwirkung*) and the "unity of it all" (*Einheit des Ganzen*) that Simmel elaborates in his analysis of the *Gewerbeausstellung* will reemerge more than a century later it public debates concerning another Berlin cultural mass event. Trying to capture the spirit of the Berlinale after Dieter Kosslick's subsequent quantitative expansion of the festival, journalists regularly used the image of an overloaded program schedule only held together by the festival brand.

Following its closing ceremony in October 1896, the *Gewerbeausstellung* left few physical traces in *Treptower Park*. In a final demonstration of the German government's remarkable opposition to the event, all structures that had

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[38] "Hier ist die Fülle und die Divergenz des Gebotenen, die als schließlichen Einheitspunkt und farbgebendes Charakteristicum nur das Amüsement bestehen läßt. Die nachbarlichen Enge, in die die heterogensten Industrieproducte gerückt sind, erzeugt eine Paralyse des Wahrnehmungsvermögens, eine wahre Hypnose, in der der einzelne Eindruck nur noch die obersten Schichten des Bewußtseins streift und schließlich nur die am häufigsten wiederholte Vorstellung als Sieger über den Leichen unzähliger würdigerer, aber in ihrer Zersplitterung schwacher Eindrücke im Gedächtnis zurückbleibt: die Vorstellung, daß man sich hier amüsieren soll." Simmel, 1896.

[39] "Nun wird eine Einheit des Ganzen allerdings in sehr wirkungsvoller und interessanter Weise durch die Idee getragen, daß diese Unübersehbarkeit von Objecten in einer Stadt produciert sind. So wenig sie diesen Ursprung etwa in einer Gleichmäßigkeit des Stiles oder durchgehender Tendenzen zum sichtbaren Ausdruck bringen, so sehr er vielmehr nur als darüber schwebende Idee eine psychologische Wirksamkeit üben kann – so ist diese doch nicht zu verkennen." Ibid.

marked the event, from the pyramid to the artificial ponds, were torn down. Yet the *Gewerbeausstellung* nevertheless left traces, namely in Berlin's tradition of colonial display. Many of the artifacts that had been shipped in for the *Colonial-Ausstellung* were consigned to the *Völkerkundemuseum* which Dieter Kosslick referenced as a logical predecessor of the Berlinale. Furthermore, the exhibition left its mark on the city's international event culture. The *Gewerbeausstellung* was one of the first instances of Berlin entering the world stage to present itself as a *Weltstadt* that is up to date with larger cultural trends. In 1896, *Kairo* and the general tradition of colonial exhibitions had been among the requisites that helped Berlin to elevate itself—requisites shaped in France and the United Kingdom in previous decades. When a century later, the Berlinale's quest for relevance on the global stage proceeded through the requisites of Iranian cinema and filmmakers like Jafar Panahi, their staging can be understood in the context of this practice, too. Not unlike the colonial street facades of the late 19th century, the showcasing of Iranian cinema is a tradition adapted from an important continental rival. It was in France, after all, where in the late 1990s Abbas Kiarostami's as well as Panahi's international careers had been kickstarted at the Cannes festival.

1.2 Exhibition Culture and Representation

While the histories and functionalities of world exhibitions by themselves share striking and enlightening commonalities with those of international film festivals, they will have to be fleshed out theoretically to actually serve as analytical tools for an examination of the Berlinale and its showcasing of Iranian cinema. For this purpose, I will take a closer look at the representational strategies that are at work in both exhibitions and film festivals and how they were processed by different academic disciplines of the humanities. Timothy Mitchell's previously mentioned analysis of the "world as exhibition"—initially published as the first chapter of his 1988 seminal monograph on the colonization of Egypt[40]—is surely among the most dense and influential theorizations of colonial exhibitions and their repercussions on the exchange of gazes between Europe and the Middle East. As such, his analyses

[40] Mitchell, 1988. pp. 15–37; Mitchell, 1989. The latter is a slightly revised version, published as a separate article, and contains some terminological updates which I mark respectively, especially his argument of "the world as exhibition" after which the article is named.

can serve as points of entrance into various other academic inquiries into issues of representation.

Mitchell's book *Colonising Egypt* examines the implementation of military, economic, and political institutions to the Egyptian context, institutions which Mitchell, conceptualizes as disciplinary techniques rooted in Western modernity, following Michel Foucault's earlier theorizations of the disciplinary society. Starting with efforts of the Saint Simonists to initiate their industrializing project in 1830s Cairo, Mitchell traces the respective developments through the following century. Most relevant to my analysis is his introductory chapter, as it frames his social history by focusing on European representations of Egypt at the 1889 and 1900 *Rues de Caires* in Paris. An examination of contemporaneous reports by both Arab and European visitors allows Mitchell to highlight the binary structures at the source of the exhibition and the way they are transcended by their interaction with the outside world.

The most important of these dialectic relationships is the one between representation and reality, between the exhibition and the real thing. From the perspective of the exhibition, it is fundamental to its strategies of display that this relation is as straightforward as possible—the exhibits have to be faithful representations of the original. The visitors' perspective, however, is far more complex, especially that of the Egyptian delegates to the 1889 *Rue de Caire*, who challenged the spectacle by putting it into dialogue with its outside, in this case the reality of late 19th century Paris. Mitchell highlights their impression that, even though the exhibition grounds were clearly distinguished physically from the rest of the city, "it was not always easy in Paris to tell where the exhibition ended and the world itself began."[41] Their observation that the strategies of representation and the exhibition's structuring of the gaze continued beyond its borders leads Mitchell to identify the "world as exhibition" as one of Western Modernity's basic principles.[42] Although Mitchell's central argument is tied to the colonial condition and the nature of Western modernity—and thus to the historical context of the *fin de siècle*—it poses several questions that can contribute to analyses of the discursive and performative framing of national cinemas at international film festivals. For this reason, his account is an

[41] Mitchell, 1988. p. 21.

[42] Ibid. pp. 21–24.

enlightening bridge between between film festivals and world exhibitions. The trajectory and vocabulary of his argument of the world as exhibition will thus help me to address my own questions to a corpus of debates in cultural studies, social theory and media theory in the following.

Achieving Objectness Through Discourse

The first concern that Mitchell highlights is the exhibitions' strategy to frame things as objects and thus exhibits:

> The curious attitude of the European subject that one finds in Arabic accounts seems to have been connected with what one might call a corresponding *objectness*. The curiosity of the observing subject was something demanded by a diversity of mechanisms for rendering things up as its object - beginning with the Middle Eastern visitor himself.[43]

The "objectness" outlined here reflects the element of discursive framing that takes place at and around the Berlinale. Although the films—and often enough the filmmakers—at the center of my analysis are not as physical as Mitchell's proto-Cairene street facades and Middle Eastern contractors and spectators, Iranian cinema and film culture is framed as a discursive object at the Berlinale ceremonies, red carpet events and press conferences as well as through the media. For a better understanding of the objectness that the exhibits at colonial exhibitions shared with films—and national cinemas, their signifieds—a brief discussion of the constitution and limitation of discourses as well as the respective terminology will be helpful. When it comes to the theorization of discourse, Michel Foucault's remarks on the subject—laid out initially in *L'ordre du discours* (The Discourse on Language)[44]—are a useful point of departure. The post-structuralist philosopher famously conceptualized discourses as "ensembles of discursive events" which are set up as "homogeneous, but discontinuous series."[45] Most of the strategies that structure these events are concerned with the realm of knowledge production and thus only of marginal interest to my analysis, like the psychiatric "difference

[43] Mitchell, 1989. p. 219.

[44] Although Foucaults thoughts on discourse are notoriously hard to pin down and nowhere realized to the extent of a convenient theoretical guideline, its basic shapes are outlined in this programmatic lecture, which is mostly in line with his later works and covers most of the terminology I work with in my analysis. Foucault, 1972. pp. 215–37.

[45] Ibid. p. 231.

between reason and madness,"[46] the positivist "will to truth,"[47] or the "fellowships of discourse"[48] in academia and elsewhere. Yet one of these strategies is particularly relevant for an analysis of the functioning of a film festival, namely the ritual.

In Foucault's terminology, ritual is concerned with a limitation of discursive subjects or participants in a discourse, similar to the fellowships. Ritual "lays down gestures to be made, behavior, circumstances and the whole range of signs that must accompany discourse; finally, it lays down the supposed, or imposed significance of the words used, their effect upon those to whom they are addressed, the limitations of their constraining validity."[49] The value of the term lies in its associative qualities—a ritual indicates not only a coded behavior that is publicly repeated over and over again, but also a corpus of expressions which are not necessarily textual. It is this quality of pointing beyond language that makes a focus on rituals intriguing to my work, which is concerned with discursive utterances in the form of performances, awards, fashion, and others on the various stages of the Berlinale as much as with the spoken or written accounts accompanying them. Of course, ritual studies have been theorized in a rich corpus of anthropological literature, from Victor Turner's seminal conceptualization of the ritual as a liminal phenomenon,[50] enhancing Arnold van Gennep's research on *rites de passage*, to more recent work connecting ritual with fields beyond religion, like Ronald Grimes demand to integrate media in ritual studies.[51] While these more anthropological conceptualizations are highly relevant to the Berlinale, where the quasi-sacred is crucial to elevate the festival atmosphere, it is important to also keep Foucault's association of rituals with a restricting discursive strategy in mind.

The concept of the discursive ritual, together the other mechanisms described by Foucault, works towards the most crucial characteristic of his theories, namely the constitutive nature of discourses. According to Foucault, discursive objects do not exist *a priori*, they are not simply shaped but produced by their discourses. This quality is precisely what leads Timothy Mitchell to

46 Ibid. pp. 216–17.
47 Ibid. pp. 218–20.
48 Ibid. pp. 225–56.
49 Ibid.
50 Turner, 1969.
51 Grimes, 2002.

ascribe objectness to world exhibitions, as their discourse leads to a spectrum of things—from technological achievements to manufactured goods to whole cultures—becoming its objects, or in this case exhibits. This logic works in both directions and makes the discursive subjects also being constituted by their statements. A common criticism towards Foucault's theorization is thus that of a certain determinism, reducing his subjects to mere functions of their assertions and his objects to being overwhelmed by the technologies of power that define them. These accusations, perhaps most pointedly formulated by sociolinguist Norman Fairclough in the early 1990s,[52] bemoan the lack of a sense of social agency. From the perspective of researchers like Fairclough who specialize in theories of social change through discourse, this is understandable; although looking for an applicable model of social discourse might not do justice to the metaphysical theorization Foucault was invested in. Nevertheless, the dynamic between the two positions of Foucault's power-entangled discursive determinism and Fairclough's rehabilitation of social agency is to be born in mind when conceptualizing the discourse on world cinema at international film festivals, as it brings up crucial questions after the choices and possibilities of foreign filmmakers and films entering the festival stages.

Beyond the terminology of the school of critical discourse analysis promoted by Michel Foucault, Michel Pêcheux, Pierre Bourdieu, and others, the concept of staging as a discursive strategy deserves attention here. In the context of discourse theory, staging was coined in Anglo-American discourse analysis, where linguist Joseph E. Grimes described it in 1975 as organizing a statement "around a particular element that is taken as its point of departure."[53] Communication scholars Gillian Brown and George Yule later embraced this conceptualization of staging in their 1983 *Discourse Analysis*, where they welcomed the term's acknowledgement of more complex "rhetorical devices like lexical selection, rhyme, alliteration, repetition, use of metaphor, markers of emphasis, etc."[54] and "consider staging as a crucial factor in discourse structure because [...] the way a piece of discourse is staged must have a significant effect both on the process of interpretation and on the process of subsequent recall."[55]

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[52] Fairclough, 1996. pp. 56–61.

[53] Grimes, 1975. p. 323.

[54] Brown and Yule, 2008. p. 124.

[55] Ibid.

Although in contrast to their French colleagues, the Anglo-American school of discourse analysis is rather focused on language—unsurprisingly so, given its roots and sphere of influence in the field of communication studies—a translation of these philological definitions into the realm of non-textual statements is highly relevant to my analysis. Staging, then, describes the *mise en scène* of a discursive event, or, to remain in the metaphoric realm of film and theater, the way a discursive object is put and presented on a stage. Its very origin in theatre and its association with stages, in fact, inscribes its performative dimension deeply into the term—a dimension I will elaborate later in this chapter, taking note of Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory on an aesthetics of the performative.

It is according to this conceptualization that I use the term staging in the following, distinguishing it from the related strategy of framing that has a much more passive connotation of something that is being fixated. Framing narrows a similar process down to an object being put into a prefabricated shape and a fixed meaning, as opposed to being taken as a requisite and put on stage. Although this happens at the Berlinale, too, especially in the textual coverage of Iranian cinema in festival publications and media reports, limiting the analysis to this dimension would not do justice to the larger phenomenon. The same goes for the concept of branding, which usually applies similar techniques as framing and staging, but directs them at the subject itself—a crucial concern of the Berlinale and other festivals and exhibitions, but again only one dimension of its relation to Iranian cinema.

In the brief recapitulation above, it has become evident that discourse theories are mostly limited linguistic discourses, apart from minor mentions in the works of Grimes, Brown, and Yule. It has also become clear that for the purpose of an analyses of events, performances, and screenings at film festivals, this focus is not sufficient, even if a portion of these discourses occur in spoken or written form. A certain lack of sensitivity on the side of discourse analysis towards other media has often been lamented, accompanied by apologetic remarks on the traditionally philological training of the respective researchers, while acknowledging the power of pictures and the need to decode and address them properly.[56] Yet, the countless and influential attempts and "turns" that

[56] As an example for this uneasiness, see Achim Landwehr's brief chapter on pictorial discourses. Landwehr, 2009. pp. 56–59.

translated the problems and theorizations around discourse into realms beyond language—from W. J. T. Mitchell's approach to images as agents of their own,[57] to the iconic turn promoted by Gottfried Boehm,[58] to Erika Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative[59]—show that images, audiovisual products or even performances may need a different level of sensitivity, but not necessarily a completely different treatment. In most cases, they can be read and analyzed in a similar way as texts, which is why the basic terminological foundations of discourse theory can be uphold, because it, in turn, has complemented theories of performative and pictorial analysis in the Cultural Studies and by Roland Barthes, their intellectual predecessor, who I will address in the following.

Reality-Effect and Mythologies

In addition to this particular theorization around the discursive achievement of objectness, a closer look at the phenomena of display and representation becomes necessary. Timothy Mitchell found that in the eyes of Middle Eastern visitors of the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, the exhibition continued beyond its borders. In their accounts, he identifies a peculiar mode of representation:

> Everything seemed to be set up before one as though it were the model or the picture of something. Everything was arranged before an observing subject into a system of signification (to use the European jargon), declaring itself to be the signifier of a signified. The exhibition, perhaps, could be read in such accounts as [...] a place where one was continually pressed into service as a spectator by a world ordered so as to represent. In exhibitions the traveller from the Middle East could describe [...] a particular arrangement between the individual and an object-world which Europeans seemed to take as the experience of the real. This reality-effect, let me provisionally suggest, was a world more and more rendered up to the individual according to the way in which, and to the extent to which, it could be set up before him or her as an exhibit.[60]

This "reality-effect"—including its hyperreal dimension I have elaborated above —is a mode of representation that stages its objects to a level where they become, semiotically speaking, no longer mere signifiers of existing signifieds, but of signs themselves. The real thing as such, identified by Mitchell as "the

[57] The image theorist's seminal, but often elusive thought, is probably best summarized in the written version of his 2001 lecture series at the University of Chicago. Mitchell, 2005.

[58] Boehm, 2007.

[59] Fischer-Lichte, 2017.

[60] Mitchell, 1988. p. 23.

Orient that escapes,"[61] does not exist. The exhibition thus comes to constitute a reality of its own, creating the surplus value of representation that Mitchell so pointedly works out. It is this reality and the superordinate system of signification on which it is based that I am interested in because it locates the level of representation that my analysis operates on.

Superordinate systems of cultural signification have first been systematically examined in the 1950s by French cultural critic Roland Barthes. The seminal essay *Myth Today* was published as a coda to *Mythologies*,[62] Barthes 1957 collection of notes on pop-cultural phenomena that had been previously neglected by scholarly analysis. Mythologies served as both methodological justification and study guide for quotidian phenomena from the iconic face of actress Greta Garbo to detergent commercials to the world of wrestling. Here, Barthes elaborated the perspective and terminology of identifying "myths," a concept that can serve as a useful tool of analysis and clarifies Mitchell's reality-effect.

Myth, according to Barthes, can best be explained as an extension of Ferdinand de Saussure's well known system of signification: when the sign, which is created by the signifier to address the signified, becomes a signifier itself, myth conceives a second layer of signification. Myth is thus a meta-language that hints at hidden layers of representation. Without going into too much detail of Barthes' terminological system, it is evident that the identification of myth can unearth hitherto hidden layers of representation and shift the perspective through which any discursive object is read by not only focusing on the object, but on the way it is staged. Just as basis semiology analyzes signs by distinguishing what they signify (the signified) and by which means (the signifier), deciphering a myth distinguishes the two layers of its signified—what is signified on the surface (its meaning) and what is the system of signification that its signifier is based on (its form). In the process of broadcasting a message, the layers are mixed and thus made unidentifiable. To stress this point, Barthes uses the metaphor of a turnstile with differently colored sides—without stopping the turnstile, it is impossible to read its original colors correctly.[63] It is this hiding of a message's connotations that leads

[61] Mitchell, 1989. p. 233.

[62] Barthes, 1990. pp. 109–59.

[63] Ibid. p. 125.

Barthes to locate a great deal of epistemic violence in myth: As "myth is experienced as innocent speech," it "transforms history into nature."[64] While Barthes describes this process with all kinds of questionably strong metaphors from impoverishment to theft to hunt and sexual violence, his argument of naturalization through myth is one to be salvaged.

The elaboration of myth and the process of naturalization makes these concepts relevant for an analysis of visual and performative staging strategies, as they are specifically tailored to messages that work beyond language. Although the essay famously opened with claiming "myth is a type of speech,"[65] Barthes soon clarified:

> Myth can be defined neither by its object nor by its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning: the arrow which is brought in order to signify a challenge is also a kind of speech. True, as far as perception is concerned, writing and pictures, for instance, do not call upon the same type of consciousness. [...] This substance is not unimportant: pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it. But this is no longer a constitutive difference. Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a *lexis*. We shall therefore take *language, discourse, speech*, etc., to mean any significant unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual: a photograph will be a kind of speech for us in the same way as a newspaper article; even objects will become speech, if they mean something.[66]

Decades before any iconic turn, Barthes acknowledged pictures, objects and—as in his examination *The World of Wrestling*[67]—performances as not only carriers of statements, but takes them seriously as discursive formations of their own. Thanks to this innovation in approach, which led him to shift his philological attention from the written to the visual and from high to popular culture, Roland Barthes is regarded as one of the intellectual predecessors of Cultural Studies,[68] whose contributions to questions of cultural representation and display make their debates crucial to to my analysis.

[64] Ibid. pp. 129-31.

[65] Ibid. p. 109.

[66] Ibid. pp. 110–11, emphasis in original.

[67] Ibid. pp. 15–26.

[68] During, 2005. p. 35.

Cultural Studies and Representation

Although their branding might suggest otherwise, Cultural Studies are neither a school nor a discipline.[69] Their practitioners are based in very different fields and their research is transgressing disciplinary boundaries in most cases, which is central to Cultural Studies' program. Also, although many of their practitioners were members of the University of Birmingham and later Open University in the United Kingdom, this concentration is not enough to describe Cultural Studies as a school located at any of these universities. I will instead characterize them as a project, because even if there is no neatly cut set of methodological tools, Cultural Studies share a certain approach on their subject matter, which is popular culture. This approach is summarized by literary historian Simon During in his textbook *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* simply as an "engaged analysis of contemporary cultures."[70]

During's understanding of engagement further clarifies the project of Cultural Studies as a critique of exclusions or marginalizations in popular culture and approach their subject matter with a certain enthusiastic bias or even fandom. This points to a certain transgression of the boundaries of academia and an engagement with culture not as an object of research, but as a part of everyday life.[71] This transgression is indeed programmatic and rooted in a strong dissatisfaction with the distinction between high and popular culture—and even more so with 1950's academia's neglect of the dissipation of this distinction. Consequently, this also reflects in the location of the project at the intersection of workers' education and academia. The multidisciplinary character in this regard is also clearly visible in Cultural Studies' most common theoretical influences, which include concepts of power and discourse by Antonio Gramsci and Micheal Foucault, an emphasis on the dynamics between class, taste, and cultural consumption inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, an interest in Michel de Certeau's understanding of everyday life, and analytical tools introduced by Roland Barthes.

Cultural Studies' input on representation is most comprehensively and programmatically bundled in *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, a

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[69] To distinguish the project of Cultural Studies—as conceived in the United Kingdom in the 1970s around Stuart Hall—from the broader academic discipline of cultural studies, I will capitalize the phrase in the following.

[70] During, 2005. p. 1.

[71] Ibid. pp. 1–3.

volume edited and published by Stuart Hall in 1997.[72] Here, Hall—undoubtedly Cultural Studies' most prolific proponent—and his co-contributors worked out a constructionist concept of representation which assumes that, to a certain degree, representation constructs a picture that is not necessarily true to its original, and is thus located between mimetic conceptions (that state representation as a mere copy of the original) and intentionalist approaches (that see it as a complete distortion of the latter).[73] Their work is particularly concerned with representation of the other—be it the other of the mainstream at the margins of a society or members of foreign societies—and thus necessarily addresses a basic theorization of difference. Hall understands difference on four theoretical levels, namely the linguistic (where only difference produces meaning), the philological (which equals difference with dialogue), the anthropological (which assumes difference to produce culture), and finally the psycho-analytical (which states the constitution of the self through the other).[74] Especially the latter is featured heavily in Hall's conceptualization of difference and its representation, which fuels his interest in "racialized regimes of representation"[75] and their fetishization of the other.

Hall's strong connotation of cultural representation with othering is even more central to his argument on *The West and the Rest*, which has become a popular phrase following the publication of his essay of the same title in 1996.[76] Here, Hall offers a conclusive genealogy of both "the West" and its discursive power. Highly connected to the concept of modernity, he argues, the West took shape during the 19th century through a global process of delimitation with the discourse of Western modernity putting itself at the center of the world. Although his argument has somewhat aged and enhanced extensively by various post-colonial theorists, it illustrates the scope of his concept of representation and its connectedness to discursive power on both a political and geographical scale. That practices of cultural signification are powerful discursive tools that work to construct global or political entities and that position themselves as centers of progress is a crucial point in understanding

72 Hall, 1997.

73 Ibid. p. 14.

74 Ibid. pp. 234–38.

75 Ibid, pp. 276–77.

76 Hall, 1996.

the world exhibitions phenomenon, where the representation of non-Western cultures was employed for the imperial project.

Generally, Cultural Studies' constructionist conceptualization of cultural representation took attention away from the dichotomy between accuracy and misrepresentation and rather focuses on the creation and functioning of representation. In addition to this theoretical contribution, their methodologies are relevant for my analysis because they expand the concept of representation significantly by not only considering images and objects but also practices and events as objects of analysis. As my analysis is to a large degree concerned with the Berlinale's strategies of staging, a look at Henrietta Lidchi's theorization of the *Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures*[77] will prove helpful. The essay of the same title is invested in an exhibition analysis that shifts the focus from strategies of meaning production through language, images or objects to practices of classification and display. Taking the 1993 *Paradise* exhibition at the *Museum of Mankind* in London as its research subject, Lidchi's analysis introduces two categories. The museologist examines the poetics of exhibiting are through a semiotic analysis of the strategies through which meaning is produced. The politics of exhibition, on the other hand, encompass this meaning's connectedness to power relations and hierarchies between the exhibitor and the exhibited.

While the latter is well along the lines of Hall's argument of "the West and the rest," Lidchi's remarks on the poetics of exhibition localize a dialectic between an exhibit's physical presence and its meaning at the base of representational dynamics. Her argument introduces a brief genealogy of traditions of museal display—originating from 16th century German *Wunderkammern* (Chambers of Wonder) and British universalist collections that teamed up with anthropological research to evolve into ethnological museums from the mid 19th century onwards— following British sociologist Tony Bennett and his work on *The Birth of the Museum*.[78] Lidchi then elaborates the inner workings of these practices of display, identifying "objects as palimpsests of meaning"[79]—like the ancient rewritable parchments she takes her inspiration

[77] Lidchi, 1997.

[78] Bennett understands the museum as ambassador and manifestation of the Foucauldian archive and examines the genealogy of museal practices of display and classification in detail. Bennett, 1995.

[79] Lidchi, 1997. p. 167.

from, objects will carry different messages depending on the context in and the practices through which they are exhibited. While the denotation stays the same, the connotation can change, even if the same object remains physically present in the same exhibiting institution. This constructedness of meaning is usually well hidden by the exhibiting institution to make the exhibits seem as innocent and hermeneutically naturalized as possible—or, as Lidchi puts it, to "purify [their] symbolic power."[80] The case of the *Paradise* exhibition shows, however, that this purification can also be achieved through transparency and self-reflexivity, especially if the audience is already somewhat aware of the problematic history of appropriation:

> It is worth noting that it is precisely because the *Paradise* exhibition was not a standard unreflective exhibit, but a resourceful and complex exhibition that addressed the problematic aspects of its own production and political accountability, that it has provoked such valuable and reflexive comment, of a kind that can push the student and cultural critic alike beyond simply stereotyping the process of exhibiting.[81]

This dialectic between an exhibition's constructedness and its hiding strongly recall Barth's concept of the myth and thus points to the dynamics of construction, myth-making, and meaning production that happen during the exhibition process. Lidchi's argument that asynchronous power-relations are often inscribed into these dynamics and that they can, paradoxically, also be hidden through an allegedly transparent and self-reflective addressing of the exhibiting practices is important to keep in mind. It resonates strongly with exhibiting institutions that attempt to purify themselves from responsibility. In the case of the Berlinale, such attempts can be identified, too, especially in terms of its structures of non-Western film funding like the World Cinema Fund, which the festival proudly uses to brand itself as a festival that reflects the global imbalances in film infrastructure.

Although Cultural Studies far too diverse in terms of both disciplines and fields of research to have any kind of standardized set of methods,[82] the inquiries of Stuart Hall and Henrietta Lidchi suggest a certain methodological direction that contribute to my examination. Cultural Studies have conceptualized culture as a circuit that is composed of an interconnected cycle of representation, regulation, production, consumption, and identity, all

[80] Ibid. p. 183.

[81] Ibid. p. 179.

[82] During, 2005. pp. 7–10.

mutually informing each other.[83] What my research is most invested in is the question of representation, namely that of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale. Understanding it as embedded in a broader circuit makes both its wider impact and its constructedness visible. In accordance with this circuit of culture, Hall has proposed six elements of an analysis of "the work of representation" that can well be translated for cultural events, taking Cultural Studies' constructionist approach to representation into account: statements made about a subject, the rules governing its discourse, the power-relatedness of its hermeneutics, the people participating in it, the institutional practices influencing it, and its historical embeddedness.[84]

The initial elements encompass the discourse around a subject, namely its statements and its rules. In the case of my research, this includes the statements made around Iranian cinema at the Berlinale itself as well as in media reports. While I hesitate to follow any model of discourse analysis all to orthodoxly, as my focus lies on the performances that are hard to address with its methodology, the discursive framework of the festival's staging is often crucial to its understanding. The same goes for the power-relatedness of the knowledge that is produced about Iran. It would surely be an overstatement to apply Foucauldian terminology to an extend that seeks to locate the Berlinale's "will to truth," but it can hardly be denied that the festival does produce a certain kind of knowledge about Iran and that this knowledge is embedded in a particular politics. This can be identified in the paradigms through which Iranian cinema is read at the Berlinale, often enough exclusively—paradigms like censorship, repression, resistance, and gender relations. Chapters Three and Four are strongly concerned with these paradigms and how they influenced the reception of Iranian films and filmmakers at the festival.

The other analytical elements proposed by Hall leave more room for an examination of the performative. I assume the role of the films and filmmakers as well as festival officials participating in the representation of Iranian cinema in Berlin as that of actors in a larger stage play that exemplarily unfolds around the case of Jafar Panahi, examined in Chapters Four and Five. The same goes for the institutional practices of the Berlinale, which manifest in a large variety of performances and stages that I will identify over the course of

[83] Hall, 1997. pp. 1–4.

[84] Ibid. pp. 45–46.

my analysis. The historical embeddedness, which Hall puts last, is even more crucial to my research. Stretching the historical context of the film festival phenomenon as far back as to the world exhibition movement and the context of the narratives negotiated at the Berlinale onto the urban stage of its host city, I am dedicating my first two chapters to the larger historical background against which the festival takes place. As such, Stuart Hall's quest to understand "the work of representation" might not offer a strict methodological toolkit, but formulates a number of crucial analytical categories that are inspired by critical discourse analysis but allow other cultural influences as well and, more importantly, are tailored to a broader set of media than texts and statements.

Branding and the Certainty of Representation

An important issue in representation is the question of its practices value from the perspective of the exhibiting institution. What does an exhibition, or a festival, gain from showcasing the other? If it is argued that exhibiting non-Western cultures elevates an institution or an event, how can this elevation be understood? In addition to the larger cultural context that the project of Cultural Studies in considering, I propose the issue of branding as a further analytical category. In his analysis of the *Rues de Caire* in Paris, Timothy Mitchel touches upon the question of branding through "the certainty of representation," which he identifies as the nexus of exhibiting and self-positioning:

> The spectacles set up in such places of modern entertainment reflected the political certainty of a new age. [...] Exhibitions, museums and other spectacles were not just reflections of this certainty, however, but the means of its production, by their technique of rendering history, progress, culture and empire in 'objective' form. They were occasions for making sure of such objective truths, in a world where truth had become a question of what Heidegger calls 'the certainty of representation'.[85]

[85] Mitchell, 1997. p. 19.

The certainty of representation (Heidegger's *Sicherheit der Abbildung*)[86] that Mitchell refers to not only points towards the strategies of meaning production but also addresses the intention behind these strategies. The certainty of truthful representations produces a certainty of the exhibitor's power. At world —and especially colonial—exhibitions, this encompasses the imperial power of the exhibiting country. At the Berlinale, as we shall see, this means the certainty of the festival as a liberal political forum for films and filmmakers that are censored in their countries of origin. Branding, as an analytical category, addresses this practice of self-staging.

Traditionally, branding has its academic home territory in marketing studies and, until this day, can not quite shake off its practically oriented background of business guidebooks. The theorization of the term that comes closest to a analysis useful to a cultural studies approach is Douglas Holt's influential concept of cultural branding published in 2004.[87] What the Oxford based marketing scholar aims at, here, is to work out an updated vocabulary on the phenomena that arise at the intersection of popular culture and marketing through an examination of what he identifies as "iconic brands." An iconic brand, according to Holt, works with "identity values," which he defines as "consensus expressions of particular values held dear by some members of a society."[88] This "cultural branding" can be successful enough for the brand to reach the status of a cultural icon that is deeply inscribed into not only the consumer culture but the popular culture of a certain region and generation— Holt quotes the likes of Coca Cola, Nike and Apple as examples.[89] The apparent problem with these categories is that they are specifically tailored to consumer brands and their logic of marketing and capitalist valorization, outside of which they do not make much sense. This results in a strong normativity of Holt's approach that measures brands solely along the lines of

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[86] Mitchell here refers to Martin Heidegger's essay *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* (The Age of the World Image), which is also often referenced by proponents of the iconic turn. Heidegger's reflections on the topic are, however, product of a highly problematic effort to rehabilitate his image as a critical scholar. German philosopher Sidonie Kellerer has found that *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* is a strongly and intransparently edited version of a lecture held in 1938—when Heidegger was still a member of the NSDAP—and was republished in 1950 with unmarked alternations that make it seem like an anti-imperialist argument critical of modern technology, thereby changing central arguments. See Kellerer, 2011.

[87] Holt, 2004.

[88] Ibid. p. 4.

[89] Ibid. p. 11.

their success—which is another problem for anyone wanting to adapt his findings to a critical analysis of the branding of cultural institutions. In the discourse of business school and marketing studies that aims at an identification, fixation, and reproduction of said success, this approach is reasonable; but its contribution to other fields of analysis is limited.

Daragh O'Reilly has criticized this in-transferability and normativity of examinations on cultural branding in his 2005 article on *Cultural Brands/Branding Cultures*. The Sheffield-based management scholar argued that "branding is not a neutral analytical repertoire for the study of exchange relationships, but is itself a particular kind of cultural brand, namely an ideological myopia which operates in the service of capital."[90] Problematizing the lack of self-reflection in current theorizations of cultural branding, O'Reilly calls for an integration of approaches from the repertoires of critical discourse analysis and Cultural Studies—especially the adaption of Stuart Hall's circuit of culture and its assumptions of constitutive representation—to unlock critical potential and enrich marketing studies' perspective on the phenomenon.[91] In terms of Holt's concept of cultural branding, O'Reilly is highly critical of its celebration of the commodification of everyday culture, which had been famously problematized by Naomi Klein in her 2001 book *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*.[92]

For the purpose of my examination, neither of these contributions are terribly applicable. My intentions are far away from advising the Berlinale how to examine its recent history for effective strategies and respective shortcomings and successfully establish itself as a brand. Branding is already a crucial concern of the Berlinale, especially since Dieter Kosslick's tenure, when the festival brand includes a whole range of merchandise from the famous festival bags to children's clothing. My research rather aims at examining its self-staging as a political festival, which is a label that the Berlinale has been proudly pushing and accepting for decades. For the purpose of such an examination, the marketing studies' proposition of cultural branding can be salvaged by taking into account its assumptions and proposed strategies, on which the Berlinale itself operates as an institution that has to compete on the increasingly crowded market of international film festivals.

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[90] O'Reilly, 2005. pp. 585–86.

[91] Ibid. pp. 577–81.

[92] Klein, 2001.

These assumptions are symptomatically summarized in Douglas Holt's "axioms of cultural branding."[93] The most important of these axioms is that "iconic brands address acute contradictions in society"[94] and "perform identity myths that address these desires and anxieties".[95] I do neither have the tools nor the resources for a psychological examination of festival audiences, which would be necessary to understand these "identity myths" in detail. Yet what Holt describes here is that, as soon as branding allies with culture, it takes socio-political context into account. His genealogy of the Coca Cola brand illustrates this: In the United States, it managed to speak to generations as different as middle class families of the early 1950s, their revolting offspring at the end of the following decade, and the hedonist nostalgic consumer culture of the later 1990s by working with and actively addressing the "cultural disruptions" of their respective eras.[96] Holt's stressing of socio-political context can be adapted to the case of the Berlinale as well, which uses its urban stage as well as the political background of the invited filmmakers work on its brand. That such an integration of context always considers cultural branding, too, is important to understand the larger motivation of the festival machine. Thus, even though the according discourse is in large parts normatively oriented towards marketing practices, the branding metaphor can help to make the perspective of the Berlinale visible, which has to compete with other film festivals and thus must behave like other cultural producers and institutions in whose markets such strategies might seem more obvious. Together with the contributions of Cultural Studies, it rounds up the understanding of the work of representation in exhibition culture that informs the theoretical framework of my analysis.

1.3 The Emergence of Film Festivals

The issues of representation I have pointed out above, from discursive strategies to myth-making to branding, have mostly been conceptualized in terms of statements about a represented subject, be it through language or audiovisual

93 Holt, 2004. pp. 6–11.

94 Ibid. p. 6.

95 Ibid. p. 7.

96 Ibid. p. 22–27.

media. The staging of Iranian cinema, however, encompasses not only the films themselves and how they are framed discursively in festival and journalistic publications, but predominantly in performances. I understand world exhibitions as crucial spiritual predecessors of film festivals precisely because they were events and thus had a strong performative nature in their exhibition of the non-West. As representations, the *Rues de Caires* that Mitchell was concerned with have worked particularly well not only because of their hyperreal recreation in architecture, but through their character as a large-scale performance in which hired actors—and animals—took part. To address this theatrical dimension in an examination of festivals and their representation of particular national cinemas, it is thus crucial to analyze their performances extensively. Consequently, before I close this chapter by tracing the emergence of film festivals from the ruins of the world exhibition movement, I will in the following turn to the theoretical achievements of the humanities' recent focus on performativity and its analytical repercussions. As Erika Fischer-Lichte is undoubtedly the researcher most associated with this, her conceptualization of performativity and the analytical categories she derives from it deserve special attention in that regard.

The Festival as a Performance

In her 2013 introduction to the phenomenon, Fischer-Lichte distinguishes two interconnected levels of the performative turn in European culture: the turn in the arts and the following readjustment of the cultural studies.[97] Given her background in theater studies, it is not surprising that the Berlin-based theater scholar localizes the beginnings of the performative turn in European arts in 1920's German theatre. It is here that Fischer-Lichte identifies a departure from the illusion and a reorientation towards the reality of the performance, with Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), then director of the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin, as its patron.[98] Especially Reinhardt's project to make the more physical and enacting elements of ancient greek theater consumable for a mass audience at his *Theater der Fünftausend* (Theater of the Five Thousand) is seen by Fischer-Lichte as a pathbreaking disruption:

[97] Fischer-Lichte, 2013. pp. 9–35.

[98] Fischer-Lichte, 2000. pp. 9–10.

> In Reinhardt's Antique Projects, theater [...] is to be understood as a model that anticipates a new performative culture in which not only the class boundaries would be neutralized, but also those between the different cultural areas like art, religion, politics.[99]

This "new performative culture" could well be broken down into a shift from naturalist adaptions to performative distortion for the sake of guiding the attention towards the structure of the medium itself—for which theater of course is a mere example, as similar tendencies can also be observed in other contemporaneous art forms, from expressionist painting to Sovjet formalist filmmaking. In itself, this localization is by far revolutionary. During the 1940s and 50s, Bertolt Brecht had turned this precise distortion into the seminal practice of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect) that had a massive impact on German and international theater culture. What is new in Fischer-Lichte's account is that she introduces a reconnection of these tendencies to the way the cultural sciences have been reacting to and dealing with them through a series of readjustments in their analytical focus. Over the course of the 20th century, these readjustments led to the performative turn of the 1990s in which she positions her own research.

Fischer-Lichte proposes the performative turn as a collapse of the "European self-conception as a textually based culture as opposed to a physically based culture."[100] For her, this collapse has its roots in late 19th century approaches in theater studies, where a play was no longer simply analyzed as a text to stage adaption but as an *Inszenierung* (*mise en scène*).[101] As the other current that inspired this shift, Fischer-Lichte identifies both Soviet cultural semiotics of the 1960s and the cultural turn in 1970s Anglo-American anthropology, which both proposed a conceptualization of culture as a text that is to be interpreted with tools adopted from philology and literature studies. The approach to culture as a performance, to which proponents of the performative turn have subscribed, is very much indebted to these conceptualization of culture as a text.[102]

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99 "Theater [...] ist in Reinhardts Antikenprojekten als ein Modell zu begreifen, in dem eine neue performative Kultur vorweggenommen wird, in der nicht nur die Klassenunterschiede ausgelöscht sein werden, sondern auch die Grenzen zwischen den verschiedenen kulturellen Bereichen wie Kunst, Religion, Politik aufgehoben." Ibid. p. 18.

100 Fischer-Lichte, 2013. pp. 31–33.

101 Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 42–57.

102 Fischer-Lichte, 2013. pp. 31–35.

This distinctive perspective is clearly in need of its own methodological repertoire. Even if performances themselves can be taken seriously as statements with an aesthetic of their own, hermeneutical operations can not proceed in the same way as a textual or pictorial analysis. They require analytical categories and tools of their own, which is why Fischer-Lichte calls for an "aesthetics of the performative" (*Ästhetik des Performativen*) in her 2004 book of the same title:

> When there no longer is a work of art, with an existence independent of its creator and recipient, when instead, we are dealing with an *event* that involves everybody [...] and production and reception occur in the same room and at the same time, it seems highly problematic to continue operating with parameters, categories, and criteria that have been developed in separating aesthetics of production, work, and reception.[103]

Addressing this apparent lack of adequate methods, Fischer-Lichte proposes the analytical guidelines of "mediality, materiality, semioticity, and aestheticity" (*Medialität, Materialität, Semiotizität und Ästhetizität*)[104] to understand performances. These guidelines encompass the subject-object-relationship between audiences and performers as well as the materiality given in the unique spatial and temporal dimensions of live performances. They further address the "readability" of performances and the dynamic between their signifying and aesthetic attributes. Many of the resulting categories, especially those concerning the "physical co-presence of actors and spectators" (*leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern*)[105] and the "performative generation of materiality" (*performative Hervorbringung von Materialität*)[106] are too strictly catered towards artistic performances on actual theater stages to be of major relevance for an analysis of the ceremonies and press conferences of film festivals, where the physical audience is always part of the performance—and often even consists of literal film actors who play themselves. In the following, I will instead focus on Fischer-Lichte's propositions regarding the hermeneutical problems particular to an aesthetic of the performative, namely the

[103] "Wenn es nicht mehr ein Kunstwerk gibt, das über eine vom Produzenten und Rezipienten unabhängige Existenz verfügt, wenn wir es stattdessen mit einem *Ereignis* zu tun haben, in das alle [...] involviert sind, Produktion und Rezeption also in diesem Sinne im selben Raum und zur selben Zeit vollzogen werden, erscheint es höchst problematisch, weiter mit Parametern, Kategorien und Kriterien zu operieren, die in separierenden Produktions-, Werk- und Rezeptionsästhetiken entwickelt wurden." Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 21–22.

[104] Ibid. p. 56.

[105] Ibid. p. 58.

[106] Ibid. p. 127.

performative dimension of objects and pictures, the problem of emergence and, most importantly, her conceptualization of the *Inszenierung*. These perspectives are of paramount importance for my analysis of the staging strategies at the Berlinale.

The first Fischer-Lichte's propositions regards the possibility of examining the performative aspects of objects, particularly the context of their handing over and the consequential attribution of meaning to them. This perspective is crucial for an enhanced understanding of awards at film festivals. Not only can awarding be regarded as a ritualistic act, but also as a performance in itself. With Fischer-Lichte, award trophies could be conceptualized somewhere between holy things, things of prestige and gifts.[107] This position at the intersection of several levels of carried meaning makes awards especially interesting objects of a performative analysis, as they ask for the kinds of prestige and economic advantage that follow the possession of a trophy as well as addressing the different people involved in its handing over, namely the winner, the audience, and the giver. All three of them, even the giver, are elevated at awards show.[108]

Similar to the perspective on objects is performance studies' approach to pictures, which they do not take as research subjects by themselves, but shift the focus to the gaze as a performative act. In some branches of the media studies, this perspective is quite popular since the late 1980s, a trend of which David Freedberg's *The Power of Images*[109] and W. J. T. Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?*[110] are testament, both assuming pictures as agents—in the latter case even as parasitical beings—who interact with their observers through gazes. In film theory, the conceptual engagement with the gaze has taken a somewhat different path. Taking the lead from Laura Mulvey's seminal 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*,[111] feminist film scholars' have localized the male gaze both behind the camera and in front of the screen. The gaze is thus traditionally met with skepticism, stressing its possibility of exclusion and

[107] Fischer-Lichte, 2013. pp. 161–74.

[108] Fischer-Lichte curiously does not address the role of the giver in her conceptualization of the object as a gift. Yet the role of the giving institution is often crucial, especially in the case of the film festivals, which use the awards they hand out as crucial parts of their branding.

[109] Freedberg, 1989.

[110] Mitchell, 2005.

[111] Mulvey, 1975.

violent fixation of a particular reading through hegemony of certain perspectives, marginalizing others. Enriching Fischer-Lichte's assumption of the gaze as a performative act with these approaches is crucial in regard to film festivals, where foreign films are usually screened in a particular context that imposes specific categories and readings. Although I do not aim at an analysis of the general spectatorial reception of the films but rather of their festival representation, the problem of the gaze is still crucial to the framing of Iranian cinema as a subject.

Perhaps the aspect most particular to live performances is their unpredictability, which Fischer-Lichte conceives as the relation between planning and emergence.[112] Although the concept of emergence (*Emergenz*) has been of some importance in biology as well as sociology since the early 20th century, she admits that it is hard to pin down in the context of an aesthetic of the performative, where a comprehensive conceptualization of emergence is not feasible. Yet, it is closely related to the self-referentiality of performances which is at the core of its hermeneutics: If planned in the staging process or not, anything that happens during a performance will be part of its reading and thus even the slightest coincidence can influence its meaning production, making performances highly complex and dynamic systems:

> Every emerging new phenomenon leads to a smaller or larger variation or change in direction that was neither planned nor possible to predict. These changes are reacted to with new or adapted plans, until their realization is interrupted by a new emergent element, and so forth *ad libitum*. Thus, neither the exact course nor the end of the process are controllable and predictable. The coherent process, which is often constructed and interpreted retrospectively, rather dissolves into a structure of turns and branches, leading to the evolution of a network that is hardly comprehensible.[113]

The particular influence of emergence in Fischer-Lichte's theory of performances points towards a crucial distinction: That between *mise-en-scène* or

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[112] Fischer-Lichte, 2013. pp. 75–85.

[113] "Jedes neu auftauchende Phänomen führt zu einer kleineren oder größeren Abweichung bzw. Richtungsänderung, die weder geplant noch voraussagbar war. Auf diese Änderungen wird mit neuen bzw. neu angepassten Plänen reagiert, bis deren Verwirklichung durch ein weiteres emergentes Element unterbrochen wird und so fort *ad libitum*. Weder der genaue Verlauf noch das Ende des Prozesses sind daher kontrollierbar und vorhersehbar. Was im Nachhinein häufig als ein in sich schlüssiger Gesamtprozess konstruiert und interpretiert wird, löst sich vielmehr in eine Struktur von Wendungen und Abzweigungen auf, so dass sich ein kaum mehr überschaubares Netzwerk heraus- bildet." Ibid. p. 85.

staging (*Inszenierung*)[114] and performance (*Aufführung*). While both are crucial elements of performativity, she insists on their distinction for analytical purposes, with the *mise-en-scène* encompassing the process of conceiving, directing, and rehearsing a stage play and the performance describing the situation of its public execution in front of an audience, to stay in the realm of theatrical metaphors.[115] Emergence and materiality are the keys to this distinction, as even the most elaborated staging strategies can not guarantee the effect of a performance, which will always be influenced by coincidence and its specific performative situation. As my analysis is interested in the institution behind the performance (the Berlinale), rather than its annually changing stage performers (moderators, juries, and laureates), my focus will be on the staging, which deserves special attention in the following.

While she traces the cultural significance of staging practices back to ancient Greek theater, Fischer-Lichte argues that their theorization in her understanding is relatively new.[116] The term *mise-en-scène* was coined in early 19th century French theater criticism, from where it soon became the German *Inszenierung* and made its way to anglophone theater circles either untranslated or as staging. Yet at that time, it only "meant the making-appear of things that exist 'somewhere else' - in the dramatic text or in the realm of aesthetic ideas"[117] and thus neither took it seriously as an act of creation of its own nor acknowledged its difference from both the play and its performance. Late 20th century theater studies, on the other hand, conceptualized *mise-en-scène* as a "strategy of creation" (*Erzeugungsstrategie*) that creates new content through careful preparation while leaving space for unexpected occurrences that might emerge during its performance, a definition that Fischer-Lichte agrees with:

> I thus define staging as the process of planning, rehearsal, and fixation of strategies that aim at performatively generating the materiality of the performance. On the one hand, this enables the material elements to emerge

[114] Following Saskia Iris Jain's 2008 translation of Fischer-Lichte's book, I am using "*mise-en-scéne*" and "staging" synonymously, with a strong preference on "staging" for reasons of readability. Unfortunately, the dimension of the German *Inszenierung* as a countable word, referring to a particular stage adaption of a theatrical play as a whole and is thus synonym of "play" or "adaption" in English language theater jargon, is lost in both translations. But as Fischer-Lichte's terminology is interested in the broader phenomenon of staging and its adaptability outside the sphere of theater and even the arts rather than in particular *Inszenierungen*, this loss is bearable and located more on the level of associations than of content. See Fischer-Lichte, 2008.

[115] Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 326–27.

[116] Ibid. pp. 318–24.

[117] Ibid. p. 322.

> as present in a phenomenal being; on the other, it creates open and ludic spaces for unplanned, unstaged acts, behaviors, and events.[118]

While this theorization of performativity as the generation of materiality through emergence and its nature as an event inherent to the interplay of staging and performance is well-established in German theater studies since the 1990s—not least thanks to Fischer-Lichte's own previous theoretical work—her innovation lies in the call for an aesthetic of the performative. This aesthetic encompasses not only a toolbox for hitherto difficult to analyze theater productions that followed the performative turn in European culture since the 1920s. An aesthetic of the performative also offers a new analytical perspective on all kinds of non-theatric performances, from election rallies to football matches to electronic music parties. Fischer-Lichte is careful not to introduce her project as an academic "turn" that completely reinvents the hermeneutics of an all-inclusive corpus of productions for which it is sometimes misunderstood:

> An aesthetic of the performative does not want to generally replace established aesthetics of work, production, and reception. Wherever artistic processes are concerned which can be appropriately addressed and described with the terms "work", "production", and "reception", there is no necessity to replace them with an aesthetic of the performative—although it might often be a promising possibility to productively complement them.[119]

Fischer-Lichte is, however, very clear that her project offers a complementing hermeneutical perspective that productively traverses the institutional borders of "artistic", "political", "religious", or "sportive" performances and invites examinations of these categories with the analytical tools she proposes.[120] With both a theatrical metaphoric that speaks to the performative dimension of events and a rich methodology that acknowledges the peculiarities of live-performances, Fischer-Lichte's program speaks strongly to my analysis. Aside from that, it is beyond doubt that—as a public event with

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[118] "Ich definiere daher Inszenierung als den Vorgang der Planung, Erprobung und Festlegung von Strategien, nach denen die Materialität der Aufführung performativ hervorgebracht werden soll, wodurch zum einen die materiellen Elemente als gegenwärtige, in einem phänomenalen Sein in Erscheinung treten können, und zum anderen eine Situation geschaffen wird, die Frei- und Spielräume für nicht-geplante, nicht-inszenierte Handlungen, Verhaltensweisen und Ereignisse eröffnet." Ibid. p. 327.

[119] "Eine Ästhetik des Performativen will nicht generell an die Stelle überlieferter Werk-, Produktions- und Rezeptionsästhetiken treten. Wo immer Kunstprozesse ablaufen oder abgelaufen sind, die sich mit den Begriffen "Werk", "Produktion" und "Rezeption" angemessen fassen und beschreiben lassen, besteht keine Notwendigkeit, sie durch eine Ästhetik des Performativen zu ersetzen - wenn auch häufig eine vielversprechende Möglichkeit, sie durch sie produktiv zu ergänzen." Ibid. p. 315.

[120] Ibid. p. 356.

a large competitive dimension—the Berlinale is a highly compatible object of an analysis in the spirit of an aesthetic of the performative.

The Urban Stage of the Host City

An intriguing example for the applicability of Fischer-Lichte's theatrical metaphor to other disciplines of the humanities is urban sociology's investment in the concept of the city as a stage. Kristin Kopp's and Klaus Müller-Richter's edited volume on the embeddedness of representations of the "primitive" in the "metropolis" is highly relevant to the issue of urban events like world exhibitions or film festivals.[121] In their introduction, they describe the genesis of the metropolis in the late 19th century through its self-imagination in different representations:

> In addition to the—broadly speaking—textual forms of representation, a large number of new *screen practices* (like the type and process photographies, anthropometrical approaches to registering and databasing criminals, the daktyloscopy, and early film) and *stage practices* emerge (like ethnographical museums, open air museums, human showcases, world exhibitions, holiday parades, etc.)—strategies, that inherently belong to the semiosis of the urban and, as cultural practices, assist the imaginary of the city in achieving "reality".[122]

The concept of the stage practice is not further theorized by Kopp and Müller-Richter, although it is used occasionally in other entries in their volume, where it serves as a blueprint for all kinds of practices that generate stages on which the metropolis is able to produce itself through public self-imagination. In this conceptualization, stage practices not only underline the metaphor's ability to generate a new perspective, they are also reconnected it to the city itself, which is both a source and profiteer of an urban event's popularity. To see the Berlinale as a stage practice through which the self-imagined institution that is "Berlin" achieves reality helps to clarify the dynamic relationship between the festival and the city. Combined with Martina Löw's and Helmut Berking's concept of the inherent logic of a city, urban sociology contributes strongly to my understanding of the Berlinale as a large-scale performance that plays on

[121] Kopp and Müller-Richter, 2004.

[122] "Neben die im weiteren Sinne textualen Formen der Repräsentation treten noch eine Vielzahl neuer *screen practices* (wie etwa die Typen- und Kompositphotographie, die Anthropometrie in Verbindung mit der erkennungsdienstlichen Aufnahme des Verbrechers, die Daktyloskopie und der frühe Film) und *stage practices* (wie etwa enthographische Museen, Freilichtmuseen, Völkerschauen, Weltausstellungen, Festtagsumzüge usw.) - Verfahren, die wesentlich zur Semiosis des Urbanen gehören und als kulturelle Praktiken dem Imaginären der Stadt 'Realität' verschaffen." Ibid. pp. 16–17.

the urban stage of its host city, at the same time drawing from the requisites that mark Berlin's inherent logic and playing into the city's self-imagination as a *Weltstadt*.

In this mutually elevating interplay between host city and festival, the Berlinale is not dissimilar to the initial urban mega events in Europe, the world exhibitions. The debates preceding the *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung* of 1896 and the fears to fall back behind the rivals of Paris, London, or Vienna have shown the dimension of inter-urban competition at the heart of the world exhibition phenomenon. On the surface, the exhibitions might have claimed to serve as a world stage on which nations could meet in peaceful competition, but beneath this myth, the urban stage was at the center of an equally important rivalry. This double character of the stage beneath the stage again reflects the Cultural Studies' general trajectory that assumes representation as a signifying practice which is far more impacted by the signifier than the signified. It also mirrors Stuart Hall's argument of the "West and the rest," especially with regard to the colonial exhibitions. As an integral part of the world exhibition framework, they used the exhibition of non-Western cultures not primarily for entertainment and education, but for the elevation of their host city. Even in the realm of colonial exhibitions, where accurate and authentic representation was claimed to be most important—as Timothy Mitchell's account has shown—the performances were very well integrated into the urban context and can be understood as a stage practice in their respective host city.

This conceptualization of the festival as a performance on the urban stage leads me to consider the larger context of Berlin's history of partition extensively in my examination of the Berlinale. Even if the central concern of my thesis is the staging of Iranian cinema, the theorizations of representation, exhibition culture, and the performative at the hand of the world and colonial exhibitions have shown that the European representation of the non-West is heavily impacted by the context of the hosting institution and city. I consequently dedicate my second chapter to the interplay between Berlin and the Berlinale's history of staging the political, which has always been a central concern of the festival. Before jumping into post-World War II Berlin, however, I will briefly address the emergence of the film festival phenomenon in 1930s Italy, which is the immediate institutional context of the Berlinale and as such has to be considered in addition to its urban context.

From World Exhibitions to Film Festivals

Above, I have outlined the representational traditions and internal as well as external dynamics of late 19th century world exhibitions, with a particular focus on the strategies of display of non-Western cultures at colonial exhibitions, and argued that they can be regarded as spiritual predecessors of film festivals. It is important to note, however, that the continuity between both formats is not only in spirit, but also marked by a very concrete historical continuity. With the beginning of World War I, the blatant European nationalisms showed their potential to escalate into a large-scale open conflict. The rhetoric of peaceful competition on the world stage became far more reluctant and at the same time, the idea of inviting rival countries to watch the nationalist display of the host country seemed impossible. In the inter-war period, the world exhibitions consequently lost much of their appeal and the movement was dealt a blow from which it would never truly recover. By the 1920s, the phenomenon of regular world exhibitions on the massive scale of previous decades was practically dead.

Rather than mega events with a universal approach, the exhibition movement had already begun to transform into smaller events with more specialized focuses in the first decades of the 20th century. Some exhibitions continued highlighting technological progress in distinct areas like transport, aviation, or shipping, some were exclusively colonial exhibitions, and some focused entirely on artistic achievements. In the latter category, the Venice Biennale (*La Biennale di Venezia*) was established in 1895 and from then on was held every two years. Over time, the event grew in size and reputation, until by the 1910s, it had evolved into a conglomeration of national pavilions organized by a number of guest countries that were spread throughout Venice, a feature adopted from the world exhibition format. While the Biennale had initially focused on the exhibition of paintings, it started to diversify its portfolio throughout the early 1930s. In 1930, a musical branch was founded, the Venice International Festival of Contemporary Music (*Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea della Biennale di Venezia*), and two years later, a cinematic branch followed. The International Exposition of Cinematographic Art (*L'Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica alla XVIIIa Biennale Venezia*) of 1932 quickly developed into the Venice Film Festival that exits until this day as one of the three big European film festivals and is widely regarded as the first film festival

in the world. As such, it serves as a direct link between the world exhibition movement and film festivals, underlining that the idea to present films in a festival context was not conceived out of thin air, but very much relies on the exhibition character—after all, the Venice Film Festival is officially named an "International Exhibition of the Cinematographic Art" (*Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica*) until this day.[123]

In addition to its character as a formal bridge between world exhibitions and film festivals, Venice also deserves particular attention for its function as a nationalist and fascist display. The dimension of peaceful and equal competition on the surface of the film festival format can be challenged with a closer look into the early years of the Venice Film Festival. The very initiative for a cinematic exhibition goes back to Giuseppe Volpi (1877–1947), who took over as president of the Venice Biennale in 1930. To understand the background of his initiative, it is important to note Volpi was by no means a tender art enthusiast who dedicated his life's work to the elevation of the young medium of cinema to an art form. As an entrepreneur, Volpi established strong industrial networks in his birth city of Venice and into the Balkans, where he acted as a diplomat for the Kingdom of Italy in the 1910s. As a reward for his crucial role in the peace negotiations following World War I, Volpi was assigned the Italian colony of Tripolitania in today's Libya, which he governed from 1921–25, earning him the title Count of Misurata (*Conte di Misurata*) that he kept until his death. After he had successfully put down a rebellion and regained much of the colony during the Second Italo-Senussi War, Volpi returned to Italy. Here, Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), who by then had overtaken the country with his fascist movement, appointed him as finance minister, a position he held from 1925–28.

Following his elevation to the highest ranks of Italian fascism, Volpi resumed his focus on the industrial development of Venice. In 1927, he had been appointed first procurator of San Marco (*Primo Procuratore di San Marco*, the highest assignment of the city) and in 1930, he took over the Venice Biennale as president. His initiative to establish an International Exposition of

[123] In the field of film festival studies, this link has been made by Christel Tallibert and John Wäfler. The Swiss media scholars have convincingly argued that the film festival concept has developed from art exhibitions, at which the practice of outsourced festivals for performative arts was widespread in the 1920s. In their *Groundwork for a (Pre)History of Film Festivals*, they call for a consideration of the Venice Film Festival in this context. See Tallibert and Wäfler, 2016.

Cinematographic Art has to be understood in this larger context of Volpi's background, which motivated him to elevate Italy's and Venice's status by making it a pioneer in acknowledging the young medium of cinema, which was still in the early days of its evolution from a new technology to an established art from. This initiative was much appreciated by Mussolini, who according to historian Richard Bosworth had "declared cinema, with its amalgam of artifice and modernity, *the* Fascist art."[124]

As such, the persona of Giuseppe Volpi as well as his industrial and political networks underline the prominent fascist character of the festival's origin, revealing the claim of an internationalist event with an equal competition as little less than an official facade concealing its actual purpose, which Bosworth assumes:

> These and other cultural events allowed Volpi to claim that his city was achieving 'an absolute world primacy' in the showcasing, if not in the production, of the high arts, with the implication that he was assisting their more general popularity in the modern Fascist manner, as well as making Venice a 'vetrina' for Fascism.[125]

Volpi remained director *and* jury president of the Venice Film Festival until 1943 and to this day, his role remains strangely unquestioned. The former colonial governor and high-ranking fascist is still fondly remembered as the festival's founding father and the awards for best actress and actor are named after him until today—an astonishingly wide range of international film stars received the *Coppa Volpi* in the past ninety years, among them Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis, James Stewart, Gérard Depardieu, Tilda Swinton, Sean Penn, Javier Bardem, Julianne Moore, Ben Affleck, Brad Pitt, Colin Firth, Helen Mirren, Cate Blanchett, Emma Stone, Charlotte Rampling, and Olivia Colman. It is thus not only Volpi's extremely prominent role at the Venice Film Festival in the 1930s and 40s but also the continuing acceptance of his persona that has to be considered when thinking about the format of film festivals. At the very least, his involvement in the original film festival shows that the institution was not conceived by a spotless network of film enthusiasts and professionals in search of a respectable forum to show their works, but in a very particular political context that clearly aimed more at the elevation of the hosts' status rather than an honest acknowledgement of the exhibits' cultural

[124] Bosworth, 2014. p. 145 (emphasis in original).

[125] Ibid. p. 148.

value. The Venice case also shows that the festival format not only has the potential to be co-opted by fascist networks but indeed goes back to their very initiative.[126]

By foreign contemporaries, the festival's facade was apparently seen through far more critically than today. At first, the Venice Film Festival turned out to be a massive success, it drew film stars from all over the world and quickly became the prestigious and glamorous event Volpi and Mussolini had desired. By the late 1930s, however, with fascism being internationally perceived as an increasing threat, the film industry and honored guests started to stay away, with the exception of a handful of international pariahs known for their flirtatious relation with the fascists, like the former British king Edward VIII (1894–1972). This was a reaction to the festival revealing itself as an increasingly fascist showcase—the festival's main award, *Coppa Mussolini*, was reserved for Italian films and the best foreign film award went to Germany almost every year. When Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* won the award in 1938 over the—at the time—widely celebrated *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first animated feature film by Walt Disney's production company, and in the following year, the German minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels officially opened the festival, the film industry finally turned their back to Venice until its rehabilitation after World War II.

Answering these developments of the Venice Film Festival being perceived as a propaganda show for the Axis powers, the French government and film industry decided to hold a counter-festival at the Côte d'Azur in 1938. Due to the occupation of France in World War II, the first International Film Festival (*Festival international du film*) did not take place until 1946, but from then on was held annually at the *Croisette* promenade in the holiday resort of Cannes. By the early 1950s, the film festival format had established itself, with Cannes and Venice as the most important events. To regulate the fast spread of newly founded festivals and to institutionalize the format, the International

[126] To a certain extent, this neglect of the fascist dimension inherent to the early history of film festivals is reflected in academic research, too, where critical inquiries into the origins of the Venice Film Festival remain surprisingly rare. In the (to date) most comprehensive monograph on the film festival phenomenon, film scholar Marijke de Valck, for example, evaluates the festival as co-opted by the fascists after the fact (de Valck, 2007. pp. 47–48). De Valck rather underlines Volpi's strong relations to the association for Venice luxury hotels and thus assumes city branding and tourism as decisive factors in the festival's conception and concludes that "choosing to make the Venice film festival a glamorous and international event should be seen as the result of successful lobby work [...] with municipal authorities" (Ibid. pp. 75-76) rather than seeking the motivation in his fascist and colonial networks.

Federation of Film Producers Association (FIAPF)—a network founded in Brussels in 1933—issued a catalog of criteria in 1951 which demanded an international competition with awards handed out by an independent jury of film professionals for a festival to be certified as an "A-festival." At first, only Cannes and Venice were listed under this label, with the Berlinale following in 1956. By the late 1950s, the film festival phenomenon was formalized in the shape that is more or less practiced until this day.

The FIAPF might have had an "Olympics of film" in mind when they proposed their criteria,[127] which foresaw nations sending their best films and filmmakers to compete on the world stage and be judged after independent standards. Yet the example of Venice with its direct link to the Biennale shows that the origin of the film festival phenomenon can also be identified in the world exhibition movement, the representational traditions of which I have outlined above in some detail. As such, the theoretical implications around the questions of representation and performance on the urban stage have to be considered when thinking about film festivals, too, leading me to focus on the requisites and paradigms through which the Berlinale has staged Iranian cinema in my analysis as well as on the particular urban context of the festival. The following chapter will consequently address the latter issue extensively by working out the interplay between the Berlinale and its urban stage from its conception in 1951 to the beginning of Dieter Kosslick's tenure in 2001.

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[127] de Valck, 2007. p. 54.

2. The Berlinale's History of Staging the Political

While the conception of the film festival format in general can be understood in the tradition of the world exhibition movement, the initiation of the Berlin International Film Festival (*Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin*) in particular was deeply embedded in the extraordinary geopolitical situation the Berlin found itself in after World War II. Before and during the war, the city had been the political and cultural center of Nazi Germany, whose aggressive expansionism had caused the war in the first place. In terms of large-scale cultural events, the city was internationally well remembered for the 1936 Olympic Games, which had at first thrilled visiting foreigners with pomp, glamour, and megalomania, but retrospectively left a bitter taste.[1] After 1945, the German populace was reasonably associated with enabling and enthusiastically applauding a fascist regime that—in addition to starting a world war—had been responsible for the industrially organized killing of more than six million people. The Allied forces of the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and France, however, famously decided against the long-term degradation of Germany proposed by the Morgenthau Plan, which had recommended the complete de-industrialization of the country. Instead, the United States opted for the European Recovery Program (ERP, also known as the Marshall Plan) while the Soviet Union also devoted much effort and resources to the restoration of their East German occupation zone. That the Allied forces were ready to make such unprecedented investments in the reconstruction of the German economy, infrastructure, and culture and that the U.S. Army's film division came up with the idea to sponsor a film festival in Berlin might seem surprising at first glance.

These initiatives to reconstruct and rehabilitate Germany (and Berlin in particular) were largely motivated by the rapidly unfolding division of the world into two power blocs is the first years after the war. Eventually, Berlin was saved by its geographical position at the very front line of these blocs. With this position came the perception as a city of paramount strategical importance during the early Cold War. The foundation of the Berlinale in 1951, like that of many other institutions, from the *Freie Universität* to the *Tierpark Friedrichsfelde*, has

[1] For an atmospheric panorama of the international coverage and foreign observations of the 1936 Olympic Games, see Hilmes, 2017.

to be understood in the context of the strategic investments of the Marshall Plan and the special status that came with Berlin's partition into four administrative sectors. The initial phase of the Allied struggle for the balanced division of Germany came to an end with the foundation of the two German states in 1949, but West Berlin's status as a *Sonderverwaltungszone* (Special Administrative Zone) and it's position of an "*Insel*" (island)[2] or "*Halbstadt*" (half city)[3] would influence the city on many levels for the next four decades. The gestures of international solidarity that the Western sectors of the city experienced through the measures of the ERP and the *Luftbrücke* (Berlin Airlift, literally "Air Bridge") of 1948/49 left a deep mark in Berlin's collective memory and very much shaped the city's inherent logic in the second half of the 20th century.

As the imagery associated with this particular brand of international solidarity still influences the Berlinale's visual discourses today, especially in its staging of Iranian cinema in the 2000s, this chapter will open with the *Luftbrücke* of 1948/49 and its role in German mnemonic discourse as a particularly strong source of narratives of solidarity and liberation. Images of Western liberalism fed into the foundation of the Berlinale as a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* (Showcase of the Free World) in 1951 as well as into the prominent role of the political on the festival stages. As such, the better part of this chapter is dedicated to the way that the political has been staged throughout the history of the Berlinale, from its early years to its transformation into a forum for political turmoil in the 1970s to finally its branding as a bridge between East and West in the 1980s and 90s. A thorough understanding of these developments is crucial to the logic of the festival as well as its relation to Berlin, as it anticipates the performances of the political that impacted the Berlinale during Dieter Kosslick's tenure.

Another crucial element of Berlin's inherent logic in regard to Iranian cinema is the city's relation to Iran. While Iran was never spotlighted prominently at the Berlinale before 2006, it appeared prominently on the urban stage of Berlin two times during the Cold War: first in the shape of S̱oreyā Esfandyārī Bakhtyārī, the half-German second wife of Shah Moḥammad Reżā Pahlavī, who was raised in Berlin and occupied large parts of

[2] Rott, 2009.

[3] Kimmel, 2018.

the German yellow press during her time at the heart of Iranian royalty between 1951 and 1958; and second with the Shah's visit to Berlin in 1967, during which the student Benno Ohnsesorg was shot, marking a turning point in the German student protests of the late 1960s. Both instances strongly shaped the German image of Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and had an impact on the collective memory of Berlin. Consequently, a discussion of their influence on the Berlin-Iran connection will round up this chapter.

2.1 Conceived in the Blocked City of Berlin

The Berlinale was initiated already in 1951, but in the first years after the liberation of Berlin through the Red Army in May 1945, the city had to deal with much more existential issues. Rather than cultural politics and visiting Hollywood glamour, reconstruction and food shortages shaped everyday life in the largely destroyed city. As a reaction to the currency reform of June 1948, the Soviet military administration sealed off the borders of their East German territories on short notice, thus effectively isolating West Berlin from its trade and supply routes with the Western Allied. This blockade was by no means as hermetical as it is often understood—the people of West Berlin would have been able to provide for themselves through the thriving blackmarket or even legally in the Eastern surroundings of Brandenburg.[4] The Allied officials however soon reasoned that they would have to keep up their supply lines to remain the sole provider of West Berlin if they were to maintain control of the city, which was seen as a prioritized strategic goal. From these concerns, the idea of an air brigade was born and soon implemented by U.S. general Lucius D. Clay to an extent that sufficiently secured the support of West Berlin with food, medicine, and coal as well as the export of trade goods from the city.

It Began with a Kiss

The Soviet blockade very soon became a focal point of Cold War propaganda. As its visual discourse proved quite persistent in Berlin public memory, echoing well into the 21st century, its contemporaneous cultural representations are

[4] This assessment was acknowledged even in a contemporaneous U.S. military examination, which in October 1948 stated that "the road, rail and water blockade of Berlin by no means constitutes a complete economic blockade neither by intent nor in fact." Quoted in Betscher, 2018. p. 307.

worth noting. The earliest and most prominent symbol of the Airlift was its most obvious, namely the planes which carried out the operations. The planes were quickly labelled as *Rosinenbomber* or *Schokoladenbomber* (raisin or candy bombers) among the West German public, especially after they began to throw CARE packages on little parachutes from their planes around Christmas, containing sweets and toys from private persons in the United States.[5] German media historian Silke Betscher traces back a concerted PR effort of the Allied forces in a comparative analysis of four illustrated newspapers and their coverage of the *Luftbrücke*.[6] This media campaign happily took cue from the *Luftbrücke*, as it was part of a larger project to positively steer away the German associations with U.S. planes with war machines that until recently had thrown bombs onto their cities. Especially the weekly newspaper *Der Spiegel*, recently founded in 1947, took part in the framing of Allied aircraft as enablers of humanitarian aid.

The most iconic picture in this context was taken by U.S. military photographer Henry Ries (1917–2004) and shows a crowd of Germans waving at

Picture 2.1: The West Berlin public eagerly awaits the US planes which represent their lifeline to the outside world.

[5] Scherff, 2008. p. 199.

[6] Betscher, 2018.

a C54 Skymaster (Picture 2.1). The group—containing enough men, women, and children to represent a cross section of the German post-war public—is standing on a mountain of rubble, elevated on an island in a sea of destruction. Carrying nothing with them and standing around waiting, they appear helpless and in desperate need of support, but their euphoria is clearly recognizable from their waiving and jumping toward the aircraft. In the background, a large residential building reminds the viewer that this scene takes place in a city at the heart of Europe.[7] Beyond the obvious fetishization of planes and their capacities that speaks from the picture, Ries' photograph follows another narrative: that in their darkest hour, the people of Berlin cried out to the world for help and that the world answered their call.

On September 9th 1948, Franz Neumann (1904–74), the Berlin chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), had closed his speech in front of a demonstration against the blockade with the words: "Berlin calls the world!" (*Berlin ruft die Welt!*). This figure of speech was soon taken up by local newspaper headlines[8] and answered by international newspapers stating "The World has heard your call" in the following days. The association of the Western solidarity displayed in Berlin was thus connected to the imagery of a call for help. This narrative was later taken up by the illustrated book *Luftbrücke Berlin*, published in 1949 by the city administration of Berlin, supposedly as a gift from the city to the Allied military administration.[9] Given that it is written entirely in German, however, the function rather seems to establish a certain historiographical narrative as soon as possible. Edited mere months after the end of the blockade, the book offers a rich example of the visual discourses around the *Luftbrücke*. It makes clear that the visual associations established by the airlift went beyond airspace routes and into the symbolic realm. A 1949 advertisement of the *C. Lorenz AG*—a producer of radio masts for telegraphs and telephones—describes their work as "also a kind of airlift" (auch eine Art Luftbrücke).[10] More importantly, the book implies that the airlift supplied much more than physical commodities—namely a sense of freedom and

[7] For a closer reading of the photograph and the history of its reception, see Hamann, 2008.

[8] Like the Berliner Morgenpost, which headlined "We call the world!" (*Wir rufen die Welt!*) on September 10th 1948.

[9] Moser, 1949.

[10] Ibid. p. 107.

democracy. This narrative is underlined in the opening greetings to *Luftbrücke Berlin*, written by the West Berlin Mayor, Ernst Reuter (1889–1953):

> Without the bold initiative and admirable commitment of all who accomplished the airlift and worked for its continuing development, Berlin could not have stood up to the pressure, it would have become part of the Soviet zone; the consequences for the whole world would have been inconceivable.[11]

The book later quotes a newspaper interview in which Reuter narrates the blockade as an "attempt to force us on our knees" (*Versuch, uns in die Knie zu zwingen*) which could only fail in the face of the people's "steadfastness and solidity" (*Standhaftigkeit und Festigkeit*).[12] These characteristics as well as the Berliners' "will to freedom" (*Freiheitswillen*)[13] had already been visually established in the figure of a label put on all products manufactured in the city during the airlift. Surrounded by the headline "produced in the blocked city of Berlin" (*Hergestellt im blockierten Berlin*), it showed the Berlin bear with a broken chain around its waist (Picture 2.2). So soon after the war, the design was apparently careful not to make the bear too aggressive, with a smile on his unusually friendly face and buckled paws that appear to be dancing rather than fighting. The broken chains around his strong legs, however, unmistakably clarify that Berlin is a powerful city and its spirit unbroken after all.

The immaterial dimension attributed to the *Luftbrücke* was in fact linked to the Allied efforts to keep up the city's cultural life. The aim was to not only raise morale, but also to remain in control of public opinion against Soviet sponsored newspapers and radio stations broadcasting to the Western parts of the city. In addition to food, coal, and other necessary goods, the airlift transported more than 10,000 tons of paper every day, enough to uphold the publication of daily newspapers in West Berlin uninterrupted—a remarkable effort given the otherwise often quoted limitations of the transported weight.[14] Cinemas that screened Allied news programs as well as theaters, opera houses, and concert venues that hosted British and French artists could also continue to operate, contrasted by exhaustive electricity cuts for private households.

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[11] "Ohne die kühne Initiative und bewundernswerte Hingabe aller derjenigen, die die Luftbrücke schufen und an ihrer dauernden Entwicklung mitgearbeitet haben, hätte Berlin dem Druck nicht standhalten können, es würde in die sowjetische Zone aufgegangen sein; die Folgen für die ganze Welt wären unabsehbar gewesen." Ibid. p. 6

[12] Ibid. p. 72.

[13] Ibid. p. 82.

[14] Scherff, 2008. pp. 148–49.

Picture 2.2: The label put on products made in West Berlin during the Air Lift of 1948/49, showing a smiling bear breaking its chains and the tagline "Produced in the blocked city of

This constant stream of Allied approved and supervised culture into the self-proclaimed "cultural island Berlin" (*Kulturinsel Berlin*)[15] contributed to the topos of German-American Friendship—which had been initiated by the Americans but in many cases remained strangely one-sided thanks to the remaining ballast of American skepticism. A very telling anecdote around the dynamics of this friendship revolves around the history of the *The Big Lift* (George Seaton, 1950) and its German version. The film, hastily initiated by Hollywood producer William Perlberg during the airlift and shot on location with few professional actors and many soldiers, follows two U.S. Air Force pilots in their efforts to supply the city from above. One of them, Danny, soon falls in love with Frederica, a young German woman. But despite their fulfilled romance, the film ends on a bitter note: When they plan to go to the United States, Danny's supervisor Hank finds out that Frederica has very different

[15] Moser, 1949. p. 81.

motives to cross the Atlantic—she wants to be reunited with her Nazi husband who has fled there after the war. Shocked by the revelation regarding his two-faced fiancée, he abandons her and ends up alone.

Picture 2.3: Poster of the German version of *The Big Lift*, released in 1953 under the title *Es begann mit einem Kuß* (lit. It began with a kiss).

The fact that a large and internationally covered project like the Airlift is immediately adapted into a lavish blockbuster is no surprise during the golden age of post-war ,Hollywood. What is intriguing, however, is the version that was released in German cinemas under the title *Es begann mit einem Kuß* (It began with a kiss). Dubbing and re-editing transformed the film into a showcase for a shining German-American romance that is represented on the poster with two hopeful young lovers and a candy bomber in the background (Picture 2.3). Supervisor Hank's outrightly anti-German attitudes were overdubbed with newly written dialogue, as well as Frederica's sinister motives. The ending, of course, was completely cut off—the German version saw Danny and Frederica happily fly off the get married in the United States. Unfortunately, this alternative version that was released in Germany in 1953 is now lost and little is known about its production history.[16] What is known about the German efforts to change the film's narrative speaks of a strong desire to stage an example of German-American friendship—or, in this case, romance.

Already in the first months after the end of the airlift in May 1949, endeavors were undertaken from both sides to present a romantic as possible image of German-American friendship. The memory culture around the *Luftbrücke* began as soon as the blockade had ended, and its visual discourses were already at hand. As I have outlined above, their imagery worked with calls

[16] For a brief reconstruction of the film as well as its production history, see Rother, 2005.

for help, freedom-carrying planes, chain-breaking bears, and passionate professions of German-American friendship. This kind of airlift historiography with a strong pro-Allied bias held up for a surprisingly long time. The 15th anniversary of the airlift was the occasion for John F. Kennedy's famous 1963 Berlin visit. It even survived the end of the Cold War and continues to thrive, with annual celebrations marking the end of the blockade taking place until this day, albeit with decreasing resonance.

To a certain extent, this rather uncritical and celebratory historiography of the *Luftbrücke* is even mirrored in German academic inquiries into the subject. Astonishingly sentimental accounts of the event were published until recently, like airspace engineer Klaus Scherff's 2008 history that loses itself in technological marvel as well as pathos-fueled descriptions of the unbearable hardships which never forced the headstrong and freedom loving people of Berlin to their knees, full of historical inaccuracies and powerful men like Lucius D. Clay or Ernst Reuter single-handedly saving the city with their brave decision-making.[17] Even political history publications attribute the origin of the whole project to the "Soviet Union's politics of fear" (*Sowjetische Angstpolitik*).[18] More critical publication from the United States on the other hand are only slowly adapted into German historiography, like military historian William Stivers' critical evaluation of the necessity of the Airlift published in 1997. Stivers concludes that the people of West Berlin could have been nurtured and supplied in a much less spectacular and expensive fashion because the blockade was never as hermetic as claimed.[19]

Exceptions in that regard are a relatively recent endeavor. In 2018, the Berlin *Alliiertenmuseum* (Allied Museum) published edited volume on the *Luftbrücke* as a memory space, marking the first critical analysis of its place in German mnemonic discourse.[20] The volume concludes that the *Luftbrücke* has been established as a deep anchor in Berlin collective memory and works as a city specific memory space (*lieu de mémoire*) of the Cold War, a term borrowed from French historian Pierre Nora.[21] Media historian Silke Betscher asks for the place of this particular memory space in 21st century political discourse:

[17] Scherff, 2008.

[18] Grewe, 2000. p. 58.

[19] Stivers, 1997.

[20] Defrance, Greiner, and Pfeil, 2018.

[21] Nora, 1984.

> If the airlift is to be understood [...] as a great propagandistic project, which purpose does the memory of the airlift serve and which purposes could it serve as a contemporary memory space? [...] Which significance do the events of the Berlin-crisis, of isolation from freight traffic and Airlift, as well as the connected discursive readings, carry in times of wars with global repercussions, of religiously motivated terror, of European populism and re-emerging nationalism?[22]

A possible answer to these questions would be that the memory space of the *Luftbrücke* is projected elsewhere in contemporary cultural debates. Out of the experience of international solidarity transcending blockades and embargoes, Berlin is branding itself as a genuinely appropriate candidate to revitalize this specific solidarity and takes to role of the broadcaster of freedom and democracy for itself. The Berlinale would be an example for such a reenactment of airlift imagery. Although the airlift and the Marshall Plan are rarely referred to directly by the festival, their imagery very much feeds into the contemporary showcasing of its own relation to Iranian films and filmmakers, which is not surprising given the Berlinale's own embeddedness into the context of the early Cold War.

Schaufenster der Freien Welt

If the effort of the airlift had shown one thing, it was that the Western Allied were ready for large scale investments to keep West Berlin in their hands and that cultural diplomacy played a big role in that regard. The premiere of the *Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin* (Berlin International Film Festival) on June 6th 1951—one month after the airlift memorial had been inaugurated at the recently renamed *Platz der Luftbrücke* in Tempelhof—has to be understood in this context, too. The idea to sponsor a film festival in Berlin goes back to the initiative of U.S. Army film officer Oscar Martay in 1950. Martay, a German-American who had gone to exile in the United States before the war, worked for the Information Service Branch of the American High Commissioner who he ultimately convinced to fund a film festival in the former German capital.

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[22] "Wenn die Luftbrücke [...] als großes propagandistisches Unternehmen zu verstehen ist, welchen Zweck erfüllt dann die Erinnerung an die Luftbrücke und welche Zwecke könnte sie als Erinnerungsort in der Gegenwart erfüllen? [...] Welche Bedeutung haben die Ereignisse Berlin-Krise, Abschottung von Güterverkehr und Luftbrücke sowie die jeweiligen mit ihnen verbundenen diskursiven Deutungsangebote in Zeiten von Kriegen mit globalen Auswirkungen, von religiös motiviertem Terror, von europäischem Populismus und wiedererstarkendem Nationalismus?" Betscher, 2018. pp. 321–22.

From its conception, the "Berlinale," as which the festival soon became known, was highly embedded into the cultural politics of the Western Allies.

On one hand, the foundation of the Berlinale was initiated in the context of the popularity of the film festival format as a showcase of geopolitics and cultural diplomacy. As I have shown in Chapter One, the immediate origins of the format are to be seen in the fascist "vitrina" of Venice and the counter-festival in Cannes. On the other hand, the Berlinale was conceived in the context of Allied reconstructive efforts in Germany which also inspired the Marshall Plan. In 1950, the German film industry still lay in ruins. Structured around the nationalized umbrella of the *Universum Film AG* (UFA) from 1933 onwards, it was massively incorporated into the cultural industry of the Nazis and was responsible for the output of a good portion of its propaganda. Consequently, it had to be completely restructured after 1945 under guidance of the Western Allied, who intended to use it in part to reeducate the German populace. The industry was supposed to be structured along the lines of the Hollywood model, with a market centered around stars, glamour, and entertainment. The revitalization of Berlin as the German film capital, which it had been in the 1920s and 30s, seemed like a logical starting point to kickstart the industry. In the face of these developments, it should be no surprise that these two cornerstones—the incorporation into the Western Cold War agenda and a showcase for star power—are deeply inscribed into the Berlinale's DNA.

Already in the first program brochures, the Berlinale was branded as a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* (Showcase of the Free World), a label that proved quite persistent and can be understood on different levels. On the urban level, it was regarded as a gift to the Berlin population. Designed as a generally accessible audience festival with public sales of cheap tickets, big venues, and open red carpets incorporated into Berlin's urban infrastructure, it recognized the Berlinaler's craving for entertainment and international rehabilitation. On the geopolitical level, it underlined Berlin's crucial position at the intersection between East and West and its consequential centrality to the Allied powers, who demonstrated their territorial ambitions. It also highlighted the Allied stabilizing influence by marking the war-torn and diplomatically conflicted city as a safe haven to which valuable film stars were happily sent. On the level of international diplomacy, finally, the festival was understood as promoting

peaceful cultural competition among participating Western nations, culminating in the narrative of "replacing the Iron Curtain with a cinema curtain," as a recent volume of photographs celebrating the festival's 60th birthday puts it.[23] In the following, I will demonstrate the entanglement of these three different dimensions—the audience festival, the safe haven of glamorous red carpets, and the geopolitical showcase—all of whom are important parts of the Berlinale brand until this day.

The dimension of the audience festival was reiterated by Dieter Kosslick in events like a public screening of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) at *Brandenburger Tor* in 2010 or the acquisition of the 2000-seat-strong *Friedrichstadtpalast* as the festivals largest venue in the same year. Deeply inscribed into the festival image, the perception as an audience event was part of the Berlinale's strategy from its earliest days. In an interview with the daily local newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, Alfred Bauer (1911–86), Berlinale director from 1951–76, stressed his commitment to public audiences and explained that "those events which best serve the film festival's purpose are those which are not exclusively for film experts but are also, as in Berlin, accessible to the public at large who form the true basis of film production."[24] As a former high-ranking Nazi film functionary, Bauer was familiar with the potential of the medium to foster the political alignment of mass audiences—a level of experience that apparently played well into the American High Commissioner's plans for the Berlinale.[25]

The perception as a festival for the West Berlin populace manifested in its venues, the cinemas it played on (see Figure 2). Starting at the modest *Titania-Palast* (1) in the quiet but undamaged South-Western area of Steglitz, the festival soon expanded to bigger and more prestigious cinema halls at *Kurfürstendamm*, like the *Capitol* (2) and the *Gloria-Palast* (3). In 1957, it found its longtime home at the *Zoo Palast* (4), Berlin's historical premiere cinema housing more than 1000 people. In addition to this, the festival held open-air screenings at the *Waldbühne* (5), a prestigious amphitheater built for the 1936 Olympic

[23] Eue and Baier, 2010. p. 28.

[24] Quoted in Cowie, 2011. p. 18.

[25] Alfred Bauer's involvement with the state regulated film industry in Nazi Germany is a subject of very recent critical research. As of now, it has been established that Bauer has worked in a leading position at the *Reichsfilmkammer*, the central body of film regulation in Germany from 1933–45. An ongoing study by the Munich-based *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute for Contemporary History) is investigating Bauer's role in the film regulation system, which according to a preliminary study published in 2020 can be understood as "not inessential." See Hof, 2020.

Figure 2: Berlin divided into four occupied zones, with markings of the Berlinale venues *Titania-Palast* (1), *Capitol* (2), *Gloria-Palast* (3), *Zoo Palast* (4), and the open-air theater *Waldbühne* (5), as well as the border cinemas *Aladin & Camera* (6) and *City* (7) and the representative boulevard *Kurfürstendamm* (3-4) and Tempelhof Airport (8).

Games with 22,000 seats. The entertaining films screened in the first decades very much reflected these large venues. Outright political propaganda films were consciously not screened, in compliance with the regulations of the International Federation of Film Producers Association (FIAPF) that required a minimum of political neutrality retain the label of an A-festival. Consequently, the films sent to the festival from the United States and Europe served as "goodwill ambassadors" by the Western Allied.[26] More effectively, politics were relocated from the cinema halls to the public spaces of Berlin.

The dimension of the audience festival not only manifested with large-scale film screenings attended by visitors from all walks of life in a casual atmosphere. Mass entertainment also happened at the red carpets, which showcased the arriving film stars not only to photographers but were designed to be visible and accessible to the general populace. They stretched far beyond the entrances and foyers of cinema halls into the city itself. From Tempelhof Airport (8) to *Kurfürstendamm* (3-4), the festival staged the appearances of their

[26] Fehrenbach, 1995. p. 238.

visiting film stars in spaces accessible to the public, where the urban stage of Berlin became the festival's extended red carpet: Gary Cooper expressed his excitement about the city in interviews on German television, Henry Fonda was driven in a cabriolet down the *Kurfürstendamm* and sex symbols like Claudia Cardinale, Cary Grant or Rita Hayworth attended the traditional public open air screenings at the *Waldbühne*. Other film stars like Billy Wilder, Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, Sidney Poitier, and James Stewart rounded up the glamorous parades at the Berlinale during the 1950s.

The strategy of making Hollywood royalty publicly accessible in West Berlin did not only serve to foster the bond between festival and audience, but also had clear political implications for the relation between the Allied powers and the West Berlin populace. Next to the obvious function of entertainment and diversion initiated and funded by Allied institutions, this also was an enactment of the United States appreciation of the Berliners whom it entrusted some of its entertainment industry's most important assets. A picture taken by festival photographer Heinz Köster in 1953 shows Gary Cooper at the peak of his career, being driven in an open cabriolet along *Kurfürstendamm*, standing up and giving autographs (Picture 2.4). While neither Cooper nor the policemen guarding him seem particularly delighted about this exposition, the crowds cheer enthusiastically. Meanwhile, festival director Bauer sits in the front passenger seat and seems very pleased with the successful publicity stunt. This photograph is typical for the official festival and press photographs of the 1950s and 60s, which usually show the arriving film stars met by large crowds exiting their airplanes or driving through the city. In later decades, this trope was replaced by more private situations at dinners or press conferences, but in he first two decades of the Berlinale, the public display of film stars very much aimed at broadcasting the image of a lively and internationally recognized Berlin to the outside world. After the 1955 Berlinale, a German newsreel report concluded:

> The curtain of the 5th Berlin International Film Festival has closed again. It again has contributed to showing the world that this city lives and that Berlin, as the old capital of our country, is again one of the film metropolises of the world.[27]

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[27] "Nun ist der Vorhang der 5. Internationalen Filmfestspiele 1955 wieder zugegangen. Sie werden weiter dazu beigetragen haben, der Welt zu zeigen, dass diese Stadt lebt und dass Berlin als alte Hauptstadt unseres Landes wieder eine der Filmmetropolen der Welt ist." Quoted in *Opening ceremony of the 60th Berlinale*, 2010. Min. 59:30–60:00.

Picture 2.4: Hollywood sends its most precious assets to West Berlin: a visibly exhausted Gary Cooper is chauffeured over the *Kurfürstendamm* boulevard in 1953, applauded by the crowds. In the front seat, Alfred Bauer, the festival's first director, seems rather pleased with the spectacle.

Look at this City!

Contemporary reports like this underline that the images produced at the Berlinale—of American stars greeted by enthusiastic German crowds, of a city proudly withstanding Cold War partition—had a strong external emanation. The visibility of the city in a shifting geopolitical landscape had been a strong topic in Berlin's call for solidarity during the airlift, most prominently in Mayor Ernst Reuter's speech at September 9th 1948 in front of the *Reichstag* building, which had included the famous appeal:

> You peoples of the world, you peoples in America, in England, in France, in Italy! Look at this city and recognize that you must not abandon it and can not abandon it![28]

In the 1950s, the festival became a tool to focus the attention of these American, English, French, and Italian delegations and journalists who participated in it. The significance of the images they send home becomes even clearer in the context of German efforts to rehabilitate the country from its well-earned international status as a pariah country: During the Nazi era, the German people had become associated internationally with large crowds enthusiastically cheering at NSDAP rallies and Hitler speeches, in addition to bringing death and destruction to the rest of the world. To have these associations replaced by pictures of Berliners standing in line and cheering for Hollywood stars very much helped the effort to broadcast the image of a liberal German people interested in reconnecting with the (Western) world. In 1953, the year Gary Cooper visited, the comments of a German news reporter underline that this dimension was very much acknowledged at the time:

> Berlin is a phenomenon. It is a city with many faces. In the middle of all the pain, it shows a bright one: The most powerful of the film business came to the Berlinale from 36 countries, and when Gary Cooper, everyone was freaking out with excitement.[29]

Towards the West, the Berlinale served to present city's "bright face" in the shape of its inhabitants crazed joy about the arriving Americans. Towards the East, however, a West Berlin that evolved beyond the face of crisis and occupation to that of a safe haven for American film stars can be read as a show of power and belittlement towards the Soviet Union. That the festival organization actually often met strong resistance by their invited artists[30] only underlines the efforts they had to undertake to convince them otherwise and thus the importance they ascribed to their presence—ultimately, Hollywood stars did not only attract visitors and entertained the masses, they also raised West Berlin's international recognition and helped to keep it on the map as a

[28] "Ihr Völker der Welt, ihr Völker in Amerika, in England, in Frankreich, in Italien! Schaut auf diese Stadt und erkennt, daß ihr sie nicht preisgeben dürft und nicht preisgeben könnt!" Reuter, 1948.

[29] "Berlin ist ein Phänomen. Es ist die Stadt mit den vielen Gesichtern. Mitten im Schmerz zeigt sie ein Frohes: Aus 36 Ländern kamen die Gewaltigen des Films zur Berlinale und bei Gary Cooper war alles aus dem Häuschen." Quoted in *Opening ceremony of the 60th Berlinale*, 2010. Min. 58:00–58:30.

[30] Blumberg, 2010.

proper and legitimate city, which in the context of its fiercely disputed status was a political statement on itself.

Artistically, the spectrum of films screened at the Berlinale in its first decades was rather wide. On one side, there were the Hollywood productions with their stars, whose presence was not reduced to the red carpet but staged as a spectacle that penetrated everyday life in West Berlin. On the other end of the spectrum, films from the various avant gardes and new waves of 1950s and 60s European cinema were selected. The directors of these cinema movements were regular guests at the festival, from Italian neorealists Michelangelo Antonionini and Pier Paolo Pasolini to individual auteurs like Ingmar Bergmann. Berlinale publications even go as far as retrospectively honoring the festival for discovering the French *Nouvelle Vague* and being the first festival to invite the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, Agnes Varda, and Claude Chabrol.[31] In the closing ceremonies, their films were usually the ones that were awarded, with the exception of some political U.S. directors like Sidney Lumet or David Lean, broadcasting the image of the festival as an institution ultimately committed to high culture rather than Hollywood entertainment.

This opposition between Hollywood and European art cinema often regarded as a paradox and critical balancing act. At the Berlinale, however, it apparently did not go all too deep under the surface. Not only have both cinemas always been mutually dependent and ultimately legitimized each other in the festival circuit, as Marijke de Valck points out.[32] In case of the Berlinale, Hollywood and Europe often even took the same function. The presentation of Jean-Luc Godard in 1961 may frame him as the *enfant terrible* from the world of French cinema, but otherwise it is not too different from that of any Hollywood star in photographs showing them in a cabriolet as usual (Picture 2.5). In the picture, Godard and his film crew are not surrounded by crowds, which underlines their status of high culture that finds meager recognition in the regular public. Yet their wide smiles tell that they have significantly more fun than Gary Cooper had a decade earlier. The trope of the stars exposing themselves in public West Berlin remains the same. Europe and Hollywood might have been perceived in fierce competition, but at the Berlinale, they took part in the same competition, the same media circuit, and the same discourse:

[31] Cowie, 2011. p. 11.

[32] de Valck, 2007. pp. 129–30.

Picture 2.5: Just like Hollywood, the French *Nouvelle Vague* is presented to the public in an open cabriolet: Jean-Luc Godard and his film crew on their way to the premiere of *Une femme est une femme* (A Woman is a Woman) in 1961.

the Free World that the festival showcased was presented as a broad spectrum between two cultural and philosophical poles, but they were all part of the Berlinale.

The union of these poles despite all creative difference is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the sea of flags that was traditionally erected in the festival area around the *Zoo Palast* from its first editions onward (Picture 2.6). At the heart of West Berlin, a large variety of nations came together under the umbrella of the Free World, displayed for everyone to see. Here, the idea of the world stage reemerges, on which nations come together in peaceful competition that is organized by a host city which thus positions itself at the center of world. Its persistence from the world exhibition tradition to the

Picture 2.6: The nations of the Free World are meeting in all their colorful glory in the large public display of the "sea of flags" above the *Zoo Palast*, like in this photograph taken in 1967.

Berlin context speaks to the remarkable flexibility of the idea of the world stage. Even if the "world" that it represented can always be modified, the stage defines a particular group of nations that belong to it. In the late 19th century, these were the colonial empires of Europe, at the Venice Film Festival during World War II, it was the Axis powers, and at the Berlinale, it was the Free World of the West that was invited and produced on these flagpoles.

Marijke de Valck points out that the film festivals' highlighting of national belonging strongly resonated with European sentiments against Hollywood's supremacy when language came to the forefront again with the introduction of film sound in the late 1920s:

> The film festival combined the "international" with the "national" by inviting nations to participate in an international showcase where they could present

> a selection of their own finest films of that year. The festival was created as a new space where language was not an obstacle, but was instead considered an unproblematic "given" in the cultural competition between film-producing nations.[33]

Although this development, driven by the technological particularities of film sound, surely played into the film festivals' showcasing of the national, its specific dimension of competition can be traced back much further. Just like the world exhibitions, the festival claimed universality while actually limiting itself to the Free World. The display of the spectacular multitude of flags not only on festival posters but in public spaces claimed an equality in competition and participation in the festival that was not given, because a good portion of countries from the East Bloc were simply left out. This changed in the 1970s, when the first Soviet films were invited and hammer and sickle symbolically ascended onto the world stage. But for the first two decades of the festival, the idea of the world stage and the concept of peaceful competition clearly followed the political agenda of not only fostering and producing the Free World by equating it with the world itself.

It should be noted, though, that the international competition did not only serve ideological purposes but also had a clear strategical dimension. In 1951, the FIAPF came together at the Berlinale to decide on a strategy against the imminent inflation of film festivals. Pressured by the institutions in Cannes, Venice and Berlin, the commission introduced a grading system for film festivals with the highest label being that of an A-festival. A competition of films that had never premiered internationally and were awarded by an independent international jury was a requirement for the coveted label. With the introduction of a jury in 1956—replacing the audience award system that had been in place for its first five editions—the Berlinale became the third festival to achieve the A-status, after Cannes and Venice. For a long time, the three central European festivals remained the only A-festivals in the world, and although over to course of the next decades, eight more institutions, from Mar del Plata to Cairo to Shanghai, ascended to this circle, the label still works as a strong elevation above the thousands of other film festivals being held annually today. This leads to the circular outcome that holding a competition is in itself a competitive advantage in the busy festival economy. Similarly, the handing out of awards works as an award for the institution. By achieving the A-status

[33] Ibid. p. 24.

early on thanks to its close connection to FIAPF, West Berlin could once again emerge as a welcoming *Weltstadt*, a mere decade after the world war that had originated in the city.

The Eastward Face of the Showcase

The circumstances of the Berlinale foundation, its performances on the urban stage of West Berlin, and its branding as the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* underline the festival's strong commitment to the Western Allied during the 1950s and 60s, especially to the United States. Embedded into the Marshall Plan, it celebrated the recently fostered German-American friendship and supported the United States' efforts of convincing the West Berlin populace of the Allied mission to rebuild and democratize society along their ideological lines. This mission was by no means restricted to the western part of the city, as the Berlinale took significant efforts to radiate into East Berlin, knowing that their *Schaufenster* worked in both directions.

In addition to its effects on the people of West Berlin and the territorial claims on the half city, the Berlinale was also "the Western cultural showcase in the East," as German media historian Heide Fehrenbach puts it in her monograph on the democratizing effects of the film industry in post-war Germany.[34] In East Berlin, this showcase manifested in more than twenty *Grenzkinos* (border cinemas) that screened festival films at strongly reduced prices until 1961, when the construction of the Berlin Wall closed the inner city border and disrupted the practice for good.[35] The *Grenzkino* venues were located in the Western sectors but close enough to the border to attract audiences from the East (see Figure 2 above). At the *Aladin & Camera* at *Postdamer Platz* or the *City* near Checkpoint Charlie, Western entertainment films were screened all year, heralded by newsreels produced by the Allied information services. The deficits in profit due to the low tickets paid in Eastern Mark were compensated by the West Berlin Senate and through the *Gesamtberliner Kulturplan* (All-Berlin Cultural Plan) that funded cultural diplomacy efforts aiming at reuniting the city under Western direction. Although the concept of the border cinemas transcends the Berlinale, they are the apparent brainchild of its

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[34] Fehrenbach, 1995. p. 236.

[35] The phenomenon of the border cinemas is quite under-researched. A first attempt at their historiography was a brief exhibition project at *Kino Arsenal* in September 2011, which was never followed up by a proper publication, but at least a short documentary. See Schemel, 2011.

initiator Oscar Martay, who wanted to make the festival accessible to East Berliners in particular.[36] The practice of reduced ticket prices paid in Easter Mark also applied to the open air screenings at the *Waldbühne*.

Picture 2.7: The Berlinale's presence is emanated eastward through barbed wire fences with posters inviting East Berliners to the festival.

Apart from the *Grenzkinos*, the presence of the Berlinale was felt in East Berlin public space, too, at least visually. Each year, around 500 posters were aligned at the sector border to advertise the festival (Picture 2.7). Arranged into a long row parallel to the border fences and near the inner city checkpoints, the posters made it impossible to enter the Western sectors during the Berlinale without recognizing that a film festival was taking place and being invited to it—explicitly as an East Berliner, as the posters made clear. In 1954, they headlined: "We very warmly invite all friends of film in the Eastern sector and in the Eastern zone to participate in the IV. Berlin International Film Festival!"[37] This, of course, only addressed the audiences, as films and filmmakers from the East Bloc were not invited to the festival until the late 1960s. A proper participation of East Germans on the stages of the Berlinale was not desired until much later, revealing the checkpoint posters as a blatant effort of cultural diplomacy. Even the very date of the festival was intended to disrupt cultural life in the Eastern part of the city. The decision to hold the

[36] Schenk, 2011.

[37] "Alle Filmfreunde im Ostsektor und in der Ostzone laden wir zur Teilnahme an dem IV. Internationalen Filmfestspielen Berlin recht herzlich ein!"

Berlinale in June, a mere month after its direct competitor in Cannes, made not much sense given the international festival calendar. The date, however, aimed to set a counter weight to the socialist *Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten* (World Festival of Youth and Students) that took place in June 1951 in East Berlin and was organized by the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth).[38]

These efforts to radiate in everyday, cultural, and political life in East Berlin were virtually stopped by the construction of the Wall in August 1961, which reduced the permeability of the inner city borders to a minimum and completely thwarted the visibility between both parts of the city. Following this development, most of the Western *Grenzkinos* closed and the festival was no longer accessible to the East Berlin public. An intriguing but short lived project was initiated in 1963, when selection of festival films were broadcasted in Western TV stations targeting East German audiences who were very well able to receive the *Westfernsehen* on their TV sets despite a governmental ban. The *TV-Brücke* (TV bridge), an initiative of Alfred Bauer himself, explicitly referenced the Allied *Luftbrücke* and thus transparently frames the Berlinale's eastward radiation as the propaganda project it had been from the beginning—a cultural supply line aiming to induce political change.[39]

Media in the *Deutsche Demokratische Republic* (German Democratic Republic, DDR) perceived these efforts and did not take it lightheartedly. Given the harsh diplomatic climate between the two states, especially during the 1950s and 60s, this should not come as a surprise. The border cinemas were labelled as "man-catching" (Menschenfängerei) and "poisoning of our youth" (Vergiftung unserer Jugend) in East Berlin newspapers, the ideological film *Schaut auf diese Stadt* (Look at this City, 1962) stated that their film selection consisted of cheap entertainment through sex and crime flicks, and a special issue of the governmental TV news program *Schwarzer Kanal* (Black Channel) even mentioned them as a reason the build the Wall.[40] The Berlinale itself was also targeted regularly, with one particularly charming newspaper article in the East Berlin tabloid *B.Z.* renaming it *Businale* (a wordplay with the German word for bosom, *Busen*) after actress Jayne Mansfield's dress had slipped her breasts

[38] Fehrenbach, 1995. p. 239.

[39] For a more detailed insight into the TV bridge and similar broadcasts, see Yurtaeva, 2017.

[40] Schenk, 2011.

at a vine tasting in 1961.[41] The instance caused a minor scandal and was thankfully taken in DDR media as a manifestation of the festival's morally questionable excess and cultural worthlessness.

The bad press and conflict with the DDR did not harm the Berlinale brand. On the contrary, it helped to foster its reputation as a political festival. In its first two decades, the festival managed to establish this branding primarily through staging West Berlin as a political city. Not only did the former German capital become a *Weltstadt* again thanks to the Berlinale, the festival in turn used the Berlin's status as a border post at the fault line of the Cold War position itself at the center of world history. As such, the festival successfully worked its political and geographical status into a unique selling point in the growing landscape of European film festivals. Furthermore, the association of West Berlin with a city enclosed by the Soviet enemy enriched the narrative with braveness and the lonesome fight of an island of freedom, even more so after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The Berlinale could easily use this imagery for its own branding, presenting itself as the last cultural bastion of the Free World—and thus help its host city overcome international associations with fascism and mass destruction. For the festival image, it did not matter that the director who headed it for 25 years was a former high ranking Nazi, a fact that Bauer apparently managed to hide in his denazification process.[42] Neither did it matter that the Berlinale functioned on many levels as a giant machinery of cultural diplomacy and pragmatic geopolitical interest. The branding as the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* was broadcasted successfully enough. Through this Cold War imagery of freedom and blockade, the first and most obvious dimension of the festival's staging of the political took shape in the 1950s and 60s: The special connection of the Berlinale to the city of West Berlin, which was framed as a political city. While this dimension continued to influence the festival's branding until 1990 and beyond, a second twist emerged from the developments of the 70s and 80s, when the Berlinale became a hot spot for political scandals.

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[41] Simbeni and Sannwald, 2018. p. 58.

[42] Hof, 2020.

2.2 Forum for Political Turmoil

Towards the late 1960s, the label of the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* became less and less attractive, for different reasons. On one hand, the negotiations around the status of West Berlin were cooling down since the Berlin Wall had cemented the territory and the partition slowly became the city's permanent status quo. On the other, a new generation was graduating the universities, a generation that had witnessed neither World War II nor the liberation of 1945. The socio-political climate made imagery of the Free World less tenable and rather encouraged artists and students to emancipate themselves from the power structures of the classical entertainment industry. Embedded into the global unrests of 1967/68, film students from all over Europe began demanding their place in the traditional institutions that were more and more perceived as rusty and impenetrable. In Cannes, this movement manifested in a coalition of striking workers, student activists, and new wave filmmakers occupying the *Croisette* in protest of restrictive French cultural politics that had intruded into the structure of the *Cinémathèque Française.* The protests ultimately led to be cancellation the festival's 1968 edition. Five months later, similar demonstrations had even more striking effects on the Venice Film Festival, which was cancelled and in reaction changed its director and abolished its awards. It took the festival twelve years to return to its normal mode and in that period had to be cancelled four more times due to its scratched reputation.

The Berlinale escaped similar protests in its 1969 edition thanks to a careful policy of keeping a low profile and not triggering the Anti-American sentiments that had fostered especially among younger West Berlin audiences.[43] In the following year however, on the occasion of its 20th edition, a scandal around Michael Verhoeven's anti-war film *o.k.* led to the festival's first cancelation, which until today remains unique in its history. In the following subchapter, I will present the three most media-effective scandals of the 1970s and 80s as well as the Berlinale's reactions to them. The instances revolve around the films *o.k.* by Michael Verhoeven (1970), *The Deer Hunter* by Michael Cimino (1979) and *Night Crossing* (1982) by Delbert Mann. This will provide insight into the performances of crisis that the festival established, building up the reputation of being a forum for political turmoil along the way.

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[43] Jacobsen, 2000. p. 165.

The Hot Summer of 1970

The United States had been rapidly losing popularity with West German society by the late 1960s.[44] Especially among those born during and after World War II, the U.S. military was associated with Agent Orange and atrocities in Vietnam rather than candy bombers and the airlift. An article from *The New Yorker*, published in October 1969,[45] caused particular outrage against American war crimes in the West German left, among them the aspiring Bavarian director Michael Verhoeven (b. 1938), who up to this point had directed two sex comedies. The *New Yorker* article detailed what became known as the "incident on hill 192"—the kidnapping, gang rape, and subsequent murder of a Vietnamese girl through four U.S. soldiers that was later covered by their superiors. Verhoeven quickly worked the incident into his film *o.k.* (1970). Graphically depicting the rape and murder as well as the soldiers' cold-bloodedness, the film mobilizes the audience's anger and disgust. Breaking the fourth wall by establishing its protagonists as actors wearing uniforms, *o.k.* further emphasizes the alienation and inhumane nature of the incident. Although Verhoeven relocated the action to a Bavarian forrest, this was not an attempt at universalization, as the film's opening sequence explicitly refers to the U.S. army's atrocities in Vietnam. The film title plays with the notion that "there are no crimes in war" because "in the jungle, all is o.k.," as the supervising officer concludes in the end.

When the film premiered at the Berlinale in on June 30th 1970, it was advertised by the enthusiastic festival director Alfred Bauer as "a fantastic new German film."[46] While audiences were reportedly shocked by the film's explicit depiction of sexual violence and moral decay, it was generally well received, as it spoke to resentments against the Vietnam War that were otherwise not mirrored in West German media. Contemporary film critics were divided, as is usual when it comes to explicit and scandalous films. Local paper *B.Z.* valued

[44] This was by no means a genuinely German phenomenon. The wave of social upheavals in the summer of 1968 attest to the globality of the youth movements' growing fatigue with their respective alliances, be it the United States in the West or the Soviet Union in the East. In the context of West Germany, however, this anti-Americanism had a particular taste due to the country's strong ties to the U.S. and their recent occupier-occupied dynamics. Although the protests were much less violent and omnipresent as in neighboring France, they were still observed with more scrutiny by the United States.

[45] Lang, 1969.

[46] Cowie, 2011. p. 28.

o.k. as "a necessary, an honest, a good film"[47] while conservative film critic Friedrich Luft noted in *Die Welt*:

> When at times nausea is stirred, partly only as a kind of masochistic entertainment or hypocritical uplifting, so that the pleasures of the cruel perpetrators are almost carried over to the audience, such an extreme attempt at the unbearable remains questionable, at best.[48]

Yet, despite mixed reviews for the film's transgressions, *Film International*—the festival's official daily journal—immediately declared it a critics' darling and close favorite to the Golden Bear.[49]

Some members of the festival jury, however, were not as delighted, especially jury president George Stevens (1904–75). The renowned Hollywood director had previously served as an information officer for the U.S. Army in World War II and in that capacity had filmed liberations of concentration camps. Enraged about the graphic accusation of the U.S. Army from a German filmmaker who—of all people—acted as a moral authority, Stevens demanded *o.k.* the be excluded from the jury consideration in an internal meeting of the group. Upon that, his fellow jury member Yugoslavian director Dušan Makavejev (1932–2019) decided to make his demand public. A minor media outcry followed, with claims of the festival direction standing by while the American headed jury excluded a critical film from the competition. Left students and filmmakers accused the festival of censorship. Alfred Bauer's late intervention in the shape a half-hearted clarification that *o.k.* remained in competition could not prevent the festival descending into chaos. After a series of undisclosed jury meetings, troubled press conferences, protesting directors withdrawing their films from the festival program, and alternative public discussion panels organized by enraged students, the jury finally resigned without handing out any awards and Bauer canceled the festival two days early on July 5th.

Although the Berlinale's in-house historiography focuses on the damage done to the festival reputation,[50] the debates around *o.k.* did help to attract

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[47] "Ein notwendiger, ein ehrlicher, ein guter Film." Quoted in *Film International* 7, 1970. p. 9.

[48] "Wenn teils Brechreiz erzeugt wird, teils nur eine Art masochistischer Unterhaltung oder pharisäerhafter Erbauung, daß fast die Lustgewinne der Greueltreibenden sich dem Publikum mitteilen, dann bleibt ein so extremer Versuch mit dem Unerträglichen fragwürdig, bestenfalls." Quoted in Ibid.

[49] *Film International* 6, 1970. p. 1.

[50] Jacobsen, 2000. pp. 172–73; Cowie, 2011. p. 31.

extraordinary media attention to the festival. It also brought a generational conflict to the surface that would very soon be productively resolved with the integration of the *Internationales Forum des Jungen Films* (International Forum of the Young Film) into the Berlinale in 1971. With these images of chaotic discussions that are resolved through open integration, the instance marked the establishment of the festival's reputation for political debate that would be carefully groomed in the following decade. From the highly publicized jury press conferences on *o.k.*, Makavejev emerged as the spearhead of the youth's fight for freedom of expression, while his opponent Stevens symbolized the aging moral monopoly of the United States. The photographs of two countering jury press conferences visualize this contrast emblematically. At the heated and crowded conference of the anti-American jury camp, an energetic and charismatic Makavejev clenches his fists on the desk, surrounded by festival employees who literally have have his back (Picture 2.8). At the counter-event,

Picture 2.8: Dušan Makavejev (l.) is becoming the symbol of the brave fight for the freedom of opinion, backed by an energetic generation of young cinephiles rebelling against...

Picture 2.9: ...the hermeneutical monopoly of the United States at the Berlinale, represented by jury president George Stevens (m.), surrounded by apathetic and disengaged professionals.

George Stevens is pictured alone in an otherwise empty wooden room (Picture 2.9). He stands isolated between his translator and the fellow jury member Véra Volmane, a French film critic who appears extremely unaffected by the proceedings, apathetically smoking her cigarette. The *Film International* issue Stevens is resentfully holding up contains an excerpt from *o.k.*'s script, accompanied by the demand to "End the War in Vietnam!"[51]—a controversial move for an official festival publication. Interestingly, in both pictures Alfred Bauer tries hard to appear unaffected, but seems rather overworked and completely fed up by the whole affair.

These images of a seemingly open forum of heated political debate are further confirmed in footage of the final jury press conference. At the climax of the event, in which Bauer again stressed the festival's neutrality, an express messenger stormed into the room and read a note to the audience that contradicted Bauer's previous statements of not being involved in the jury's internal debate. The footage—included in a 2010 documentary on the

[51] "Den Krieg in Vietnam beenden!" *Film International 4*, 1970. p. 4.

Berlinale[52]—underlines that the festival organization's intransparency, exhaustion, and unprofessional handling of the flow of information clearly was the main reason that the relatively minor affair escalated so spectacularly. The figure of the messenger however also evokes the narrative device of the *deus ex machina*, introducing the unforeseen twist of Alfred Bauer's possible involvement at the very last minute. Consciously staged or not, the whole instance proved a highly entertaining political thriller for the attending journalists and protesters, complete with twists and turns—and rumors of conspiracies to the highest level of government. Even federal chancellor Willy Brandt was said to have contacted the jury, urging them to find a solution.[53] German film journalist Peter Jansen recalls the "hot summer of 1970" as follows:

> Days became nights and nights became days, and whoever still sat around watching films at the *Zoo Palast* or anywhere else, or whoever dared to misuse the night for sleep, risked to miss out the present, and thus the history.[54]

In its 20th edition, the Berlinale itself had become a political event and as such became more interesting than the films it actually screened. Its reputation was surely further damaged among left students and independent filmmakers, who had never held the festival in high regard anyway. The affair around *o.k.* however also established the festival as a hot spot for political turmoil, a branding which would be further fostered and treasured in the following decades. For Michael Verhoeven, the scandal proved quite advantageous, too. *O.k.* was never properly distributed until much later, when a DVD release marked its 50th anniversary in 2020. That the film remained in the drawer for half a century was however due to a conflict between Verhoeven and producer Rob Houwer, who was insulted that he did not get more publicity for himself during the scandal, and not due to the controversy itself. Yet even if it was not released, *o.k.* proved very popular with the German film industry. After the media debate had elevated it to the status of a manifesto of artistic freedom, *o.k.* was a success at the German Film Awards, where it won prizes for Best Screenplay and Best Actress, and was later even agreed on as the West German entry to the Academy Awards—no minor achievements for the first serious film of an emerging independent filmmaker who until then had been

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52 Blumberg, 2000. Min. 32:15–33:00.

53 Cowie, 2010. p. 30.

54 Schröder, 2000. pp. 21–22.

working mostly on lighthearted sex comedies. As such, both the film and the Berlinale profited from the fact that the political controversy had the welcome side-effect of successful marketing in the busy economy of attention.

Internationales Forum des Jungen Films

In the "hot summer of 1970," the unrest of the young, independent cinephiles—who perceived the Berlinale as an event focused on glamour and entertainment hosting mainstream cinema while neglecting art and politics—had discharged, but under the surface, it had already been boiling in the previous years. In 1968, a circle around filmmakers Werner Herzog, Alexander Kluge, and Peter Zadek had organized a counter-Berlinale at the *Rollkrug* cinema in the working class district of Berlin-Neukölln. The event hosted experimental film screenings as well as political panel discussions. At this occasion, Werner Herzog (b. 1942) described the Berlinale as a "pseudo-public" (Schein-öffentlichkeit), a statement that proved rather prophetic regarding the staging of the numerous press conferences and discussions around *o.k.* two years later.[55] Similar events were hosted at the *Arsenal* cinema in Berlin-Schöneberg under the label *Woche der Kritik* (Critic's Week), which took place parallel to the Berlinale.[56] The *Arsenal* had been founded in 1963 by the *Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek* (Friends of the German Cinemathek), a collective of young intellectual cinephiles headed by Ulrich and Erika Gregor (b. 1932 and 1934) which aimed to distribute and archive independent films that would otherwise remain invisible.

Although the festival organization might have perceived it that way,[57] these institutions never tried to seriously overthrow or even penetrate the Berlinale. Their initiating groups were relatively isolated and despite some minor protest events in 1970, they never constituted a movement that took orchestrated efforts against the festival organization, as it had happened in Cannes and Venice at the same time. In the aftermath of the cancelled 20th edition, however, *Berliner Festspiele* (Berlin Festivals)—the state-funded institution responsible for the Berlinale and other festivals—initiated a committee to

[55] Blumberg, 2000. Min 29:45.

[56] Schröder, 2000. p. 8.

[57] In a private conversation, Ulrich Gregor remembered that Alfred Bauer had suspected the *Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek* to have orchestrated the affair around *o.k.*—an accusation he amusedly denied, as his group had been busy enough to organize their own event at the time.

restructure the Berlinale in reaction to the criticism it faced in dealing with the *o.k.*-affair. By the end of 1970, the committee decided to follow the example of the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* (Directors' Fortnight) in Cannes and the *Giornate del Cinema* (Week of Cinema) in Venice by hosting an independent parallel festival under the umbrella of the Berlinale. The *Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek* were contacted to organize such an event, since they were the most organized and longstanding critical institution. The festival-in-festival they organized soon became the *Internationales Forum des Jungen Films* (International Forum of the Young Film, short: *Forum*) and took place in 1971 for the first time, with Ulrich Gregor as its director. The 36-year-old film historians and his colleagues were given a small budget and, more importantly, complete independence in film selection, programming, and screening.

The *Forum* introduced decidedly transparent selection criteria in reaction to earlier criticism of the competition section. Roughly one half of its program was focused on its function as a platform for emerging directors from Germany, the other half on documenting contemporary trends in non-European film cultures. Furthermore, all of the selected movies were supposed to consider themselves as not only independent films but media of political agitation, as Ulrich Gregor put it during the opening ceremony of the *Forum's* first edition:

> The films we show were not primarily created from industrial calculation, […] but they are films whose producers assume the medium as a vehicle for ideas, as an instrument for communication with which they want to express a certain perspective, with which they want to progress the medium film itself or with which they want to change something, the spectator or the society as well.[58]

The staging of the screenings and the status of the movies themselves also were integral parts of the section's programmatic. Gregor and his colleagues were very skeptical about the idea of a film festival as an "exhibition of efforts" (Leistungsschau), as Alfred Bauer used put it, which started with gala premieres and headed towards a competition sealed by awards. Mirroring the Argentinian filmmakers' Fernando Solanas' and Octavio Getino's demands

[58] "Die Filme die wir zeigen, sind nicht primär entstanden aus einem industriellen Kalkül, […] sondern es sind Filme, deren Hersteller das Medium Film als ein Transportmittel für Ideen, als ein Kommunikationsinstrument betrachten, mit dem sie einen bestimmten Gesichtspunkt ausdrücken möchten, mit dem sie das Medium Film selbst weiterentwickeln möchten oder mit dem sie etwas verändern möchten, den Zuschauer oder auch die Gesellschaft." Blumberg, 2010. Min. 41:15–41:45.

from their seminal 1969 Third Cinema essay,[59] the *Forum* aimed to emancipate the movies from their surrounding glamour. Instead, Gregor established discussions between the audience and the film crew after the screenings to strengthen the spectators' reflection of the movie and agitate them further.

With the move to establish the *Forum* under its umbrella, the Berlinale further fostered the branding as a political festival and enhanced this reputation into the dimension of the festival as a platform for political debate. Transparency, discussions, and critical filmmaking were integral to the *Forum* and it was staged as a logical and timely evolution of the audience-oriented political festival to develop a younger and more open second trail. While criticism of the low comprehensibility and mass appeal of the program followed soon, the media generally welcomed the liberalization of the festival, hailing the first edition of the *Forum* as much more interesting than the official competition.[60] These two poles, over the years, led to the *Forum's* metaphoric position "between barricade and ivory tower" (*zwischen Barrikade und Elfenbeinturm*), as festival historiographer Nicola Schröder put it.[61]

The Berlinale's strategy to rejuvenate and open itself up to political debate worked out well. In the wake of the festival's interruption in 1970, even its in-house magazine *Film International* had called for a "new Berlinale" on the front page.[62] Yet, only one year later, the restructuring of the festival was limited to the establishment of the *Forum*. A complete makeover was avoided and Alfred Bauer could stay as its director until he retired because of old age in 1976. The *Forum* entered the stage of the Berlinale and took the role of the political actor. This way, political debate was consciously incorporated and at the same time carefully limited to one section of the festival where it was given a side-stage of its own. This, at least, was the initial idea. But by the end of the 1970s, the political performances would again spill over into the competition section.

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[59] In both their *Tercer Cine* (Third Cinema) manifesto and in their practical work as directors, Solanas and Getino developed techniques of making discussions integral parts of film screenings to amplify the motivational efforts of the movies, which they saw as instruments of political agitation. Their ideas soon spread to Europe, where they were particularly virulent among filmmakers and cinephiles in the 1970s. See Solanas and Getino, 1970.

[60] Schröder, 2000. p. 17.

[61] Ibid.

[62] „Neue Berlinale wird gesucht!" *Film International 12*, 1970.

The Deer Hunter

Despite Bauer's efforts to outsource it to the *Forum*, his successor Wolf Donner (1939–94) soon gave political turmoil a place at the center of the festival stage during his short time in office. The Hamburg-based film journalist took his office as director of the Berlinale in 1976, and although he stayed for only three years, he was responsible for some lasting changes in the festival framework and its atmosphere, pushing it into the direction of a more sober political event. In terms of staging the political, the festival's handling of *The Deer Hunter* in 1979 is the most intriguing case in that regard.

The New Hollywood drama by director Michael Cimino (1939–2016) revolves around three steel workers from Missouri who voluntarily enlist to fight in Vietnam during the end of the war. The film tells their stories in three segments: Before, during, and after their military assignment. Although the narrative is strongly focused on the soldiers marital and social conflicts which are laid out extensively in the film's framing segments set in Missouri, it is the middle segment dealing with the war itself that was at the center of attention during the Berlinale in 1979. While the film's overall tone is relatively subtle and invested in the ambiguous emotional lives of its protagonists impacted by insecurity and trauma, the scenes set in Vietnam portray the North-Vietnamese soldiers as one-dimensional, bloodthirsty psychopaths. Their methods of torture are displayed at length, with the game of Russian Roulette taking such a central place in the narrative that it became popular enough to boost the number of deaths through shooting games in the U.S. to a record high in the years after the release of the film—all this despite the fact that not a single case of the Vietcong practicing Russian Roulette was ever recorded by witnesses.[63]

This and other inaccuracies in the depiction of the North Vietnamese naturally caught the attention of the Soviet delegation to the Berlinale already ahead of the film's premiere. That the Soviet Union and its associated republics sent a delegation to Berlin at all was a relatively recent development[64] and carried a symbolic weight that went beyond the realm of cultural politics. The delegation's concern over the film was thus a diplomatically sensitive issue, to say the least. The timing of *The Deer Hunter*'s premiere early in the festival week

[63] Arnett, 1970.

[64] The first time the festival was visited by a Soviet delegation was in 1975 and 1979 marked only the third instance of such an invitation.

also catered to their concern—only three days before the beginning of the Berlinale on February 20th 1979, the Chinese army had started an offensive into North Vietnam, attacking several border posts and starting to march into the country with an army of 200,000.[65]

Given the unpredictable nature of the conflict in its first days, the Soviet delegation approached festival director Wolf Donner at the opening day of the festival and urged him to withdraw *The Deer Hunter* from the Berlinale program. Pointing to the producers of the film, who were outraged by the mere suggestion, Donner rejected the Russian proposal. Upon that, the Soviet delegation demanded to at least reschedule the film's premiere towards the end of the festival. It had been planned for the festival's prominent third day and the Soviets hoped that a premiere in the last days would bring it further away from the media attention, where the Chinese invasion had become a hot news item. A later premiere would also have allowed their delegation to leave the festival early as a compromise through which they would neither miss the premieres of their own film nor be associated with a piece of American war propaganda—a link that would discredit them at home.[66] When Donner rejected this proposal, too, and insisted on the film's premiere on February 23th, the Soviet delegation had no other way to save their face than to leave the festival immediately and to withdraw all their films. Their associated delegations of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the DDR as well as a handful of independent filmmakers and even three jury members followed the example of the Soviets on the second day of the event. In the end, the Berlinale lost a total of 25 films and almost half of their jury in 1979—all just to prove the point of adamantly insisting on their own schedule and not yield to Soviet pressure.

The instance of *The Deer Hunter* illustrates that from the late 1970s onward, the Berlinale did not avoid political turmoil in the framework of the

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[65] The Chinese attack was in fact a crucial chapter in Sino-Soviet politics, which had been deteriorating since Mao Zedong's death in 1976. In November 1978, Vietnam and the Soviet Union had agreed to a mutual defense pact. When China invaded Vietnam on February 17th 1979—in response to the Vietnamese toppling of the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge in Indonesia in the previous year—it provoked a Soviet intervention. The Soviet Union ultimately decided against a military intervention and only supplied Vietnam with infrastructure and intelligence, but in the first days of the invasion it seemed very much possible that the attack would lead to a full scale Sino-Soviet proxy war. Thus, in the days around February 20th, the issue of Vietnam was highly sensitive for any Soviet official traveling abroad and interacting with foreign journalists, who were eager to know how the country would react to the Chinese attack.

[66] Cowie, 2010. p. 38.

event. To the contrary, scandals like this were welcome opportunities to foster the branding of the festival as a defender of free speech, which was deeply ingrained in the festival image as well as West Berlin's inherent logic of the Cold War border post. Moritz de Hadeln, who followed Wolf Donner as Berlinale director in 1980,[67] even accused his predecessor of staging a calculated scandal in an authorized biography published in 2018. De Hadeln witnessed the events of 1979 in the position of the future festival director being worked in and in his version, Donner was friends with Berlin's social democratic Mayor Dietrich Stobbe (1938–2011), who was up for re-election only four weeks later. At the time, Stobbe struggled with low popularity ratings and ceased the opportunity to publicly applaud the Berlinale for defending the freedom of expression, reviving the prominent narrative of West Berlin standing up against attempts of Soviet oppression.[68] It is unclear how much this effort eventually helped him in the re-election, as the votes for the Social Democrats only marginally increased from the last election, but it surely did not damage Stobbe's government coalition which could continue for two more years.

Whether calculated or simply taken as a convenient opportunity, the negotiations with the Soviet delegation were carried out on the main stage of the festival, which through hosting a political power play fostered its branding of the political festival. The screening of *The Deer Hunter* was not Donner's only contribution to the reinstatement of the Berlinale's image as a decidedly sober event. It was him who made the decision to reschedule the Berlinale from July to February. The main reason behind this was a strategic re-positioning in the schedule of European A-festivals, as the festival in Cannes, Berlin's strongest competitor, took place in May and usually had already taken up the best and most relevant films before the Berlinale could screen them in world premieres. Moving the festival to February, ahead of Cannes, was seen as an attempt to reverse this situation and leapfrog the selection committees at the Côte d'Azur.[69]

This plan never fully worked out and even worsened the situation on the long term—now, the festival was too close to the Academy Awards, which made

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[67] Donner had voluntary resigned in 1978 and de Hadeln was already announced as his predecessor in January 1979. The *Deer Hunter* scandal did not contribute to these decisions.

[68] Jungen, 2018. pp. 205–6.

[69] Cowie, 2010. p. 34.

it difficult for hopeful Oscar contenders to premiere their films in Berlin. The new date, however, had a much more significant side-effect that changed its general character significantly: The bleakness of wet and cold Berlin February, which is not snowy winter anymore but definitely not spring already. This grey and depressing new atmosphere robbed the festival much of its glamour, entertainment, and leisure. The gloomy season instead instead underlined the character of the gloomy working festival, as it forced most of the social life surrounding the film screenings to the inside, to restaurants, cafés, offices, and hotel rooms. The streets of West Berlin passed as beautiful and inviting only in the few months of summer; in February, the festival had to retreat from grad public parades along *Kurfürstendamm* and open-air screenings at the *Waldbühne*. As a result, intellectual and political debates became more central to visitors of the festival as they had to somehow replace the traditional boat rides on the Wannsee and the strolls through Charlottenburg. Although Donner tried to take it with humor and started to sell Berlinale bobble hats as merchandise in

Picture 2.10: Festival director Wolf Donner (2nd r.) embraces the new festival date in grey and wet Berlin February and turns it into a merchandise gag by personally selling *Die Film Fest Mütze!* (The Film Fest Hat!) and *Der Film Fest Schirm!* (The Film Fest Umbrella!) in front of the *Zoo Palast* in 1977.

front of the *Zoo Palast* (Picture 2.10), the Berlinale fully became a somber and puritan *Arbeitsfestival* (working festival) with the move to February.[70]

The Wind of Freedom

When Swiss-Italian filmmaker and festival manager Moritz de Hadeln (b. 1940) took over from Donner as festival director in 1980, he made an effort to play down the function of the Berlinale as a forum for political scandals. At least, the scandals had to be linked back to artistic criteria to avert that the festival invited controversial films or issues solely for the sake of being controversial. Following this strategy, the festival doubled down on its function as a *Brücke zwischen Ost und West* (bridge between East and West) during his tenure, as we shall see in the following subchapter. In 1982, the éclat around the Disney production *Night Crossing*, however, proved that both the West German media and the provincial government in large parts still expected the Berlinale to be the forum for political turmoil and the brave defender of freedom as which it had branded itself in the 1970s.

Night Crossing was a mid-scale Hollywood production released in February 1982 in U.S. cinemas with meager box office revenue and modest critical acclaim. Disney's first foray into the realm of non-animated family films came with blatant political overtones: the film takes up the true story of an East German family that succeeded in crossing the inner-German border with a self-constructed hot-air balloon. Hollywood director Delbert Mann shot the drama in Northern Bavaria, near the DDR's southern border, with a mostly American cast. Critics noted the film's high production value, the suspenseful story arc and the passable work of the actors, but even West German film journalists found irritation in the clichéd depiction of everyday life in the DDR.[71] The film shows impoverished East German housewives fighting for an orange, uses omnipresent espionage among neighbors as a story device, and lets its protagonists utter unmotivated general statements on the state with buzzworded catchphrases like "People simply are not made to live like this." Given the film's meager artistic value and its over-the-top propaganda, it should be no

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[70] It is unclear where exactly the term originates, but it came up from time to time in contemporary newspaper reports and soon found its way into festival historiographies, for example in Jacobsen, 1990. p. 8.

[71] "Hier erfahren wir, wie sich Tick, Trick und Track die Ostzone vorstellen." "*Diese Woche im Fernsehen*," 1985.

surprise that the selection committee of the Berlinale decided against inviting *Night Crossing* to the Berlinale. The distributor offered the film to the festival, as Berlin was seen as the logical venue for its European premiere, but de Hadeln politely declined the offer, noting that it just was not "extraordinary" enough to be shown at an A-festival.[72]

The problem was that in early January 1982, Disney had already announced that *Night Crossing* would screen as the opening film of the Berlin Film Festival. This forced the festival organization to dement and explicitly state that the film would not be invited. While the film had never been programmed in the first place, this correction led to the impression that the Berlinale had in fact withdrawn the film for political reasons—an impression that was strengthened when de Hadeln, famous for his brutally honest and often un-diplomatic character, released a press statement saying that in addition to the poor artistic value, the film would have been bound to cause problems with the East German delegation anyway, just as *The Deer Hunter* had three years before.[73]

In late January 1982, conservative West German media outlets started an exhaustive campaign against the Berlinale, which had supposedly given way to pressure from the East. The initiator of the campaign, publisher Axel Springer (1912–85) by that time controlled 80% of the West Berlin newspaper landscape, and his enterprise was deeply rooted in the tradition of German-American friendship. Springer was consequently adamantly opposed to the West German left or any sign of appeasement to the East, and his publishing house was known for launching its often populist media campaigns with much noise and little subtlety. On January 31st 1982, their widest circulating daily newspaper *Bild* titled in large letters on their front page: "Balloon film: Threats from the Eastern Secret Service?" (Ballon-Film: Drohungen vom Ost-Geheimdienst?) Other Springer-owned newspapers found even harsher words. *Welt am Sonntag* regretted that the festival had depraved from a "proper fest for the people" into a "stupid socialist gathering of ideologues."[74] Even conservative newspapers not published by Springer criticized the festival for its supposed cowardice. On

[72] Jungen, 2018. p. 216.

[73] "*Heiße Luft*," 1982.

[74] "Diese Berlinale, die einmal ein wahres Volksfest gewesen war, ist im Schatten der Entspannungspolitik immer mehr zu einem stupiden sozialistischen Ideologentreff geworden." Quoted in Jungen, 2018. p. 216.

February 8th 1982, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the most somber and conservative daily newspapers, regretted in its front page editorial that "Eastern objections were bowed to before they had even been expressed."[75]

The campaign soon caught attention of the Christian-Democratic Party (CDU) and its ruling coalition in the Berlin senate, were the issue was soon debated and finally laid before the internal commission of the *Bundestag*, the West-German parliament. While these debates, despite a strong effort of the conservative CDU, ultimately had no consequence for the festival, it made its not-screening of *Night Crossing* a highly political affair. The éclat finally peaked on February 12th 1982, the opening day of the Berlinale. Axel Springer himself had personally brought 250 copies of the film and screened *Night Crossing* at the *Royal Palast*, a large cinema hall within walking distance to the *Zoo Palast*, to stage an explicit counter-event to the Berlinale's opening ceremony. At least for one night, Springer had taken over the Berlinale's mantle of the defender of the freedom of speech and proudly displayed it on the stage of the *Royal Palast* and the wider stage of West-German politics.

The affair around *Night Crossing* underlines how strong the Berlinale's image as a forum for political turmoil had become by 1982. The festival had fostered its brand of the political platform to a degree at which the West German media were already expecting the Berlinale to serve as a cultural stage of Cold War politics. This anticipation went so far that the media were startled when its new director apparently had no interest in that role, at least when the film in focus was simply not good. It should be noted, however, that more left-leaning mainstream media outlets saw through the campaign and recognized it as a pseudo-debate. The social-democratic weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* summed up the affair as "inflated by the wind" (*vom Winde gebläht*)[76] like the titular ballon and the widest circulated political weekly *Der Spiegel* identified it as "hot air" (*heiße Luft*).[77] These contemporaneous commentaries were not only stating that their political opponents—the alliance of CDU and publisher Axel Springer—made much ado about nothing. They were also applauding the Berlinale for

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[75] "Die Berlinale beugt sich Einwänden aus dem Osten, bevor sie überhaupt ausgesprochen wurden."

[76] A wordplay with the German title of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), which translates *Vom Winde Verweht*, and the German title of *Night Crossing*, translated as *Mit dem Wind nach Westen* (With the Wind Towards West). See "*Vom Winde gebläht,*" 1982.

[77] "*Heiße Luft,*" 1982.

refusal to serve as a stage for the conservative brand of anti-DDR propaganda and provocation for its own sake. When the storm had passed, de Hadeln may have rejected the role that was offered to him by conservative media, but in the eyes of the left-leaning public came out as an institution confident enough to stand in for its own artistic choices against political pressure from the right.

These three major affairs of the 1970s and 80s show that the Berlinale's strategies of staging the political had been developed and enriched since its initial years as the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt*. With the societal changes and upheavals of the late 1960s, its role evolved into a forum for political turmoil, where scandals and debates took over the festival stages as central performances and everyone who was using the festival time only to watch movies "risked to miss out" on the real action, as film critic Peter Jansen put it in a 1970 report.[78] The instances I have examined above show that these performances were surprisingly independent of the particular ideological content they carried. The festival proved able to coherently defend films by the anti-American German left in the shape of Michael Verhoeven against U.S. pressure, but it also saved Hollywood war films like *The Deer Hunter* from the Soviet delegation. Festival historiographies read these instances as the Berlinale defending the freedom of artistic expression.[79] I argue that additionally, the Berlinale managed to foster its branding as a political festival standing in for the invited films through these instances. The case of *Night Crossing* shows that by 1982, this branding was strong enough that the media was positively irritated when the Berlinale chose to avoid further turmoil and decided against programming an outrightly propagandist film.

This atmosphere of political turmoil and heated debate was by far not particular to Berlin. The global unrests of 1968 shook up many different institutions in many different places, and film festivals were not at all immune to their protests, as the occupations of Cannes and Venice have shown. With the Berlinale, however, there was one notable difference: here, the protesters did not have to occupy the red carpets and disrupt screenings to implement their demands. The structural changes at the Berlinale in the 1970s were usually house-made, from the inner quarrels of the jury over *o.k.* to the East Bloc delegations' withdrawal after the festival director's stubbornness, external

[78] Schröder, 2000. pp. 21–22.

[79] Cowie, 2010; Blumberg, 2000.

protests were the smallest problem of the Berlinale. All it took for the *Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek* was to organize a modest counter-festival in a basement in Berlin-Schöneberg and they were invited to build up an independent section of the festival on their own, which became the *Forum*. It is precisely the contrast to Cannes and Venice that shows that the Berlinale was not forced to reluctantly integrate the political into its framework, but rather embraced it with open arms and actively integrated it as a welcome requisite on the festival stages.

2.3 Eastward Bound

Under Alfred Bauer and Wolf Donner, the Berlinale's staging of the political and its branding as a political festival had developed two different dimensions: first with the festival serving as a stage practice for the political city of Berlin in the 1950s and 60s, and second with the political obtaining an entertainment value of its own with the scandals of the 1970s and early 80s. A third dimension evolved during the tenure of Moritz de Hadeln from 1980–2001. De Hadeln focused on the discovery of previously neglected national cinemas and turned his attention eastward, to countries whose cinematic output was at that time little known in the Western economy of attention guided by Cold War politics. From the DDR to the Soviet Union and from Taiwan to China, de Hadeln's Berlinale is credited with tapping into several national cinemas in the East.

In itself, this spirit of "discovering" previously neglected national cinemas and showcasing them in the West was not particular to the Berlinale. Especially during the 1990s, retrospectives on individual countries were very much en vogue. Film journalist Peter Cowie enthusiastically described this spirit as following in his 2010 book on the Berlinale:

> It is the thrill of the chase, the quest for a masterpiece that comes from an unexpected corner of the filmmaking world, whether Uruguay, Uzbekistan, or just the good old United Kingdom.[80]

It could however also be argued that beneath this "thrill of the chase" lies an urge to exhibit the non-West which is deeply inscribed into the very format of film festivals, given their heritage as successors of the world exhibition movement where displays of non-Western cultures became common at colonial

[80] Cowie, 2010. p. 129.

exhibitions in the late 19th century. The Berlinale, however, appropriated this broader trend by adding a political flavor to the process of showcasing national cinemas. In accordance with its host city's perception as a Cold War border post, de Hadeln explicitly reinstated the Berlinale's character as a *Brücke zwischen Ost und West* (bridge between East and West)[81] when he focused on cinema from behind the Iron Curtain. In a way, this practice "nationalized" the political by binding it to nations associated with a certain political exoticism. This focus on films and filmmakers from politically exotic countries in many ways laid the foundation for the staging of Iranian cinema from the mid-2000s onwards.

The Concept of National Cinema

Before examining the role of East German, Soviet, and Chinese cinemas at the Berlinale, a brief theoretical excursion through the concept of national cinema will be necessary, as the idea to define film production along the lines of national boundaries is all but uncontested. The term "national cinema" was originally applied to different European national cinemas that competed with Hollywood—which dominated their respective domestic markets—in the first half of the 20th century. In his 1994 essay on this European opposition to Hollywood, film scholar Thomas Elsässer identifies the concept of the national cinema as a combat term of an era in which language was crucial in terms of film production. After the introduction of film sound in the later 1920s, language became a tool with which emerging film studios in Europe could fight against the dominion of Hollywood in European cinemas. Elsässer consequently argues that the term is somewhat outdated in an age of regular European co-productions, networks, and transfers.[82]

From a more theoretical point of view, the concept of national cinema has been challenged from the 1990s onward, inspired by the contestations of the nation state in political science. In analogy to theoretical interventions like Ernst Gellner's concept of invented traditions, Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, or Eric Hobsbawn's theory of nationalism, national cinema has increasingly been seen as an invented notion constructed to grasp cinematic

[81] Jungen, 2018. p. 196.

[82] Elsässer, 2005. pp. 35–56.

output along the lines of the (imagined) nation state.[83] As a consequence, understanding film through the essentializing lens of national cinema would overemphasize the respective cinematic mainstream of a national film industry and neglect their smaller and more peripheral sectors.[84] A common denominator of contestations of "national cinema" is that it was empirically inspired by European nationalism. This is hardly surprising, given that these contestations are usually based on examinations of 20th-century European film history, which has witnessed programs of cinematic nationalization in fascist Germany and Italy, amongst many other blatantly nationalist cases.

When examinations steer away from this Eurocentric perspective and are applied to national cinemas on a global scale, they strike a far more reconciliatory tone. The early 2000s saw an unexpected rehabilitation of the concept of national cinema through post-colonial film scholars arguing that film industries are significantly structured by nationally specific frameworks, restrictions, and infrastructures, which would justify speaking of specific national cinemas.[85] The most programmatic approach of attempting to salvage the concept of national cinema for the 21st century comes from film scholar Susan Hayward. The initiator and general editor of the *National Cinema Series* at Routledge sees a strong "liberating and empowering" potential in the concept.[86] Following a canon of post-colonial (film) critique spanning from Frantz Fanon to Homi Bhabha to Paul Virilio, Hayward sees the emergence of a national cinema as a necessary step along the path towards liberating oppressed non-Western film cultures from "Hollywood colonialism."[87] Consequently, framing national cinemas as such would be a tool to ultimately re-define them independently of the monopoly of U.S.-American cultural influence. In analogy to Fanon's "native poet,"[88] Hayward proposes clear steps for the "native poet-film-maker" to denounce their oppressors and re-possess their national cinema.[89] While her protectionist criticism of Hollywood's hegemony in global film production and consumption was and is surely justified, Hayward's

[83] Jarvie, 2000.

[84] Higson, 2000.

[85] Vitali and Willemen, 2006.

[86] Hayward, 2000. p. 91.

[87] Ibid. p. 88.

[88] Fanon, 1963.

[89] Hayward, 2000. pp. 92–93.

romanticization of non-Western cinema seems rather problematic, as it leaves out a crucial question that becomes obvious in the context of European film festivals: What happens when these national cinemas are exhibited in the West and become exoticized and appropriated into the European cultural economy—often for their very degree of political criticism?

The practice of exhibiting films from the supposed periphery in the West and reading them as authentic accounts of a national cinema, culture, or even society is rarely challenged in these and other texts dealing with national cinema. Even those that examine processes of global film transfer and reception rarely give up their hope of finding authentic and proper readings of films as meaningful accounts of foreign cultures. Poonam Arora's pointedly titled *The Production of Third World Subjects for First World Consumption* is an example of this.[90] The media scholar's ethnographic study compares the international reception of two highly prolific Indian films, Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* (1988) and Aparna Sen's *Paroma* (1985). Both films were exhibited at international film festivals and were received with a strong curiosity for the exotic. But Arora argues that the first, Nair's Oscar-nomiated drama *Salaam Bombay*, "conforms to a system of representation that is predicated on an anachronistic specularity, a regime where the third world is constructed for, and subject to, the gaze of the first world."[91] She sees Sen's *Paroma*, however, as a valuable contribution to Hindu discourse on marriage that is too contextually rich to be read correctly by Western audiences. While Arora's analysis of *Salam Bombay* explicitly addresses the titular "production of Third World subjects for First World consumption," her overall argument holds on to the idea of authentic accounts in which subjects are not produced for Western audiences but accurately displayed in order to be understood by them.

Ultimately, a comprehensive theoretical inquiry into the practice of exhibiting national cinemas at European film festivals is yet to be undertaken. It should therefore be no surprise that festivals themselves continue to organize their programs along the lines of national cinemas and encourage their audiences to read films as accounts of the respective cultures and societies. While the Berlinale's staging of Iranian cinema from the 2000s onward is only the most recent example of this practice, the trend started in 1980 at the

[90] Arora, 1994.

[91] Ibid. p. 296.

beginning of Moritz de Hadeln's tenure. Often lauded for his cosmopolitan, pan-European identity and his eagerness to travel the world searching for new films and cinematic approaches,[92] de Hadeln's Berlinale began to showcase specific national cinemas and brought the factor of the political into the mix—what was exotic about the national cinemas he was interested in was their political status of being from beyond the Iron Curtain. Consequently, the political again entered the stages of the festival, this time bound to specific nations in the form of the politically exotic.

Peeking Behind the Iron Curtain

The first case of this "nationalization" of the political was West Berlin's closest and most obvious gateway to the East. In 1980, the relations between the East German *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR) and the *Bundesrepublik* (BRD)—and West Berlin in particular—were frozen to the degree that neither of the two German states even recognized the other's legitimate existence. After some steps towards mutual respect and more intensive diplomatic relations in the late 1960s, the situation had cooled down again to a status quo of programmatic ignorance and non-diplomacy in the early 1980s. The status of West Berlin remained especially disputed, as the East German government did not acknowledge the half city as part of the BRD, but rather as an independent unit of its own—which made inner-city diplomatic relations near impossible. In his authorized biography, written by Swiss journalist Christian Jungen, Moritz de Hadeln remembers a reception at the Moscow International Film Festival at which the Berlinale was the only invited festival delegation that was not assigned to a nation state but to the *selbstständige Einheit Westberlin* (independent unit West Berlin).[93] Despite the difficulty of representing an institution from a territory that was technically not even recognized, de Hadeln started off his new assignment with the Berlinale by regularly crossing the inner-Berlin border to see East German films and build up relations with the *Hauptverwaltung Film* (Central Administration of Film) of the DDR Ministry of Culture, which was responsible for their foreign distribution.

The general idea to showcase films produced by the state funded *Deutsche Film AG* (German Film Working Group, short: DEFA) at the Berlinale was a

[92] Cowie, 2010, p. 40.

[93] Jungen, 2018. p. 275.

reversed upgrade of its earlier motto of the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt.* In the 1950s and 60s, the festival had worked as a showcase for films from the West Bloc and put much effort into broadcasting them to East Berlin. Two decades later, it actively worked on giving West Berlin audiences a glimpse into everyday life behind the Wall. However, in contrast to the propaganda-driven earlier decades, de Hadeln and his co-curators were diplomatic enough not to show overtly dissident films at the festival. After all, they depended on the East German cultural authorities to continue their cooperation in the coming years and thus guarantee an ongoing flow of DEFA-films to the Berlinale.[94] Obvious political messages were not necessary or even desired in the selected films. The very act of curating more and more East German films carried political undertones in itself, as it meant that a West Berlin public institution recognized the DDR as a country with a flourishing cultural scene—and not narrow-mindedly as a political enemy threatening its existence, as many conservatives perceived it. In the decade where even Sting's simple line "the Russians love their children, too" made for a successful pacifist pop song, generating empathy with the direct political enemy was a spectacular act in itself.

The spotlight on East German cinema was, however, less subversive than it might seem. The film screenings were very much in line with the politics of the BRD's narrative of the German people being torn apart by the illegitimate Soviet occupation and waiting for an eventual reunification. Films like *Solo Sunny* by Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase (screened in competition in 1980) ultimately emphasized that the aims and struggles in East Germany were not so different from the ones on the other side of the Wall—in this case protagonist Sunny's attempts to make a living as a singer and find happiness as an independent woman in East Berlin. And although dissident voices were not heard as overtones in the DEFA-films invited to the Berlinale, they were often integrated in subtle ways. Like many others films screened at the festival, *Solo Sunny* revolves around the everyday life of day dreamers, artists, and other nonconformist individuals and thus subtly documents the social erosion of the DDR and its failure to adapt socialist values to generations born after 1945.

As such, East German cinema offered Western audiences an attractive combination: the anticipation of subtle between-the-lines criticism, the promise

[94] Haase, 2010. pp. 140–54.

of a peek behind the Iron Curtain, and ultimately the empathic insight that people over there were surprisingly similar. It was these factors that made East German cinema attractive to West Berlin audiences, removed the DEFA-films' stain of originating in a rogue state, and elevated them to the red carpet at the *Zoo Palast*. Simultaneously, they helped the Berlinale to establish its brand of the bridge-builder. In combination, these ingredients resulted in a successful recipe for showcasing the national cinemas of "rogue states," a recipe that is being rehashed until today, with Iran being one of the latest candidates.

Unsurprisingly, the Berlinale's showcasing of East German films was not undisputed in West Berlin public discourse. On the one hand, the festival had to justify its programming culturally, as the films stood in low esteem with most West German filmmakers and critics. De Hadeln quotes Volker Schlöndorff (b. 1939), the highly prolific director of *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum, 1979), complaining that the DEFA-films were "all terrible and ridiculous."[95] These low expectations, however, made it easy for East German filmmakers to impress their neighbors. Screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase (b. 1931) recalls that, in some instances, he could impress his Western colleagues simply by eating with knife and fork.[96]

Political criticism, however, was not smoothed out as easily: conservatives in the Berlin senate regularly complained that the Berlinale was downplaying censorship and thus assisting the DDR's Ministry of Culture in presenting the country as open and tolerant. According to these critics, truly subversive films were not programmed out of a fear of upsetting socialist functionaries. In 1980, the ruling Christian Democratic Party (CDU) protested when the festival did not pick up *Die Wunderbaren Jahre* (The Wonderful Years, 1980) by the exiled East German director and writer Reiner Kunze (b. 1933). Based on his own best selling novel, Kunze's film tells the dramatic story of a dissident couple that is pushed into suicide by functionaries of the socialist system who invade their private lives and high school careers. Although even large West German newspapers exposed the film as an empty propagandistic

[95] "Er behauptete einmal, die DEFA-Filme seinen 'alle furchtbar und lächerlich' gewesen." Jungen, 2018. p. 287.

[96] Haase, 2010. p. 160.

effort,[97] the Berlin CDU was outraged that the Berlinale did not program the film, which they read as an cowardly act of capitulation towards the DDR and an extension of their censorship.

Although the diplomatically sensitive selection practice of the Berlinale indeed avoided major diplomatic conflicts with the DDR delegations in the 1980s, the festival was perceived with great skepticism in the East. There were regular problems with the delivery of the actual film copies that had been promised but often did not arrive in time. An anecdote sees director Konrad Wolf (1925–82) hastily traveling back to East Berlin to secure a private copy of *Solo Sunny* on the very day of its premiere.[98] State functionaries accompanied the East German film teams visiting the festival at every step and reported back what they were saying in public speeches. In some cases, they even confiscated award trophies and later handed them back to the laureates on their own terms on DDR territory. Actress Kathrin Sass (b. 1956), who reports of this practice, furthermore remembers that the Silver Bear she received for her performance in *Bürgschaft für ein Jahr* (On Probation, 1982) actually hindered her subsequent career in the East German film industry, where she did not receive further offers for a long time.[99] In the DDR, the Berlinale Bears were not associated with prestige, but rather with cultural arrogance and questionable politics.

Such demonstrations of power were not only executed by Eastern political players. The West Berlin senate regularly used the festival stage for its symbolic politics, too. The most intriguing example for this was performed by conservative Senator for Culture Volker Hassemer (b. 1944) in 1985. As there were no formal diplomatic relations between the DDR government and West Berlin, Hassemer saw a chance to shine as the first West Berlin official to have a diplomatic meeting with an East German cultural official, namely Horst Pehnert (1932–2013), the DDR Deputy Minister for Culture. As chairman of the *Hauptverwaltung Film*, Pehnert had been Moritz de Hadeln's first official contact person for film distribution in the East and a regular visitor of the

[97] Even fellow exiled dissident Wolf Biermann attested the film a "dumb and self-just hate against everything DDR-related, against everything that is left or wants to be left" in his review for *Die Zeit*, published on February 29th 1980. In his similarly damning newspaper-review, former festival director Wolf Donner resumes: "The film delivers emotions instead of arguments, it denounces and agitates and is thus fatally coherent with the latest atmosphere in the West." See "*Erstürmt die Höhen der Kultur,*" 1980.

[98] Jungen, 2018. p. 278.

[99] Simbeni and Sannwald, 2018. p. 106.

festival. In 1985, Hassemer invited Pehnert, his East German counterpart, to negotiations in Moritz de Hadeln's office during the Berlinale. Pehnert agreed, but was surprised to discover that the CDU-politician had brought a camera team with him—he intended to film their meeting and broadcast it in West German TV as a pioneering diplomatic negotiation between Eastern and Western functionaries. When Pehnert protested, the camera team was sent away by de Hadeln and the two stayed for unofficial talks.[100] Although the meeting might not have left the spectacular public impression that Volker Hassemer had hoped for, it shows the rich potential the festival had built for serving as a forum of cultural diplomacy on allegedly neutral ground—a neutrality Moritz de Hadeln knew how to stage well by making use of his Swiss citizenship. Similar practices of symbolic policy would become very common in relation to the Soviet Union and China, as we shall see in the following.

In terms of awards, which are a festival's most important currency of attention, the 1980s were also a rather successful decade for DEFA-films at the Berlinale. Four Silver Bears for actors and actresses, one for a director, and the Golden Bear for Rainer Simon's post-war drama *Die Frau und der Fremde* (The Woman and the Stranger, 1985) made the DDR one of the most-awarded countries of the 1980s. A further trophy, the *Berlinale Kamera*, was handed to the chief film functionary Horst Pehnert in 1989 to honor his decade-long collaboration with the festival. This success, however, was only the tip of the iceberg of attention that was focused on East German cinema: more than one hundred DEFA-films were screened at the festival (18 of them in competition) in the 1980s alone. As a consequence, the esteem for the Berlinale among East German filmmakers was high enough that Wolfgang Kohlhaase—who was himself elected as a jury member in 1985 after serving as Konrad Wolf's screenwriter for years—called the Berlinale retrospectively "the overall most important festival for DDR films."[101]

Forum for Soviet Cinema

At the same time, the Berlinale also played a significant role for the generation of young Soviet filmmakers associated with the reforms and transitions that began in the mid-1980s. Their films were similarly successful and staged with

[100] Jungen, 2018. pp. 283–84.

[101] "Insgesamt war die Berlinale das wichtigste Festival für ostdeutsche Filme." Blumberg, 2000. Min. 72:30.

similar strategies of awards, symbolic politics, and accompanying political debate. Soviet cinema, however, took a slightly different place in the festival cosmos. East Germany was, despite all political distance, West Berlin's neighboring country, and part of the attention came from a need to understand the people on the other side of the Wall. The USSR, on the other hand, was staged as the ultimate political villain of the 1980s, and the screening of Soviet films was thus even more spectacular. To a smaller degree, this also goes for other cinemas of the Warsaw Pact countries, most notably Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria, which were also spotlighted strongly during the 1980s.

Since the early days of the format, major European film festivals had been very open to programming Soviet films. Filmmaking pioneers Sergej Eisenstein (1898–1948) and Dziga Vertov (1896–1954) were honored posthumously with retrospectives in Cannes and Venice, where living Soviet directors like Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–86) or Mikhail Kalatozov (1903–73) were regular guests and award winners from the 1950s onwards. West Germany in general—and the Berlinale in particular—however, was strongly involved with the alliance policies of the Cold War and thus far more restricted in publicly showing affection for cultural products from the East Bloc. Official diplomatic cooperation was limited to the issue of World War II memory culture, with the overcome enmity between the countries and German gestures of guilt as connecting denominators. West German chancellor Willy Brandt's 1970 state visit to Poland and his iconic *Kniefall von Warschau* (Warsaw genuflection), which saw him falling on his knees in front of a monument commemorating the 1943 uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, is surely the most iconic example of this memorial diplomacy.

These meagre and mono-thematic diplomatic relations were mirrored in the Soviet films initially presented at the Berlinale. In 1977, the Golden Bear was awarded to *Voskhozhdeniye* (The Ascension, 1977), which marked the first time that a Soviet film had won the festival's competition. The decision to award Larisa Shepitko's (1938–79) World War II drama fits very much into the context of the West German-Soviet relations. Set at the Eastern front, the film follows the martyrdom of a Soviet soldier who is captured by the German army, endures torture, and ultimately gets executed for his refusal to give away crucial information. Despite its visual evocation of Christian passion plays—through

the conscious resemblance of the protagonist with Jesus Christ and an occasional use of religious imagery like an implied halo around his head or the penitent traitor kissing his feet on the verge of execution—*Voskhozhdeniye*'s prominent glorification of the soldiers' efforts and endurance is politically confirmative of Soviet historiography of the Great Patriotic War. As such, the programming and subsequent awarding of the film very much fit into the climate of the 1970s, in which Willy Brandt's *Kniefall* had shifted West German mnemonic culture from repression to an acknowledgement of guilt.

This level of success and even the invitation of a Soviet film was a rare exception at the Berlinale before de Hadeln's tenure. *Voskhozhdeniye* was only the second film from the Soviet Union ever screened at the festival, and it would remain the last one until 1980. From that year onwards, its new director Moritz de Hadeln turned the attention to Soviet and East Bloc cinema in a previously unprecedented manner. In the decade preceding the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the Berlinale programmed 172 Soviet films in addition to 48 Czechoslovakian, 41 Hungarian, 21 Polish, and 18 Bulgarian films. 54 of these were screened in the festival's competition, the rest went to the *Forum*, *Panorama*, and children's films sections. These numbers are a staggering increase given the fact that, taken together, during all three previous decades, each of these countries sent only two to three films to the festival in total.

At times, this focus was a conscious effort to showcase Soviet national cinema, while the quality of the films ranked second behind the country of origin. In the early 1980s in particular, films were shown occasionally simply because they had been produced in the Soviet Union. An example of this is *Moskva slezam ne verit* (Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears), which was screened in the competition in 1981. The comedic drama about the troubles of three young women in finding proper husbands later won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Despite this success, however, Moritz de Hadeln later admitted that he considered the film "a pathetic melodrama unworthy of Soviet women" and that he simply had to invite it to have the Soviet Union somehow present at that year's festival.[102]

De Hadeln was well versed in film diplomacy with the Soviet ministry of culture—before moving to Berlin, he had managed the Locarno Film Festival,

[102] „Es ist ein weinerliches, den sowjetischen Frauen unwürdiges Melodrama." Jungen, 2018. p. 300.

which had been under close surveillance by both the KGB and the Swiss secret service for its close relations to Soviet filmmakers.[103] The diplomatic qualifications he brought with him from Locarno attributed to a different understanding of relations with the Soviet Union and other Soviet Republics, which clearly distinguished him from his predecessors. Whereas Wolf Donner had caused the early departure of the Soviet delegation with the screening of *The Deer Hunter* in 1979, Moritz de Hadeln avoided major political scandals, while at the same time managing to negotiate the premieres of many more Soviet films. The actual film copies were at times difficult to obtain, especially if they dealt with politically sensitive issues, as the decision-making process in Moscow involved many different cultural functionaries. Similarly to his negotiations with the DEFA, these compromises brought the festival regular criticism from conservative politicians, who accused the Berlinale of helping the Soviets in a disinformation campaign in cultural diplomacy, screening supposedly liberal films to paint a progressive image of the country.[104]

This challenge of having to appease both the conservative hardliners in the West Berlin parliament and the skeptical Soviet film authorities significantly eased up when General Secretary Michail Gorbachev's (b. 1931) efforts to restructure the political system began to bear fruit in the second half of the 1980s. The reform process became known under the programmatic term *Perestroika* (Restructuring) and aimed to open the economy, liberalize the markets, and introduce more transparency (*Glasnost*) to the political process. In addition, the reforms also had strong repercussions in the cultural sector. For the sake of a liberalization of the film industry, filmmakers were given more rights of participation and were asked by the Ministry of Culture to reform the system of film production and distribution according to their own needs. This new agency manifested in the "5th Congress of Soviet Filmmakers" in May 1986, where the participants decided on a virtual suspension of censorship and significantly more freedoms in choosing their topics and distributing their films independently of the Ministry of Culture. In the general atmosphere of progressive reforms, most of their demands were met by the cultural authorities.

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[103] Wäfler, 2018.

[104] Jungen, 2018. p. 340.

Helped by an eased system of international distribution, the films produced under these new guidelines enabled the Berlinale to dedicate even larger parts of its program to Soviet cinema in 1987. That year's festival edition highlighted the cultural impact of *Perestroika* in a variety of ways and showed that the staging of a national cinema consisted of more than the mere programming of films. In 1987, the Berlinale used a broad range of performative strategies—from the composition of juries to the awards they hand out, and from accompanying publications to symbol politics on its side stages. It is also a telling example of the Berlinale's underlying branding concerns: in an advance press release, Moritz de Hadeln had laid out the spotlight and explicitly acknowledged that the festival was using the ongoing global interest in the Soviet Union as an unique feature to brand itself as a forum for the new Soviet cinema.

> There is an excellent range of several extraordinarily remarkable films from the USSR. For the first time, they document the changes after the internationally much debated 5th Congress of Soviet Filmmakers at one of the big festivals.[105]

Naturally, the festival's dedication was reflected in the competition section, which selected three Soviet films as well as nine films from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. A further seven films from the USSR were shown in the *Forum* and *Panorama* sections, among them several older works that had been restricted but were finally allowed to be screened following the loosened censorship guidelines. In addition, a special thematic section was dedicated to the *Umweltproblematik in der Sowjet-Union* (Environmental Problems in the Soviet Union), obviously in reaction to the ongoing news item of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant ten months earlier. The section was headlined by the first Soviet documentary shot on site of the nuclear accident, *Kolokol Chernobylya* (The Bells of Chernobyl, 1986), which was accompanied by strong public interest and sold out screenings.[106]

Alongside the programming of films, the composition of the jury reflected the focus on the East Bloc at the 1987 Berlinale. Among the eleven jury members were a Soviet writer as well as a Czech and a Romanian director.

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[105] "Aus der UdSSR kommt ein hervorragendes Angebot gleich mehrerer, überaus bemerkenswerter Filme, die erstmals auf einem der großen Festivals die Veränderungen nach dem international viel debattierten V. Kongress des sowjetischen Filmverbandes dokumentieren." *Press Release*, 1987.

[106] "*Glocken von Tschernobyl*," 1987.

But it was the West-German jury president who was presented as the emblematic connector of East and West: actor Klaus Maria Brandauer (b. 1943), who had made a successful career in Hollywood in the 1980s while at the same time starring in several high profile Soviet films. In the festival brochure, de Hadeln announced proudly:

> With Brandauer, we have found the most fitting jury president one could wish for at a film festival that stands under the banner of the bridge between East and West, an actor who was in front of the camera in the USSR as well as the USA and who began his career in his European home.[107]

Throughout the 1980s, the competition juries regularly contained one Soviet member and one or two members from other nations of the East Bloc. Before, the ratios had varied, with filmmakers from the socialist countries joining the juries occasionally. From 1980 onwards, however, two to three fixed spots were reserved for them, just as they always had been for the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and West Germany. The composition of the committee was certainly able to convey political messages, which de Hadeln's announcement of the appointment of Brandauer underlines.

Appropriately for the focus on Soviet cinema in 1987, the jury handed out the Golden Bear to a film produced in the USSR. *Tema* (The Theme, 1979) tells the story of Kim, an aging playwright who suffers from writer's block. Seeking inspiration, he travels to the countryside, where, instead of writing, he loses himself in a serenade of amorous adventures. Director Gleb Panfilov (b. 1934) had already finished the film in 1979, but it was not released until its premiere at the Berlinale because it showed the playwright as a lazy and promiscuous narcissist rather than a national poet. Suspicions that the writer's block might be read as a metaphor for censorship had further contributed to the decision of the Soviet authorities to prohibit *Tema*'s release. With the developments of *Perestroika*, however, the film was allowed to be distributed to the Berlinale, where it profited from the trending topic of Soviet censorship, received strong attention, and ultimately won the main prize of the competition. A German member of the 1987 jury admits that while *Tema* surely was "poetic, no propaganda film, silent, sensible, and masterfully directed," the

[107] "Mit Brandauer haben wir den wohl geeignetsten Jurypräsidenten gefunden, den man sich für ein Festival, das unter dem Banner der Brücke zwischen Ost und West steht, wünschen kann, einen Schauspieler, der sowohl in der UdSSR wie in den USA vor der Kamera stand und der seine Karriere in seiner Heimat Europa begann." *Filmfest-Journal 1*, 1987. p. 1.

general interest in Soviet cinema and the low expectations to its quality "of course" attributed to the decision to award the film with the Golden Bear.[108]

The festival's main stage at the *Zoo Palast*, however, was not the only stage where symbolic politics of the Cold War were performed in 1987. The most attention-catching incident took place at *Rathaus Schöneberg*, the West Berlin city hall and a historical venue for official political receptions. Here, the *Berlinale Kamera*, the honorary prize of the festival, was handed out to Elem Klimov and Jack Valenti on March 1st 1987. Both functionaries were presented as representatives of the film industries in the two major power blocs opposed in the Cold War: Klimov (1933–2003) acted as the first secretary of the Russian union of filmmakers and was a central figure in their 5th Congress, while Valenti (1921–2007) was a major U.S. studio lobbyist responsible for the European distribution of countless Hollywood films. Officially, both received their prizes for their contributions to the Berlinale, where they had acted as intermediaries of their respective countries for a long time. Yet, their awards were handed out together and in a venue with a political character rather than connections to the Berlinale—and also in the presence of Mayor Eberhard Diepgen and Senator for Culture Volker Hassemer. The meeting was effectively staged by the festival and much reported and photographed by the international media (Picture 2.11). The honorary awards were thus more a symbol of the thawing of Soviet-American cultural relations. Instead of the trophies, it was the handshake between the two rival functionaries that became the center of attention. It is important to note, however, that the awards and Moritz de Hadeln himself remained in the press pictures prominently. The fact that the event had been initiated by the Berlinale cast the festival as a relevant platform for political debate—and in this case, even quasi-diplomatic talks. In a public letter to the festival organization, West German president Richard von Weizsäcker praised the event as the *Reykjavík der Filmwelt* (Reykjavík of the film world), referencing the negotiations between Ronald Reagan and Michail Gorbachev in Iceland five months earlier.[109] This framing elevated the

[108] „Natürlich spielte es bei der Auszeichnung ein bisschen eine Rolle, dass die Sowjets plötzlich in der Lage waren, solch kritische Filme zu zeigen. Das wollten wir honorieren. Aber *Das Thema* war auch poetisch, kein Propagandafilm, still, sensibel, meisterhaft inszeniert." Quoted in Jungen, 2018. p. 334.

[109] Ibid. p. 333.

Picture 2.11: Symbolic politics on the festival stage during the *Berlinale Kamera* ceremony at *Rathaus Schöneberg*. The meeting of laureates Elem Klimov (l.) and Jack Valenti (2nd r.) is staged as a cultural diplomacy summit of historic proportions, framed by cultural senator Volker Hassemer (2nd l.) and Berlinale director Moritz de Hadeln (r.), who has arranged the event.

Berlinale to the host of one of the most important summit meetings of the 20th century.

The focus on Soviet cinema remained prominent in the following years and many of the screened films profited from this attention in terms of awards. In addition to the Golden Bear for *Tema* in 1987, nine Silver Bears and two honorary prizes were handed out to Soviet competition entries during the 1980s. The festival awarded a further sixteen Silver Bears to other countries of the East Bloc, as well as another Golden Bear to Czechoslovakia in 1990. All this was no small feat and an unprecedented success for East Bloc films at any Western film festival. The Berlinale's particular dependence on Cold War alliance policies makes this success all the more extraordinary. Its branding as the "Forum for the new Soviet cinema," as its in-house historiography puts it,[110] was thus a sign not only of a focus on a particular national cinema—in the

[110] "*1987 Yearbook*."

context of the Cold War, it also translated into the branding as a political festival that had the courage to oppose current trends of cultural diplomacy and economies of attention.

Hollywood Climbs the Wall

That the Berlinale's spotlight shifted away from the East Bloc in the early 1990s had a very particular historical reason, namely the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellite states—or, from the German perspective, the fall of the Berlin Wall. The *Mauerfall*, as the German idiom puts it, in the night of November 9th 1989 had massive consequences for the city of Berlin, which was no longer divided into two different states. The Berlinale now represented the cultural life of former East Berlin, too. With it came new audiences, new cinemas, a new infrastructure and—with the *Potsdamer Platz* in 2000—ultimately a new home right in the former border territory. These changes and the consequent expansion into East Berlin shaped the festival during the 1990s.

In its first edition after the fall of the Wall, the Berlinale embraced the current developments and the international hype around the reunification of its host city. At that time, in February 1990, the city was in a chaotic state of transition. The official reunification was still six months away and the inner-Berlin border not quite completely open, its status remaining unclear. Still, the 40th Berlinale wanted to be the first cultural event to represent both halves of the city. Plans for a unified festival were allegedly as old as the Berlinale itself. While it had remained an unfulfilled dream of longtime director Alfred Bauer, Moritz de Hadeln stated that he had been making plans for the eventual reunification and an eastward expansion of the Berlinale since 1985.[111] The relaxation of border regulations in 1989 finally made it possible to realize these plans. A festival accreditation was regarded as permission to cross the border, making the "Berlinale-pass" a valuable document for visitors to East Berlin.

The opening of the 1990 Berlinale took place at *Kino Kosmos*, the largest cinema of the DDR and one of its most glamorous film premiere venues. Outside, right on the boardwalk of the representative *Karl-Marx-Allee*, the red carpet was rolled out, surrounded by classical socialist architecture in all its concrete splendor—the Berlinale's first premiere in East Berlin made very effective use of its exoticized socialist scenery. Before the Hollywood stars

[111] Jungen, 2018. p. 291.

arrived on the concrete boulevard, however, an even more iconic photo opportunity was taken. The lead actresses of that year's opening film, Julia Roberts (b. 1967) and Sally Field (b. 1946), were driven to the remains of the Berlin Wall and climbed on top, helped by two friendly East German border policemen (Picture 2.12). The photograph of the four of them standing hand in hand on top fits perfectly well into the iconography of the *Mauerfall*, which had seen David Hasselhoff looking for freedom on New Year's Eve 1989/90 six weeks before. Yet while photographs of people standing on the Wall were a common sight in Western media at the time, visually representing the overcoming of the inner-German division, in the context of the Berlinale they had an additional dimension. Although Julia Roberts radiates naivety and innocence in the picture, she was arguably the biggest female film star of the 1990s. The strategy to use Hollywood royalty to generate publicity had been common since the early days of film festivals, but putting them on top of a monument that is a news topic of its own shows how effectively the Berlinale was playing on the political nature of its host city and its international associations. This strategy of using the most iconic Cold War landmark also

alamy

Picture 2.12: Julia Roberts (2nd l.) and Sally Field (2nd r.) standing on the Berlin Wall, holding hands with two visibly delighted East Berlin policemen.

echoes the images that were produced in the 1950s, when Berlin was staged as the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt*—only that now, a wide crack was broken into the showcase window and film stars started marching right through it.

A later attempt at this, however, shows how short lived the hype around the *Mauerfall* ultimately was. When U.S. director Billy Wilder (1906–2002) came to visit the festival as an honorary guest in 1993, he was invited to a reunion with actor Horst Buchholz (1933–2003). Wilder had directed the German film star in his 1961 comedy *One, Two, Three* about an American PR agent who is sent to Berlin to negotiate putting Coca-Cola on the East German market, but is held up by a series of comedic developments involving a communist boxer from the East, played by Buchholz. What the film lacked in artistic quality, it made up for with historical relevance: on the night of August 13th 1961, the Wall was built right through the film set, causing the shooting to be delayed and being continued on a sound stage in Munich. In 1993, Buchholz and Wilder were brought together in front of the *Brandenburger Tor* for a photo shooting that was supposed to bring closure to the troubled production history of *One, Two, Three*, which features many scenes with the landmark in the background that ultimately could not be shot on location. The Berlinale was supposed to be the facilitator of this closure. The recreated photograph, however, shows both stars standing aimlessly and irritated in the Berlin winter, visibly exhausted and freezing (Pictures 2.13 and 2.14). Reportedly, neither Buchholz nor Wilder understood the idea behind the photo and were very upset about the appointment.[112] Thus, the picture tells the viewer more about a staged PR shot than conveying the historical gravity that the Berlinale had aimed for.

The 1990 edition of the festival energetically rushed ahead into its new eastern territories and celebrated the end of the Cold War by handing out the Golden Bear *ex aequo* to a Czech and a Greek production—two films representing the dissolving power blocs. These efforts were however soon hampered by fading interest. Initially, the screenings in the East Berlin cinema halls that participated in the festival from 1990 onwards were poorly attended. It took the festival some time to find its footing in the East, where the Berlinale was less welcome than its organizers might have expected in the preceding decades. Moreover, the festival had lost an important source of films.

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[112] Simbeni and Sannwald, 2018. p. 86.

Picture 2.13: Billy Wilder (l.) and Horst Buchholz (r.) during the filming of *One, Two, Three* (1961), before production was interrupted by the construction of the Berlin Wall right through the film set in August 1961.

Picture 2.14: More than 30 years later, their film shooting is symbolically finished in this publicity stunt of the Berlinale that visually reunites Wilder (r.) and Buchholz (l.) in front of *Brandenburger Tor* in 1993.

As film industries in the East Bloc found themselves in radical transitions—which few filmmaking careers survived—the flow of films rapidly ran dry after 1990. With the Iron Curtain down, the East Bloc had lost much of its political appeal anyway, and the festival had to find new territories to showcase in Berlin.

Discovering Three Chinas

Luckily, the next candidates for an encounter even further east had already been established in the mid-1980s. Already at the beginning of his time as festival director, Moritz de Hadeln had commenced annual trips to China to sight films for the Berlinale. In festival historiographies, this is often attributed to his personal fascination with the country and contacts to the Chinese film industry that were enabled through the networks of his late friend Edgar Snow, an American journalist and biographer of Mao Zedong.[113] While de Hadeln's enthusiasm might have been genuine, his trips must also be seen in the general context of film festivals discovering new national cinemas and their pressure to present the next big thing. As the festivals' blind spots in East Asia grew thinner, with Japanese and Korean films already being invited regularly, an attempt to present Chinese cinema was a logical next step for the Berlinale to raise its international profile.

The term Chinese cinema is rather problematic, especially considering the troubled 20th-century history of the country. Without going too deeply into this debate,[114] a brief excursion into the state of art filmmaking in the "three Chinas" (the People's Republic, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) during the Reform Era following the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 will be helpful. The "Fifth Generation" of Chinese filmmakers that was showcased at the Berlinale in the 1980s and 90s were all from a single cohort of directors graduating from the *Bejing Film Academy* in 1982. As many members of this small group soon started to develop an influential and genuine style of filmmaking, the Chinese press labelled them the "Fifth Generation" after four previous waves of similar innovations.[115] Following the creative drought during and after the Cultural

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[113] Cowie, 2011. pp. 45–46.

[114] Zhang Yingjin gives a comprehensive overview of the problematics of the term—which he deems flawed but ultimately necessary—in the first chapter of his monograph on the national dimension of films from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. See Zhang, 2004. pp. 1–12.

[115] Bettinson, 2012. p. 6.

Revolution, these directors and their mentors at the film academy refused to be mere tools of the cultural industry by producing propaganda works. Instead, they aimed to modernize Chinese cinema by favoring taciturn and ambiguous storytelling that focused on individual experiences rather than collective ones. For this, the Fifth Generation envisioned a reduced visual approach that demanded active participation from the audience instead of mere consumption. The relaxed political climate of the Deng Xiaoping era (1982–87) made it possible for this program—even though it was deemed subversive—to not be banned but rather to be supported and even subsidized by the state. Furthermore, the poor quality of state television had driven urban audiences back to the cinemas in the late 1970s. The flourishing film industry could consequently afford to indulge in experiments like the Fifth Generation.

Similar new waves were initiated simultaneously on the shores of the South China Sea, although in very different contexts. At that time, Hong Kong was a small British colony on the verge of being subjected to Chinese authority. The handover plan had been announced in the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 but was not realized until 1997, when the harbor city became a Chinese Special Administrative Region with certain privileges. A generation of young post-1984 filmmakers consequently took up the citizens' anxieties about these changes and their future Chinese government, negotiating issues of dual identity and rebellion against authorities in their films. In doing so, they developed a new, ambiguous film language that defined the Hong Kong art cinema of the 1980s and 90s.

In Taiwan, it was also antipathies against mainland China that inspired the evolution of a new wave of filmmaking, although again under different circumstances. After the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, Taiwan has claimed to represent all of China and named itself the Republic of China. The conflict with the People's Republic of China had been brooding ever since, and in the early 1980s, the nationalist government discovered cinema as a medium of propaganda and started to order films that dealt with the Republic's recent history and sought to reinforce its claim as the legitimate successor to the original Chinese Republic of 1911. Although the attempt backfired and remained short-lived, it gave birth to a school of filmmaking that dealt with previously taboo historical events and the political status of Taiwan, especially

its impact on individual identities torn between tradition and rapid modernization.

Although these three different "new waves" of Chinese cinema developed independently, they had three characteristics in common that defined their relationship with European film festivals. First, they mostly failed to connect with domestic Chinese audiences, an experience similar to the case of the Iranian and many other "new waves." Their approach was seen as too difficult, and most of the films did not sell more than a handful of copies to their respective local cinemas, resulting in very few screenings. This stood in harsh contrast to their reception at film festivals, where they generated much more attention and influence, starting with the Berlinale. Second, they dealt with topics from their respective local histories—like the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic or the economic boom and rapid modernization in Taiwan—but concentrated on the impact that these larger developments had on the lives of individuals or families. Third, they told these stories in a style that was less literal and more visual than had been usual in their respective film industries. Speaking about the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien, who presented his debut feature in the 1986 *Forum*, American film scholar James Udden identifies him as the "forefather" of "the pan-Asian festival style."[116] With this characterization, Udden hints at the long takes, static cameras, and rural settings that the films from these new waves often worked with, developing a distinct visual style that was soon deemed typical for Chinese cinemas and became very popular at European film festivals.

By the late 1980s, the Berlinale had become the festival that was widely credited with starting this trend. Since 1982 it had screened more and more films from the three Chinas in an explicit endeavor to import Chinese cinema for European exhibition. These efforts were crowned for the first time when the Golden Bear was awarded to *Hong Gaoliang* (Red Sorghum) in 1988. Directed by Zhang Yimou (b. 1950), who would become the most prominent face of the Fifth Generation, the historical drama is set in a rural area in the region of Shandong in the 1930s during the Japanese invasion. The story revolves around a woman who is widowed after an arranged marriage and starts to take over the winery of her late husband. To underline its historiographical character, the film is narrated by the widow's grandson and displays all the characteristics

[116] Udden, 2012. p. 85.

that made the Fifth Generation's cinema attractive in the eyes of the competition jury: innovative camera work, a striking visuality based on strong colors, history told from the perspective of the powerless, a rural setting, and a healthy dose of skepticism towards both tradition (represented by arranged marriages and the male monopoly on economic power) and state-sponsored modernity (represented by the Japanese efforts to destroy the titular red cornfield to make way for street construction). As such, the Golden Bear in 1988 went to *Hong Gaoliang* not only as a singular work but also as a representative of the Fifth Generation, of which it was an obvious example.

The success of Zhang Yimou's film in Berlin had a striking effect on his domestic career, which is paradigmatic for many awarded non-Western films and filmmakers. Although the director became famous in China after the much propagated Golden Bear, this did not necessarily translate into popularity. The initial domestic reception of *Hong Gaoliang* was mixed. On the one hand, the film became an immediate success when it was re-released in Chinese theaters. This success, combined with later awards at other festivals, made it possible for Zhang to direct films on larger and larger scales. A decade later, he was able to finance international blockbusters like *Yingxiong* (Hero, 2002). On the other hand, the film's slow and ambiguous narrative remained unintelligible for many people. Especially in the region of Shandong, where the film was shot, people were reportedly enraged by their depiction as uncivilized, brutal, and sexually promiscuous peasants. The fact that—at least in northeastern China—the figure of the bear has insulting connotations did not help *Hong Gaoliang*'s reputation in that region, given that the film had been awarded with a bear statue.[117]

It should be noted that it was not the Golden Bear alone that helped the film at the domestic box office. Its domestic success was surely catalyzed by the award and the regarding news coverage, but it can also be read in the context of efforts by the *Bejing Film Academy* to make Chinese films more popular. The years before had seen a sharp decline in audience numbers and financial losses for production companies in the People's Republic, causing anxieties that the avant-garde filmmakers might loose their connection with Chinese audiences.

117 „In this region, the bear can be used as a swearword, it symbolizes impoliteness and brutality." Quoted in Jungen, 2018. p. 371.

Consequently, efforts were made to make films more accessible and less experimental, a strategy that started to work out in the late 1980s.[118]

The success in Berlin, however, surely shaped the cinema of the Fifth Generation as a whole. Film scholar Zhang Yingjin states that the Golden Bear in 1988 "marked an end to avant-gardism and a beginning of commercialism" for their films.[119] This evaluation not only hints at Zhang Yimou's later status as a commercially successful filmmaker directing state-commissioned historical or fantasy blockbusters like *Jinling Shisan Chai* (Flowers of War, 2011) and *Chang Cheng* (The Great Wall, 2016) starring Hollywood superstars Christian Bale and Matt Damon, and even the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games in Bejing. It also describes the increasing gap between art, mainstream, and propaganda films in mainland China. As the relatively small branch of art cinema represented by the Fifth Generation drew enough attention due to their successes at international film festivals, their anxieties over their domestic reputation decreased. The accusation that they produced their films solely for international audiences while completely losing touch with Chinese viewers became commonplace. Zhang Yingjin pointedly remarks that the Fifth Generation

> started as the state-subsidized production of an ideologically subversive art cinema peripheral to the core in the mid-1980s and has mutated to the internationally funded co-production of "ethnographic cinema" of "authentic" Chinese culture and history since the early 1990s.[120]

In this evaluation, the Chinese case is paradigmatic for the reciprocal influence of European film festivals and non-Western art films, a dynamic that haunts Iranian art cinema until today in the shape of accusations of solely producing "festival films."

Visually Reconciling China and Taiwan

As they had been in the case of the Soviet and East German films in the previous decade, Moritz de Hadeln and his co-curators were careful to only invite those films from the People's Republic of China that had an official international screening permission by the Ministry of Culture. Since the Berlinale is a state-funded festival, violations could have led to diplomatic rows.

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118 Zhang, 2004. pp. 239–40.

119 Ibid. p. 238.

120 Ibid. p. 3.

From a practical point of view, the festival organization could also not afford to lose their connections to the cultural authorities and put future collaborations at risk. However, the Berlinale's 1993 edition proved that screening films from two different Chinas—the People's Republic and Taiwan—had to lead to diplomatic turmoil at some point. But the festival had proven in the past that it knew well how to effectively use the requisite of diplomacy for political performances that played into its image. As with the Berlinale's strong stance against the Soviet delegation leaving the festival in protest against *The Deer Hunter* in 1979 and the summit meeting between Jack Valenti and Elem Klimov in 1987, Sino-Taiwanese relations were no exception in this regard.

1993 marked the second year in a row that a Taiwanese film was invited to the Berlinale competition. The selection of young director Ang Lee (b. 1954) and his English-language comedy *Xi Yan* (The Wedding Banquet) reflected the increasing focus on the country. In addition, the *Forum* and *Panorama* sections each screened one further Taiwanese film. According to Moritz de Hadeln, this raised suspicions at the Chinese embassy. They contacted the festival director to share their concern that the Taiwanese films might run under the label "Republic of China," the official name of Taiwan and one that was not recognized by China and also many Western countries including Germany. The embassy warned that the Chinese delegation would have to cancel their attendance and pull all of their nine films from the program if the festival would use that name in their announcements.[121] While de Hadeln put a great deal of effort into using "Taiwan" instead of "Republic of China" in any official publications, the atmosphere remained uneasy during the festival. To break the ice, the festival director invited the official delegations of both countries to dinner at a restaurant near the *Zoo Palast*. Since both countries did not have official diplomatic relations at that time, de Hadeln intended to use this opportunity to repeat his success of the Soviet-American film summit of 1987. This time, however, no opportunity to photograph a cheerfully conciliative handshake came up. Both delegations of distributors, producers, and officials of the Ministry of Culture met at the restaurant and managed to negotiate a complex seating order. Yet de Hadeln remembers that the atmosphere was so frozen that not a single word was uttered during and after the dinner, despite

[121] Jungen, 2018. p. 382–83.

the apparently Herculean efforts of the talkative festival director and his wife to get a conversation going.[122]

While the unofficial attempt at a reconciliation behind closed doors was unsuccessful, on the public level it worked out all the better. To appease the anxious Chinese delegation, the festival put two of the biggest film stars from the People's Republic into spotlight. Director Zhang Yimou—who had won the Golden Bear for *Hong Gaoliang* in 1988—was appointed as president of the competition jury and in addition, a *Berlinale Kamera* was awarded to Gong Li, the lead actress of said film. And, as if to crown the efforts to reconcile the two Chinas, the jury headed by Zhang ultimately awarded the Golden Bear *ex aequo* to two films, one from Taiwan and one from the People's Republic. Officially, the jury decides the winner independently of the festival organizers, which is the golden rule of any serious competition and a requirement for A-festivals according to FIAPF-regulations. But while de Hadeln later went out of his way to explain that he had nothing to do with the awarding, the jury around Zhang had undeniably noted the diplomatic row around the invitation of Taiwanese films and the festival director's efforts to do both countries justice.

Aesthetically, the Golden Bear winners of 1993 could not have been more different. The Chinese laureate *Xiang Hun Nü* (The Women from the Lake of Scented Souls) had been directed by Xie Fei (b. 1942), who had already been awarded the prize for best director three years earlier. His slow drama displays the usual elements of the "pan-Asian festival style" as outlined by James Udden. In long takes, it tells the story of a sesame oil maker in the countryside who rebels quietly against the patriarchy by socially climbing to become the owner of her oil mill and by having extramarital affairs. At the same time, however, modernity does not bring her and her family the wellness and security they had hoped for. Insofar, the film fits well into the unwritten quality criteria of European film festivals. Zhang Yingjin however ranks the influence of *Xiang Hun Nü* on Chinese film history as negligible, apart from making female sexuality and extramarital sex slightly more accepted in the Ministry of Culture.[123]

At first sight, the Taiwanese winner *Xi Yan* (The Wedding Banquet, 1993) does not seem to fit onto the same stage as *Xiang Hun Nü*. Compared to the rural

[122] Ibid. p. 385

[123] Zhang, 2004. p. 287.

tranquility of the Fifth Generation, the film feels like an outright feast of entertainment. The story revolves around Wai-Tung, a young Taiwanese expat living in New York with his boyfriend. When his conservative parents come to visit, Wai-Tung has to fake a wedding with a Chinese woman to satisfy their marital demands. With its Manhattan setting, large parts of the dialogue in English, a fast narrative with plenty of jokes, a strong and heartfelt identification with the main characters—including the conservative parents—and a celebration of tolerance and multicultural understanding, *Xi Yan* feels very close to the Hollywood-produced 1990s romantic comedies that were hugely popular at the time. In fact, the film became at surprise hit in the United States and the most financially profitable production of the year—no small feat given that 1993 also saw the release of *Jurassic Park*.[124]

A closer look at the political subtext, however, makes the win of Ang Lee's comedy less surprising. The negotiation of homosexuality in a conservative environment as well as the generational conflict following the rapid economic and cultural modernization in East Asia are actually very much in line with the Berlinale's interest in ethnographic filmmaking and politics. Furthermore, Ang Lee's career would become the most successful case of a non-Western director being discovered by a European film festival. He had shot his first three films, including *Xi Yan*, with the money and oversight of the Taiwanese Central Motion Picture Company, but after the 1993 Golden Bear, Lee left the local Taiwanese film industry for good and rose to international fame. The attention he received three years later after his second Golden Bear —for the film adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*—enabled an astonishing Hollywood career, directing big budget studio films like *Hulk* (2003) as well as successful auteur films like *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) in between. With *Life of Pi* (2012), Lee became the only Asian director to receive two Academy Awards.

However different *Xiang Hun Nü* and *Xi Yan* and their respective impacts might have been, the fact that both of them were awarded the Golden Bear made the Berlinale once again emerge as an intermediator in an international conflict. The jury was well aware of the political significance of their decision. According to one juror, the group's president Zhang Yimou said in a jury meeting: "If we award both films, we recognize not only their artistic quality,

[124] Klady, 1994.

but both Chinas."[125] The reconciliation was perfect when the winners Ang Lee and Xie Fei entered the stage together and Lee diplomatically refrained from calling his home country "Republic of China" in his acceptance speech. Consequently, the press photos of the two directors holding each other's hands high up into the camera signify much more than the product of a jury unable to decide on a singular film (Picture 2.15). As the two directors had been established as representatives of China and Taiwan, theirs was also a handshake between two countries in conflict. The two bear statues framing the picture as well as the signature golden curtain of the *Zoo Palast* in the background clearly identify the Berlinale as the facilitator of the event, which was staged as another successful cinematic reconciliation between two strict political rivals, at least visually. In real life, this reconciliation of course never happened—the only thing that was actually successful was the festival's symbolic politics.

Picture 2.15: The People's Republic of China and Taiwan shake hands in this visually striking act of symbolic politics enabled by the *ex aequo* Golden Bears for Xie Fei (l.) and Ang Lee (r.) in 1993.

The focus on Chinese cinema during the era of Moritz de Hadeln remained strong until the end of his tenure and is one of the cornerstones of the festival program until today. In 2001, when de Hadeln's contract with the

125 Jungen, 2018. p. 386.

Berlinale was cancelled after more than two decades, China's presence at the festival was again very palpable. Gong Li (b. 1965), the lead actress from *Hong Gaoliang,* was jury president and awarded *Bejing Bicycle* by Wang Xiaoshuai with the Grand Jury Prize and Taiwanese director Lin Cheng Sheng with the Silver Bear for best director for his film *Ai Ni Ai Wo* (Betelnut Beauty, 2000). Even though de Hadeln's twenty-year impact on the Berlinale is often curiously downplayed in the festival's in-house historiography, his achievement in discovering Chinese cinema is what he is remembered for. This is unsurprising given that the astonishing careers of Zhang Yimou and Ang Lee were kickstarted at the Berlinale and they consequently qualify as excellent poster boys for the festival. Actress Gong Li can be mentioned in this regard, too, since she later rose to being the undisputed superstar of Chinese cinema, with an international popularity unusual for Asian actresses. Being the institution that singlehandedly discovered these and other filmmakers still brings much prestige to the Berlinale.

These claims to enabling successful careers and giving birth to global film stars are certainly understandable in the context of the highly competitive field of European film festivals. Even an A-festival like the Berlinale has to constantly prove its relevance to journalists, audiences, filmmakers, and the funding state institutions—as well as sponsors from the private sector, which have become increasingly relevant since the early 2000s. However, the underlying assumption that non-Western filmmakers need to be "discovered" by European film festivals in the first place deserves at least some level of critical inquiry. In an increasingly globalized film industry, shaped by international co-productions and—in the digital age—even a global reception, this notion seems very outdated. In the 1980s, it already carried strong implications of a quasi-colonial quality control and symbolic crowning through European film festivals, who would decide which films and directors are elevated into the global Olympus of filmmaking. These practices of curation, exhibition, and elevation apparently still can not entirely cast off the traditions of display developed in the era of world exhibitions, as I have argued in Chapter One.

While these assertions can certainly also be made in relation to most other European film festivals, the particularities of the Berlinale make it an especially interesting case. The branding as *the* political festival was carefully fostered over the five decades I have covered in this chapter to a degree that the

label is omnipresent in its stage practices until today, since Dieter Kosslick happily adopted it when he followed Moritz de Hadeln in 2001. In a 2018 exhibition by the *Deutsche Kinemathek* on press photos from the festival history called *Zwischen den Filmen* (Between the Films), *Politik* is fittingly listed as a separate category, shoulder to shoulder with sections on *Fashion* and *Stars.* In addition to photos of politicians visiting film premieres and receptions, the *Politik* section exhibits a "best-of" of the festival's symbolic politics: the press conference on *o.k.* in 1970, the Soviet delegation departing in protest over *The Deer Hunter* in 1979, Ang Lee and Xie Fei holding hands in 1993, and finally Dieter Kosslick standing concerned next to Jafar Panahi's empty chair in 2011, which I will address in Chapter Five. These pictures show how little the Berlinale's strategies of staging the political have changed since 1951. Their display in a separate exhibition category further underlines that these practices are continuously considered to be integral to the festival brand.

As I have shown in this chapter so far, the first phase of the Berlinale's incorporation of the political was defined by its appropriation of Berlin's contested status in the 1950s and 60s. Taking its cue from Western associations of the blocked city surrounded by the Soviet-controlled DDR, the Berlinale effectively employed its red carpets and public receptions on an urban stage perceived as a political hotspot. In the 1970s, the festival stages then became hotspots of their own, initially against their will and then increasingly gratefully, happily welcoming diplomatic scandals to establish their branding as a forum for political turmoil. Finally, in the 1980s and 90s, the political was nationalized and attributed to communist rogue countries which were eagerly exhibited. The political exoticism of the close but estranged East Germany as well as of the previously demonized Soviet Union or of the supposedly unknown depths of the Far East was deeply inscribed into the Western "discovery" of their national cinemas.

It is precisely this showcasing of the nationalized political that characterizes the era of Dieter Kosslick, Moritz de Hadeln's successor as festival director. The notion of discovery, the ethnographic interest that transforms films and filmmakers into representatives of their country, the showcase of the politically exotic, and the irritation of audience expectations are all ingredients into the festival recipe that Kosslick's predecessor established during his twenty-year tenure. As such, these elements will resurface in the

following chapters on Iranian cinema, which is arguably the most prolific recent case of this phenomenon. In many ways, Iran succeeded China as the Berlinale's country in focus after its novelty factor had worn off in the early 2000s. However, before turning towards the role of Iranian cinema in the following chapters, it will be necessary to consider the wider Iranian-German relationship. Iran has had special place in West Berlin public consciousness long before it became a country in focus at the Berlinale, with associations that go back beyond the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and start with Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his wives.

2.4 The Special Berlin-Iran Connection

From the late 19th century onwards, Germany and Iran slowly extended their previously not mentionable diplomatic relations with a series of trade agreements. This development was rooted in both countries' ongoing struggles with Russian, British, and later French dominance in the Middle East. In Iran, the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925) intended to break free from imperial influence and eyed the German Kaiserreich (1871–1918) as a trade partner with presumably low colonial ambitions, while the latter used Iran to provoke anti-colonial sentiments against their own neighboring political enemies. The trade relations continued to evolve after the end of World War I in 1918 and into the Pahlavi dynasty, which took power in 1925. By the mid 1930s, Nazi Germany had become Iran's strongest trade partner and diplomatic relations remained friendly. After Germany had started World War II in 1939, Iran at first remained its ally but was quickly and without much resistance occupied by the United States and Great Britain in 1941. Ideologically, the ties between the Nazis and Iran were more loose than often assumed. Although the race theories promoted by the German fascists assumed both people part of the Aryan race, Iranians were usually given as a prime example of an impure people that had mixed up with other ethnicities.[126] A loose German association of Iran with Aryanism, however, was established during that time and survived the eventual downfall of the Nazis in 1945.

In the bloc politics that evolved in the early days of the Cold War, West Germany and Iran shared a similar international position. Although 2,500

[126] For a closer examination of that period, see Hirschfeld, 1980. pp. 135–299.

kilometers apart and with very different degrees of involvement in the war, both countries were set at strategically crucial positions and—from the Western perspective—seen as bridge posts to the East. This resulted in both a strong political surveillance or, at times, active involvement by the Western Allied and a relatively strong position of power, as the latter were highly dependent on their cooperation. Especially Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–80), who had been installed by the United States and Britain in 1941 as a presumably pro-Western leader of Iran, started to play out this dependency by approaching the Soviet Union time and again, pressuring the United States into political favors in the 1950s and 60s. This political strategy very much shaped German-Iranian relations, too. Until the 1969, West Germany did not maintain relations with countries that recognized the DDR as a legitimate nation state, a policy known as the *Hallstein-Doktrin*. This gave Iran, which officially was not part of any power bloc, a strong political leverage towards the BRD, which remained eager to appease the country and to not cause any kind of affront that might cause the country to approach the DDR.[127]

German Dreams of Royalty

The prevalence of the West German paranoia and the resulting appeasement policy towards Iran went beyond diplomatic circles, which is interesting in regard to the public image of Iran in the BRD. Especially media censorship was a concern from the 1950s onwards. In one exemplary instance in 1965, the Iranian embassy contacted the federal government with an order to prohibit the term "Arab Gulf" in West German newspapers—a sensitive terminological issue until today—which led a journalist of the liberal newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* to speak of the "German Persia-Complex" (deutscher Persien-Komplex).[128] Despite this sensitivity, the topic that was covered most obsessively by West German media was more gossipy than one might assume, namely the private life of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and especially his second wife, Soraya Esfandiary-Bakhtiary (1932–2001).

Soraya, a nickname soon adopted by the tabloids, married the Shah in 1951. Until that point, the then 19 year old had spent a large part her prior life in Berlin, where she had been born to a Russian mother and an Iranian father.

[127] Michels, 2017. pp. 31–36.

[128] Quoted in Ibid. p. 36.

Her German background and the royal marriage into an exotic country known from fairytales made Soraya a perfect projection surface for the worn out and glamour-hungry West German public after World War II. The London-based historian Eckhard Michels assumes in his book on the Shah's state visit in 1967:

> Soraya's career seemed [...] to be a parable for Germany's return to power after World War II, from ruins to prosperity, from international isolation back to the spotlight of the world public.[129]

The popularity of Soraya in the *Bundesrepublik* of the 1950s can hardly be underestimated. In 1955, the conservative newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* called her "the most successful, even though involuntary cover girl of the German tabloids."[130] In 1961, an exhaustive survey among West Germans concluded that Soraya was the most recognizable woman among their respondents, placed on the top spot before the likes of Sophia Loren or Marilyn Monroe.[131] During the peak of the media hype, the *Shahbanu* (Farsi for Shah's wife) almost prompted an amendment to the German constitution: after German tabloids and the yellow press had spread rumors on a royal separation in 1958 and thus affronted the Iranian foreign ministry, the *Bundestag* debated a significant extension of §103 StGB—which prohibits the defamation of foreign dignitaries—to their relatives. Due to protests from journalists, the *Lex Soraya*, as the amendment was nicknamed, never got passed, especially after news of the couple's actual divorce had broken later that year.

Although throughout the 1950s and 60s, Soraya and the Shah were discussed in most West German newspapers in an astonishingly positive and unpolitical light, the most obsessive and widely circulating genre in that regard was the yellow press (*Regenbogenpresse*), an extra-colorful and sensationalist sub-genre of the tabloids. Popular among the post-war society for their escapism and scandals that bordered the fantastic, their staging of the couple is mainly responsible for the West German associations with pre-revolutionary Iran. In 1977, German media scholar Richard Blank has argued that the Shah had conveniently filled the vacuum of glamorous leadership left by the abdication of

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129 "Die Karriere Sorayas schien [...] eine Parabel für den Wiederaufstieg Deutschlands nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg aus Trümmern zum Wohlstand, aus der internationalen Isolation zurück ins Rampenlicht der Weltöffentlichkeit zu sein." Ibid. p. 39.

130 "das erfolgreichste, wenn auch unfreiwillige Covergirl der deutschen Illustrierten" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 5th 1955.

131 Michels, 2017. p. 49.

Kaiser Wilhelm in 1918 and the defeat of Adolf Hitler in 1945.[132] A satirical 1967 television segment on the Shah's state visit to West Germany confirms this idea, calling him "the emperor from the Orient, the *Shahanshah* who—be it with Soraya, be it with Farah—since 15 years helps to close a gap in the German civic spirit."[133] In extension of that argument on the couple helping to close this "gap in the German civic spirit", historian Simone Derix later identified Soraya as "the empress adopted by the Germans."[134]

In his *Schicksalsberichte vom Pfauenthron* (Fateful Reports from the Peacock Throne), Richard Blank has collected and edited a vast amount of West German yellow press coverage on the Shah an his wife.[135] In these reports, the fact that a young woman born and raised in Berlin of all places was now so close to the "last *Kaiser* of the world"[136] and became "the fairytale princess of our times"[137] is indeed the prevailing theme during the 1950s. More importantly, of course, was a healthy interest in the state of the royal relationship—magazines like *Wochenend*, *Heim und Welt*, and *Frau im Spiegel* kept their readers informed if the couple was currently overshadowed by clouds of crisis or sailing "all alone on the dream ship of love."[138] The cause of this voyeuristic interest, however, was always Soraya's connection to Berlin and Germany. For one thing, the papers often stressed the love of the German people for the *Shahbanu*:

> Does she feel the friendship of her German fans? Does she sense the yearning with which millions of Germans long to hear a direct greeting of hers?[139]

The weekly *Wochenend*, which had asked this question passionately, later quoted her: "Germany is my second, or better, my first home!"[140] In other instances,

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[132] Blank, 1977. p. 300.

[133] "Der Kaiser aus dem Morgenland, der *Schahanschah*, der - sei's mit Soraya, sei's mit Farah - seit 15 Jahren eine Lücke im deutschen Bürgersinn schließen hilft." Brodmann, 1967. Min. 3:45–4:00.

[134] Derix, 2008.

[135] Blank, 1977.

[136] "der letzte Kaiser der Welt" *Das Neue Blatt*, no. 3, 1975. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 298.

[137] "die Märchenprinzessin unserer Zeit" *Wochenend*, no. 2, 1955. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 260.

[138] *Heim und Welt*, no. 24, 1957. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 111.

[139] "Ob sie die Freundschaft ihrer deutschen Anhänger fühlt? Ob sie die Sehnsucht spürt, mit der Millionen Deutsche darauf warten, einen direkten Gruß von ihr zu hören?" *Wochenend*, no. 40, 1954. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 277.

[140] "Deutschland ist meine zweite, oder besser, meine erste Heimat!" *Wochenend*, no. 7, 1968. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 278.

Picture 2.16: The cover of *Frau im Spiegel* 17, 1958, showing Soraya (l.) in all her modesty of a regular young woman from Berlin following her divorce from the Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (r.).

the press brought up more ethnic imagery when dealing with "this girl from the blood of a German mother,"[141] "the endearing German-blooded wife of the Shah of Persia."[142] *Das Neue Blatt* quoted a "source close to the Persian court" calling the Germans "the large, powerful, influential tribe of people to which Soraya herself belongs and who respects, admires, protects her."[143] This imagery of blood and heritage, of tribe and root clearly evokes the vocabulary of the Nazis. As such, the Pahlavi court became a stage on which the recently condemned racist ideology was allowed to enter again, establishing a connection to the audience that went into forbidden territory, thus making it all the more exciting.

In addition to Soraya's national heritage, it was her modesty and down-to-earthness that made her an ideal figure of identification to the German readership. After her eventual separation from the Shah in 1958, *Frau im Spiegel* juxtaposed the ex-lovers in a striking cover where Soraya was presented as the modest girl from the streets of Berlin again (Picture 2.16). Her plain coat and small, ordinary handbag were contrasted with the glamour and military splendor of Mohammad Reza's medal-filled uniform. Reports had also often denied any kind of political aspirations in the Shah's wife:

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141 "dieses Mädchen aus dem Blut einer deutschen Mutter" *Neue Post*, October 23rd 1954. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 203.

142 "die reizende deutschblütige Gemahlin des Schahs von Persien" *Wochenend*, no. 6, 1955. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 240.

143 "Den großen, mächtigen, einflußreichen Volksstamm, dem Soraya selbst angehört und der sie anerkennt, bewundert, beschützt." *Das Neue Blatt*, no. 22, 1967. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 294.

> The beautiful wife of the Shah knows neither political ambition nor does she own a will to power. Soraya is nothing more than a lovestruck young woman who wants nothing more than being happy.[144]

The reader was informed that the "lovestruck young woman" was also often homesick and regularly wrote letters to her mother. The yellow press put much effort into telling a relatable fairytale one about a common girl from Berlin transported into a tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*, generating empathy for the empress while reproducing all kinds of Orientalist phantasies.

In 1958, the catastrophe happened—the Shah divorced his German wife. During the following years, the yellow press narrative evolved in two intriguing directions. First, the empathy with Soraya rose to a record level, as the world cried for the fallen princess and "uncounted thousands want to do something good to her, [...] to send her heartfelt letters or even presents" to cheer her up.[145] Yet, second, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was never blamed for the divorce, because their separation was framed as a matter of destiny, since *Shahbanu* had not gifted her husband an heir to his throne, giving him no choice but to seek himself another wife after seven years of childless marriage. Soraya of course remained a central figure in the Shah's emotional life and "the only woman he has ever truly loved"[146] even after her exile from the court. During the 1960s, headlines claiming Mohammad Reza's ongoing love for her continued in the tabloids. With this twist, the yellow press extended their reader's love to the Shah and later his second wife, Faraḥ (b. 1938).

Already in the early days of the Pahlavis' marital crisis, the yellow press started to extend the empathy for Soraya to her husband. Concerning the rumors around the empress' infertility, *Wochend* reported in 1957: "The people grumble, the mullahs grumble. Of the two lovers' most personal concern they make a major state issue."[147] The West German public's affection for the

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[144] "Die schöne Gattin des Schahs kennt weder politischen Ehrgeiz noch besitzt sie einen Willen zur Macht. Soraya ist nichts anderes als eine verliebte junge Frau, die nur glücklich sein möchte." *Wochenend*, no. 4, 1954. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 111.

[145] "Ungezählte Tausende möchten ihr Gutes tun. Selbst Ärmste der Armen bestürmen die Zeitungen mit Nachfragen um Sorayas Privatadresse, weil man ihr herzliche Briefe oder sogar Geschenke zuleiten möchte." *Heim und Welt*, no. 52, 1959. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 80-81.

[146] "mit der einzigen Frau, die er jemals wirklich geliebt hat." *7 Tage*, no. 43, 1974. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 119.

[147] "Es murrt das Volk, es murren die Mullahs. Aus dem persönlichsten Anliegen zweier liebender Menschen machen sie eine Haupt- und Staatsaktion." *Wochenend*, no. 25, 1957. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 96.

suffering lovebirds was carried over from Soraya to Mohammad Reza when the latter remarried and, finally, had children with his new wife Farah. From the 1960s onwards, the tabloids sprang at the Shah's new family life and the monarch transformed from the people's loving father to a caring father of four children: Under headlines like "The Shah: I tell a fairytale to my children every night"[148] the papers detailed how "like any happy father, the world's last *Kaiser* can play with his children for hours and hours."[149]

Yet underneath all the deep interest in the soap opera lives of the royal protagonists, the West German media hype was not simply based on personal concern and sympathy. The tabloid's love for the Pahlavis was embedded into the assumption of a particularly strong bond between the two countries. The reports were full of details like Mohammad Reza driving a Mercedes or Soraya founding a kindergarten based on German concepts. Even the royal pets became objects of interest—as long as they were German:

> I know no animal in the world that is, in his whole essence, so superiorly funny and at the same time moody as a dachshund. Back in the days, when I was a little girl, my grandfather [...] had a dachshund, and as a young girl I have always wanted to own a dachshund.[150]

Wochenend quoted Soraya in 1956 after remarking that the couple had just bought two dachshunds from a breeder based in the province of North Rhine-Westphalia who had previously provided the court with a couple of German shepherds.

In addition to these intimate details of German heritage flowing into the *Golestan* palace in Tehran, the bilateral friendship was also celebrated on a broader political level. The West German media narrative of the 1953 coup against Moḥammad Moṣṣadeq (1882–1967) is the most shining example for how close the BRD stood behind the Iranian monarchy. An extensive sensationalist report on the political situation in *Wochenend*, for example, described the former Iranian prime minister as a "hook-nosed old man" who, backed by "swift and chatty wirepullers," had enriched himself and his greedy friends under the

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[148] "Der Schah: Jeden Abend erzähle ich meinen Kindern ein Märchen." *Das Neue Blatt*, no. 9, 1972. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 99.

[149] "Mit ihr, der fast 12jährigen Schwester Farahnaz und dem bald neunjährigen Ali Reza kann der letzte Kaiser der Welt wie jeder glückliche Vater stundenlang spielen." *Das Neue Blatt*, no. 3, 1975. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 298.

[150] "Ich kenne kein Tier der Welt, das in seiner ganzen Art so überlegen lustig und gleichzeitig launisch ist, wie gerade ein Dackel. Mein Großvater [...] hatte damals, als ich ein kleines Mädchen war, einen Dackel, und ich habe mir als junges Mädchen immer gewünscht, einen Dackel zu besitzen." *Wochenend*, no. 42, 1956. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 77.

pretext of oil nationalization and was consequently overthrown by the hard working and Shah-loving people of Tehran.[151] The tabloids were not the only ones who circulated this U.S.-American perspective on the events of 1953. Even the coverage of left-leaning weekly *Spiegel* was poor on political background information and rather described the ensuing process against Mossadegh as "the largest show of the world," and characterized him as an "gesticulating old dervish in the flannel pajama" who acted like a confused and isolated old man.[152] Not without a certain pride about the West German backing for the Shah, the *Neue Post* later quoted an Iranian court official on the eve of the monarch's 1967 visit to the BRD:

> Everywhere in the world, but never in Germany will an attempt on the Shah's life be made. The Germans would tear the man apart who would raise his hand against the Shah.[153]

Intriguingly, in contrast to their relation to the Pahlavi regime, the German-Iranian love encompassed only the court life, but never extended to the country as a whole. Persia may have been located in the middle of "the magic of the Orient,"[154] where "the beautiful Sheherazade once lived, with her fairytales from *One Thousand and One Nights*,"[155] but in proper Orientalist fashion, the backwardness of the society was underlined regularly. Concerning the Shahbanu's position at the court, the readers were constantly reminded that "Persia [is] a country deeply rooted in Mohammedanism, where a women is still worth much less than a man."[156] *Wochenend* explains "that in the eyes of the

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151 "Wer genau beobachtet, sieht überall die flinken und geschäftigen Drahtzieher auftauchen, die neuen Wind in das Feuer des Fanatismus pusten, wenn es zu verlöschen droht. [...] Die Villa des Ministerpräsidenten Mossadegh wird gestürmt! Das Haus geht in Flammen auf! Der hakennasige Greis hat sie Schlacht seines Lebens verloren!" *Wochenend*, no. 2, 1955. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 184.

152 "Im spiegeldekorierten Haremssaal des Saltanatabad-Palastes außerhalb Teherans, wo seit drei Wochen der Prozeß läuft, ruft der gestikulierende alte Derwisch im Flanell-Schlafanzug immer wieder: "Ich bin hier der rechtmäßige Premier ... Ich bin nicht verrückt!" "*Mossadegh Prozess: Größte Schau der Welt,*" 1953.

153 "Überall in der Welt, aber nicht in Deutschland wird ein Attentat auf den Schah verübt werden. Die Deutschen würden den Menschen zerreißen, der seine Hand gegen den Schah erhöbe." *Neue Post*, July 22nd 1967. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 293.

154 "Mit dem ganzen Zauber des Orients, mit einem für Europäer unvorstellbaren Prunk, mit einer Prachtentfaltung ohnegleichen feierte Persien die Krönung seines Herrscherpaares." *Frau im Spiegel,* November 13th 1967. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 35

155 "Solche Erzählungen gehören nun einmal zur üppigen Phantasie des Orients, wo ja auch einst die schöne Scheherazade lebte mit ihren Märchen aus Tausendundeiner Nacht." *Heim und Welt*, no. 19, 1957. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 260.

156 "Denn trotz aller Modernisierungsversuche ist Persien ein zutiefst im Mohammedanismus verwurzeltes Land, in dem eine Frau noch immer viel weniger gilt als ein Mann." *7 Tage*, no. 43, 1974. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 19.

Orient, a woman is worth no more than an object."[157] In contrast to these apparent feminist declarations, the same paper later remarked that Soraya's "type of woman is made for love, marriage and motherhood," with facial features of "women who are, with all their essence, directed towards a full-blooded man."[158] This kind of Orientalist double standard, typical for conservative critics of "Oriental backwardness," can be found all over the yellow press, which after all never blamed the Shah for divorcing a wife on the grounds of her assumed infertility.

In a similar manner, the same weeklies that were filled with whole pages of horoscopes regularly looked down on the superstitious Orientals and their supposedly beduin social order. When protests against the costly 2500-year celebrations in Persepolis arose in Tehran in 1967, *Wochenend* framed the matter with the headline "Desert raiders joggle the Throne of Peacocks!"[159] The function of the ruling Pahlavi family in this traditionalist fairytale society was clear, according to the yellow press—they were modernizers and represented Western islands in a sea of Oriental backwardness.

> The Shah and Soraya were both raised occidentally. Right from the cradle they were educated in the high ideals of western democracy. [...] Will Soraya one day fall victim to the dilemma between Occidental will and Oriental ability?[160]

In the opening observations on his rich and colorful collection, Richard Blank underlines this basic contradiction: on the one hand, the papers loved the royal family, on the other, they ridiculed the Iranian people, especially if they speak out against Soraya and the Shah.[161] This observation is an interesting negative image of the German partiality in media coverage of Iranian cinema in the early 21st century. While until the 1970s it was the

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[157] "Hinzu kommt, dass in den Augen des Orients eine Frau nicht mehr zählt als eine Sache." *Wochenend*, no. 19, 1957. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 200.

[158] "Der von Soraya verkörperte Frauentyp ist wie geschaffen für Liebe, Ehe und Mutterschaft. Mit ihrem flächigen Gesicht, mit ihren großen Augen, dem breiten Mund und den vollen Lippen offenbart sie dem Beschauer ein hauptsächlich vom Gefühl getragenes Temperament. Solche Frauen sind ihrem Wesen nach auf einen Vollblutmann gerichtet." *Wochenend*, no. 48, 1957. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 31.

[159] "Wüstenräuber rütteln am Pfauenthron!" *Wochenend*, no. 16, 1967. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 105.

[160] "Der Schah wie Soraya sind abendländisch erzogen worden. Von Kindesbeinen an hat man sie die hohen Ideale westlicher Demokratie gelehrt. [...] Wird Soraya eines Tages Opfer des Dilemmas zwischen abendländischem Wollen und morgenländischem Können sein?" *Wochenend*, no. 12, 1956. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 202.

[161] Blank, 1977. pp. 22–23.

Pahlavi government that was a shining beacon of modernization in a traditionalist society of religious fanatics, the narrative is turned around in contemporary reports on Iran, where a young, progressive, and liberal people is suppressed by an Islamist government that actively promotes quasi-medieval institutions and values.

Jubelperser and Prügelperser

The decidedly pro-Pahlavi West German coverage of Iran took a blow in the summer of 1967 with the escalating student protests against the Shah's visit to West Berlin. In a matter of only a few weeks, the public image of Iran was strongly reconfigured. As this event impacted West Berlin's collective memories of the country, especially in the highly educated post-war generation, its repercussions are crucial for a deeper understanding of the Berlinale's current relation to the Islamic Republic. The protests and the subsequent death of the student Benno Ohnesorg were suspiciously absent from the coverage of the yellow press, as Blank notes,[162] but they were dominating the contemporaneous German mediascape, sparked further anti-police protests and the German student movement, and thus ultimately heralded what historian Gerd Koenen described as "the red decade" (*das rote Jahrzehnt*),[163] an era that shaped the political climate of the *Bundesrepublik* lastingly.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's first state visit to West Germany in 1955 had drawn wide enthusiasm and thousands of onlookers whose cheers made "a fairytale-welcome for *Kaiserin* Soraya," as local newspapers had put it.[164] While in the years before his second state visit in 1967, the enthusiasm had somewhat cooled down thanks to the absence of the now ex-wife Soraya, there was still no discernible opposition against the regime of the Shah in West Germany apart from a small group of exiled Iranian students organized in the *Conföderation Iranischer Studenten* (CISNU). The CISNU's impact on German academic politics and other leftist student organizations was neglectable, as their political agenda was unilaterally limited on opposing the Iranian monarchy and most of their chapters were active in the technical universities of industrial regions far away from the politicized student bodies in the large universities of West Berlin,

[162] Ibid. p. 299.

[163] Koenen, 2001.

[164] "Märchenhafter Empfang für Kaiserin Soraya" *Bonner General-Anzeiger*, February 28th 1955. Quoted in Blank, 1977. p. 81.

Hamburg, or Munich. When they published an essay on the current political situation in Iran in February 1967, however, they attracted the wider attention of the leftist student opposition.

Written by the young Bahman Nirumand (b. 1936), the essay titled *Persien, Modell eines Entwicklungslandes* (Persia, a Model of a Developing Country) was published as a 150-page paperback booklet ahead of the state visit. The exiled Iranian academic's analysis detailed the damage of the Shah's restrictive policies and its championship through the United States, of which an ailing economy, illiteracy, soaring poverty, famines, and violations of civil rights were practical consequences. Nirumand contrasted these grievances with the excessive life at court, the expensive state propaganda, and the booming oil sector, the revenues of which remained unfelt by the broader populace. It is important to note, however, that the majority of the book was in fact an attack on Western imperialism. Nirumand was always anxious to trace the social and political illness back to the imperialism of the "Free World" greedy for oil and only interested in keeping up the status quo of a Western oriented leader reigning a poor society with strong hands:

> So verfolgt auch in Persien die Freie Welt konsequent die Prinzipien ihrer Freiheit, und sie hat Glück, einen eingeborenen Statthalter gefunden zu haben, der ihre Interessen rücksichtslos durchzusetzen weiß, ohne daß die Freie Welt ihr Gesicht verlöre.[165]

In May 1967, a month before the Shah's state visit, the CISNU sent hundreds of copies of Nirumand's book as gifts to the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (SDS), a growing organization of left-leaning students invested in academic politics, with groups in many West-German universities. *Persien, Modell eines Entwicklungslandes* somewhat raised awareness of Iranian society among the members of the SDS. In the atmosphere of growing anti-Americanism, protests against the war in Vietnam, and flirtations with Maoism, the "Third World" moved into the focus of the internationalist wing of the New Left. A pre-occupation with Iran thus very much fitted their ideology of looking for models of revolutionary movements beyond the late capitalist societies of the West. In May 1967, the writer and publisher Hans Magnus Enzensberger (b. 1929)—a personal friend of Nirumand and co-editor of his book—strongly criticized the

[165] "In Persia, too, the Free World is consequently putting the principles of its freedom into practice, and it is lucky to have found an native governor who knows to enforce its interests ruthlessly, without letting the Free World lose face." Nirumand, 1967. p. 131.

media coverage on Iran in the left monthly *konkret* and called for a critical readjustment:

> Ever since Mossadegh was overthrown [in 1953], Iran makes no headlines anymore. It only fills the gossip columns. Concerning us, there are no crises happening anymore, only fairytales on the Peackcock Throne. [...] Because we have two advantages from Iran perishing: We make profit from it and wa are entertained. The first thanks to our industry, the second thanks to our newspaper corporations.[166]

That many left organizations in the BRD thankfully took up the topic of the Shah's state visit explains the sudden surge of interest in Iran among students in 1967. On the eve of the state visit, Nirumand was invited by the West Berlin SDS chapter for a public lecture on his book. His emphatic speech on June 1st in the overcrowded main auditorium of *Freie Universität* was accompanied by calls to protest against the Pahlavi couple, who would visit Berlin the following day. Also present among the more than 2,000 listeners were the already infamous libertines of the *Kommune I*, handing out paint eggs and paper bags with portraits of Mohammad Reza and Farah to wear at the demonstrations.

The official motivation of the rather spontaneous protest movement might have been resentment of the Iranian monarchy and the BRD's double standards in catering a dictatorship. In his book on the state visit, German historian Eckhard Michels however underlines that Iran was a mere projection surface for the student's movement.[167] Most of the protesters were much more invested in West German domestic policies, especially the role of the state authorities, which was to be provided with greater authority in states of emergency. These *Notstandsgesetze* (Emergency Acts) were scorned by the left and had been debated in the *Bundestag* during the previous weeks. The fact that the West German public and media grew concerned about the exhaustive security budget and police presence that accompanied the Pahlavis' visit—complete with the closure of whole inner cities and highways—made it a very welcome occasion for leftists to call for protests against the *Notstandsübung* (Emergency Exercise), as which it was perceived. The situation in Iran seemed to be not

[166] "Seit dem Sturz Mossadeghs [1953] macht der Iran keine Schlagzeilen mehr. Er füllt nur noch die Klatschspalten. Dort finden, was uns betrifft, keine Krisen mehr statt, sondern nur noch Märchen auf dem Pfauenthron. [...] Denn davon, daß der Iran krepiert, haben wir zweierlei: wir verdienen daran, und wir unterhalten uns damit. Fürs erste sorgt unsere Industrie, fürs zweite sorgen unsere Zeitungskonzerne." *konkret*, no. 5, 1967.

[167] Michels, 2017. pp. 133–38.

more than a further requisite on the stage of the state visit. The country was interesting only insofar as it was an example for the imperialism of which Nirumand had accused the Free World, or to quote Enzensberger's afterword to his book:

> This book speaks of only a single country. It speaks of a detail: Twenty two million people are, against the background of the unimaginable whole, a detail. [...] And the parenthesis limiting this single case simultaneously asks for its dissolution: It demands the question of how exemplary the example is.[168]

When the Shah arrived in West Berlin on June 2nd 1967, the demonstrations quickly started to escalate. Around noon, Mohammad Reza and Farah Pahlavi were received at *Rathaus Schöneberg*, the city's favorite venue for state visits, housing the balcony at which John F. Kennedy had held his speech four years earlier. On the square in front of the *Rathaus*, around 2,000 onlookers had gathered, among them roughly 400 demonstrating students. Also among the crowd were some hundred Iranians who, as was reported later, had been bussed in from other cities and were paid by or in some cases even members of the Shah's secret service (SAVAK, short for *Sāzmān-e Eṭṭelāʿāt va Amniyat-e Keshvar*). These claqueurs had already been reported from earlier stations of the state visit and soon became known as *Jubelperser* (cheering Persians)—a fixed term that was later even included in the *Duden*, the canonic dictionary of the German language. In front of *Rathaus Schöneberg*, however, the *Jubelperser* rapidly turned into *Prügelperser* (clobbering Persians) who started beating up several student protesters with large sticks. Although nobody was severely harmed, word of the *Prügelperser* and especially their assistance by the German police, who had let them clobber without consequence, spread fast through West Berlin. Within a day, and later intensified by the police brutality of the evening, the image of the *Prügelperser* was burnt into Berlin's public consciousness (Picture 2.17). Connected to the Shah, this image of state sponsored brutality replaced the beautiful fairytale pictures of Soraya which had already begun to fade.

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[168] "Dieses Buch spricht nur von einem einzigen Land. Es spricht von einem Detail: zweiundzwanzig Millionen Menschen sind, aufs unvorstellbar Ganze gesehen, ein Detail. [...] Und die Parenthese, mit der hier ein Einzelfall eingeklammert ist, fordert zugleich ihre Auflösung: sie fordert die Frage heraus, inwieweit das Exempel exemplarisch ist." Nirumand, 1967. p. 149.

Picture 2.17: An Iranian counter-protester beats up student protesters in front of *Rathaus Schöneberg*, where the Shah and his wife were visiting, on June 2nd 1967. The instance produced the image of the *Prügelperser* in a matter of hours.

Although the events of that day's evening very much overshadowed the image of the aggressive Shah enthusiasts, they anchored the state visit deeply in the city's public memory. Prompted by the brutality of the demonstration in Schöneberg, a crowd of more than 1,000 student protesters came together in front of the *Deutsche Oper*, where the Pahlavis were presented with Mozart's *Zauberflöte* to close their Berlin visit. After crowd members had thrown paint eggs in the direction of the royal couple, police shattered the demonstration brutally, pressing the protesters into a nearby street. In the concurring chaos and beatings, the 26-year old student Benno Ohnesorg was shot in the head and later died of his wounds. Such an extent of police brutality, further 42 protesters were injured, was hitherto unknown in the BRD. Together with later investigations showing that Ohnesorg was shot unprovoked and deliberately by a plainclothes policeman, the incident set West German students first into shock and fear and later radicalized them to a degree that the anti-Shah demonstrations are widely read as the beacon of the student movement of the following years.

Ohnesorg's death motivated a long-term radicalization of leftist organizations revolting against the established authorities of the BRD. The date

of the murder even serves as namesake of the terrorist *Bewegung 2. Juni* (2nd June Movement). The particular occasion of the rebellion against the Shah was soon lost in the trauma and chaos following the state visit. The awareness of the Iranian case faded almost immediately after the Pahlavis had left West Germany, as Eckhard Michels points out:

> Among the future intellectual elite of the *Bundesrepublik*, there was lack of either knowledge or interest in Iran, and the Middle East in general. Or the positive picture of the Persian monarchy since the 1950s still weighed more than the events of May and June 1967.[169]

Exemplarily, the film *Polizeistaatsbesuch* (Police State Visit)—a satirical documentary broadcasted in July during a prime time slot at the largest German public TV station *ARD*—ridicules the Pahlavi couple occasionally, but mostly takes aim at the costly preparations for their visit, the double morality of participating politicians, and the West German police, whose brutality it depicts graphically with first hand footage.[170] Consequently, it should not surprise that a survey on the political alignments of West German students conducted in January 1968 shows how little knowledge on Iran was left a mere six months after the state visit and Bahman Nirumand's book. Asked to identify countries as dictatorships according to the current state of world politics, only 15% named Iran, even fewer than the 20% of participants who identified "the Arab countries" as dictatorships.[171]

Michels' argument that the ongoing positive image of the Pahlavis, fed by the decades-long colorful coverage of the royal couple through the *Regenbogenpresse*, is another plausible explanation for the continuing lack of knowledge of the specific Iranian case even among West German students. A further reason might be the media campaign that ensued in the aftermath of the state visit. After footage the documentary *Polizeistaatsbesuch* was broadcasted in West German television, the Iranian embassy filed a complaint with the foreign ministry and demanded a public rectification as well as harsher sentences for the protesters. To counteract this minor diplomatic crisis, a speaker of the foreign ministry held a presentation on the achievements of the

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169 "Bei der zukünftigen intellektuellen Elite der Bundesrepublik herrschte entweder Unkenntnis über oder Desinteresse am Iran beziehungsweise dem Mittleren Osten im Generellen. Oder es wirkte das seit den fünfziger Jahren grundsätzlich positive Bild der persischen Monarchie in der Bundesrepublik weiterhin stärker als die Ereignisse vom Mai/ Juni 1967." Michels, 2017. p. 231.

170 Brodmann, 1967.

171 Quoted in Michels, 2017. p. 292.

White Revolution in the *Bundestag*. In addition, the federal government paid a group of journalists to travel to Iran to cover the Pahlavis' crowning ceremony in October 1967. Out of this effort grew a wave of news reports and TV documentaries on Iran, either euphorically presenting Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's modernization projects or broadcasting glamorous images of royal excess at the the crowning ceremony. The largest of these was a title story the the political weekly *Spiegel*.[172] The 15-page report, titled "Seven Nights of Cheering," is dedicated to point out the assumed success of the series of economic and social reforms of the early 1960s that became known as the White Revolution. Along the way, the report often explicitly discredited "the short-time-Persian Bahman Nirumand" who, according to the paper, had worked with outdated statistics to create a distorted picture of Iran: "This Nirumand, who only spent three years of his adult life in Iran, influenced today's distorted German picture of Iran with his little book."[173]

Despite this concerted, and seemingly successful, effort to positively re-brand the image of the Iranian monarchy, the summer of 1967 undoubtedly was a disruption in the West German media coverage of the Pahlavi couple. The colorful reports from the Oriental fairytale throne in the 1950s and early 60s were replaced with careful portraits of an autocrat who spent the country's oil revenue not only on modernization projects but also on an excessive court life. Although the yellow press continued to report on the couple's glamorous private life—and continues to do so until today[174]—their interest declined significantly and reports from more serious media outlets grew more and more critical. What was left after these two decades of inconsistent German media coverage were associations of Iran with protests against state oppression, with chaotic demonstrations where young people violently clash with the police. This especially goes for West Berlin's public memory, which in 1967 had experienced its very own traumatic taste of these images. These associations with resistance against violent oppression—strengthened in the Islamic Revolution a decade later—were easily reactivated during the 2009 protests

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172 "*Sieben Nächte Jubel*," 1967.

173 "Dieser Nirumand, der als Erwachsener nur drei Jahre im Iran verbrachte, beeinflußte mit seinem Büchlein das verzerrte deutsche Persien-Bild von heute." Ibid. p. 131.

174 The tabloid *Bunte* still visits Farah Pahlavi in her Parisian exile for an annual birthday interview, where she showed off her art collection and dreams of her late "thoughtful husband, who was always, with all his heart, concerned for the wellbeing of others." See Moschini, 2018.

against the re-election of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an issue that was heavily spotlighted by the Berlinale forty years later.

Chaos im Iran: The Islamic Revolution of 1979

The eventual downfall of the Shah and the regime change that came with the Islamic Revolution in early 1979 acted as a further obvious disruption in the West German media coverage of Iran. Unlike the yellow press' obsession with the Pahlavi couple or the turmoil caused by the state visit in 1967, however, the fascination with the transformation of the country into an Islamic Republic was not a phenomenon particular to the BRD. From the first riots in Qom in January 1978 onwards, Western media outlets and intellectuals all over the world observed the developments in Iran from a similar perspective. Initial curiosity grew into euphoric hopes during the mass demonstrations and general strikes of the summer of 1978, transformed into a somewhat fascinated skepticism towards the religious figures as their position of leadership in the movement became more and more obvious during autumn, and finally into a disappointed fatalism with the triumphant return of Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–89) to Tehran on February 1st 1979. At least since the anti-Western slogans became trademark of the Islamic Republic that was proclaimed on March 31st and reports of arrests and executions of counter-revolutionaries dominated the news in the following weeks, all Western hopes for a progressive change were destroyed, both for liberal and leftist observers. When the hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in Tehran finally led to a definitive break between Iran and the West in November 1979, Western media had already assigned Khomeini and his followers the roles of the most notorious super-villains on the stage world politics.

With a certain delay, the media coverage in the BRD, too, went through this change of perspectives. For the following brief overview of the narratives that dominated the coverage, I will exemplarily pick out the *Spiegel*, the highest grossing West German political weekly.[175] Although the magazine started reporting the upheaval only in April 1978, when nationwide demonstrations and riots had already been going on for months, its editors soon began to cover

[175] It should be noted that in the late 1970s, their readership (and authorship) was probably closer to the aged student protesters of 1967 than to that of the yellow press reports on Soraya. But for a cross section of West German media, *Der Spiegel's* timid buildup of hopes that were shattered within a year of revolution seems paradigmatic.

the events on a regular basis with a growing sense of hope for a progressive regime change. The paper's support for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—which had been declining since their praising cover story in 1967—was already completely forgotten in the first article written on the "uproar against the *Kaiser*." The "economic disaster" into which the "megalomanic" Shah had led Iran, were made out as the main reasons for his dawning downfall, together with the omnipresent "terror of the SAVAK."[176] In September 1978, an extensive cover story followed took Pahlavi's reign apart and supported the narrative of the glamorous playboy who somehow had held himself in power for more than three decades with a combination of military power, corrupt politicians, and excessive prestige projects. The article clearly sympathized with the critics of the Shah, "an angry god, estranged of the people"[177] and "whose downfall—if he will be toppled or not—seems breathtaking."[178]

Picture 2.18: The cover of a December 1978 issue of *Der Spiegel*, translating "Bloody Weeks in Iran - Dictatorship of the Mullahs?"

This early enthusiasm started to change in the following title story on the revolution, released two months later in December 1978 (Picture 2.18). The issue's cover shows a Shi'ite preacher in front of a demonstration, smoke on the horizon, under a headline asking "Bloody weeks in Iran - Dictatorship of the Mullahs?" (*Blutige Wochen im Iran - Diktatur der Mullahs?*) Inside the magazine, a nearly 20-page-article covers the current developments of the revolution and especially its increasingly religious character. Compared to the cover, the reportage is rather nuanced. Starting with the battle of Kerbala

[176] "*Iran: Aufruhr gegen den Kaiser*," 1978.

[177] "Im Hubschrauber, dem Volk wie ein zürnender Gott entrückt, pendelt er zwischen Palast und Reitställen hin und her." "*Irgendwas muß schiefgelaufen sein*," 1978. p. 147.

[178] "Sein Niedergang - egal, ob und wann er stürzt - wirkt atemberaubend." Ibid. p. 141.

(680), it gives a deep introduction into Shi'ite history and theology, pointing out its centuries-old ties with Iranian society. Consequently, the article contrasts the "national crisis of identity"[179] that the rapid modernization projects of the Shah had brought by with the foothold of the religious figures of the revolution and the youth's hopes that were attached to their preachings:

> At least in the eyes of many young people, the call for a revival of Islamic values is not synonymous with falling back to the Middle Ages; the simplicity of Islamic principles rather seems to them like a return to a politically and economically cleaner, simple, and ascetic society.[180]

In headlines and conclusions, however, the magazine did not resist the orientalist catchphrases dominating Western reports of political Islam. Khomeini's followers were "religious enemies of modernity"[181] and their program "points back towards the Middle Ages."[182] The following cover story on the Iranian revolution was released only a month later, in January 1979, and featured an exhaustive portrait of "Shah-Conquerer Khomeini" (Shah-Bezwinger Chomeini).[183] The report is highly skeptical of the concept of state religion in the Ayatollah's writings, to which it dedicates a whole page. It nevertheless acknowledges that, in contrast to other large-scale revolutionary movements, he had "the large majority of the people on his side."[184] The report even identifies him as part of the "progressive wing of the Shiite clergy,"[185] after giving examples of his popularity and religious cooperatives handing out free food in the country's impoverished rural areas.

Mere weeks later, however, in February 1979, *Der Spiegel*'s enthusiasm for the revolution was finally abandoned for good. A report from the streets of Tehran after Khomeini's arrival on February 1st was titled "Sleeper-Express

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[179] "nationale Identitätskrise" "*Ein gerechtes Wort an einen ungerechten Herrn,*" 1978. p. 141.

[180] "Der Ruf nach einer Wiederbelebung islamischer Werte ist zumindest in den Augen vieler Jugendlicher nicht gleichbedeutend mit einem Rückfall ins Mittelalter; die Einfachheit islamischer Prinzipien scheint ihnen vielmehr als Rückkehr zu einer politisch und wirtschaftlich sauberen, sparsamen und einfachen Gesellschaft." Ibid. pp. 141–42.

[181] "Moderne Massenpropaganda gegen religiöse Modernisten-Feinde" Ibid. p. 138.

[182] "Das Programm Chomeinis weist zurück ins Mittelalter." Ibid. p. 150

[183] "*Die Heimat von Ausbeutern reinigen,*" 1979. pp. 88-105.

[184] "Dabei hat der Schiiten-Führer - im Gegensatz zu den Bolschewiki des Jahres 1917 - die große Mehrheit des Volkes auf seiner Seite." Ibid. p. 95.

[185] "Damit zählt Chomeini bis heute zum progressiven Flügel des schiitischen Klerus." Ibid. p. 101.

into the Middle Ages,"[186] hinting at the invisibly creeping regress of the country while simultaneously playing with the Orientalist motif of the German-built Middle Eastern train networks.[187] The following cover linked this claimed regress into medieval times even clearer to religion with the cover headline "Back to the Middle Ages - Iran: The Islam Claims Power."[188] The cover story details instances of terror and violence in several Muslim societies of the Middle East. The spreading of the "Islamic Stone Age" (*Islamische Steinzeit*)[189] that the authors claimed to be observing all over the region was pictured with a graphic series of images showing hangings in Damascus, public decapitations in North Jemen, a woman being lashed in Saudi Arabia and a close up of cut off hands in Afghanistan—only to be completed with a photograph of Khomeini smiling evilly with a stretched out right arm, evoking the Nazi salute.[190]

With the link between Islam and regressive and brutal policies established, the revolution, in which Khomeini had finally succeeded with his installation of the Islamic Republic, all hopes that had initially been invested in the movement by West German journalists and intellectuals were permanently lost. The news reports from Iran published by *Der Spiegel* in the following months all pointed towards the repressive enforcement of religious law, with headlines like "Headscarf Up or Beating Up!"[191] dominating the coverage. When radical Iranian students took fifty-two staff members of the Tehran U.S. embassy hostage in November 1979, the confrontation with the United States seemed to escalate. *Der Spiegel* reacted with a cover showing a grim Khomeini holding a broken scimitar in front of a burning U.S. flag under the headline "Chaos in Iran - Khomeini the Fanatic"—a fitting visualization of the final stage of the Ayatollah's transformation into the super-villain of world politics, a savage fighting with medieval weaponry seeking nothing else than destruction (Picture 2.19).

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[186] "*Schlafwagenexpreß ins Mittelalter,*" 1979.

[187] Peter H. Christensen's study on the German construction of the Ottoman Railways, making visible the colonial entanglement and notions of German technological superiority over the Oriental. See Christensen, 2007.

[188] "Zurück ins Mittelalter - Iran: Der Islam fordert die Macht." Cover headline of *Der Spiegel*, no. 7, 1979.

[189] "*Wenn der Teufel geht,*" 1979. p. 112.

[190] Ibid. pp. 102-5.

[191] "*Kopftuch auf oder Schläge drauf!,*" 1979.

Picture 2.19: The cover of a November 1979 issue of *Der Spiegel*, translating "Chaos in Iran - Khomeini the Fanatic."

The evolution of the public image of Iran from hopeful revolutionary to religious fanatic dominated the West German media coverage in 1978/79 and left an impact that can still be felt today. This was, however, a development in most Western countries and not at all particular to the BRD. The most notorious example for the initial enthusiasm towards the toppling of the Shah comes from France, where Michel Foucault (1926–84) famously visited Iran two times in late 1978 and reported from the country for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sella* as well as in personal writings. In these, the French activist-philosopher showed an extraordinary sympathy with the movement, specifically embracing its religious dimension from early on. In a 1978 newspaper report, Foucault nicknamed Khomeini as an "old saint" and applauded the "political spirituality" which he saw as a possible herald to a global new age of political thinking that would transcend Western modernity, a central concern of his writings.[192] Only after the violence against counter-revolutionaries became increasingly visible and Foucault had been repeatedly criticized by feminist colleagues in summer 1979, he silently abandoned his support for the Islamic Republic.[193] His case and a side glance to France very much attests to the political climate of the time, in which it was standard procedure among left intellectuals to initially sympathize with the movement before condemning it as an untenable development over the course of 1979.

[192] Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016.

[193] Although seemingly motivated by a mission against an assumed trend of leftist scholars being too tame and politically correct to properly criticize Islam, Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson's book on these writings gives a comprehensive overview over this development. Afary and Anderson argue that Foucault's support for the Islamic Revolution was neither an honest mistake nor his fascination with spirituality an isolated incident, contextualizing it with his earlier writings and its influence on his turn to religiosity as a technique of the self to transgress the hazards of Western modernity. See Afary and Anderson, 2005.

From the 1980s until the 2000s, German news coverage on Iran was stable in depicting the country's regime as a circle of religious zealots repressing a mysterious society. Reported topics usually regarded political developments related to global security, such as the decade long war with Iraq that started in 1980 or the ongoing negotiations on the country's nuclear development. Apart from that, it was mostly obscure news items on the prohibition of anything remotely fun or the initiation of a national competition for caricatures denying the Holocaust. The German interest in the Iranian civil society—and especially in its cultural output, on which the Berlinale started to focus in 2006—is a phenomenon of the 2000s with which I will deal extensively in the following chapters.

Regarding the second half of the 20th century, the fascination with Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his wives is surely the most striking particularity of the West German gaze on Iran. While the Western perspective on the Islamic Revolution was relatively coherent, the pre-revolutionary coverage has to be kept in mind. It has stirred associations in German public memory that can help explaining its peculiar relationship to Iran after 2006. On one hand, there was the romantic obsession with Soraya's German blood finding entrance into the royal bedrooms of Persia, which strengthened the imagined German-Iranian brotherhood as well as giving the post-war public one final *Kaiser*—at least in the dreams of the tabloids. On the other, a generation of West Berlin students experienced the shared trauma of political unrest and police violence in the summer of 1967. In combination, these two associations in the public memory of West Berlin laid the foundations for an empathic interest in Iranian society on which the cultural Berlin-Iran connection of the 2000s was based.

3. The Emergence of Iranian Cinema on the Festival Stages

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, Iran had been quite present in the various German mediaspheres, and coverage of the country reflected a broad spectrum of mediatic curiosity. Different parts of the German public associated a range of things with Iran, from the dreams of royalty occupying the yellow press, to the Shah's state visit enraging the students of the 1967 generation, to the mass media's political exoticization of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. These associations with all sorts of drama were especially virulent in Berlin, the hometown of Soraya and the city where the 1967 *Schahbesuch* had unleashed the deadly police brutality that radicalized the student movement. Despite this interest, however, the Berlinale never cared much for Iranian films until 2006.

In his memoirs, festival director Dieter Kosslick credits himself with putting Iran back onto the cinematic world map and puts the "glamorous renaissance" of Iranian films at the Berlinale in the context of supposedly strong historic relations:

> With Jafar Panahi and Rafi Pitts, we continued the Berlinale's tradition of the 1980s and 1990s and presented Iranian cinema in all its facets and narrative richness. It experienced a glamorous renaissance with us. In the 1990s, many Iranian films were screened in the Berlinale program, but only when we began to show them in the competition, which gets most of the attention, did Iran reappear on the cinematic world map and not only under the name of Kiarostami.[1]

A look into the festival history however shows a different story: While the 1990s witnessed a strong performance of Iranian art cinema at international film festivals, spearheaded by the poetic realism of ʿAbbās Kiyārostamī (1940-2016), the Berlinale very much ignored this trend. Before the early 2000s, only a handful of Iranian entries had been programmed in the festival's competition.

The first Iranian film was screened in the *Forum* section in 1972: Dāryūsh Mehrjūyī's seminal drama *Gāv* (The Cow, 1969), which is widely

[1] "Mit Jafar Panahi und Rafi Pitts knüpften wir an die Tradition der 1980er und 1990er Jahre der Berlinale an und präsentierten das iranische Kino in all seinen Facetten und erzählerischem Reichtum. Es erlebte eine glanzvolle Renaissance bei uns. In den 1990er Jahren liefen viele iranische Filme im Berlinale-Programm, aber erst als wir begannen, sie im Wettbewerb zu zeigen, dem die meiste Aufmerksamkeit zukommt, erschien der Iran wieder auf der Weltkarte des Kinos und trug nicht nur den Namen Kiarostamis." Kosslick, 2021. p. 126.

regarded as the initiator of the Iranian New Wave of social realist cinema with an eye for the psychological hardships of modernization.[2] The film, which showed a peasant slowly losing his mind while mourning the loss of his beloved cow, had by 1972 already been screened in film festivals in Rotterdam, Venice, and Chicago, where it had picked up awards and received much critical acclaim. The *Forum* screened it less as a discovery of its own than as a recent development in world cinema that the young institution wanted to reflect. The festival archives show a small note in the program catalog, but neither a film team on the list of invited guests nor any press coverage — *Gāv* apparently did not raise much attention in Berlin.

Throughout the 1970s, the festival turned its attention towards Iranian cinema slightly, and two further social dramas from the country were invited to the official competition: *Ṭabeyʿat-e Bījān* (Still Life, 1974) and *Bāgh-e Sangī* (Garden of Stones, 1976). Both were awarded Silver Bears, which at the time was a much smaller feat than today: In each of the years, seven awards were handed out to the ten competition films. But especially *Ṭabeyʿat-e Bījān* seemed to have impressed the festival programmers and juries in 1974. In addition to the Silver Bear, the film won the awards of the *Internationales Katholisches Filmbüro* (International Catholic Film Office) and the Protestant film jury Interfilm for its "precise and authentic depiction of a milieu."[3] The radically sober drama about the everyday life of an aging railroad crossing inspector in the middle of nowhere who is being substituted by an electronic traffic signal was praised in an article in the festival journal *Film International* "for the sensibility and intensity that the young director Sohrab Shadid-Saless shows in his portrait of two old people in today's Iran, for the courageous realism that captures human values and dignity in simplicity and silence."[4] This sympathy apparently went both ways, as the invitation to Berlin seems to have left a certain impression on director Sohrāb Shahīd S̱āleṯ (1944–1998)—when he left Iran in 1976, he moved

[2] Naficy, 2011. pp. 336–40.

[3] "Für die genaue und authentische Darstellung eines Milieus." *Begründung der Interfilm Jury,* 1974.

[4] "für die Behutsamkeit und Eindringlichkeit, die der junge Regisseur Sohrab Shadid-Saless bei seinem Portrait zweier alter Menschen im heutigen Iran an den Tag legt, für den Mut zu einem Realismus, der aus der Einfachheit und Stille humane Grundwerte und Würde gewinnt." *Film International* 7, 1974. p. 5.

to West Germany, where he continued to make television movies until shortly before his death.[5]

After these two minor success stories in the competition, however, the relationship did not evolve further. Until 2006, the only other Iranian film that made it into the competition was Masʿūd Kīmyāyī's war drama *Dandān-e Mār* (Snake Fang, 1990), which received an honorable mention in 1991. In the non-competition sections, there also was a continued lack of interest. Every other year, *Forum* and *Panorama* screened films that had become critical and commercial hits in Iran throughout the 1980s and 90s, like Rakhshān Banī-Eʿtemād's Tehran drama *Nargess* (1992) or Ebrāhīm Ḥātamīkiyā's extremely popular veteran thriller *Āzhāns-e Shīsheh-ī* (The Glass Agency, 1998). However, this programming amounted to not more than one Iranian film every three or four years. Most of these were of high artistic quality, yet they were rarely world premieres but more of a selection of films that had already been shown with great success at other festivals.

A small exception in this regard was the children's section of the Berlinale (*Kinderfilmfest*), which screened Iranian films on a very regular basis. Apart from the individual motives of the selection committee, which generally has different curators than the main competition, the reasons for this are related to the inner workings of the Iranian motion picture industry. The production company for most Iranian children films, *Kānūn-e Parvaresh-e Fekrī-ye Kūdakān va Nūjavānān* (Center for the Intellectual Education of Children and Young Adults), had been founded by Farah Pahlavi in 1965 and survived the revolution as one of the best-funded cultural institutions of the country. This explains the astonishingly high output and quality of children's films in Iran since the 1970s. The *Kānūn* was known for its relative creative freedom, especially in the 1980s and 90s, and drew many highly prolific directors of the Iranian New Wave, like Abbas Kiarostami, Amīr Nāderī, and Bahrām Beyżāʾī. This resulted in a development that found children's cinema often full of

[5] Although the films Shahid Saless made in German exile were never successful and the director suffered from depression and isolation until his death, his late work is quite remarkable and has been something of a recent rediscovery in film studies. For a comprehensive volume on Saless's German exile, see Fatehrad, 2020.

subversive state criticism, the decoding of which became a favorite activity of European festival juries and film critics during the 1990s.[6]

Deservedly or not, however, the Berlinale's *Kinderfilmfest* has never been taken very seriously by film critics or the Berlin audiences and has remained at the periphery of the festival cosmos. Furthermore, Iranian films never won any awards in that section, which would be the only chance for a film in a side section to gain a bit of attention among the hundreds of films screened each year at the Berlinale. As such, until 2006, Iranian cinema remained mostly disregarded at the Berlinale, either neglected or belittled and put into the category of the children's section that was beloved by school classes and pedagogues but virtually ignored by critics and cinephiles.

Looking at the Iranian film industry, one could assume that this neglect was due to its poor output. Battling budget cuts in the war-torn country and navigating various forms of censorship within a political system engaged in a constant effort of self-legitimation and nation-building, the Iranian cultural industry of the 1980s and 90s had all characteristics of a struggling institution. Film production suffered a severe blow through the revolution in 1979 and the subsequent 10-year war with Iraq. Paradoxically, this situation resulted not in a crisis but a creative golden age—at least if measured by the international recognition that the films of that time received. The 1990s famously witnessed a boom of Iranian cinema at European film festivals where it met with astonishing success from the mid-80s onwards. Amir Naderi's *Dāvandeh* (The Runner, 1984) heralded this trend in Venice and Nantes, where it won the main prize, followed by Abbas Kiarostami's *Khāneh-ye Dūst Kojā-st?* (Where Is the Friend's Home?, 1987), which won the Bronze Leopard in Locarno where, some years later, Ebrāhīm Forūzesh's *Khomreh* (The Jar, 1993) won the Golden Leopard. While these three films had children as protagonists, the grown-ups followed soon: Jafar Panahi's social dramas *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* (The White Balloon, 1994), *Āyeneh* (The Mirror, 1997), and *Dāyereh* (The Circle, 2000) were awarded with the Golden Camera in Cannes, the Golden Leopard in Locarno, and the Golden Lion in Venice, respectively. The crowning achievement of the most important festival prize, the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, was finally made by Abbas Kiarostami with *Ṭaʿm-e Gīlās* (The Taste of Cherry, 1997),

[6] Ullmann, 2015.

his philosophical drama on the last day of a man determined to commit suicide and say farewell to society in the hills outside Tehran.[7] As American film scholar and critic Bill Nichols put it prophetically in 1994 after sitting through a retrospective of Iranian films at the Toronto International Film Festival, the 1990s saw festival programmers, film critics, and cinephiles seize "the opportunity to elect Iranian cinema to the ranks of the international art film circuit."[8]

All this buzz around Iranian films at Cannes, Venice, Locarno, and numerous smaller European festivals was missed out entirely by the Berlinale. By the early 2000s, the international success of Iranian cinema had become a cliché: first because it was not new anymore and the hype had begun to wear out, and second because it had become clear that the success abroad it stood in no relation to the modest domestic reception of the films. In Iran, most of the art films awarded in Europe were not really popular and neglected by audiences as too enigmatic and out of touch with their everyday lives. Most of the films showed poverty and rural contexts which were seen as misrepresenting modern Iran abroad. Kiarostami himself was even treated with hostility for selling out to the European art film circuit and not producing films for Iran. By 2006, even U.S. film critics acknowledged critically that "Iranian cinema is a quintessential example of what could be called a festival cinema"[9]—namely a cinema that almost exclusively exists at film festivals, where it is praised, but is virtually irrelevant in its home country.

Yet, 2006 was the very year the Berlinale started to screen Iranian films far more regularly than before: In the following decade, more than fifty films were invited to the festival, twelve of them in the competition section, to which seven Silver and two Golden Bears were awarded. Until 2019, no year went by without at least two Iranian films in the festival program. This chapter puts the focus on Iranian cinema in the context of the festival's politics under Dieter Kosslick, who headed the Berlinale from 2001–2019, and examine how films and filmmakers from the Islamic Republic were staged in particular. In this, I will try to find answers as to why the Berlinale started to feature Iran from that

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[7] For a more detailed look into the successes of Iranian cinema at international film festivals, see Farahmand, 2002.

[8] Nichols, 1994b. p. 27.

[9] Peña, 2006. p. 40.

particular point onwards, after it had already fallen out of fashion for the international festival circuit. To understand the particular state that the festival was in at the beginning of the 21st century, however, a closer look at its reorganization in the early 2000s will be necessary in the following.

3.1 Glamour and Politics on the Former Death Strip

The Berlinale was in a process of rejuvenation that was deemed necessary to carry the festival brand into the 21st century when Dieter Kosslick took over from Moritz de Hadeln in 2001. De Hadeln was seen as a troublemaker whose intellectual aspiration to discover new cinematic expressions grew more and more out of touch with the Berlin audiences' appetite for some glamour and entertainment along with their cultural education. In April 2000, the Berlin Senate, still occupied with city branding and struggling to find a new identity for the recently reunited capital, saw de Hadeln as unsuitable to continue as festival director and advised *Berliner Festspiele*, the festival's parent organization, to dissolve his contract prematurely.[10] Earlier that year, the Berlinale had moved to its new location in the recently finished conglomeration of high rise glass facades of the *Potsdamer Platz* which the senate and its investors hoped would become the new heart of the city. The first task of Dieter Kosslick was thus to integrate the festival into its new locality, a place with a troubled history and a much-disputed status.

Filling the Death Strip with Cosmopolitan Life

When the Berlinale's offices and cinema halls moved into the shiny new skyscrapers of the *Potsdamer Platz*, the whole area had just recently been built up from scratch to serve as the modern heart of a reunified Berlin. The history of the place, however, goes back more than a century and is strongly tied to

[10] Moritz de Hadeln's contract went until 2003, but it was decided to terminate it two years early after an intervention by Michael Naumann, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, in accordance with Berlin Cultural Senator Christoph Stölzl, in 2000. As de Hadeln had served as festival director for more than two decades by this point, the end of his tenure was overdue. Still, his contract's early termination came as a surprise. The exact reasons for the dismissal are unknown, but it has been speculated that it was a strategic decision by Michael Naumann, whose newly created job position did not give him much actual power, to raise his public profile. Sure enough, at that time Naumann was perceived as taking matters in his own hands and liberate the festival from the must of the Cold War that de Hadeln was associated with. See Jungen, 2018. pp. 414–18.

different contemporaneous conceptions of modernity. German urban sociologists Joachim Fischer and Michael Makropoulos have described it as a "historic, contemporary, and future place of a real as well as an imaginary topology of modernity."[11] Further, they have argued

> That this urban place did and does experience "modernness" par excellence, is commonplace. Here, obviously, modernity was compressed—also in its shape of extermination. This square was designed by modernity, and it was also destroyed by modernity.[12]

Initially, the sister squares of *Potsdamer Platz* and *Leipziger Platz* had served as gateways in the customs wall that had defined Berlin's administrative borders since the early 18th century, with the former being located near the gate that faced the neighboring city of Potsdam—hence the name *Potsdamer Platz*. After the foundation of the German *Reich* in 1871, with Berlin as its capital, the square's northern surroundings became the empire's political and diplomatic center. In the following decades, the area rapidly transformed from a rural market place into an urban center crowded with luxury hotels, restaurants, night clubs, department stores, theaters, and cinemas—a hub of entertainment that catered to the parliamentary buildings and embassies around the *Brandenburger Tor* one kilometer to the north. By the 1920s, *Potsdamer Platz* had become Europe's most busy traffic hub and home to the continent's first traffic light tower. Between the sprawling boulevards of the *Kurfürstendamm* in the west and *Unter den Linden* in the northeast, *Potsdamer Platz* stood as one of the modern centers that elevated Berlin to the status of a *Weltstadt*, an attribute the city had fought for desperately since the late 19th century and the era of world exhibitions, as I have shown in Chapter One.

The area's first life as a social and cultural hub came to a sudden and definitive end in 1945. As many war-related Nazi institutions had settled in the neighborhood (the *Reichskanzlei*, the air force and propaganda ministries, and the headquarters of the SS and SA among them), *Potsdamer Platz* and its surroundings had been the target of frequent air raids in World War II. By summer 1945, only ruins were left of the once popular hotels, bars, and stores. Afterwards, in the 1950s, the subsequent division of Berlin into four sectors

[11] "der Potsdamer Platz in Berlin als geschichtlicher, gegenwärtiger und zukünftiger Ort einer realen wie imaginären Topologie der Moderne" Fischer and Makropoulos, 2004. p. 8.

[12] "That this urban place did and does experience 'modernness' par excellence, is commonplace. Here, obviously, modernity was compressed—also in its shape of extermination. This square was designed by modernity, and it was also destroyed by modernity." Ibid. p. 8.

thwarted the revitalization of the area. Architects from all over the world eagerly awaited the opening up of the city center, dreaming of a playground on which they could pursue their visions of (re)building a modern metropolis from scratch.[13] However, when the area became border territory between the two German states in 1949, all plans for the space between *Brandenburger Tor* and *Landwehrkanal* were put on ice. Consequently, while the *Kurfürstendamm* and *Alexanderplatz* were rapidly reconstructed into flourishing centers of West and East Berlin, *Potsdamer Platz* remained a deserted space with an uncertain future.

This border status reached a new level of materiality in August 1961 with the East German decision to build a concrete wall on the border to West Berlin to hinder their citizens from migrating to the BRD. South of the *Brandenburger Tor*, the double wall went directly through the ruins of *Potsdamer Platz*. Its eastern part cut the octagon of *Leipziger Platz* in two and the western part crossed *Potsdamer Platz* itself. The stretch of more than 100m between the two walls, which 30 years earlier had been the busiest junction of Europe, became a no man's land known as the *Todesstreifen* (death strip), which was filled with barbed wire, floodlighting watchtowers, and tripwire machine guns. The space near the eastern side of the Wall consisted of a few administrative buildings and houses and the city of East Berlin only fully began half a kilometer further in. On the Western side, in the area between the Wall and the *Landwehrkanal*, all but a few of the ruins were torn down. The underground train stations were closed. By 1962, only the rough shapes of the streets were left of the 1km^2 area that had been *Potsdamer Platz* and its surroundings—the rest had been completely swept away (Picture 3.1).

This status quo of borderland desert defined *Potsdamer Platz* for three decades. In the late 1960s, the Senate of West Berlin carefully tried to revitalize the area with the construction of the *Kulturforum*, consisting of the *Philharmonie* (the philharmonic hall), the *Neue Nationalgalerie* (the museum of modern art), and the *Staatsbibliothek* (the state library) in the wastelands 400m west of the Wall. Although much effort and money was put into this complex, it never fully managed to resonate with its surroundings and did not fill the area with life. As the streets around the new buildings began to be covered with weeds and trees, the *Kulturforum* remained an island of post-modern architecture, its buildings resembling alien spaceships that had landed in an overgrown street

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[13] Ibid. pp. 196–98.

Picture 3.1: 1965 aerial photo of the *Todesstreifen* marking the inner-Berlin border at *Potsdamer Platz.*

desert rather than the beacons of high culture they were intended to be (Picture 3.2). The only life that was brought into the area before the fall of the Wall in 1989 came from tourists and artists that drew inspiration from the post-apocalyptic glory of the place. Wim Wenders' seminal film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (Wings of Desire, BRD 1987) might the strongest testament to the role of the *Potsdamer Platz* as a source of inspiration for artists in these decades.

After further urban development plans for the western half of *Potsdamer Platz* were cancelled in the 1980s,[14] the area remained deserted until the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. The opening of the inner-German border and the subsequent vanishing of all border buildings (including the Wall itself) suddenly created a large available area in the center of Berlin and paved the way for a reconstruction of the former pulsating heart of the city. The West Berlin Senate reacted quickly, and by summer 1990, months before the actual *Wiedervereinigung* (reunification) on October 3rd, had already sold the vacant 480,000m^2 area to Sony and Daimler-Benz. The latter's CEO, Edzard Reuter (b. 1928), was the son of former West Berlin mayor Ernst Reuter (1889–1953) and claimed to have a deep personal investment in shaping the modern face of his late father's municipality. Despite intense public debate about the future

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[14] In an article on the West Berlin Senate's rediscovery of the area, Dutch historian Krijn Thijs discusses these plans in detail. Presented and intensely debated for the Berlin International Architecture Exhibition from 1979 onwards, developers foresaw residential quarters, an inner city highway, and recreational parks. Due to the lack of a common vision and unclear responsibilities, however, these ideas were soon abandoned. See Thijs, 2014.

Picture 3.2: The *Kulturforum* with the *Neue Nationalgalerie*, *Staatsbibliothek*, and *Philharmonie* in 1978.

character of the historic place, laden with the symbolic potential of remaking Berlin into a modern *Weltstadt* again, the decision on how to reconstruct *Potsdamer Platz* was made hastily and rather undemocratically: after a large-scale international competition, the Senate and the investors decided on concepts by star architects Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano in 1991 and construction work started swiftly.

For the following decade, a large red *Infobox* on *Leipziger Platz* informed the public about the progress at the construction site. Here, with some marketing effort, *Potsdamer Platz* was branded not only as "Europe's biggest construction site" (*die größte Baustelle Europas*) but also as a promise to reconnect reunified Berlin with its glorious pre-war past, tapping into a nostalgic discourse of Berlin as *the* metropolis of the wild 1920s. The *Infobox* advertised the integration of historic heritage items like the 1925 traffic tower or an elaborate reconstruction of the *Kaiserpalais* luxury restaurant in the middle of post-modern architecture. The area was supposed to reconnect Berlin with its disrupted heritage of "modernnness"[15] as well as repair the city's divided urban identity while at the same time make the German capital finally a *Weltstadt* again—the expectations could hardly have been higher.

[15] Fischer and Makropoulos, 2004. p. 8.

When the remade *Potsdamer Platz* opened to the public step by step between 1998 and 2000, however, it soon became clear that the place did not offer much to city strollers. In the first months, enthusiastic Berliners—often children from the East like myself—excitedly visited the all new city center in awe. But apart from a shopping mall and a handful of entertainment venues like two multiplex cinemas and the very short-lived "Music Box." The three 100m skyscrapers, the massive glass tent of the *Sony Center*, the large casino, the various high-rises containing the offices of international corporations, and suitably luxury housing surely were sights to behold, especially in a traditionally low-rise and often unpretentious city like Berlin. Apart from gazing at and walking among the buildings, however, there was not much to do at the new *Potsdamer Platz*, which is probably the main reason why the place failed to connect with Berliners. Feelings of resentment against the new urban center were reflected in public discourse: journalists from all sides of the political spectrum criticized the hollow atmosphere of the new *Potsdamer Platz*. The left-wing weekly newspaper *der freitag* regarded the place a testament to a "desire for banal spaces,"[16] while the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* condemned that it represented "future and nothing else:" "No one wants to linger at Potsdamer Platz, it is the total today."[17]

In an initial critical examination, urban sociologists Joachim Fischer and Michael Makropoulos point to the historically bloated and ultimately unfulfilled promises of urban modernity that the place embodies. Borrowing from Robert Musil's seminal 1930 novel about a hollow young intellectual, Makropoulos identifies the new *Potsdamer Platz* as "the square without qualities" (*Platz ohne Eigenschaften*).[18] Other contributions in their edited volume see it as a "hegemonic self-display in its appropriation of the city center through powerful corporations, in the shape of an architecture of overpowering"[19] or a "place of pre-structured consumption"[20] that is "staged as a public space but effectively

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[16] "Sehnsucht nach banalen Räumen" Hering and Veihelmann, 2001.

[17] "Am Potsdamer Platz möchte man sich nicht aufhalten, er ist das totale Heute." Hanika, 2002.

[18] Makropoulos, 2004. p. 161.

[19] "Am Potsdamer Platz wird uns Herrschafts-Selbstdarstellung vorgeführt—als Aneignung eines Stadtzentrums durch mächtige Wirtschaftskonzerne und in Form von Überwältigungs-Architektur." Resch and Steinert, 2004. p. 107.

[20] "Ort des vorstrukturierten Konsums" Göttlich and Winter, 2004. p. 102.

under private control."[21] Common to all these criticisms, popular and academic, is a deep frustration around the place's primary use as a pompous headquarters of large corporations and the unfulfilled promises as an accessible and relatable public place. City branding agencies and the Senate of Berlin had framed *Potsdamer Platz* as a historic and future urban center that would create a balance between the "City East" around *Alexanderplatz* and the "City West" around *Kurfürstendamm* and *Zoologischer Garten*, but the ultimate planning decisions were made in a hasty fashion that mainly catered to the investors to whom the area had been sold mere months after the fall of the Wall.

The decision to relocate the Berlinale to *Potsdamer Platz* has to be seen in this context of the area struggling with a perceived elusiveness. The Berlin Senate had seemingly anticipated such criticism already during the construction phase and looked for ways to fill the foreseeably hollow landscape of concrete and glass with life. As a symbol of the newfound unity, the former *Todesstreifen* was supposed be able to entertain the Berlin public and display a metropolitan internationalism to the outside world, where in some corners fears of a reunited Great-Germany had begun to re-emerge. In this spirit, Berlin major Eberhard Diepgen announced the move of the Berlinale from its headquarters at the *Zoo Palast* to *Potsdamer Platz* in 1995. Drawing audiences and spreading glamour, the film festival was tasked with filling the former death strip with cultural life—a task that the *Kulturforum* had struggled with for decades.

It had little effect on the Senate's decision that the organization team of the Berlinale was highly skeptical about the atmosphere and facilities of the new location. Although the festival organizers had been considering a change from the aging *Zoo Palast* since 1992, Moritz de Hadeln was openly opposed to the new location. In letters to the cultural senator he argued that the musical theater sponsored by Daimler-Benz—which would become the *Berlinale Palast*, the festival's main venue—was completely unsuitable as a cinema hall. The building had not been designed to screen films, let alone host their glamorous premieres. Yet, as the construction of the theater was already too advanced, only minor adjustments could be made: mobile acoustical wall panels would ease the annual transition from musicals to film screenings and a small

[21] "Der Platz wird als öffentlicher Raum inszeniert, steht aber unter privatwirtschaftlicher Kontrolle." Ibid. p. 104.

Section	Ø Films	Founded
Wettbewerb is the traditional international competition of the festival, in which the international jury hands out the Golden and Silver Bears. It is restricted to international premieres, e.g., to films that have never been screened outside of their production countries.	25	1951
The **Retrospektive** presents film programs focused on genres, different historical periods, specific film styles or cinematic technologies. Curated by the history department of *Deutsche Kinemathek*, past programs have focused on topics like Technicolor or cinema in the Weimar Republic.	43	1951
The **Forum** section is independently organized by the *Deutsche Kinemathek* and focuses on experimental cinema or stylistic innovation. It is not restricted to international premieres and often features films that have been screened at other festivals or on other platforms.	62	1971
Hommage screens films from specific directors, producers, actors or other kinds of filmmakers, usually from the person that receives the *Goldener Ehrenbär* (Honorary Golden Bear) in a particular year.	7	1977
Kinderfilmfest shows films for children, often accompanied by additional educational programs. The films are often screened during daytime in large, representative venues in the presence of the film team to give the visiting school children a proper festival experience. In 2007 this category was split into two and renamed **Generation Kplus** and **Generarion 14plus**.	54	1978
The **Panorama** section was originally intended as a showcase for smaller films with no place in the main competition. It developed a focus on queer cinema and grew into the festival's second-largest section after the *Wettbewerb*. It has no jury awards but an audience award that is voted for by viewers.	62	1980
As an expansion of the *Wettbewerb*, **Berlinale Special** features high profile films with international stars or special topics. To raise their profile, films in this section receive gala premieres in large, central venues like the *Berlinalepalast* or the *Friedrichstadtpalast*.	19	2004
Perspektive Deutsches Kino is limited to films produced in Germany and was conceived as a launchpad for young German directors.	15	2002
Forum Expanded is a spin off from the *Forum* and focuses on experimental extra-cinematic expressions. Instead of screening films, it features video installations, art exhibitions or concerts.	43	2006
A selection of recently restored copies of old films is screened in **Berlinale Classics**.	9	2013
Reacting to the peak of critically acclaimed TV series in the 2010s, **Berlinale Series** premieres TV series in blocks of 2–3 episodes.	8	2015
Kulinarisches Kino (Culinary Cinema) was conceived of by Dieter Kosslick. Films are screened at special venues with dinner tables while the audiences eat matching dinners cooked by star chefs.	15	2007
In the **Shorts** section, short films of less than 30mins are screened in thematically organized blocs of 4–5 films. The section has its own international jury that awards a Golden and a Silver Bear at the official awards ceremony that closes the festival.	29	2008

Figure 3: Program sections of the Berlinale until the end of Dieter Kosslick's tenure in 2019.

projection room was integrated.[22] Apart from these concessions, the hall would remain a musical theater for most of the year, which accounts for the strange non-cinematic atmosphere of the *Berlinale Palast*, which has hosted the premieres of all competition films in the festival since 2000. At least *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz* in front of the building, on which the red carpet is rolled out every February, received a cinematic touch when it was named after the German film star.

Moritz de Hadeln's reservations, however, were ignored by the Senate. In 2000, coinciding with the festival's 50th anniversary, the Berlinale took place in its new venues at *Potsdamer Platz* for the first time. On that occasion, it also presented a new logo that for the first time acknowledged the name "Berlinale" officially, which until then had been a mere colloquial nickname. It is written vertically on the back of a bear, Berlin's heraldic animal, which in this iteration carries the festival on its back while its front arms are in the usual position of combat that speaks to the competition of a film festival. The logo is normally red, like the red carpets over which the competitors march to present their films, underlining the glamour and competition that the festival seeks to bring to the city.

The 51st Berlinale would be de Hadeln's last occasion as festival director, and when Dieter Kosslick took over from him in 2002, the festival's new visual and spatial brand was already established. The Berlinale was supposed to fill the former death strip with glamour and cultural life and give the *Potsdamer Platz* a public purpose. On one hand, the area represented an open and unladen playground on which the festival had much space and projection surface to unfold itself. One the other hand, however, the high expectations of metropolitan and cosmopolitan flair brought towards the new city center were carried over to the Berlinale, where concerns of branding and the festival image were now of a far higher significance than before. What remained, however, was the strong connection of the festival to its urban stage—in the divided city, it was supposed to mark West Berlin as Allied territory and serve as a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt*, and now, it was part of an effort to fill the large whole in the middle of the city and help establishing an urban identity of reunified Berlin.

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[22] Jungen, 2018. pp. 411–12.

The Largest Audience Festival in the World

Although the in-house historiography of the Berlinale credits Dieter Kosslick with the successful re-branding that happened in the early 2000s,[23] much of the new look the festival gained in these years had been initiated before the former film journalist and fundraiser took over in 2002. The new logo and corporate design had been introduced by his predecessor and while it is true that Kosslick did manage to boost the audience numbers during his 18-year tenure, this development had already started in 2000 and should be attributed not only to his persona but also to the multiple new cinema halls that came along with the move to *Potsdamer Platz* as well as a significant increase in the festival's budget. Nevertheless, Kosslick introduced many internal and programmatic innovations that altogether enlarged the festival's scope.

Coming from the cosmos of German film sponsoring and a position as director of the country's largest federal film fund, the *Filmstiftung NRW*, which he had headed for ten years, Kosslick put a strong emphasis on managing the festival's image. Flashy and colorful branding was a crucial concern for the then 54-year old—in his autobiography, he names the successful German advertising man Charles Wilp as the professional icon of his adolescent years.[24] While his predecessor de Hadeln, as a cinephile, saw the curation and programming of films as his core responsibility, Dieter Kosslick delegated the research of the films to a large team of geographically-organized curators and introduced regional delegates for national film industries from Latin America to the Middle East to Oceania. These delegates worked for the different programming sections of the festival, making them less independent and more connected than before. This network between the sections, along with the introduction of several new sections, resulted in a far larger and constantly growing body of films that were presented at the festival. Since 2002, the Berlinale has screened roughly 400 films a year on average—a significant growth compared to the 200–300 films that were common before.

To accommodate this increased number of films, Kosslick significantly enlarged the program structure of the Berlinale (Figure 3). In addition to the *Wettbewerb* (Competition), *Panorama*, *Forum,* and *Kinderfilmfest* (Children's Film Festival) sections, Kosslick introduced the categories *Berlinale Special*, a pool for

[23] Cowie, 2010. pp. 49–50.

[24] Kosslick, 2021. p. 68.

high profile films that screened out of competition but featured international film stars and blockbusters that had already premiered at other festivals, and *Kulinarisches Kino* (Culinary Cinema), where films about food were screened in small venues accompanied by haute cuisine dinners cooked for the audience. Furthermore, Kosslick created a separate program for upcoming German directors, *Perspektive Deutsches Kino*, in reaction to criticism that German cinema had been severely neglected by Moritz de Hadeln. With *Berlinale Shorts*, a separate section for short films was introduced along with an international jury of its own. Kosslick introduced these four programs in his first two years in office. When the festival's *Retrospektive* and *Hommage* sections for historic films (and since 2013 is the section *Berlinale Classics*) and *Forum Expanded* (the 2006 spin off of the *Forum*) are taken into account, this makes up for a total of fourteen different sections—all of them with their own curatory teams and thematic focuses and most of them with their own juries and awards. In the beginning of Kosslick's tenure, the German media mostly welcomed this multitude as a timely diversity appropriate for a growing city like Berlin. With each festival year, however, it has been increasingly been perceived as a chaotic and elusive growth that has made an overview of the festival program nearly impossible, even for professional journalists.

For local audiences, regular Berliners with an affiliation for culture, entertainment, or glamour, it has became even more difficult to understand the program and work out which film they should see at which time and at which venue. Apart from people queuing at the pre-sale box offices in the *Potsdamer Platz Arkaden* for rare premiere tickets of films in the *Wettbewerb* or *Berlinale Special* sections—hoping for a chance to sit in the same cinema hall as Will Smith, Nicole Kidman, or The Rolling Stones—most visitors had to either spend much time studying the various program brochures or apply a surprise bag strategy and randomly go to a cinema hall and watch one of the films on offer. For audiences, this variety often led to stress and the disappointment of either not getting the desired tickets or randomly walking into an uninteresting film. For the festival, however, more screenings led to a boost in sold tickets, which strengthened it financially and gave the organizers solid numbers to present to the Senate and private sponsors.

With ticket sales rising year after year, the Berlinale was able to continue proudly calling itself the largest audience festival of the world. In an

interview on the occasion of the festival's 60th anniversary in 2010, Dieter Kosslick highlighted this as being the most important attribute of the festival:

> The Berlinale is driven by the industry, it's driven by film critics, but it's driven first and foremost by audiences. There is no festival in the world at which so many people are able to buy tickets.[25]

The branding as an accessible audience festival whose primary function is entertainment, education, and the global recognition of (West) Berlin goes back to the early days of the festival, when the *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* was used to produce pictures of happily cheering Berliners welcoming Western film stars a mere decade after Germany had started another World War. At the beginning of the 21st century, the reasons behind these initial motivations had long been overcome. Berlin lay neither in ruins nor did the Cold War (which had effectively ended with the fall of the Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991) call for the spiritual and cultural support of encircled West Berlin. Despite the different political and economic circumstances, however, the motivation to have a large audience film festival in the heart of the German capital remained. The city was still being reconstructed and the new city center at *Potsdamer Platz* badly needed to be filled with life and visitors. In terms's of Germany's international image, the festival played a useful role in allaying fears of a reunified Germany and also helped raise the country's profile as a global player in an increasingly crowded and more complex political world order. Of course, large streams of audiences were also important for the Berlinale itself. In the context of inner-European competition, the Berlinale gratefully accepted the branding of being "the audience festival," a label that set it apart from its counterparts in Cannes and Venice, which are very exclusive to journalists and members of the film industry. And, finally, the festival also needed more and more visitors as evidence of its value towards its sponsors in the Senate and in the private sector.

In addition to the rise in film screenings, Kosslick applied different strategies to make the festival continuously accessible to the public. In 2004, he declared the last day of the Berlinale, traditionally a Sunday, the *Publikumstag* (audience day), at which tickets are sold at a reduced price and exclusively to ordinary visitors—by this point professional visitors have mostly departed from the festival anyway, as all the premieres, ceremonies, and parties are finished

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[25] Cowie, 2010. p. 15.

by Saturday. He also constantly worked on acquiring new cinema halls, the largest and most prestigious of which was the *Friedrichsstadtpalast,* where films from the *Wettbewerb* and *Berlinale Special* have been screened since 2009, often with public red carpet premieres as big as those at the *Berlinale Palast.*

The *Friedrichsstadtpalast* is a very telling example of Kosslick's expansion of the Berlinale. Founded as a 5,000 seat circus in the 1870s and rebuilt in 1984 in East Berlin as a revue theater, the venue has a long tradition of bread-and-circuses-styled public entertainment on a scale bordering the megalomanic. The building in the heart of Berlin features the largest theatre stage in the world, a 160,000 liter mobile water basin that is turned into an ice skating rink in winter, and its wide stage portal has enough space for the world's longest row of dancers, which is a regular part of the opulent and sensationalist revue shows that are staged at the theater for most of the year. What the *Friedrichsstadtpalast* is clearly *not* is a cinema hall. The uncomfortable old wooden chairs, the open acoustics of the extremely large room, and the seating order of an amphitheater makes it difficult to be immersed into long and exhausting art films, even more so than in the *Berlinale Palast* and its flair of a Las Vegas musical theater. However, the venue holds seats for more than 1,700 festivalgoers and in 2008, Kosslick proudly promised "to deliver a high quality film experience" and "even more opportunities for viewers to attend the highly popular Berlinale films."[26] The bulky name "FriedrichstadtFilmpalast" soon disappeared from festival marketing, but the theater remained a regular screening venue.

The Berlinale's enhanced focus on mass appeal and entertainment since the early 2000s also translated into a more prominent staging of red carpet receptions. These performances became a nodal point for various elements of the festival: the publicity for the films whose narratives already began in front of the cinema halls with the performances of its actors and directors on the red carpets; the media outlets for which photographers produced pictures of the stars marching along the carpet, broadcasting the image of a glamorous and attractive international event; the visibility of private sponsors, especially automobile manufacturers like VW, BMW, and Audi who supplied the limousines; and last but not least the economy of attention in the busy festival cosmos of hundreds of film premieres in which scheduled peak events give

[26] *Press Release*, 2008.

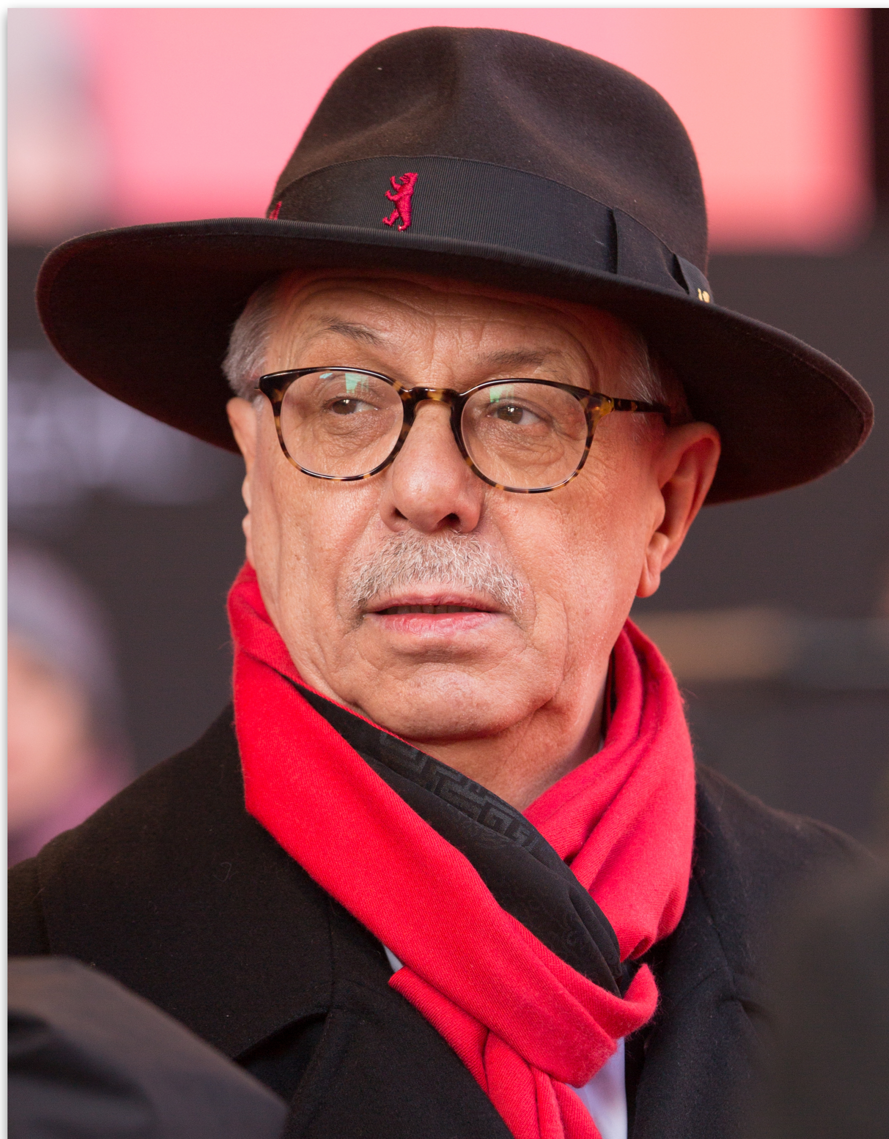
necessary structure. For the audiences, however, the red carpet events emanated more public glamour and a more condensed atmosphere than before.

In contrast to earlier decades, where the whole city of West Berlin had become a red carpet and stars like Gary Cooper toured the *Kurfürstendamm* in an open cabriolet, the new location at *Potsdamer Platz* was much more constrained than the *Zoo Palast*, with its broad boulevards integrated into the city center. Encircled by skyscrapers and high rises to all sides, the new venue of the *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz* is a much more concentrated location that designates a more particular space to the red carpet in front of the *Berlinale Palast*. At the same time, *Potsdamer Platz* is a relatively deserted area of business, especially after dark, which became an advantage for the festival—despite the Berlinale and its shiny film premieres, not much else is going on in the area.

This atmosphere turned the red carpet events under Dieter Kosslick into much more condensed performances. The film teams where driven in expensive limousines from their hotels, often merely hundreds of meters away from the *Berlinale Palast* in the nearby *Hilton* or *Grand Hyatt*, to the red carpet and then walked the last steps on their own, surrounded by flashlights of dozens of cameras. The fans who cheered for them—hoping for the chance of a selfie or an autograph—now had to travel to the red carpet specifically, and could not longer accidentally stroll in the area and spontaneously join the spectacle. This might have accounted for smaller crowds of visitors, but thanks to the condensed atmosphere, the screaming and cheering of members of the public became very much a part of the spectacle. Consequently, when the festival was lucky enough to acquire star studded films for their program and then convince said Hollywood stars to attend their own premiere or even the closing ceremony, *Marlene-Dietrich-Platz* almost spilled over with a glitter and glamour that was accessible to regular Berliners who could hope to be part of it.

Mr. Berlinale

When the Berlinale since the 2000s focused more strongly on audience appeal and the glamour manifested on the red carpets in front of the *Berlinale Palast*, the festival became increasingly embodied by its director Dieter Kosslick. Although the former fund manager had appeared relatively shy and unremarkable at press conferences and other festival events in his first year—showing up in a grey checked jacket or a T-shirt—he soon developed the attire of a ceremonial film festival host (Picture 3.3). The outfit that Kosslick wore



Picture 3.3: Dieter Kosslick in his festival director outfit in 2018.

from 2003 onwards on virtually any occasion during the festival was a fashionable black coat with a red pin of the Berlinale bear on the lapel and a scarf around his neck—usually a red one, his favorite color "in wine as in politics," as he used to comment wittingly.[27] His attire was completed by the most important item, a large black stetson hat with red and golden Berlinale bears above the brim.

Kosslick's black stetson hat by Italian luxury designer Borsalino worked not only as a fashionable accessory but also as a remarkable carrier of different associations. After having suddenly fallen out of fashion in the 1960s, hats are eye-catching items that recall certain classical attributes. Austrian fashion historian Ingrid Loschek points out that the Calabrese hat, a direct predecessor

[27] Suchsland, 2009.

of Kosslick's stetson, has been associated in Germany with the revolutionaries of 1848 and thus with political freethinking.[28] Even more importantly, felt hats with large brims have been associated with chivalry since the 17th century and are also widely regarded as being "artists and intellectuals" hats.[29] The most important recent reference point in that regard would be Joseph Beuys (1921–86), the German performance artist and public intellectual who used a brown stetson hat as his trademark. In her monograph on the topic, art historian Jannecke Schoene understands the hat as a "token of Beuys' mode of performance" and argues that "Beuys-with-hat does not exist as a subject prior to the moment of his entrance, but emerges only in the performance, and even defines this state through the accessory."[30]

Not entirely dissimilar to Beuys' hat-wearing habit, the outfit of coat, scarf, and hat became a stage costume for Dieter Kosslick's during the festival. Sometimes one could spot him arriving at the *Berlinale Palast* in plain clothes, immediately rushing to a changing booth near the entrance where his assistant handed him scarf and hat. Changed into this attire, he then stepped onto the red carpet to publicly welcome his guests. He even wore the outfit indoors and often appeared in press conferences and film screenings with hat and scarf on. A costume change only happened for the opening and closing ceremonies, where he would enter the stage wearing a black tuxedo with a usually red bow-tie. Over the course of his tenure, his outfit became so iconic that for his final appearance on the red carpet in 2019, he was presented with a group of festival visitors dressed like him, holding a graffito portrait of himself as a farewell gift. Just like Marilyn Monroe's white dress, Che Guevara's red starred beret, or Batman's black cape and cowl, Kosslick's three-piece outfit had become a costume iconic enough to turn him into his alter ego of the festival's master of ceremonies.

This role of course brings a number of associations: the political freethinker, the cinephile intellectual, but also the charming and charismatic gentleman. Declaring Kosslick as a stage figure implied that he not only represented, but embodied the Berlinale. Like a Barthesian myth, through the

[28] Loschek, 2005. p. 285.

[29] Hülsenbeck, 1998.

[30] "Das heißt, Beuys mit Hut ist kein Subjekt, das dem Moment seines Auftritts vorangeht, sondern das erst in der Inszenierung erscheint und diesen Zustand als ein Inszeniertes über das Accessoire geradezu markiert." Schoene, 2016. p. 66.

naturalization in many years of public appearances, his attire had become a "third object" (*troisième objet*),[31] a sign representing the Berlinale. The classical chic of an expensive coat and hat carried over to the festival when they spoke of glamour while the reserved style and monochrome black are also associated with a certain restraint fitting for infamous Berlin understatement as well as the role of a host.

As such, Kosslick's costume underlines the role of the festival's receptionist and welcome guide to the stars, a role that he happily took on. The director soon became known for greeting filmmakers not with a handshake, but with a hug and often kisses on the cheek. This staging of Kosslick's familiarity with the practices of the international film business did not end with his welcoming of film stars in the hotel lounge or even at the airport, which was often well documented in pictures or video clips in press or social media. When stars arrived at the red carpet for the premiere of their film, Kosslick was usually seen chatting jovially or joking with them, walking down the carpet together holding hands (Picture 3.4). This continued when the filmmakers had arrived in the cinema and taken their seats in the *Berlinale Palast*. As a ritual at premieres in the competition section, the film team was invited on stage before the screening began, and it was usually Kosslick taking them to the stage, again holding their hand and pulling them into the spotlight and thus acting as the facilitator of the event. The habit of holding hands was even commented on in German tabloids who expressed deep respect for the festival director for being so intimate and close with Hollywood's rich and famous. In an article titled "A Director Takes Care: Berlinale-Boss Takes Stars by The Hand," the Berlin tabloid *B.Z.* wrote:

Picture 3.4: Dieter Kosslick holding hands with actress Nicole Kidman after picking her up from the airport in 2015.

[31] Barthes, 1990. pp. 179–233.

> With whom is Berlinale-boss Dieter Kosslick holding hands there? Or should the question be: With whom doesn't he hold hands? The director of the film festival is touchingly taking care of the prominent guests: he offers them his hand at his Berlinale. And the stars willingly take it. Natalie Portman, Nicole Kidman, or even jury member Audrey Tautou let gentleman Kosslick accompany them.[32]

Equipped with an iconic costume and the power of being the host of "his Berlinale," Kosslick's stage role became an alter ego bearing many of the attributes of a comic book superhero. He even earned a nickname that reflected his embodiment of the festival: Mr. Berlinale. The name originated during the opening ceremonies of the early 2000s, where he was introduced by regular moderator Anke Engelke as either "the boss" (*der Chef*) or "Mr. Berlinale." What may have started as a joke was soon picked up by German newspapers. In 2019, on the occasion of Kosslick's farewell from the position, journalists regularly used it to introduce their texts taking stock of his tenure,[33] their interviews with the outgoing festival director,[34] or their personal memoir's of the "Kosslick-era."[35] In combination with the costume and the habitus of the joy-spreading host at ease with stars from all over the world, his nickname completed a stage figure that Dieter Kosslick would become when he was in the function of the festival director.

Like a fully fledged super hero, Mr. Berlinale's task was not only to represent, but also to define and condense an otherwise loose cluster of ideas and associations. In the early 2000s, Mr. Berlinale was exactly the hero the festival needed to grow, and growth was seen as the only possible answer to stay relevant in a city that had not only doubled in size with the fall of the Wall but had also evolved and diversified into a more and more dynamic business location. This growth was difficult to finance at a time of stagnating state subsidies in culture. In the role of Mr. Berlinale, Kosslick was a friendly and charming negotiator with possible investors from the private sector. This proved to be a a successful strategy: during his tenure, the festival made contracts with

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[32] "Mit wem hält Berlinale-Chef Dieter Kosslick da Händchen? Die Frage sollte besser lauten: Mit wem nicht? Der Direktor der Filmfestspiele kümmert sich rührend um die prominenten Gäste, reicht ihnen bei seiner Berlinale die Hand. Und die Stars greifen zu. Natalie Portman, Nicole Kidman oder auch Jury-Mitglied Audrey Tautou lassen sich von Gentleman Kosslick begleiten." "*Ein Direktor kümmert sich*," 2015.

[33] "*Mr. Berlinales Ära endet nach 18 Jahren*," 2019.

[34] "DW sprach mit 'Mr. Berlinale' über großes Kino und unvergessliche Begegnungen." von Bock, 2018.

[35] "Er ist für mich immer Mister Berlinale." Wowereit, 2019.

various private sponsors that guaranteed several millions of euros a year and effectively doubled the festival's budget.[36] As the festival program expanded and diversified, as outlined above, Mr. Berlinale became a much needed anchor point for audiences to guide them through the dozen program sections and hundreds of films. In this sense, Kosslick did indeed act as the savior that festival historiography has made him out to be. From the point of view of the larger festival organization, this is understandable: Kosslick's image as a charmer and hugger should also be understood in contrast to his predecessor Moritz de Hadeln, whom festival historian Wolfgang Jacobsen remembers as follows:

> De Hadeln has failed as a popular figure. Which he never wanted to be. Journalists, and in part also the audiences, held a grudge against him for this. Not necessarily in the beginning. But with time they thought the man could indeed be a bit more friendly in his public demeanor. And he had little if any interest in what would be called marketing today.[37]

With Mr. Berlinale, journalists, audiences, private sponsors, and the Berlin Senate had finally found the person they needed. In contrast to his unpopular predecessor, Kosslick not only strove to include intellectually difficult films, he also made them palatable. However, his strategies of condensing complex and diverse phenomena into events, requisites, and slogans often led to oversimplifications that became problematic when applied to the realm of international politics.

Sex, Politics, and Rock'n'Roll

This staging of the political at the Berlinale during Dieter Kosslick's tenure, in which Iranian cinema became a beloved requisite from 2006 onwards,

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[36] In return for their funding, these sponsors were made very visible in the festival cosmos. Their logos were shown on festival posters and in the Berlinale trailer that preceded every single screening, and they were also granted different places in the festival space to pursue their marketing. The car manufacturers (Volkswagen, BMW, and later Audi) provided the limousines at the red carpet, and from 2017, the "Audi Lounge," an improvised lounge building in front of the Berlinale Palast, hosted parties, a coffeehouse, and a hub for TV and radio journalists doing interviews and reports. L'Oreal built a similar building at Potsdamer Platz during each Berlinale, offering free make up sessions. German jewelry producer *Glashütte* sponsored the *Glashütte-Dokumentarfilmpreis*. The public TV station *ZDF* received exclusive screening rights and much space for advertisements in program brochures. Marketing contracts to the extent introduced by Kosslick have been particular to his tenure.

[37] "Gescheitert ist er als populäre Figur. Die er aber auch nie sein wollte. Das nahmen ihm Journalisten, und zum Teil auch das Publikum, übel. Nicht unbedingt am Anfang. Aber mit der Zeit dachte man sich schon, der Mann könnte in seinen öffentlichen Auftritten auch einen Zacken freundlicher sein. Und er hatte an dem, was man heute Marketing nennen würde, so gut wie kein Interesse." Quoted in Jungen, 2018. p. 416.

happened on many different levels. This is well illustrated by the festival director's editorials in the first pages of the annual program catalog of the Berlinale. In addition to the annual press conference some weeks before the start of the festival, these small texts served as an opportunity for Kosslick to introduce the festival program to the public and to try to create coherence in the steadily growing body of hundreds of films by underlining their common topics. To show that the festival was an up-to-date, highly relevant cultural institution that spoke to the larger world of society and politics (instead of sitting isolated in the ivory tower of the arts), these common topics were usually connected to media debates of current interest.

In 2002, Kosslick's first editorial put the festival under the catchphrase "Accept Diversity," a festival motto that he introduced on his own initiative.[38] Published five months after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, it took its cue from the atmosphere of insecurity and negative feelings towards Islam in the West, and suggested that mutual acceptance was the only solution if larger conflicts were to be avoided. The editorial pointed out that diversity was definitely represented in the Berlinale program, with its films from many different countries.[39] In 2009, Kosslick opened the editorial with an irritatingly sensationalist wake-up call regarding the currently raging financial crisis: "Crisis, again. This time not a minor crisis, this time the really big thing. The financial crisis."[40] Thus, the 2009 the festival motto became "crisis." Similar slogans continued to frame the festival until Kosslick's final year, which he put under the motto: "The private is political."[41]

The wide selection of around 400 films might make it seem difficult to claim coherence, but the large range and the consequential elusiveness actually made it easy to find a common frame, which could be basically anything—diversity, crisis, and the interplay of the private and the political can be read into a lot of films. It is thus less interesting to ask what the festival program actually represented (which was naturally far more incoherent than the editorial claimed) than to consider which assumptions were behind the framing of the program. In Kosslick's view, well in line with the inherent logic of

[38] Kosslick, 2021. p. 39.

[39] *Berlinale Journal*, 2002. p. 1.

[40] "Schon wieder Krise. Diesmal keine Detailkrise, diesmal ein richtig großes Ding. Die Finanzkrise." *Berlinale Journal*, 2009. p. 1.

[41] "Das Private ist politisch." *Berlinale Journal*, 2019. p. 1.

Berlin, political commitment was a core responsibility responsibility and had to be balanced carefully with entertainment, its other main pillar. Entertainment, he assumed, was what audiences wanted, while commitment was what they actually needed but did not readily partake in—much like the proverbial spinach of politics that has to be mixed into the delicious meal of glamour and fun. The slogan that illustrates this mix best is the one Kosslick chose as a headline for the 2005 program: “Sex, Politics and Rock ’n’ Roll.”

> Sex, Politics and Rock ’n’ Roll. This year’s Berlinale wants to offer a program for heart and mind. The festival presents societal conflicts and invites discussion. But that curiosity and entertainment also belong to cinema is likewise reflected in our program.[42]

Sure enough, Kosslick gave examples to illustrate the provocative slogan. Sex was represented in the competition entry *Kinsey* (USA, 2004), a biographical drama about the sexologist Alfred Kinsey, and *Inside Deep Throat* (USA, 2005), a documentary about the beginnings of the porn film industry in the United States that was screened in the *Panorama* section. Rock ’n’ Roll entered the festival in the shape of pop star George Michael who visited the Berlinale promoting a recent documentary about himself. Kosslick’s comments, however, are also programmatic for his assumptions about the festival as a whole: voyeuristic curiosity (represented by sex), entertainment (represented by rock ’n’ roll), and discussions about societal conflicts (represented by politics) were supposed to easily go hand-in-hand, belonging together as much as “Sex, Drugs, and Rock ’n’ Roll,” the 1970s slogan that Kosslick was playing on.

This combination was not only aimed at making the festival more attractive to audiences, journalists, and sponsors who supposedly were tired of political education and hungry for glamour and colorful entertainment. It also turned political issues into easily consumable portions which the Berlinale needed to perform the role of a socially relevant and committed cultural institution. Following the migration of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees to Germany in 2015, Kosslick put the 2016 Berlinale under the motto “Route 66,” a phrase that in his eyes cleverly combined the festival’s 66th birthday with the plight of refugees on their way to Europe on different routes:

[42] “Sex, Politik und Rock ’n’ Roll. Die diesjährige Berlinale will ein Programm für Herz und Hirn bieten. Das Festival präsentiert gesellschaftliche Konflikte und lädt zu Diskussionen ein. Dass zum Kino aber auch Schaulust und Unterhaltung gehören, zeigt unser Programm ebenfalls.” *Berlinale Journal*, 2005. p. 1.

> The motto of this 66th Berlinale was "Route 66," borrowed from the 2451-mile road from Chicago to Santa Monica in California. Yet our Route 66 was not only supposed to describe our festival year, but also the refugee routes of the more than 60 million people fleeing war, terror, and religious delusion at that time.[43]

As soon as complex political issues were boiled down to oversimplifying catchphrases in the cosmos of Kosslick's Berlinale, they became stage requisites at the festival's performances. In his speeches at the annual opening and closing ceremonies at the *Berlinale Palast*, the festival director usually commented on recent news items. Although Kosslick often acted resigned and helpless towards the conflicts, injustices, and social illnesses the Berlinale addressed, he sometimes also hinted at the function that he assumed film festivals could have in solving them.

Such hints can even be found at the fringes of the festival cosmos, like the program of the *Retrospektive,* which runs parallel to the public attention of the *Wettbewerb* and *Berlinale Special* sections. It might seem peripheral to the Berlinale, but its tighter programmatic coherence and more elaborate catalogs often make the festival's assumptions more visible than other, more elusive sections. The *Retrospektive* section delivers the most coherent program of all, as it is obviously not restrained by the need to show premieres and has a vast corpus of films to chose from. It is curated and supervised by film historians of the *Deutsche Kinemathek*, a public film institute close to the Berlinale. The 2004–2006 retrospectives, which I will briefly look into in the following paragraphs, focused on films of the Marshall Plan and were conceptualized on Kosslick's personal initiative. Thus, they are telling of the Berlinale's larger assumptions of cinema and its social function.

The three part retrospective that was screened at the Berlinale in the years 2004–2006, aptly called *Selling Democracy*, curated and restored films that were produced as part of the Marshall Plan between 1947-1955 and served as cinematic carriers of the message of economic and political reconstruction and democratization that was realized in the European Recovery Program (ERP). The films that were screened ranged from educational films aimed at West

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[43] "Das Motto dieser 66. Berlinale war "Route 66" in Anlehnung an die amerikanische 2451 Meilen lange Straße von Chicago nach Santa-Monica in Kalifornien. Jedoch sollte unsere Route 66 nicht nur das Festivaljahr beschrieben, sondern die Flüchtlingsrouten der mehr als 60 Millionen Menschen thematisieren, die damals auf der Flucht vor Krieg, Terror und religiösem Wahn waren." Kosslick, 2021. p. 189.

Germans about the crimes of the Nazi era[44] or the new political regime in East Germany[45] to films shown to US citizens justifying the billions of tax dollars that their administration spent on Western Europe, focusing on the humanitarian emergency[46] and the political necessities of the Cold War.[47]

The 30-page English-language program catalog of the *Selling Democracy* retrospective contains essays by Dieter Kosslick and the series' two curators, US film historian Sandra Schulberg and German film historian and director of the *Kinemathek* Rainer Rother, all on the significance of the Marshall Plan's film department and its relevance today. Kosslick's essay opens the catalog and carries the headline "Thanks, Mr. Marshall!"[48] His text loudly applauds the Marshall Plan, which is hardly surprising given the fact that the Berlinale itself was one of its many measures, founded in 1951 on the initiative of US film officer Oscar Martay. The concept of an international film festival as a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* in West Berlin was very much in line with the strategy of the Marshall Plan, which counted not only on political education but also on cultural investments that ensured West German self confidence and foster the US-German bond.

In his essay, Kosslick already hints at the contemporary relevance of political education through films: "As we look at the wars going on around the world, perhaps we can learn from and draw inspiration from the films of the Marshall Plan."[49] The point is taken up more specifically by Sandra Schulberg in her text: "Today, the US government intends to launch another effort to 'sell democracy,' this time in the Middle East. Calls for another Marshall Plan abound."[50] This hint towards the contemporaneous foreign policy of the United States is an interesting twist, especially in essays about the Marshall Plan. On the one hand, Kosslick and Schulberg strictly distanced themselves from the current administration of George W. Bush and his invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003—as well as a possible war against Iran, which at that

[44] *Nürnberg und seine Lehre*, 1947.

[45] *Nicht Stören, Funktionärsversammlung!*, 1951.

[46] *Hunger*, 1949.

[47] *Between East and West*, 1949.

[48] Rother and Schulberg, 2004. p. 4.

[49] Ibid. p. 6.

[50] Ibid. p. 10.

time was also being debated. On the other hand, they acknowledge cinema as an appropriate and effective tool for democratizing foreign countries.

This exercise in historiography and memory culture is quite paradigmatic for German coverage of the United States in the early 2000s. The federal government of social-democratic chancellor Gerhard Schröder had made an explicit point of not participating in the US-led coalition of countries that started the invasion of Iraq in early 2003 that toppled the government of Saddam Hussein. In the same year, global demonstrations against the war in Iraq took place in Germany, too, and half a million people protested in Berlin. As such, anti-American sentiments were on the rise in Germany when the *Selling Democracy* retrospective was launched in 2004. At the same time, the historic bonds between the two countries were highlighted to underline that the massive US-American help in the reconstruction of West Germany had not been forgotten. Nevertheless, the Bush administration's handling of international crises was a welcome opportunity for Germany to lecture its former mentor in humanitarian issues and thus contest their moral monopoly and position as *the* global superpower, a position that by this time had already begun to weaken.

With the *Selling Democracy* retrospective, Kosslick swam on this wave of criticism of the United States and applied it to the Berlinale: by reminding audiences that cinema had been an effective tool of democratization in the past and suggesting that it might work in a similar way in the future, he offers his film festival as a cinematic institution ready to use films for political purposes, especially democratization and adherence to human rights. Six years later, in an interview on the occasion of the Berlinale's 60th birthday, Kosslick summed up his position as follows:

> I have been a political director insofar as I've put the spotlight on human rights, on globalization, on diversity and the need for tolerance. [...] A mega-event like the Berlinale need not be merely for entertainment, but it can also be used to show that something is wrong in the wider world.[51]

Kinemathek director Rainer Rother draws from this assumption of Kosslick's Berlinale as an institution with political relevance when he praises his colleague in his own contribution to the *Selling Democracy* catalog: "In his own

[51] Cowie, 2010. p. 53.

way, he sells democracy every day, and the Berlin Film Festival is the better for it."[52]

By making the Berlinale's assumptions of cinema and politics explicit—with the first serving as a tool for the latter—the *Selling Democracy* retrospective closed the circle of the festival's history of staging the political, which I have explored in Chapter Two. It also anticipated the next step in the evolution of the political at the Berlinale. In the 1950s and 60s, the festival had served as a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* for the Western Allied on the urban stage of Berlin, where political programs collided and Western liberalism and had to be defended with cultural means against the threats of communism and recently defeated fascism. In the global rebellions of the late 1960s and 70s, the Berlinale itself became a political stage for the clash of generations and the contestation of Western politics from the left, and readily accepted that role. Under Moritz de Hadeln, the Berlinale of the 1980s and 90s discovered communist countries and displayed them with a fascination that exoticized the political. With Dieter Kosslick taken over in the 2000s and 2010s, the tradition of the political festival was reinstated and enhanced with a further dimension: the Berlinale as a politically committed cultural institution, ready to spread democracy and Western liberalism with all the performative and discursive tools a film festival has to offer. In a way, this developed the function of the showcase of the Free World further, only that values were no longer just defended, but self-consciously spread, and that the festival had successfully emancipated itself from the United States.

3.2 Kick-Off: Iran at the 2006 Berlinale

Given the festival's newly found role as a candid critic of its former sponsors, expressed for instance in the *Selling Democracy* catalog, in Kosslick's ceremonial speeches, or in US filmmakers like Dustin Hoffman, Martin Scorsese, or Oliver Stone openly voicing criticism against the Bush administration on its stages in 2003, it is not surprising that the Berlinale started to orient itself towards the Middle East in the early 2000s. With one of the largest film industries in the region, a rich history of being exhibited successfully at international film festivals, and a continuous status as a daily news item, Iran

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[52] Rother and Schulberg, 2004. p. 27.

was an obvious choice in that regard. For more than a decade, Iranian cinema became the most prominent means for the Berlinale to show its political commitment. Shortly before his tenure ended, Kosslick was asked by a Berlin newspaper about his legacy and the mark he had left on the festival. He replied:

> We programmed political commitment and art films so that the topics and films found a large audience. We advocated Iranian directors and showed forbidden Chinese films. [...] The 1951 Berlinale guidelines state that the festival should contribute to international understanding, and this should continue to be the case.[53]

Casting Iran

The festival's advocacy for Iranian directors, which Kosslick states as his first and most important contribution to *Völkerverständigung* (international understanding), began in late 2005 during the preparations for the 56th Berlinale. In August, Mahmud Ahmadinejad's (b. 1956) alliance of conservative splinter parties had won the presidential election with a surprising landslide victory. The inauguration of the "proletarian, populist newcomer"[54] sent shock waves through Western media outlets, driven by fears of a drastic deterioration of the already volatile Iranian-American relations and a possible deadlock in the ongoing nuclear negotiations. In addition, reports of prominent Iranians like Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi calling for a boycott of the election and Ahmadinejad's rumored participation in the U.S. embassy hostage crisis of 1979 had dominated Western news coverage of the Iranian presidential election.[55] It was, however, not only fear and skepticism with which the new president was regarded in the West. German newspapers in particular were torn apart between concerns of a "religious tsunami sweeping away all freedom"[56] and a fascination with the presumably modest political outsider who might well

[53] "Wir haben politisches Engagement und künstlerische Filme so programmiert, dass die Themen und Filme ein großes Publikum gefunden haben. Wir haben uns für verfolgte iranische Regisseure eingesetzt und verbotene chinesische Filme gezeigt. [...] Im Berlinale-Statut von 1951 heißt es, das Festival soll zur Völkerverständigung beitragen und das sollte auch weiterhin so sein." Vogel, 2018.

[54] Axworthy, 2013. p. 377.

[55] In his political biography of Ahmadinejad, journalist Kasra Naji effectively recapitulates these reports and their background. See Naji, 2008. pp. 11–25.

[56] "Droht dem Land ein religiöser Tsunami, der alle Freiheiten unter sich begräbt?" Lau, 2005.

become an "Islamic Robin Hood."[57] Furthermore, in terms of cultural politics, Ahmadehinejad's presidency had the ended eight years of relatively liberal legislation that are often referred to as the Khatami era, and his election pushed the Iranian film industry into a state of insecurity.

It was during this uncertain period of concern about a conservative backlash and a new wave of fascination for Iran that a delegation of six Berlinale curators, including Dieter Kosslick, travelled to Tehran in late 2005, looking for films that could be screened at the festival in the following year. It is unclear whether the timing of the trip had something to do with Ahmadinejad's election or whether the early scheduling of the most important Iranian film festival, the *Jashnvāreh-ye Fīlm-e Fajr* (Fajr Film Festival, short: Fajr), made an acquisition of films seem particularly easy that year.[58] In any case, the procedure was unusual for different reasons. Kosslick had recently introduced a system of regional delegates when he took over as festival director. His predecessor, Moritz de Hadeln, had prided himself on making every journey to the United States, Russia, and East Asia himself and on personally securing contacts with the film industries there. From the early 2000s onwards, however, the Berlinale started to appoint particular curators for a number of regions who would do the traveling, networking, and film sighting on their own. While most of the regions were large areas spanning several countries (like Latin America or the Middle East), Iran was one of the few countries to get its own regional delegate. It was in this context that a team of Berlinale curators visited Tehran in late 2005 to look for films. Kosslick reportedly accompanied them on their first trip to strengthen ties with the Fajr Film Festival and to build up a cooperation that never came to fruition.[59]

[57] "Mahmud Ahmadinedschad hat sich dagegen mit seinem Plan einer Umverteilung des gesellschaftlichen Reichtums zu Gunsten der Armen auch den Ruf eines islamischen Robin Hoods erworben." "*Iran: Hardliner siegt bei Präsidentschaftswahl,*" 2005.

[58] The Fajr Film Festival usually happens during the month of Fajr, which is early February in Europe and commemorates the Iranian revolution. It thus collides with the Berlinale. In 2006, however, the timing of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar) and the *ʿĀshūrāʾ* celebrations in early February led to the Fajr date being pulled into January. For the first time in years, this constellation made it possible for the Berlinale curators to watch films selected for the festival in Tehran and still have time to pick them for their own programming.

[59] Fazanefar, 2006.

After the visit, all plans for future cooperations with Iranian authorities were soon given up. The festival director describes the research trip in his autobiography in bleak terms:

> On many buildings, tiles were missing, public parks were dried out, and I remember a heartbreakingly crying woman whose shoes had been stolen while she was visiting a mosque. These were individual impressions that, over the time of my stay, added up to the image of a country that was in a difficult position not only economically.[60]

Kosslick's individual impressions of 2005 already foreshadowed many of the aspects of everyday life in Iran that would be represented in the selected films: poverty, heartbreaking personal stories, the plight of women, exoticized religiosity, and general bleakness. It is difficult to reconstruct the eyes with which Kosslick and his colleagues saw the country during their first visit, but it clearly captured their ongoing fascination. The very act of actively scanning through a large number of films from a particular country is not in line with the standard application procedure at the Berlinale. Normally, the filmmakers submit their works to the festival by autumn, when they are screened for the curators, who then select a number of them for their program. In this case however, the team watched "over a hundred Iranian films in five days, a record setting thing," as one of the screened directors told me in an interview. This unusually proactive selection process implies that the festival undertook a conscious effort to screen more films from Iran and to place a particular focus on the country.

The motivation for this effort of casting Iran as the next spotlight for the festival is unclear, but the process stands in intriguing contrast to other political rogue states Kosslick dealt with. At the time, the festival director was seemingly interested in politically exotic countries that provoked the German public. In 2006 he travelled to the Pyongyang International Film Festival as a guest of honor and, in 2003, he tried hard to invite Fidel Castro to the Berlinale on the occasion of a documentary about him that premiered in Berlin. In his memoirs, Kosslick describes his flirt with the Cuban president at length, calling him only *Commandante* and expressing his continuing regrets

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[60] "Von vielen Gebäuden waren die Kacheln abgeschlagen, die Parks waren vertrocknet, und ich erinnere mich an eine herzzerreißend weinende Frau, der die Schuhe geklaut worden waren, während sie die Moschee besucht hatte. Das waren einzelne Eindrücke, die sich über die Zeit meines Aufenthalts zum Bild eines Landes summierten, das nicht nur mit einer schwierigen wirtschaftlichen Lage zu kämpfen hatte." Kosslick, 2021. p. 125.

that the publicity stunt of having Castro on the red carpet never did work out.[61] His visit to North Korea, too, is remembered fondly: "We flew low, very low over bright green and radiant meadows—a beautiful country."[62] In contrast to Iran, however, neither Cuban nor North Korean cinema was ever showcased in Berlin. With the Islamic Republic, the Berlinale had apparently finally found a a political exotic that was suitable for a sensational entrance onto the festival stage.

The result of the extended research trip to Tehran was that the selection committee brought back six Iranian films for the 2006 program: five feature films, of which two played in the competition and *Forum* sections and one in the *Panorama* section, as well as one short film. The six films varied strongly in tone, aesthetics and topic, and they were presented and perceived on the stages of the festival in various ways. Yet although the festival by no means introduced a coherent collection of Iranian cinema in its 2006 program, that year certainly saw the initiation of certain modes of representing and reading Iranian films at the Berlinale. For this reason, I will in the following take a detailed look at the experiences of these films at the 56th Berlinale.

Iranian Winter in Berlin

The first Iranian film to be screened in the international competition in 30 years was *Zemestān Ast (It's Winter)* by Rafīʿ Pītz (b. 1967).[63] The bleak family drama is dedicated to the memory of poet Mehdī Akhavān S̱āleṯ (1929–1990), whose poem of the same title is recited as a song in the mirrored scenes in the beginning and the end of the film. Both poem and film reflect on the cold, unbridgeable distance between people, even within families, and the desolate

[61] Ibid. pp. 196–204.

[62] Ibid. p. 174.

[63] Synopsis: The film opens with a man boarding a train at a snow-covered village station. He is leaving to find work elsewhere, turning his back on his family. His wife, Khātūn (Mītrā Ḥajjār), is told that he will send her money as soon as he has found a job, but after months of waiting without hearing from him, she loses all hope. In summer, Marḥab (ʿĀlī Nīksolāt) arrives at her village, a young and energetic man who soon starts to work at a local car repair shop. He falls in love with Khātūn, and when she receives news that her husband has passed away, Marhab and Khatun marry. Yet their honeymoon abruptly ends in autumn, when Marhab loses his job. Unable to find work again, he, too decides to leave the village. In winter, he finds himself at the same snow-covered train station where his predecessor disappeared a year ago. Marhab, however, is unable to board the train when it arrives—in the very last minute, he decides to stay. As the train leaves, Marhab is left staring into the bleak winter landscape and an uncertain future, but willing to stay in his newly found home.

tone and slow pacing are arguably an acquired taste. The film opened with an inconspicuous red carpet premiere on a slow Tuesday afternoon and apparently failed to excite festival audiences and juries. The news coverage was limited and *Zemestān Ast* won no awards, leaving the Berlinale stage as abruptly as it had entered it.

In the festival program catalog, the film had been announced with a synopsis that foregrounded the protagonists' wish to leave Iran for economic reasons and expanded the family drama to "the struggle for survival of a generation that would like to leave their native land but who soon find themselves caught in a vicious circle."[64] Kosslick later stressed that "with enormous force, it shows the coldness that reigns in Iran, the ignorance of the regime towards the people, this everyday brutality."[65] Accordingly, the press conference of *Zemestān Ast* at the Berlinale was very much focused on its comments on Iranian politics as a whole. As usual, the event took place right after the press screening, in front of a group of journalists who had just watched the film, and was moderated by film curator Ralf Schenk, who introduced the "guests from Iran" after welcoming them "to the press conference of our Iranian competition entry *Zamestan* (sic)."[66] The focus on Rafi Pitts as a representative of his birth country was immediately picked up by the audience, whose interrogation was dominated by an eagerness to squeeze political statements out of the director. An Italian journalist opened with a question about unemployment in Iran and wondered whether the current nuclear program might be a distraction from such domestic problems.[67] A British colleague asked whether the cold distance between Khatun and Marhab was a critique of Iranian gender politics,[68] a comment doubled down by a German journalist asking if Marhab intended to buy off his fiancée with his engagement gift, a carpet.[69] Pitts only had a variation of the same answer to

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[64] "Überlebenskampf einer Generation, die ihre Heimat verlassen möchte und dabei in einen Teufelskreis gerät" *Katalog*, 2006. p. 60.

[65] "Er zeigt mit ungeheurer Wucht die Kälte, die im Iran herrschte, die Ignoranz des Regimes gegenüber den Menschen, diese Brutalität, die den Alltag prägt." Kosslick, 2021. p. 125.

[66] "Ich begrüße Sie recht herzlich zur Pressekonferenz unseres iranischen Wettbwerbsbeitrags "Zamestan (sic)—It's Winter. Ich möchte Ihnen zunächst die Gäste aus dem Iran vorstellen." *Press conference of Zemestān Ast*, 2006. Min. 10:15.

[67] Ibid. Min. 11:00.

[68] Ibid. Min. 32:00.

[69] Ibid. Min. 34:00.

these questions: that he was less interested in governments and politics than in "the human condition, which concerns my country, but also concerns so many countries."[70] Another German journalist, however, did not give up and defended her personal reading:

> You said it's up to the audience to interpret the film for themselves, as far as they are able to. And I personally think that, among other things, the film criticizes Iranian society. And I wonder if other people, and I mean the Iranian film censorship, also said that the film was criticizing society?

Upon this, the already tired Pitts forwarded the question to his producer who laughed and reassured the journalist that their film had had no problems with censorship whatsoever.[71] By then, the film had already premiered at an Iranian festival and would be released in cinemas nationwide and without amendments in the following year. Nevertheless, the question of censorship was picked up again concerning the role of the Berlinale, when a journalist implied to Pitts that a festival like this could help spread "the spirit of freedom" for Iranian filmmakers who face particular difficulties. To this, the director only remarked that arthouse cinema in general struggles at the box office and that any film is lucky to get the attention of an international festival, which of course also goes for Iranian arthouse films, but mainly for economic reasons rather than political ones.[72]

This first press conference for an Iranian film at Kosslick's Berlinale set the tone for similar events to come. First, the journalists' questions framed the film in a way that extrapolated the particularities of the plot into a generalizing portrait of Iranian society. In this reading, the poetic family drama about a couple's struggle to find a balance between stable marital life and a harsh job market in their dying village becomes a film about the problems of the Iranian working class and unemployment in the country—an interpretation that the festival's program brochure had already implied when it had spoken about "the struggle for survival of a generation that would like to leave their native land but who soon find themselves caught in a vicious circle."[73]

Second, the questions gravitated towards possible problems with censorship. The example of *Zemestān Ast* shows that this issue, which comes up

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[70] Ibid. Min. 12:30–13:30.

[71] Ibid. Min. 25:00–27:00

[72] Ibid. Min. 21:30–24:00.

[73] "Überlebenskampf einer Generation, die ihre Heimat verlassen möchte und dabei in einen Teufelskreis gerät" *Katalog*, 2006. p. 60.

at press conferences and Q&A sessions of virtually all Iranian films screened at international festivals, is completely independent of actual conflicts the film might have. *Zemestān Ast* was funded by Iranian public institutions and faced no problems with censorship, neither in relation to its domestic and international festival screenings nor with its cinematic release in Iran. Nevertheless, since it was produced in Iran and features no state propaganda, it was assumed that it must be at odds with official institutions. This paradigm of censorship would remain one of the cornerstones of the perception of Iranian films at the Berlinale in the following years.

Third, Rafi Pitts was assumed to be a representative of Iranian cinema, an entity that supposedly required no further explanation or classification. Such assumptions are not exclusive to Iranian directors or even non-Western filmmakers in general. Even German or French directors often enter the festival stage as agents of their national cinemas or at least certain larger trends in it. In case of Rafi Pitts, and many of his colleagues, however, it is important to point out the absurdity and redundancy of such claims: at the beginning of the war with Iraq, 14-year-old Pitts had left Iran to live with his British father and received all of his formal film education in London, where he also started his career as a director. Before *Zemestān Ast*, he had produced two feature films in Iran, to which he had occasionally returned to since the late 1990s. After this, he would produce one more film in his birth country before going into exile for good. Since 2011, he has resided in France and the United States, where he continues to work as a film director. As such, Pitts is a textbook example for an exile filmmaker, a phenomenon so virulent among directors born in Iran that Iranian-American film scholar Hamid Naficy famously derived his seminal concept of the "accented cinema" from their community.[74]

Football and Gender Politics

Many of the tendencies in the framing of filmmakers and their work at press conferences can also be observed in the second Iranian entry into the 2006 Berlinale competition: *Offside* by Jafar Panahi (b. 1960). However, Panahi's first of many appearances on the Berlinale stages had completely different preconditions than *Zemestān Ast.* While the political ascriptions to Rafi Pitts and the aspirations to frame him as a key witness for contemporary Iranian society

[74] Naficy, 2001.

seem quite absurd on closer inspection, Panahi's bittersweet soccer comedy is an activist film that unambiguously presents its political demand of lifting the stadium ban against women spectators.[75] Consequently, journalists did not have to dig particularly deep to find the subversive messages of the work. The press conference, however, often overshot this target: Panahi had to explain repeatedly that although the laws restricting women are very much discriminating, everyday life in Iran is not dominated by police brutality and women do indeed have certain freedoms. Journalists were especially irritated by the relaxed relationship between the soldiers and the soccer fans, who often joked with their captors or even pushed them around. A French journalist wanted to know if this was a way of idealizing the harsh reality,[76] while a German colleague even suggested that Panahi had held himself back with his criticism to avoid censorship.[77] To such assumptions, the director repeatedly answered that military service is mandatory in Iran and that many soldiers were simply regular young men with no bad intentions who, just like the women, belong to the large "family of Iran" (*khānevādeh-e Īrān*),[78] a point that implicitly comes up in the film several times. Another German journalist speculated that the absence of the female actors at the Berlin premiere meant that women were not allowed to leave the country. Instead, Panahi had to clarify that visa problems, caused by the late invitation on behalf of the festival,

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[75] Synopsis: *Offside* depicts the attempt of five women to get inside Azadi Stadium in Tehran to watch the soccer match between Iran and Bahrain despite a ban on female spectators. One of the nameless women arrives dressed up as a man but is picked up by the soldiers who regulate the stadium security before she can enter. She is brought to an improvised outdoor detention space near one of the entrances, where she meets the other four detainees. Soon after the kick-off, discussions about the stadium ban emerge between the women and the soldiers. In these arguments, which humorously point out the absurdity of the situation, it becomes clear that the soldiers would rather be home with their families or watching the decisive World Cup qualifying game themselves. Soon after Iran scores the 1:0 in the second half, the stadium security manager arrives at the scene and orders the women to be transported to the Guidance Patrol (*Gasht-e Ershād*) in an improvised security bus. In the bus, the love-hate relationship that has evolved between the women and their captors is strong enough for the soldiers to turn on the radio so that they can all follow the game together. After the final whistle, they are back in the inner city and in the chaos of festivities of the Iranian victory, the bus has to stop and the women get out to disappear in the street celebrations.
The film was shot during actual football matches on site over the course of June 2005, the qualifying game amongst them. To be more mobile in large crowds and near security controls, the film was shot with a digital camera, which in 2005 was unusual for a cinematic film. Along with the fact that the characters are played by real-life football fans instead of actors, this gives the film a strong documentary look.

[76] *Press conference of Offside*, 2006. Min. 14:30.

[77] Ibid. Min. 21:30.

[78] Ibid. Min. 15:15.

were the actual problem and that there were many Iranian actresses who very regularly travelled to film festivals abroad on their own.[79]

The question of censorship again came up repeatedly, and here, too, Panahi had to explain that he saw himself as a social rather than a political filmmaker and that he was optimistic about the film's unamended release in Iran.[80] Further, the fact that *Offside* premiered in Berlin of all places was discussed at the press conference in an unusually strong way. In part, this had to do with the content of the film: the victory of the Iranian national team against Bahrain, around which the plot is organized, had secured their participation in the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. For this reason, Panahi and his colleagues repeatedly remarked that Berlin, where the football event would take place four months later, was just the right place for their film's international premiere. But another dimension of the screening at this particular festival was the Berlinale's political profile, brought up by a Dutch journalist:

> Its the first time that Iranian films are shown at the Berlinale, where they have a strong presence this year. What does this mean to you as an Iranian filmmaker at the Berlinale? And that the festival has a tradition of showing films with quite political views?[81]

An Iranian journalist later doubled down on the political signals that the film would possibly send out. After thanking Panahi for his unusual comedy about "gender apartheid," she asked whether he would consider a possible Golden Bear for *Offside* as a sign of support in the fight for women's rights. The director remarked that he of course would be glad to win and enjoy the attention that such an award brings with it, but answered carefully: "You make it very political. I respect the jury and do not think that they should primarily consider these particular questions."[82]

Intriguingly, Panahi here seemed to be anticipating suspicions that he had purposefully produced an activist film for the sake of making it attractive to Western festival curators and juries. Such criticisms often came up in Iran when directors won awards at festivals abroad, and would be levelled at Panahi personally in the following years. At the time of the press conference, this was

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[79] Ibid. Min. 15:30–16:45.

[80] Ibid. Min. 12:30.

[81] Ibid. Min. 37:30.

[82] Based on the translation by the simultaneous interpreter, original statement in Farsi inaudible. Ibid. Min. 53:30–54:30.

a purely hypothetical question, but two days later, Panahi indeed stood on the stage of the closing ceremony when *Offside* won the Grand Jury Prize, the runner-up to the Golden Bear. In his speech, the director briefly excused his absent actresses before dedicating the award to all women who had to cross-dress to gain admission to sporting events, pointing out that the phenomenon was well known even in Ancient Greece.[83]

While his comment could well be understood as an attempt to put the phenomenon of the stadium ban against women into a more general and global context, *Offside* had been branded as a particularly Iranian film from the beginning of the festival. The announcement in the 2006 program had already played with audience expectations of restrictive gender roles in Iranian society, stating that "even in Iran, there is an increasing number of soccer-loving women."[84] The synopsis further put a strong emphasis on the film dealing with the "social dilemma of modern Iranian women."[85]

It should thus be no surprise that German media coverage readily jumped at the topic and universally celebrated the film. Not only did *Offside*'s connection of football, women, and comedy play particularly well with German critics, they also widely framed the film around the political situation in Iran rather than its social aspects or the general question of female sports spectatorship in different societies. Most reviews started with a clarification of the legal status of Iranian soccer stadiums, like the weekly news magazine *Stern*: "In theocratic Iran, women unfortunately have to remain outside."[86] The local *Rheinische Post* pointed out that *Offside* depicts the "hardships of women which uncover much about about the socio-political climate in Iran" before musing that "the mullah regime doesn't like such films."[87] The film's coverage in German media swam on a new high of love for soccer in anticipation of the upcoming World Cup, and generally showed a strong urge of distinction towards the restrictive other of the Iranian government. This paired with

[83] *Closing ceremony of the 56th Berlinale*, 2006. Min. 57:30–59:15.

[84] "Auch im Iran gibt es immer mehr fußballbegeisterte Frauen." *Katalog*, 2006. p. 52.

[85] "Das soziale Dilemma, in das moderne iranische Frauen geraten können, hat Jafar Panahi in seinen vorangegangenen Filmen schon häufiger thematisiert." Ibid.

[86] "Es gilt im Gottesstaat Iran für Fußballstadien: Frauen müssen leider draußen bleiben." Heidböhmer, 2010.

[87] "Mit neorealistischer Präzision schildert Panahi meist harte Frauenschicksale, die viel über das gesellschaftspolitische Klima im Iran enthüllen. Kein Wunder, dass solche Filme dem Mullah-Regime nicht gefallen." "*Offside: wo die Mädels im Abseits stehen*," 2006.

empathy with the soccer-crazed general populace, and empathy that however always left a belittling aftertaste. All articles speak of the protagonists as "girls" or even "gals" (*Mädels*) rather than women,[88] showing once again that the apparent need to liberate women in Muslim societies does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with actual respect. This issue would often resurface on the festival stages in the following years, where Iranian gender politics were widely spotlighted and commented on, while female directors from the country remained a rare exception on the Berlinale's guest list.

The combination of criticizing the government while simultaneously emphasizing the similarities of the protagonists with their Western counterparts (the Berlinale audiences) was a recipe for success that would work for many later Iranian films at the festival. In the case of *Offside*, it certainly played out: the film premiered on a busy Friday night, arguably one of the very best time slots for a competition film, went home with the second most important award of the festival, and over the course of the summer received a successful cinematic release in 18 countries in Europe and the Americas. By contrast, the other Iranian film, the poetic family drama *Zemestān Ast*, more or less disappeared from the global film stage after its premiere in Berlin.

Further Insights into Iranian Society

As for the four remaining Iranian films that were screened in other sections of the festival that year, similar modes of representation can be made out, from the eagerness to present the films as portraits of contemporary Iranian society to a focus on their possible political statements. While there is no data on the short film *Kamī Bālātar* (A Little Bit Higher) about two crane operators,[89] the feature films in the *Panorama* and *Forum* sections were well covered in program catalogs and the media. Māzyār Mīrī's (b. 1972) drama *Beh Āhestegī…* (Gradually…) premiered in the Panorama section, where it failed to generate

[88] See, for example "*Kino in Kürze*," 2006; Heidböhmer, 2010; Mirza, 2006.

[89] Shorts are usually screened in blocs of four to five films and thus have no premieres of their own, no press conferences, and very rarely receive media coverage. In case they win no awards, they only exist on the stage of the festival in the cinema halls at the time they are screened. For this reason, they largely have to be left out of this analysis, as their reception and presentation is not observable outside of the ephemeral chatter of the cinema halls and lounges.

much attention.[90] The Berlinale program brochure is quick to underline that the film scratches taboo topics and presents its protagonist as a man fearing for his social status rather than worrying about the fate of his wife.[91] The director's biography further frames him as a subversive filmmaker, pointing to an early short film of his "that has remained banned by the censor to the present day."[92] The presumption of Miri as a subversive filmmaker due to one forbidden short film was a premature exaggeration, however: After its premiere in Berlin, *Beh Āhestegī...* was released in Iran without problems. Miri soon continued to make popular pious romantic dramas and never seems to have faced censorship again.

A very similar framework was applied to *Ṣobḥ-e Dīgar* (Another Morning), a drama that festival publications and media coverage also evaluated for its subversive potential.[93] Nāṣṣer Refāʿī's film premiered in the Forum section, where it was announced as "an incidental and unexpected insight into Iranian society:"

> We see how fewer newspapers are sold on the streets because the censors shut them down; how the police chase young members of the opposition. Other taboo subjects such as pickpocketing and adultery are broached. *Another Morning* shows a side of Iranian daily life that the official images do not.[94]

For a film about the isolation of a fresh widower who tries to adapt to his new life, this description is quite surprising. While Anke Leweke, the Berlinale curator who wrote the text, admits that these everyday life observations are incidental, the focus on these taboo subjects clearly echoes the tradition of the Western gaze eager to uncover the truth about the Orient behind the "official images."

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[90] Synopsis: The film depicts the efforts of a young man, Maḥmūd (Moḥammad Reżā Forūtan) to find his wife Parī (Nīlūfar Khūsh Kholq). Parī was known to suffer from mental health issues and after she disappears suddenly, her husband starts looking for her all over Tehran. After days of unsuccessful searching, he finally identifies a faceless corpse in a morgue as his wife, presumably to avoid the social stigma of having been left by his partner.

[91] "Just as in his feature film debut, *Unfinished Song*, about harassed singers in his native Iran, Maziar Miri's second feature also touches on social taboos. For if Mahmoud fails to find his wife, he will have real problems as far as his social status is concerned..." *Katalog*, 2006. p. 162.

[92] Ibid. p. 163.

[93] Synopsis: Middle-aged widower Kamalī (Majīd Jalīlyān) is coming to terms with the death of his wife. *Ṣobḥ-e Dīgar* shows his everyday life and his struggle with loneliness and isolation. At times, hope shimmers through: Kamālī falls in love with a co-worker and sees a chance for a fresh start, but she does not respond to his attempts to win her over. Another bid for a new life is symbolized by a lottery ticket that Kamālī buys for himself. When this fails, too, the widower has to finally accept his new life as a single man.

[94] *Katalog*, 2006. p. 169.

German media coverage of *Ṣobḥ-e Dīgar* also underlined its potential as a portrait of Iran as a whole rather than the particular drama at its core, like the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which recommended it as a film that "reflects the paralysis of a country."[95] Other reviews similarly see it as a "contemporary document of Iranian society" and emphasize director Refaie's difficulties to get a permission to film.[96] International journalists, on the other hand, were far more critical of the the two films, whose quality was cast into doubt. *Screen Daily*, a festival edition of *Screen International*, the largest British film business publication, described the drama as "a tough nut to crack for all but the most dedicated students of Iranian cinema" and cynically commented on its marketability:

> Though commercial prospects look remote, festival dates are still possible: Showing Iran as a nest of iniquities just when its government is becoming more prominent on the world stage is something no programmer can ignore.[97]

The review of of *Beh āhestegī…* in the Hollywood-based magazine *Variety* was even more scathing:

> The narration is much too slow to make this interesting. [...] When not sliding into melodrama, the film hedges toward mystery, but ends up just being perversely complicated and uninvolving.[98]

The discrepancy between these reviews is quite telling of the willingness of the quoted German media outlets to overlook a clear lack of filmic quality for the sake of getting the much desired insight into Iranian society as an incidental by-product of a mediocre drama.

The second Iranian film in the 2006 Forum, *Kārgarān Mashghūl-e Kārand* (Men At Work, lit. Workers Are Busy), is an entirely different case.[99] Mānī Ḥaqīqī's (b. 1969) comedy about a group of rich middle aged men strikes a tone

[95] "Nasser Refaie reflektiert die Lähmung des Landes." Xuân Müller, 2006.

[96] "Nachdem ich das Drehbuch vorgelegt hatte, brauchte ich acht Monate und viele Diskussionen, um die Behörden zu überzeugen, dass der Film gut ist und ein Zeitdokument der iranischen Gesellschaft darstellt, um die Drehgenehmigung zu erhalten." Avidan, 2006.

[97] Fainaru, 2006.

[98] Young, 2005.

[99] Synopsis: The film starts with four upper middle class couples returning from a skiing trip in the mountainous outskirts of Tehran. On the side of the road, they discover a tall rock standing on the edge of a valley. They get out to tip the boulder over the cliff for no particular reason but entertainment. Yet soon they discover that the rock is standing much more firmly than anticipated. A dispute between the friends emerges over how to proceed best: some argue that they should find a lever, some want to use their cars and some just want to go on and leave the stone be. After a long series of unsuccessful attempts, the remaining men finally give up—just before the boulder falls off the cliff on its own.

unlike any of the previously discussed films: an absurdist humor instead of melancholy and poetry, and no political topic on its surface. Yet, this absence of an obvious political statement was claimed as so unusual that it was even highlighted in the Berlinale program catalog, which notes about *Kārgarān Mashghūl-e Kārand*:

> It is not only its sense for the comical inanity of existence that makes this digitally-shot film so wonderfully unique; it is also its readiness to rise above the social criticism that the West continually expects from Iranian cinema.[100]

Although this commentary notably celebrates the film's transcendence of the political, the biography of Mani Haghighi printed in the catalog right next to the description frames him as a subversive filmmaker by underlining that "his debut feature, *Abadan*, was criticized by Iranian authorities."[101] It might be true that *Abadan*, Haghighi's 2003 comedy about a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War, was never shown in Iran, but this is mainly due to the fact that Haghighi himself was not satisfied with the product and held it back from a domestic release. The director's later films, including *Kārgarān Mashghūl-e Kārand*, would later all premiere in Iran, and with increasing success. Unsurprisingly, this fact would not stop journalists from asking about censorship during Haghighi's later appearances at the Berlinale.

The only interview that Haghighi gave to the German press in 2006 was with the website *Qantara.de*, a side-project of the government-funded *Deutsche Welle* that aims to establish of a cultural dialogue between Germany and the Muslim world. The article is very much focused on the details of the director getting a permission to shoot the film, which ultimately was quite easy and uneventful, as he explains in the interview:

> My producer brought the manuscript to the cultural ministry, which approved it in two days. Ten days later, we were already shooting. Shooting took 18 days. Editing and sound took much longer. Then we handed the completed film to the ministry. There, it stayed for a while, as the new president was just changing the functionaries of all ministries. As soon as the new functionaries had seen the film, they approved it immediately.[102]

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[100] *Katalog*, 2006. p. 94.

[101] "Sein Spielfilmdebüt, *Abadan*, wurde von offizieller iranischer Seite kritisiert." Ibid.

[102] "Mein Produzent brachte das Manuskript zum Kulturministerium, das ihn innerhalb von zwei Tagen genehmigte. 10 Tage später drehten wir bereits. Die Dreharbeiten dauerten 18 Tage. Schnitt und Tonarbeit dauerten viel länger. Dann legten wir den fertigen Film dem Ministerium vor. Dort lag er eine Weile, weil der neue Präsident gerade alle Beamten in den Ministerien auswechselte. Sobald die neuen Beamten den Film sahen, genehmigten sie ihn sofort." Avidan, 2006.

In this absurdly uneventful statement, Haghighi uses many words to state that there were no problems at all, while much time of the article is spent with an explanation of the system of censorship and permission in the Iranian film industry—despite the fact that it eventually did not apply to the film in question at all. The article further tries hard to charge the cynical comedy with a political meaning and underlines that "director Mani Haghighi expresses himself very carefully when he says that a political film hides under the grotesque plot"—without detailing, however, where exactly the political is supposed to be hidden.[103] Here, again, the German media's eagerness to find secret political messages in Iranian films is readily apparent, regardless of whether they are actually there or not.

In conclusion, the 2006 Berlinale already set the tone for its future relation with Iranian cinema. Although there was of course no coherent framing and orchestration—as the films screened in different program sections and the media coverage and filmmakers' self-expression are not within the Berlinale's sphere of influence—a foundation for the later role of Iranian films at the festival stages was laid, especially at press conferences and in program catalogs. Most importantly, an eagerness emerged among both the festival organizers and journalists to scan Iranian films for political statements, to deduce general portraits about Iranian society from particular stories, and to focus on the question of state censorship. These three layers of perception were applied even if they were unrelated to the film's actual background: the absence of the political was duly noted in *Kārgarān Mashghūl-e Kārand;* the dramas *Beh āhestegī…* and *Ṣobḥ-e Dīgar* were presented as contemporary documents of Iranian society; and *Zemestān Ast*, *Kārgarān Mashghūl-e Kārand*, and *Beh āhestegī…* were persistently interrogated regarding their difficulties with the authorities even though they had been produced and released without problems. Furthermore, the biographies published by the Berlinale framed most of the directors as subversive filmmakers by emphasizing their conflicts with the ministry of culture, at times even by picking out obscure and long-forgotten incidents.

These perceptions clearly speak to the primacy of the political at the festival. Yet in contrast to earlier instances of the Berlinale's history, especially during the Cold War and its aftermath, Iran was considered an outsider on the

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[103] "Regisseur Mani Haghighi drückt sich vorsichtig aus, wenn er sagt, dass sich hinter der grotesken Handlung auch ein politischer Film verstecke." Ibid.

stage of world politics. Unlike earlier showcases of the Soviet Union or China, the interest in Iran was accompanied by a good portion of anthropological curiosity, in addition to the country's status as a frequent news item. The paradigm that defined this curiosity was again the political, specifically the paradigm of resistance. To use the words of Palestinian American anthropologist Lila Abu-Loghod, the Berlinale showed "a tendency to romanticize resistance"[104] in its focus on Iranian cinema from the very beginning, a phenomenon that she and many of her colleagues have diagnosed in the humanities and their gaze on Middle Eastern societies. Fellow researcher Michael Brown, who later furthered this debate on tendencies to "translate the apparently trivial into the fatefully political"[105] and remarked: "We reassure ourselves that the pursuit of what might seem to be esoteric ethnographic detail is really a form of high-minded public service."[106]

It seems that the same was true for the invitation of Iranian cinema to the Berlinale in 2006. While most of the films and directors had to be somewhat bent and reinterpreted to find their subversive potential, the only filmmaker who actually fit into these expectations turned out to be Jafar Panahi. As an explicitly political comedy about female soccer fans and their relation to the military that was banned in Iran, his competition entry, *Offside*, was the film that worked best with these expectations and accordingly was by far the most successful and prominent of the six Iranian films screened at the festival in 2006 and took the Grand Jury Prize. Panahi's recipe of a decisive stance against the government of the Islamic Republic paired with an often humorous and loving portrayal of its conflict with regular Iranians would prove successful again in the future, as we shall see in the following chapters. Furthermore, important personal relations were forged that year—with Rafi Pitts, Mani Haghighi and, most prominently, Jafar Panahi, half of the six invited Iranian filmmakers became regular guests of the Berlinale and would return again with their later films.

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[104] Abu-Lughod, 1990. p. 42.

[105] Brown, 1996. p. 729.

[106] Ibid. p. 730.

3.3 Iran Settles in at the Berlinale between 2007 and 2010

In the following four years, further 15 Iranian films were invited into the Berlinale program. This number might diminish next to established film industries like the United States or France, but in comparison to the number of other countries in the region, it reveals a relatively high interest in Iran. Taken together, all Middle Eastern countries present at the Berlinale in the same time frame, that is Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Qatar, also have a total of 15 films between them. During this period, the groundwork laid in 2006 evolved into a certain routine of framing Iranian films and, at the same time, the Berlinale's connections to the film industry of the Islamic Republic were expanded. With the 2009 protests against the re-election of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and their extensive coverage in Western media, the German image of Iran was sharpened further, which in turn influenced the country's representation at the Berlinale. As these years set the stage for the festival's unprecedented focus in 2011 and thereafter, when Jafar Panahi became its poster boy for political cinema, I will take a closer look at the relations of the Berlinale with Iranian filmmakers in that period.

Criticism: A Red Carpet for Ahmadinejad

The young love between the Berlinale and Iranian cinema was not unanimously welcomed in Germany, especially in the early years. Surprisingly, there was much criticism from the Iranian community in Germany, organized by the *Club iranisch-europäischer Filmemacher* (Club of Iranian-European Filmmakers, CIEF) and expressed in two open letters to festival director Dieter Kosslick. The first of these letters was published in early February 2006, just before the 56th Berlinale started, when it had been announced that six films from Iran would be screened there. The signing filmmakers accused the festival of "offering [president Mahmud] Ahmadinejad a cultural stage for his propaganda."[107] They argued that, to release a film in Iran, artists had to arrange with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which only

[107] "Der Berlinale werfen die Exilanten folglich vor, Ahmadinedschad eine kulturelle Bühne für seine Propaganda zu bieten." Quoted in Xuân Müller, 2006.

allowed and funded projects that fit their political guidelines[108]—conveniently ignoring the fact that state sponsorship is by far not the only source of film funding in the country. Of the six films the CIEF addressed with their letter, only *Zemestān Ast* was produced with public money. The others were all privately funded, and *Offside*, the most highly prolific of the bunch, was even paid for by director Panahi's own production company and accepted by the cultural ministry only with a different director and a fake script.[109] Still, the signees assumed that the films' premieres in Berlin would be in the best interest of the government of the Islamic Republic, which would even anticipate some social criticism to claim that Iran was a an open society that tolerated critics. In this line of argumentation, especially the more subversive films like *Offside* became disguised vehicles of "well dosed propaganda" (*wohldosierte Propaganda*).[110] Consequently, the letter used harsh words to condemn Kosslick's decision to invite Iranian films:

> With the presentation of these films you involuntarily support a fascist regime that, after almost three decades of terror and severe human rights violations in the country, tries to intimidate the world with nuclear threats and an antisemitic as well as anti-Israeli posture.[111]

Two years later, when Iran was again very present at the Berlinale with five films, the CIEF's cause was further supported by anti-German factions of the radical left, whose decidedly pro-Israeli stance had led them to become very aware of the Iranian government and their international activities. During the 2008 Berlinale, German film scholar Tobias Ebbrecht published a report in the left-wing weekly *Jungle World* on the strong Iranian presence at the festival under the sarcastic title "Why is it so beautiful in Iran?"[112] Ebbrecht, too, brought up the films as welcome alibis of artistic freedom in the Islamic Republic, especially those with politically subversive messages. After replicating

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[108] "Um in Iran einen Film drehen zu können, muss zunächst das islamische Kulturministerium zustimmen. Die genehmigten Kinoproduktionen würden zudem allesamt mit staatlichen Fördermitteln unterstützt. Finanzielle Hilfe erhielten natürlich nur diejenigen, die den Vorgaben des iranischen Kulturministeriums entsprechen." Ibid.

[109] This trick to receive a permission to shoot *Offside* was confirmed by Jafar Panahi at the Berlinale press conference. See *Press conference of Offside*, 2006. Min. 26:30-28:00.

[110] Xuân Müller, 2006.

[111] "Mit der Präsentation dieser Filme unterstützen Sie unfreiwillig ein faschistisches Regime, das nach fast drei Jahrzehnten Terror und schweren Menschenrechtsverletzungen im Lande mit atomaren Drohungen und antisemitischer wie antiisraelischer Haltung die Welt zu bedrohen versucht." Ibid.

[112] Ebbrecht, 2008a.

the distorted picture of a supposedly total system of control and funding in the Iranian film industry, the activist researcher enlists film theory and the concept of "double addressing"[113] to further his argument:

> This double addressing is built on the Western projections and the fascination with Iranian cinema. It thus confirms a mode of reception that needs supposed criticism and subversion, but means their exact opposite, namely the ideological agreement with a socially romanticized worldview critical of civilization. [...] This anti-modern thrust is conform with the ideology of Ahmadinejad's regime. The current president stands in the tradition of renewing the Islamic Revolution, explicitly recurring to the social question and a strict rejection to lift the pervasive terror of virtue.[114]

According to Ebbrecht, the eagerness of Western audiences to find subversiveness and social criticism in Iranian films is in fact only testament to their own anti-modern attitude that is obsessed with the rural victims of not only the regime, but of modernity—and thus, confirms Ahmadinejad's ideology of social justice for the downtrodden parts of the populace (*mostażaʿfīn*). This argumentative circle is applied mostly to the poetic and social realist branch of Iranian cinema that used to be popular at European festivals in the 1990s—yet, ironically, this genre was mostly absent from the Berlinale. In a later article in the anti-German journal *Extrablatt*, a more detailed update of the earlier publication, Ebbrecht explains this further and extends it to the branch of political cinema preferred by the Berlinale. Concerning *Offside*, he writes:

> For a Western audience, these films are evidence of cultural pluralism and subversive freedoms in Iran, which in turn are supposed to act as an argument in support of one's own attitude in favor of appeasement and cultural dialogue. The projected dissident attitude is further affirmed because

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[113] The concept of "double addressing" was introduced by cross-cultural literary theorist Barbara Wall. Originally, she applied it to children's books, where it reveals multiple audiences (e.g., children and parents) who are entertained by different parts and interpretations. In the context of film studies, it can make visible different hermeneutic layers of a film that speak to particular audiences, an attempt that Ebbrecht makes on Iranian films. See Wall, 1991.

[114] "Die Doppeladressierung orientiert sich an den westlichen Projektionen und der Faszination am iranischen Kino. Sie bedient also eine Rezeptionshaltung, deren Bedürfnis nach vermeintlicher Kritik und Subversion gerade ihr Gegenteil meint, nämlich die ideologische Übereinstimmung in einem sozialromantischen und zivilisationskritischen Weltbild. [...] Diese antimoderne Stoßrichtung geht mit der Ideologie des Regimes unter Ahmadinejad konform. Der gegenwärtige Präsident steht in der Tradition einer Erneuerung der islamischen Revolution unter explizitem Rekurs auf die soziale Frage und strikter Ablehnung jeder Lockerung des allgegenwärtigen Tugendterrors." Ebbrecht, 2008a.

> one wishes oneself to be subversive and critical and at the same time belong to the national project.[115]

Here, his idea is extended insofar that Western lovers of Iranian films not only secretly confirm the political ideology of the Islamic Republic, but also project subversiveness and criticism into them to acquit themselves. Were they not so visibly motivated by a strict anti-appeasement ideology towards Iran, and also often inaccurate and outdated, Ebbrecht's considerations could have been intriguing contributions to the German debate on Iranian cinema. Even in this early stage of the Berlinale's relationship with Iran, Ebbrecht examines the festival's (and its audience's) fascination with the political in Iranian cinema and concludes that it is not only rooted in activism, but also in an eagerness to sharpen the Berlinale's own subversive profile. Unfortunately, his points are entirely subordinated to his own ideological background and thus mislead him into rather confusing argumentative realms.

In the following year, the programming of the 2009 Berlinale finally brought Ebbrecht and the Iranian-German CIEF together physically in a series of protest events against the film *Letters to the President*.[116] The Czech documentary about Mahmud Ahmadinejad and his supporters had been selected to premiere in the Berlinale Forum section and its critics feared that it

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[115] "Für das westliche Publikum gelten diese Filme als Ausweis des kulturellen Pluralismus oder subversiver Freiheiten im Iran, was dann als Argument für die eigene Haltung des Appeasements und des kulturellen Dialoges herangezogen wird. Die projizierte dissidente Haltung wird darüber hinaus affirmiert, weil man sich selbst wünscht subversiv und kritisch zu sein und gleichzeitig dazuzugehören zum nationalen Projekt." See Ebbrecht, 2008b. p. 10.

[116] Synopsis: Director Petr Lom and his team followed the president of the Islamic Republic for several weeks in the summer of 2008. The documentary's focus lies with the phenomenon of citizens writing letters and request to Ahmadinejad, which are collected at the Presidential Letter Processing Center in Tehran where a team of Basij trainees answers or forwards roughly three quarters of the millions of letters sent there annually. Throughout the film, dozens of Ahmadinejad voters and supporters voice their concerns, from anti-American and -Israeli rants to nuclear euphoria. Others complain about inflation and rising levels of poverty. The documentary is told completely from their perspective, Ahmadinejad himself never addresses the camera and is only shown through public appearances at rallies, travels, and other populist events.
Overall, Lom's effort of neutrality is indeed irritating, especially in contrast to the demonizing portraits of Ahmadinejad in Western media. The film, however, is very clear about its distance to the subject: many of the views expressed are so absurd that their uncommented screening is an unflattering exposure in itself (at one point, the head of the Letter Center seriously proposes that Western dentists should play recordings of Quranic verses to anesthetize their patients before an operation because of their soothing qualities). Ultimately, the greatest appeal of *Letters to the President* is its wide access to Iranian government offices, unparalleled in any other contemporaneous documentaries produced in the West. As such, the film's programming is not so much testament of the Berlinale's aim of an ideologic dialogue with the Iranian government or its supporters, but of a voyeurist eagerness to uncover insights into a supposedly closed circle.

might paint the president of the Islamic Republic in too humane and accessible colors. This prompted the CIEF to publish its second open letter to Dieter Kosslick, this time even demanding his resignation, "because for years, you as artistic director are primarily responsible for the Berlinale offering the Iranian regime a stage for its propaganda."[117] Their letter again argued that the selected Iranian films "allow well dosed social criticism, but through this very fact work as necessary propaganda to deceive the global cultural stages"[118] and consequently accused the Berlinale of collaboration with the Iranian government and of helping its international legitimization.

In addition to the letter, the CIEF and the German NGO "Stop the Bomb," a network of activists working to prevent the construction of nuclear arms in Iran, organized a panel discussion under the title "Thanks to Kosslick: A Red Carpet for Ahmadinejad" (*Kosslick macht's möglich: Ein roter Teppich für Ahmadinejad*). A week later, on the premiere day of *Letters to the President*, they called for a small demonstration in front of the *Sony Center* cinema. At both events, Tobias Ebbrecht spoke on panels together with organizers and signees of the open letters. Although they were rarely circulated outside of anti-German circles and Iranian diasporic communities, the protest was well covered in German media. *Der Spiegel*'s report on the overall Berlinale program, published in advance of the festival, was even titled "Scandal Around Iranian Film" (Iranischer Film sorgt für Eklat) and put the debate about Letters to the President on the central stage.[119] The paper had already covered the 2006 open letter in an extensive report[120] that was discussed at the *Offside* press conference. On this occasion, Jafar Panahi had reacted quite uncomprehending and mused that the protesters must surely have personal reasons but that their accusations were completely untenable.[121]

Despite the media coverage of the reports, the protests of the CIEF and its German supporters ebbed away after 2009. This may have been due to the

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[117] "Wir fordern daher Ihren Rücktritt, Herr Kosslick, da Sie als Intendant hauptverantwortlich dafür sind, dass die Berlinale dem iranischen Regime seit Jahren als Bühne für seine Propaganda dient." Quoted in "*Kosslicks kultureller Dialog*," 2009.

[118] "Die von diesem Ministerium abgesegneten Festivalbeiträge erlauben zwar wohldosierte Sozialkritik, fungieren aber gerade dadurch als notwendige Propaganda zur Täuschung der internationalen Kulturbühnen." Ibid.

[119] "*Iranischer Film sorgt für Eklat*," 2009.

[120] Xuân Müller, 2006.

[121] *Press conference of Offside*, 2006. Min: 50:30.

Iranian re-election protests becoming a central concern of Western media in that year and replacing the focus on the nuclear program, or the Berlinale's opposition to the Iranian government, which the festival articulated much more clearly in subsequent years, as shall be discussed below. Yet even between 2006 and 2009, when the protests were active, it is important to note that they were limited to a small circle of critics. Significant or not, the Berlinale was not affected by the criticism, which it more or less ignored, and continued to expand its connections with the Iranian film industry.

Villagers and Women

Between 2007 and 2009, eight Iranian films were screened in the Berlinale program, two of them winning Silver Bears in the competition section. In 2008, the award for Best Actor went to Reżā Nādjī (b. 1942), who played the protagonist in *Āvāz-e Gonjeshk-hā* (The Song of Sparrows).[122] The slow morality tale plays out the advantages of rural life over the greed and arrogance of the city and with its poetic narration fits more into the new wave of Iranian cinema that had been favored by the film festival circuit and Western film critics until the late 1990s. Its director Majīd Majīdī (b. 1959) had in fact been in the international spotlight in 1998, when his family drama *Bacheh-hā-ye Āsmān* (Children of Heaven) became the first Iranian film nominated for an Academy Award in the United States. With this context in mind, *Āvāz-e Gonjeshk-hā* is more of an exception in the usual pattern of Iranian films at the Berlinale. Yet, its experiences on the stages of the festival, to which Majidi would never return, show that journalists and the festival jury applied the layers of perception that had emerged in 2006 and had become ritualized in the following years.

[122] Synopsis: The poetic drama tells the story of the ostrich farmer Karīm (Reżā Nādjī) and his wife and three children. The family lives in a village in central Iran and is content with the few possessions they own. One day, an ostrich runs away from their farm and Karim is blamed. Furthermore, his daughter's hearing aid is broken. Karim goes to Tehran to repair it. While he is initially overwhelmed by the busting city, he soon gets the hang of it and starts to work as a moped driver. Enthusiastic about the city and the money he is earning, he starts to bring all kinds of material goods back to the village: broken furniture, old windows, and parts of machinery. Over time, Karim becomes greedy. One day, he carries too much garbage and collapses under its weight, breaking his leg. He is forced to return home and stay at the farm. When his son starts to work and takes responsibility for earning the family's livelihood, Karim is touched and decides to return to the village for good and to give up his city life. In an obvious didactic metaphor, the final scene shows the prodigal ostrich return to the farm. Observing this, Karim sheds tears of joy.

The film's press conference paradigmatically showed the ritual of interrogating Iranian directors regarding their film's political statements. In this case, the media was not too concerned with censorship and the government, but with religion and the politics of family. A British journalist remarked that he was irritated by the religiosity of the characters and the "warm, Islamic face" that contrasted too much with other images of Islam "these days."[123] His thought was expanded by a German radio journalist who wanted to know whether the religious morality presented in the film was representative of Iranian society, of which 90% were Muslims.[124] To both questions, which echoed well know anti-Muslim sentiments, Majidi stated in a rather surprised tone that despite a certain modesty and his view on the equal worth of all human beings, there was not much religion in his film but rather a strong sense of morality. Another journalist inquired if the film intended to shed a light on social problems in Iran, naming child labour and insecure insurance policies as examples,[125] revealing his eagerness to extend the particular issues of the film to Iranian society at large.

Furthermore, much of the press conference was spent belittling the film team in particular and Iranian cinema in general as a rather charming, but hopelessly rural network. At one point, the question came up whether *Āvāz-e Gonjeshk-hā* was initiating Iranian cinema's move from the village to the big city: "Will Iranian film finally come to Tehran now?" To this, the visibly irritated director responded that his script had simply asked for scenes to be shot in the capital and that he could not answer for Iranian cinema in general.[126] Obviously, the interviewer was referring to the notion of Iranian films being obsessed with village life, of which the globally successful films of Dariush Mehrjui, Abbas Kiarostami, and Majidi himself were testament. This distorted picture had led Western film critics to fall in love with Iranian cinema in the first place in the 1980s, marveling at the simplicity and poetics of rural life, at the same time romanticizing and belittling its object of desire in classic Orientalist fashion. This particular mode of perception, which had been prevalent in the Western gaze on Iranian cinema decades before the Berlinale

[123] *Press conference of Āvāz-e Gonjeshk-hā*, 2008. Min. 18:00.
[124] Ibid. Min. 20:30.
[125] Ibid. Min. 28:30.
[126] Ibid. Min. 24:00–25:00.

discovered the country for itself, was manifested again in the reception of Majidi's film in 2008. This gaze was especially concentrated on the film's main actor: journalists were excited about the liveliness of Reza Naji's performance and the simple but steadfast morality he and his fellow villagers represented. The fact that Naji was no professional actor but a layman made the fascination even bigger and finally led to him winning a Silver Bear in the awards ceremony at the end of the festival.

As intriguing as the story of *Āvāz-e Gondjeshk-hā* at the Berlinale is, it is an example of a particular mode of the Western gaze on Iranian cinema that by 2008 had already worn out and was going extinct. Its belittling obsession with the simple and rural life seen through the eyes of a virgin and untouched film industry was a relic even then, and not at all paradigmatic of the staging of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale. In fact, *Āvāz-e Gonjeshk-hā* would be the last rural Iranian family drama shown at the festival, which had become more invested in a blend of social dramas and political films depicting the urban middle class and elite.[127] A prime example of the first category is *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* (About Elly),[128] which premiered in the 2009 competition and marked Aṣghar Farhādī's (b. 1972) first invitation to the Berlinale.

Although the film works well as an ambiguous moral thriller full of universal moral puzzles, *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* was framed as a particularly Iranian

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[127] An exception was the children's section of the Berlinale, which had been focused on rural children films since they entered the global film festival circuit in the late 1980s and continued to do so until the early 2010s.

[128] Synopsis: A group of friends goes on a weekend trip to a holiday house at the shore of the Caspian Sea. Three couples are joined by two singles, Ellī (Tarāneh ʿAlīdūstī) and Ahmad (Shahāb Ḥosseynī). Elly, the pre-school teacher of one of the couple's children, was invited by Sepideh (Golshīfteh Farāhānī), who organized the trip and clearly wants to set her up with the recently divorced Ahmad. As soon as they arrive, the friends start to tease Elly and Ahmad amicably and work on their mission to bring them together, making both of them clearly uncomfortable. On the second day of the trip, Elly politely decides to leave while Sepideh and her friends continue to persuade her to stay with them. While Elly watches the children playing on the beach alone, she suddenly disappears. The others, who had been distracted by one of the children's swimming accident, start to wonder what happened: did Elly drown or did she simply leave, too uncomfortable and shy to tell anyone? When the arriving rescue divers find no body in the water and the friends realize that Elly's phone is gone from her bag, Ahmad and Sepideh begin looking for her at the local bus station. In the ensuing arguments, however, more details about Elly emerge. No one really new her, but puzzle pieces start to form an unflattering picture: Sepideh had been aware that Elly had a fiancé with whom she planned to break up. A complicated net of secrets and disputes emerges between the couples until, on the third day, Elly's fiancé arrives at the house and they are completely overwhelmed with the decision to tell him the truth about their plans. In the end, divers find a body at a beach near the house which her fiancé identifies as Elly's. By then, the weekend is over and the disillusioned friends make their way back to Tehran.

film “that shows the inner conflict of the country,”[129] despite Farhadi’s claims to the contrary on various festival stages. The press conference was again paradigmatic in this regard: after the usual questions about censorship and accolades “for this very interesting cultural experience of modern day Iran,”[130] as a Spanish journalist put it, the audience was most concerned with gender issues in Iranian society. The film, however, actually deals more with relationships and the conflicts of truth versus secrecy than with the standing of the depicted women in Iranian society. The script thoroughly examines Sepideh’s and Elly’s moral backgrounds without judgement, and the male characters, especially Ahmad, are treated the same way.

Thus, many of the questions in the press conference seemed outrightly absurd. What do the quarrels in the film and the death of Elly have to do with domestic violence in Iranian marriages and the stoning of women?[131] Was her death a punishment for her taking part in the trip despite being engaged?[132] Was the sequence of Elly flying a kite a symbol of her limited freedom?[133] Although most of the questions show a narrow reading of the drama solely along the lines of gender relations, Farhadi remained calm and always politely answered that this was surely not what he had in mind when writing the script —but that the audience was of course allowed their own interpretations. When a journalist mused that great art can only be produced by artists who are frightened and asked the director if he was afraid of anything while making the film, Farhadi joked that he was indeed always afraid, but only of the audience being bored.[134]

Unsurprisingly, most of the reviews of *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* in German newspapers also focused on gender issues or extended the relations depicted in the film to Iranian society at large. Reports framed *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* as a “societal panorama”[135] and a “radically open picture of the reality of everyday life in

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[129] “2009 war dann Asghar Farhadi zum ersten Mal Gast im Wettbewerb, mit Darbareye Elly (Alles über Elly), einer Familiengeschichte, die die Zerrissenheit seines Landes zeigt.” Kosslick, 2021. p. 126.

[130] *Press conference of Darbāreh-ye Ellī*, 2009. Min. 18:00.

[131] Ibid. Min. 20:30.

[132] Ibid. Min. 35:00.

[133] Ibid. Min. 18:45.

[134] *Press conference of the laureates of the 59th Berlinale*, 2009. Min. 49:30.

[135] “Der Preis für die beste Regie ging an den iranischen Regisseur Asghar Farhadi für sein Gesellschaftspanorama ‘Alles über Elly’.” “*Goldener Bär geht nach Peru*,” 2009.

Iran."[136] In his review for *Der Spiegel*, film critic Wolfgang Höbel simply referred to it as "the Iranian women drama" (*das iranische Frauendrama*) and was surprisingly open about his inability to comprehend the plot and the gendered morality the film supposedly depicts:

> It is not fully clear which weird standards for female irreproachability are applied in the Iranian society monitored by mullahs, and whether the director criticizes or approves these standards.[137]

These reports and the film team's interrogation at the press conference shows that journalists readily jumped at the gender issues in the film, which are notably only negotiated on the surface of the plot, and not even in a particularly Iranian context. Few elements of the story are rooted in the background of Iranian or Islamic moral systems. For example, the friends tell the landlady of the holiday home that Ahmad and Elly are a recently married couple to avert suspicion, and Elly is afraid that her religious mother might find out that she is on a trip at which an unmarried man is present. Yet, the main questions of the film—whether it is morally reprehensible to set up friends who are clearly uncomfortable with the situation, or the fact that Elly joins the trip before actually breaking up with her fiancé—are universally applicable and would raise eyebrows in German social circles, too, as Farhadi had to underline repeatedly during the press conference.

Questions of gender morality in Iranian society were also at the forefront in the film's framing in the Berlinale program catalog. Here, the synopsis was quite inconspicuous, after detailing the basic plot, the catalog announced a secretive drama that slowly unravels the truth about Elly's disappearance.[138] The picture that accompanied the text in the printed program, however, shows two shy women in headscarves apparently behind bars (Picture 3.5). The image is taken from the scene of the friends' arrival at the gates of the holiday house early in the film, which includes a brief shot of Elly and Sepideh filmed through the gate, looking at the house in anticipation of a happy weekend by the beach. Taken out of context, though, it evokes notions of Iranian women

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[136] "Hätte die Jury unter Vorsitz der Schauspielerin Tilda Swinton nicht eigentlich den in seiner Alltagsschilderung iranischer Lebenswirklichkeit radikal offenen 'Darbareye Elly' auszeichnen müssen, statt lediglich Regisseur Asghar Farhadi mit einem silbernen Bären zu ehren?" Zinsmaier, 2009.

[137] "Man versteht nicht ganz, welche merkwürdigen Maßstäbe für weibliche Untadeligkeit in der von Mullahs überwachten iranischen Gesellschaft gelten und ob der Regisseur diese Maßstäbe nun kritisiert oder gutheißt." Höbel, 2009.

[138] *Katalog*, 2009. p. 64.

Picture 3.5: The film still from *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* (About Elly) used in the 2009 Berlinale program catalogue, taken from the scene where Elly and Sepideh arrive at the holiday house. The metal bars, however, evoke imprisonment rather than the anticipation of a weekend at the beach that is actually transmitted in the scene.

being limited by strict morality codes of state and society, which both play only minor roles in the actual film. Yet, the picture and its associations with imprisonment are the first thing that Berlinale audiences saw when looking for information on the film.

In contrast to *Darbāreh-ye Ellī*, another Iranian drama in the 2008 Panorama section did indeed deal with the issue of female experiences in Iran explicitly. Manīzheh Ḥekmat's (b. 1962) *Seh Zan* (Three Women) is deeply rooted in the specifics of modern Iranian history and contemporary society, and deals with the divisions that class, gender roles, and the generational gap of the Islamic Revolution have created between women.[139] Although *Seh Zan* failed to generate much buzz at the festival, its press conference again shows the familiar modes of media perception of Iranian films screened at the Berlinale.

[139] Synopsis: Mīnū (Nīkī Karīmī), born in the early 1970s, works as a restorer of antique carpets. When her aging mother (Maryam Būbānī) disappears to find a lost carpet, Minu sets out to look for her. She goes to Tehran to seek the help of her teenage daughter (Pegāh Āhangarānī), who also cannot be found, as she herself has set out for a spiritual journey into the countryside. In the ensuing quest, the drama works as a portrait of three generations of Iranian women: the grandmother, representing the pre-revolutionary past; Minu, who romanticizes this past and clings to it rather than the present that she embodies; and Pegāh, the young woman in search of her identity.

Andreas Struck, a German filmmaker who served as moderator, started the press conference asking right away if the drama could be seen as a "portrait of Iranian society."[140] Most of the questions then revolved about the standing of women in the country and applauded Hekmat for giving insights into the "real Iran."[141] Interestingly, Hekmat had a similar experience as Panahi at the press conference for *Offside*. Initially, she was very clear in her feminist stance and her anger about the violation of women's rights in her home country. Later, however, she had to backpedal when it became clear that she had overshot the target: journalists seemed surprised and started to ask whether unrelated women and men could actually visit and talk to each other in Iran and whether her film was idealizing this.[142]

It is telling that the journalists at the press conference, as well as the moderator and Hekmat herself, only scratched the surface of the film and its context. While *Seh Zan* was thoroughly examined for statements about the problems of contemporary Iranian women and their relations with each other, the tradition of female filmmaking in Iran to which the film is heavily indebted was never mentioned. *Seh Zan* is a spiritual sequel to *Doh Zan* (Two Women), a very popular drama by Tahmīneh Mīlānī (b. 1960) that was released in Iran in 1999 with great success. Like *Seh Zan*, it deals with different generations of women, one from before the 1979 revolution and one strongly influenced by it. Further, both films share the same lead actress, Niki Karimi (b. 1971), who herself worked as a director at the time, when she was arguably one of the most popular film stars in the country. Given all these intertextual references, it is difficult to discuss *Seh Zan* without the network of controversial but successful female Iranian filmmakers like Mīlānī, Karīmī, and others, in which the film actively situates itself. Their films, including *Seh Zan* itself, are usually released domestically, do well at the box office, and have a strong impact on women's rights debates in Iran.[143] This part of the film's context, which surely would be interesting for an audience with a serious interest in the state of female filmmaking and feminist discourse in Iran, was suspiciously absent from the way that *Seh Zan* was presented at the 2008 Berlinale. Instead,

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140 *Press conference of Seh Zan*, 2008. Min. 1:30.

141 Ibid. Min. 15:30.

142 Ibid. Min. 26:30.

143 For introductions into the rich and complex field of female filmmaking in the Islamic Republic, see Khalili Mahani, 2006; Naficy, 2012b. pp. 93–173.

in the program catalog, Hekmat was framed as an experimental documentary filmmaker and feminist activist[144]—an impression further conveyed in the press conference.

Although *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* and *Seh Zan* are very different cases (the first screened successfully in the competition and received much more attention than the latter) both films' experiences at the festival show a similar trend: journalists and the Berlinale curators placed the emphasis on the question of what their depictions of women have to say about gender issues in Iranian society, but failed to thoroughly examine and report their actual context. In the case of Farhadi's film, this resulted in a misunderstanding of the moral suspense engrained in *Darbāreh-ye Ellī*, while the framing of *Seh Zan* lacked consideration of Hekmat's position in the Iranian film industry network. The most important reason for this was surely the sheer number of films that journalists have to cover and that Berlinale organizers have to present in brochures and press conferences. The result, however, is not only indicative of the predefined Western gaze at Iranian women, which refuses to imagine any other roles for them than as the victims of a patriarchic society, it also shows that this interest usually remains very superficial. This phenomenon is by far not particular to the Berlinale and its relation to Iran, but can be understood in the backdrop of the larger context of representing of Muslim women in Western societies, which is embedded in a certain gendered Orientalism.[145] In her rich anthropological work, Lila Abu-Lughod has explored this wide-ranging issue, most comprehensively in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Going through an extensive corpus of sources from American foreign policy programs to popular non-fiction literature about Islam, she concludes that most Western representations were "reducing the poignant and complex lives of Muslim women to a question of rights or equality."[146] Her point is very true for the Berlinale, too, where *Seh Zan* was not able to tell its story of the vibrant networks of female filmmakers in Iran.

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[144] Her biography there reads: "Born in Arak in Iran in 1962; after making experimental films she worked for a number of production companies in various capacities and began producing in her own right in 1995. 3 Zan marks her second work as a feature film director." *Katalog*, 2008. p. 177.

[145] Furthering Edward Said's arguments on Orientalism, Middle Eastern scholars have drawn the concept of gendered Orientalism from their analyses of the role of gender in Orientalist representations. See, for example Kabbani, 1986; Yeğenoğlu, 1998.

[146] Abu-Lughod, 2013. p. 223.

From 2007 to 2009, the staging of Iranian films at the Berlinale continued to take shape, with the modes of reception that had emerged in 2006 becoming more and more ritualized. In press conferences as well as program catalogs and even jury decisions, the ongoing trend to interrogate Iranian filmmakers about the usual topics of censorship, political statements, and a possible extrapolation of the particular film to Iranian society as a whole could be observed. In 2008 and 2009, this framing gained a new nuance that had already loomed during the premiere of *Offside*: a fascination with the supposedly downtrodden and marginalized parts of Iranian society, be it the villagers in *Āvāz-e Gonjeshk-hā* or the women of *Seh Zan* and *Darbāreh-ye Ellī.* It should be noted, though, that this fascination, as supportive as it is supposed to be, is always accompanied by pity and belittlement. Subjects are framed as victims in need of help and care. This care, then, always seeks to exhibit subjects in that manner: Reza Naji, the naive layman standing overwhelmed on the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* after being awarded the Silver Bear; Manizheh Hekmat, who was presented as an independent feminist director rather than having her networks made transparent; and Golshifteh Farahani, the lead actress of *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* and "the beautiful Persian" (*die schöne Perserin*) who, it was feared, would be prevented from traveling to Berlin by Iranian authorities.[147] Instead of carefully illuminating the rich contexts of the biographies and networks of these directors and actors, however, these exhibitions remain mostly superficial, shedding a brief spotlight that is only interested in showcasing them as victims of an oppressive society.

These instances continued to lay important foundations and further developed the way that Iranian cinema would be framed at the Berlinale. In mid-2009, however, major developments in Iran and the way these were depicted in Western media had a lasting impact on its role on the stages of the festival. Not only did 2009 mark the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, which was celebrated in Iran but led to a heightened attention to the subject in the rest of the world, it also saw the Iranian presidential election in June and the country-wide protest movement against possible voter fraud. As

[147] Rumor had it that Farahani might not be able to come to the Berlin premiere due to difficulties with the authorities: in the previous year, she had starred the Hollywood spy thriller *Body of Lies* (2006) and the Iranian Ministry of Culture was supposedly angry enough about it to prevent further travels abroad. Although the rumors ultimately proved unfounded and Farahani made it to the festival, they were spread far in advance, in Iranian as well as German media. See "*Stargast aus Iran*," 2009.

these protests had a strong influence on the German mediasphere and its relation to Iran in the following years, a brief but thorough excursion into the events and their representations in German media is necessary before continuing with the 2010 Berlinale.

The 2009 Election Protests and the Visual Reconfiguration of the German Image of Iran

During the first term of his presidency, which was about to end with the election in June 2009, the early enthusiasm for Mahmud Ahmadinejad seems to have been fading slowly, even among his supporters based in the rural and poorer areas of the country. The humble yet charismatic populist in the beige windbreaker had failed to keep his economic promises. On the contrary, inflation and unemployment rates continued to rise at a previously unseen pace. Furthermore, his foreign policy, based on insistence in the nuclear question and a hardline anti-Israeli and anti-American posture had not bore fruit and was made obscure by the recently inaugurated U.S. President Barack Obama and his initially soft rhetoric towards Iran. These factors led to an uplift for the reformist camp, which had largely nominated Mīr-Ḥosseyn Mūsavī to run against Ahmadinejad. The 67-year-old architect had already served as prime minister from 1981–89 before his retirement as a politician. In 2009, his role in Iranian politics and the mass-executions of the 1980s had been forgotten enough among younger generations for him to be seen as a new hope for bringing in social reforms and lifting restrictions in everyday life.[148]

In spring 2009, the election campaign itself took off and spread an atmosphere of unusual enthusiasm and open debates. Mousavi's campaign organized street demonstrations that took place peacefully and without much police presence. Since these rallies were dominated by the color green, the movement around the reformist hopeful was soon branded the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* (Green Movement). 2009 also marked the first TV debate between presidential candidates in Iranian history, in which Ahmadinejad lost his temper and at one point explicitly threatened his oppenent's family, crossing the line of accepted dispute and making himself appear as the loser of the show. The

[148] For a detailed look into the legitimacy crisis Ahmadinejad faced on the eve of the election, even in his own ranks, as well as Mousavi's position in the reformist camp, which is far more complex than I can possibly do justice in this overview, see Saikal, 2009.

transparency and anticipation that marked the last weeks of the campaign was extraordinary, to the extent that an Iranian BBC journalist described it as "unlike anything that the generations that grew up after the 1979 revolution had ever experienced."[149] All these impressions brought strong expectations of a reformist landslide victory.

On June 12, the day of the election, however, these expectations clashed with the announced results. In the afternoon, before the polls closed, the influential conservative Speaker of Parliament, ʿAlī Larījānī, had even already congratulated Mousavi on his anticipated win—prematurely, as it would turn out few hours later. The first results published by the Interior Ministry around midnight showed a clear victory of 69% for Ahmadinejad, with Mousavi coming in second with 31%. The expected high turnout was confirmed at 85%. The next morning, the ministry announced that all ballots had been counted and declared Ahmadinejad as the winner of the 2009 presidential election, an outcome that would still have to be approved by the Guardian Council (*Shūrā-ye Negahbān*) according to the constitution. Given the impressions of the previous weeks, the results were immediately doubted by national and international observers.

In his history of Iran since the 1970s, Michael Axworthy, founder of the Centre for Persian and Iranian Studies at Exeter, gives a relatively balanced account of the circumstances and irregularities that were brought up by Iranian opposition groups who cast doubt on Ahmadinejad's victory.[150] The motivation of the ruling elite around Ali Khamenei was clearly visible even before the election: in an usual move, the Ayatollah had given his public support to the incumbent president in advance. But other irregularities were soon pointed out. While results were usually announced province by province, in 2009 they were given in large groups of ballots from all over the country, making it difficult to immediately assign them regionally. When the final result, sorted by provinces, was published later, the ballots seemed suspiciously well ordered, "as if someone had picked figures for the final result and had then applied that formula to each part of the country in arbitrary fashion, with the help of a computer programme."[151] Further irregularities came to light when looking into

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[149] Kheradpir, 2011. pp. 39–40.

[150] Axworthy, 2013. pp. 402-4.

[151] Ibid. p. 403.

the results of smaller candidates. As an example, the second reformist candidate, Mehdī Karrūbī, had won eleven million votes in the parliamentary elections two years earlier and was now projected to have received only 0.85% of the overall votes. British TV even interviewed a defected member of the *Basīj* militia who claimed that his colleagues were tasked to fill in blank ballots and those of illiterates in favor of Ahmadinejad.[152]

Debating the truth of the matter seems completely futile, as even after more than a decade, it remains unlikely that there will ever be conclusive proof of the alleged election fraud. The very fact, however, that such fraud was widely assumed and publicly argued sparked nation-wide protests and, in turn, an increasingly brutal crackdown on them, one that would shape the country's political landscape, and its international image, for years to come.

The police's surprising laissez-faire practice towards demonstrations that had made the rallies of the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* possible in the weeks leading up to the election was already given up on the day of the election itself. Even before the polls had closed, police surrounded the Interior Ministry and the Mousavi campaign headquarters in Tehran, where they announced a prohibition of all gatherings. Nevertheless, demonstrators started to come out onto the streets in major cities on Saturday, June 13th, immediately after the official results were announced. Protesters wore green scarves and bandanas, and the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* soon embraced more than just the supporters of Mousavi, becoming a general platform for people to voice their anger over the apparent fraud and to demand a recount or even a new election. During daylight hours the protests seemed to remain peaceful but after nightfall shootings were rumored. Over the weekend alone, seven protestors were reported dead, according to numbers published by the police. On Sunday, Ahmadinejad was quick to denounce the protesters as "*Khas-o-Khāshāk*" (as colloquial term for dust and trash), confident they would not continue for long. Khamenei himself weighed in on the same day, giving his blessing to the reinstated president.

Ahmadinejad's and Khamenei's statements, however, only raised tensions considerably, especially since the Guardian Council had not yet approved of the result, making Khamenei's blessing premature from the very perspective of the constitution. Thus, on Monday, June 15th, even more

[152] For a thorough description of the role of the *Nīrū-ye Moqāvemat-e Basīj* (Popular Mobilization Force, short: *Basij*) in the 2009 election crisis, which also delves into their functions in public administration in addition to their paramilitary dimension, see Safshekan and Sabet, 2010.

protestors flooded into the streets, reportedly over a million people in Tehran alone. Khamenei's unexpected about-face on the following day, when he ordered a partial recount and a thorough examination of the results by the Guardian Council, helped to cool matters down for two days. But Thursday marked the sixth day of the deaths of the seven protestors, which prompted protesters to declare it a day of grief. In cities all over the country, millions of people wearing black and green gathered, marking the largest demonstrations in Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. At this point, the protests were not only a response to the elections, but also to the surprising brutality of the police: many people could be seen carrying pictures of relatives and friends who had been missing or hospitalized since the weekend, thereby tapping into a powerful narrative given the high standing that martyrdom and the notion of absence has in post-revolutionary Iranian collective memory.[153]

In an apparent display of power, Khamenei reacted again. On June 19th, he gave a speech on the Tehran University Campus following the Friday prayers in which he made clear that the election results were indisputable and that he would not tolerate further attempts to compromise them. Over a period of one and a half hours he argued that the elections and their campaigns had been held thoroughly and honestly and that more street demonstrations were not the constitutional way and consequently had to stop immediately. The Ayatollah concluded his speech with the announcement that protesters would feel the consequences if they were to ignore his ruling—a comment that was understood by many as an open threat. The subsequent fear indeed kept lots of people away from the streets on the following day, and with good reason: it turned out Khameini's announcement was indeed to be understood as a threat. Saturday, June 20th, shaped up as the bloodiest day of the 2009 protests.

The most prominent victim of that day's crackdown was Nedā Āqā-Solṭān, a 27-year-old woman who was shot in the chest and bled to death within minutes on a busy street in Central Tehran. According to eyewitnesses, she had not planned to take part in the protests, but was just leaving her car, which was stuck in the street demonstrations, when she was hit by what seems to be the bullet of a sniper on a nearby rooftop. What makes this incident stand out among the many shockingly brutal attacks by police and Basij units on

[153] Roxanne Varzi's monograph on the matter conveys a deep understanding of the status of martyrs since 1979, especially in visual culture, which would prove to be paramount for the election protests. See Varzi, 2006.

protesters that occured that day was the fact that her death was recorded on bystanders' cellphones and soon widely shared online and on international news outlets. The very graphic video and Neda herself, who was usually only referred to by her first name, became the symbol of the 2009 crackdown which, in total, led to the deaths of dozens of people and thousands of people arrested, many of them ending up in highly dangerous prison conditions and reportedly even tortured.

The events of this second weekend after the election proved effective in their repression of further protests. From Sunday on, demonstrations ebbed significantly. On June 22th, the Guardian Council had completed their examination of the election and officially declared Ahmadinejad the winner. After this, the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* apparently resigned and the frequent mass gatherings faded out slowly. Protests were only rekindled over the next months on particular occasions, such as the funeral ceremony for Neda Agha-Soltan on July 30. A new strategy of the movement was also the infiltration of public demonstrations that were held on national holidays, such as the *Rūz-e Qods* (Jerusalem Day) in September, the anniversary of the U.S. embassy takeover in November, or the *ʿĀshūrā̓* processions in December. On such occasions, protestors mixed into the state organized events, putting on green bandanas and replacing the usual slogans of "*Marg bar āmrīkā!*" (death to America) with "*Marg beh hīchkas!*" (death to no one) or even "*Marg beh dīktātūr!*" (death to dictatorship), redirecting the revolutionary slogan of 1979 at the current regime. This practice, however, was soon countered by the closing of central spaces for supporters of the movement, frequent internet crackdowns, and aggressive police measures. By the spring of 2010, the protests of the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* had virtually died down without having accomplished any of their goals. Most of their organizers remained in prison or, like the spearheads of the movement Mousavi and Karroubi, under house arrest.

In contrast, the consequences of the movement were more noticeable abroad. On the level of diplomacy, initial reactions by Western governments were limited. U.S. president Barack Obama, careful in the context of his recent efforts to better his country's image in the Middle East, calmly conveyed his deep concern over the protests, but decidedly avoided casting doubt on the elections and giving any impression of interference. After a week of protests, however, European foreign ministries, including the German, communicated

their concerns more clearly by inviting their Iranian ambassadors and appealing to the Iranian government that the right to demonstrate and the media's freedom to report were not negotiable. While these measures were all that governments were willing to take from their diplomatic arsenal, international media coverage of the protests was much more persistent. The issue very much dominated the headlines in the second half of June 2009 and a general interest in Iranian civil society persisted well beyond summer.

An important reason for this lies in the practicalities of covering the protests. On the one hand, foreign media outlets, including the offices of the TV networks al-ʿArabīya and NBC, were raided and severely damaged early in the protests. Journalist visas were strongly restricted and, for security reasons, most outlets instructed their Tehran correspondents to stay in their hotels. This made the actual coverage of the events much harder. On the other hand, many of the protestors were equipped with smartphones and were therefore able to shoot pictures and videos and share them online. Perhaps for the first time in history this made news cameras and photo journalists obsolete, at least for the acquisition of visual sources. As a consequence, the coverage became very image-heavy and focused on the impact of social media, whose potential was not yet fully assessable in 2009. Given these factors, the Iranian election protests became a news event of a particular quality, marked by an enthusiasm not only for the possible political outcome in Iran, but also for the newly discovered liberating potential of social media.

Particular aspects of the international media coverage of the 2009 protests have often been criticized, like the widely-broadcasted notion of the "Twitter Revolution."[154] Further attempts have been made to apply quantitative framing analysis to make out tendencies in particular media outlets. Findings include that U.S. news outlets focused more on the circumstances of the elections and their possible manipulation than Arab media, whose coverage framed the protests as a revolution demanding civil liberties and regime change, which is unsurprising, given the hostile relationship of most Arab states with the Islamic Republic.[155] Media scholar Yahya Kamlipour even edited a volume of the many—often essayistic and unfinished—efforts to examine the reactions of different national mediaspheres, from Canada to China, to the

[154] Esfandiari, 2010.

[155] Schenk and Ahmed, 2011.

protests.[156] Yet while academic debate on the issue was rich and soon widened to the Arab Spring, which started in 2011, a comprehensive critical examination of the news coverage of the 2009 election protests still seems to be pending. It is clear, however, that the protests were reported widely, and most international media outlets were candid in their enthusiastic support for the demonstrating reformists and the process of democratization from below that was ascribed to them.

Germany was no exception in this regard. On the eve of the election, *Der Spiegel* published an extensive report on Iran, giving the Orientalist promise to look at "life behind the veil" already in the title.[157] Describing the country as "a kind of Vatican with elements of parliamentary democracy and dashes of North Korea,"[158] reporters Erich Follath and Dieter Bednarz assumed that the country was governed by a stable regime that offered the choice between the "little doctor" Ahmadinejad and his opponent Mousavi, who was equally aggressive in his nuclear aspirations.[159] They saw demonstrations, but little hope for regime change from below when they concluded: "The young people are no revolutionaries."[160]

Estimations like this radically changed after the elections and the first weekend of protests against the allegedly fraudulent official results. From Monday, June 15th (the day after the election) onwards, the demonstrations in Iran became a daily news item for almost two weeks. German newspapers were filled with extensive portraits of the political system of the Islamic Republic, meticulous reports from the streets of Tehran, and commentaries on the elections and the state of Iranian civil society. All over the political spectrum, sympathies clearly lay with the protest movement.[161] Opinion pieces by prominent German-Iranian journalists and scientists proved to be a particularly

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[156] Kamalipour, 2010.

[157] "Das Leben hinter dem Schleier." Bednarz and Follath, 2009b. p. 104.

[158] "Iran muss man sich als eine Art Vatikan mit Elementen der parlamentarischen Demokratie und nordkoreanischen Einsprengseln vorstellen." Ibid. p. 105.

[159] Ibid. p. 108.

[160] " Die jungen Leute sind keine Revolutionäre." Ibid. p. 105.

[161] German media scholar Christine Horz examines differences between news outlets from various political camps and finds a colder reporting style among conservative and liberal newspapers and a more anti-imperialist stance in leftist newspapers. Although these differences, clearly representing the German political spectrum, have to be noted, the overall narratives and images of the protests reproduced in German media were quite similar. See Horz, 2010.

popular format in the early days. In the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Katajun Amirpour framed the protestors as "the silent majority"[162] and the Berlin *Tagesspiegel* printed a commentary by Abbas Maroufi titled "the betrayed generation."[163] Some commentators even refused to acknowledge that an election had taken place at all, arguing that "what happened in Iran on Friday can not be called an election because the candidates were not the candidates of the people."[164] Most commentators agreed that the election protests marked the beginning of the end for the Islamic Republic, like Gina Nahai, who in the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* described them as a "point of no return."[165] Bahman Nirumand, the German-Iranian author and politician who had already provided the German student movement with their image of Iran under the Shah back in 1967 (see Chapter Two), sketched the fight of the Iranian "women and teenagers" against the "*Mogel-Mullahs*" (cheating mullahs) in a commentary for the left-wing daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*.[166]

Nirumand's commentary, which mirrors his 1967 booklet *Persien, Modell eines Entwicklungslandes* (Persia, a Model of a Developing Country), anecdotally closes the circle of the German image of Iran over the last decades. Forty years after the Shah had visited West Berlin, the *Prügelperser* (clobbering Persians) celebrated their comeback in German media, this time as the "*Mogel-Mullahs*" who were cracking down on the Iranian youth legitimately demanding a free election. This narrative was not limited to opinion pieces in daily newspapers but was also reproduced in the weekly reports published by *Der Spiegel* during the summer of 2009. From romanticized diaries of "the enthusiasm in the fight for more freedom, the power of the street, and the defeat against the mullah-regime"[167] to meticulous and extremely graphic protocols of the "deadly hunt on protesters,"[168] these features show an exuberant sympathy for the demonstrators that is hard to distinguish from revolutionary voyeurism.

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[162] "Die schweigende Mehrheit." Amirpour, 2009.

[163] "Die betrogene Generation." Maroufi, 2009.

[164] "Das, was am Freitag in Iran stattgefunden hat, kann man nicht als Wahlen bezeichnen, denn die Kandidaten waren nicht die Kandidaten des Volkes." Richter, 2009.

[165] "Es gibt kein Zurück mehr." Nahai, 2009.

[166] Nirumand, 2009.

[167] "Der Enthusiasmus beim Kampf um mehr Freiheit, die Macht der Straße und die Niederlage gegen das Mullah-Regime" Bednarz et al, 2009c. p. 88.

[168] "Eine gefälschte Wahl, tödliche Hatz auf Demonstranten und Streit selbst unter Hardlinern – in Teheran ist nichts mehr, wie es war." Bednarz and Follath, 2009d. p. 86.

A particularly telling report was the magazine's cover story printed two weeks after the election. Under the headline "Rebels in the Theocracy" (*Rebellen im Gottesstaat*), the report showcased the different dimensions of the protests, from the "tsunami in green" (*Tsunami in grün*) to the "techno-revolutionaries" (*Techno-Revolutionäre*) who were thwarting state censorship to turn the internet into a "virtual mega mosque" (*virtuelle Mega-Moschee*).[169] The broader argument of the 13-page feature, however, follows a trajectory that aims far beyond the presidential election. Making the point that Iran brands itself as "the avant-garde of the Muslims"[170] the reporters scented a turning point of the Islamic world. Accompanied by a timeline that began with the 1979 revolution and ended with the terrorist attacks in Europe in the aftermath of 9/11, the feature framed the election protests as the beginning of the end of Islamic fundamentalism:

> After a week of protests, Iran has reached a turning point. It stands at the center of events and at the same time is a symptom of a development within the whole Islamic world, which apparently has entered a new phase. In it, politically influenced, religiously flavored fundamentalism is gradually losing attraction.[171]

This attempt to inflate the ongoing events with a larger meaning is in itself remarkable and telling of prevalent anti-Muslim sentiments that connect the question of political Islam in the larger Muslim world with religiously motivated terrorism. The feature further fed the narrative of the election protests as a generational movement of a liberal and progressive youth against pious old men. This is explicitly visualized in the cover of the *Spiegel*-issue, which was dedicated to the protests (Picture 3.6). Under the headline translating "Rebellion Against the Radicals—Why the Islamic Fundamentalism Will Fail," the foreground of the cover shows two women showing victory signs. Proudly showcasing their green bandanas and wristbands, their black headscarves barely covering their dyed blond strands of hair, the women represent youthful vitality and liberal attitudes. They stand opposed to the pallid images of the four old men in the background, exemplifying the whole

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[169] Bednarz et al, 2009a.

[170] "Iran, das Land, das sich als Avantgarde der Muslime versteht, steht plötzlich ganz anders im Zentrum des Weltgeschehens, als es die Machthaber für möglich hielten." Ibid. p. 94.

[171] "Iran ist nach einer Woche bewegender Demonstrationen an einem Wendepunkt angelangt. Er steht im Zentrum der Ereignisse und ist zugleich ein Symptom für eine Entwicklung in der gesamten islamischen Welt, die offenbar in eine neue Phase eingetreten ist. Dabei verliert der politisch geprägte, religiös gefärbte Fundamentalismus allmählich an Strahlkraft." Ibid. p. 99.

Picture 3.6: The cover of a June 2009 issue of *Der Spiegel* visually narrates the election protests as a generational conflict between a liberal youth and an international axis of old men's Islamic fundamentalism.

spectrum of the Islamic fundamentalism that the magazine is constructing: Ali Khamenei and Mahmud Ahmadinejad are aligned next to Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and, even more unrelated to the Iranian context, Osama bin Laden.

This visual juxtaposition of the protests against an axis of sinister religious fundamentalists holding large parts of the Middle East hostage is paradigmatic for the coverage of the 2009 election protests in German media. The narrative shows a romanticized enthusiasm for the the Green Movement that is much more than mere sympathy for their demands. Given the intensity of such imagery, it should not surprise that the media coverage sparked an ongoing interest in Iranian civil society that went far beyond the news reports of the summer of 2009. Even after the demonstrations and the coverage had ebbed down in autumn, the German cultural market was flooded with books, graphic novels, and films either imported from Iran, produced by Iranian artists in exile, or by Germans documenting everyday life in the country. The focus of nearly all of these works was on young, subversive Iranians and mostly aimed at surprising the audience by breaking with the supposed cliché of all Iranians being anti-Western pious Muslims and instead showcasing their taste for state of the art trends in Western popular culture.

Early examples for this phenomenon can be found before the 2009 protests, perhaps most prominently in *Persepolis*, the auto-biographic graphic novel by French-Iranian Marjane Sartrapi (b. 1969) that was published in Germany in three volumes between 2004 and 2008. Turned into an animated movie in 2007, *Persepolis* became an international bestseller and proved particularly successful in Germany, where it is still widely available in bookstores and was screened in cinemas for months. The main draw of the

work about the "rebel under the headscarf" (Rebellin unter dem Kopftuch), as German media labelled the heroine,[172] lay in its surprising revelations about Iranian society in the 1980s, such as the existence of a vast network of communist organizations or the frequent punk rock parties on Tehran rooftops. The easily consumable medium of the graphic novel surely also contributed to its success—*Persepolis* which gives an introduction into recent Iranian history that is almost suitable for children. Yet, although reviews underlined that Sartrapi had aimed at "dispelling European prejudices about her home country,"[173] *Persepolis* ultimately fed a new cliché about Iran: that since the Islamic Revolution, the active and Western-oriented civil society of Iran had no room to breathe within the theocratic regime that policed every aspect of their everyday life. Consequently, Sartrapi's youth in Iran could only end in emigration.

Persepolis ultimately offered a template for a multitude of Iranian-focused publications published in Germany after the summer of 2009. The medium of drawn entertainment remained popular and was the form taken by other works, such as *Zahra's Paradise* (2011), a graphic novel by bloggers Amir Soltani and Khalil covering the events of the election protests from the perspective of a mother looking for her son, or *The Green Wave* (2011), an animated film by Iranian-German director Ali Samadi-Ahadi on the same topic. Translations of subversive Iranian novels into German, such as *Der Colonel* (written by Mahmud Doulabatabadi and translated by Bahman Nirumand in 2009) or *Eine iranische Liebesgeschichte zensieren* (Censoring an Iranian Love Story, written by Shahriar Mandanipour and translated by Ursula Ballin in 2010), were also part of this trend. While these books did not actively refer to the election protests, they did feed the German curiosity for a peek into everyday life in Iran. A later blossom of this trend reflected the surge of backpacker tourism in Iran in the early 2010s, with the publication of adventurous travelogues such as *Couchsurfing im Iran* (Couchsurfing in Iran, Stephan Orth, 2015). This trend continues today, as the recent publication of *In den Iran. Zu Fuß. Ohne Pass.* (Into Iran. On Foot. With No Passport, Mehdi Maturi and Kerstin Greiner, 2020) shows.

[172] Nass, 2004. p. 23.

[173] "Die Künstlerin, die seit 13 Jahren in Paris lebt, will nicht zuletzt auch hiesige Vorurteile über ihre Heimat ausräumen." Tabeling, 2007.

The new wave of interest in all things Iranian also reached the realms of film production and distribution, too. Beyond the ongoing and rising presence of the country on the stages of the Berlinale, to which we will return our focus soon, Iran became a frequent guest in German cinemas. This is not only mirrored in the foundation of smaller film festivals that were exclusively focused on Iranian films, such as the *Visions of Iran* Festival in Cologne (held biennially since 2013) or the Iranian Film Festival Zurich (held annually since 2014). The curiosity about Iran also prompted the belated release of earlier films, most prominently *Kassi az Gorbeh-ha-ye Īrānī Khabar Nadāreh* (No One Knows About Persian Cats). Bahman Qobādī's 2009 narrative feature set in the Tehran rock music scene was released in Germany in 2011 and became an immediate success.

Another popular example that also portrays the vital and subversive cultural scene in the capital was the Swiss documentary *Raving Iran*, which played in German cinemas for months in 2016 and proved especially popular in Berlin techno clubs and small cultural venues where it was shown regularly over the course of the following summers. The film depicts two DJs in Tehran who organize illegal desert raves and ultimately plays into the prejudices about Iranian society it claims to counter: the documentary is primarily about the DJs conflicts with authorities and their ultimately successful attempt to escape the country by means of an invitation to an electronic music festival in Zurich. It is also a sad example for the low boundaries of the actual care of some cultural producers for the Iranian protagonists they portray with curiosity, as the film's German director Susanna Regina Meures (b. 1977) shows the raves in detail at the cost of the safety of the participants. Not only could the participants and locations be easily identified by Iranian authorities, the film itself also caused huge problems for the two DJs—their decision to travel to Zurich had to remain permanent choice, as a return to Iran without being arrested was no longer possible after the release of the film. As such, *Raving Iran* shows that the German interest in Iran can easily fall into ethically problematic realms in which people put the satisfaction of their own curiosity, and often the accumulation of their own cultural capital, before the protection of the people they purport to care about.

Film became a particularly popular medium to meet the surge of German curiosity in Iran in the aftermath of 2009, which can perhaps be

attributed to the very visual character of the protests and their coverage. The digital dimension of the election protests has been heavily emphasized in media coverage. Headlines like "Iran twitters a breeze of dawn"[174] or "Twitter counts more than armouries in this new politics of people power"[175] mark only the tip of the iceberg of the narrative of the so-called Iranian Twitter revolution. Academic publications like Marcus Michaelsen's book on the medial dimension of the protests have often pointed out that the role of social media has been overemphasized and cannot account alone for the fast and spontaneous spread of the Green Movement.[176] The various forms of social media used by the protesters have however been almost exclusively discussed in terms of their ability to instantly share information, help organize demonstrations, and empower opinion-making unfiltered by state authorities. Yet, the heavy reliance of social media also had the intriguing side effect of privileging visuality in the news coverage of the protests. The flood of imagery and footage shot by protestors on the streets of Tehran was not a mere symptom of the digital dimension of the 2009 protests, it also made the demonstrations iconolatric events of their own.

In an essay on representations of the protests, visual anthropologist Pedram Khosronejad attempts to work out their iconography and underlines the screen-related factors in their history.[177] From the presidential TV debate preceding the election to the video of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, which became the audio-visual symbol of the crackdown on the demonstrations, the events of June 2009 were transmitted through visual media to a previously unknown extent. This dimension was certainly noted in Iran at the time, and it should not come as a surprise that many filmmakers felt an obligation to speak out publicly in support of the movement. On June 17th, after the first weekend of protests, a "declaration of independent Iranian documentary filmmakers" was published that demanded an end to police brutality and underlined the protesters' right to assemble. In the same week, popular activist filmmaker Rakhshan Bani-Etemad published an open letter in the name of Iranian mothers looking for their sons and daughters who were lost in the protests and

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[174] "Iran twittert Morgenluft." Schumacher, 2009.

[175] Garton Ash, 2009.

[176] Michaelsen, 2013.

[177] Khosronejad, 2011.

feared dead or in prison. Even some of the most prominent figures of Iranian cinema, like Dariush Mehrjui or Majid Majidi, reportedly supported the protests.[178] Others decided to make films about the protests and got arrested in the process. Among them were Jafar Panahi and Moḥammad Rasūlāf, who would soon become the global faces of the repression faced by Iranian filmmakers and who received immense support from the Berlinale, as I will explore in the following chapter.

The audiovisual dimension of the 2009 election protests is an important factor to keep in mind, as it boosted the German hunger for images from Iran and explains why film became the medium of choice to satisfy the public curiosity towards the country. The protests also prompted flashbacks to the summer of 1967, since the imagery of police forces hand in hand with thugs paid by the Iranian state brutally beating up young demonstrators echoed the image of the *Prügelperser* in West Berlin. Many members of the generation of the West German student protesters of the late 1960s, which had been shocked by images of the dead Benno Ohnesorg, now sat in editorial positions in newspapers—and at the head of the Berlinale. Video footage of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan and other instances of police brutality in the streets of Tehran consequently could effectively resonate in West German collective memory. If these associations played a role or not, the 2009 election protests sparked an enthusiastic and empathic German interest in Iranian civil society, which was visualized through young people fighting for democracy on the streets of Tehran. Unsurprisingly, this trend found its way onto the stages of the Berlinale and shaped the role Iranian cinema played at the festival in the following years.

Showcasing Angry Young Iranians in 2010

Given the extraordinary focus of international media on Iran as well as the already established love affair between Iranian cinema and the Berlinale, it should hardly come as a surprise that the country was again given much attention at the festival 2010. However, the impact of the election protests themselves on films screened a the Berlinale was less significant than might have been expected, for the simple reason that while plenty of images and videos had rapidly found their way into news coverage, professional film

[178] Naficy, 2010. p. 216.

production was not as quick. After all, the festival took place in mid February, only six months after the most intense phase of the protests had ended. During the uncertainty in the summer of 2009, most of the Iranian film industry had different things in mind than hastily developing the events into proper feature films.

Only one of the seven films by Iranian directors in the program of the Berlinale in 2010 had the protests as its subject: Nāder Davūdī's (b. 1963) *Red, White & The Green.* The documentary mainly covers the pre-election protests that initiated the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* and interviews with relevant political actors. Nevertheless, the announcement text in the program brochure devoted most of its space to the ensuing demonstrations, which the film only foreshadows, writing that "during the course of a few days—the most violent since the Islamic Revolution—more than 65 people died."[179] It should be noted that the number of 65 deaths is not confirmed. The actual toll is nearly impossible to determine and is highly disputed, with governmental sources giving a number of 36 and opposition sources estimating 72. These numbers account for the whole summer of 2009, surely more than "a few days," which casts serious doubt on the information in the program. The text further tries to underscore the authenticity of the film and its director. Davudi, a Tehran-based photojournalist with a focus on football, is presented as "making ethnographic documentaries in order to provide a detailed record of this important phase in Iran's history."[180] Ultimately, the announcement promise that the film will satisfy the public's hunger for extraordinary images of the events: "The film shows fifty-eight minutes of images of the Iranian capital as it has never before been seen."[181]

While the documentary was the only film screened in 2010 that extensively dealt with the presidential elections of the previous year, a look at the other Iranian films selected that year shows that the Berlinale again had a significant interest in Iran. *Red, White & The Green* had premiered in the Panorama section, and another Iranian documentary with strong political overtones was screened in the *Forum* section: *All Restrictions End: The Politics of Clothes* by experimental director Reżā Ḥāʾerī (b. 1974). This film contemplates

[179] *Katalog,* 2010. p. 260.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid. p. 261.

the influence of the Islamic Revolution on Iranian fashion culture, from the promotion of the veil (hijab) to the prohibition of Western-style tuxedos. In the relatively new section *Kulinarisches Kino* (Culinary Cinema), two of the fourteen films came from Iran. Given that the section usually focused on French, Italian, American, or occasionally East Asian films and their depictions of local cuisines, Iran might have seemed a rather unusual guest in the program. Unsurprisingly, however, both films dealt with the politics of cooking and eating in Iran. *Dastūr-e Āshpazī* (literally: Cooking Instruction, presented by the Berlinale as Iranian Cookbook) is a documentary about the culinary habits of five different Tehrani families united by the fact that it is always the women who do the cooking, as the program points out at length. The other film, *Moush va Gorbeh* (Cat and Mouse) is a short film about poverty among children who collect garbage that is fed back into the Iranian food industry. Given that the Culinary Cinema section had been initiated on Kosslick's initiative in 2007 and at the time had only a small team of organizers (who were mainly tasked with booking chefs and locations that could serve food and screen films at the same time), the festival director had a strong influence on the curation of the section. It thus seems likely that the programming of two Iranian films in this section in 2010 was a conscious decision to feature Iran due to the country having been a prominent news item in the previous year.

Apart from these films, which highlighted different political aspects of everyday life in Iranian society, the most prominent and visible film from the country at the 2010 Berlinale was *Shekārchī* (The Hunter).[182] Rafi Pitt's follow up to his 2006 drama *Zemestān Ast* again premiered in the festival's competition. The synopsis printed in the program catalog strongly underlines the film's subversive potential, detailing Ali's previous prison time (which is mentioned in the film, but plays no further role) and highlighting that his wife and

[182] Synopsis: The slow and dark thriller deals with a brief and violent episode in the life of ʿĀlī (Rafi Pitts), a security worker at a Tehran factory. One day, he arrives home from work to discover that his wife and daughter are gone. After waiting at the police station for hours, he is told that both have been shot near a demonstration in a clash between protesters and the police. Overwhelmed by anger and grief, Ali goes on a rampage. Hiding on a nearby hill, he kills two random policemen with a rifle. Afterwards, Ali seeks refuge in the wooded mountains north of Tehran, where he is hunted down by the police. After an elaborate and twistful hunt, Ali is finally arrested by two policemen. Soon, however, an argument between the two begins to give him new hope: the older policeman, Ḥassan, wants to kill Ali immediately to avenge his colleagues, while the younger Āzem convinces him to hand him over to the authorities. When Azem leaves for a toilet break, Ali overwhelms and kills Hassan and steals his clothes. When Azem returns, he misreads the situation: thinking that his colleague has killed the prisoner, he shoots and kills the disguised Ali.

daughter are shot in a demonstration, which leads him to his bloody revenge at the police. These suggestions of prisons, political violence, and resistance check many boxes from the media coverage of the 2009 protests. The text also hints at omnipresent police surveillance, stating that after Ali shot the policemen and fled into the woods, "the police have long been on his trail,"[183] an implication not made in the film. While the catalog text did not invent plot points, it overemphasized the political ones, especially the fact that the Ali's wife and daughter are shot in a demonstration, which is more of a side note in the script and is never actually shown or explained further. With this emphasis, the description situates the film in the discourses of police brutality and chaotic lawlessness in Tehran that had prevailed in German media coverage of Iran in 2009, thus linking it to the audience's pre-existing assumptions about the country.

Picture 3.7: The German poster for *Shekarchi*, published under the title *Zeit des Zorns* (Time of Wrath) by its German distributer *good!movies*.

A similar framing of the film as a testimony on contemporary Iranian society is evident in its German poster (Picture 3.7), which was widely put up throughout the *Potsdamer Platz* area during the festival, together with the posters of other competition films. Although the title *Shekārchī* translates as "hunter," the German title is given as *Zeit des Zorns* (Time of Wrath), implying that the film was not a universal revenge thriller but one about a particular time period. The color scheme of the poster highlighted its Iranian particularities: from bottom to top, the green of Ali's car and the white of the colorless sky are complemented by the deliberately red title. Together, these three colors visually evoke the Iranian national flag and, as if that were not enough, the original title of the film is given in Arabic letters. Taken together, the elements of the poster suggest a film about contemporary Iran, which, as the title says, is marked by wrath and desperation.

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[183] *Katalog*, 2010. p. 45.

After the the premiere of *Shekārchī*, its press conference showed that most of the journalists present at the festival read the film in a similar framework as the Berlinale publications had anticipated. Despite the oft-rehearsed ritual of questions about censorship and possible political interpretations, to which Pitts gave the usual answers, saying that censorship had up to now not been an issue and interpretation was a matter for the audience, the press conference soon gravitated towards the election protests. After an Israeli journalist congratulated the director to his “quick, yet elaborate reaction to the recent events,” the director had to clarify that the film had been written long before the elections and filmed over the course of the summer of 2009. The demonstrations and the “recent events” hinted at by the journalist flared up when most of the film had already been shot. Pitts had then taken the opportunity to include them by adding the plot detail of the family being shot at a demonstration into the script and re-filming the scene in which Ali is told about his wife’s fate by a police officer.[184]

Although with this statement Pitts had clarified that he had been inspired by the events of June 2009 only after the bulk of the film had been finished, most of the following questions still centered around his opinion about the protests and their impact on Iranian society: Was filming disrupted by the protests?[185] Did he think that police brutality would cause a backlash of civil unrest in the country?[186] What did the fact that a woman was shot say about the current social status of women in Iran?[187] Sitting in the press conference room in Berlin, Pitts became the representative of angry young protesters in Iran. The fact that he had also played the role of Ali in the film did not make his association with the protagonist any weaker.

Yet the identification of the protagonist, a vengeful cop-killer, with Iranian protesters in the first place shows that the audience was eager enough to read commentaries on recent events into the film, even if they were not necessarily part of it. After all, it is possible to read the thriller as something other than a political revenge story. Given the ending, in which Ali himself is mistaken for a policeman and shot, one could argue that the film tells the story

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184 *Press conference of Shekārchī,* 2010. Min. 10:30–13:00.

185 Ibid. Min. 37:15.

186 Ibid. Min. 22:00.

187 Ibid. Min. 42:30.

of a desire for revenge that turns a regular man into a murderer, showing him becoming the very thing—a violent policeman—he had wanted to fight against in the first place. This narrative is a rather common and well-known trope in revenge thrillers. The journalists who saw the film in Berlin, however, actively sought a political interpretation and jumped on the aspect of the demonstrations, which had already been highlighted in the program brochure. Although most reviewers had been rather bored by the film's slow narration and deterred by its extremely gloomy atmosphere, critics generally agreed that they had watched a portrait about the current political atmosphere in Iran.

Besides its retro-engineered connection to the election protests, the Berlin premiere of *Shekārchī* was notable because it marked one of few instances of Iranian women on the main stages of the Berlinale. In the previous year, Asghar Farhadi's *Darbāreh-ye Ellī*, had marked the first opportunity for Iranian actresses walking down the red carpet and, on the occasion of *Shekārchī*, Rafi Pitts had brought his actress Mītrā Ḥajjār (b. 1977) with him. For the film team, the red carpet ceremonies in front of the *Berlinale Palast* always mark an opportunity to be photographed by present journalists or to give autographs to fans, should there be any. For Kosslick and the Berlinale as an institution, they are a good chance to showcase the friendship between the festival director and the invited filmmakers. In that regard, Iranian film teams are no exception—in the recording of the ceremony for *Shekārchī*, Kosslick can be heard asking his assistant for the name of the actress before her limousine arrives:

> Kosslick: "Can you tell me again how the actress is called?"
> Assistent: "Erm, Mitra..."
> Kosslick: "Yes, Mitra, that's enough!"[188]

The director's insistence that the first name is all the information he needs is not unusual and fits in his image of the jolly and colloquial festival host. When it came to Iranian women, however, Kosslick showed surprising reserve and even clumsiness. Already briefly after the recorded dialogue with his assistant, he can be heard joking: "Everybody please leave their headscarves on! So that we don't get into trouble! With the mullahs!"[189] Aside from his casual chatter

[188] Kosslick: "Könnt ihr mir nochmal sagen, wie die Schauspielerin heißt?"
Assistent: "Ähm, Mitra..."
Kosslick: "Ja, Mitra, das reicht!"
Red carpet for Shekārchī, 2010. Min. 0:05.

[189] "Bitte schön die Kopftücher aufbehalten hier! Damit wir keinen Ärger kriegen! Mit den Mullahs!" Ibid. Min. 0:15.

about Iranian authorities, who are reduced to religious clerics, his joke exposes a certain uneasiness and fear of contact. This fear, however, was soon inverted when Mitra Hajjar walked onto the red carpet and reached Kosslick, who immediately greeted her by putting his arm around her waist to accompany her inside. When Hajjar politely receded from his hug, Kosslick apologized and their walk continued with a gap between them. This was not the first instance of a similar awkward situation. On the red carpet for *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* in 2009, Kosslick had wanted to hug actress Merīlā Zāreʿī, from which she had to recede in a similar fashion. Back then, Kosslick had reacted by instead applauding her elaborate traditional dress, commenting: "Wow! It's vintage!"[190]

Both instances not only show that Kosslick's intercultural competence, as the director of a large festival and hosting hundreds of filmmakers per week, was slightly overstrained by the presence of Iranian women, they also speak of their being reduced to mere requisites. A photo book published by the festival in 2018 shows an image of Mitra Hajjar on the red carpet premiere of *Shekārchī*, accompanied by the caption:

> With her colorful clothing made of precious, lustrous fabrics, she easily manages the balancing act between the Iranian dress code and a glamorous entrance, demonstrating how stylish the combination of the abaya, the long coat that conceals the contours of the body, and the chador can be. She is thus perfectly dressed for the February temperatures in Berlin.[191]

But in a book that aims to give a photo history of the festival, edited as it was by the *Deutsche Kinemathek*, the description seems to confine Hajjar to the realm of a superficial decoration. Although the text acknowledges the "balancing act" that Iranian women have to master when entering public spaces in Western countries, it mostly revels in the beauty of the dress, not without noting how surprisingly "stylish" Iranian fashion can be. As such, it files her in a decidedly different register than the brooding, smoking, male intellectuals like Rainer Werner Fassbinder or Martin Scorsese that otherwise fill the volume.

It can be argued that female filmmakers from all over the world are treated in a similar way on red carpets, irrespective of their origin. While this is true, this treatment ironically also mirrors the diminishment and oppression of women that Western observers accuse Iranian society of. To this date, not a single female director from Iran has been invited to the Berlinale competition.

190 *Red carpet for Darbāreh-ye Ellī*, 2009. Min. 8:30.

191 Simbeni and Sannwald, 2018. p. 40.

Although female filmmakers do face obstacles and harassment in the Iranian film industry, as they do in many Western industries, there are some quite successful and influential counter-examples from all post-revolutionary generations, such as Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Tahmineh Milani, and Nikki Karimi. Still, Iranian women are invited to the red carpet of the Berlinale solely as actresses, translators, or relatives of directors. In this way, the festival reproduces the image of a society in which respected positions are exclusively reserved for men, while women act as beautiful decorations. This practice is paralleled in the way that female filmmakers, and Iranian women in general, are reduced to playing the role of victims, which I have discussed earlier in this chapter at the example of Manizheh Hekmat and her appearance at the 2008 Berlinale.

The above analysis of Iranian cinema's entrance onto the stages of the Berlinale from 2006 to 2010 shows that it was not only Iranian women whose works and biographies was framed "only in terms of rights, present or absent," to use Lila Abu-Lughod's words.[192] From the beginning, all films from Iran were presented under the paradigm of the political, of resistance and censorship. In the more harmless cases, a film's story might be extrapolated to a portrait of Iranian society, like *Zemestān Ast* (It's Winter) in 2006 or *Āvāz-e Gondjeshk-hā* (The Song of Sparrows) in 2008. In other cases, the films were distorted by socio-political interpretations to such a degree that the filmmakers hardly recognized their own work, like Asghar Farhadi experienced when *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* (About Elly) premiered in Berlin in 2009. At other times, the festival rendered contexts and references invisible that would have challenged prevalent German notions about Iran, such as in the case of *Seh Zan* (Three Women) in 2008. The 2009 election crisis and the international media spotlight of the protests only affirmed and amplified this practice and resistance and repression came to the forefront. In the context of Palestinian rap, cultural studies scholars have identified a similar phenomenon, which American anthropologist Ted Swedenburg has called "the resistance paradigm:"

> Sympathetic academic (as well as some media) accounts of Palestinian rap for their part have been guided, in large part, by what might be called the struggle, or resistance, paradigm, the model that has informed most approaches to popular culture in Palestine/Israel. According to this influential line of thinking, the battle for Palestinian rights is so pressing

[192] Abu-Lughod, 2013. p. 25.

> that to devote research energies to something so seemingly irrelevant or frivolous as popular culture would be downright irresponsible.[193]

It seems that the same narrative—the fear of acting irresponsibly by concentrating on matters so profane as entertainment or art films from Iran—played into the representation of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale after 2009 as well. The status of the country as a daily news item, which put the fight of Iranian civil society at the forefront, effectively rendered the festival's practices as enacting a moral imperative. Iranian cinema's role on its stages was cemented as an indispensable tool to raise awareness about the countless injustices happening in the country. This practice also had a lasting impact on the festival's focus on the urban Iranian youth, which was perceived as the main actor of the protests, and their social status, a topic that would come up in many Iranian films invited to the Berlinale in the 2010s.

Of the films screened up until 2010, only a handful of directors actually filled the role of the politically subversive activists that the Berlinale ascribed to them. Jafar Panahi, the most prominent of them, had already made his first entrance onto the festival stages when he premiered his film *Offside* in 2006. Although this would remain his last physical appearance in Berlin to date, Panahi reprised his part as the poster boy for political cinema multiple times in the following years. As his impact on the Berlinale and its relation to Iran was so paramount and materialized in many different forms, the following two chapters will closely examine his role from 2011 onwards in detail.

[193] Swedenburg, 2013. pp. 17–18.

4. Jafar Panahi Becoming the Poster Boy of Political Cinema at the 2011 Berlinale

The exhibition *Zwischen den Filmen - Eine Fotogeschichte der Berlinale* (Between the Films - A Photo History of the Berlinale), arranged by the *Deutsche Kinemathek* in late 2018, structured the impact of the Berlinale in different areas. Next to ten other categories (among them "Stars," "Movie Theaters," "Fashion," and "Parties"), it of course showcased "Politics" (*Politik*), a topic that always had an important place in the festival's branding, especially under "Mr. Berlinale," Dieter Kosslick. The poster that introduced visitors to the "Politics" section of the exhibition read:

> From the beginning, the Berlinale has also been a political event—during the Cold War, it proved cultural diversity and internationality in isolated West-Berlin. Mayors like Willy Brandt or Klaus Schütz always took the opportunity to open the festival and invite the honorary guests to the West-Berlin *Rathaus Schöneberg*. The big stars among them were occasionally received at *Schloss Bellevue* by Federal Presidents Walter Scheel and Richard von Weizsäcker. After the fall of the Wall, the German Reunification became a topic for filmmakers from the old and new federal states, and their films were screened in all sections of the Berlinale. The Berlinale again and again was a forum for political protests, like the withdrawal of the Soviet delegation from the Competition in 1979 out of protest against the participation of the American Vietnam-drama *The Deer Hunter*, which other socialist countries followed. Or in 2011, when director Jafar Panahi, who had been appointed as a festival juror, was not allowed to leave his home country.[1]

The text structures the role of politics on the festival stages into two dimensions that I have explored in Chapter Two: the Berlinale as an anchor of internationality that helped West-Berlin to fight against its isolated insularity, and the festival becoming a forum for political protest. For the latter phenomenon, it offers only two examples from the long lasting love affair between the Berlinale and the political, namely the withdrawal of the socialist

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[1] "Von Anfang an war die Berlinale auch eine politische Veranstaltung - im Kalten Krieg bewies sie kulturelle Vielfalt und Internationalität des isolierten Westberlin. Regierende Bürgermeister wie Willy Brandt oder Klaus Schütz ließen es sich nicht nehmen, das Festival zu eröffnen und die Ehrengäste ins Westberliner Rathaus Schöneberg einzuladen. Stargäste wurden von den Bundespräsidenten Walter Scheel und Richard von Weizsäcker gelegentlich im Schloss Bellevue empfangen. Nach dem Mauerfall wurde die deutsche Wiedervereinigung zum Thema von Filmschaffenden aus alten und neuen Bundesländern, und ihre Filme liefen in allen Berlinale-Sektionen. Die Berlinale war immer wieder Forum für politische Protestaktionen, so etwa als die sowjetische Delegation 1979 aus Protest gegen die Teilnahme des amerikanischen Vietnam-Kriegsdramas *The Deer Hunter* ihre Beiträge aus dem Wettbewerb zurückzog und eine Reihe anderer sozialistischer Staaten dem folgten. Oder im Jahr 2011, als der Regisseur Jafar Panahi, der in die Festivaljury berufen worden war, nicht aus seinem Heimatland ausreisen durfte." *Poster Zwischen den Filmen*, 2018.

countries from the program in 1979 and Jafar Panahi's absence from the international jury in 2011. The exhibition's prioritization shows the crucial role of Panahi for the festival's branding as a "forum for political protests," and as such, the filmmaker deserves particular attention in the following two chapters, which explore how he was staged as the poster boy for political cinema at the Berlinale between 2011 and 2015.

Three years after he had presented *Offside* in Berlin, Jafar Panahi got involved into the election protests, like many other of his filmmaking colleagues. During the summer of 2009, he was publicly outspoken about his support of the *Jonbesh-e Sabz* (Green Movement) and took part in demonstrations. Panahi also broadcasted this support globally—when he was jury president at the Montreal World Film Festival in late August 2009, he brought green scarves for his fellow jury members, who wore them on the red carpet in a spontaneous protest action against the crackdown on demonstrations in Iran. This publicity stunt caused Panahi to be banned from traveling to foreign film festivals in the future. Back in Iran, the filmmaker started to develop a film about the election protests which ultimately brought him into jail: on March 1st 2010, Panahi and 15 colleagues and family members were arrested in his Tehran flat, where the film was being shot without government permission, on unspecified charges. All of his colleagues were released in the following two weeks, but Panahi was incarcerated for almost three months in *Evīn*, a jail in North Tehran notorious for holding political dissidents.

Soon after Panahi's arrest, filmmakers from all over the world started to publicly call for his release. At that time, the Cannes Film Festival had already invited him to be part of the international jury in their upcoming 2010 edition. As Panahi was still in jail when the festival started on May 12th, it became a stage for a number of efforts to pressure the Iranian government into releasing him. During the awards ceremony, the moderator expressed the festival's support for the detained filmmaker and French actress Juliette Binoche, who was among the laureates, called for his release. On May 24th, a mere day after the closing ceremony in Cannes, Panahi was indeed released from prison on a bail of $200,000.

In the legal aftermath of his prison time, Panahi was put on trail for "assembly and colluding with the intention to commit crimes against the

country's national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic"[2] in November 2010. The court convicted Panahi to an occupational ban that prohibited him to write scripts, direct films, give media interviews and leave the country in his capacity as a filmmaker for twenty years. Part of the verdict was also a suspended jail sentence of six years, which however never was implemented—a common practice of Iranian courts to threaten filmmakers into compliance. Few weeks after the trail, the Berlinale joined the ongoing calls for solidarity with Panahi and invited him to the international jury of their upcoming 61st edition. When he, expectedly, did not show up to take his jury place in February 2011, the festival dedicated large parts of its program to the troubled filmmaker.

The various solidary signals the Berlinale sent to Panahi that year included a retrospective of five of his films in all major sections of the festival, a demonstration on the red carpet in front of the *Berlinale Palast*, an empty chair symbolizing his vacant jury spot, and several speeches at the opening and closing ceremonies. The latter fittingly saw an Iranian film winning the Golden as well as two Silver Bears, namely Asghar Farhadi's *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*. Ultimately, the 2011 Berlinale was so dedicated to showing its support for Panahi—and Iranian civil society as a whole—that it retrospectively put its 61st edition under to motto "The Berlinale sees green" (*Die Berlinale sieht grün*) in its online archive.[3]

As central as Panahi was on the festival stages in 2011, it turned out to be only the beginning of his success story at the Berlinale. Despite his occupational ban, he continued shooting films in Iran, at first clandestinely in his homes and later more openly with a camera attached to the dashboard of his car, recording him while he drove through Tehran. The Berlinale happily took two of these films as opportunities to showcase Panahi and programmed them in the competition section. Thus, in 2013 and 2015, Panahi again emerged on the stages of the Berlinale, this time through a mixture of onscreen appearances and two surrogates: *Pardeh* (2013) was presented by actor and co-writer Kāmbūzyā Partovi and *Taxi* (2015) by Panahi's ten-year-old niece, Hānā Saʿīdī, who had also starred in the film. Both *Pardeh* and *Taxi* prompted a number of solidary signals similar to those of 2011, namely speeches at the

[2] Todd, 2019. p. 122.

[3] "*2011 Yearbook*."

festival ceremonies and protests on the red carpet. Far more remarkable, however, was the larger stage play that was at work in these films, which culminated in their awarding with a Silver Bear in 2013 and a Golden Bear in 2015.

In the staging of Panahi and his films at the Berlinale, many of the layers through which Iranian cinema was perceived and that had been established from 2006 onwards came to the forefront again, especially the paradigms of resistance and censorship. At the same time, the performative dimension of the festival's relation with Iranian films and filmmakers was central in that regard. As such, his case is not only the most prominent but also the most exemplary when it comes to the staging of Iranian cinema in Berlin. In the following two chapters, I will consequently explore the festival's performances around Jafar Panahi in detail. This chapter will examine the 2011 Berlinale in detail, first asking about the significance of the political in its performances as well as in Panahi's self-understanding as a filmmaker, and second working out the imagery of freedom and imprisonment, in which the festival's narrative of Panahi's case intersected with the Berlinale's own myths of origin. Chapter Five will then turn to the dynamic between Panahi's absence and presence on the stages of the Berlinale, the first being established through his empty jury chair in 2011 and the latter being performatively generated onscreen with his competition entries *Pardeh* in 2013 and *Taxi* in 2015.

4.1 The Significance of the Political

To understand the performances at the 2011 Berlinale, it is crucial to first unpack the role that the political played in them. This encompasses not only the political performances at the festival itself, from the protests on the red carpet to the subsequent awarding of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* at the closing ceremony, but also the role of the political in Jafar Panahi's films, which has been a central category in their reception throughout his career. From early on, Panahi emphasized over and over again that he wanted to be understood as a "social filmmaker" (*fīlmsāz-e ejtemāʿī*) rather than as a "political filmmaker" (*fīlmsāz-e siyāsī*). The filmmaker had already stressed this distinction in Berlin, at the 2006 press conference of *Offside*, after his allegoric soccer comedy had been

repeatedly categorized as a political statement by the present journalists.[4] Since, however, most of his films—and increasingly his whole career—have been rendered as such, it seems worthwhile to explore the complex of Panahi's self-understanding before going into the performances of political activism at the 2011 Berlinale.

From Poverty to the Festivals

Jafar Panahi was born in 1960 in Meyaneh, a small town in the province of East Azerbaijan, briefly before his parents moved to Tehran, where he grew up in an apparently humble home. His father was solely responsible for the income of the family of nine and worked as a house painter. Retrospectively, he describes his upcoming in Southern Tehran along the lines of economic struggles, with politics being the last of his concerns:

> I grew up in a poor neighborhood in south Tehran, where political issues were not a priority. My whole family worked blue-collar jobs, and I first became aware of class differences when my father and I were painting an army general's house. Free expression was not allowed in the country; I remember one day a university student showed me a caricature of the Shah, and was very cautious and secretive about it.[5]

As a young boy, Panahi developed a strong interest in literature and filmmaking which he could live out in the facilities of the *Kānūn-e Parvaresh-e Fekrī-ye Kūdakān va Nūjavānān* (Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, short: *Kānūn*), a state funded organization established in 1965 by Farah Pahlavi, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's third wife. Aiming at the free education of children and teenagers in culture and media, the *Kānūn* provided both mentorship through the publication of children's books and films and the possibility for children to gain filmmaking practice by offering courses and equipment—material that was hard to come by and would have been completely unaffordable otherwise. It was in this environment that Panahi, like many other directors of his generation, made his first filmmaking experiences. Initially, he had been interested in writing and won a literary competition with his first book at the age of ten. In his teenage years, however, he switched to filmmaking and worked as a mentor for children who learned to work with camera equipment.

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[4] *Press conference of Offside*, 2006. Min. 12:30.

[5] Akrami, 2018. p. 57.

By the start of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, Panahi was 19 years old and started his obligatory military service. He spent two years at the north-western frontline fighting Kurdish guerillas. At one point, he was taken hostage for 80 days together with some of his colleagues until they were released after a hunger strike.[6] Most of the time, however, he was part of the Iranian army's filmmaking corps, carrying 16mm cameras to the frontlines and shooting short documentaries. These reels then would be sent back to Tehran and screened on national TV as part of their daily frontline coverage.[7] When his mandatory service ended in 1982, however, he left the army despite offers to continue his service as a war documentary filmmaker. Instead, he enrolled in the college of *Ṣedā va Sīmā-ye Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī-ye Īrān* (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting), the state media corporation of the young Islamic Republic. From there, he graduated as a director in 1988.

After his graduation, Panahi shot several TV movies and short films in Bandar Abbas in Southern Iran, but eventually returned to Tehran in the early 1990s. At this point, his ambition to become a successful cinema director seems to have been quite articulated in the young filmmaker's head. An anecdote he sometimes offers to interviewers is how he destroyed all copies of what would have been his debut feature, *Pol* (The Bridge), because he felt it was not worthy of the career he had planned for himself:

> Even though I was not well-known at the time and no one really knew or understood what I was capable of as a director, I simply felt that the film could not be part of my filmography. That's why I stole the reels from the archive and destroyed them.[8]

His ambition led him to send his short films to the Fajr Film Festival, which rejected them time and again, but also to contact his idol Abbas Kiarostami and inquire about a job. By that time, Kiarostami already was an internationally well established director who won several awards at smaller foreign festivals and turned out to be a European critics' darling after his film *Nemā-ye Nazdīk* (Close Up, 1990). The star filmmaker eventually hired him as assistant director

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[6] Todd, 2019. p. xv.

[7] Panahi was by far not alone in this, as many soldiers-cum-filmmakers were working on the battlefield, most prominently Sayyid Morteżā Āvīnī (1947–1993). The practice was part of the young Islamic Republic's initiative to use film as a medium to persuade and recruit as many people as possible for the cause of the *Defāʿ-ye Moqaddas* (Sacred Defense), as which the war was framed. For more on the genre of frontline documentaries, which was extremely widespread and present in 1980s Iran, see Devictor, 2009.

[8] Khoshbakht, 2019. p. 146.

of his 1994 drama *Zīr-e Derakhtān-e Zeytūn* (Through the Olive Trees). Their collaboration then developed into a mentoring relationship. In this context, Kiarostami wrote a script based on an idea of Panahi's, which the latter soon developed into his first feature film, *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* (The White Balloon, 1995).[9]

The light drama turned out to be extremely successful. It won the *Camera d'Or* for the best first feature in Cannes as well as awards at smaller festivals in Japan, Brazil, and Canada, it was submitted by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmī*, short: *Ershād*) as the Iranian entry to the Academy Awards,[10] and for a long time was screened on national TV every year ahead of the *Nowruz* holidays,[11] becoming the Iranian equivalent of *Home Alone* (1990). These notable domestic and international successes become plausible in the context of the wave of acclaim for Iranian films featuring children, especially at festivals. By the mid-90s, this wave was at its height, following the successful earlier exports of *Dāvandeh* (The Runner, Amir Naderi, 1984), *Khāneh-ye Dūst Kojā-st?* (Where is the Friend's Home?, Abbas Kiarostami, 1987), or *Bāshū, Gharībeh-ye Kūchak* (Bashu, the Little Stranger, Bahram Beyzai, 1989). At that time and in terms of cinema, Iran was most closely associated in the West with the populist family thriller *Not Without my Daughter* (Brian Gilbert, 1991), and thus violent patriarchy, child abduction and anti-Americanism. Well made and intelligent Iranian children's films in turn allowed more liberal and open-minded cinephiles to highlight a softer and warmer side of Iran, while at the same time delegating it to the safe niche of non-adult cinema that could not seriously compete with European art cinema.[12]

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[9] Synopsis: While shopping with her mother for the Iranian New Year's celebrations of *Nowruz*, the seven-year-old Rāżyeh (Āīdā Moḥammadkhānī) sees an especially fat goldfish. Since goldfishes are part of the celebrations, she wants to have that particular specimen, but at 100 tomans, her mother deems it far too expensive. Back home, however, Razieh convinces her parents to give her the family's last banknote, 500 tomans, to buy the fat goldfish. On the way to the market, the siblings lose the money while distracted from a snake charmer, but find it back soon. When they lose the money the second time behind the gates of a closed store, a young Afghan balloon vendor helps them to retrieve it. Happily, they can now buy the goldfish that Razieh wanted.

[10] The Iranian government later tried to withdraw the film from the Academy Awards to protest against a new row of embargoes imposed by the Clinton administration. The withdrawal, however, was not accepted by the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences, which then simply did not nominate the film.

[11] Todd, 2019. p. xi.

[12] Ullmann, 2015.

In 1995, however, this wave of acclaim was already on the verge of collapsing and becoming a cliché. In interviews, it becomes clear that Panahi was very observant of how *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* was received in the countries where he promoted it successfully.[13] Despite claims that he wanted to continue making films centering around children,[14] Panahi began to anticipate festival tastes efficiently and went on to make *Āyeneh* (The Mirror, 1997). For most of its running time, *Āyeneh* is indeed a film very much like many others produced in Iran—it puts a child in an overwhelming situation and uses it as a device to examine adult society. It tells the story of six-year-old Mīnā, who is not picked up from school and gets lost while trying to find her way home. In the second half of her journey, however, a twist sabotages the familiar narrative: Mina's actress (Mina Moḥammadkhānī) leaves her role, addresses the camera and declares that she wants to stop filming immediately and to go home. The narrative then deviates from its previous plot to the film set itself where the director, Panahi, negotiates the remaining filming process with his child actress. This clever—and totally scripted—switch to the meta-level of film production can easily be understood as a self-ironic commentary on the overwhelming position of children in Iranian art cinema. It is also Panahi's announcement to stop the practice of using them as narrative devices to tell adult stories and instead starting to use the camera (which in the end turns out to be the titular mirror) for further examinations of society.

Panahi would start to put this announcement into action with his following films, but first, his meta-commentary was dutifully acknowledged internationally. *Āyeneh* received the main prizes of festivals in Singapore, Istanbul, and Locarno in 1997, which is regarded as the most important stepping stone towards the European A-festivals. Back in Tehran, however, Panahi was started to be confronted with criticism that he would make his films with the tastes of festival directors and jurors in mind and was described as "another Kiarostami" in film magazines.[15] In the summer of 1997, this was no small feat given that Panahi's mentor and idol had just returned to Iran

[13] See, for example an interview he gave to the Tehran based magazine *Māhnāmeh-ye Sīnemā-ye Fīlm* (Cinema and Film Monthly) in early 1996, in which he details which jury members of the Tokyo International Film Festival had already watched and liked *Bādkonak-e Sefīd*, calculating his chances in advance. Weeks after the interview, he went on to win the main prize in Tokyo, just as he had predicted. See Eslami and Golmakani, 2019.

[14] Panahi, 2019a.

[15] Talebinejad, 2019. p. 43.

after having won the *Palme d'Or* in Cannes, an achievement that brought Kiarostami much criticism of producing his films for foreign acclaim rather than Iranian movie theaters.

While *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* and *Āyeneh* had been produced and screened in Iran without bigger problems, Panahi's following two films struggled to get shooting permissions by the *Ershād* and were ultimately not shown in Iranian movie theaters, which only cemented his reputation as a festival filmmaker, a frequent accusation in the Iranian film community and a discourse virulent in film criticism of the 2000s. This accusation was further fueled when Panahi's success on the international stage continued undamped. *Dāyereh* (The Circle), his portrait of four women struggling with state authorities and patriarchic family structures, proved extremely popular at festivals all over the world and won the Golden Lion at the 2000 Venice Film Festival, one of the three most important awards in the European film festival landscape. The follow up, *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* (Crimson Gold), a drama about an impoverished army veteran driven to alcoholism and crime, saw Panahi return to Cannes, were he won the jury award of the side section *Un Certain Regard* in 2003.

Both *Dāyereh* and *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* deal with topics that are laden with taboos in Iranian public discourse, the first with female self-determination towards the state and their families, the latter with the poor treatment of veterans, who are rarely assisted by the state in overcoming war-induced traumata and re-entering society. Unsurprisingly, neither received a permission by the *Ershād* to be screened in foreign countries. Instead, Panahi used his knowledge of the festival networks to submit them. In an interview following the Australian premiere of *Dāyereh* in 2001 he revealed, not without a certain pride, how he used his status as leverage to enforce the film's screening in Venice:

> I did invite a few festival representatives to my house. [Festival director] Alberto Barbera officially invited the film to the Venice Film Festival after he saw it. But the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance refused to send a print, claiming the film didn't have a screening permit. Fortunately, thanks to my fellow filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, I had already sent a copy abroad. After learning about the film's problems, he offered to put my reels in a box labeled with the title of his own film, *Gabbeh*. The Ministry was sending *Gabbeh* to international festivals at the time, and Makhmalbaf thought the box wouldn't attract suspicion.[16]

[16] Teo, 2001.

A similar strategy had made it possible for Panahi to receive a permission to make the film in the first place. In the same interview, he recalls how, after the Ministry of Culture had rejected the script, Iranian reformist newspapers instigated an outcry against "the censors for keeping a filmmaker who had won two major international awards from making another film." Upon this, the *Ershād* gave in and granted him a permission to shoot the film. *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* was permitted in a similar, albeit less spectacular manner—apparently, the ministry had learned from the Venice anecdote and started to take the calculated risk of rather having subversive films screened abroad than causing an uproar at home, and possibly internationally. By the mid-2000s, Jafar Panahi had apparently internalized the game of the international film festival circuit. Already in the first decade of his career, he adapted to the dynamic needs of the global market, evolving his work from children's films to more and more sensitive subjects. Another thing he had learned was to use his popularity abroad as leverage to produce his films back home against the increasing resistance of the *Ershād*.

Social Filmmaking

From *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* onwards, the topics of Panahi's films grew more and more sensitive, and his clashes with Iranian authorities became a rule rather than an exception—a trend that would continue with his football comedy *Offside* (see Chapter Three). As a consequence, Panahi was started to be branded as a political filmmaker in Iranian as well as foreign media in the mid-2000s. In early 2006, on the occasion of the *Offside* premiere at the Fajr Film Festival, eminent film critic Aḥmad Ṭālebīnezhād published an open letter to Panahi in the Tehran based magazine *Māhnāmeh-ye Sīnemā-ye Fīlm* (Cinema and Film Monthly) in which he accused the director of calculated provocation and courting censorship to later use it as a selling point for his films abroad. According to Talebinejad, Panahi had receded to a rich-and-famous lifestyle and lost touch with the poor and downtrodden, who he portrayed in his films mainly to catch foreign attention.

Panahi swiftly replied with an open letter to Talebinejad in the same magazine. While he acknowledged that he had seen foreign posters of his films that advertised the fact that they were forbidden in Iran, the director denied

any influence on their global distribution and marketing campaigns.[17] On the matter of courting censorship, Panahi pointed out that he understood his job as "uncovering reality" (*vāqeʿīat elqāʾ kardan*) rather than pleasing authorities. Underlining his personal integrity "as a role model for young people" and as a director who "broke onto the filmmaking scene with diligence and tenacity," Panahi clearly prioritized reality over the preferences of the *Ershād* and argued that his conflicts with authorities came from his urge make uncompromising films rather than from a wish to provoke at all cost.[18]

The exchange between Panahi and Talebinejad stands paradigmatically for the reception of the controversial director, which is mostly framed in the discourse of Panahi as a "political filmmaker" (*fīlmsāz-e siyāsī*). The label works in two directions: in Iranian discussions, it is usually implied as an accusation of calculated provocation for the sake of aesthetic quality, while in Western debates, it is mostly equated with courageous commitment for the cause of human rights and social justice in Iran. Notably, Panahi strongly denies the label in both contexts and wants to be seen as a "social filmmaker" (*fīlmsāz-e ejtemāʿī*, lit. societal filmmaker) instead. In a 2008 interview with UK based researcher Shiva Rahbaran, he distanced himself from political filmmaking, which in his eyes would always submit its subject to a "party's or ideology's point of view" and thus can never be independent.[19] In contrast, Panahi understood his practice of social filmmaking as objectively reflecting reality and "giving history a report."[20] About *Offside*, at the time his most recent film, he remarked:

> This is not fiction; it is a present-day event happening in this country. I have not invented or created a story! Every single Iranian who watches this film has experienced or witnessed such a conflict with the authorities.[21]

Panahi elaborates this commitment to filmmaking as an honest reflection of social realities in a recently published conversation with his personal friend Jamsheed Akrami, where he remarks: "If you are a socially committed filmmaker, you can't close your eyes to adult realities, no matter

[17] Panahi, 2019b. p. 110.

[18] Ibid. p. 108.

[19] Rahbaran, 2016. p. 166.

[20] Ibid. p. 167.

[21] Ibid. p. 173.

how dark they are. I didn't create them—I just shed light on them."[22] When the film scholar critically probes if his constant violations of the rules issued by the *Ershād* are a deliberate challenge to censors, Panahi replies:

> When I am making a film, I don't think about the possible reactions it might provoke, or whether some scenes could be shown or not. I only concentrate on what's right for the film. I never start with a conscious decision to break taboos. But if my characters need to do or say something that might end up being controversial, I won't hesitate to do it.[23]

The commitment to record unfiltered reality is central in Panahi's self image. It manifests in his insistence on being a social rather than a political filmmaker as well as in the prioritization of his (and his films') personal integrity. As stylistically different as films like *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* and *Offside* might appear on the surface, his work is certainly indebted in a tradition of cinematic realism. Film critics often work out their connection to Italian neorealism, and Panahi himself never ceases to point to Vittorio de Sica's 1948 *Ladri di Biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves) as his first source of inspiration.[24] It is important to note, however, that his films do not aim at documenting particular characters or settings. As much as Panahi points out that his work is not political, it always extrapolates the circumstances of its narrative to the larger context of Iranian society as a whole. In *Bādkonak-e Sefīd*, Raziyeh experiences the social and economic pressures on Iranian working class girls; *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* explores the desperate biographies of traumatized army veterans; and *Offside* is not a comedy of errors about football crazed women but criticizes the governmental stadium ban for women. In a 2001 interview about *Dāyereh*, he made this extrapolation transparent after being asked why the women in the film had been in prison in the first place:

> It doesn't matter It could be anything you want. That's not important. It's a very delicate point. If I had decided to give them some crime that they were guilty of, like something political or because of drugs, they would have become specific persons. But they are not specific persons. You can have anybody there. Then the problem is a much larger problem.[25]

This willingness to create characters that work as social functions rather than individuals and to let his films speak for larger problems in Iranian society made Panahi an especially attractive filmmakers for European festival

[22] Akrami, 2018. p. 61.

[23] Ibid. p. 63.

[24] See, for example Keough, 2019. p. 119.

[25] Teo, 2001.

curators on their chase to find authentic documents from seemingly sealed off countries like Iran. Of this, Panahi was well aware: “It seems as if the world’s thirst for knowledge about contemporary Iran can only be satisfied through film,” he remarked in 2008.[26] He further did not see his consequential role as an informal ambassador to the West as a problem. On the contrary, Panahi seemed to take the cultural ascriptions of Iranian-ness with pride. In the same interview, he underlined his particular “Iranian historical and cultural background” that was conveyed in every shot of his work.[27] When asked about the accusations of being a “festival filmmaker,” Panahi wrote the label off as an invention of state officials who felt threatened by his films:

> This is one of the tactics of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to isolate us both from our people and the international community. As soon as they realized that the interest in Iranian films is growing worldwide, they started to attach such labels to us. They did not know any better way to confront us.[28]

The interviews Panahi gave between the release of *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* in 2003 and his arrest in 2010 again reveal his detailed knowledge of the workings of the international festival scene and the surrounding discourses. By 2009, Panahi had further learned to effectively deal with the accusations of the festival cinema discourse that was prevalent in his home country, namely with dismissing it as an invention of the government. Panahi was also well connected to the networks of the film festival circuit and anticipated the Western thirst for cinematic knowledge about the Islamic Republic and its political landscape. It is thus secondary whether he understood himself as a political filmmaker or not: he was perceived as such at festivals as well as in Iran and was well aware of this perception, as his frequent insistence of being regarded as a social filmmaker reveals.

The developments of 2009 and 2010 marked a clear disruption in Panahi’s career and turned him into the unique case of a filmmaker that was both well established and working in the underground at the same time. His films changed significantly from this point onwards, but Panahi’s reputation as a political filmmaker was naturally only fostered by his vocal solidarity with the Green Movement during the summer of 2009, his arrest in the following

[26] Rahbaran, 2016. p. 170.

[27] Ibid. p. 172.

[28] Ibid. p. 174.

March, and ultimately his occupational ban of September 2010. When the Berlinale invited him to the jury in 2011, however, they not only invited him as a political filmmaker. Since it was well known that he was prohibited to travel to foreign festivals, they also clearly staged their own posture as a forum for political activism. This posture manifested in various ways which I will examine in the following.

Green Ribbons on the Red Carpet

Over the course of the 61st Berlinale, which took place from February 10th–20th 2011, the festival put much effort into showing that they not only spoke out in support of artistic freedom in Iran in general, but also that they amplified pressure on the Iranian government in the particular case of Panahi. In his role as Mr. Berlinale, Kosslick was by that time well practiced in catchphrasing the political and using it as a stage prop to elevate the festival from mere glamorous entertainment, as I have shown in the previous chapter. Recalling his past festival slogans, from “Accept Diversity” (2002) to “Sex, Politics and Rock ’n’ Roll” (2005) to simply “Crisis!” (2009), it should hardly come as a surprise that Kosslick in 2011 again framed Panahi’s case in the most sensationalist terms that were more interested in loud symbolic politics than in nuanced and differentiated representation. Perhaps the most exemplary instance of the activist performances in the framework of the 2011 Berlinale was the protest event for Panahi on the red carpet on the second day of the festival.

The little demonstration that the festival put together in front of the *Berlinale Palast* had been scheduled before a screening of Panahi’s allegoric soccer comedy *Offside* (which had premiered at the festival back in 2006) in the context of a larger retrospective of his films. “As a sign of the festival’s solidarity with Jafar Panahi,”[29] to quote the program catalog, the different sections screened a selection of five earlier films by Panahi: *Offside* was re-released in the competition section, where it had premiered five years earlier; the *Panorama* showed *Dāyereh*, Panahi’s 2000 portrait of repressed women; and his bloody veteran drama *Ṭalā-ye Sorkh* from 2003 went to the *Forum*, the festival’s platform for more experimental and independent films. The cross-sectional tribute to Panahi even affected the children’s program *Generation* and

[29] *Katalog*, 2011. p. 383.

the short film section *Shorts*, which screened his 1995 *Nowruz* crowdpleaser *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* and *Gereh Geshāyī* (Untying the Knot), a short film about an impoverished carpet-weaver that Panahi had shot in 2007.

The festival's program catalog had announced the retrospective with an extensive feature in its last pages. The announcement was introduced by a quote that reaffirmed the narrative of Panahi as a social filmmaker who is not occupied with politics:

> I don't make political films, I make humanistic films. Political films always take sides; they dictate and try to tell us what's right and what's wrong. A humanistic film would never do that. Instead of searching for the roots of a phenomenon, it merely bears witness to it.[30]

Panahi's statement is completely in line with his previously mentioned mantra of being a social rather than a political filmmaker and frames the director as a mere chronicler of Iranian society which his works display without judgement. It is followed by a paragraph that details his current legal problems, which it describes as "in breach of the fundamental human right of freedom of speech." The context of the election protests as well as the catalyst for Panahi's arrest, namely his public support for the Green Movement and his work on a film about the protests, are not addressed in the text.[31] Taken together with the statement about his films as mere witnesses, the feature intriguingly feeds Panahi's own narrative of himself as everything but a political filmmaker.

The political instead entered the festival stages in the shape of the festival's own activism ahead of the screening of *Offside*. The re-release of the film was treated like a regular competition premiere, with a gala on the red carpet at the *Berlinale Palast*, the festival's central venue. The high priority of the event was also highlighted by its timing on a Friday at 4:30pm, which is one of the most attractive time slots in the busy economy of attention during the ten festival days. It is further notable that the event was scheduled on February 11th, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. It is unclear whether

[30] Ibib. p. 382.

[31] "Renowned Iranian director, writer and producer Jafar Panahi, who was invited to take part in the International Jury at this year's Berlinale, has been banned from leaving Iran. In December 2010 Panahi was handed a six-year prison sentence and a twenty-year ban on directing films as well as leaving the country for alleged 'propaganda against the Islamic Republic'. An appeal was made against the sentence. Another Iranian film director, Mohammad Rasoulof, was also sentenced to six years' imprisonment. These sentences, which are in breach of the fundamental human right of freedom of speech, have unleashed waves of protest around the world. Last year Panahi's request to travel to the Berlinale to take part in a World Cinema Fund event was denied; he was also refused permission to travel to festivals in Cannes and Venice." Ibid. p. 383.

the date was selected consciously or simply fit the festival schedule, but it surely held a strong symbolic value that was, however, rarely addressed on the day itself. The evening before, during the opening ceremony, Dieter Kosslick had announced the event as follows:

> We will show this film [*Offside*] again at 4:30pm, so 4pm on the red carpet. I hope that everyone will be there. We have printed green bears, so that we will stand down here in the color of the resistance in Iran and then we will again express the solidarity and then we will watch Iranian films.[32]

Expressing solidarity by wearing green bear pins and watching Iranian films—Kosslick's advertisement made it seem like siding with resistance was never so easy. The festival organization also handed printed photographs of Panahi holding up his 2006 Silver Bear to participants, complete with green ribbons to carry them around the neck. His announcement further broadened the protest to more than Panahi's case. It was, after all, not *Offside* but "Iranian films" that could be watched, regardless of the fact that Panahi is by no means a suitable representative for the diverse ecosystem of Iranian cinema. Altogether, Kosslick's call for solidarity promised a stunt of easily consumable symbolic politics, and just as he had hoped, many followed it. Not only was the 1,600 seat venue sold out, but a modest number of photogenic German film stars and politicians also rallied on the red carpet in front of the building.

Among the guests arriving in limousines before the screening were well established German actresses and actors (Senta Berger, Bruno Ganz, and Heino Ferch), internationally renowned directors of the New German Cinema (Volker Schlöndorff and Wim Wenders), a group of German actresses with Iranian or Turkish parentage (Minu Barati, Sibel Kekilli, and Jasmin Tabatabai), as well as prominent Greek filmmaker Costa-Gavras. Claudia Roth, then chairwoman of the German Green Party, represented the political prominence, and a callback to the festival's rich history of political turmoil came with director Michael Verhoeven, who had caused the cancellation of the 1970 Berlinale with his Vietnam docudrama *o.k.* A further star guest was actress Iris Berben, attending in her function as president of the *Deutsche Filmakademie* (German Film Academy). Notably, the *Filmakademie* started their campaign

[32] "Wir zeigen diesen Film [*Offside*] nochmal um 16:30, also um 16 Uhr auf dem roten Teppich. Ich hoffe, alle sind da. Wir haben grüne Bären drucken lassen, so dass wir auch in der Farbe des Widerstands im Iran hier unten stehen und dann werden wir nochmal die Solidarität ausdrücken und dann schauen wir uns iranische Filme an." *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 49:00-49:30.

"Filmmakers in Prison" a few weeks after the event. Together with *Amnesty International* and *Reporters Without Borders*, they produced a videoclip for the campaign that put Jafar Panahi in the front spot—wrongly implicating that the director was in prison at the time.[33]

When most of the prominent guests had arrived and hung their Panahi-photographs around their necks, Dieter Kosslick took over in his role as festival receptionist. He gathered about two dozens of them for a group photograph that was intended to serve as the emblematic image of the red carpet protest (Picture 4.1). The picture shows many of the film stars mentioned above, most of them smiling and showing their Panahi-badges into the camera, conveying the simple message of expressing solidarity with the convicted filmmaker through showcasing his photograph that had been provided by the Berlinale. Only one member of the group holds up something different: German director Volker Schlöndorff (b. 1939) proudly presents a Crystal Simorgh award statue which he had received at the 2005 Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran. Even at first sight, the statue in the centre of the picture is a visual irritation, and the background complicates matters further. Around him, people show photographs of Panahi receiving a Silver Bear in Berlin, while Schlöndorff embodies a living reverse mirror-image of said photograph—a German director holding up a Crystal Simorgh that he received in Tehran.

Unfortunately, the rich texture of Schlöndorff's gesture was not further addressed by himself or anyone else at the event. The director did not clarify in interviews that he had received the award by a state-funded Iranian festival,

Picture 4.1: German film stars rally on the red carpet to show their solidarity with Jafar Panahi on February 11th 2011, provided with green ribbons and photos of Panahi.

[33] Deutsche Filmakademie, 2012.

and for his Holocaust drama *Der Neunte Tag* (The Ninth Day, 2004), a film based on the autobiography of a catholic priest detained in the Dachau concentration camp—a fact that would surely have irritated German media coverage, which often focused on state-carried Holocaust denial in the Islamic Republic. Nor was it clear whether Schlöndorff had brought the award out of protest—as if to return or destroy it—or out of sheer pride. From all the context published about the red carpet protest, it appears like the director had simply wanted to bring something Iranian to the Iran-related event. In a similar fashion, the speaker boxes in front of the *Berlinale Palast* played slow traditional Iranian music in the background, atmospherically keeping in the guests' minds that the event was related to the country.

After the picture had been taken, the guests joined the bustle on the red carpet that was irritatingly business as usual. From behind the barriers limiting the red carpet, photographers screamed to get the stars' attention. The guests arrived in limousines sponsored by the festival and presented themselves and their outfits to the never ending staccato of flashlights. Journalists found niches in the busy crowd to extract brief interviews from the attendants. In one of such interviews, Greek filmmaker Costa-Gavras raved about the "very moving" emotional atmosphere during the opening night and the festival's gesture of the empty chair.[34] In another, Dieter Kosslick himself walked around carrying a cardboard poster for *Offside* and posed for cameras (Picture 4.2). Like Schlöndorff's Crystal Simorgh, Kosslick's gesture is rather irritating, since *Offside* had not even been the film that had brought Panahi before court. It was, however, not only the film that would be screened later on, but also Panahi's only film that had

Picture 4.2: Dieter Kosslick with a cardboard poster of *Offside* during the red carpet protest.

[34] *Red carpet for Offside*, 2011. Min. 3:30.

premiered at the Berlinale up to this point, which suggests that for Kosslick, something that underlined Panahi's relation to Berlin was more significant than a relation to his legal problems.

When the limousines had finished bringing the star guests to the red carpet, a truck carrying a big poster drove by. It showed a picture of a young Panahi with folded arms and a headline asking: "Where is Jafar Panahi?" (Picture 4.3). The truck had been organized by the *FriedensFilmPreis* initiative, a Berlin-based organization funded by private donations that annually curated one of the dozens of independent awards handed out at the fringes of the festival. Their actions were not organized by the Berlinale, but tolerated and applauded by Kosslick, who kept a friendly relation to the initiative during his time as festival director. The "much appreciated poster action" that "reinforced the clear and solidary posture of the Berlinale leadership", as the group later described it on their website,[35] was in some ways emblematic for the whole event. Apart from organizing the screening, handing out badges and green ribbons, and providing the venue of the *Berlinale Palast* with its representative

Picture 4.3: A truck sponsored by the Berlin-based *FriedensFilmPreis* initiative, touring the red carpet with a large poster that asks: "Where is Jafar Panahi?"

[35] "Die Friedensfilmpreis-Gruppe hat mit einer vielbeachteten Plakataktion 'Wo bleibt Jafar Panahi?' die klare und solidarische Haltung der Berlinale-Leitung verstärkt." FriedensFilmPreis, 2011.

red carpet, not much of the protest event was orchestrated. That led to the invited guests showing up and, equipped with not more than the Panahi-bagdes, following their own ways of protest by giving interviews, by organizing poster trucks, by launching campaigns, or by presenting their own relation to Iran, like Volker Schlöndorff. The result was a melange of symbols connected only by their vague relation to Iran: an Iranian award-statue, folkloristic music, images of Panahi and his films, green ribbons—and all of that on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

It appears worthwhile to briefly consider the actual significance of the political in the festival's red carpet activism at this point. One particular conceptualization might be helpful in that regard, namely the distinction between politics and the political that has been proposed in radical political philosophy, especially in the writings of Chantal Mouffe. In her 1993 *The Return of the Political*, the Belgian political theorist introduced a conceptualization of the political marked by antagonism and conflict.[36] Everything that orders and institutionalizes social relations, on the other hand, Mouffe delegated to the realm of politics:

> 'The political' refers to this dimension of antagonism which can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations. It is a dimension that can never be eradicated. 'Politics', on the other hand, refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seeks to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting, since they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'.[37]

It should be noted that Mouffe has developed her theory to grasp the crisis she diagnosed at the heart of contemporary liberal democracies, caused by a certain de-politization of politics which had emptied it from all conflict and ethical debate.[38] To consider the implications of her larger argument on Kosslick's Berlinale would thus admittedly overextend both my analytical framework and her concept. Yet, applied to the festival's claims of political activism, Mouffe's distinction can help to illustrate a certain fissure in its performance.

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[36] Mouffe, 1993.

[37] Mouffe, 2013. p. 8.

[38] "Many of the problems facing liberal democracies today stem from the fact that politics has been reduced to an instrumental activity, to the selfish pursuit of private interests. The limiting of democracy to a mere set of neutral procedures, the transformation of citizens into political consumers, and the liberal insistence on a supposed 'neutrality' of the state, have emptied politics of all substance. It has been reduced to economics and stripped of all ethical components." Mouffe, 1993. p. 111.

Understood through the lens of these contributions, the red carpet protest as well as the other Panahi-related actions at the 2011 Berlinale can hardly be characterized as political, which is marked by antagonism. In the context of the German public—in which the Berlinale operates—their protest was far from controversial. On the contrary, it was very much in line with the politics of the larger German image of Iran, especially so soon after the election protests of 2009, which had fostered that image less than two years ago, as I have shown in the previous chapter. That the Iranian government and security services had escalated the brutality of their crackdown on the Green Movement, that the country had serious deficits in terms of artistic freedom, and that oppositional filmmakers should neither be arrested nor prohibited to work was an obvious and wide-ranging consensus in Germany at that time. Formulated along the lines of Chantal Mouffe's distinction, the protest of the Berlinale was not in any way opposed to the context in which it appeared and consequently not political, but rather well integrated into the politics of the German associations with Iran.

When they planned the 61st Berlinale, the festival organization surely was more concerned with entertainment value than with political theory, so it would be incoherent to scale their activities along these standards. Since Kosslick and the festival however never tired of characterizing their activities as political protest, Mouffe's objection still appears to resonate. The claim to act politically was crucial to the festival's self-understanding as the "political festival"—a label that was already very well established but needed to be fostered again and again over the years—but at second sight, it reveals a certain hollowness in relation to the case of Panahi. The red carpet protest was thus only political in the sense that Kosslick had enacted so often in his time as festival director, namely in a rather superficial and buzzworded type of symbolic politics that rendered anything with news value and—more often than not—anything non-Western as political.

These considerations help to understand why during the 2011 Berlinale, the showcasing of anything Iran-related was claimed political. For that to work, however, Schlöndorff's Crystal Simorgh, Kosslick's film poster, and the folkloristic music did not entirely suffice—an actual Iranian witness needed to be put onstage to round up the red carpet protest event. He was found in the person of Rafi Pitts, who had already presented two of his films at the festival

in the past. When the guests had posed on the red carpet for about 30 minutes, they went inside and the event was carried on at the stage of the *Berlinale Palast*. Before the screening of *Offside* began, the lights went down, the festive jingle that marks the start of every competition premiere was played, and a moderator entered the stage to announce festival director Dieter Kosslick and "Iranian director Rafi Pitts" for a short introductory discussion ahead of the film.[39] Pitts had been introduced as "representing contemporary Iranian cinema" already at the opening ceremony of the 2009 Berlinale, where he had served as a jury member[40]—an irritating identification, given that the director had spent most of his life in exile (see Chapter Three). In 2011, it was even more misleading since Pitts at the time had lived in Paris for a whole year. After the 2010 premiere of his thriller *Shekārchī* in the Berlinale competition, he had not been able to return to Iran. This background made it all the more absurd when Kosslick asked his "friend and filmmaker Rafi Pitts: Rafi, how is the situation? What can you tell us? What's going on?"[41]

Kosslick's question might be irritating, given that Pitts, had neither set a foot into Iran nor met Panahi since they last encounter a year before. Yet the filmmaker had somehow managed to become the spearhead of the international protest against Panahi's conviction in the prior weeks. From France, Pitts had published an open letter to president Ahmadinedjad, challenging him about the election protests and the actual meaning of the Islamic revolution.[42] He had further called to a global two-hour strike in film production on the 2011 anniversary of the revolution, which was the day he stood on the Berlinale stage. Pitts had promoted both of these actions in a recent interview with the left-wing daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*.[43] Yet while Pitts indeed was publicly vocal about his support of Panahi, Kosslick's treatment of him as an Iranian filmmaker without mentioning his ongoing exile again shows the festival's need for Iranian witnesses to be put on a stage. Since he had not met or spoken to Panahi, nor had been in Iran to actually experience the current situation, Pitts simply held a brief lecture about the injustice happening to Panahi and his

39 *Red carpet for Offside*, 2011. Min. 42:15.

40 "Er repräsentiert das aktuelle iranische Kino und war 2006 mit seinem Film *It's Winter* hier im Berlinale Wettbewerb: Rafi Pitts." *Opening Ceremony of the 59th Berlinale*, 2009. Min. 96:00.

41 *Red carpet for Offside*, 2011. Min. 43:30.

42 Pitts, 2010.

43 Kappert, 2011.

own musings on failure of the Islamic Revolution of 1979—this being the only occasion that someone pointed out its anniversary.

Gold for Iran

A far more prominent Iranian witness than Pitts, however, was found in the shape of the only Iranian competition film at the 61st Berlinale, namely *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*.[44] Asghar Farhadi's moral suspense drama swiftly emerged as one of the main contenders for the Golden Bear in 2011, which it ultimately won along with two acting Silver Bears for the ensemble of male and female cast respectively. This astonishing performance of the film at the awards ceremony was widely read as "a distinct political sign"[45] and "a symbol of compassion and also a solidary salute to the two filmmakers Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof"[46] in German media. Since it underlines perfectly how anything Iran-related was rendered political at the Berlinale in general—and in 2011 in particular—I will explore its appearance in Berlin in some detail in the following.

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[44] Synopsis: The film revolves around the titular couple (played by Leylā Ḥātamī and Peymān Moʿādī), a Tehran upper middle class family with a teenage daughter. Sīmīn files a divorce because she wants to leave the country, but Nāder will not join her as he has to take care of his father sick with Alzheimer's. When a family judge is instructed to decide who will get custody of the daughter—a crucial question, since the parents plan to live in different countries—a series of complicated events disrupts the divorce process. As Nader is overwhelmed by looking after his father on his own, he hires a caregiver, Rāżyeh (Sāreh Bayāt). Since she comes from a deeply religious family and has to take her daughter to work, Razieh is overwhelmed by the task herself. One day she has to leave Nader's father briefly and ties the old man to his bed. As Nader comes home, finds his father all alone and constrained, and additionally wrongly assumes that Razieh has stolen money from him, he is enraged and wants to throw her out of the apartment. When Razieh insists on being paid first, however, a bitter argument between the two erupts, ending in Nader pushing Razieh out of the apartment's door, upon which she falls down the stairs. After the accident, Razieh has to be hospitalized and it becomes clear that she was four months pregnant and has lost her child. Her devastated and aggressive husband sues Nader and blames him for the murder of his unborn child. The central moral mystery of the the film now becomes the question whether Nader knew in advance that Razieh had been pregnant. The conflict between the two families is ultimately resolved, but in the process, Nader's daughter Termeh learns that her father had been well aware of Razieh's pregnancy. In the final scene, the judge puts Termeh in the position of deciding for herself with which parent she will want to live in the future: With Simin, who will take her away from her home country, or with Nader, with whom she shares a stronger bond but who has consciously pushed a pregnant woman down the stairs? The last shot rests on her face but cuts away before she shares her decision with the audience, leaving the moral judgement open.

[45] "Mit dem Preis für den iranischen Film setzte die internationale Jury unter Vorsitz der italienischen Schauspielerin Rossellini ein deutliches politisches Zeichen." "*Iranischer Film erhält Goldenen Bären*," 2011.

[46] "Der Goldene Bär lässt sich als Zeichen der Anteilnahme begreifen und auch als ein solidarischer Gruß an die beiden Filmemacher Jafar Panahi und Mohammad Rasoulof." Nord, 2011.

Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn was not the only Iranian film at the 61st Berlinale, but by far the most prolific of them.[47] Its screening in Berlin was not a world premiere, it had already opened at the Fajr Film Festival in Tehran two weeks before. The success of the film there—and later abroad—is hard to overemphasize: at Fajr, enthusiastic viewers perceived it as the long awaited savior of Iranian popular cinema, finally bridging the gap between high quality art cinema and mainstream appeal. It won five Crystal Cimorghs,[48] an unusual feat for a social drama at a festival that more often than not awards propagandist war movies, family comedies, or other varieties of kitsch. When it opened in Iranian cinemas in March, it became a popular sensation, lived up the high expectations of Iranian audiences, and began a journey that would end with Asghar Farhadi receiving an Academy Award in Los Angeles one year later.

The film's long journey was however still in its first steps when it premiered in Berlin, where it amazed audiences as well as journalists. Although it was first screened on a slow Tuesday in the early afternoon, arguably one of the most thankless slots for a competition film, the moral suspense and ambiguity that Farhadi's drama constructs thrilled audiences as much in Berlin as it had in Tehran two weeks before. After four days of poor pickings for critics covering the 2011 competition, word got around that *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* was a sensationally well-directed, -written and -acted piece of intimate theater. Among the people who had watched the film, lively discussions emerged, playing through the various points of view that Farhadi's screenplay makes plausible and ultimately lets collide, from Nader's moral responsibility, to Simin's choice between emigration and motherhood, to Razieh's economic hardships, and finally to Termeh being torn apart between her parents' different perspectives. This bitter joy of experiencing that there are no simple truths, and certainly no winners, in the family conflicts at the heart

[47] Three child-focused films were screened in the Generation section: *Bād o Meh* (Wind and Fog, Moḥammad ʿAlī Ṭālebī), *Qeṣṣeh-hāye Yek Ḫaṭī* (Stories of a Straight Line, Behzād Faraḥāt), and *Khāneh-ye Fāṭemeh Kojā-st?* (Where is Fatemeh's Home?, Fereydūn Najafī). In addition, *Gom o Gūr* (Disappearance and Grave, Moḥammadreżā Farzād), a documentary about the "black Friday" during the Islamic Revolution (*Jomʿeh-ye Siyāh*, September 8th 1978) in which more than 100 protesters were shot by the Shah's military, premiered in the experimental *Forum Expanded* section. In total, five films from Iran were screened at the 61st Berlinale, added to the five film retrospective of Panahi.

[48] It won the awards for Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Sound Recorder, and the festival's audience award.

of the story apparently stood at the core of what made the drama an immediate "Berlinale-Sensation,"[49] as reviews put it right after the premiere.

Farhadi's film was received with outright excitement and its artistic qualities were undisputed in Iran and later in the rest of the world. Yet at the 2011 Berlinale, this enthusiasm naturally collided with the festival's staging of its support for Jafar Panahi. Following its premiere on February 15th, *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* was immediately dragged into the vortex of that the Berlinale's activism for Panahi that dominated the event. The very first question at the film's press conference came from a German journalist, who asked about Farhadi's opinion on Jafar Panahi and his situation, to which the director could only answer that it made him sad to be in Berlin without him, as they were personal friends.[50] The rest of the press conferences followed the usual rituals of these events on Iranian films, an experience that Farhadi had already made when he presented *Darbāreh-ye Ellī* in Berlin in 2009 (see Chapter Three). Just like with his previous film, all following questions revolved around the role of religion in the narrative and read the film as either a well veiled political statement or a clash between tradition and modernity that was of course seen as symptomatic for contemporary Iranian society.

It should be noted that for Farhadi and his film team, the appearance at a festival that was vocally criticizing the Iranian government was a difficult diplomatic tightrope act. As authorities were on particular alert at the time, any suspicious statement of the director could have led to serious consequences. Farhadi had made that experience recently in Tehran, where he had publicly expressed hope that his restricted colleagues would be able to travel and work again soon, upon which the the Ministry of Culture ordered the filming of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* to be halted for eight days.[51] Understandably, such intimidations led the film team to be particularly careful when they presented their film in Berlin. While foreign festival premieres are complicated balancing acts for any Iranian film team, the context of the 2011 Berlinale made it even more difficult than usual to remain inconspicuous in the eyes government agents who closely observed the event. This is also why the premiere of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* had not been overtaken by the issue of Panahi or the election

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[49] Sander, 2011.

[50] *Press conference of Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, 2011. Min. 8:15–10:30.

[51] Kilb, 2011a.

protests. The event had went on without any Panahi-badges, posters, or other requisites from the festival's pool of protest items on the red carpet. Only one of the film's producers carried a green bear as a pin-up button at the lapel of his jacket.[52] Kosslick immediately noticed the producer's green bear and joked that the next time, he should wear a red one - "just in case!"[53] Instances like this anecdotally underline the diplomatic balancing act which Iranian film teams and the festival organization performed in 2011.

Despite of these potential problems for Farhadi and his film team, journalists readily jumped on reading the political into *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*. Like with most other Iranian films, nearly every German review of the family drama excessively looked for hidden clues that justified political interpretations. While critics were united in their praise for the screenplay, they were quick to remark that in addition to the high quality of the film, it *also* came from Iran. A review published on *Spiegel Online* after the Berlinale had ended makes this clear in an exemplary way:

> As an intensely directed and believably acted relationship drama alone, this film would have deserved awards [...]. But "Nader and Simin" is set in Iran, an unfree country, and the way in which Asghar Farhadi uses the situation there as background and lets all the depicted conflicts become metaphors for the political unfreedom makes this film a masterpiece, just because it is not done in an obvious way.[54]

Other articles also understood the setting in Iran as a background, a stage set by the masterful director Asghar Farhadi. Hanns-Georg Rodek, chief critic of the populist *Die Welt*, underlined that the film takes the universal premise of a divorce "and plays it through for Iranian circumstances."[55]

After clarifying that the film was highly recommendable not only because it was good, but also because it was from Iran, critics went on to work out the specifics of this Iranian context, which was mostly limited to a certain

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[52] The bears are handed out a give-aways to guests at the Berlinale every year, usually in red. In 2011, the festival distributed green bears instead to underline their solidarity with the Iranian opposition.

[53] *Red carpet for Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, 2011. Min. 6:45.

[54] "Schon allein als intensiv inszeniertes und glaubhaft gespieltes Beziehungsdrama hätte dieser Film Preise verdient [...]. Aber 'Nader und Simin' spielt in Iran, einem unfreien Land, und die Art und Weise, wie Asghar Farhadi die Situation dort als Hintergrund einsetzt und all die in seinem Film dargestellten Konflikte zu Metaphern werden lässt für die politische Unfreiheit, ist meisterhaft, gerade weil es an keiner Stelle aufdringlich geschieht." Kuzmany, 2011b.

[55] "Asghar Farhadi [...] nimmt eine universelle Situation - Eltern, die sich trennen wollen, und ein Kind zwischen ihnen - und spielt sie auf iranische Verhältnisse durch." Rodek and Tabatabai, 2011.

religious exoticism that highlighted the role of Islam in the film. As part of the class conflict that is played out between the two families, one upper middle class, one working class, religion indeed features prominently in Farhadi's film, where it works both as a motivator for narrative development and as a marker for character conflicts. Most reviews, however, detached it from the class context in which Farhadi put it and instead displayed it in classic Orientalist fashion. The Berlin weekly *Tip* worked out "civil and fundamentalist codes, sharia-law, family loyalty, sense of honor, and marital solidarity"[56] as the field in which the story develops. A review published in *Die Welt* summed up the plot in a sensationalist manner: "They go to court - it will be about honor and blood money."[57] Adding the aggression of Razieh's husband, framed as a "religious fundamentalist,"[58] reviewers concluded that by watching the "exceptional film about the hostile Ayatollah-state,"[59] audiences would "learn about the circumstances of everyday life under the leadership of the Mullahs."[60]

The religious exoticism that was widely highlighted by German reviewers of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* was ultimately framed in juxtaposition to the surprising modernity of the titular couple. The confrontation between them and the poverty-stricken family of Razieh was unilaterally read as an allegory for the conflict between "modernity and archaic law"[61] in contemporary Iranian society. This interpretation is indeed hinted at in Farhadi's screenplay, but reviews highlighted it as the ultimate key to understand Iran and its "torn society."[62] In his review for the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, critic Andreas Kilb argued that the lawsuit in the film "is also a trial on Iranian society, on its social and civil contradictions, on its balancing between medieval

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[56] "Bürgerliche und fundamentalistische Codes, Sharia-Gesetz, Familienloyalität, Ehrgefühl und eheliche Solidarität sind nur einige der Ebenen, die sich verschränken, während sich langsam der tatsächliche Ablauf des Geschehens aus den wechselnden Darstellungen herausschält." Weixlbaumer, 2011.

[57] "Es geht vor Gericht - und es wird um Ehre und Blutgeld gehen." Rodek and Tabatabai, 2011.

[58] "Seiner überforderten Frau gegenüber ist der religiöse Fundamentalist so ausfallend, dass sie um sich und ihre Tochter Somayeh fürchtet." Bach, 2011.

[59] "Ein Ausnahmefilm über den lebensfeindlichen Ayatollah-Staat Iran." Kniebe, 2011.

[60] "Wie beiläufig erfahren wir etwas über die alltäglichen Lebensumstände unter der Herrschaft der Mullahs." Kuzmany, 2011b.

[61] "Asghar Farhadi hat einen besonders scharfen Blick für die alltäglichen Paradoxien, die das Nebeneinander von Modernität und archaischem Gesetz in seiner iranischen Heimat provoziert." Weixlbaumer, 2011.

[62] "Irans zerrissene Gesellschaft." Ströbele, 2011.

religiosity and technical modernity."[63] *Spiegel Online* also took part in the attribution of modernity with positive progress and religion as backward-oriented Islamism, a common Orientalist trope:

> Along the way, director Asghar Farhadi draws the picture of two Tehran worlds—the educated middle class that is hardly affected by Islamism and the poorer people who do not have much more than God.[64]

Given the critics' unity in pointing out the film as a "realistic portrait of modern Iran,"[65] it should hardly be surprising that all reviews excessively looked for hidden political messages in the film. The opening scene of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, which sees the titular couple filing their divorce in front of a family judge, was particularly highlighted in reviews. Filmed in a five-minute long sequence with a static camera, the frame only shows Nader and Simin in frontal, sitting next to each other, while the judge is asking questions from offscreen (Picture 4.4). In film studies literature, the scene's framing has often been interpreted as Farhadi giving the status of the judge, whose angle of view defines the camera perspective, to the audience.[66] This analysis is plausible given that the character studies in the following scenes are staged like pieces of evidence for the viewers. Over the course of the scene, Simin states that she wants to leave the country and take their daughter with her, which Nader, who needs to remain in Tehran to take care of his sick father, does not approve. She accuses her future ex-husband of not caring for their child's future, upon which the judge intervenes:

Simin:	*(to Nader)* Is your daughter's future not important to you?
Judge:	Every child in this country gets the opportunity to grow up.
Simin:	I don't want my daughter to grow up in these circumstances, shouldn't that be my right as a mother?

[63] "Der Prozess, den die beiden sich liefern, ist auch eine Verhandlung über die iranische Gesellschaft, über ihre sozialen und zivilen Widersprüche, über ihren Spagat zwischen mittelalterlicher Religiosität und technischer Moderne." Kilb, 2011b.

[64] "Nebenbei zeichnet Regisseur Asghar Farhadi dabei das Bild von zwei Teheraner Welten - der gebildeten Mittelschicht, die mit Islamismus wenig anfangen kann, und die ärmeren Leute, die nicht viel mehr haben außer Gott." Sander, 2011.

[65] "Asghar Farhadi zeichnet mit "Nader and Simin" ein realistisches Bild des modernen Iran." Ströbele, 2011.

[66] Reichle, 2014. p. 72.

Judge: What circumstances?[67]

Picture 4.4: Film still from *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, showing the titular couple in front of the family judge, who takes the position of the audience.

The judge's question is only answered by Simin's silence. It is this brief sequence in the opening scene that proved most interesting for German journalists. In an exemplary review for the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, film critic Tobias Kniebe interpreted the fixed camera position as "the judge, the system give the tight parameters that frame this story."[68] Later, Kniebe mused about the circumstances (*sharāyeṭ*) that Simin mentions without explaining them further:

> Silently threatening, the judge only asks which "circumstances" Simin is hinting at and which make her so sure that her daughter won't have a future here. Upon this, she looks down and doesn't answer. But the Ayatollah-state doesn't inquire here. Every Iranian knows what is meant. And the rest of the

[67] Simin: *(to Nader)* "Āyandeh-ye dokhtarat barāt mohem nīst?"
Judge: "Īn hameh bacheh to īn mamlekat khānūm dāran bozorg mī shon."
Simin: "Man tarjīḥ mī dam dokhtaram to īn sharāyeṭ bozorg nasheh, īn ḥaqqū beh ʿonvān yeh mādar mī tūnam dashteh bāsham?"
Judge: "Cheh sharāyeṭī?"

[68] "Der Richter, das System - das ist der enge Rahmen, der diese Geschichte einfasst." Kniebe, 2011.

> world feels it, too. At this moment, Asghar Farhadi wouldn't have been able to show more in the current Iranian system of censorship, anyway.[69]

Kniebe's reading is a rather bold interpretation of the screenplay's mystery that reveals how he and most of his colleagues readily assumed every hole and ambiguity of the narrative as a victim of censorship. This analytical approach is very problematic regarding *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, which prominently works with elements of suspense. When confronted with such a complicated narrative that gives and withholds information to raise tension, viewers are supposed to be dragged into the story, not interpret every open question and deliberate narrative hole as an omission of censorship.

Farhadi himself later underlined this position in an interview with *Die Tageszeitung* (taz), where he offered a very different explanation for the scene:

> taz: Mr. Farhadi, in the first scene of your film, Nader and Simin - the couple whose separation you tell - sit in front of a judge. The woman wants to leave Iran, because of the "circumstances," she says. Which particular "circumstances" are meant there?
>
> Farhadi: In a way, the film is the answer to this question. This is not easy to put into words, it has to be experienced and felt, and with care for the details.
>
> taz: Concerning the "circumstances," one automatically thinks of 2009, of the crackdown on the democracy movement, and wonders if they, too, could be meant.
>
> Farhadi: If we would narrow the film down to a perspective of power politics, we would limit the main problematic too much.[70]

As such, the scene turns out to be a perfect example for the hermeneutic pitfalls that Iranian films often offer for Western audiences: if films only hint at circumstances, viewers think of state oppression; if a potentially delicate question is not answered immediately, they assume censorship; if a scene is

[69] "Leise bedrohlich kommt nur die Nachfrage, welche 'Umstände' Simin denn bitteschön meine, deretwegen sie so sicher sei, dass ihre Tochter hier keine Zukunft habe. Da senkt sie den Blick und antwortet nicht. Aber der Ayatollah-Staat hakt hier nicht nach. Jeder Iraner weiß, was gemeint ist. Und der Rest der Welt spürt es auch. Mehr könnte Asghar Farhadi in diesem Moment auch gar nicht zeigen im aktuellen iranischen Zensursystem." Ibid.

[70] taz: "Herr Farhadi, in der ersten Szene Ihres Films sitzen Nader und Simin - die Eheleute, von deren Trennung Sie erzählen - vor einem Richter. Die Frau möchte den Iran verlassen, aufgrund der 'Umstände', sagt sie. Welche 'Umstände' sind da konkret gemeint?"
Farhadi: "Der Film ist im Grunde die Antwort auf diese Frage. Das ist auch nicht leicht in Worte zu fassen, das muss man erfahren und spüren, da muss man auf die Details achten."
taz: "Unwillkürlich denkt man bei den 'Umständen' an 2009, an die Niederschlagung der Demokratiebewegung, und fragt sich, ob auch das damit gemeint sein könnte."
Farhadi: "Wenn wir den Film nur auf eine machtpolitische Sichtweise bringen würden, dann würden wir die Hauptproblematik zu sehr begrenzen." Rebhandl, 2011.

framed in an irritating way, it must be "the system" that confines the camera; and judges and courthouses are under general suspicion anyway. Farhadi clarifies that the ambiguity of Simin's answer is rather a deliberate mystery and should be a motivation for audiences to inquire about the circumstances in the couple's lives which are shown later in the film, circumstanced that go beyond "the perspective of power politics."

The filmmakers insistence to no only read *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* along the lines of politics, however, had no place in the reviews that were shared in the German media after had premiered. Journalists even read the dramatic potential of the screenplay as a general metaphor for the despair of the Iranian people. *Spiegel Online* published a picture series about the film that shows the image of the desperate Nader pressing his head against a window and is underlined: "Despair about the father's illness—or about the hopelessness in Iran?"[71] Similarly, film critic Carolin Ströbele mused in her review in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: "It is ultimately left open if the young woman is overwhelmed with taking care for the old man or with her life in Iran."[72] Simply because the film was set in Iran, which reviewers clearly associated with a life in hopelessness and constant struggle, the assumption was clear: *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* was not allowed to be about anything else than Iranian politics. If they were not on the surface of the drama, they had to be hidden, which led the journalists to read the film predominantly along the lines of repression and freedom. The often baseless and circular interpretations that resulted from this hermeneutic process is rarely more transparent than in the final sentence of Hanns-Georg Rodek's review for *Die Welt*:

> One has seldom understood better—and through a completely unpolitical situation—how in an unfree society, people inevitably get entangled in webs of dishonesty.[73]

Whether the perspective of the German media on *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* as a genuinely political film has played into its massive success at the awards ceremony of the Berlinale is difficult to estimate. The international jury, which

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[71] "Verzweiflung über die Krankheit des Vaters - oder die Ausweglosigkeit in Iran?" Kuzmany, 2011a.

[72] "Bis zum Schluss bleibt unklar, ob die junge Frau eher mit der Pflege des alten Mannes überfordert ist oder mit ihrem Leben in Iran." Ströbele, 2011.

[73] "Selten hat man - aufgehängt an einer völlig unpolitischen Situation - besser begriffen, wie sich Menschen in einer unfreien Gesellschaft zwangsläufig in Gespinste der Unehrlichkeit verstricken müssen." Rodeck and Tabatabai, 2011.

hands out the awards, makes their decisions independently. As in most years, the group was made up of six members from different branches of the film industry: two directors, an actor and an actress, a producer, and a costume designer. With the exception of Indian actor Amir Khan, all came from Western countries (Italy, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Germany). Jafar Panahi does not count in that regard, as he was a purely symbolic jury member who did neither watch any of the films nor took part in the jury meetings. The role of Panahi's metaphysical presence at the Berlinale, however, is certainly to be noted. While the remaining six jury members had to remain impartial, they were strongly affected by the gestures of solidarity for Panahi. They had been, after all, very much part in the festival's staging of his absence, which was centered around the empty jury seat. Jury president Isabella Rossellini had read out his letter on the opening night and most of the jury had taken part in the red carpet protest stunt before the screening of *Offside*.

Consequently, the focus of the 61st Berlinale on Panahi in particular, and Iranian freedom of speech in general, surely had an impact on the decoration of an Iranian film with three of eight bear statues. The qualities of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* are out of question, the film had been the undisputed favorite in the race for the Golden Bear and turned into a global success later on anyway, as I have pointed out above. But the sheer amount of jury affection it received at the closing ceremony was exceptional for a film festival awards show and still came as a surprise. The film not only won the Golden Bear, the whole cast was awarded: The Silver Bear for the best actress went to the complete female ensemble and the Silver Bear for the best actor was handed to the complete male ensemble. In a festival year so focused on Iran, it is difficult not to understand the jury decision as a spotlight on Iranian cinema as a whole.

In any case, the media reports following the big win of the film read it in that way. Journalists were eager to defend it against possible accusations that it was awarded only out of "political correctness"[74] or because of its "bonus of the origin in a country of suffering."[75] Most reports, however, very much

[74] Kuzmany, 2011b.

[75] "Wenn Asghar Farhadis Film am Samstagabend den Goldenen Bären entgegen nehmen wird - woran nach dem Stand von gestern, zur Festival-Halbzeit, kaum einer zweifelt -, verdankt er das nicht dem Bonus seiner Herkunft aus einem Land des Leidens, sondern einzig und allein seinen überragenden filmischen Qualitäten." Rodek and Tabatabai, 2011.

celebrated the awards for the "Iran-film" as a "signal to Tehran,"[76] "a distinct political sign"[77] or "a symbol of compassion and also a solidary salute to the two filmmakers Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof."[78] One report even turned the awards statues into "three green bears," a hint that again shows how present the association with the Green movement of the election protests was in the German mediasphere of that time.[79]

The evaluation of the the awards' political impact was not denied by the festival director himself. In a statement for the German news agency *dpa*, Kosslick called the jury decision a "courageous choice" and saw the Golden Bear as "part of the people's security,"[80] apparently meaning the film team that would be safe from state authorities thanks to the heightened media scrutiny. Taking aside the question of his or the festival organization's influence on the jury decision, this underlines how Kosslick, too, immediately took part in the framing of the award as a political signal to the Iranian authorities, and even a safety factor for the laureates, an assumption that is not entirely baseless. Iranian authorities would surely have thought twice to arrest a filmmaker who recently won a high-profile award. A similar thing apparently saved Mohammad Rasoulof from prison when the court decided to adjourn his suspended prison sentence a week after he had won the Golden Bear in March 2020. Comparable restrictions, however, did not threaten Asghar Farhadi or any of his decorated actresses and actors. None of them had problems with the authorities and they had been highly respected film stars in Iran long before the Berlinale anyway, a status that surely worked as a far more reliable safety factor against repressions. Kosslick's statement thus only implicated that in Iran, no artist was safe from authorities, whatever they were working on.

During his acceptance speech at the awards ceremony at the *Berlinale Palast*, Farhadi had even mentioned Panahi. After thanking his team and the festival, he switched his attention to his home country:

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[76] "Seine Auszeichnung mit dem Goldenen Bären ist ein Signal nach Teheran." Nirumand, 2011.

[77] "Mit dem Preis für den iranischen Film setzte die internationale Jury unter Vorsitz der italienischen Schauspielerin Rossellini ein deutliches politisches Zeichen." "*Iranischer Film erhält Goldenen Bären*," 2011.

[78] "Der Goldene Bär lässt sich als Zeichen der Anteilnahme begreifen und auch als ein solidarischer Gruß an die beiden Filmemacher Jafar Panahi und Mohammad Rasoulof." Nord, 2011.

[79] "Drei Grüne Bären." Jakat, 2011.

[80] "Eher ist der Bär ein Teil des Schutzes der Leute." Faninzadeh, 2011.

> What a good opportunity for me to remember the people of my homeland, about whom I report, from whom I draw my stories and write my stories, the great, beloved and patient people of my country Iran. My thoughts are with Jafar Panahi, of whom I hope that his problem I hope will be solved so that next year, he will be able to stand in this very spot.[81]

At the press conference for laureates at the neighboring Grand Hyatt hotel, however, Farhadi realized that his expression of hope that Panahi's "problem" would be solved apparently did not go far enough for some journalists. After the film team had again been asked extensively about the usual issues brought up towards Iranian filmmakers—headscarves, censorship, and hidden political meanings—an Iranian-German journalist took the microphone. In Farsi, she congratulated Farhadi to the Golden Bear, which she understood as an award for all Iranians, but soon went on to criticize his half-hearted engagement for Panahi. In a lengthy monologue, she enlisted the various freedom of press violations happening in Iran before expressing her regret that Farhadi had not used this "international tribune" (*trībūn-e beyn-ol-melalī*) to raise awareness for these violations instead of only mentioning Panahi's name.[82] To this, Farhadi replied that he had two possibilities: talking openly about political problems and being silenced as a filmmaker, or expressing his views in the language of cinema and be able to continue to direct films. He made clear that his choice lay with the second possibility by adding: "Cinema is the best language." (*Sīnemā zabān-e behtarīn ast.*)[83]

In the broader discourse around Farhadi's win, however, such silent and ambiguous overtones had no place. Later media reports only noted that he "steered clear of politics"[84] at the awards ceremony. Ultimately, it did not matter what the filmmaker himself did or said at the Berlinale—his film and its awarding had already been rendered as political. In the larger context of the 2011 Berlinale, *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* was assigned the role of the "Iran-film," as Bahman Nirumand had put it in his review,[85] and was needed by the festival as

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[81] "Cheqadr forṣat-e khūbī-ye barā-ye īn keh yād bokonam az mardom-e sarzamīn-e keh tū-yash gozāresh dānam, az ūnhā qeṣṣat-hā yād gereftam va qeṣṣat-hā neveshtam, mardom-e bozorg-e ʿazīz-e va ṣabūr-e keshvāram Īrān. Yād mīkonam az Jaʿfar Panāhī, keh omīdvāram moshkel-esh ḥal beh che sāl-e baʿd ūn īnjā īstādeh bāsheh." *Closing Ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 50:45–51:15.

[82] *Press conference for the laureates of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 107:15–109:45.

[83] Ibid. Min. 109:45–111:00.

[84] "Von Politik hält sich Regisseur Asghar Farhadi fern." Jakat, 2011.

[85] Nirumand, 2011.

an Iranian witness in a year that massively spotlighted the current situation in the Islamic Republic. As such, it was read as a political film per se. It did not matter that the components of Farhadi's drama—divorce, family law, class conflicts, and a generally bleak atmosphere—were actually rather universal topics and served to raise the moral suspense at the heart of its mystery-driven narrative. Just as with most Iranian films that had been screened at the Berlinale since 2006, all these elements were perceived as particular to and emblematic of contemporary Iranian society.

That the staging of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn* and its striking awards success needed to be framed as political in the atmosphere of the 61st Berlinale mirrors the festival's performances of activism, most prominently at the red carpet protest ahead of the *Offside* screening. I have argued that these protests can hardly be understood as political—in terms of antagonism and contestation—since they were completely in consensus with the larger German image of the Islamic Republic as an authoritarian society that represses its filmmakers. Yet just like the role of *Jodāī-ye Nāder az Sīmīn*, the political was claimed as the central category in its staging. It was needed to foster both the label of the "political festival" and the paradigms of repression, censorship, and resistance that had defined the perception of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale since 2006.

The one element that could be argued as genuinely political at the 2011 festival was Panahi's work and career—which ironically was the very thing that was emphasized as "not political" in the program catalog. Here, the first thing that readers learned about Panahi was his statement: "I don't make political films, I make humanistic films."[86] The opening ceremony of the festival had doubled down on this perspective, with the moderator stating about Panahi and his colleague Mohammad Rasoulof, who had been arrested alongside him: "They both consider themselves not explicitly as political filmmakers, but as storytellers."[87] In these characterizations, the Berlinale followed the filmmaker's own narrative of himself as a "social filmmaker," a label that he had carefully cultivated since the early 2000s to defend himself against accusations of being a "festival filmmaker." This discourse of festival cinema and political filmmaking, which I have outline above, was transferred without further context into the publications of the Berlinale, leading to a reduced

[86] *Katalog*, 2011. p. 382.

[87] *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 46:15.

representation of him as “not political.” Given the sensitivity of Panahi’s films and their frequent subversive transgressions, the accuracy of this representation is rather questionable, especially in this reduced form.

While the dimension of the political was highly significant to the 61st Berlinale, it is difficult to pin it down, as it was everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The showcase of red carpet activism and the Iranian winner of the Golden Bear were rendered as political, although this characterization can be challenged, and Panahi, the filmmaker who was highlighted so spectacularly, was presented as an unpolitical chronicler of his society. What is clear, though, is the claim to the political, which was unambiguously formulated and stood at the center of the performances. As elusive and inconsistent as it might seem, this understanding of the political was actually very much in line with Kosslick’s Berlinale. From the start of his tenure in 2001, the festival director had conveyed an understanding of the political that was less interested in background and contestation than in spectacular slogans and performances that should offer an easily consumable moral counterbalance to the entertainment factor of the glamorous the Hollywood stars on red carpets. When the 2011 Berlinale staged these symbolic politics in the way that I have outlined above, it thus fit perfectly into the context of Kosslick’s understanding of the political.

4.2 Summoning the Spirit of Freedom

Another category that emerged in the showcasing of Panahi at the 61st Berlinale was the imagery of freedom and imprisonment. This imagery was deeply intertwined with the dimension of the political insofar as it encompassed the issue of artistic freedom in Iran, the lack of which the Berlinale decried in its protests. It had, however, an additional layer that I will address in the following, namely the narrative of Jafar Panahi as a prisoner of the Iranian government. At several instances during the festival week, the filmmaker was suggested—and sometimes explicitly stated—to be imprisoned in Iran. The wording of the festival organization was notably unclear in regard to the particular situation of Panahi at the time of the event—he was said to be either in prison, under house arrest, or forbidden to leave the country.

To explain this unclarity, it helps to recall the actual situation of the filmmaker in February 2011. Panahi had been arrested on March 1st 2010 and

remained in *Evīn* prison until his release on bail on May 24th. From September to November 2010, he had been on trial for "assembly and colluding with the intention to commit crimes against the country's national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic."[88] In the end, the court had convicted him to an occupational ban of twenty years. Furthermore, his previous prohibition to travel abroad in his capacity as a filmmaker had been extended. The court had also issued a suspended jail sentence of six years, which however never was implemented. In February 2011, at the time of the Berlinale, Panahi had been out of prison for almost nine months and was free to move but restricted from filmmaking and trips to foreign festivals. That the Berlinale nevertheless presented him as a prisoner thus deserves some attention. In the following, I will examine the different ways in which this representation proceeded at the 2011 Berlinale and consider why it was important for the festival to bring up the imagery of freedom and imprisonment so prominently. Before looking to Berlin, however, it will be helpful to address briefly what had happened at the Cannes film festival in the previous year. The festival took place from May 12th–23rd 2010, during Panahi's prison time. As such, its handling of the issue can serve as an insightful contrast to the events at the 2011 Berlinale.

The Tears of Juliette Binoche

Before his arrest in March, Panahi had been invited to serve in the international jury of the 2010 Cannes film festival. When it became clear in the run-up, however, that Panahi would not physically be able to attend, his jury spot remained vacant. This empty chair, however, was a mere metaphor for most of the festival week. When the jury members gave their opening press conference on May 12th, Panahi was not mentioned, and the opening ceremony later that day addressed neither him nor his empty jury spot. The issue of the imprisoned filmmaker began to enter the Cannes stages only midway through the festival, when false rumors of his release began to spread among festival crowds. On May 18th, Panahi's wife gave a statement from Tehran declaring that her husband's condition had deteriorated to such an extent that he had gone into hunger strike. As it happened, the same day also saw the premiere of *Copie conforme* (Certified Copy), the latest film by Cannes regular Abbas

[88] Todd, 2019. p. 122.

Kiarostami, in the competition section. Expectations where high as to how Kiarostami would react to the situation of his friend and former protégé.

During the press conference for his film, an Iranian journalist informed Kiarostami that his colleague had just gone into hunger strike in protest of his detention, upon which Kiarostami calmly conveyed his anger about Panahi's "intolerable" situation and commented: "When a filmmaker is imprisoned, it is an attack on art as a whole. We need explanations. I don't understand how a film can be a crime, particularly when that film has not been made." Reportedly, he also circulated an open letter demanding Panahi's release.[89] While Kiarostami had responded in a rather restricted and distant manner, emblematic for his public role of the sunglasses-wearing artist, the reaction of his film's actress Juliette Binoche (b. 1964), who sat right next to him, was far more emotional—she began to silently weep upon hearing about the hunger strike.[90] The tears of the extremely popular French actress, who played the lead role in Kiarostami's film, and in that year also decorated the official festival poster, produced a strong image that was widely reported on.

Binoche's tears apparently resonated strongly enough to bring the situation of Jafar Panahi to the foreground of the festival and when the awards were handed out five days later at the *Palais des Festivals*, the closing ceremony addressed the issue twice. Immediately after entering the stage, British actress Kristen Scott Thomas, who moderated the ceremony, expressed the festival's support for the imprisoned filmmaker:

> Good evening! It is the 23rd of May, the festival is coming to a close, and the Iranian director's Jafar Panahi's seat is still vacant. He has been on hunger strike for nine days now. As Stephen Spielberg recalled, the Cannes festival is a fortress protecting cinema. As is often the case, the festival has had its fair share of controversies, including this year's selection: a witness to freedom to see, to think, and to speak out without restriction.[91]

Apart from the fact that he was not present and currently on hunger strike, the statement did not specify what exactly had happened to Panahi and assumed the audience's knowledge about his situation, which was framed as a restriction of artistic freedom. It further evoked the particularly dramatic image of a fortress when it came to Cannes' opposition to such restrictions, a decidedly more militant metaphor compared to the language used later by the Berlinale.

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89 Brown, 2010.

90 "*Juliette Binoche weeps at Cannes*," 2010.

91 *Closing ceremony of the 63rd Festival de Cannes*, 2010. Min. 0:15–1:00.

Kristen Scott Thomas' opening monologue, however, did not specify how the fortress of Cannes actually practiced its protection—after she had finished, the evening went on as usual. When it came to the main competition, jury president Tim Burton called in his fellow jury members one by one. Among the art house and Hollywood filmmakers who entered the stage in the following, Panahi was not further mentioned, confirming his status as a non-member of the jury. When the jury took their seats on the right side of the stage, there merely was an empty chair on the far right of the back row (Picture 4.5)—a fact that was not commented on in any way, visually or orally.

Once again, it was Juliette Binoche who put Panahi into spotlight. When she won the Best Actress Award for her role in Kiarostami's *Copie conforme*, she entered the stage but instead of walking directly to the lectern, she made a detour to the jury seats (Picture 4.6). There, she went to the empty seat in the back row and took a white cardboard sign from it that had previously not been visible. Arriving at the lectern, she placed the cardboard sign in front of her, although with its back side pointed to the audience, making it a mysterious object (Picture 4.7). Binoche started off her acceptance speech, complete with the usual heartfelt thank-yous to her collaborators, her family, and the festival. After that, she finally turned the cardboard around, revealing that it was Jafar Panahi's name written on its front (Picture 4.8), and closed her speech calling attention to the imprisoned director's situation:

> There is a man who today is still in Iran. He has made the mistake to be an artist, to be independent. And especially tonight, I think of him. I hope that he will be here himself next year. It's a hard fight for this artist and intellectual in a country in need of us. Okay, that's it.[92]

Binoche's statement was the final public remark at the 2010 edition of the Cannes film festival regarding its absent guest. Again, it did only pointed rather vaguely to his status as an independent artist in a repressive country as the simple reason for his problems. Mirroring the image of Cannes as a protective fortress, Binoche finished with the claim that repressed Iranian artists and intellectuals needed "us," which probably addressed the international community of high profile film professionals that was present the audience. Once more, however, no particular demand or strategy was given. Taken

[92] "Il ya un homme qui aujourd'hui encore est en Iran. Il a la faute d'être artiste, d'être independent. Et je pense a lui spécialement ce soir. J'espère qu'il sera ici lui-même l'année prochaine. C'est un dur combat pour cet artiste et intellectuelle en un pays qui a besoin de nous. Voila, c'est tout." Ibid. Min. 29:00–29:30.

Pictures 4.5-8: Jafar Panahi's empty jury chair can be spotted on the far right of the back row during the presentation of the jury at the 2010 Cannes closing ceremony. Juliette Binoche takes the previously hidden cardboard sign from the empty chair, positions it backwards on the lectern and later reveals Panahi's name printed on it.

together with the fact that she had to take the hidden cardboard sign from the empty chair before, Binoche's whole performance seems not only improvised, but also not agreed upon with the festival organization.

Overall, the solidarity from Cannes as an institution towards Panahi was limited to the gesture of the empty jury chair—which however remained obscure at the actual festival—and a brief statement by the closing night moderator. More visible protests came from the single Iranian director in competition, Abbas Kiarostami, and his actress Juliette Binoche. Both the their and festival's public statements were notably vague and insular calls for attention instead of unambiguous demands to release of Panahi, who at the particular time was in the dire situation of being in hunger strike in prison. Nevertheless, these statements apparently were enough to pressure Iranian authorities. On May 24th 2010, a mere day after the festival's closing night, Panahi was released from prison on a bail of $200,000.

His release was widely reported and celebrated, with the German-French TV station *Arte* even broadcasting a five-minute-long video message showing Panahi back at his home. The clip shows the filmmaker thanking first his Iranian colleagues and friends, then the European and American directors who

spoke out for him. He then mentions the Cannes film festival in general and the "tears of Juliette Binoche" (*ashkhā-ye Juliette Binoche*) in particular, to which he ascribes an irreplaceable role in his release. Panahi then continues to describe his arrest and his time in prison, in the end stating his expectation of further restrictions that are uncertain to him: "Let's see what happens to me."[93]

The timing of Panahi's release can only be understood as a reaction to the protests in Cannes. As such, it clearly worked well for the image of the French festival and confirmed its branding of the powerful "fortress protecting cinema" that was even able to force foreign governments into freeing imprisoned filmmakers. When the Berlinale later invited Panahi to its jury and used a rhetoric framing him as a prisoner, this too has to be understood in the context of the events at the 2010 Festival de Cannes. The rivalry between the two festivals can hardly be underestimated and had frequently caused similar imitations. The rebellion against its perception of being Cannes' little sibling is deeply inscribed into the spirit of the Berlinale and manifested in a constant struggle to prove that it was at least as glamorous and powerful as its rival at the Côte d'Azur. Amongst other factors, which I will explore in the following, this inferiority complex also played into the festival's urge to present Panahi as a prisoner and itself as his savior.

The Narrative of Imprisonment

The Berlinale announced their invitation of Jafar Panahi to the international jury of its upcoming 61st edition in a press release on December 6th 2010. For a number of reasons, this move was rather unusual. First, the jury is normally announced as a whole and a press release for a single member is an honor that is reserved, if at all, for jury presidents. Second, by the time of the announcement it was well known that as of his verdict of November, Panahi would be legally unable to take a jury seat at a European festival, which had been denied to him even before his arrest. As such, in contrast to the invitation to Cannes, which had been made before his arrest in March, the initiative was a mere gesture of solidarity from the start. And third, the whole context of Panahi's legal situation was not addressed in the press release itself. The statement simply said: "Berlinale director Dieter Kosslick has invited the

[93] "Wir werden ja sehen, was mir passiert." (Farsi original largely inaudible under the German dubbing) *Interview mit Jafar Panahi*, 2010. Min. 5:30.

renowned Iranian director Jafar Panahi to join the international jury of the 61st Berlin International Film Festival" before quoting Kosslick: "We hope that Jafar Panahi will be able to attend the festival and perform this important task on the international jury of the 61st Berlinale."[94] Although Kosslick's explicit expression of hope can be understood as a hint to readers unfamiliar with Panahi's case, the statement did not clarify the legal background. Instead, it extensively detailed his filmography and success at film festivals before stating: "In his films, Jafar Panahi critically explores the social situation in his homeland."[95] It is unclear why the press department framed the statement in this way, but by rendering Panahi's travel invisible in advance of the festival, it implicated that it was entirely possible that the director might actually be able to come to Berlin—an expectation that was not justified, given the circumstances. As such, it clearly enhanced the impact of the ultimate reveal that Panahi was not able to join the festival.

At the press conference that introduced the jury on February 10th 2011, the first day of the festival, Panahi's situation was finally addressed in more detail. After the present jury members had been introduced, the moderator arrived at an empty chair and explained:

> As you see, the next chair is vacant. It belongs to the Iranian director Jafar Panahi, who also has already won here in Berlin with his film *Offside*. We still have the big hope that he will join us over the course of the next week—you know that he is incarcerated. We wish for it! An applause to him![96]

With this introduction, the festival's narrative of Panahi's case began with an outright untruth, since at this point, the filmmaker had not been "incarcerated" (*inhaftiert*) for nearly nine months. The six-year jail sentence to which he had been convicted three months before the press conference was never executed. The press conference raised the dramatic stakes of Panahi's situation by

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[94] "Berlinale-Direktor Dieter Kosslick hat den renommierten iranischen Regisseur Jafar Panahi in die Internationale Jury der 61. Internationalen Filmfestspiele Berlin eingeladen. Wir hoffen sehr, dass Jafar Panahi die Möglichkeit erhält, diese wichtige Aufgabe in der Internationalen Jury der 61. Berlinale zu übernehmen', sagt Berlinale-Direktor Kosslick." *Press Release*, 2010.

[95] "In seinen Filmen setzt sich Jafar Panahi kritisch mit der sozialen Situation in seinem Heimatland auseinander." Ibid.

[96] "Wie Sie sehen, ist der nächste Stuhl frei. Er gehört dem iranischen Regisseuer Jafar Panahi, der auch hier in Berlin schon gewonnen hat mit seinem Film *Offside*. Wir haben noch die große Hoffnung, dass er während der Berlinale noch zu uns stoßen wird - Sie wissen, dass er inhaftiert ist. Wir wünschen es uns! Ein Applaus zu ihm!" *Press conference of the international jury of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 9:30–10:00.

turning his suspended jail sentence into an ongoing time in prison, a narrative that would be repeated and implicated often over the course of the festival.

The journalists' questions consequently were eager to get information on the current situation and well-being of Panahi, which however could not be given since nobody from the jury had been in contact with the director or had followed the news around him well enough to clarify that he was still coming to terms with his verdict but not in prison. Instead, the press conference shifted to the symbolic level. When a journalist from Abu Dhabi TV asked jury president Isabella Rossellini (b. 1952) for a statement about Panahi's absence, the veteran US-Italian actress answered that his presence was felt and that freedom of speech and art needed to have the highest priority.[97] An Indian journalist took the same path when he asked if Panahi's jury invitation means that censorship was a central topic at the Berlinale, to which Rossellini replied that while she did not speak for the festival, the attempt to take a strong position for tolerance and freedom of opinion was surely the background of the invitation.[98] Overall, the press conference showed that while Panahi's jury seat was understood as a symbol of freedom—in its varieties of art, speech, and opinion—nobody publicly corrected festival officials in their announcement that the director was still in jail, a false claim that effectively amplified the dramatic stakes of the situation.

At the opening ceremony later on the same day, the background of Panahi's current situation was addressed in some more detail. Towards the end of the evening, festival director Kosslick and the ceremonial moderator, German comedian Anke Engelke (b. 1965) entered the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* and announced the introduction of the international jury. Normally, each jury member would be presented through a short video and then enter the stage one after the other. This routine was referenced in this year, too, and the presentation began with a short video about Jafar Panahi as the first member of the jury. The 40-second clip did not differ from the introduction of a regular jury member and simply retold his career and ended with the Silver Bear for *Offside* in 2006. While it was mentioned that the filmmaker often dealt with tabooed issues, it refrained from his current legal problems.

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[97] Ibid. Min. 13:15–14:00.

[98] Ibid. Min. 16:30–17:30.

This issue was addressed live by Kosslick and Engelke afterwards. When the video had finished and the silver screen rolled upwards again, Panahi would normally have entered the stage. Instead, however, it was again Kosslick and Engelke walking to the middle of the stage where a white plastic chair with a cardboard sign carrying Panahi's name was already placed. After uneasily clearing her throat, Engelke began to explain the situation in the mixture of English and German typical for her moderation style:

> This chair is empty, ladies and gentlemen, and I guess most of you know why. For all the others we should explain. Jafar Panahi and his colleague, Mohammed Rasoulof, were arrested before, no, after he was invited to participate in the Berlinale as a jury member. They were both sentenced to six years in prison and were banned from filmmaking for twenty years.[99]

This brief introduction—apparently hastily improvised—provides a conflicting picture of Panahi's current situation. Engelke initially places his arrest before the time of his invitation to Berlin in December 2010, but then corrects herself and says that it happened afterwards. She then explains that he and Rasoulof—who apart from that night would not nearly enjoy as much solidarity as his colleague—were sentenced to a prison sentence of six years, the suspension of which is not addressed. Her statement again gave the impression of Panahi and Rasoulof still being in jail and this being the reason for the former's absence. Furthermore, the seemingly minor detail of when exactly the arrest had taken place is also quite decisive. Her version of events puts the Berlinale into the position of being dragged into the process, since the festival would have invited him before his problems started. In fact, it was of course the other way around and Panahi had long been arrested, released, and convicted before the Berlinale spoke out the invitation, which had been a planned gesture of solidarity rather than a regular jury appointment from the very beginning.

The incoherency with which the festival organization described Panahi's situation in 2011 is striking and clearly speaks of the Berlinale's need to narratively increase the hardship of the filmmaker. Him being in a prison cell —as it was suggested by the moderators of the jury press conference and the opening ceremony—simply made the festival's expressions of solidarity sound

[99] "Dieser Stuhl ist leer, meine Damen und Herren, und ich glaube die meisten von uns wissen auch warum. This chair is empty, ladies and gentlemen, and I guess most of you know why. For all the others we should explain. Jafar Panahi and his colleague, Mohammed Rasoulof, sind verhaftet worden bevor er eingeladen wurde, nein, nachdem er eingeladen wurde zur Berlinale, als Jurymitglied teilzunehmen, zu sechs Jahren Haft und zu zwanzig Jahren Berufsverbot. They were both sentenced to six years in prison and were banned from filmmaking for twenty years." *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 45:30–46:15.

far more dramatic. While it was not technically accurate, however, the narrative of him as a prisoner was mostly related to the fact that he was not able to come to Berlin and take his jury seat. According to the festival, it was apparently not decisive if the filmmaker was in prison or at home: he was incarcerated in the larger prison of Iran. Panahi and other Iranian opposition members would often evoke the metaphor of being released from the actual *Evīn* prison into the "the larger prison" (*zendān bozorgtarī*) of the Islamic Republic, most prominently in his 2015 film *Taxi,* where human rights lawyer Nasrīn Sotūdeh uses the image. At the 2011 Berlinale, this metaphor was never referenced explicitly but often suggested regarding the particular situation of Panahi, most prominently in the staging of the open letter that the filmmaker had sent to the festival in advance and which deserves some attention in the following.

Iran as the Larger Prison

Given how crucial his role on the festival stages was in 2011, Panahi himself remained notably silent during the event. His only statement concerning the festival was an open letter that was read out prominently by jury president Isabella Rossellini during the opening ceremony. The way in which this letter was staged reveals much about the festival's representation of Iran as a hermetically sealed country and consequently the metaphorical prison in which Panahi was held. Even before the remaining jury members had assembled on the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* during the opening ceremony, Kosslick began to extensively introduce the letter:

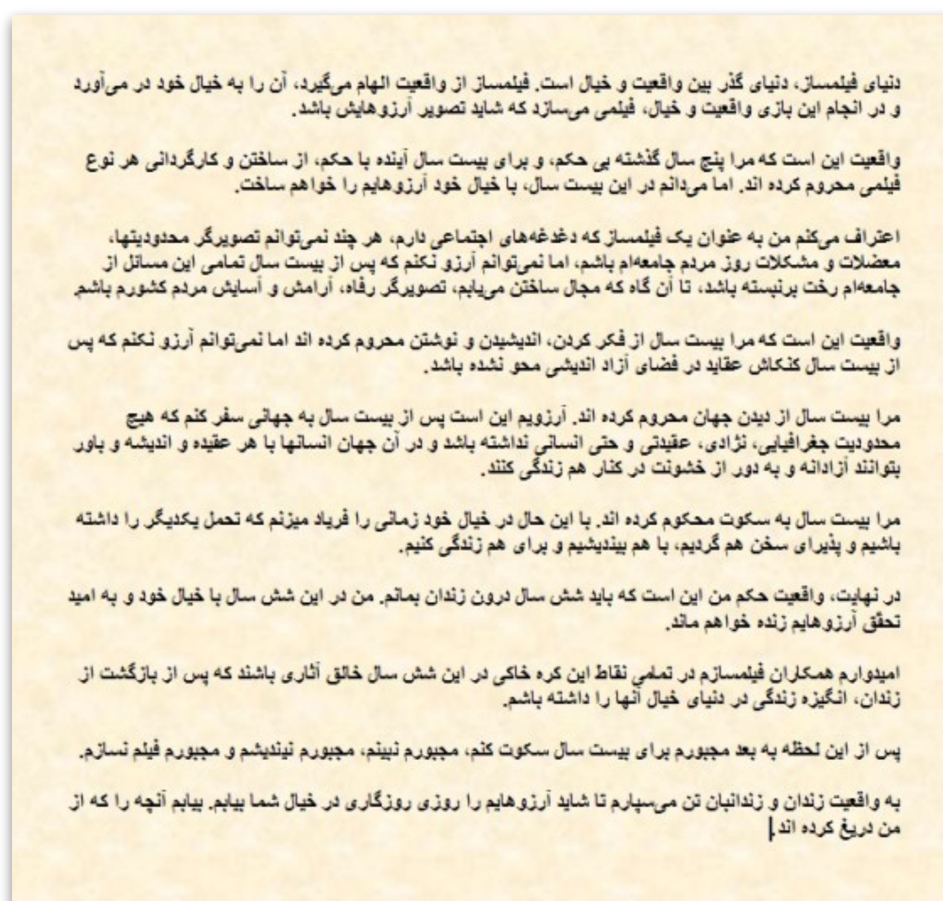
> I think, we are going to listen now, he sent us a message, I have to say, he sent us a letter that will be read out by Isabella Rossellini later. The problem is that I—let's say, he will probably be in big trouble if we read it, but we talked yesterday, he absolutely wants us to read this letter here tonight. I also ask my American colleagues for their understanding for this, because this is the last thing, probably, that we're going to hear from him.[100]

Kosslick's remark that he had wished not to have Panahi's statement read out publicly to avoid further problems for him seems quite absurd and out of place in the light of the efforts that the Berlinale had put into spotlighting

[100] "Ich denke, wir hören uns jetzt mal an, er hat uns ne Nachricht geschickt, ich muss sagen, er hat uns einen Brief geschickt, den nachher gleich Isabella Rossellini verlesen wird. Das Problem ist, dass ich dachte—ich sage mal, er wird wahrscheinlich in große Probleme kommen, wenn wir den vorlesen, aber wir haben gestern gesprochen, er möchte unbedingt, dass wir diesen Brief heute Abend hier verlesen. Ich bitte auch meine amerikanischen Kollegen um Nachsicht, dass wir das tun, denn das ist das letzte, wahrscheinlich, was wir von ihm hören werden." Ibid. Min. 48:00–48:45.

his case that night and later during the festival. What is further puzzling about Kosslick's announcement is the apology to his "American colleagues." By suggesting that American guests and film professionals present in the room might have a problem with letting an Iranian speak, even indirectly, the festival director evokes an absurd level of anti-Iranian attitudes among Americans. It should be kept in mind that the support for Panahi from the American film community had been very strong from early on, which makes Kosslick's apology quite irritating.

Far more notable, however, is his suggestion that the letter might be the last to be heard of the filmmaker. Here, Kosslick again overly dramatizes Panahi's situation. Even at a time of massive surveillance and highly alerted security services in Iran, communication channels from Tehran to Berlin were aplenty and later messages—written or recorded on film—would have been easily possible. This emphasis on the supposed difficulty to get messages out of Iran also manifested in the way the letter was presented on the festival homepage later on. Here, a German transcription of the statement was



دنیای فیلمساز، دنیای گذر بین واقعیت و خیال است. فیلمساز از واقعیت الهام می‌گیرد، آن را به خیال خود در می‌آورد و در انجام این بازی واقعیت و خیال، فیلمی می‌سازد که شاید تصویر آرزوهایش باشد.

واقعیت این است که مرا پنج سال گذشته بی حکم، و برای بیست سال آینده با حکم، از ساختن و کارگردانی هر نوع فیلمی محروم کرده اند. اما می‌دانم در این بیست سال، با خیال خود آرزوهایم را خواهم ساخت.

اعتراف می‌کنم من به عنوان یک فیلمساز که دغدغه‌های اجتماعی دارم، هر چند نمی‌توانم تصویرگر محدودیتها، معضلات و مشکلات روز مردم جامعه‌ام باشم، اما نمی‌توانم آرزو نکنم که پس از بیست سال تمامی این مسائل از جامعه‌ام رخت بربسته باشد، تا آن گاه که مجال ساختن می‌یابم، تصویرگر رفاه، آرامش و آسایش مردم کشورم باشم.

واقعیت این است که مرا بیست سال از فکر کردن، اندیشیدن و نوشتن محروم کرده اند اما نمی‌توانم آرزو نکنم که پس از بیست سال کنکاش عقاید در فضای آزاد اندیشی محو نشده باشد.

مرا بیست سال از دیدن جهان محروم کرده اند. آرزویم این است پس از بیست سال به جهانی سفر کنم که هیچ محدودیت جغرافیایی، نژادی، عقیدتی و حتی انسانی نداشته باشد و در آن جهان انسانها با هر عقیده و اندیشه و باور بتوانند آزادانه و به دور از خشونت در کنار هم زندگی کنند.

مرا بیست سال به سکوت محکوم کرده اند. با این حال در خیال خود زمانی را فریاد میزنم که تحمل یکدیگر را داشته باشیم و پذیرای سخن هم گردیم، با هم بیندیشیم و برای هم زندگی کنیم.

در نهایت، واقعیت حکم من این است که باید شش سال درون زندان بمانم. من در این شش سال با خیال خود و به امید تحقق آرزوهایم زنده خواهم ماند.

امیدوارم همکاران فیلمسازم در تمامی نقاط این کره خاکی در این شش سال خالق آثاری باشند که پس از بازگشت از زندان، انگیزه زندگی در دنیای خیال آنها را داشته باشم.

پس از این لحظه به بعد مجبورم برای بیست سال سکوت کنم، مجبورم نبینم، مجبورم نیندیشم و مجبورم فیلم نسازم.

به واقعیت زندان و زندانبان تن می‌سپارم تا شاید آرزوهایم را روزی روزگاری در خیال شما بیابم. بیابم آنچه را که از من دریغ کرده اند.

Picture 4.9: Jafar Panahi's open letter to the Berlinale as presented on the festival website, evoking a physical letter written on parchment.

uploaded, but above, a picture of the machine written document in Farsi on a textured beige background was posted, suggesting that an actual physical letter had been sent to the festival (Picture 4.9).[101] This detail in the presentation of the letter again made it seem like digital communication from Iran to the rest of the world was completely impossible due to the often quoted internet crackdown of the Iranian government, fueling the narrative of the hermetically sealed authoritarian state working without a gap.

Fitting to this presentation of the letter as a physical document, Isabella Rossellini read out the text from a scrambled piece of paper. Before she started, the Italian actress announced: "Jafar was able to—he sent this letter to all of us."[102] Her posture again suggested that the letter had to be somewhat smuggled out of Iran. On the following day, Kosslick further fostered this narrative. Appearing onstage to introduce the screening of *Offside*, he reminded the audience of Isabella Rossellini's reading of the letter the previous night:

> So I just want to say a last word about the situation last night. My Iranian colleague was clever and brave enough, at the moment when Isabella was reading Panahi Jafar's letter, she called the secret number and she put the telephone in front of the box. So he heard everything last night.[103]

Kosslick's brief report on Panahi receiving news of the expressions of solidarity in Berlin reinstated the narrative of Iranians trapped in a hermetically sealed country, supposedly depending on "clever and brave" agents to smuggle information from and to the Free World, and dramatically framed Panahi's private phone number as "the secret number." The reality, however, had far less in common with the spy thriller staged at the festival. From the couch of his Tehran apartment, Panahi could have easily watched the ceremony online through a foreign VPN connection, a technology which enables the media consumption of most urban Iranians.

Overall, the 2011 Berlinale did much to suggest Panahi's imprisonment, either in jail or in the larger prison of the Islamic Republic. Yet while these suggestions were given in a prominent and sensationalist way, the actual details about his whereabouts remained rather vague and incoherent—what was important was the supposedly simple fact of imprisonment. The content of Panahi's letter itself can perhaps help to shine a light on these blurred notions

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[101] "*Open Letter from Jafar Panahi,*" 2011.

[102] *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min 53:45.

[103] *Red carpet for Offside*, 2011. Min. 46:00–46:45.

that were broadcasted from the festival stages. Not only does it offer an account of the filmmaker's own view of his situation, it also underlines his broader understanding of imprisonment:

> The world of a filmmaker is marked by the interplay between reality and dreams. The filmmaker uses reality as his inspiration, paints it with the color of his imagination, and creates a film that is a projection of his hopes and dreams. [...]
> The reality is they have deprived me of thinking and writing for twenty years, but they can not keep me from dreaming that in twenty years, inquisition and intimidation will be replaced by freedom and free thinking.
> They have deprived me of seeing the world for twenty years. I hope that when I am free, I will be able to travel in a world without any geographic, ethnic, and ideological barriers, where people live together freely and peacefully regardless of their beliefs and convictions.
> They have condemned me to twenty years of silence. Yet in my dreams, I scream for a time when we can tolerate each other, respect each other's opinions, and live for each other.
> Ultimately, the reality of my verdict is that I must spend six years in jail. I'll live for the next six years hoping that my dreams will become reality. I wish my fellow filmmakers in every corner of the world would create such great films that by the time I leave the prison I will be inspired to continue to live in the world they have dreamed of in their films.
> So from now on, and for the next twenty years, I'm forced to be silent. I'm forced not to be able to see, I'm forced not to be able to think, I'm forced not to be able to make films.
> I submit to the reality of the captivity and the captors. I will look for the manifestation of my dreams in your films, hoping to find in them what I have been deprived of.[104]

The central metaphor that Panahi uses in the letter can be found in most of his films, too, namely the "interplay between reality and dreams" (*goẕar beyn-e vāqeʿīat va khiyāl*). The reality that he refers to here is his physical situation, which is defined by "captivity and captors" (*zendān va zendānebān*). At the time of writing, it was not yet clear whether his six-year prison sentence would ever be implemented. In the letter, Panahi assumes that it would—and soon—so he takes the perspective of a man who is about to be sent to jail any minute. For the audience, his prison sentence thus becomes a given, which, again, reinforces the narrative of him as a prisoner.

What is more interesting that this unambiguous narration of Panahi's reality, however, is the dimension of his dreams. In this realm, too, the filmmaker feels subjected to imprisonment. He presents his twenty-year occupational ban as a prohibition to think and write (*andīshīdan va neveshtan*) that

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[104] English translation of the letter as it was read out unmodified by Isabella Rossellini. See "*Open Letter from Jafar Panahi*," 2011. For the Farsi original, which my analysis also references, see "*Open Letter Jafar Panahi (Farsi)*," 2011.

forces him to silence (*sokūt*). This encompasses even the realm of his perception, since he is also "deprived of seeing the world" (*az dīdan-e jahān maḥrūm kardeh*). Some of these limitations, Panahi plans to bypass spiritually: He is banned from writing, but he can still dream of a better world, he is forced to be silent, but in his dreams, he can still scream, etc. Yet in the last two paragraphs, the filmmaker is very clear that there is ultimately no way around his verdict and the "reality of the captivity and the captors." In the account of the letter, his reality is equated with prison, but far more importantly, his dreams are deprived of the freedom to think (*āzād-e andīshī*). It is precisely this evocation of freedom that stands at the core of not only Panahi's letter but also his representation at the 2011 Berlinale.

"An Attack on the Fundamental Value of Freedom Itself"

In contrast to Cannes nine months earlier, the Berlinale did not have a real prisoner to root for. Instead, it was the notion of freedom that was prominently evoked on the festival stages. This was nowhere clearer than during the formal speeches of German politicians that were given during the opening ceremony. The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media[105] as well as the acting mayor of Berlin entering the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* to holding brief speeches was an integral part of the opening ceremonies at Kosslick's Berlinale. Normally, they would connect the festival motto to current political developments and then underlined the significance of the Berlinale to the German film industry and the larger cultural landscape rather than picking out particular films or filmmakers. In 2011, however, both speakers mentioned the case of Panahi explicitly.

The acting Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Bernd Neumann (b. 1942), was first to take the stage. As usual, the conservative politician expressed his pride of the German film industry and its connections to the broader film world, for which the festival was an

[105] The position is formally equal to that of a cultural minister. In Germany, cultural affairs are organized on the level of federal states, which is why the country has no proper cultural ministry. To encompass this gap, Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder created the position of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (*Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien*) in 1998. Amongst other tasks, the commission is concerned with "cultural projects of national importance" and as such is directly responsible for sponsoring the Berlinale as well as appointing the festival director. Since the commissioner is directly subordinated to the federal chancellor, their rank is formally equal to that of a minister in the cabinet.

emblematic event. When he came to the Berlinale's political dimension, he took the uncommon path of addressing a Jafar Panahi's situation:

> With its diverse issues and films, the Berlinale is an expression of the freedom of the arts and culture, a cornerstone of democracy. An attack on the freedom of a filmmaker is nothing else than an attack on the fundamental value of freedom itself. *[Applause]* Ladies and gentlemen, this goes, for example, for China, but especially for Iran. We are sad that Jafar Panahi is hindered by the Iranian dictatorships (sic) to participate in our Berlinale. Particularly today, our deep solidarity belongs to him.[106]

While it is unusual that a politician—and one with the formal rank of a member of government—focuses explicitly on the case of a particular filmmaker, his statement is also well in line with the other expressions of solidarity at the festival. It is notable, though, that Neumann uses the strong term of the "attack" (*Anschlag*) for Panahi's prohibition to participate in the Berlinale. The German word is usually reserved for terrorist attacks and thus evokes an imagery that is not intuitive when it comes to a prison sentence and an occupational ban spoken out by a foreign judiciary. Furthermore, it was not just any attack that Neumann accounted the Iranian government with, but an "attack on the fundamental value of freedom itself."

The image was extended in the recurring vocabulary of the political in the following speech by Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit (b. 1953):

> The Berlinale always also stands for debate. For debate in the realm of societal problems that we have to overcome together. And because of this, the Berlinale was also always a political Berlinale in all those years, and as we have just heard by the State Minister, it again has gained a political dimension because a jury member can not be here. This shows again how important it is that the medium of film is also used for debate about societal, democratic processes, which are urgently necessary in the whole world.[107]

[106] "Die Berlinale ist mit ihren vielfältigen Themen und Filmen Ausdruck der Freiheit von Kunst und Kultur, einem Eckpfeiler der Demokratie. Ein Anschlag auf die Freiheit eines Filmemachers ist nichts anderes als ein Anschlag auf den Grundwert der Freiheit überhaupt. *[Applaus]* Meine Damen und Herren, das gilt zum Beispiel für China, aber insbesondere für den Iran. Wir sind traurig darüber, dass Jafar Panahi von den iranischen Diktaturen (sic) gehindert wird, an unserer Berlinale teilzunehmen. Ihm gehört gerade auch heute unsere tiefe Solidarität." *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 20:15–21:00.

[107] "Die Berlinale steht immer auch für Auseinandersetzung. Für Auseinandersetzung im Bereich der gesellschaftlichen Probleme, die wir miteinander zu bestehen haben. Und deshalb war die Berlinale auch immer eine politische Berlinale in den ganzen Jahren, dass die, wir es gerade von Staatsminister gehört haben, auch dies Jahr wieder eine besondere politische Dimension bekommen hat dadurch, dass ein Jurymitglied nicht hier sein kann. Das zeigt wieder, wie wichtig es ist, dass das Medium Film auch zur Auseinandersetzung genutzt wird über gesellschaftliche, demokratische Prozesse, die dringend notwendig sind auf der ganzen Welt." Ibid. Min. 25:00–25:45.

Like the previous speaker, Wowereit prominently embeds the Berlinale's spotlight on Panahi into its larger character, which he explicitly references as the label of the political festival. I have outline above to which extent the political was both elusive and highly significant at the 61st Berlinale and the social democratic Mayor further underlines this point his speech. In this context, Wowereit notably renders the festival's role passive by stating that the Berlinale had "gained a political dimension"—instead of having generated this dimension, which would have been a far more accurate description given that the festival had made the active choice of inviting a filmmaker of whom it was well known that he would be unable to accept the invitation.

Both Neumann and Wowereit link the case of Panahi to an imagery of freedom and democracy, framing the latter as a precondition for—or "cornerstone" of—the latter. The freedom that is encompassed here is of course the freedom of speech and of the arts, but as Neumann's speech has framed it, these are equal to "freedom itself." In their accounts, the notion of Panahi as a prisoner is finally clear and unburdened by any irritation of past or future jail sentences: The filmmaker was subject to a violation of his artistic freedom.

In this, the speeches and the general narrative of the festival employ what cultural anthropologist Talal Asad has termed a "language of justice" in his 2003 book *Formations of the Secular.* In his attempt at an anthropology of secularism, Asad has dedicated a whole chapter to the genesis of human rights discourses and their impact on the self-understanding of secular societies in Europe and the United States.[108] His analysis is more invested in the incoherent conceptualization of these rights, which are supposedly universal and inalienable but at the same time are perceived to be violated mostly in the non-West—an assumption that clearly resonates with the Berlinale favorably decrying the Iranian and other Middle Eastern governments. Yet Asad also examines the functioning of these "languages of justice" which prefer to frame the religious along the lines of human rights discourses, to which the imagery of artistic freedom surely belongs. In this context, he notes:

> It is important not to regard these discourses as merely legitimizing a priori positions of power, because languages of justice do not simply justify political acts, they help to shape political actors.[109]

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[108] Asad, 2003. pp. 127–58.

[109] Ibid. p. 140.

While the religious was rarely explicitly referenced regarding Panahi's case in the context of the Berlinale, it was still evoked, exemplarily in Neumann's choice of words that recalled a terrorist attack. Four years later, his successor Monika Grütters (b. 1962) made this connection far more explicit. When Panahi again could not come to the festival to present his film *Taxi*, Grütters gave an extensive speech that compared the restrictions against him to the January 2015 attack on the Paris headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*, which had occurred a month before the festival. According to Grütters, both were aimed at limiting the freedom of the arts and luckily, Kosslick's Berlinale had "positioned itself against the power of prohibitions."[110] Like Neumann's rhetoric of the "attack on the fundamental value of freedom itself," her remarks can very much be understood in the context of Asad's larger argument. The imagery of the religious fundamentalists—be they terrorist gunmen killing satirists and bystanders or the Iranian government hindering the departure of a filmmaker—as enemies of freedom is always also a confirmation of the own position as a liberal subject or institution.

Thus, Asad's claim that languages of justice "help to shape political actors" underlines how the language of freedom at the 2011 Berlinale branded the festival as a champion of the imprisoned filmmaker Panahi. In the case of the Berlinale, the imagery of freedom of course resonated particularly well. The festival's initial motto of the "Showcase of the Free World" had been carefully fostered in the 1950s and was never forgotten since, as I have outlined in Chapter Two. Both Berlin and the Berlinale remembered their Cold War function as the border post of American liberalism and the case of Jafar Panahi in 2011 was a welcome opportunity to reinstate and update it. Kosslick himself even referenced the according imagery in a joke towards the end of the festival's opening ceremony. After moderator Anke Engelke had finished her informative monologue on the case of Panahi, she went on to ask Kosslick if he knew anything about the filmmaker's current whereabouts. The festival director, who up to then had left the explaining to Engelke, answered:

Picture 5.1: Photographers at the 2015 laureates' press conference attempt to get a shot of...

[110] "So, lieber Dieter, hast du die Berlinale nicht nur künstlerisch geprägt, sondern sie immer im Zeitgeschehen positioniert. Und dafür danke ich dir, lieber Dieter, von Herzen! Politisch setzen wir Akzente gegen die Macht der Verbote. Was für ein Glück also, was für ein Glück, in einer Gesellschaft zu leben, in der aus diesen Keimen etwas wachsen darf!" *Opening ceremony of the 65th Berlinale*, 2015. Min. 23:00–23:15.

> Yes, we were on the phone yesterday. I always thought he would still come, but he sits in Tehran and they didn't let him out. I told him that we would provide him with a plane, so that he can fly here, and because the phones were tapped I said: I'll fly you back, too.[111]

Emblematic for his public appearances in which he likes to present himself as the accommodating festival host who easily befriends filmmakers, Kosslick gave his answer in a joking manner. The absurdity of his casual proposition is obvious—after all, Panahi had not stayed in Tehran because he had lacked the means of transport. His joke rather served to present the Berlinale as a potential savior of filmmakers in need. The image of the Berlinale-sponsored plane piloted by Kosslick himself evoked associations of the Berlin Air Lift that, in the liberal narrative, had secured the freedom of encircled West Berlin in 1948/49. Just like the people of the contested post-war city, Panahi was held in Iran isolated from the Free World, and just like their former sponsors of the U.S. Army, the Berlinale offered help from the air.

Kosslick's joke underlines just how neatly the case of Jafar Panahi and his situation in 2011 fit into the festival image. Nine months before, Cannes had presented itself as a protecting fortress that indeed managed to prompt the filmmaker's release from prison. At the Berlinale, the solidarity with Panahi had followed the inner logic of its host city and summoned the spirit of freedom that was inherent to its own heritage as the beacon of liberalism. The rivalry with Cannes surely played into its decision to more or less copy the French festival's move to invite the filmmaker into the jury. But over the course of the festival, its representation of him was impacted by the particularities of the Berlinale, narrating him as a prisoner and a symbol for the larger violations of artistic freedom in Iran.

Ultimately, the case of Jafar Panahi indeed left a striking impact on the 61st Berlinale. It was staged in all the different ways that a film festival can possibly offer: In the casting of the jury, in press conferences, in central ceremonies, on red carpets, in cinema halls, and in the festival program itself. At the closing ceremony on February 19th, moderator Anke Engelke summarized the festival week as follows: "It was an interesting Berlinale, a

[111] "Ja, wir haben gestern miteinander telefoniert. Ich dachte ja immer er kommt noch, aber er sitzt in Teheran und sie haben ihn nicht rausgelassen. Ich hab ihm gesagt, dass wir ihm ein Flugzeug zur Verfügung stellen, dass er hier herfliegen kann und da wir ja abgehört worden sind, hab ich gesagt: Ich flieg dich auch wieder zurück." *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 46:45–47:30.

good mix I think. We had everything: An empty chair. Horses. Cats. 3D glasses."[112] Symbolized by the empty chair that had represented his vacant jury spot, the matter of Panahi was mentioned as an undisputed highlight of the festival. At the same time, however, it also dissolved into far more trivial matters—namely the facts that many competition films featured animals, like the cat in Miranda July's *The Future* or the titular mare in Béla Tarr's *A torinói ló* (The Turin Horse), and that the competition had featured three films in 3D.

The moderator's brief summary that made Panahi part of the festival's "good mix" again shows the extent to which the political was catchphrased at the Berlinale, which also manifested in the retrospective branding of the 61st edition under the motto "The Berlinale sees green" (*Die Berlinale sieht grün*). In the larger context of Kosslick's Berlinale and its interest in a loud and sensationalist understanding of the political, Panahi's situation was in the end boiled down to the color of green, the empty chair, and an "Iran-film" winning the Golden Bear. These instances, which I have examined in this chapter, have highlighted the dimension of the political as well as the dominant imagery of freedom in the festival's staging of Iranian cinema. Another crucial factor in Panahi's relation to the Berlinale, however, is the impact of his continuous absence, which also marked the festival in 2013 and 2015, when his films were invited but he again was unable to travel to Berlin. In 2011, this dimension was symbolized through the empty chair and in later years, the regarding imagery evolved significantly into a mix of onscreen appearances and personal substitutes that I will explore in the following chapter.

[112] "Es war eine interessante Berlinale, gut gemischt, finde ich. Es war alles dabei: Ein leerer Stuhl. Pferde. Katzen. 3D Brillen. We had everything." *Closing ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 1:15.

5. Onstage Absence, Onscreen Presence: The Road to the Golden Bear in 2015

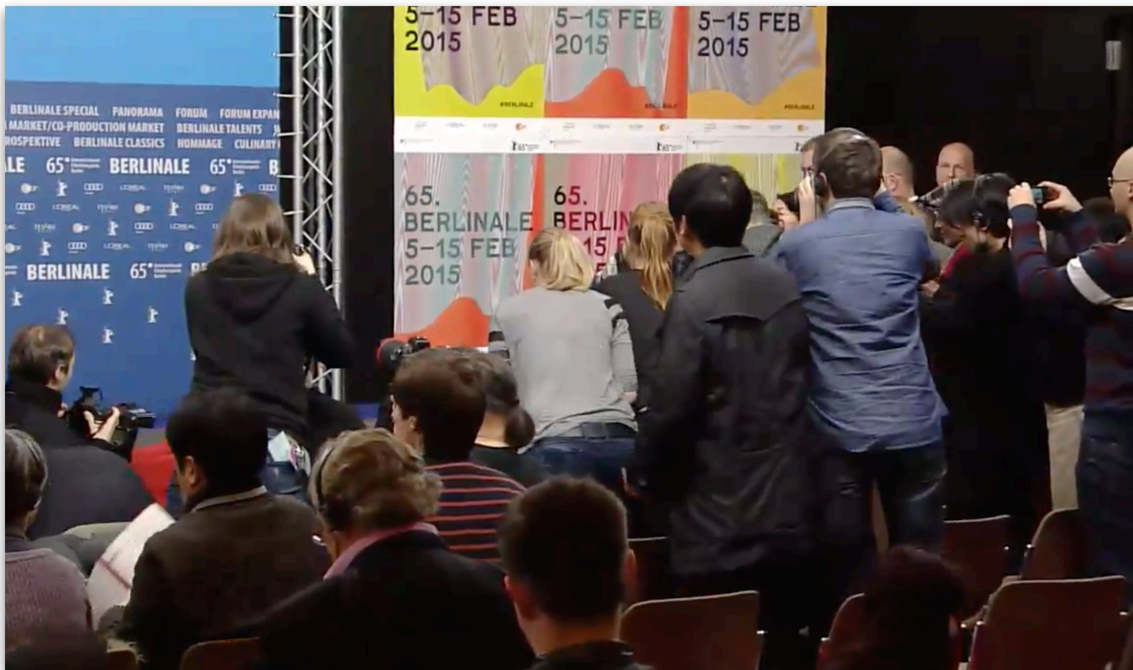
After Jafar Panahi had won the Golden Bear for *Taxi* in 2015, the moderator of the ensuing press conference for laureates had a problem: the winner of the Berlinale's highest award was not present. At the closing ceremony an hour earlier, his niece Hana Saeedi had taken the award for her uncle, who still was in Iran and prohibited from traveling to foreign festivals. Saeedi, however, did not come over from the *Berlinale Palast* to the conference room of the neighboring Grand Hyatt hotel for the press conference, so no one was there to answer the journalists' questions or, equally important, to pose for photographs with the Golden Bear trophy. When all the other laureates had left the stage of the conference room, the moderator quickly checked in with the head of the festival's press office to decide on the further procedure in this unusual situation. He then announced:

> As you know, the director of the Golden Bear isn't here this year, unfortunately, as you have heard before. But we can offer to the photographers that we can post the Golden Bear for the picture here, without him, if you like to.[1]

Following this announcement, the head of the press office arranged the award statue on the edge of the little stage, upon which the present photographers eagerly swarmed to the front of the conference room. What followed was five minutes of hastily clicking cameras that tried to get pictures of the Golden Bear standing lonely on the platform (Pictures 5.1 and 5.2). Time and again, photographers who stood on the wrong side of the room asked the present festival staff to rearrange the trophy, until finally everyone had their picture of it.

It is remarkable that most of the photographers actually took pictures of the Golden Bear, the design of which has remained the same since 1951. In itself, the statue is not an interesting sight. Only some of the journalists were more interested in the absurdity of the larger scene and rather photographed their colleagues gathering in front of the stage. That in this particular moment, the lonely bear trophy on a gray platform was deemed worthy of a press photograph speaks for the difficulty to visualize the continuous absence of Jafar Panahi on the festival stages. The photographers' effort was only the last of

[1] *Press conference for the laureates of the 65th Berlinale*, 2015. Min 131:45.



Pictures 5.1 ans 5.2: Journalists attempt to capture the absent Panahi's Golden Bear trophy that was put on the stage of the press room.

many attempts to record his non-appearances at the Berlinale in the 2010s visually, narratively, or performatively. After 2011, when Panahi had been invited to the international jury, two of his films were screened in the festival competition, namely *Pardeh*, which in 2013 won the Silver Bear for the best screenplay, and *Taxi*, for which Panahi won the 2015 Golden Bear. Since he had not been allowed to shoot the films in the first place—let alone submit

them to a foreign film festival— and was still prohibited to travel abroad in his capacity as a filmmaker, Panahi did not come to Berlin to present these films.

His absence consequently heavily impacted their staging at the festival. In both films, however, the filmmaker appears as an actor playing himself. Festival audiences saw him in a small role in *Pardeh* and more prominently in *Taxi*, where he drives the titular vehicle. Taken together with his continuous physical non-appearance, the emergence of the filmed Panahi on the cinema screens created an intriguing interplay between absence and presence that I will explore in this chapter. It was this interplay that ultimately earned Panahi his Golden Bear, as it was part of the larger stage play that was performed at the Berlinale around him, starting in 2011 with the absence of the supposedly imprisoned filmmaker to his ultimate triumph in 2015.

5.1 The Empty Chair and the Staging of Absence

In the previous chapter, I have examined the 61st Berlinale and its handling of the issue of Jafar Panahi. The narrative of him as a prisoner and the festival's posture as his savior was neatly embedded into the sensationalist understanding of the political at Kosslick's Berlinale as well as its longstanding heritage as a beacon of freedom and liberalism. At the center of this imagery, which was evoked prominently on the various stages of the festival, was the origin of the whole showcase, namely Panahi's absence. The fact that the filmmaker had not been able to take his jury seat was symbolized most prominently by the image of the empty chair. During the opening and closing ceremonies, this chair was presented onstage in the shape of a white plastic chair carrying Panahi's name and at instances in which the jury appeared at the festival as a group, a spot in their middle was left vacant. In the following, I will analyze how Panahi's absence was staged through the image of the empty chair and explore the implications of its integration into the 2011 Berlinale as well as its impact on the larger narrative of Panahi.

Waiting for Panahi

A important prerequisite for the staging of Panahi's absence in that year was the expectation that, perhaps, he might show up after all. In advance of the

opening day on February 10, the filmmaker had been featured heavily in German media, most prominently in the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, which dedicated a five page dossier to him in particular and the workings of censorship in the Iranian film industry in general.[2] Before the 61st Berlinale had started, Panahi was the most prominent talking point when it came to the international jury, to which he had been invited. Whenever he was reported on, however, the possibility of him coming to Berlin after all was left open. Already in the press release that had announced his invitation in December 2010, Kosslick was quoted stating: "We hope that Jafar Panahi will be able to attend the festival and perform this important task on the international jury of the 61st Berlinale."[3]

It should have been clear from the beginning that Panahi would be unable to attend due to his verdict. He technically could have come to Berlin, but the problem would have been reentering his home country—in addition to the high likelihood of authorities confiscating his passport upon reentry (hindering any further trips abroad), he would have potentially faced more serious consequences, especially since a suspended jail sentence against him was still up in the air. Coming to the Berlinale thus would have been a one-way trip for the filmmaker, with an ensuing life in exile as the only feasible outcome. Nevertheless, the suspense about Panahi possibly taking his place in the jury was upheld until the start of the festival. On February 10, 2011, the the moderator of the opening press conference still expressed the Berlinale's "big hope that he will join us over the course of the next week."[4] At the ensuing opening ceremony, Kosslick also hinted at the possibility that Panahi might still be coming after all.

Even after the festival had started, hopes about the filmmaker appearing during the event were continuously fueled. When *Offside* was shown at the *Berlinale Palast* in the framework of the larger retrospective of his work, Dieter Kosslick and Rafi Pitts introduced the film with a brief lecture by the latter about the repressions against Panahi. Pitts' speech culminated in a further expression of great expectations: "Let's hope that Jafar Panahi will be here

[2] Beier, 2011.

[3] "Wir hoffen sehr, dass Jafar Panahi die Möglichkeit erhält, diese wichtige Aufgabe in der Internationalen Jury der 61. Berlinale zu übernehmen." *Press Release*, 2010.

[4] "Wir haben noch die große Hoffnung, dass er während der Berlinale noch zu uns stoßen wird." *Press conference of the international jury of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 9:30.

before the festival is over and, you know, keep fighting for it!"[5] After he had finished and left the stage together with Kosslick, a festival moderator entered and closed the panel with the words: "I believe the absence of Jafar Panahi will make this 61st Berlinale a particularly special one and we will remember it—and that is a good thing."[6]

It is difficult to reconstruct whether in these days, the festival organization genuinely believed in the possibility of the filmmaker actually showing up during the festival. What is clear, however, is that the expectations of this highly unlikely scenario where fueled extensively. It was not only the absence of Panahi that made "this 61st Berlinale a particularly special one," as the moderator had put it, but also the waiting for him. At times, this waiting even took the dimension of a quasi-religious veneration of the very void that Panahi's absence left in the festival space. In his 1955 essay of the same title, André Bazin has proposed to "consider the festival as a religious order."[7] In this, the French film theorist and critic mocked the prestructured ceremonial rituals that festivalgoers participated in and which he experienced as incredibly stressful and hindering the actual experience of watching films. The larger argument of Bazin resonates until this day: at the core of these rituals stands an assumed sacredness that is necessary to uphold the festival atmosphere.

This sacredness is also what has led anthropologists Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff to propose the concept of the "secular ritual" in 1977.[8] Their term encompasses all kinds of public events—from political gatherings to sports competitions—and ultimately attempts to liberate ritual theory as well as theories of the sacred from their usual association with the realm of the religious. The sacred, according to Moore and Myerhoff, can also be found in rituals performed in supposedly secular spaces. Their concept thus can help to grasp the quasi-religious dimension at the heart of the Berlinale and other film festivals, which in turn makes the ritualistic veneration of Panahi's absence less irritating than it might appear at first glance.

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[5] *Red carpet for Offside*, 2011. Min. 45:30.

[6] "Ich glaube, die Abwesenheit von Jafar Panahi wird diese 61. Berlinale zu einer ganz besonderen machen und wir werden sie in Erinnerung behalten—und das ist auch gut so." Ibid. Min. 47:00.

[7] "Du festival considéré comme un ordre." Bazin, 1955.

[8] Moore and Myerhoff, 1977.

Picture 5.3: The international jury as presented during the opening press conference on February 10th 2011. In the middle of the group, a spot is left empty for Panahi.

In 2011, this dimension was perhaps never more striking than at the opening press conference on the first day of the festival. Traditionally, this event presented the international jury to journalists, who then had the opportunity to discuss the jury's expectations, their criteria of judging films, and the potential dynamics inside the group. That year, however, these issues took the backseat in favor of questions after the fate of Jafar Panahi. In contrast to the jury presentation in Cannes in 2010—where had also been invited—there was actually a physical space left vacant in the middle of the stage, right between German actress Nina Hoss and jury president Isabella Rosselini (Picture 5.3). Even at first glance, Panahi's absence was made visible visible as a literal hole in the middle in the middle of the jury body.

Yet Panahi's spot was notably not all emptiness. A name tag marked the absent inhibitor of the space, and as if to summon his aura by treating him as a physically present person, a glass and a bottle of water were provided for him, not unlike like ritual offerings to a spirit (Picture 5.4). Just like the other spots, it even had a microphone in front of it, into which of course no one would speak during the event. These requisites had two implications for the larger staging of Panahi. First, they were part of the ritual of waiting, since they suggested what the moderator had also expressed in his introduction of Panahi, namely that he might arrive any minute—everything was standing ready for

him. And second, they elevated the absence of the filmmaker to a quasi-religious matter: it was not only Panahi but his spirit that was missing from the festival space, and the Berlinale did its best to summon it. With this, the opening press conference had already set the tone for the rituals of veneration that would impact the ensuing festival week.

Picture 5.4: Close up of Panahi's empty spot at the opening press conference on February 10th 2011.

The Object of the Empty Chair

It was not enough for the asserted hole that Panahi had left in the body of the jury to be visualized by a vacant spot in their middle, as it had happened in the opening press conference and later during the jury screenings, where a seat was left free for him. In accordance with Kosslick's fondness of relatable and catchy symbolism, Panahi's absence also had to manifest itself physically in some way. This was achieved with an empty white chair that the festival director brought to the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* at the opening and closing ceremonies. In the following, I will examine the appearances of the empty chair at these events, where it acted not as a mere symbol of absence or a placeholder for Panahi, but

Picture 5.6: Close up of the empty plastic chair.

as a ritualistic object that enabled the performative dimension of his representation at the Berlinale in the first place.

The chair had its first time in the spotlight during the presentation of the international jury at the opening ceremony. Just like the rest of the ceremony, this presentation had been ritualized to an extremely high degree during Kosslick's tenure. The routine had been established in the early 2000s and was since performed every year. It included a presentation of each jury member through a short video clip narrating their career, often focused on their past appearances at the Berlinale. When this video was finished, the screen in the back of the stage would turn off and lights in the theater hall would turn on again, and the jury member would enter the stage to a round of applause and a brief chat with Kosslick or moderator Anke Engelke. After that, it would again be lights off and video on to present the next jury member, and so on, until the whole jury was assembled. Upon this, Kosslick and the jury president would officially announce the start of the festival and the ceremony was over. As the last element of the whole routine, the jury presentation thus acted as the finale of every opening ceremony.

In 2011, this prestructured protocol was prominently disrupted. After Engelke had announced the jury presentation, it started out as always: lights in the room went down and the traditional golden rain on crimson background filled the screen in the back of the stage, which then showed a 40-second video about Jafar Panahi and his career. The clip neither mentioned his trouble with the Iranian authorities nor the fact that he had not been able to come to Berlin. When the video had finished with his Silver Bear for *Offside* in 2006, Panahi would normally have been expected to enter the stage, which obviously did not happen. Instead, the lights went on again and a white plastic chair with a cardboard sign carrying Panahi's name was standing in the middle of the stage (Picture 5.5). Standing around it were Engelke and Kosslick, who went on to explain Panahi's current situation and express their regret that, although they had believed in it, the filmmaker was still "sitting in Tehran because they didn't let him out."[9] Kosslick then came to address the empty chair that stood in front of him, touching it uneasily while explaining:

> Now that he's not here, we have the tradition; Thierry Frémaux from Cannes is here, I warmly welcome him; they have left the chair empty, too, it looked

[9] "Ich dachte ja immer er kommt noch, aber er sitzt in Teheran und sie haben ihn nicht rausgelassen." *Opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 47:15.

> a bit prettier, well, we are in France, in Cannes anyway; and now here we have a German chair that we have to leave empty.[10]

Picture 5.5: Dieter Kosslick and Anke Engelke on the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* with the empty chair standing in for Panahi during the jury presentation at the 2011 opening ceremony.

Kosslick's typically convoluted statement references his French counterpart Thierry Frémaux, the director of the Cannes film festival, which nine months earlier had also invited Panahi to its jury and had to handle the non-appearance of the filmmaker who then was still in prison. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, however, the festival at the Côte d'Azur had dealt with the issue far more discretely. In Cannes, the vacant jury spot had remained a metaphor and only manifested physically during their closing ceremony. And even there, it had been hidden so far in the back of the stage that laureate Juliette Binoche had to grab the cardboard sign with Panahi's name on it herself to make the audience aware of his absence. By identifying the empty chair as a "tradition" established in Cannes, Kosslick thus actively tried to normalize the gesture of his festival by framing it as a question of common sense.

[10] "Nun ist er ja nicht da, nun haben wir die Tradition, Thierry Frémaux aus Cannes ist da, ich begrüß ihn herzlich, die haben ja den Stuhl auch frei gelassen, der sah ein bisschen hübscher aus, wir sind ja auch in Frankreich, jedenfalls in Cannes, und hier haben wir nun nen deutschen Stuhl den wir leerlassen müssen." Ibid. Min. 47:30-48:00.

Far more intriguing than this attempt at the normalization of the chair is Kosslick's description of the object: this was a "German chair," supposedly fitting the Berlin virtue of humble understatement in contrast to the "prettier" one picked by the fine folks at the Côte d'Azur. Given that the exemplar at Cannes was however hardly seen and the Berlinale cardboard sign was nearly identical to the one held up by Juliette Binoche, Kosslick's comparison is very difficult to comprehend. It is notable, though, that while his white plastic chair indeed looked rather cheap and unglamorous, there certainly was more to it than that (Picture 5.6). The chair in fact had no discernible features whatsoever: everything from the legs to the seating to the backrest was made of the same white plastic. On one hand, this color transmitted a notion of innocence that fit the story of the unfairly imprisoned filmmaker. On the other, its blankness also served as a projection space—empty not only of someone siting on it but also of any distracting associations, it was the perfect placeholder for Panahi.

Picture 5.6: Close up of the empty chair standing at the 2011 opening ceremony.

If the chair, then, is assumed as a ritualistic substitute for its absent holder, it can also appear as an actor in itself. In her 2004 book on the aesthetics of the performative, theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte lists the "bodily co-presence of actors and viewers" (*leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern*) as one of the crucial preconditions for a performance.[11] Recalling the work of the eminent German theater scholar Max Hermann in the early 20th century, Fischer-Lichte points of that if the audience is in the same room as the actors, a "liveness" emerges as the defining feature of the performative. It could consequently be argued that as a substitute for Panahi, the chair enhanced the impact of the performance by many times: with the chair onstage, it was no longer only Engelke and Kosslick performing but also Panahi—or rather his very absence—that emerged as a bodily present actor in their play.

The role and the qualities of the white plastic chair were far thus greater than Kosslick had been willing to admit in his understating remark. At the opening ceremony of the 61st Berlinale, it acted as the most outstanding jury member of all. Contrary to the festival director's suggestion that it was an imported tradition and a completely natural practice, the Berlinale did much to amplify the impact of its performances. First, it staged the expectations of Panahi perhaps entering the stage after all by integrating him seamlessly into the ritualized protocol of the jury presentation. Then, it presented a physical substitute for him live on stage. Completed by Isabella Rossellini's subsequent reading of his open letter, which I have addressed in the previous chapter, the whole finale of the opening ceremony underlined the effort that the Berlinale put into staging Panahi's absence from its 61st edition.

The Berlinale Family Greets its Absent Member

The symbol of the empty chair had been well established over the course of the festival week and was already something of an afterthought when the closing ceremony took place nine days later—enough so that moderator Anke Engelke comically mentioned it in her opening monologue as a highlight on the same level with the frequent appearances of animals in the competition films and the novelty of 3D glasses. After this brief introduction, the awards show went on as usual for fifteen minutes—with Kosslick thanking the festival sponsors and short film awards being handed out—until Engelke called the international jury

[11] Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 58–126.

in. Upon this, the spotlight turned to the stage entrance, but instead of the jury, it was only Dieter Kosslick who walked in, laboriously carrying the white chair with Panahi's name on it (Picture 5.7) The applause soon ebbed down, and in silence, the festival director wandered to the middle of the stage, next to him a visibly irritated Anke Engelke who only managed to utter a questioning and awkward "Okay..."[12]

Kosslick's gesture of bringing in the chair himself, of Mr. Berlinale taking the matter in his own hands in a very literal sense, was surely meant to demonstrate for a last time that the festival's spotlight on Panahi was a top

Picture 5.7: Mr. Berlinale himself carries the empty chair onto the stage of the *Berlinale Palast* during the 2011 closing ceremony.

[12] *Closing ceremony of the 61st Berlinale*, 2011. Min. 19:30.

priority. Given the sudden silence, however, the audience was apparently as irritated as Engelke. The delay that Kosslick's walk to the center of the stage brought with it led to thirty seconds of awkward atmosphere, which is quite a long time for a professional and high profile awards show. As such, the moment stood out prominently and suggested that is was less the Berlinale organization as a whole than Kosslick as an individual deciding on the matter. At the very least, it underlines the effort to explicitly showcase Panahi's absence through the empty chair as a ritualistic object rather than letting his non-appearance speak for itself.

When Kosslick had finally arranged the plastic chair at the center of the stage, Engelke cleared her throat and briefly summarized Panahi's situation again. After pointing out the protest on the red carpet that the Berlinale had organized ahead of the screening of *Offside*, she went on to ask Kosslick: "How is Jafar Panahi? Does he know what has happened here?"[13] Kosslick answered:

> Yes, a pity that he's not here. That's sad enough. But Isabella Rossellini has read out the letter here on the first night and the last sentence was: From now on, I won't say anything. So I don't know directly. But I know it indirectly through a friend.[14]

Although Kosslick's intention surely was to built up some momentum to the revelation of how Panahi had perceived the Berlinale from afar, his answer actually betrayed the extent to which the festival had staged the absence of the filmmaker during the week. It would have been well possible for the filmmaker to send more messages to Berlin, without any clandestine measures like "secret numbers," smuggled letters, or mysterious friends informing Kosslick indirectly. While the festival director frames Panahi's silence as a conscious decision announced in the letter, he again bends the truth to a point of breaking—the last sentence of Panahi's letter had by no means been "From now on, I won't say anything," and nowhere in the text had he expressed similar plans. Instead, Kosslick's narrative reveals that the absence of Panahi was in fact a crucial element of the stage play that the festival performed around him in 2011.

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[13] "Wie geht es Jafar Panahi? Weiß er, was hier passiert ist?" Ibid. Min. 19:45–20:00

[14] "Ja schade, dass er nicht hier ist. Es ist traurig genug. Aber Isabella Rossellini hat ja hier den Brief verlesen am ersten Abend und der letzte Satz war ja: Ab jetzt sag ich nichts mehr. Deshalb weiß ich es auch nicht direkt. Aber ich weiß es indirekt durch einen Freund." Ibid. Min. 20:00–20:30.

Incidentally, the same goes for the vacancy of Panahi's seat in the international jury. Here, too, it technically would have been possible for the filmmaker to do his work as a proper jury member from Tehran. By 2011, most of the films in the festival were available digitally and the competition line-up could have been sent to Iran for Panahi to judge the films from home and take part in the jury meetings via video-calls. In later years, similar procedures were taken if a jury member could not come to Berlin for any kind of reason. Most strikingly, this enabled none other than Mohammad Rasoulof to act as a jury member in 2021. Panahi's filmmaking friend, who had been arrested together with him in 2010, could not travel to the 2021 Berlinale due to the same verdict. Yet when he—like other jury members—was not in Berlin, he was still a regular part of the jury body, watching and judging films from his home. The comparison with Rasoulof's and other cases—for example of American filmmakers who were at times too busy to come to Berlin physically—reveals that in 2011, it had never been foreseen for Panahi to act as a regular jury member. Instead, the invitation was not only purely symbolically, it also relied on the very fact of him not appearing in Berlin.

In the continuation of Kosslick's report on Panahi's situation at the closing ceremony, it becomes a bit clearer why the absence of the filmmaker was so crucial for the festival:

> He has noticed what has happened here at the opening and of course also the big demonstration on the red carpet. And he said to his friend that he had been very lonesome in the beginning and when he had seen that these two days, he knew that no artist in the world is alone as long as he belongs to this family and that he is really happy to belong to this family. And so, while he is not here, we are with him and he knows this and doesn't feel lonely. And I think there is not a lot that we could do, but maybe it was a lot for him. Therefore, we again greet him very warmly![15]

The narrative of Kosslick's report on Panahi's reaction to noticing the activities conducted for him in Berlin is quite straightforward. At first, the filmmaker had sat isolated in Tehran, feeling lonesome and gloomy. But thanks to the prominent expressions of solidarity at the festival stages, he realized that he

[15] "Er hat das mitbekommen, was hier bei der Eröffnung passiert ist und natürlich auch am nächsten Tag die große Demonstration auf dem Roten Teppich. Und er hat zu seinem Freund gesagt, dass er sehr einsam gewesen wäre am Anfang und als er das dann gesehen hätte, seit er das gesehen hätte die beiden Tage, wüsste er, dass kein Künstler auf der Welt mehr einsam ist, wenn er zu dieser Familie gehört und dass er ganz glücklich ist, zu dieser Familie zu gehören. Und von daher ist er zwar nicht da, aber wir sind bei ihm und er weiß es und er fühlt sich nicht alleine. Und ich glaube, das ist zwar nicht viel, was wir machen konnten, aber vielleicht viel für ihn. Von daher grüßen wir ihn nochmal ganz herzlich!" Ibid. Min. 20:30–21:15.

was not alone after all since he was shown that he belonged to the family of the Berlinale. Through Panahi's words—distorted by an apparent game of hearsay—Kosslick brands his festival as a family comprised of artists from all over the world. The metaphor surely opens up associations of belonging, of a strong bond that comes with the commitment to help each other out in times of distress.

As such, Kosslick's narrative characterizes two protagonists at the same time. First, it represents Panahi as lonesome and agonized by the repressions he faces, and second, it brands his festival as a savior of its isolated family member. Both of these characterizations ultimately underline that the ritualistic enactment of Panahi's presence was necessary for the Berlinale to perform its care for him and stage their bond of friendship or even family. Through the various rituals of veneration and summoning his presence through the placeholder of the empty chair, the Berlinale showed that it thought of Panahi, that he was with them, at least spiritually, and thus made him feel less alone. Thus, these performances ultimately also had a dimension of belonging and staging the festival's invisible bond to the filmmaker.

Kosslick himself admits that in the end, "there is not a lot that we could do, but maybe it was a lot for him." It is true that the measurable effect of the 61st Berlinale on Panahi's particular situation was very limited—especially in comparison to Cannes, which in 2010 had prompted his release from prison. On the symbolic level, however, it indeed did a lot, namely establish the larger stage play of the relationship between Panahi and the Berlinale. The 2011 Berlinale can be seen as the first act of a sophisticated four-year performance that would conclude with the Golden Bear for *Taxi* in 2015. On one hand, this first act introduced the story of the imprisoned filmmaker faced with repressions that attempt to isolate him. The other actor was the Berlinale, ready to help out Panahi in any way possible. On the other hand, that year already offered a little dramatic arc of its own, with the absence of the filmmaker at its core. The festival had first fueled great expectations of its missing jury member coming to Berlin after all. Then it was his very absence that was staged in numerous ways, from the quasi-religious attempts to summoning his spirit by providing his vacant space with water and a microphone, to the empty chair as a ritualistic placeholder. And in the end, it

was revealed that, while his situation remained unchanged, the rituals indeed had an effect: Panahi had allegedly noticed them and felt less alone.

5.2 Emerging From Behind the Curtain

After these performances of Panahi's absence had marked the Berlinale in 2011, the staging of his story continued two years later with an enhanced repertoire. While it had been anchored to requisites like the empty chair and the vacant jury seat before, the performative dimension shifted more and more to the films that Panahi continued to produce despite his occupational ban. Through these films, Panahi returned to the Berlinale in 2013 and 2015, although he again did not personally travel to Germany. He had shot these films privately and under the radar of the cultural ministry, as many independent filmmakers are forced to do if they do not receive permissions. *Pardeh* (lit. Curtain, released as Closed Curtain), the first of the two, was shot in Panahi's holiday residence, a villa at the Caspian Sea. The depressive and claustrophobic chamber play premiered in the 2013 Berlin competition, where his co-writer Kambuzia Partovi received the Silver Bear for the Best Screenplay. For his next film, Panahi carefully started to work in the public again, although he restricted the camera to the semi-private space of the titular car. *Taxi* was even more successful than its predecessor in the Berlinale competition, where it won the Golden Bear in 2015.

While their cinematic appeal is rather limited, these films gain a much deeper hermeneutic dimension when their context of both production and reception is taken into account. Their artisanal background heavily impacts both films, as it underlines their open claim of being prohibited to be shot in the first place. This restriction leads to a spatial confinement of the camera, to a house and to a car, that is underlined in every single shot. Their background in turn strongly influenced their reception, too. As they are completely subordinated to their self-reflecting nature, they became parts of a larger and more elaborated stage play rather than screened films—a punchline that had been anticipated by Panahi already in the title of *Īn Fīlm Nīst* (This Is Not a Film), the film he shot before *Pardeh* and *Taxi* and which was presented at the 2011 Cannes film festival. Their performance consisted of Panahi lifting the titular curtain in *Pardeh* and emerging from behind onto the stages of the

Berlinale, proving that he is alive, but not well. Two years later, *Taxi* again worked as a life sign, this time in a more optimistic tune and in the posture of Panahi bursting the chains of his restriction. This imagery turned out powerful enough to be crowned in gold in a publicly staged happy end. It is especially this dimension of the two films' complex performances at the Berlinale that I will examine in the following, as it is essential to their cinematic scope, which goes far beyond their running time. Before, however, a brief consideration of their film theoretical implications is necessary to understand their nature as contributions to the larger staging of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale.

Post-Cinema, Non-Cinema, or Performative Cinema?

The academic reception of the films that Panahi has shot after his occupational ban is embedded into a larger discourse of digital filmmaking. Since the early 2010s, there has been a constantly growing debate in critical film studies about the effects of digitalization on classic hierarchies in the film industry. Given the wide spread of small cameras and even smart phones with their ever evolving camera and sound recording standards, basic film production no longer requires a large amount of funding and equipment. At the same time, growing band withs seemed to make the independent distribution of films a lot more accessible—at least until giant streaming corporations began monopolizing the global market later in the decade. The technical potential of an assumed democratization of the film industry was observed with both anxiety and excited anticipation in film studies and led to an ongoing debate on the nature of a digital cinema that makes the previously set rules and hierarchies of film production and distribution increasingly superfluous. In academic publications on this discourse, Panahi's post-prison trilogy of *Īn Fīlm Nīst*, *Pardeh,* and *Taxi* was lauded as a savior of the cinema to come, and even inspired a number of film scholars to new theoretical proclamations.

In 2016, the department of media studies at the University of Marburg edited a volume on *The State of Post-Cinema*. The collection of essays suggests that recent developments in filmmaking have led to the fact that established dichotomies and hierarchies in film studies "no longer apply to the current state of moving-image culture,"[16] as the editors Malte Hagener, Vinzenz Hediger, and Alena Strohmaier state in the introduction. To illustrate this fact,

[16] Hagener, Hediger, and Strohmaier, 2016. p. 3.

they use *Taxi* as a prime example of their hypothesis, since the film was not only made with the basic equipment of three small digital cameras, but dedicates its content to the process of filmmaking itself. Most of the passengers are related to films and their production in different ways, from the shady film dealer to Panahi's friend showing him footage from his security camera to the driver-director himself whose project to shoot a film in his car becomes an integral part of the narrative. Especially the addition of his niece Hana, who prepares a video for her film class, leads to several film-in-film sequences in which the borders between the footages of her and her uncle's cameras become increasingly blurred. These observations, with which the authors open their introduction, finally lead them to use *Taxi* as the very gateway into their theoretical considerations:

> Panahi's production suggests film is ubiquitous, yet its presence is asymmetrically distributed between a variety of social actors and institutions. Who makes films and under what conditions? Who controls the circulation of images and controls censorship? Who watches who, where, when, and under what circumstances? And if moving images, like water, always find a way to spread, how do they affect the spaces that they reach and the interstices they use? These are some of the questions that Panahi's film raises and that we would like to address in the present volume.[17]

With this choice of example, the editors unfold their far-reaching theory of post-cinema at the hand of Panahi's recent style of filmmaking. Co-editor Alena Strohmaier further dedicates a whole chapter to "Jafar Panahi and the Contours of Cinema," which focuses on the different spatial levels of the three films. She argues that the films' spatiality serves as an entry point for the spectator, who is often forced to imagine things that are not shown and thus becomes involved in the filmmaking process. The mental film set in *Īn Fīlm Nīst,* the black curtains in *Pardeh*, and the windowpanes of the *Taxi* would be the best examples for these screening spaces that serve as entrances for the viewer's projection. In accordance with the theoretical bracket of the volume, Strohmaier thus concludes that "Panahi's films are deluding traditional hierarchies of narration, staging fragmented stories that nest on and inside each other."[18]

In his 2018 monograph on *Global Digital Filmmaking and the Multitude*, film philosopher William Brown takes a similar route, although he brands the

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Strohmaier, 2016. p. 125.

phenomenon as Non-Cinema. The concept, however, is close to Hagener, Hediger and Strohmaier's Post-Cinema. Radically defining film as everything captured with a camera, Brown also underlines the empowering potential of digital production and distribution technology in making the subaltern visible and watering down the exclusions of "cinema-capital," as the marxist film philosopher puts it.[19] His approach is even more emphatic than that of Post-Cinema as it presents Non-Cinema as "the creation of the conditions in which cinema can have a future"[20] and closes his introduction with the enthusiastic appeal to "let seven billion cine-poems bloom."[21]

Intriguingly, Brown, too, gives Jafar Panahi's post-prison trilogy a prominent place in the genesis of his theoretical account and dedicates two whole chapters of his book to the Iranian director. Brown is particularly interested in the first of these films, *Īn Fīlm Nīst*, which he frames as "cinema out of control."[22] The film's title is, on one hand, a tongue-in-cheek play on René Magritte's influential 1929 painting *La trahison des images* (The Treachery of Images). The painting shows a smoking pipe with the underline "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe), a semiotic inquiry into the connection between signifier and signified. Panahi's reference, however, is not particularly adequate: Magritte's painting plays with the connection between representation (as a not-pipe) and object (the painting of a pipe) while *Īn Fīlm Nīst* (This is not a film) generates its paradox from the interplay of representation (as a not-film) and medium (a film indeed). Panahi's title rather works as a response to his verdict that prohibits him to make "films"—by refusing to call his work a film, he surely does not fool the Iranian ministry of culture and Islamic guidance, but hints to his audience at his occupational ban already in the title. William Brown understands this dimension of the title as an evasion of state regulation. Combined with his definition of cinema as controlled through either capital or,

[19] Brown, 2018. p. 2.

[20] Ibid. p. 5.

[21] Ibid. p. 12.

[22] Ibid. p. 213.

in the Iranian case, the state,[23] he thus presents Panahi's films as prime examples for his Non-Cinema.

Drawing on Brown, Hungarian film philosopher Judit Pieldner later extended the concept of Non-Cinema to *Pardeh* and *Taxi*, in which Panahi adapted and elaborated his style of digital filmmaking. She attests both films the same potential to work the restrictions into the filmmaking process and to integrate the non-filmic reality into the diegesis (meaning the world of the story that is told by the filmic narrative). *Pardeh* gives her good reasons for this examination: From the unseen thieves breaking into the villa, attempting to "steal" reality, to Melika tearing down the curtains, risking discovery by the supposedly ever-observing Iranian authorities, to Panahi himself entering the film in its third quarter, *Pardeh* is full of transgressions between the diegetic and the non-diegetic. *Taxi*, too, has these twists at its core, although here they evolve more constantly through the ongoing revelation that the taxi driver is not only played by Panahi, but supposed to represent him, too, and that the film shoot itself is indeed part of the diegesis. It is especially this "breaking in" of reality, as Pieldner puts it,[24] that would classify them as Non-Cinema:

> The status of in-betweenness of non-cinema ensues from its dynamics of displacement and transgression, from its marginal position, raw matter and blurred contours, which become all the more significant in the recognition of the non-cinematic gesture as a political act that distances itself from the cinema and, synchronously, folds back on the "real."[25]

What these enthusiastic film theoretical considerations of Panahi's post-prison films fail to address, however, is the role they played at international film festivals—the Berlinale in particular—and how these performances were part of the larger stage play that they constituted. This omission is quite intriguing, because already in the first of these features, Panahi himself addresses the Berlinale explicitly. *Īn Fīlm Nīst*, shot in March 2011, contains a small scene in which Panahi reads a comment on an Iranian website about the recently finished 61st Berlinale which had made a lot of noise around his case and the empty jury chair. In the middle of the 75-minute feature that was

[23] "Cinema, from the state's perspective, is thus defined as control: it is the control of all elements included in the film by the film-makers and following a script 'blueprint' that exists in advance of the film itself – and the control of the film industry more generally by institutions like the MCIG [Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance], or, beyond Iran, simply capital, which attempts to eliminate risk via the vetting of scripts prior to production." Ibid. p. 215.

[24] Pieldner, 2018. p. 119.

[25] Ibid. p. 111.

filmed in Panahi's apartment, he takes a break from explaining the process of shooting an unfinished film and relaxes on the couch with his MacBook. We see the filmmaker slowly starting his laptop while the camera shifts between him and his pet iguana Iggy, who crawls all over the couch and his owner. When the computer is finally ready, Panahi opens a browser and complains that all the websites he wants to open are *basteh* (shut down, unaccessible)—without mentioning that via a foreign VPN connection he could easily bypass these restrictions, a practice Iranians with an affinity for media are usually familiar with. When he has finally found an "accessible" website, he starts reading aloud an article about a recent debate about him at the *Khāneh-ye Sīnemā* (House of Cinema) in Tehran. After an abrupt cut, the camera then films Panahi from behind the couch as he suddenly turns his head to the camera with a broad smile, saying: "He further says we have shaped the Berlin festival! We have ruled Berlin!"[26] He starts laughing, which turns into a strong cough, smiles into the camera again and turns his attention back onto the laptop when the sequence is cut and the film moves on.

Panahi's coughing laugh shows a remarkable joy, interrupting the bleak and depressed glimpse into the mind of a recently convicted filmmaker that *Īn Fīlm Nīst* represents otherwise. His reaction, however, is not only the childish excitement, grateful and touched by the solidarity from Germany, that one might expect after the way he was framed at the Berlinale in 2011. It also reveals a knowing laugh of victory that shows a certain level of calculation—calculation not only of the attention he received in Berlin, but also of the Iranian media who were commenting on it. As the website had before been labeled as one of the few accessible sources from an Iranian address and thus "giving away nothing" (*hīchī ne-dah*), as Panahi had put it,[27] the scene communicates that the very fact of the reporting on his role at the Berlinale gives him a victorious joy. As the same time, the scene mentions the bitter dimension of this joy; after all, Panahi's laugh is immediately choked by a cough mixing into his smile, before the film continues with his subject's restricted and depressing everyday routine. Released in May 2011, only three months after the Berlinale, *Īn Fīlm Nīst* already established the narrative that,

[26]"Dīgeh mā jashnvāreh Berlin nūjrīj kardīm! Berlin-o modīriyat kardīm!" The subtitles of the 2016 German Blu-ray edition say: "He says: We have majorly influenced the Berlin festival!" *Īn Fīlm Nīst*, 2011. Min. 38:00–41:15.

[27] Ibid. Min. 39:30.

despite his physical absence, his role on the festival stage had lifted his spirits and motivated him to defy the verdict that prohibits him to shoot further films.

It is curious that none of the papers and volumes on Panahi's late oeuvre mentions this scene in their otherwise very detailed and thorough analyses. A reason for this might be found in the fact that it addresses the question of distribution, an integral part of their argument. While the concepts of both Post- and Non-Cinema claim that the digitally produced and circulated films watered down established hierarchies of filmmaking and distribution, Jafar Panahi is actually a counter-example to this argument: the films he has shot illegally worked well inside the same old networks of the film industry and their economy of attention in which Panahi's previous work had already been distributed, namely the international film festival circuit. Alena Strohmaier's chapter in *The State of Post-Cinema* acknowledges that "it was thanks to Panahi's reputation as a filmmaker that [*Īn Fīlm Nīst*] ended up in the competitions of the major international festivals, so some of the traditional mechanisms of creating value are still in place."[28] Yet she still classifies the films as defining examples of Post-Cinema, even though the cases of *Pardeh* and *Taxi* show the paramount and integral role that the festival circuit plays in their distribution as well as their cinematic substance. When looking at the circumstances of their production, it is indeed important to note that the position from which Panahi shoots his films is not situated at the margins of invisibility from which William Brown's "seven billion cine-poems" are supposed to bloom. When he continued to make films despite the prohibition, Panahi could access the well established global platform of film festivals like Cannes and Berlin.

To understand the full scope of Panahi's post-prison trilogy, it is necessary to embrace their performative dimension, too. By this, I do not mean the "performative power of the medium"[29] that invites the viewer to creatively fill the numerous blank surfaces of projection in the films, which the authors mentioned above have addressed at length.[30] Rather than looking merely at the abstract affective relation between individual spectators and the films, I will instead address Panahi's wider performances on the festival stages, particularly in the cases of *Pardeh* and *Taxi* at the 63rd and 65th Berlinale. In that regard,

[28] Strohmaier, 2016. p. 117.

[29] Pieldner, 2018. p. 112.

[30] William Brown has conceptualized this most thoroughly in his chapter on the "diegetic spectator". See Brown, 2018. pp. 33–53.

Erika Fischer-Lichte's call for an aesthetics of the performative offers a conceptual framework to understand the importance of the festival context for these films. In her seminal 2004 theoretical work, the theater scholar points out:

> When there no longer is a work of art, with an existence independent of its creator and recipient, when instead, we are dealing with an *event* that involves everybody [...] and production and reception occur in the same room and at the same time, it seems highly problematic to continue operating with parameters, categories, and criteria that have been developed in separating aesthetics of production, work, and reception.[31]

The films Panahi has made since *Īn Fīlm Nīst* very much classify as events rather than self-contained works. Neither can they be understood independently of their producer, who prominently appears as himself in all of them, nor of their festival reception, which is addressed in their very narratives. In case of *Īn Fīlm Nīst*, for example, the doubtful rumor of the film being smuggled to the Cannes film festival on a USB flash drive hidden inside a cake was circulated persistently, feeding to the narrative that the film's very existence and distribution was a dangerous act of rebellion.[32] As we shall see later in this chapter, similar narratives revolved around the travel of *Pardeh* and *Taxi* to Berlin.

Consequently, these films should be examined as actors in a larger performance of their staging at the Berlinale. In accordance with Fischer-Lichte, I understand staging (*Inszenierung*) as a "strategy of creation" (*Erzeugungsstrategie*), meaning that the circumstances of the performance create additional hermeneutic layers that add to the original work[33]—be it through the mise en scène of a classic dramatic text on a theatre stage or through the

[31] "Wenn es nicht mehr ein Kunstwerk gibt, das über eine vom Produzenten und Rezipienten unabhängige Existenz verfügt, wenn wir es stattdessen mit einem *Ereignis* zu tun haben, in das alle [...] involviert sind, Produktion und Rezeption also in diesem Sinne im selben Raum und zur selben Zeit vollzogen werden, erscheint es höchst problematisch, weiter mit Parametern, Kategorien und Kriterien zu operieren, die in separierenden Produktions-, Werk- und Rezeptionsästhetiken entwickelt wurden." Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 21–22.

[32] The factuality of this anecdote is indeed not more than a rumor. It apparently originated on the festival floor and not in an official statement by the Cannes committee or Panahi himself. It further seems highly implausible—while it is true that the film was added to the festival schedule very late and was screened outside the official program, Panahi is well enough networked in the film world to hand the digital prints to travelers in Iran who bring the film to Europe. The effort of hiding a flash drive in a cake and send it to France seems rather unnecessary. Its narration, on the other hand, only feeds the trope of Iranian security agencies working well enough to control all outside travel and seal the country off hermetically, thus adding to the danger and high risk of Panahi's act.

[33] Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 325–26.

screening of a film in the context of a festival competition with its press conferences, red carpets, media coverage, and awards ceremonies. As the festival is a particular performative space different from a regular film screening in a cinema or on a device in a private home, its influence has to be taken into account, as Fischer-Lichte remarks in her chapter on the spatiality of performances:

> Spatiality [...] is not given but rather created over and over again. The performative space is not—like the geometrical space—given as an artifact for which one or more producers are responsible. It is thus not corresponding to the character of a work, but that of an event.[34]

The festival premiere of a film by Panahi is thus as much part of its performative space as its affective reception in its viewers' minds, to which the rich analyses of film theorists are limited, and has to be taken into account in its reading.

The term "staging" arguably brings questions of agency that in the case of Panahi and the Berlinale are difficult to answer. Did Panahi calculate a particular kind of reception in Berlin? Did the Berlinale count on him submitting further films? And who, in the large and complex organization of the festival, planned on which details of the films' screening and performances, and which of these elements emerged spontaneously? At this point, it is indeed important to keep in mind that Panahi and the Berlinale are larger than their relation to each other. The filmmaker has his own community as well Iranian audiences and other European festivals on his mind, too, while the Berlinale screens hundreds of films annually and dozens of them receive press conferences, red carpets, and media attention. The relation, however, intensified enough in 2013 and 2015 to be examined separately in the following. And while it is futile to speculate on the levels of calculation and planning from both sides, it is undebatable that there were performances taking place on the stages of the festival in a fashion not dissimilar to the 2011 Berlinale. How much of these performances was planned and by whom is ultimately less important than it might seem at first glance—what emerged onstage had a

[34] "Räumlichkeit [...] ist nicht gegeben, sondern wird ständig neu hervorgebracht. Der performative Raum ist nicht - wie der geometrische Raum - als ein Artefakt gegeben, für das ein oder mehrere Urheber verantwortlich zeichnen. Ihm eignet entsprechend kein Werk-, sondern ein Ereignischarakter." Ibid. pp. 199–200.

particular materiality and significance, to speak with Fischer-Lichte.[35] Just as in 2011, this significance was organized around the symbolic order of Kosslick's understanding of the political as well as around the narratives of the prisoner and the absent, which I have worked out in the previous subchapters. In the following, I will examine these performances of 2013 and 2015, when *Pardeh* and *Taxi* generated Panahi's presence in Berlin for the first time since 2006, if only on screen.

Setting the Stage for Panahi's Return

When *Pardeh* was programmed in the competition of the 2013 Berlinale, anticipations were high. Since his empty jury chair, Panahi had been highlighted in Europe two times. In May 2011, *Īn Fīlm Nīst* had premiered in Cannes and was subsequently released cinematically in eight countries. And in October 2012, he became the first filmmaker to receive the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named after Soviet nuclear physicist and peace activist Andrei Sakharov, by the European Parliament. As in Cannes, Panahi did not attend the ceremony in Strasbourg and his adult daughter Sūlmāz Panāhī accepted the award on his behalf. With regard to Berlin, however, his latest film *Pardeh*—which in contrast to its predecessor *Īn Fīlm Nīst* was expected to actually deserve this labeling—marked his first appearance since his occupational ban and generated extraordinary interest ahead of its premiere.

Already during the opening ceremony on February 7th 2013, *Pardeh* was mentioned several times, and not only by festival director Dieter Kosslick. It was again Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media Bernd Neumann who pointed to Panahi in his speech—a highly unusual level of attention for one particular competition film. Opening his remarks with the familiar invocation of "the freedom of arts and culture as well as the adherence to human rights as a precondition for democracy," Neumann soon came to Panahi:

> I'm happy that his film *Pardeh* is shown this year in the Berlinale competition. Maybe he can even present it in person. And because of this, I emphatically

[35] The phenomena of the performative generation of materiality and the emergence of significance are central enough to Fischer-Lichte's conceptualization of performativity that she dedicates a chapter to each of them. See Ibid. pp. 129-242 and pp. 243-84.

> appeal to the Iranian government to let Jafar Panahi travel to his film's world premiere to Berlin.[36]

Briefly afterwards, in the context of the presentation of a trailer for all competition films, moderator Anke Engelke asked Kosslick if he thought that Panahi and his co-director Kambuzia Partovi (b. 1955) might come to Berlin for the premiere, to which the festival director, like Neumann, expressed hope:

> Yes, we think—we hope that he comes, that they both come. Normally, the directors present the films. Let's wait for it, it's a big moment, but it's also already good that someone with an occupational ban of twenty years can make a film at all, and I'm happy that it then lands on my desk. It's nice![37]

Upon this, Engelke further flared up expectations by answering in English: "We're keeping our fingers crossed that Jafar and Kambozia (sic) can come here next Tuesday and present their new film."[38]

In many ways, the remarks at the opening ceremony mirror what had been said two years before. Panahi was framed as a representative of Iran's problems with artistic freedom and human rights, his still suspended prison sentence was underlined, and everybody left the possibility open that the filmmaker might actually come to Berlin over the course of the festival. This optimism, most emphatically embodied by the joyful Kosslick, was even more absurd and misplaced as it had been in 2011, though. Not only did Panahi's verdict still prohibit him to travel to foreign film festivals, he had also just shot a film and sent it to one, a thing that he was explicitly forbidden to do under the occupational ban. For this, he luckily never faced consequences. A trip to Berlin would have most likely cost him the possibility to return to his home country afterwards. Up until the opening ceremony, there had been no sign that these circumstances would change in any way. The expressions of hope were thus, again, only enhancing the performance of Panahi's absence by prolonging the process of waiting for him.

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[36] "Ich freue mich, dass sein Film *Pardeh* in diesem Jahr im Wettbewerb der Berlinale gezeigt wird. Vielleicht kann er ihn sogar persönlich präsentieren. Und deshalb bitte ich ausdrücklich die iranische Regierung Jafar Panahi zur Weltpremiere seines Films nach Berlin reisen zu lassen." *Opening ceremony of the 63rd Berlinale*, 2013. Min. 17:30–18:00.

[37] "Ja, wir denken - wir hoffen, dass er kommt, dass sie beide kommen. Normalerweise stellen die Regisseure ja die Filme vor. Warten wir mal drauf, es ist ein großer Moment, es ist aber auch schon gut, dass jemand, der 20 Jahre Berufsverbot hat, überhaupt einen Film machen kann und dass der dann auf meinem Schreibtisch landet, find ich eigentlich auch gut. Schön isses!" Ibid. Min. 35:45–36:15.

[38] Ibid. Min. 36:30.

Apart from that, the only new thing was the appeal from a German government commissioner to the Iranian government, asking them "to let Jafar Panahi travel to his film's world premiere to Berlin." This would have been a remarkable development, had it been underlined later on through an official request, and by someone more high-ranking than Neumann, who as a commissioner was formally part of the government, but not with the title of a minister. However, Neumann's onstage remark remained the only instance in which such a request was pronounced and can thus hardly be counted as a serious diplomatic exchange. The remark, however, was still enough for the Berlinale to salvage it by branding itself as a diplomatic site. Five days later, during the press conference of *Pardeh*, the moderator underlined that it was unprecedented that "the German government" had demanded Panahi's permission to travel to Berlin. And even then, mere hours before the premiere, he held up hopes that the filmmaker might come after all: "Maybe miracles can happen..."[39] With this, the stage for Panahi's return the Berlinale was set: Physically, he was absent again but the actors explicitly fueled the anticipation of his imminent arrival.

Unsurprisingly, co-director Partovi had to attend the ensuing premiere alone and Panahi did not materialize on the red carpet at the last minute. Instead, however, he appeared on the screen of the *Berlinale Palast* through the film, at first symbolically and later as an actor himself. *Pardeh* is set inside the holiday residence of an unnamed writer, his hideaway at the shore of the Caspian Sea. The writer, a chaotic intellectual in his 50s, is portrayed by Kambuzia Partovi, a longtime friend of Panahi, filmmaker himself, and credited as co-director of the film. The film starts with a five minute one-shot of the writer's arrival at his villa. Accompanied by a dog, he gets out of a white car and walks into the house. The camera films the process from inside from behind the barred front window, an obvious hint at the villa being a prison-like place. The bars, however, are not enough shielding from the outside world for the writer—as soon as he enters the building, he starts to pull up black curtains in front of all windows, followed by the camera which stays with him in a series of more long uncut shots. Only when he is finished covering every window of the mansion, he gets rest and sits in front of a particularly large

[39] "Die Bundesregierung, sowas ist noch nie passiert, hat ja die iranische Regierung offiziell gebeten, Panahi doch anreisen zu lassen, wenigstens zur Premiere. Vielleicht geschehen ja Wunder..." *Press conference of Pardeh,* 2013. Min. 38:30.

black curtain that works as a second screen at which he stares for a minute-long shot that has served as the most prominent image of the film in the program catalogue and later marketing (Picture 5.8). By then, the audience has watched this procedure of covering the house for almost ten minutes without dialogue.

Through this first scene, it is already established that *Pardeh* serves to offer audiences a peak behind the titular curtain, but it remains unclear what exactly there is to seen. The curtain is filmed obsessively, yet shows nothing but black—the first of many hints at Panahi's prohibition to film and thus show anything to his audiences. The narrative reveals soon that, in addition to this metaphor, the curtains also have a very particular security purpose, namely to hide the writer from state authorities of whom he is convinced to be observed. In accordance with the camera staying inside the house, it further becomes clear that their security also has a non-filmic function beyond the diegesis: due to Panahi's occupational ban, the shooting of the film had to happen in secret. These bits of information, along with the writer's job and resemblance with Panahi and his actor's, Partovi's, credit as co-director, soon make him appear as a symbolic surrogate of Panahi—not only does Partovi stand in for his friend as a director (and at the festival premiere in Berlin), he also portrays a figure analogous to him.

Picture 5.8: The writer (Kambuzia Partovi) and Pessar, the dog, sit in front of the titular curtain that shields the house from the outside.

Over the course of the film's first act, however, this analogy is increasingly distorted, because it is actually the dog that is established as the prisoner and also the reason of the writer's fear and persecution. A television newsreel informs the audience that dogs are considered impure in Iran and it is illegal to keep them. This information, which was only valid for two years in the mid 2010s, when the film was shot, is accompanied by very graphic images of dogs being slaughtered and their bloody corpses thrown into mass graves. The dog watches this dramatic footage before the sorrowful writer intervenes and turns off the TV. From that scene onwards, he is increasingly staged as a prisoner who is not even able to leave the house for a walk. The audience's empathy is further built up by the fact that, in contrast to the writer, he is given a name that associates with innocence and companionship, Pessar (Farsi for "boy"). The writer's role, in turn, becomes that of a guardian and caretaker, manifested visually in a scene in which he shaves his head like a military recruit to underline his role of dutifully serving the dog's security. On the one hand, due to the image of the prisoner that is persecuted by the state, it is thus Pessar that is transformed into a Panahi-like figure. On the other, the writer takes more of Panahi's role as a filmmaker, with the illegal dog standing in for the films that he has to protect from the state—a role that Panahi has often enough claimed for himself in public interviews following his verdict.

To complicate matters further, the second act sees the emergence of another surrogate for Panahi. Melīkā, a young woman coming from a beach party that was dissolved by the police, is also taking shelter in the villa. She, too, carries characteristics of the roles that Panahi took on since his verdict. In addition to the harassment by state authorities, she is psychologically unstable and suffers from a depression that borders on the suicidal. Her imprisonment in the villa makes matters worse, and while her depression is never acted out dramatically, it is often mentioned and translated into suicide attempts claimed to be happening offscreen. The suffering figure of Melika in many ways parallels the Panahi of *Īn Fīlm Nīst*: claustrophobic, suffocating, and disoriented, but with an angry will to ultimately fight on.

During the second and third act, the tableau of the three figures becomes increasingly unreal. Melika often vanishes and the writer, with whose perspective the film is staying in this part of the film, is asking himself whether he has imagined her all along. Further, the symbolic order of the film

becomes more of a mixed metaphor: on one hand, the figures represent different parts of Panahi's (alleged) character, on the other, they increasingly come to stand for different parts of the Iranian society that are persecuted by the state in different ways. Intellectuals who want to protect their works, young women who are forbidden to dance and celebrate publicly with unrelated men, and dogs who were forbidden to be held in homes at the time of filming. At one point, a further taboo is thrown into the mix when the writer hides a bottle of whiskey that plays no role in the rest of the film, out of fear that the police might search the house.

Lifting the Curtain

The chaotic mix of allegedly forbidden or harassed members of Iranian society is developing further in the fourth act of *Pardeh*, when a dispute between Melika and the writer escalates and she starts to tear the villa's curtains down. For the first time since the beginning of the film, sunlight floods the secluded indoors in which the camera is trapped. When all windows are uncovered, Melika starts tearing down the curtains that hide the walls of the villa's staircase, and it is here that Panahi enters the screen for the first time, if only through the detour of his work. Behind the curtains, large film posters are revealed, which diegetically confirm that the mansion's owner is not the protagonist writer, but film director Jafar Panahi, who has gathered these marginalized characters in his house in the first place. Interestingly, those are international posters—an Italian billboard for *Āyeneh* (*Lo specchio*) can be seen next to French versions of the posters of *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* (*Le ballon blanc*) and *Dāyereh* (*Le cercle*) (Picture 5.9) In correspondence with their successful premieres in Locarno and Cannes, the choice of decorating the house with these particular posters underlines not only Panahi's status as a filmmaker, but the importance of film festivals for his career. When he enters the stage of *Pardeh*, he does it through the festivals, without which these Italian and French versions would hardly exist.

Mere moments later, Panahi emerges onscreen in person. While the panicked writer still goes after Melika on her path of angrily uncovering the house, the camera suddenly ceases to follow the pair. Instead, it stays in the dining room neighboring the staircase, where after a brief pause, an inconspicuous black-haired man in a plain t-shirt enters the frame. When he

Picture 5.9: As Melika (Maryam Moqaddam) tears down the curtains, it is not only the bright outside world that enters the film but also the figure of Panahi, who is revealed as the owner of the house through his film posters.

looks around, he is revealed as Jafar Panahi, his face recognizable for festival audiences from the pictures in the Berlinale program brochures and large portraits in the *Berlinale Palast.* For the first time since his mythical absence in 2011, viewers get a moving picture of the persecuted filmmaker, proving that he is, indeed, alive. Panahi puts on his glasses, walks towards the large film posters, studies them, and starts putting the curtains up again to contain them. Now that he has entered the film, their presence is no longer necessary to symbolize him. When he realizes how tall they are, however, he has to catch a ladder (Picture 5.10). His first brief appearance ends as abruptly as it has begun: the person who reenters the frame and continues to cover the posters after a cut is not Panahi, but the writer, suggesting once more that they represent different parts of the same character.

As such, his short-lived cameo appearance underlines that Panahi, at this point in the film is not tall enough to cover the posters—and thus fill the large shoes of the internationally renowned filmmaker—on his own. Diegetically, the assistance of the writer is as much needed as the pro-filmic assistance of Kambuzia Partovi as a co-director. The self-reflective move blurs the borders between film and film production, typical for Panahi's work, and intriguingly mirrors the fact that he also needs *Pardeh* as a vehicle for a comeback to the stages of the international film festivals. Above all, the scene

Picture 5.10: Briefly after entering the film in person, Panahi (playing himself) catches a ladder to hide the tall posters again.

narrates that the person of Panahi, which is taking the central role in this play, deems it necessary to split his personality into different aspects to survive as a filmmaker who has to live up to his international reputation.

The resulting identity crisis is played out on the cinema screen and causes a hermeneutic crisis of the film as well. Throughout the fourth act, narrative chaos reigns. The symbolic layers opened up by the different Panahi-like characters and their shifting relation, ultimately complicated by a cameo appearance of their maker himself, are clashing and the non-filmic reality starts to break in. Melika by now seems to have gained a mythical knowledge of the characters' status as roles in a film which shines through in her puzzling nihilistic utterances. At one point, she asks the writer, who is having a hard time working: "What you don't write, he doesn't shoot. So what? Do you think you can write down reality? Here, of all places?"[40] Later, when unidentified intruders break into the the house and wreak havoc but steal nothing, their reality is questioned by Melika. Panahi again enters the film and starts to clean up the mess that the home invasion has caused before he is once more replaced after leaving the frame, this time by the dog Pessar. By now, Melika and the writer feel their maker's presence. This seems to upset the young women, a

[40] "Keh nam neveshtī ūn nam sākht. Keh chī? Fekr mī tūnī vāqeʿyat nevīsī? Ūn ham īnjā?" *Pardeh*, 2013. Min. 59:30.

comment of hers underlines that the films starts to become overcrowded by too many characters: "One of us two has to go. Don't you see? He wants to stay."[41]

The hermeneutically chaotic and often unclear fourth act of *Pardeh* culminates in another appearance of Panahi and the tentative resolve of the conflict between the characters. Emerging suddenly from the bathroom after a shower, Panahi prepares three glasses of tea, acknowledging the existence of two more persons in the house and underlining that he exists in the same reality as the other characters. When he is finished, he goes out to the porch, where he finds an iPhone positioned to record the beach outside. He takes the device and starts playing a video that soon fills the whole cinema screen and shows Melika recording herself. She says that she has kicked the writer out and asks the viewer to follow her. When she has put the phone down with the camera directed at the beach, the video shows her slowly walking into the sea until she has vanished for good. Her apparent suicide thus not only concerns herself, the explicit demand to follow her into the water underlines that Panahi's suicidal tendency and willingness to give up are working in him.

After this scene and the temporary exits of Melika and the writer from the film, Panahi's identity crisis seems to be resolved for a time. The filmmaker awakes from a nap on his couch and seems to remember a dream. From the off, we hear the voices of Melika and the writer, still arguing but implicating that he killed Melika off, presuming that their actions have taken place in the filmmaker's mind. With this revelation, the film finally establishes a stable narrative reality that resembles the pro-filmic reality: Panahi has retreated to his holiday home in order to shoot a film in which the writer, Pessar, and Melika appear as characters. His power—that of an author over a story—is reclaimed and with it, the film's narrative crisis is overcome, too. What viewers see from now on is indeed Jafar Panahi spending a day at his Caspian Sea villa and gaining confidence about his situation.

The writer and Melika still appear in *Pardeh's* fifth and last act, but mostly as offscreen voices commenting on Panahi's actions and speculating on his sanity. At one point, Panahi takes out his iPhone and watches a video clip in which Kambuzia Partovi in the role of the writer acts in a scene that was shown at the beginning of the film, strongly suggesting that he knows what has happened previously because he has directed it. The first to fourth acts then

[41] "Yekī az mā do tā bāyad beravad. Nah dīdī? Mī khāhad bemūneh." Ibid. Min. 66:00.

have become a film in the framing film of the fifth act. It is however also suggested that what had taken place in the film-in-film has also happened in the villa of the fifth act. The rooms are still full of glass sheds and rubble from the break-in. At one point, a woman and her son are coming by to look for her sister, a woman named Melika, who took shelter in this house after the police had broken up a beach party. Panahi claims to be alone and has no idea who she is talking about, upon which the boy searches his house and indeed finds no trace of Melika. The faded figures are thus apparently established as Panahi's internal voices, but this status is played with again and again.

The main focus of the *Pardeh*'s final act, however, is not on the question of the reality of the characters that have substituted for Panahi up to this point. Their status in a limbo somewhere between characters in a film, intriguingly real people living inside the filmmaker's mind, and parts of his personality is rather confirmed and allowed to stand in its ambiguity. Instead, the rest of the film shows Panahi and his mundane daily business. Above all, these last scenes underline that he finds solace in simple and down-to-earth (real) people from his mansion's neighborhood. Most of the scenes attempt—and often fail—to show Panahi as a humble man of the people. His female cook comes by and brings him delicious traditional food, which he immensely enjoys while she laments about her daughter's sickness, as if to put Panahi's own crisis into perspective. A neighbor rings and tries to cheer him up by telling him that he will surely be able to make films again and that this work is beloved in the whole country and indeed the whole world. A particularly cringeworthy scene sees two carpenters repairing the broken windows. When they are finished, one of them shyly asks for a picture with Panahi, but they can not agree who should decide on where to take the it: The renowned filmmaker, well versed in camera perspectives and framing, or the carpenter? "You're the director!", the latter insists, but Panahi insists that he decides where to make the picture.[42] The brief scene, like his enjoyment of the traditional food and the appearance of the neighbor, puts Panahi's character as a modest friend of the common people on display. Since they, however, simultaneously underline his popularity and take place in his Caspian Sea holiday mansion—complete with its own artificial lake—their very existence in a film he has written and directed himself destroys all traces of humility. What they leave instead is a strong taste

[42] "Shomā Kārgardān-eh!" Ibid. Min. 81:30–82:00.

of condescendence and disrespect towards the "common people," which he ultimately exploits for his own purpose of feeling better.

Still, it seems important to Panahi to show that he found solace in their presence. While the voices of Melika and the writer still occasionally comment on their maker's mental health with worry, they ultimately acknowledge that he is healing. One of the last sequences sees a brooding Panahi going out to the porch, with Melika's voice suddenly panicking that he might drown himself in the sea. To emphasize her concern, the video of her going into the sea plays again, although backwards and with Panahi in the water—this time, it is him, but he is coming *out* of the water and back into the house. The film then cuts to him on the porch again, where he has apparently just contemplated suicide. However, he ultimately relaxes, smiles, and goes back into the house. From the off, Melika asks concerned: "What is he thinking about?" The writer calms her: "He thinks about renovating the place."[43] After his process of healing and getting back to work is complete and the identity crisis overcome, the last scene then subverts the opening of the film: from the same position, with the frame showing the panoramic look out of the window onto the beach, the camera records Panahi closing the barred gates of the house. Neither the dark curtains nor the figure of the writer are necessary anymore to contain the house and the film set—Panahi has regained his good spirits and is in control again. And the end credits start rolling.

Therapeutic Performance

In the 106 minutes of *Pardeh's* runtime, festival audiences had not only watched a film, they had also gotten a glimpse into the filmmaker's situation, staged in a claustrophobic, sterile and desolate atmosphere. Yet *Pardeh* is not a film about depression in general but about Panahi's depression in particular. His crisis of identity—marked by the split of his personality into different characters that he puts into action against each other—is after all mirrored in the film's structure, a puzzle of constantly overlapping narrative layers. His healing, ultimately translated into the decision to repair the damaged house and finally leave it to go back to Tehran, is also symbolized in the film's shift to his perspective in the final act. Furthermore, it was well known and explicitly underlined in the festival marketing of the film that Panahi had been prohibited to make films

[43] "Barā-ye chī fekr mī konad?" - "Fekr mī konad dasteh sarū bekeshad." Ibid. Min. 88:15.

and that *Pardeh* was obviously a clear breach of this verdict. The figure of the writer and many pieces of dialogue in the film strongly hint at the verdict being the main cause of Panahi's depression. Consequently, the very existence of *Pardeh* is not only gradually revealed in its narrative, it is part of the healing process: he overcame the crisis by shooting this film. As such, *Pardeh* itself becomes a therapeutic measure for the struggling Panahi.

It is important to note, however, that what viewers saw at the Berlinale was not the screening of a recording of this therapy session, but indeed its very performance. Especially in the world premiere at the *Berlinale Palast*, audiences witnessed Panahi overcoming his depression onscreen while at the same time watching the vehicle through which he managed to do so, namely the film with which he resolved the crisis. In *Pardeh*, Panahi had to take the route over the festival posters of his work to finally emerge onscreen. The people the film addresses are thus the very film festival audiences sitting in the Berlin cinema hall. From the standpoint of a film critic, this makes for an intriguing watch and opens up a dimension in the cinema that points beyond the film itself. It also shows, however, that *Pardeh* is not much more than a depressed filmmaker's navel-gazing—or, in the words of Hamid Dabashi, a "self-indulgent vagary," as Iranian studies professor has described the film in an opinion piece published on *Al Jazeera*.[44]

As his verdict also included a prohibition to speak publicly about his work, Panahi gave few interviews on the film after its release. In those, he admits that he actually saw it in a similar fashion, that *Pardeh* was more of a finger exercise for the sake of making a film and getting better through the process. Consequently, much of its narrative developed spontaneously and out of practical necessity rather than from a plan to make a particularly convoluted film with a complex interlacing of narrative layers. The titular curtains, for example, heavily loaded with the symbolic value of trapping the camera inside, were an actual security measure, as Panahi feared to be observed and wanted to film in as much secrecy as possible. The same goes for the initial decision to shoot at the Caspian Sea rather than in densely populated Tehran. When one night during the shooting, burglars smashed the villa's windows, this too was

[44] Dabashi, 2013.

worked into the script and charged with the puzzling notion of intruders attempting to "steal reality", as Melika puts it in the film.[45]

The Berlinale apparently did not care that *Pardeh* might have been not much more than a filmmaker's attempt to overcome his depression and happily offered itself to the film's performance. The festival had set the stage for such a comeback already back in 2011 and *Pardeh* offered them a good enough reason to celebrate it in a similar fashion. On the red carpet before its premiere, Kosslick put up his green bear pin again when he welcomed co-director Partovi and actress Maryam Moqaddam. At the awards ceremony, the narrative of Panahi's comeback even proved powerful enough to earn the film a Silver Bear for Best Screenplay. Fittingly, it was jury member Shirin Neshat who announced this decision under strong applause—after all, the successful U.S.-based visual artist is one of the most prominent advocates for freedom of expression in the Islamic Republic. To receive the award, which was dedicated to Panahi, Kambuzia Partovi again had to stand in for his friend. He dutifully took over the task and held a brief acceptance speech that did not mention Panahi in name, but focused on the futility of any attempts to silence artists.

The awards ceremony did not only show the continued and durable potency of Panahi on the festival stages, it also underlined that his status as a poster boy of Iranian cinema was strong enough to outshine anybody in his orbit—even after ten festival days, Anke Engelke did not manage to memorize Partovi's full name. The moderator even awkwardly joked about her difficulties to do so when she announced why the man who would come up next was not Panahi:

> As we all know, Jafar Panahi can not be here tonight. Accepting the award on his behalf is his co-director, the man who inspired Michael Jackson to compose *[singing]*: You're just another part of me, Kambodjiya (sic) Partovi.[46]

The disregard for Partovi is stunning in contrast to the heavy spotlight on his absent colleague. After all, the making of *Pardeh* and his trip to Berlin had consequences for him, too. When they reentered Iran, his and Maryam Moqaddam's passports were confiscated and he was put under an eight-year occupational ban. This made it impossible for Partovi, an established director himself, to legally shoot films and leave the country, factually putting him into

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[45] Grey, 2014.

[46] *Closing ceremony of the 63rd Berlinale*, 2013. Min. 25:45–26:15.

the same position as Panahi. Luckily for him, the verdict was reversed two years later after a shift in the Cultural Ministry following the election of Hassan Rouhani as president. In the immediate aftermath of the 2013 Berlinale, however, things looked as dire for him as they did for Panahi. Yet in contrast to the latter, the festival did not start any solidary actions, only a brief press statement two weeks later pointed out the confiscation of the passports but not the occupational ban.[47]

Neglecting Partovi in favor of spotlighting Panahi is only consequent in the festival's staging of the latter, though. While the co-director was necessary to stand in for his colleague, his role did not evolve beyond that of a surrogate. Just like the empty chair had been in 2011, he was more of the placeholder serving to underline his colleague's absence. It is notable that throughout the whole festival, Panahi was never visible or audible live. Such an appearance would have been very much possible, two years before, the filmmaker showed up via Skype at the press conference for *Īn Fīlm Nīst* in Cannes to answer journalists' questions. In Berlin, such an attempt was not made, neither at the two press conferences for *Pardeh* nor at the awards ceremony. Instead, the festival made a large effort to secure his presence only in ways that reminded of his absence. Consequently, the effect of *Pardeh*'s performance that made Panahi present onscreen was further amplified. It was very much a life sign, but it had been sent to Berlin months ago. It showed that the filmmaker had been getting better, but also underlined his depression and kept up the concerns around his wellbeing.

Ultimately, the performance worked so well that at the press conference following the first screening, journalists turned out to be very worried. Questions about the film itself were displaced by concerns for Panahi's state of mind, which were reinforced when Partovi pointed out that his colleague suffered strongly from not being able to work. One journalist inquired if the prominent role of suicide in *Pardeh* was a sign that Panahi considers taking his life, which Partovi did not deny. A German journalist even turned out to be outrightly desperate for him, "because it is unbearable to just sit there, watch and not be able to do anything."[48]

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[47] *Press Release*, 2013.

[48] "Im Film habe ich empfunden: Für mich ist es viel mühsamer, zu gucken, als es weniger Arbeit gewesen wäre, psychische Arbeit, den Film selber zu drehen, weil es unerträglich ist, wenn man da sitzt und schaut und nichts tun kann." *Press conference of Pardeh,* 2013. Min. 32:30.

That in the end, these concerns only amplified the power of *Pardeh*'s performance was underlined by the remark of a journalist who was simply grateful for Panahi's onscreen presence in the film: "I would like to thank you that we could see Panahi again!"[49] His gratitude stands emblematic for what *Pardeh* ultimately represented at the Berlinale. Its merit was not so much in its cinematic qualities but in its performance of Panahi's identity crisis, laid out and overcome in front of the Berlin audience. As such, it successfully generated his presence onscreen while at the same time evolving the narrative of him as a politically and creatively repressed prisoner in his own home. Two years later, this narrative would be continued and granted a sequel, further underlining the performative character of Panahi's post-prison films at the Berlinale, which in them had finally found welcome vehicles to bring their staging of Iranian cinema to full bloom.

5.3 With a Taxi to Berlin

In 2015, festival audiences could witness the continuation of the performance of Panahi on the festival stages when his next film premiered in the competition. *Taxi* works as a sequel to the live therapy session of *Pardeh* insofar as it again features Panahi in person, only that this time it shows the filmmaker not only alive and struggling, but uplifted, defiant, and even taking care of others. As such, the film works very much as a happy end of Panahi's post-prison trilogy. This notion, again, was not only transmitted through the audiovisual content screened at the festival, but also through the non-filmic background. The latest work by the restricted filmmaker was courted in the fashion established in 2011 and 2013, but this time even crowned with the Golden Bear. The triumph of the highest honor in the festival competition very much fed into the narrative of Panahi finally having recovered from his personal and creative crisis—not least thanks to the Berlinale.

The very fact of a new film by the director, who was still under the occupational ban, was widely celebrated as a sensation even before the premiere on February 6th 2015. In late January, Panahi released a statement in English via the British *Guardian* that already set the unyielding tone for the film and reinstated his narrative of desperately needing to work in order to feel alive:

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[49] Ibid. Min. 21:15.

> Nothing can prevent me from making films since when being pushed to the ultimate corners I connect with my inner-self and, in such private spaces, despite all limitations, the necessity to create becomes even more of an urge. Cinema as an art becomes my main preoccupation. That is the reason why I have to continue making films under any circumstances to pay my respect and feel alive.[50]

It should be noted, though, that the prevailing narrative of him being prevented from making films was by then already made somehow obsolete by his actual situation. The successful release of *Pardeh* in Berlin had proven to Panahi that it was very much possible for him to continue working as a director. In Iran, he had suffered no consequences for the breach of his verdict, apart from an angrily toned statement by Javād Shamaqdarī, then director of the *Sāzemān-e Sīnemā-yī va Omūr-e Samaʿī Baṣarī* (Organisation for Cinema and Audiovisual Affairs, the film department of the Iranian cultural ministry). Shamaqdari had protested against the Silver Bear for *Pardeh*, a film he called a "crime and unlawful behavior" (*jorm va raftār-e ghayr-e qānūnī*), and demanded the Berlinale to overthink its award.[51] Despite this public acknowledgement of *Pardeh* as a crime, however, nothing happened.

If anything, the Silver Bear had only further proven that his film festival network continued to function better than ever and that he had a built-in audience as well as an effective platform for further films—a set of circumstances for which many other filmmakers all over the world could envy him. Even his longtime friend, U.S. based film scholar Jamsheed Akrami, noted this privileged status in a 2018 interview:

> Ironically, that's what every filmmaker in every repressive regime wishes for. Your verdict was meant to send you to jail and deprive you of ever making another film, but actually it has been like a permit to work freely, albeit not too visibly. You are barred from leaving the country, but you can move freely and work within Iran.[52]

Unsurprisingly, this dimension of Panahi's situation was never addressed at the Berlinale. Instead, on February 5th 2015, the opening ceremony celebrated the fact of the film's premiere as an accomplishment of festival director Dieter Kosslick. Monika Grütters, who in December 2013 had replaced Bernd Neumann as Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, claimed in her speech that it was "not to be taken for granted"

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[50] Beaumont-Thomas, 2015.

[51] "*Vākonesh-e Shamaqdarī beh Khers-e Noqreh-ye Jaʿfar Panāhī*," 2013.

[52] Akrami, 2018. p. 67.

that *Taxi* was to be screened in the competition, but that it was due to Kosslick's persistence in inviting Panahi again and again until he would be able to actually attend:

> I appreciate that you, dear Dieter Kosslick, say you will invite Iafar (sic) Panahi until he is allowed to come to Berlin. *[applause]* This persistence is important, because not only in hermetic systems, but very generally, it is art that builds bridges where politics and diplomacy face its limits.[53]

Grütters' version of events, in which Kosslick personally brought *Taxi* to Berlin, once more frames the Berlinale and Kosslick as the saviors of independent Iranian cinema and artistic freedom as a whole. She did not address the paradox of how the film could get out of the supposedly hermetic system of the Islamic Republic in the first place. In the metaphor of the taxi that allegedly had brought the film to Berlin, Kosslick would later address that question during the film's premiere.

For now, the opening ceremony simply celebrated the prospect of a new appearance of Panahi, albeit again a non-physical one. This time, the Berlinale abstained from keeping any hopes up that the filmmaker might show up in person. Such a staging of his physical absence was not necessary anymore, since *Pardeh* had shown two years before that his onscreen presence made up for it. Word had already gotten around that *Taxi* would show even more of him and strike a comparatively optimistic tone. The Berlinale program catalogue had already made that clear and prepared audiences for the uplifting performance they would witness through a film still that showed the smiling Panahi behind a driving wheel (Picture 5.11). The announcement promised a "comedic and dramatic drive" in "his mobile film studio that captures the spirit of Iranian society," followed by the unyielding statement he had issued earlier in the *Guardian*.[54]

Collecting Passengers, Picking up Issues

What audiences saw when the film premiered at the *Berlinale Palast* the day after the opening ceremony was the guided tour around Iranian society—or Panahi's version of it—they were promised. Over its brief 80 minute runtime, *Taxi* shows

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[53] "Ich finde es gut, dass du, lieber Dieter Kosslick, sagst, du wirst Iafar (sic) Panahi solange einladen, bis er nach Berlin kommen darf. *[Applaus]* Diese Hartnäckigkeit ist wichtig, denn nicht nur in hermetischen Systemen, sondern ganz generell gesehen gilt ja, es ist die Kunst, die dort Brücken baut, wo Politik und Diplomatie an ihre Grenzen stoßen." *Opening ceremony of the 65th Berlinale*, 2015. Min: 22:30–23:00.

[54] *Katalog*, 2015. p. 42.

Picture 5.11: A smiling Panahi is announced in the Berlinale program, driving through Tehran behind the driving wheel and back in control.

the filmmaker driving around Tehran in real time, with changing guests in the passenger seats who all represent different social and political issues. In contrast to *Pardeh*, the film strikes a decidedly uplifting note: people are cracking jokes and react to Panahi either amused or warm-heartedly while the director himself visibly enjoys the role of the taxi driver. This joyful spirit is also reflected in the atmosphere inside the car. Even though the space, which the camera again notably leaves at no point, is much smaller than the mansion at the Caspian sea, it is flooded by light and the sounds of the city. The mobility of the car further has the effect of a constantly changing background instead of the claustrophobia that *Pardeh* had conveyed. While the film more often implicitly and explicitly lectures on the restrictions against Panahi, this time it refuses to yield to hopelessness and crisis but rather highlights his defiance and good spirit. When the camera frame thus shows Panahi for the first time after ten minutes, his emergence is not a mysterious intervention into the narrative structure but rather a tongue in cheek revelation of the man in the driver's seat who had already been talking to the first passengers. His first shot shows him as audiences had already seen him in the program catalogue: A cheeky smile on his lips, hardly containing the laugh about the role play and the flat cap he is wearing.

In a way, the constantly moving taxi works like a heterotropia as conceptualized by Micheal Foucault: something between an object and an "other space" that is unfinished, unrestricted, and unassociated enough to serve as a discursive arena were all kinds of issues can be addressed more freely than outside.[55] As long as the car is on the move, everyone can speak freely. Like the villa in *Pardeh*, the titular vehicle thus collects all kinds of figures repressed by Iranian authorities. In contrast to the writer, the dog, and Melika, however, they are not broad and shifting metaphors but represent very particular social and political concerns, and do so in a much more explicit fashion. Furthermore, they interact much less and their appearances are concerned with their own situation rather than with their relations to each other. The prevailing structure of the film follows a person getting into the car to be later joined by another and ultimately make room for the next passenger. In the meantime, they interact with Panahi in a trustful manner that unfolds their problems with Iranian society. This pattern repeats ten times throughout the film, with Panahi as the only exception—he is, after all, the main anchor for the audience to observe his passengers. This fixed structure and the panoptic portrayal of the figures make up for a viewing experience that is far more accessible than the multi-layered hermeneutic puzzle of *Pardeh*, especially for viewers with a strong cognitive interest in Iranian society in general rather than Panahi's particular situation.

As diverse the issues that are negotiated in *Taxi* seem—ranging from particularities of Iranian inheritance law to social distortion and the general brutalization of society—all of them are rooted in government politics and mostly point out the problematic human rights situation in Iran. From executions to film censorship, from the legal discrimination of women to an erratic prosecution with questionable priorities, the film often feels like a checklist of what is wrong in Iranian politics. Notably, Panahi presents himself as attempting to broaden his perspective as far as possible and to represent a large proportion of the Iranian populace, including culturally engaged students and businessmen as well as children and elderly religious people. This apparent maximization of the spectrum, however, ultimately fails: not only is it limited to members of the Tehran middle class, but also to Panahi's particular social sphere, as nearly all of the passengers turn out to have some kind of relation to

[55] Foucault, 1986.

him. Consequently, what viewers see is a representation of Iranian society filtered through Panahi's horizon, a limitation that the film fails to address due to its very claim of showing the broadest possible range of social classes. Panahi even dresses up for the part of the man of the people and ambassador for all parts of Iranian society, his outfit topped by the flat cap. This costume of a jovial intellectual in touch with the working class is rather irritating on the body of a filmmaker whose latest films have showcased both his large and well furnished apartment and his mansion at the Caspian Sea.

In accordance with Panahi's often asserted agenda of simply recording reality as it is, *Taxi* only superficially touches most of the issues it features. The sheer number of subjects in the film's brief runtime leads to a parade of debates that ultimately remain on the surface. The issue of the death sentence,[56] for example, emerges in a discussion between the first passengers, a businessman and a teacher. Both give their opposite standpoints, the first pointing to the strong effect of deterrence and the latter to Iran's status as global leader in executions. But before either can convince the other or at least react to their arguments, the businessman has to get out to make room for a busy seller of bootlegged DVDs whose car broke down. The dealer, "Film-Omid" (*Omīd Fīlmī*), then is engaged with Panahi in a discussion about the merits of the cinematic blackmarket that gives his customers the possibility to watch otherwise banned movies but also floods the market with poorly tasted entertainment and Western mainstream—what he initially offers Panahi is the latest season of the zombie series *The Walking Dead* and a copy of Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011). The swift rotation of briefly touched issues goes on in that fashion when Film-Omid is replaced by a man injured in a car crash who wants to film his testament to secure his wife's share in it, pointing to the discrimination of women in inheritance law. When he is released at the hospital, two women enter who desperately want to put their goldfish into a holy spring in time for a personal anniversary in a scene that ridicules the superstitions of the deeply religious.

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[56] Iran is notorious for being the country with the highest number of death sentences per capita in the world, many of them carried out in public. 2015, the year *Taxi* was released, saw a notable rise in the usage of capital punishment: Normally, annual cases are in the 300s, but that year, Amnesty International registered 977 executions. The Iranian government often quotes the war on drug trafficking at its south-eastern borders as the main reason for these high numbers, but the causes for death sentences vary widely. For the 2015 report, see Amnesty International, 2016.

Lectures on Film Regulation in Iran

After the film's first half has gone by in this fashion of superficially discussed issues being hectically handed over, Panahi breaks with the tiring structure for a notable exception. In a further move reflecting his performance of playing himself and dragging personal matters into his films, he suddenly throws out the religious women when he realizes that he has to pick up his niece from school in Northern Tehran. At this point, it is not only the diegetic, taxi driving Panahi who abandons his passengers, but also the real life filmmaker abandoning his characters and prioritizing his private life over them. In showing that Panahi's obsession with filmmaking has its limits, this decision and the following appearance of his niece is a further element in the larger performance of Panahi's situation. For audiences at the Berlinale premiere of *Taxi*, Hana Saeedi, the real life niece who plays herself in the film, was already well known. In contrast to Panahi, Saeedi was present in Berlin and had just walked the red carpet, substituting for her uncle. A week later, she would stand in for him again, accepting the Golden Bear on his behalf at the closing ceremony. Saeedi thus was an integral part of *Taxi*'s performance on the stages of the Berlinale and her appearance in Berlin as well as in the film demands particular attention.

In the onscreen taxi, she also turned out to be a defining presence. As soon as she enters the car, Saeedi puts on a remarkable show and wins over audiences by starting a heated exchange with her uncle. First, she engages in a silent duel of petulant gazes until she explodes into an angry monologue in which she passionately complains about him being late. Coming from a ten-year-old in a school uniform and delivered in a high-pitched voice, her monologue is rather amusing and makes for another comic scene in the uplifting film. It should be noted that the figure of the angry girl losing her temper has been a common trope in Panahi's early films. Established in *Bādkonak-e Sefīd*, his debut feature, he had taken it up again in the follow-up *Āyeneh*. Even as the latter had explicitly bidden farewell to the trope in a scene that famously saw the protagonist girl break character and announce the termination of her role, Panahi digs it out again for *Taxi*.

On the surface, this seems like an empowering move on different levels —after all, Panahi had suggested frequently that he had focused on girls instead

of boys in his early children films because they suffered not only from a society ruled by adults but also from gender discrimination.[57] The scene of Saeedi's entrance, like those in *Bādkonak-e Sefīd* and *Āyeneh*, however, generates its humor from the irritation of a small girl loudly advocating her position and demanding respect. It thus works from the same belittling perspective that it asserts to counter, a disrespectful mechanism that is virulent in both Panahi's portrayal of his niece and her staging at the Berlinale. Fittingly, after their fight is over, the filmmaker continues to ironically address her as "Khānom" (Lady), ironically putting her into the position as a grown up and thus using the very technique for which Iranian children's films had been famous in the 1990s and which he had explicitly abandoned in *Āyeneh*.

The representation of Saeedi in *Taxi* however shows more than Panahi's obsession with the trope of self-confident girls. He also takes his niece as a narrative device to talk about film censorship and the obstacles for filmmakers in the Islamic Republic. Like all other guests in his taxi, Saeedi embodies a particular facet of the omnipresent repression in Iranian society, and as his most private passenger, it is only consequent that she represents his most personal concern. When their argument is resolved and the car is continuing its ride back to the city center, she takes out her camera and starts filming him for a school project. Her uncle reacts irritated, upon which Saeedi explains to him that it is part of an assignment in her film class—a festival will be held in her school soon and she has to submit a short film. As she is overwhelmed by the regulations her teacher has issued for the films, she has no idea what to shoot and asks her uncle for advice. When Panahi still acts clueless about what her problem might be, she gives him the detailed example of an argument between neighbors she has filmed earlier: a father refused his daughter to receive visits by her Afghan boyfriend, but the boy defied his orders and climbed into her window at night.

After she has finished describing her footage, Panahi seems quite excited about her potential film:

Panahi:	Fine! There you have a finished film. What else do you ask for?
Saeedi:	Nothing else. You are a director yourself and know that this is not presentable!

[57] See, for example Panahi, 2019a. pp. 13–14.

Panahi: It is not what now?

Saeedi: Pre-sen-ta-ble! All the directors know that. You know nothing about directing! I can't believe it![58]

Showcasing her already established posture of the furious and condescending girl, Saeedi's is shocked to learn that her uncle, a film director himself, does not know about the alleged basics of film distribution. He apparently has no idea what it means when a film is not "qābel-e pakhsh" (presentable, lit.: not possible to be shown or distributed), which is delivered as a punchline referencing Panahi's own legal problems. After all, he is presented as caring little about what is deemed presentable on Iranian cinema screens, otherwise his films would not be banned. As such, the joke's function is to further work on Panahi's branding as the rebel boy of the Iranian film business—well established and professional, but ignorant of its rules.

When her uncle continues to act clueless about what she means, Saeedi starts reciting the detailed regulations that her teacher gave her to make a film presentable: female characters have to wear a veil (hijab), all characters have to follow the Islamic dress code, physical contact between men and women is forbidden, excessive pessimism (*siyāh namāyī*, literally: making things seem black) is to be avoided, positive characters (*shakhṣ-hāye mos̱bat*) are not allowed to wear ties and should be named after the Islamic Imams rather than carrying traditional Iranian names. When she arrives at the rule that tells them to avoid the topic of political and economic issues (*mes̱āl-hāye siyāsī va eqteṣādī*), a visibly frustrated Panahi finally interrupts her lecture. Saeedi moans and protests that there were more rules, but when she realizes that her uncle is seriously worked up, she falls quiet and they drive on in silence for a while.

In many ways, this scene is constructed as the centerpiece of the film and was read in this way by the Berlinale curators, too. After the film was announced as the winner of the Golden Bear, it was this scene that was screened at the awards ceremony as an emblem of its worthiness. In the structure of *Taxi*, it also works as a framework for its second half. Like Saeedi, the issue of film censorship stays in the taxi for good and all of the following

[58] Panahi: "Khūb! Tū teh fīlm-e kī sākhteh. Dīgeh cherā… donbāl cheh mī gastī?"
Saeedi: "Deh nadīgeh. Tū yeh shan khūd-e kārgardān mī dūnī qābel-e pakhsh nīst!"
Panahi: "Chī-chī nīst?"
Saeedi: "Qā-bel-e pachsh! Kāgardān-e hamīn-hā mī dūnand. Kārgardānī nemī dūnī! Nemī shakeh!"
Taxi, 2015. Min. 43:00–43:30.

sequences and passengers explicitly reference the guidebook that she recited. Immediately after her uncle has interrupted her lecture, he stops at a gas station and gets out of the car. Saeedi is left alone inside and starts killing time by filming her surroundings. These include a boy who collects garbage on the street and finds a bank note that has fallen out of the pocket of a nearby couple. When he picks the money up and puts it his own pocket, she opens the car window and angrily asks him to hand the money back so her film does not include a political and economic issue in order to remain *qābel-e pachsh*. When her plan does not work out and the couple fails to respond to the boy, Saeedi frustratedly realizes that the world around her is apparently not presentable for her school project.

The following sequence, too, functions to illustrate Panahi's point that the filmmaking regulations are not compatible with his experience of reality. The next passenger, Āresh, a former neighbor of him, tells the filmmaker about a recent robbery into his house, which he learned was committed by a friend of his. He and Panahi debate if it would be justified to report the friend to the police and how decency and moral integrity are on decline in Iranian society. At this moment, Saeedi returns from a coffee shop and enthuses over the nice waiter who gave her a free juice. Before Aresh gets out, he casually informs him that the friend who broke into his house was the very waiter who just attended to his niece.

As they drive on, Panahi takes this occasion to explain his niece how blurred the line between good and evil was in real life. His former neighbor, a highly respectable (*moṯbat*) person and victim of a crime, carried the ancient Iranian name Aresh and wore a Western suit with a tie. His perpetrator, on the other hand, was a known thief, but also a very nice waiter at a coffee shop. Their real-life attributes collide with the regulation of representing good people as respectable role models and bad people as despicable characters, which ultimately is based on the Quranic principle of "commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil" (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-n-nahy ʿani-l-munkar*). The encounter consequently serves as a further example of reality colliding with state-decreed religious ideals. Like Saeedi's short video about the garbage collector, the case of Aresh then argues that the issue of social distortion in Iranian society is not *qābel-e pachsh* according the teacher's guidelines.

Even the film's penultimate scene, featuring human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh (b. 1963), illustrates one of the rules, namely the prohibition of excessive pessimism (*siyāh namāyī*). The defense attorney was prominent for her self-sacrificing support of clients in politically charged trials even before filming, having served three years in *Evīn* prison once and put under an occupational ban. In 2018, Sotoudeh was sentenced again on charges of spreading anti-state propaganda and remains in and out of prison to the point of writing. Her case attracted strong support from Western law agencies and public media and in 2013, a year before filming the taxi scene, she was awarded the Sakharov Prize of the European parliament together with Panahi. It is obvious that their experiences and legal problems parallel in many ways, which is underlined in her appearance in *Taxi*, where she is staged as the Panahi of the Iranian justice system. During her brief ride in the car, Sotoudeh details her latest case and stirs associations with Panahi's devotion to female football spectators in *Offside*. The lawyer reports that she is currently defending a young woman arrested for attending a volleyball match and violating the rules of gender segregation in stadiums. Deriving from this case, she starts a monologue detailing her views about the system of legal repression in the Islamic Republic, from surveillance to pretended propaganda charges to terrible prison conditions. When she is finished, she laughingly points into the camera and says that Panahi better cut her speech out because it would cause him problems.

Sotoudeh's appearance not only serves as a lecture on the Iranian legal system. As her last remark to the camera already indicated, her scene, too, illustrates a point concerning film censorship. When she has left, Saeedi once again gets back to her guidebook and asks: "One more thing, what does excessive pessimism mean?"[59] She elaborates that her teacher has explained that if reality (*vāqeʿyat*) was bleak, they should rather not show it. But Saeedi claims to have problems understanding how one can possibly fade out the parts of reality that are deemed too bleak. Upon this, her uncle laughs and takes their encounter with Sotoudeh as an example: what she had said was the truth, but the reality she had described was rather desolate and thus her speech would surely be deemed pessimist by her teacher. Hence, its filming would

[59] "Āreh dīgeh, siyāh namāyī yaʿnī chī?" Ibid. Min. 75:30.

count as *siyāh namāyī*. Framed in such way, the lawyer's ride in the taxi joins the appearances of Aresh and the garbage collecting boy in becoming another lesson about the absurdity of filmmaking restrictions in Iran.

The problem of the *Taxi*'s second half and its focus on film censorship is not only its tedious didactic approach—aimed at lecturing viewers who are unfamiliar with the issue—but also its representation of the regulations. Since they are introduced via Saeedi's textbook, they appear like a fixed set of rules, which they are not: the very problem of the censorship system in the Islamic Republic is that there are no stable guidelines. In the years following the 1979 revolution, the newly formed Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmī*) had aimed at a legal fixation of rules to judge what should and should not be contained in films in order for them to be screened publicly. These attempts, however, were abandoned when it became clear that the rules had to be reevaluated too frequently.[60] Since the late 1990s, film censorship consequently strongly depends on the larger political climate in the country and often changes within weeks due to factors ranging from a new administration to finer shifts in the political atmosphere.

In addition, even at a given point in time there are no universal parameters of what is permitted and what is not. The degree of scrutiny with which a film is regulated depends on the reputation of the director, on the topic, and on the genre. In this process, not even the rule of thumb that liberal filmmakers and social issues are more restricted than conservative colleagues and state carrying narratives is not always reliable. A young and upcoming director, for example, will have a much harder time getting his debut made in comparison to an internationally renowned filmmaker like Asghar Farhadi, independent from either's political orientation. Similarly, a drama about the Iran-Iraq War will be observed much more carefully by the *Ershād*'s film department than a family comedy film.[61] This volatility, and often even

[60] For a through overview of the evolution of the regulation of the film industry through the Ershād in the decade after the revolution, see for example Naficy, 2012a; Siavoshi, 1997.

[61] A striking example of the blurred lines between conservative and liberal filmmakers is the case of Moḥammad ʿAlī Āhangar. Despite his reputation as a vocal religious and ultraconservative filmmaker, his films about the 1980s war against Iraq, a phenomenon deeply inscripted into the narrative of the emerging Islamic Republic, have faced difficulties to obtain screening permissions because they stand under the suspicion of problematizing the war effort and undercutting the narrative of the "Sacred Defense" (*Defāʿ-ye Moqaddas*). See Ullmann, 2021.

arbitrariness, is precisely what makes the regulations so difficult to navigate for many Iranian filmmakers.

The guidebook that Panahi is presenting in *Taxi* disregards these crucial fine tunings of the censorship system. It is true that some cornerstones are indeed universally demanded and constantly in place since 1979, like the requirement of a hijab for female characters that Saeedi quotes. The more absurd of her teacher's guidelines, however, like the distinctive clothing and naming of heroes and villains, are unwritten rules at best and transgressions against them can be well observed in films that have successfully made it thorough the vetting process of the *Ershād* in the 2010s. Similarly, the rule that asks her to avoid political and economic issues as well as excessive pessimism is notoriously difficult to measure. Understandably, this rule is most important to Panahi—after all, it is the reason for which most of his own films have been banned from Iranian cinema screens. The rule, however, largely depends on the interpretation of the officials at the Cultural Ministry responsible for a particular film and is thus highly flexible. Some issues, like Nasrin Sotoudeh's description of Iran as a nothing but a "larger prison" (*zendān bozorgtarī*) will surely be deemed unacceptable to most officials. Others, like his own example of the garbage collecting boy who decides to keep the money he has found, might be read in different ways. While it is certainly an economic issue, its political criticism works on a level of speaking about child poverty that has been possible in Iranian publics at any time during Panahi's career.

Performing the Victory over Censorship

The focus on film censorship as the most important issue in *Taxi*, however, follows another agenda beside educating audiences on the phenomenon itself. Its main purpose is to underline Panahi's defiance of the rules, which necessarily have to be framed as a fix set of guidelines in order to distinctly mark their transgression. This defiance is deeply inscribed into the film's structure—after all, *Taxi* is the very product of Panahi's effort to disobey his verdict.

As such, like its predecessor *Pardeh*, *Taxi* has to be understood as part of a larger performance on multiple stages. A recurring issue in both films is the metaphor of theft (*dozdgīr*). Melika had already implicated in *Pardeh* that the

thieves had not been able to "steal reality" (*dozdgīr-e vāqʿeyat*).[62] In the framework of *Taxi*, Panahi reconfirms that the theft he is concerned with is nothing less than the theft of reality itself, with the finished product of the film (that claims to have recorded said reality) being the very victory over such attempts. The first passenger in the titular vehicle, a shady businessman, already makes this clear when he recognizes the camera in the car's dashboard and speculates about its purpose:

Businessman:	What's this, mister?
Panahi:	This?
Businessman:	*[points into the camera]* The one you installed in the front.
Panahi:	*[turns camera around until it faces the passenger seat]* This here?
Businessman:	Against theft, mister?
Panahi:	It's also against a kind of theft.[63]

Panahi's confirmation that the cameras are not only for shooting a film, but also a measure against an unnamed "kind of theft" already hints at the issue of censorship, which is established as the main reason for recording with small cameras hidden in a car.

This notion of the camera as a security measure is later invoked again when Aresh shows him footage from his home surveillance camera on his iPad, again highlighting the potential of film recordings to prevent that something is stolen. The issue of theft is discussed in these scenes in very practical and unsymbolic terms: the businessman goes on to complain that a friend of his recently got his tires stolen in broad daylight, lamenting the rising crime rates in Tehran, and Aaresh was robbed of money hidden in his home. The inclusion of the film cameras into the diegesis, however, points beyond these practical issues onto the meta-level and establishes them, too, as a protection against theft. This is later reconfirmed in Hana Saeedi's short film about the garbage

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[62] "Reality can't be stolen." (Vāqʿeyatī keh nemīsheh dozdī.) *Pardeh*, 2013. Min. 64:45.

[63] Businessman: "Āqā-ye chī-eh?"
Panahi: "Ūn?"
Businessman: "Enkīn jelū goẕāshtīd."
Panahi: "Īn?"
Businessman: "Dozdgīr āqā?"
Panahi: "Yeh jūr-e dozdgīr ham ast."
Taxi, 2015. Min. 6:15–6:45.

collecting boy, when the fact that he has stolen the banknote makes her recording unpresentable. His behavior robs her of the possibility to submit her recording of reality to the school film festival.

It is the finale of *Taxi* that ultimately makes clear that it is indeed the film itself that needs protection. After they have let Nasrin Sotoudeh out of the car, Panahi and his niece drive to *Cheshmeh ʿAlī*, an ancient spring in Southern Tehran, where they want to free the goldfish that the two religious women have forgotten in the backseat. When they arrive, they leave the car and hurry for the spring. Their plan once more aims at underlining Panahi's quality as a man of the people: not only does he realize the wish of the superstitious women he had abandoned earlier, he also finishes his film on a note associated with Iranian folkloric culture, as the pilgrimage to *Cheshm-e ʿAlī* and the superstition that he reconciles with goes back to pre-Islamic times.[64] The scene however has a further purpose. When the two have left, the car is empty for the first time in the film, only the camera remains inside, directed out of the front window. As soon as they are out of sight, a motorcycle drives by and stops in front of the vehicle. Its two riders look around, get off and start running towards the taxi. After smashing the windows and breaking into the car, they discover the cameras as the most valuable goods and pull them from their mounts. At this point, the recording suddenly stops, the screen turns black. For a few seconds, some hectic rummaging can be heard until the film is over.

The fact that what the thieves steal is not only the filming equipment but the footage itself shows that there is more to the scene than an anecdote about petty crime in Tehran. At this point, the theft of the film is an obvious metaphor for Panahi's censorship experiences. *Taxi* has spent a lot of time illustrating the system of censorship and with its finale presents itself as its victim. The black clothing and helmets of the thieves as well as their arrival on a motorcycle evokes associations of the paramilitary *Basīj* forces that, among other things, brutally helped dispersing the 2009 protests (Picture 5.12). Their outfit becomes a further clue hinting at their role as brutal agents of a state that tries to undercut Panahi's plan of recording reality. By integrating the film

[64] In fact, excavations date the first settlements around the spring to around 5500 BC, making it a symbol for an ancient heritage that is commonly used by non-Muslim Iranian nationalists to counter the narrative of the Islamic Republic. See Alizadeh, 1990.

Picture 5.12: The final shot of *Taxi* sees two men in black clothing arrive on a motorcycle and break into the car to steal the camera equipment. Nasrin Sotoudeh's rose on the dashboard frames the shot from the bottom.

cameras into *Taxi*'s diegesis, he has made clear that their theft equals censoring the film.

The film, however, very much exists. This had been made clear already in the previous scene. When Nasrin Sotoudeh had discovered the camera that recorded her from the dashboard, she had laughed and put a rose right under it, commenting into the lens: "This here is for the others in the cinema. I put this here for the cinema people, who are very delightful."[65] By speaking into the camera and directly addressing the "cinema people," she makes clear that the footage is very much intended to be screened in front of audiences and not a mere byproduct of a taxi driving filmmaker's overflowing need to record. While this should be clear in any case, the scene explicitly acknowledges *Taxi*'s existence in front of an audience. As the rose remains on the dashboard, it is still in the frame of the last scene, together with the motorcycle censors stopping the film. Read as a symbol for the film's existence on a cinema screen, its co-presence with the thieves stands for Panahi's victory over censorship and again proves the sentiment Melika has stated in *Pardeh*: that it is not possible to steal reality, or at least the perspective on reality Panahi that is recording.

[65] "Īnam barāye achareh-ye sīnemaī. Īnam goẕeshtam īnjā barāye ahl-e sīnemā keh kheylī bāmazeh." *Taxi*, 2015. Min. 72:30.

Apart from showcasing the convicted filmmaker's defiance and performing the film's bypassing of state regulation, there is not much more to the many hints at the meta-level that *Taxi* contains. Throughout the 80-minute runtime, most of the passengers interact with the cameras and the filmmaking process in some way or the other: the businessman questions if Panahi is an actual taxi driver and wonders about the filming equipment, Nasrin Sotoudeh winks at the camera and wittily says that she knows what is going on in the car, and Hana Saeedi's camera often takes over the screen itself. Most of all, Film-Omid, the DVD-dealer, constantly makes tongue-in-cheek comments about the filming. From the moment he gets into the car, he acts nervously and soon points into the camera, commenting wittily: "Do you make another film, Mr. Panahi?"[66] When Panahi remains silent on the issue, Film-Omid goes on to ask if the other passengers' lines were scripted and remarks that he recognized parts of their dialogue from his earlier films.

This constant shifting into the realm of the pro-filmic should have serious implications for the film's narrative structure. However, it does not lead to challenging about the nature of its diegetic reality, which has a strong tradition in Iranian docufiction films, beginning with Kāmrān Shīrdel's pioneering *Ūn Shab Keh Bārūn Ūmad* (The Night it Rained, 1967). Reality, after all, seems to be a rather straightforward and recordable concept for Panahi. Instead, these moments merely point to the simple fact of *Taxi*'s unusual filming method of shooting in a car with hidden cameras. This, in turn, is presented as a security measure, not only against the abstract idea of people trying to steal reality, but against the very practical concern of state authorities detecting the shooting and confiscating the footage. As such, the passengers' hints into the camera ultimately only foster Panahi's status as a rogue director who subverts a highly regulated film industry.

Consequently, despite its seemingly complex self-reflection, *Taxi* is not much more than what it is at first sight: Panahi filming himself and his guests while taking a ride through Tehran and debating the state of Iranian society. The idea of using a taxi as a looking glass into a city or society is not particularly new. As a cinematic symbol, taxis for decades have had the function of a space in which the whole society hops on and off to interact with the driver, who in turn observes his passengers closely. They can be found in

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[66] "Fīlm dārī dīgar, āqā-ye Panahi?" Ibid. Min. 10:30.

all kinds of genres and locales: most famously in the classic portrait of New York's gritty underbelly in *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), but also in the french comedy film series *Taxi* (Gérard Pirès, 1998) or in the episodic arthouse classic *Night on Earth* (Jim Jarmusch, 1991), where it acts as a device to connect five cities on two continents. It has become such a well-functioning trope that it even works in science fiction films like *The Fifth Element* (1997), where director Luc Besson uses a flying taxi to introduce viewers to his vision of 23rd century New York.

Even in the particular local context of Tehran, the idea is not new. The commonality of the taxi trope in Iranian cinema is best exemplified by a rumor that circulated in the city after the success of Panahi's film at the Berlinale: a driver in Southern Iran had allegedly also shot a film inside his taxi in 2014, but when he heard about Panahi's project, he frustratedly decided to not release it because he would have appeared like a copycat. With *Dah* (Ten, 2002), Panahi's late mentor Abbas Kiarostami had also directed a film set in a taxi, portraying its driver and the ten passengers she collects on her ride through Tehran. While Panahi clearly salutes his teacher with *Taxi*, the film never reaches the level of cleverly blurring the lines between documentary and fiction that Kiarostami had mastered, most prominently in his seminal *Nemā-ye Nazdīk* (*Close-Up*, 1990). *Taxi* is tellingly Panahi's first film title without any metaphorical meaning whatsoever and the titular vehicle indeed stands for nothing more than the physical object. Similarly, the many hints at the meta-level only serve to underline Panahi's defiance—a revealing attempt to distribute his brand of a rogue filmmaker who serves the higher cause of recording his reality to save it from state censorship.

Last Stop: Berlin

At the 65th Berlinale, *Taxi* found fertile soil to evolve into an even wider performance. As it had happened two years before, audiences bore witness to Panahi emerging onscreen and honoring the festival with his presence. In contrast to its heady and claustrophobic predecessor, however, the uplifting comedy served as a happy end to the persecuted filmmaker's story. While *Pardeh* had dwelled in its own limitations and Panahi's depression, *Taxi* celebrated the lighthearted filmmaker back at the driving wheel, visibly enjoying the control over his filmmaking that had scrambled for in his haunted Caspian Sea villa

two years before. The film not only worked in this way through its tongue-in-cheek humor and comparatively bright and easygoing atmosphere. Because it had made the process of film censorship—and the threat to its own existence—its central issue, *Taxi* became both vehicle and demonstration of Panahi bypassing his verdict. What spectators witnessed was thus not only the absent filmmaker entering the festival stage through a detour but also proof of his successful fight against the state authorities that had put him under the occupational ban. Its screening consequently functioned as another performance, namely that of Panahi's victory over censorship.

Physically, of course, the filmmaker remained as absent as he had been in previous years. This fact was again highlighted on multiple occasions at the stages of the Berlinale, from the comments at the opening ceremony, where Monika Grütters had thanked Kosslick for continuously inviting Panahi against all odds, to the film's premiere at the *Berlinale Palast*. On the red carpet, supporters of the filmmaker again demonstrated with posters saying „Thank you Jafar Panahi! Thank you Berlinale!" and "From Tehran to Berlin: Take a Taxi." The latter slogan played with the question of how the film had found its way to the festival. In an interview on the red carpet, Kosslick dwelled in this alleged mystery on a similar note, stating to reporters of the German news agency *Reuters* that "by accident we got this film here - maybe with a taxi?"[67] His evasive humorous answer only added to the question, which in itself was not too mysterious altogether. After all, it should not have been too difficult for one of Panahi's many supporters to take a flash drive with the film and get it from Tehran to Berlin.

That Iranian authorities did not approve of the screening should have been obvious. Ḥojjatollāh Ayyūbī, the head of the cultural ministry's film department, had protested the selection of *Taxi* into the Berlinale competition already ahead of the premiere. In an open letter addressed to Kosslick, he warned the festival not to fall for a "taxi full of new misunderstandings about the Iranian people" (*tāksī-ye sūʾ-e tafāhomhā-ye tāzeh-ye ʿalayhe mardom-e Īrān*) and lamented the "terrible voice of politics" (*ṣedā-ye mahīb-e pā-ye siyāsat*) that the film was invested in.[68] His open letter to Kosslick, however, had no further consequences—the Islamic Republic is not as tightly sealed off as its

[67] Roddy, 2015.

[68] Ayyūbī, 2015.

government officials (and the festival narrative) might wish. The film found its way out of the country after all and even if Panahi did not submit it thorough the usual channels of application, *Taxi* surely did not fall into the Kosslick's hands "by accident," as his anecdote claimed. This narrative rather reveals that the issue of the film's physical presence in Berlin had become an equally important part of its staging at the festival as the whereabouts of Panahi. For the Berlinale, it was preferable to mystify its journey out of the allegedly hermetic Islamic Republic to Europe instead of discretely let the fact of its presence in Berlin stand for itself.

On a similar note, the festival made no apparent effort to involve Panahi himself into the events surrounding the premiere of *Taxi*. The filmmaker was never connected in a livestream or sent a video message, neither to the premiere nor to the awards ceremony at which he won the Golden Bear, although it, again, would have been very much possible. Unlike two years before, the festival did not even hold a press conference, making *Taxi* the only competition film in Kosslick's whole 18-year tenure at the Berlinale without one. This omission of an opportunity for journalists to inquire about the film only amplified its power to speak for itself. After all, nothing more was needed to perform the central message of its screening at the Berlinale: that the filmmaker was alive and kicking, and had once again successfully completed the stunt of fooling the state authorities.

Despite all this focus on Panahi's presence on screen and absence on stage, however, he still needed some kind of surrogate to stand in for him at the Berlinale. Instead of to the inconspicuous co-director Partovi, who had substituted for him two years before, it was his niece, the second protagonist of *Taxi*, who travelled to Berlin, accompanied by the filmmaker's wife Ṭāhereh Panahi. Hana Saeedi turned out to be the most fitting surrogate the festival could have wished for. Just like in the film, the ten-year-old girl represented the repressed and powerless in Iranian society who self-confidently act in courageous defiance. In Berlin, Kosslick nevertheless treated her with the same belittlement as her uncle in the taxi. Like the grown-ups, she received a poster with her portrait on the walls of the *Berlinale Palast* ahead of the premiere, but was too small to sign it herself. Luckily, Kosslick was by her side to lift her up so she could reach it and ritually put her signature onto the wall (Picture 5.13).

Picture 5.13: Dieter Kosslick holds up Hana Saeedi for the ritual signature of her portrait at the *Berlinale Palast* ahead of her uncle's film premiere on February 6th 2015.

In many ways, Saeedi turned out to be an extremely fitting surrogate for her uncle. For one thing, she allowed Kosslick, who had in the past acted rather awkwardly and reserved in the presence of Iranian women, to take in his usual role of Mr. Berlinale, the friendly host who takes film stars by their hand. As a ten-year-old, she could walk the red carpet in a dress that showed her shoulders and Kosslick could hug her, hold her hand, and lift her up without caring about "getting in trouble with the mullahs," a concern that had restrained him earlier when hosting Iranian actresses on the red carpet (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, the gesture of the festival director holding her up to sign her own poster stands as a strong symbol for the image of the powerless Iranian filmmaker in need of elevation to the ranks of the Berlinale, an image Kosslick had nurtured over the

Picture 5.14: Guests traditionally receive gifts from Dieter Kosslick. Mostly, these are flowers, but for particular stars, they are tailored to the individual, like a guitar strap for Keith Richards or an extra large jacket for Gerard Depardieu. Ten-year-old Hana Saeedi received a Berlinale teddy bear.

previous decade. Fittingly, instead of flowers, she received a teddy bear from the Berlinale merchandise collection during her first meeting with Kosslick at the day of the premiere, an image that was widely shared in the festival's marketing material of the film (Picture 5.14).

The staging of Saeedi as the brave little girl peaked at the closing ceremony on February 14th where she had to accept the Golden Bear on her uncle's behalf. When all secondary awards had been handed out, jury president Darren Aronofsky (b. 1969) entered the stage with the Golden Bear trophy and announced *Taxi* as its recipient. Accompanied by loud cheers and ongoing applause from the audience, Dieter Kosslick and moderator Anke Engelke joined the U.S.-American director at the center of the stage and started an apparently improvised speech:

> Engelke: As you know—or do you want to say this, Dieter? *[he makes an inviting gesture]* Well, you're the boss.
>
> Kosslick: No, you say it. Just say it.
>
> Engelke: The chair was already on the stage a few years ago and we waited and hoped that he could come when he was member of the jury, Jafar Panahi. But the occupational ban is still in place. House arrest, too. But we are glad that family is here. That one of his actresses is here, who you have just seen in the film, his little niece Hanna Saeedi, and his wife is here. Welcome Tehereh (sic) Panahi![69]

The interaction between the two shows how exceptional the awarding of an absent person was, with no fixed protocol in place, especially if it was the highest award. Engelke seemed to be uncomfortable with her role of the explainer and completely clueless of how to deal with the situation, showing the lack of consultation and planning ahead of the ceremony. She also apparently misremembered the key parameters of Panahi's situation, wrongly stating that the filmmaker was "still" under house arrest, which he had never been. What happened here clearly was not organized by a grander festival

[69] Engelke: "Wie Sie wissen - oder möchtest du das sagen, Dieter? *[he makes an inviting gesture]* Na, du bist der Chef."
Kosslick: "Nee, sag du's. Sag du einfach."
Engelke: "Der Stuhl war ja vor ein paar Jahren schon auf der Bühne und wir warteten und hofften, dass er kommen könne, als er Mitglied der Jury war, Jafar Panahi. Aber das Berufsverbot gilt nach wie vor. Hausarrest ebenfalls. Aber wir sind froh, dass Familie da ist. Dass eine seiner Darstellerinnen da ist, die Sie eben im Film gesehen haben, seine kleine Nichte, Hanna Saeedi, und seine Ehefrau ist hier. Willkommen Tehereh (sic) Panahi!"
Closing ceremony of the 65th Berlinale, 2015. Min: 58:00–58:30.

machinery but emerged more or less spontaneously, acted out by the involved actresses and actors themselves. Yet, it was still part of the larger stage performance—as Erika Fischer-Lichte reminds us, it can be the very spontaneity of a performance through which significance emerges.[70]

Although Engelke had invited Tahereh Panahi, the filmmaker's wife, onstage, Kosslick had a different idea. In an unusual move, the director ran off the stage towards the audience with the Golden Bear, handing the statue to Hana Saeedi who took it, nodding politely (Picture 5.15). This, apparently was not enough exposure for Kosslick, who swiftly took the girl's hand and brought her, instead of her aunt, back to the stage with him. (Picture 5.16) Having arrived there, he left her at the center of the stage and retreated to the side. For a moment, Saeedi stood alone with jury president Aronofsky and held the bear statue in her stretched arm with a proud smile. Accompanied by raving

Pictures 5.15-18: Instead of Tahereh Panahi (2nd r.), Kosslick hands the Golden Bear to Hana Saeedi, takes her by the hand to drag her onto the stage of the *Berlinale Palast.* A smiling Saeedi holds up the the Golden Bear that was just handed to her by jury president Aronofsky (r.) to raving applause and standing ovations. When she is asked to hold a speech, however, she breaks down in tears while moderator Anke Engelke stretches out her arm to comfort her.

[70] Fischer-Lichte differentiates between the materiality of a performance, in which spontaneously emerging phenomena are desemantisized and robbed of all meaning, and the associations of the audience, which affectively assigns meaning to them and turns them into significants. Through this interplay, spontaneity can very well lead to an "emergence of significance" (*Emergenz von Bedeutung*). Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 243–55.

applause and standing ovations in the audience, her posture produced an image that would later stand emblematic for the whole festival edition (Picture 5.17).

When the brief moment had passed, however, it became clear that none of the people onstage had a particular idea on how to resolve the situation. Aronofsky, who stood closest to Saeedi, attempted to fill the void by bending down and inviting her to say something. When he had brought Saeedi to the lectern, the situation and the immense pressure involved in the moment of standing in front of nearly 2,000 people in a foreign country, in a situation with incalculable consequences for her family and herself, seemed to finally sink in. She took a deep breath, but all she could bring out was the statement that she did not know what to say: "I don't know anything to say, I'm simply out of my mind."[71] Upon this, she burst into tears and hid her face (Picture 5.18). Engelke swiftly came to her side, petting her back and asking Kosslick to get the other film teams onstage for a group photo. Kosslick, apparently unable himself to cope with the situation he had created, gratefully took up the idea and invited the remaining award winners to come to him and gather for the group photo that traditionally caps off the awards ceremony. While waiting for the people to arrive, he took the still crying Saeedi by her hand and brought her to the jury members who stood at the side of the stage. Here, the group of randomly collected European and American film stars continued to comfort her in a bizarre scene that saw French actress Audrey Tautou hugging her, German actor Daniel Brühl and American screenwriter Matthew Weiner patting her back, with jury president Darren Aronofsky standing aside, clapping his hands and saying: "Bravo! Bravo!"[72]

The chaotic display clearly did not go according to plan, if there ever had been a plan for Panahi winning the Golden Bear in absence. While the jury traditionally decides on the award winners in secret meetings, Kosslick and the organizers of the closing ceremony are normally informed ahead of the event. What exactly they had planned for the night is open to speculation. It is only evident that Aronofsky, Engelke, and Kosslick, the three people in charge of the moment, had not convened in advance. Yet, in the way that it happened —orchestrated or chaotically developed between uncoordinated actors—

[71] "Nemī dūnam chīzī begam, faqat ḥāżer-o-ẕehn dūnam." Closing ceremony of the 65th Berlinale, 2015. Min. 59:30.

[72] Ibid. Min. 59:45–60:15.

significance emerged. In her call for an aesthetics of the performative, Erika Fischer-Lichte warns that there can hardly ever be a hermeneutic of a performance, even in traditionally directed theater plays. An audience can only experience it rather than understand it in a way prescribed by its actors. The best a spectator can hope for is understanding a thing about themselves in the "oscillation between symbol and association."[73] As such, what happened on the stage of the Berlinale Palast when *Taxi* was awarded the Golden Bear in 2015 seemingly defies any attempt to read and understand it. Fischer-Lichte also remarks, however, that this goes for the realm of the affective, which is set in a limited semantic system, whereas in performances that move in "fictional worlds or other symbolic orders" very well offer hypotheses that can ease audiences into understanding and give meaning to an event.[74]

The 2015 awards ceremony, I argue, was precisely such an event embedded in a particular symbolic order. This order had been established during the larger stage play of Panahi's relation to the Berlinale and the era of his career that followed his verdict. By 2015, audiences—from the invited guests at the *Berlinale Palast* to people following the festival coverage—were well-trained in associating the filmmaker and Iranian cinema in general with repression and rebellion. The hermeneutic oscillation between the symbol of the crying ten-year-old girl with the bear statue and the associations that it recalls happened in a rather tight order of representation and can consequently indeed be understood, namely in the context of the role Iranian cinema had played in previous years. The dragging of a ten-year-old into the spotlight combined with the belittlement that characterized the way in which Kosslick treated Saeedi at the awards ceremony and earlier follows the template of the festival's broader staging of Iranian films. Like the overwhelmed child, most films from the Islamic Republic had met a particular kind of pitiful respect that focussed less on their content than on their context, which was allegedly plagued by constant censorship and other forms of repression. In this narrative, the Berlinale could easily embody the role of the savior that takes the suffering filmmakers by their hands and brings them into the supposedly safe space of the festival stage. Like a helpless child, Iranian cinema had to be led by the strong hands of the grown

[73] "Oszillieren zwischen Symbol und Assoziation" Fischer-Lichte, 2017. pp. 271–75.

[74] Ibid. p. 273.

up festival, looking back at decades of experience with political gestures and showcasing national cinemas.

It was certainly no coincidence that children had proven such a powerful ingredient to the success of Iranian films on the global stage in 1980s and 90s. Their disarming innocence and helplessness made them perfect objects for the liberalizing phantasies of European audiences. After their fifteen minutes of fame have passed, however, the festival is unable to do much more than petting their backs, say a few uplifting words and send them back into a film industry and society that remains largely untouched by the circus abroad. Apart from the handful of filmmakers that enduringly profit from the attention, the festival's gestures largely dissolve into symbolic politics that resonate with colonial narratives of civilizing societies that are lagging behind a few centuries in a supposedly progressive and teleologic historical development.

As one of the handful of filmmakers profiting from the attention, Panahi apparently was fine with the role that he and his niece took on the festival stage. After all, the exposure his films received in Berlin strongly boosted their cinematic distribution elsewhere: Following its successful run at the Berlinale, the film was released in most European countries under the title *Taxi Tehran*, underlining Panahi's alleged function as a tourist guide through his hometown, and grossed more than $3.3 million—an astonishing amount of money for a film with a virtually non-existent budget that was not even released in its country of origin. By comparison, *Offside*, Panahi's most successful box office outing up to this point, had earned $561,000 worldwide, which is still a result most Iranian directors can only dream of. Given this involvement in the festival circuit and global film market, it seems all the more questionable to categorize *Pardeh* and *Taxi* as spearheads of the phenomenon of Non- or Post-Cinema.

The meta-narrative of the two films also turns out to be quite traditional rather than revolutionary storytelling. Coming from the cinematic house arrest that Panahi had staged in *Īn Fīlm Nīst*, and following his spectacular absence at the 2011 Berlinale, he emerged from behind the curtains of his Caspian Sea villa onto the screens of the *Berlinale Palast* with *Pardeh*. While the performed therapy session that audiences had witnessed in 2013 had stirred all sorts of concerns about the filmmaker's mental wellbeing, these were completely dispelled two years later. When *Taxi* premiered in 2015, it showed an uplifted

and laughing Panahi who defiantly bypasses his verdict. That he again did not travel to the festival in person was not really important anymore: the story of his victory over censorship, performed live on the stages of the Berlinale, was enough to grant him a further victory, namely in the festival competition. The jury statement that Aronofsky had read out before he announced the winner of the Golden Bear explicitly draws from this narrative of the hero's unbroken spirit defeating the own limitations:

> Limitations often inspire storytellers to make better work. But sometimes, those limitations can be so suffocating they destroy a project and often damage the soul of the artist. Instead of allowing his spirit to be crushed and give up, instead of allowing himself to be filled with anger and frustration, Jafar Panahi created a love letter to cinema.[75]

The image of Hana Saeedi proudly holding up the Golden Bear into the cameras thus produced the final cathartic moment in the larger stage performance. Even if the story was told with unusual means that worked with a repertoire beyond the filmic, it still conveyed the well-known heroic narrative that served as an extremely effective emotional anchor point for audiences, the jury members, and the ensuing media coverage. When the awards ceremony of 2015 was over, all that was left to do for journalists at the ensuing press conference was to photograph the empty panel. After her onstage breakdown an hour earlier, neither Saeedi nor her aunt took part in the press event. Instead, the organizers simply put the Golden Bear onto the conference stage. The trophy, showing the Berlin bear standing up on its back paws, worked as the final substitute for the absent laureate, who had also stood up spectacularly to his oppressors. Dozens of photographers gathered in front of the statue and scrambled to take pictures of it, trying to capture the absence of Panahi one last time—a futile task, as it turned out. He had already found his happy end and his story at the Berlinale was told out.

[75] Closing ceremony of the 65th Berlinale, 2015. Min. 55:30–56:15.

Concluding Thoughts on the Work of Festival Representation

In many ways, Panahi is emblematic of the wider phenomenon of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale. The core of the story as it was told at the festival is marked by repression, censorship, and resistance. Its dramatic arc, from depressed desperation to defiant triumph, was not only told but performed live in front of the festival audiences. By extending the narrative to a number of additional stages, the Berlinale presented itself in the posture of the savior without whom the protagonist's resistance would allegedly have remained invisible and who offered the framework for his triumph. My initial irritations with the imbalanced relation between Kosslick and the ten-year-old Hana Saeedi as well as with the belatedness of the Berlinale's "discovery" of Iran have led me to consider the larger context of the staging of Iranian cinema in Berlin. Stuart Hall has proposed the phrase of "the work of representation," which dynamically impacts what he conceptualized as the "circuit of culture."[1] For my examination of this larger context, a proper analysis of the work of festival representation, to borrow Hall's phrase, was indispensable. This included both the variety of stages that I have identified at the Berlinale as well as the particularity of Berlin's inherent logic, which heavily impacted these stages. In the following, I will briefly outline the findings of my analyses before considering their wider implications.

A Variety of Stages

My examination identified a number of different festival stages, many of them symbolic, like the larger stage of *Potsdamer Platz* located in the *Neue Mitte* of a reunified Berlin, the red carpets onto which filmmakers march before presenting their latest efforts, and the media coverage crucial to the festival discourse. Others are the actual physical stages on which the opening and closing ceremonies at the *Berlinale Palast* or the press conferences at the Grand Hyatt hotel are held. The performances on these stages turned out to be far more important for the festival representation than the films themselves and the dynamic of their curation. While a certain preference of the curation committee for politically subversive cinema from Iran can surely be made out, there have been plenty of examples of films whose role at the Berlinale was far

[1] Hall, 1997.

more impacted by their festival representation and their stageability than by their actual artistic content. Often enough, it was ultimately the paradigms and topics through which they were read that defined their appearance in Berlin. In this regard, each kind of stage worked with its own mechanisms of representation, many of which evolved in the years after 2006, as Chapter Three has shown.

The red carpets, mostly reserved for competition films premiering at the *Berlinale Palast*,[2] usually serve to showcase the film stars to photographers and fans, but since there are practically no Iranian filmmakers known to the German public, this aspect was largely irrelevant in this case. The red carpet's second function, however—namely to highlight Kosslick's role as Mr. Berlinale, the friendly host and receptionist at ease with the international film world—was very much relevant at the premieres of Iranian films and was often aimed at showcasing the solidarity and the close relations of the Berlinale with the Iranian film scene. In the case of Jafar Panahi, this solidarity was not expressed in the usual warm hugs and holding hands, but in actual political protests against his conviction. Such a disruption, and ultimately dramatic enhancement, of the usual procession of film stars took place three times during Kosslick's tenure: in 2011, 2013, and 2015.

Iranian filmmakers stood out on the red carpet in a further regard, namely in the way that Iranian actresses were presented and received. That women's clothing and hairstyles on red carpets receive massively different observation and coverage than that of their male counterparts' is neither new nor particular to film festivals. At the *Academy Awards*, the biggest ceremonial event of the film world, most of the hour-long pre-coverage from the red carpet is dedicated to this imbalanced coverage. Women walking up to the Dolby Theater in Los Angeles still face constant variations of the question "Who are you wearing?" from reporters who want to know who designed their dresses. In the case of Iranian actresses, however, a whole new array of standards was applied. The presence or absence of a veil (hijab) was read as either fearful compliance with the government at home or as an act of resistance against it.

[2] Apart from the competition section at *Berlinale Palast*, red carpet events only take place in the *Berlinale Special* or *Berlinale Gala* premieres at *Friedrichstadtpalast*. Since these two sections are traditionally reserved for large blockbusters that have already been shown elsewhere, this has never affected Iranian films. At times, particular *Panorama* films get red carpet screenings at the *Kino International*, too, but these events receive not nearly the same amount of publicity.

Usually, comments were made in a subtle and anxiously neutral manner, for example by expressing marveling amazement at an actress' successful "balancing act between the Iranian dress code and a glamorous entrance."[3] At times, however, Kosslick's more colloquial remarks about fearing "trouble with the mullahs" can be heard in the recordings.[4] Albeit in an often uneasy and subtle fashion, the red carpets became an arena of gender stereotypes concerning Iran, one of the crucial paradigms of reading Iranian films.

At the festival's opening and closing ceremonies, Iranian cinema acted as a frequent disruptor who refined the otherwise highly ritualized protocol, as described in detail in Chapters Four and Five. In their annual speeches, both the acting Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Berlin mayor singled out particular Iranian films as representing human rights issues in the country, frequently accompanied by calls for their director's liberation and praise for the Berlinale's posture. This happened most prominently in 2011, when the traditional presentation of the international jury at the opening ceremony was largely arranged around the empty chair put up for their absent member Panahi and his open letter was read out in its entirety by jury president Isabella Rossellini. That year, the symbolic politics around Iranian cinema even spilled over into the closing ceremony, when Asghar Farhadi's *Jodaaii-ye Naader az Siimiin* (A Separation) completely dominated the awards schedule and made the festival's 2011 focus on Iran complete. In 2015, the closing ceremony was also the forum in which the staging of Panahi's niece, Hana Saeedi, as a child representative of the fate of the supposedly helpless Iranian filmmakers, unfolded in a most spectacular way. Far more than the films they actually presented, it was their theatrical framing in the *Berlinale Palast* that defined the reception of Jafar Panahi and Asghar Farhadi at the festival.

Other important stages at the Berlinale were the press conferences held regularly after the press screenings of each competition entry and most *Panorama* films. Ever since Iranian films started being programmed in 2006, these events served as platforms for extensive interrogations about the state of human rights in Iranian society and the role of censorship in the film industry. Chapter Three showed how these issues emerged as the central paradigms

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[3] Simbeni and Sannwald, 2018. p. 40.

[4] *Red carpet for Shekārchī*, 2010. Min. 0:15.

through which Iranian films were read at press conferences, irrespective of the actual content of the films or the filmmakers' willingness to participate in this inquisitory ritual. In 2018, Mani Haghighi (b. 1969), a director who had presented four films in Berlin and often pointedly defied and renegotiated the role typically reserved for Iranian filmmakers, asked journalists with an amused and patient annoyance after the umpteenth question about the political message of his comedy *Khūk* (Pig): "Why do you think Iranian films are supposed to be some kind of a tour guide of Iran for you?"[5] When I interviewed him later, Haghighi elaborated on this and singled out press conferences as the most annoying part of presenting a film at a festival, conveying his feeling that journalists were far more interested in his national identity than his work as a filmmaker:

> It's as if it could be *anybody* sitting there, it doesn't even matter. As long as you're Iranian and you can speak the language, you can answer these questions. I doesn't even matter who you are and what you've done specifically in your work. And what's worse is that your work becomes completely overshadowed by the city you live in, or the country you live in. So, I mean I understand that, I know I come from a very strange... place in the world and people have questions about it. You know, but it's as if I'm a visitor from Pluto or something. [*laughing*] I mean, is there air? Is there a lake? Is there water?

Although Haghighi was the most outspoken Iranian director regarding this issue, other filmmakers have shared his frustration about their treatment at press conferences. There were regular instances of Iranian film teams desperately trying to move the discussion away from censorship practices that often did not even affect their film in the first place. For nearly every Iranian film screened at the festival, press conferences can thus be identified as the stage on which the paradigm of censorship and the filmmakers' role as representatives for Iranian society at large was performed. Naturally, these narratives later trickled down into the media coverage (which is largely based on these events) in a clear case of a representation that is framed by journalists almost irrespective of the particular circumstances and personalities of the Iranian filmmakers in question.

The spectrum of festival stages also included the cinema screens, which would normally be assumed to be the central platform of a film festival, especially in 2013 and 2015 around the case of Jafar Panahi. Chapter Five analyzed how Jafar Panahi's films themselves were integrated into this process

[5] *Press conference of Khūk*, 2018. Min. 30:30.

of staging, when *Pardeh* and *Taxi* continued his story onscreen. Following Erika Fischer-Lichte's conceptualization of the performative, both films can be read as live performances rather than film screenings insofar as their presentation itself is testament to their subject, namely Panahi's defiance against his ban on filmmaking. Since Panahi also appeared in these films as an actor, they further offered the onscreen presence of a director whose continuous physical absence had been advertised prominently in advance. Through performative means, the spirit of Panahi was channeled via the cinema screen, which multiplied the impact of his story. First, *Pardeh* showed Panahi overcoming a depression induced by imposed artistic inactivity and can be regarded as a live therapy session. Two years later, *Taxi* marked his defiant triumph that later spilled over into the awards show, where he was awarded with the Golden Bear. Taken together with the performance of the empty chair in 2011, Panahi's story was acted out as a stage play over the course of four years, co-produced by him and the Berlinale, with a dramatic arc complete from crisis to an assumed happy end.

Disrupting the Protocol, Fueling the Festival Machine

It is important to note that neither the different stages outlined above nor the performative quality of festival representation are particular to the case of Iranian cinema. Kosslick's Berlinale had a long history of turning the festival into a sensational performance with glamorous red carpets, large ceremonies, and even event-like film screenings. From the eight-hour-long competition film *Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis* (A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery, Lav Diaz, 2016) advertised as a challenge for even the hardest-boiled cinephiles, to the premiere of the filmed Rolling Stones concert *Shine a Light* (Martin Scorsese, 2008) in the presence of the world famous band, to the open air screening of *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) on the world's largest cinema screen covering the *Brandenburger Tor* in 2010, Kosslick was continuously dedicated to film screenings in spectacular settings. A reason for this proclivity can perhaps be found in his personality—even in his early days as the manager of a low budget film fund in 1980s Hamburg, he initiated floating screens on the *Alster* to boost his company's popularity. Kosslick still acts as an outspoken advocator for the cinematic experience today, most recently in his autobiography, of which he dedicated a

good third to this issue in a chapter titled "Thursdays for Future."[6] This advocacy is also rooted in the ongoing battle of cinema as an institution against the rapid victory march of video streaming platforms. The Covid-19 pandemic might have opened the last round of this power struggle, but its origins can be traced back into the mid-2000s—fears regarding the future of cinema and proclamations of its impending demise have dominated the better part of Kosslick's tenure at the Berlinale.

On whatever level they are to be understood, performances defined Kosslick's Berlinale far more than the curated films themselves, making the festival an urban event par excellence. As my analysis has shown, Iranian cinema was no exception in this. The peculiarity about the role of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale was rather that it frequently acted as a disruption, at least on the surface. A common element in most of their appearances was that Iranian films stood out in the context of the highly ritualized protocols of the festival machine: self-organized political demonstrations on the red carpet rather than the usual march of photographs, interviews and autographs; actresses in dresses that had to negotiate standards above and beyond style and good looks; an empty chair acting as a symbolic jury member; absent laureates at awards shows; and press conferences organized around a recurrent set of questions more concerned with the country of origin than with the particular film. All of these instances were entertaining disruptions to an otherwise clearly marked and rather monotonous set of festival rituals.

Iranian cinema consequently stood out from the usual performances at the Berlinale. Again, this was not due to a limitation in curatorship: the festival did curate a very broad spectrum of films, from small productions by young independent filmmakers to the latest offerings of veteran director Majid Majidi, from films never screened in the Islamic Republic to Asghar Farhadi's domestically blockbusting crowdpleasers, and from the politically subversive products of activist filmmakers to the opulent and technically sophisticated epics by Mani Haghighi. Despite this wide aesthetic and thematic scope, however, the films seemed to be largely defined by the simple fact that they were Iranian. This standing-out speaks to a certain level of problematic exotization at the Berlinale. It is very much in line with the pattern of national

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[6] A wordplay with the weekday that is reserved for releases in German cinemas (Thursday) and the *Fridays for Future* movement that calls for school strikes to demand measures against human-induced climate change. Kosslick, 2021. pp. 211–88.

competition as had already been practiced at the 19th century world exhibitions, from where it was conferred to film festivals and other events, as I have argued in Chapter One. At the world exhibitions, amidst an organization along the lines of national states, an extra platform was designated to the non-Western other, too, back then in the shape of the Colonial Exhibitions.

Although it can be argued that Iran was technically subject to the same rules as any other country in terms of submission, curation, screening, and awarding, the performances of Iranian films at the festival speak to a language of exotization. When Kosslick suggested the Berlinale as a "legitimate, living successor" of the 19th century *Völkerkundemuseum* (Ethnographic Museum) and compared it to a colonial goods store in a 2017 interview,[7] he might have been thinking more of his own fond childhood memories of the colonial goods stores in his Swabian home than of the violent and destructive heritage of Colonial Exhibitions. Yet his remarks also reveal the continuity of their traditions of display, which are alive in the same mechanisms that made the staging of Iranian cinema stand out in the usual festival context. It is helpful to remember that these exhibitions were not only a demonstration of power towards the colonies, but primarily a measure of nation branding. The case of the *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung* of 1896 demonstrates that its Colonial Exhibition very much served to elevate the Reich's capital to the ranks of a *Weltstadt* by showcasing the rich loot of its colonial expeditions—not entirely dissimilar to a festival director's pride in having secured a number of allegedly exciting films from all over the world. In this regard, the Berlinale's ambition to remain a globally relevant A-festival in fierce competition with Cannes and Venice also influenced its showcasing of Iranian films and filmmakers—under the label of the political—as exotic subjects through whom audiences in Berlin could allegedly learn more about the Islamic Republic.

It is in this context, too, that the category of the "political," which emerged as the central paradigm through which Iranian cinema was presented in Berlin, should to be understood. The curation of subversive Iranian films was often framed as a "political decision" and the awards they received portrayed as "political signals" to the Islamic Republic, through which the Berlinale fostered its (self-)branding as a "political festival." What exactly the term was meant to encompass at the festival usually remained rather elusive

[7] Busche and Peitz, 2017.

and inconsistent. In following a conceptualization of the political as defined by antagonism and dissent (as post-Marxist political philosopher Chantal Mouffe has proposed),[8] the Berlinale's representation of Iranian cinema surely did not meet the criteria for the "political," as it was very much uncontroversial in the context of the larger German image of Iran. It rather confirmed the well established associations of violent repression and a general lack of freedom on one hand and solidary companionship on the other. Apparently, the festival's posture towards Iran was "political" only in terms of Kosslick's superficial and sensationalist understanding of the political as a dimension that needed to be added to the cocktail of glamour and entertainment to keep the festival relevant. As such, the association of Iranian cinema with the political seems well in line with catchphrases like "Sex, Politics, and Rock'n'Roll," the official motto of the 2005 Berlinale.

Yet although the political might have often been a mere stage requisite (albeit a crucial one) in the festival performance of Iranian cinema, its implementation certainly followed a particular liberal script. As Chapters Three and Four have demonstrated, the political was evoked through questions of freedom of speech, censorship of the arts, gender relations, and state violence. In the current political climate of the Islamic Republic, these issues are indeed pressing, but since they have completely overshadowed many other potential aspects of Iranian cinema, it can be argued that the films were deliberately understood solely in terms of what cultural anthropologist Talal Asad has identified as the "language of human rights."[9] In his 2003 book *Formations of the Secular*, Asad argued that this focus on freedom and human rights is not a universal given or a matter of common sense, but rather follows the particular doctrine of secularism. Concerning the question of gender relations in Muslim societies, American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod made a similar argument in her 2013 book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, pointing out the degree to which the Western discourse of Muslim women as helplessly subjected to patriarchic structures is influenced more by particular liberal assumptions than by their actual situation.[10]

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[8] Mouffe, 1993.

[9] Asad, 2003. pp. 140–58.

[10] Abu Lughod, 2013.

In the context of such considerations, the Berlinale's heavy spotlight on the political in its representation of Iranian cinema emerges as driven by its own symbolic politics, which are deeply invested in branding itself as a savior rather than in any actual attempts to change for the better the circumstances it decries. As such, Iranian films and filmmakers might have marked formal disruptions of the ritualized festival protocol, but in their standing-out and individual success, they were following a script that actually kept the festival machine running. The role of the repressed and rebellious that was assigned to them—and which some of them, like Jafar Panahi, happily played—enabled the festival to foster its own branding and fit into the sensationalist understanding of the political that Kosslick had favored. In this, Iranian cinema not only fit particularly well into the mechanisms of the Berlinale, but also into the character of its host city.

Drawing from the Repertoire of Berlin History

The function of Iranian cinema as an exotic disruption refreshing the festival protocol, the heavy focus of the political in its staging, and the liberal script that this practice followed, are all deeply embedded in the "inherent logic" of Berlin. Proposed by urban sociologists Martina Löw and Helmut Berking to explain the particularity of a city,[11] the concept has turned out to be crucial to understanding the success of Iranian films at the Berlinale. The branding of the "political festival" has made Iran such an attractive candidate in the first place and its astonishing success has been highly intertwined with the urban stage on which the festival acts. As a divided city, Berlin had stood at the center of world politics for nearly half of the 20th century. This partition might have been a thing of the past when Kosslick took over as festival director in 2001, but was still strongly felt in the city at the time—especially in the Berlinale headquarters at the recently opened *Potsdamer Platz*, where ten years earlier the *Todesstreifen* had been a massive scar in Berlin's urban core. In addition, the status of West Berlin as contested territory and a liberal island surrounded and encircled by its socialist rival is very much mirrored in the history of the festival, which like many other West Berlin cultural and academic institutions had been founded as a beacon of freedom.

[11] Berking and Löw, 2008.

Chapter Two extensively discussed how the Berlinale's double status as both a *Schaufenster der Freien Welt* (Showcase of the Free World) and a bridge between East and West fed into its branding as a political festival. Just two years after the Western Allied had secured the status of West Berlin by overcoming the Soviet supply route blockade through the *Luftbrücke* of 1948/49, the film office of the US Army again initiated a coordinated action of supply with the foundation of the festival in 1951, although this time on the cultural level—instead of *Rosinenbomber* (Candy Bombers), Hollywood stars were sent to parade along *Kurfürstendamm*. These stars acted as living proof of both the city's secure status and the Allied commitment to the West Berlin public. Even at this early point in the festival history, the Berlinale already worked as a large-scale secular ritual aimed at the elevation and entitlement of the people of West Berlin. As a siren call for East Berliners, this signal was even consciously broadcast to the other half of the city through border cinemas and a reduced admission prices.

When the status of the Berlinale as a beacon of liberalism began to fade in the late 1960s, with the hardening of the inner-German border and the West German cultural elite turning its back on American interventionism, the festival still continued its tradition of staging the political. In the small and insulated cosmos of West Berlin, it established itself first as a forum for political unrest and later as a bridge between East and West. The latter branding, fostered during Moritz de Hadeln's tenure as festival director from 1980–2001, manifested itself in a concerted effort to showcase cinema from the East Bloc in the 1980s and from China in the 1990s. This practice of singling out rogue candidates from the stage of world politics and bringing them to Berlin set important precedents for the role that Iran later fulfilled at the Berlinale. The continuity in showcasing the politically exotic suggests that the mechanisms behind the Berlinale's representation of Iranian cinema might have been influenced more by a historically driven liberal agenda than a secularist or Orientalist one.

These longstanding traditions and their impact on the Berlinale as well as the inherent logic of its host city ultimately set the stage for the arrival of Iranian cinema in 2006. As has been pointed out, the context of the films heavily impacted the politics behind the festival's relationship with Iran, from the foregrounding of the political to the showcasing of freedom as a core value

and central paradigm. Yet perhaps even more importantly, it defined the performative dimension that was so central to the representation of Iranian films and filmmakers in Berlin. No major film festival plays the urban stage quite like the Berlinale—in comparison, Venice has outsourced its festival onto the separate island of the Lido, while Cannes and Sundance have to awaken their sleepy host towns for two weeks a year. The Toronto International Film Festival might be the other major exception in this regard, but in Europe, the Berlinale is the only large film festival that takes place in the scenery of a sprawling metropolis. Like his predecessors, Kosslick had to fill a massive area with cultural life, and he achieved this by turning large parts of the city into an extended red carpet as well as by catering to the spirit of the host city.

It was thus the visual narratives from the rich repertoire of Berlin history that the Berlinale could draw from in its encounter with Iranian cinema. Grand gestures of international solidarity, invisible hands stretching out from the West to help a battered populace in their struggle against their oppressors, creating global visibility for a repressed and isolated people—these narratives are deeply inscribed into the spirit of Berlin, or at least into the version of it that the Swabian Kosslick imagined. During the 2011 opening ceremony, when the festival director told the audience that he had offered to personally fly Panahi from Tehran to Berlin and back, he could hardly have illustrated this narrative tradition better: Kosslick piloting a modern-day cultural *Rosinenbomber* sponsored by the Berlinale. Together with all the other prominent gestures of solidarity and assistance that defined the festival's overall staging of Iranian cinema, Kosslick's remark underlines how deeply the representational practices of the Berlinale are embedded into its own institutional contexts and consequently reveal far more about its own standards than about the actual state of Iranian cinema.

Objections from the Back Seats

Given the historical roots of this particular kind of festival representation, it is no wonder that the success of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale turned out to be more persistent than Dieter Kosslick's tenure, which ended in 2019 with the termination of his contract. In their first press conference, his successors, the duo of managing director Mariette Rissenbeek (b. 1956) and artistic director Carlo Chatrian (b. 1971), immediately sent clear signals that their festival would

be more interested in aesthetic innovation than political activism. Yet despite their apparent efforts to implement corresponding changes and modify the festival image, it was again an Iranian film that won the Golden Bear in 2020 (marking the third one for the country in a single decade) and once again one that was far more invested in its political message than in aesthetic merit. Mohammad Rasoulof's *Sheyṭān Vojūd Nadārad* (There is No Evil; lit. Satan does not exist), parallels the works of his colleague Jafar Panahi in many ways. Not only is it concerned with a very particular issue of Iranian politics, namely the practice of the death sentence, the director also shares the background of working without government permission and being denied traveling to Berlin for the premiere. Rasoulof had even been directly associated with Panahi at the Berlinale before, as he had been arrested and convicted together with him in 2011. After the premiere, *Sheyṭān Vojūd Nadārad* was met with extensive standing ovations and the whole audience applauded in the direction of Rasoulof's empty seat in a strikingly emotional moment.

In that year, I had intended to observe how the Berlinale would evolve with a new organizational team in charge, but I found the continuities far more striking. By the end of the festival, I managed to sneak into the *Berlinale Palast* again, this time as a seat filler in the highly exclusive awards ceremony. Normally, access to the ceremony is strictly reserved for invited nominees and honored guests, but when any of them do not attend, festival workers can apply to fill their place so that in the end, the whole *Berlinale Palast* is fully seated with elegantly dressed people sitting in the audience to witness the crowning of the best films in the festival competition. In late February 2020, when the event was taking place, the Covid-19 pandemic was beginning to take hold of Berlin, so many invited guests declined their highly coveted invitations and left their place to seat fillers like myself.

When I got into the *Berlinale Palast* in 2020, my excitement rekindled that of my seventeen-year-old self sneaking into the same venue back in 2006, only that this time, it was far more glamorous than a regular film screening—and I had a far better view of what was happening. I took my assigned seat in the back rows of the parquet and for the first time watched the ceremony not as a broadcast, but live. I sat among the film professionals, festival organizers, and politicians and sensed the tension in the room about who would take home the main award. By the end of the show, when all of the Silver Bears had been

handed out, jury president Jeremy Irons (b. 1948) entered the stage. The veteran British actor, known for his role as a Spanish Jesuit priest in *The Mission* (Roland Joffé, 1986) and at the time popular for his appearance in the critically acclaimed TV miniseries *Watchmen* (Damon Lindelof, 2019), carried the gravitas and excitement of the moment and announced the Iranian contribution *Sheyṭān Vojūd Nadārad* as the winner of the Golden Bear.

At this point, my experience tipped over into the unreal and my memories overlapped. Five years before, I had seen Dieter Kosslick handing the Golden Bear to Hana Saeedi in the broadcast from my home and had been irritated about yet another child being dragged onstage as a representative for Iranian cinema. When a mere fifty meters in front of me yet another film by an absent Iranian filmmaker was being crowned, I felt my past irritation—the one that had driven me to begin this project in the first place—wash over me again: Had this practice of awarding Iranian cinema for its political and performative qualities not already become a tired trope? Had the hype not been over after the Golden Bear for *Taxi* in 2015? Yet again, the answer lay in the festival context, rather than in the film itself—the mechanisms driving it seem to be more persistent than a particular film or even a new artistic director.

It was ultimately not least my academic background in Islamic studies that enabled this insight into the persistency and embeddedness of the phenomenon. Through an encounter with Edward Said's writings, Stuart Hall's contributions to cultural studies, and the perspective of post-colonial scholars, Islamic studies have since the 1980s and 90s started to critically inquire into their own deeply problematic colonial and Orientalist origins. The resulting sensitivity towards one's own gaze demands a reversal of the viewing direction and encourages inquiries into the work of representation—in the case of Islamic studies the representation of Muslim societies like Iran in European cultural institutions.

In addition to this particular sensitivity, Islamic studies is used to engaging with neighboring disciplines and enlisting their contributions. This practice is especially encouraged at *Freie Universität Berlin*, which like the Berlinale was founded as a beacon of liberalism to secure the status of isolated post-war West Berlin. Over the decades, it has evolved into a promoter of the so-called "small disciplines" like Islamic or Iranian studies, which in turn frequently offer contributions to other related fields of research. While their

right to exist is increasingly being questioned, resulting in funding and infrastructure cuts, it is precisely the mutual contribution between these "small disciplines" that can lead to hitherto invisible insights and often enough to challenging one's own assumptions.

My work on this project has led me to appreciate the potential of these collaborations between different disciplines. Without the contributions of film studies to the field of Iranian cinema, I could have hardly been able to acknowledge the cinematic tradition's vast diversity and complex entanglements with domestic cultural politics. Without an engagement with the emerging field of film festival studies, I would have hardly got up the courage to take the often exclusive cosmos of film festivals as the subject of serious academic inquiry. Without the inspiration from theatre studies to take the performative elements of events into wider consideration, I would not have been able to identify the various stages of the Berlinale in the first place. Without the distinct perspective of art history and its view on the genealogy of Western traditions of exhibition and display, I could not have traced the continuities of the phenomenon back the word exhibitions of the 19th century. And without the sensitivity of Islamic studies for Western representations of the non-West, I would not have had the framework for engaging in the often difficult task of challenging my own gaze on Iranian cinema and its staging at the Berlinale. It was thus the interdisciplinary trajectory developed at the crossroads of several "small disciplines" that enabled me to work myself from the back seats of the *Berlinale Palast* towards the festival stages and encounter the initial irritations that had driven me to this project in the first place.

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Road to Guantanamo, dir. Micheal Winterbottom. United Kingdom, 2006.

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Sense and Sensibility, dir. Ang Lee. United States, 1996.

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The Deer Hunter, dir. Michael Cimino. United States, 1979.

The Fifth Element, dir. Luc Besson. France, 1997.

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Xiang Hun Nü (The Women from the Lake of Scented Souls), dir. Xie Fei. China, 1993.

Yingxiong (Hero), dir. Zhang Yimou. China, 2002.

Zemestān Ast (It's Winter), dir. Rafīʿ Pītz. Iran, 2006.

Zīr-e Derakhtān-e Zeytūn (Through the Olive Trees), dir. ʿAbbās Kiyārostamī. Iran, 1994.

Zusammenfassung der Dissertationsschrift

In dieser Arbeit setze ich mich mit der Repräsentation von iranischen Filmen und Filmemachern auf der Berlinale während der Amtszeit von Festivaldirektor Dieter Kosslick (2001-2019) auseinander. Da diese Repräsentation nicht nur auf den Kinoleinwänden, sondern gerade auch auf den unterschiedlichen Bühnen des Festivals, vom roten Teppich zur Pressekonferenz bis zur zeremoniellen Preisverleihung, stattfand, nehmen sich meine Analysen der performativen Dimension dieses Phänomens an. Da meine islamwissenschaftliche Perspektive hierbei von einer theoretischen Anbindung an die Theaterwissenschaften bereichert wird, untersuche ich die Inszenierung des iranischen Kinos auf der Berlinale.

Um die Genealogie solcher „Bühnen" zu erfassen und einen ihnen entsprechenden methodischen Rahmen zu erarbeiten, widme ich mich zunächst dem Phänomen der Weltausstellungen des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts, aus denen in den 1930er Jahren das Format der Filmfestivals hervorgegangen ist. Hier wurden bereits zentrale Elemente von kultureller Repräsentation auf städtischen Massenveranstaltungen etabliert, von der Form des nationalen Wettbewerb mit einer abschließenden Krönung durch den Gastgeber bis hin zur Ausstellung des Nicht-Westlichen und Exotischen in separaten Kolonialausstellungen. Da die Aufführungen der Berlinale vor allem vor der Kulisse von Berlin stattfinden, lohnt sich zudem ein Blick in die jüngere Geschichte und das Wesen der Stadt. Ausgehend von Martina Löw's Vorschlag zur Untersuchung von Städten nach ihren spezifischen „Eigenlogiken" wendet sich meine Arbeit anschließend dem Topos der geteilten Stadt zu, deren Westsektoren in der Nachkriegszeit durch spektakulär inszenierte Rettungsaktionen wie die Luftbrücke von 1948/49 als Insel der Freiheit gerahmt werden. In diesem Kontext ist auch der Ursprung der Berlinale zu verstehen, die 1951 als „Schaufenster der Freien Welt" gegründet wird. Auch in späteren Jahren etablierte sich die Berlinale als explizit politisches Festival, das in den 1980er Jahren begann, als „Brücke zwischen Ost und West" gezielt Filme aus der DDR und dem weiteren Ostblock zu präsentieren.

Zahlreiche dieser Ausstellungstraditionen und visuellen Narrative, deren Genealogie sich die erste Hälfte meiner Arbeit widmet, fanden sich nach 2006 in der Inszenierung von iranischen Filmen und Filmemachern auf der Berlinale wieder. Obwohl die Erfolgswelle des iranischen Kinos auf internationalen Filmfestivals bereits Ende der 1990er Jahre verebbte, begann die Berlinale unter ihrem neuen Direktor Dieter Kosslick in dieser Zeit, gezielt Filme aus der Islamischen Republik einzuladen, um den als verfolgt und unterdrückt präsentierten Filmemachern eine Bühne zu bieten. Die Schlagworte von Zensur, Unterdrückung und Rebellion, mit denen diese Filme von Beginn an auf dem Festival aufgeführt und markiert wurden, fügten sich dabei nahtlos sowohl in die Marke des „politischen Festivals" ein als auch in Kosslicks Verständnis des Politischen als spektakulärer Ausgleich zu Unterhaltung und Glamour.

Am deutlichsten zeigte sich diese Art der Selbstinszenierung der Berlinale als Festival, das iranischen Regisseuren ermöglicht, filmischen Widerstand gegen Zensur zu leisten, bei Jafar Panahi, dem sich die letzten beiden Kapitel meiner Arbeit zuwenden. Nachdem der Regisseur 2010 im Iran zu einem Berufsverbot von 20 Jahren und einem Ausreiseverbot zu ausländischen Filmfestivals verurteilt wurde, wurde er auf der Berlinale zu einem Aushängeschild des politischen Kinos. 2011 berief ihn das Festival in die internationale Jury und widmete einen Großteil seiner 61. Ausgabe dem abwesenden und als eingesperrt dargestellten Regisseur. Zwei Jahre später ging die Inszenierung von Panahis Abwesenheit in Berlin auf die Kinoleinwand über, als sein Film *Pardeh* (Der Vorhang) im Wettbewerb gezeigt wurde. Während Panahi hier noch als depressiver und eingeschränkter Filmemacher auftrat, kehrte er 2015 durch Teheran fahrend in voller Stärke zurück. Sein Film *Taxi* zeigt ihn als gewitzten Rebellen, der hinter dem Lenkrad die Kontrolle über sein Schaffen zurückerlangt und mit Hilfe der Berlinale vor den Augen des Publikums die Ketten der Zensur sprengt.

Entsprechend dem Mythos der gepeinigten und isolierten Stadt Berlin, die sich nach 1945 mit internationaler Hilfe ihren Status als Weltstadt zurückerkämpft hat, eignet das zeitversetzte Drama vom abwesenden Jurymitglied zum mundtot gemachten Künstler, der schließlich sein mediales

Comeback vor den Augen der Weltöffentlichkeit feiert, daher bestens für das Festival, das Panahi 2015 mit dem Goldenen Bären krönt. Anhand einer Analyse seiner performativen Rahmung in Berlin sowie seiner Filme *Pardeh* und *Taxi* kommt meine Arbeit zu dem Schluss, dass die Inszenierung iranischer Filme und Filmemacher auf der Berlinale sehr viel mehr über den Charakter und die Bedürfnisse des Festivals - und seiner Gastgeberstadt - aussagt als über den tatsächlichen Zustand des iranischen Kinos.

Summary of the Dissertation

This dissertation is concerned with the representation of Iranian films and filmmakers at the Berlinale during the Dieter Kosslick's tenure as festival director (2001–2019). Since this representation unfolded not only on the silver screen, but especially on the various stages of the festival, from the red carpet to the press conference to the awards ceremony, my analysis is dedicated to the performative dimension of the phenomenon. Given the methodological approach of theater studies that enhances my background in Islamic Studies, I consequently examine the staging of Iranian cinema at the Berlinale.

To comprehend the genealogy of these festival stages and work out a regarding methodological framework, I initially address the phenomenon of late 19th century world exhibitions, from which the film festival format evolved in the 1930s. Here, crucial elements of cultural representation at urban mass events were established, from the form of the national competition crowned by the host to the exhibition of the non-West and the exotic at separate colonial exhibitions. Since the performances of the Berlinale take place in the scenery of Berlin, a look into the recent history and the character of the city is also necessary. Taking cue from Martina Löw's proposal to examine cities in terms of their specific "inherent logic," my dissertation subsequently addresses the trope of the divided city. Soon after the war, West Berlin was framed as a beacon of liberalism through spectacularly staged efforts like the Berlin Airlift of 1948/49. The origin of the Berlinale, which in 1951 was founded as a "Schaufenster der Freien Welt" (Showcase of the Free World), is to be understood in this context, too. In later years, the Berlinale established itself as an explicitly political festival and a "bridge between East and West," which in the 1980s started an effort to showcase East German and the wider East Bloc cinema.

Many of these representational traditions and visual tropes, the genealogy of which I trace in the first half of my work, impacted the staging of Iranian films and filmmakers at the Berlinale from 2006 onwards. Iranian cinema's wave of success at international film festivals had already ebbed down in the late 1990s, but under the new festival director Dieter Kosslick, the

Berlinale began to invite films from the Islamic Republic extensively in the 2000s to offer its stages to the filmmakers, which were framed as restricted and repressed. The paradigms of censorship, repression, and rebellion, which impacted the presentation and reading of these films from the beginning, were seamlessly embedded into the brand of the "political festival" as well as into Kosslick's understanding of the political as a spectacular counterweight to entertainment and glamour.

The most emblematic case of the festival's branding as a platform for the cinematic rebellion of Iranian filmmakers is Jafar Panahi, with whom the last two chapters of my dissertation are concerned. After the director was convicted to a 20-year occupational ban and a prohibition to travel to foreign film festivals in 2010, he emerged as the poster boy of political cinema at the Berlinale. In 2011, the festival invited him into the international jury and dedicated large parts of its 61st edition to the absent and allegedly imprisoned filmmaker. Two years later, this performance evolved onto the silver screen, when his film *Pardeh* (Closed Curtain) was shown in the festival competition. While this cinematic therapy session presented Panahi as a depressive and restricted filmmaker, he returned in good sprits in 2015. In his film *Taxi*, he can be seen as a witty rebel who is back behind the driving wheel and in control of his creative process, breaking his chains with the help of the Berlinale live in front of the audiences.

Given the myth of the suffering and isolated city of Berlin, which after 1945 with international support regained its status as a global metropolis, Panahi's three-part stage play of the absent jury member to the silenced filmmaker who finally celebrates his comeback live in front of a global audience on the stage of the Berlinale thus turned out to be extremely suitable for the festival, which accordingly crowned him with the Golden Bear in 2015. Following an analysis of his staging in Berlin as well as his films *Pardeh* and *Taxi*, I conclude that the performances of Iranian films and filmmakers at the Berlinale are far more telling of the character and the needs of the festival (and its host city) than about the actual state of Iranian cinema.

Erklärung zur selbständigen Anfertigung der Arbeit

Gemäß § 7 Abs. 4 der Gemeinsamen Promotionsordnung zum Dr. phil./Ph. D. der Freien Universität Berlin (Amtsblatt 60/2008 vom 2. Dezember 2008) versichere ich, alle Hilfsmittel und Hilfen angegeben und auf dieser Grundlage die Arbeit selbständig verfasst zu haben. Die Dissertation ist in keinem früheren Promotionsverfahren angenommen oder abgelehnt worden.

Viktor Ullmann   Berlin, den 18. Juni 2021