

Representation of the "Resistance-Negotiation Duality" in Iranian Cinema During Ahmadinejad's Presidency: A Semiotic Analysis of the Film Che

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Received 24 October 2025

Accepted 24 November 2025

Abstract: This study analyzes the representation of the resistance-negotiation duality in Iranian cinema, focusing on the film *Che* directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, the tension between resistance discourse and negotiation discourse in Iran's foreign policy, particularly regarding the nuclear issue, reached its peak. This research employs structuralist semiotics and Fiske's tripartite code system (social codes, representational codes, and ideological codes) to analyze three key sequences from the film. The research findings demonstrate that Hatamikia, through his sophisticated characterization of Chamran and Vesali, represents the resistance-negotiation duality not as two contradictory approaches, but as two complementary strategies within a unified national front. By linking the historical event of Paveh to Iran's contemporary circumstances, the film symbolically reconstructs the nuclear crisis, international sanctions, and regional tensions. This research shows that cinema can function beyond merely reflecting political discourses, serving as a space for producing alternative and moderate discourses, and while preserving revolutionary values, it can promote a rational and pragmatic approach.

Keywords: Resistance, Negotiation, Iranian Cinema, Political Discourse, Semiotics.

Introduction

Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the foreign policy discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran was shaped around two fundamental approaches: "resistance" and "negotiation." These two concepts, which appear contradictory on the surface, have been the central axis of the country's political, cultural, and strategic debates over the past four decades, and depending on temporal conditions and prevailing discourses, one of them has taken priority in the country's policymaking. In Iranian political literature, "resistance" is defined as standing firm against the domination and influence of foreign powers, particularly the United States and Israel. This concept is rooted in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution and is based on slogans such as "Neither East, nor West," "anti-imperialism," and "negation of domination." Resistance within this framework is considered not merely a political strategy, but an ideological identity intertwined with revolutionary and Islamic values. On the other hand, "negotiation" is defined as diplomatic engagement and dialogue with the international community to resolve issues and disputes. This approach emphasizes political realism, preservation of national interests, and reduction of international tensions, and in various periods, particularly during the Construction and Reform governments, has been proposed as a solution for escaping political and economic deadlocks.

Proponents and opponents of these two approaches have always been present in Iran's political arena. Advocates of resistance believe that surrendering to external pressures means betraying the ideals of the revolution and the blood of martyrs, and that negotiation without power and authority only leads to the imposition of the other side's demands. This current holds the belief that history has shown Western powers do not honor their commitments and only understand the language of power. In contrast, advocates of negotiation argue that in today's world, no country can achieve progress and development in complete isolation, and dialogue and constructive engagement with the world is not only not contrary to the principles of the revolution, but is necessary for preserving national interests and public welfare. This current believes that fruitless resistance drives the country toward economic and social crises, and a middle path must be found through intelligent diplomacy.

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Several turning points in recent years have made this debate the focal point of Iranian political literature. One of the most important of these was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013), which, with its slogan of returning to revolutionary ideals and resistance-oriented approach in foreign policy, particularly regarding the nuclear issue, brought this duality to its peak. During this period, Iran's nuclear file became a public discourse, and concepts such as "independence," "national dignity," and "resistance against bullying" became linked with nuclear activities. The severe international sanctions imposed on Iran during this period caused an economic crisis on one hand, and on the other, turned the debate of resistance versus negotiation into the central axis of the 2013 electoral debates, which, with Hassan Rouhani's victory and his promise of "the key to solving problems," saw the negotiation discourse return once again to the forefront of Iran's foreign policy. Another turning point was the JCPOA agreement in 2015, which, as a symbol of the negotiation discourse, created great hopes for improving Iran's economic and political conditions. However, America's unilateral withdrawal from this agreement in 2018 and the return of sanctions once again strengthened the resistance discourse and raised questions about the effectiveness of negotiation and trust in the West. These events demonstrated that the tension between resistance and negotiation is not only limited to a theoretical debate, but has profound impacts on Iran's domestic and foreign policies, economy, and even the general culture of Iranian society. In this context, cinema, as a cultural tool and medium, has played an important role in representing and strengthening or critiquing these discourses. The film *Che*, directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia, which was made and screened in 2013, right on the threshold of the shift in discourse from resistance to negotiation, is a prominent example of this representation. This film, through its narrative of forty-eight hours from Mostafa Chamran's life during the Paveh incident, symbolically addresses the resistance-negotiation duality and attempts to present a picture of the interaction and tension between these two approaches within the framework of a historical narrative.

Literature Review

The resistance discourse, as one of the key concepts in the foreign policy and culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran, emerged after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as an ideological and strategic approach against foreign domination, particularly Western powers and Israel. This discourse has been examined by researchers not only in the foreign policy, but also in cultural, regional, and global dimensions. In the following, based on related articles and research, a review of studies conducted in this field is presented.

- One study in this area, an article titled "Cultural Components of the Islamic Resistance Discourse in the Middle East" by Amir Dabiri Mehr et al. (2021), using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis method, examines the cultural components of this discourse in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. The authors emphasize Islamic identity, political Islam ideology, and Islamic beliefs as key components, and argue that the resistance discourse has not yet signified its floating signifiers in many countries of the region and requires hegemonic formation. This study highlights challenges such as loss of forces and theoretical disruptions, and suggests that resistance must first enter the arena of hegemony to remain sustainable.
- Another study titled "The Role of Resistance Discourse in Regional Regulation: Capacities and Challenges" by Yaghoub Ghalandari and Hossein Mohseni (2024), based on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, analyzes the role of resistance in regional developments. The authors argue that the resistance discourse, through Islamic-discursive system-building, has been able to negate the hegemony of domination and create a new articulation of regional order. This research focuses on internal challenges (such as economic problems), regional challenges (competing discourses), and extra-regional challenges (Western intervention), and considers its innovation to be the simultaneous examination of capacities and challenges of order-building. This article demonstrates the impact of resistance discourse on Iran's policies in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine.
- The article "The Cultural Components of the Islamic Resistance Discourse in the Islamic World" by Mahdi Nazemi Ardakani and Safarali Khaledian (2018), using a descriptive-analytical method, introduces cultural components such as religious belief, national identity, and political Islam ideology as the main factors in the creation, strengthening, and continuity of

the resistance discourse in the Middle East. The authors emphasize the role of these components in overcoming Western and fundamentalist discourses, and warn that neglecting any of these elements could challenge the resistance discourse. This research describes the Islamic Awakening as a context for the expansion of resistance and considers it an irreversible path in changing the face of the Middle East.

- In the field of foreign policy, the article "Analysis of Resistance Functions in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran" by Reza Simbar (2023), using a descriptive-analytical method, examines the position of resistance in Iran's foreign policy. The author focuses on the identity and realistic aspects of resistance and argues that Iran, by highlighting the language of Islamic resistance, has created an axis of resistance against extra-regional interventionist forces. This research highlights the functions of resistance in preserving Syria's political system, confronting terrorism in Iraq, and standing firm in Lebanon and Yemen, and considers resistance a strategy for strengthening Iran's geopolitical position in West Asia.
- Finally, the article "The Concept of Active Resistance Strategy in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran" by Reza Ansari Bardeh and Mahdi Javdani Moghadam (2021) introduces active resistance as a new reading of non-alignment based on the negation of domination and being dominated. The authors, using a descriptive-analytical method and elite interviews, argue that active resistance, due to its alignment with the principles of the Islamic Revolution and the West Asian environment, is the main orientation of Iran's foreign policy and explains Iran's performance better than the non-alignment strategy.

These studies primarily focus on the political, general cultural, and strategic aspects of the resistance discourse and have paid less attention to its media or cultural-artistic representation. The present research, with its focus on the representation of the resistance-negotiation duality in Iranian cinema (with emphasis on the political discourse of Ahmadinejad's government), has a fundamental difference from previous studies; because instead of directly examining foreign policy or general cultural components, it analyzes the media and cinematic aspect of this discourse. This novel approach demonstrates how cinema, as a cultural tool, has represented the tension between resistance (as an anti-domination ideology) and negotiation (as a diplomatic approach) during the Ahmadinejad period, and how this representation has influenced public opinion and cultural policies. This difference steers the research toward cultural-media analysis and fills the existing gap in the literature.

Methodology

Semiotics studies three main areas: the signs themselves, the codes in which signs are organized, and the cultures in which these codes and signs operate (Fiske, 2007: 64). In this research, the structuralist semiotics method has been employed based on Fiske's code system. Fiske's approach, which bears similarities to Roland Barthes' perspective, emphasizes the role of signs in the critique and analysis of power. In this approach, linguistic and semiotic events are not accepted as simple narratives and require deconstruction, because what appears natural is often intentional and encoded so that the audience empathizes with the author (Fiske, 2007: 119). One technique that can help uncover the ideologies of a text is Fiske's television code technique. In his article on television culture, Fiske presented three types of codes for discovering signs used in television programs.

1. **Social Codes:** Because humans live in society, they are already within certain rituals, identities, customs, and social rules that have powerful connotations. These codes are manifested through language, body movements, and behavior. For example, wearing armor and helmets indicates soldiers from a particular period in a country's history.
2. **Reality Codes (Technical Codes):** These codes are more related to the creative power of the filmmaker and are less social, essentially having an aesthetic character. Among these codes, one can mention appearance, clothing, face, lighting, camera, editing, and music. The mentioned codes form the representation of other elements such as narrative, conflict, character, dialogue, time, place, and casting. In fact, after encoding at the level of reality, the creators of a television program must employ various technical techniques to convey signs. For example, in camera

codes, the camera angle, the shot used, and whether it is in motion or static, express different signs.

3. **Ideological Codes:** These codes place the elements mentioned above within the category of social coherence and acceptability. Some of these codes include individualism, patriarchy, race, social class, materialism, capitalism, and so forth. Ideological codes organize other codes in such a way that a set of consistent and coherent meanings are created. Also, meaning is only created when reality and types of representation and ideology merge into one another and reach unity in a coherent and apparently natural manner. Based on ideological codes, it becomes clear what concept the producer of the work has employed the two codes of reality and representation to convey and what meaning to produce in order to give it an ideological nature (Fiske, 2011).

Theoretical Concepts and Literature

The period following the presidency of Seyed Mohammad Khatami and the Reform government saw the turn of a political current that could be said to stand in opposition to the discourse and ideas of Khatami's government, and this time, this discourse was able to gain public favor. This current was previously known by names such as traditional right and conservative, and was later referred to as "principalism" (fundamentalism). The principalist current, after the Reform government came to power, had been able to introduce itself as an alternative in the public mind by exploiting certain shortcomings and inadequacies of the Reform government. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed the presidency of the ninth government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on June 24, 2005, under circumstances where none of the domestic or foreign analysts had predicted the possibility of his victory or his social and cultural theories. Many analysts considered his campaign slogans a repetition of the ideological thoughts and revolutionary ideology of the early Islamic Revolution, which, in the view of these individuals, no longer seemed realistic in Iranian society (Khajesarvi, 2007: 27). Ahmadinejad's victory in the 2005 elections showed that a large number of voters seriously supported the principalists and were aligned with their demands for fair distribution of wealth, poverty eradication, fighting corruption, and defending Islamic state values (Ehteshami, 2008). Ahmadinejad had his own special propaganda method and sought to use different themes for his campaign. Issues such as Islamic state, transformation in the country's management approach to public treasury, simple living and honesty of officials, fighting corruption and discrimination, justice-orientation, returning government to the people, emphasis on Islamic economic development, criticism of the banking system, decentralization, resistance against cultural invasion, attack on political development, and introducing Ahmadinejad as an academic and a competent manager constituted the main themes of Ahmadinejad's propaganda (Tajik & Roozkhosh, 2008: 109). By raising such criticisms, he tried to introduce the starting point of his government in the field of culture and consider the main concern of Iranian society to be a cultural issue. Although in the new government's slogans, economic and political progress also formed part of the government's discourse, undoubtedly the fundamental concern of this government was rooted in the sphere of society's general culture. This concern had a different quality from the concerns of previous governments. In the governments of the 1980s in Iran, proximity to the revolution and direct confrontation with the issue of war caused spiritual values to be preserved in the country. Therefore, the concerns of governments during this period were less drawn to the field of culture. However, in the 1990s and until the ninth government came to power, discourses of economic development and political development became the priorities of Iranian governments. From the new government's perspective, these orientations were considered a kind of retreat. This determination of the new government to present a theory contrary to current global trends was more prominently manifested in the president's explicit criticisms of liberalism as the dominant theory of the world's political systems (Khajesarvi, 2008: 28).

The principalist discourse, which forms and sustains the identity of the Islamic justice government for the Islamic Republic, defines roles of national othering for it in the sphere of foreign and international policy. Roles such as "justice-spreading and oppression-fighting state," "anti-domination agent," "anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism," "anti-arrogance," "fortress of revolution and liberation," "defender of Islam and Shi'ism," "supporter of the oppressed," "inspirational force in the Islamic world," "revisionist and foundation-breaking state," "independent active state," "supporter of liberation movements," and "allied and loyal" (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2007: 70). In the new discourse, previous discourses

governing Iran's foreign policy, by distancing themselves from Islamic and revolutionary values, had led to ontological insecurity in Iran's foreign policy, which had to be compensated for by revising the formulation of identity-making sources, national role, and behavioral approach (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2014: 183). One of the most important issues of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government in the foreign policy arena was the nuclear issue during his presidency, around which a duality formed along the axis of "resistance" or "negotiation." In fact, it was during this period that the nuclear issue acquired a discursive dimension; meaning it became a generalized discourse at the social level that made it possible to give meaning to the actions and behaviors of Ahmadinejad's government's foreign policy. The nuclear discourse possessed such power that it provided the possibility of giving meaning to concepts of Iran's foreign policy in a new horizon. The nuclear discourse breathed new life into concepts such as anti-arrogance, independence, negation of domination, and export of revolution. This discourse opened up a pioneering horizon for Iran's foreign policy during the principalist period, in which concepts and discourse that had been marginalized during the Construction and Reform periods returned to the text of Iran's foreign policy. In Ahmadinejad's principalist government, neglected concepts such as anti-arrogance and resistance against the domination system, with the emergence of nuclear discourse and with the new meaning they had acquired in the nuclear discourse, returned to the foreign policy arena and became the axis of Iran's foreign policy actions and decisions during this period (Dehghani Firouzabadi & Atayi, 2014: 30-31).

Research Findings

Film Introduction: The film *Che* tells the story of forty-eight hours from the life of Dr. Mostafa Chamran, who travels to the city to negotiate with Kurdish separatist leaders. The film's narrative is confined to this limited timeframe of forty-eight hours and does not encompass Chamran's entire life. To uncover the ideological meanings and signs, we first review brief information about the Paveh incident. The Battle of Paveh, or the Paveh incident, was a battle that occurred during the 1979 Kurdish rebellion in Iran from August 14 to 19, 1979. In this battle, several thousand Kurdish forces from the Komala and Democrat parties attacked the city of Paveh and attempted to capture it. In response, several hundred gendarmerie and Revolutionary Guard forces defended the city. To strengthen the city's defense, approximately 80 Guard forces under the command of Ali-Asghar Vesali joined the defenders. Until August 18, the advantage lay with the Kurdish side, and they managed to capture almost the entire city except for the gendarmerie post and the Guard garrison. After efforts by Valiollah Fallahi, the Army Ground Forces commander, and Mostafa Chamran, the provisional government's representative, to preserve the city, ultimately by Ayatollah Khomeini's order, the leader of the Islamic Republic, Army Aviation helicopters were able to defeat the attackers, break the siege of Paveh, and recapture the occupied areas.

For analyzing the film's ideological signs, we have three main characters, and to properly understand and comprehend these signs, we must examine these characters. Mostafa Chamran, who is the representative of Mehdi Bazargan's provisional government in the film and strives to resolve the Kurdistan crisis through negotiation. Dr. Enayati, the leader of the Kurds, and Asghar Vesali, the commander of the Guards dispatched to Paveh who are resisting in the city and see resistance as the path to liberation and success for the people of Paveh. Considering the film's production time and screening date (the film was made in early 2013 when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was Iran's president, but had its premiere at the Fajr Film Festival in February of the same year, coinciding with the first months of Hassan Rouhani's presidency), the main axis of the film's events can be examined under the negotiation-resistance duality. This is particularly significant since that same year, the first agreement of the new nuclear negotiating team with the P5+1 group had taken place. At one point in the film, Vesali says to Chamran: "He sees him more as Bazargan's Chamran than Khomeini's Chamran," a dialogue that effectively expresses the difference in Vesali's and Chamran's perspectives for resolving the Paveh crisis. The director attempts to extend Vesali's perspective to the entire political atmosphere governing Iran in those years and to challenge Iran's new political discourse—a discourse that believes in negotiation, reconciliation, and compromise with the West. On the other hand, the director has clearly understood that the previous discourse of the former negotiating team did not meet with favor in the elections and received low votes (Saeed Jalili received slightly over four million votes in the 2013 elections). For this reason, he tries to observe the aspect of moderation in characterizing the film's

characters. However, he ultimately ends the film with Ayatollah Khomeini's order to recapture Paveh, as an endorsement of Asghar Vesali's views, who considered resistance against the enemy as the factor for victory. The film limits the narrative duration and sequence of story events to forty-eight hours so that the director can establish his ideological signs for the viewer through this method. Furthermore, the film's ideological signs are represented around two main characters (Vesali and Chamran), and the film's central axis is the type of behavior, performance, and interactions of these two individuals with hostile forces outside the Islamic Republic of Iran's circle of power.

Extended Analysis of the First Selected Sequence

Sequence Description: This sequence begins with Chamran and Fallahi's presence in a room where Vesali and one of the Kurdish Guards and his wife are located. Vesali asks Sirvan (one of the Kurdish Guards) to explain the situation of the area to Chamran. After Sirvan's explanations, a debate arises between Fallahi and Vesali about fortifying the hospital. Fallahi opposes this action, and Vesali says there is no choice. Hana, Sirvan's wife, says that if a bullet is fired from the hospital, the Kurds will also retaliate. Chamran recommends that five volunteers go toward the bridge near the Guard hill and resist. This suggestion is welcomed by Vesali. Chamran places the flower he is holding on Sirvan's rifle and leaves the room. Hana angrily removes the flower from the rifle and throws it away, places their infant in Sirvan's arms, and asks Sirvan to abandon the struggle. Sirvan disagrees with her. This sequence ends with Hana's cries.

Social Codes

Appearance: The characters' appearance is accompanied by shock and astonishment at the hospital's conditions.

Clothing: In this sequence, Chamran wears a simple dark jacket with cloth trousers, Brigadier General Fallahi wears an Army military uniform, and Chamran's guard forces also wear simple jackets and overcoats in army green. Asghar Vesali, who has been wounded in this sequence, wears simple khaki pants with a dark short-sleeved t-shirt, and his clothes are dusty and bloody with a red bandana tied around his neck. Other individuals such as patients and nurses also wear clothing appropriate to the environment. Men and women present as actors in the scene wear local Kurdish clothing, and doctors and nurses are seen with white medical coats showing bloodstains.

Makeup: In Chamran's makeup, efforts have been made to approximate his actual face. He wears large round rubber-framed glasses, the top of his head is bald, and he has long, neat beards. In Brigadier General Fallahi's makeup, efforts have also been made to resemble his actual face. He is tall, has a clean-shaven face with long mustaches, and short hair with the top of his head bald. Asghar Vesali, as another key character in this sequence, has disheveled and unkempt hair, long beards with signs of fatigue evident on his face due to his presence in urban combat. Hana and Sirvan also appear in this sequence as a Kurdish married couple, and efforts have been made to design their faces close to reality inspired by indigenous faces from that region.

Environment: This sequence takes place in the hospital. The hospital space is very chaotic, showing the dire situation of the city. In the hospital corridors and rooms, many sick, injured, and wounded people are visible.

Behavior: Chamran's behavior in this sequence is calm and logical. Asghar Vesali is somewhat anxious, and his behavior is combined with anger and sarcastic speech. Brigadier General Fallahi speaks from the position of a military commander, and his behavior is accompanied by decisiveness. Sirvan is wounded and worried. His wife Hana is also worried about her wounded husband's condition and displays emotional and excited behaviors.

Speech: Chamran speaks calmly and deliberately. Vesali is angry and constantly speaks with sarcasm and irony. Brigadier General Fallahi also tries to speak with authority as an experienced military commander. Sirvan, who has escaped from Kurdish armed forces, tiredly explains what he has seen, and Hana also speaks with desperation and worry.

Head and Hand Movements: In this sequence, a bloody sheet is passed between Brigadier General Fallahi's and Asghar Vesali's hands, becoming a symbol of the situation they are in.

Sound: In this sequence, sounds of murmuring, screaming, and patients' groans are used to convey the hospital's dire situation. At the end of the sequence, a melancholic melody is mixed with the sound of an infant's crying to create impact and show the scene's emotions.

Representational Codes

Camera: The camera in this sequence generally uses medium shots and two-shots. At the beginning of the sequence, to show the hospital space, a moving camera (tracking) is used with point-of-view shots.

Lighting: It appears that no special codes have been used.

Editing: In the opening shots, efforts have been made to show hospital images captured with a moving camera through several cuts from different angles.

Music and Sound Recording: In the background of the images, efforts have been made to use effects such as murmuring and sounds of groaning and screaming, and at the end, melancholic emotional music is played.

Narrative: In this sequence, discussion and dialogue take place among three commanders present in the scene about actions that should be taken.

Conflict: Several conflicts exist in this sequence. First, a discussion occurs between Asghar Vesali and Chamran about the concept of killed versus martyred. Another conflict is between Asghar Vesali and Brigadier General Fallahi about the hospital's conditions. At the end, there is also a conflict between Hana and Sirvan, where Hana believes Sirvan should no longer participate in battle, but Sirvan refuses and considers it his duty.

Character: This sequence occurs with the presence of characters such as Dr. Chamran, Brigadier General Fallahi, and Asghar Vesali, all of whom are based on real personalities.

Dialogue: Dialogues in this sequence are mostly accompanied by anger, harshness, and aggression.

Time and Place: The time of this sequence is at night, and its location is in Paveh city hospital.

Actors: Fariborz Arabnia plays Dr. Chamran, Babak Hamidian plays Asghar Vesali, Saeed Rad plays Brigadier General Fallahi, Amir Delavari plays Sirvan the Kurdish fighter, and Merila Zarei plays Hana, Sirvan's wife.

Ideological Codes

Paradigmatic Relationship: This sequence begins with a view of hospital corridors filled with injured and wounded people. Dr. Chamran, Brigadier General Fallahi, and their companions are walking through the hospital corridors, and the dire situation there has somewhat shocked them. Chamran is looking for Asghar Vesali because he had heard something happened to him. Finally, Asghar Vesali, who has been injured, is found with one of his comrades in one of the hospital rooms. Vesali's comrade, a young Kurd named Sirvan, has also been injured and provides Chamran with a report on the city's situation. Brigadier General Fallahi believes the hospital should not become a fortress, but Vesali believes they have no choice and are forced to do this, and this conversation again shows the difference of opinion between Asghar Vesali and Brigadier General Fallahi. The discussion among Asghar Vesali, Brigadier General Fallahi, and Dr. Chamran escalates. This issue causes Brigadier General Fallahi to leave the room with displeasure. Finally, Vesali agrees with Dr. Chamran's suggestion and leaves the room. Dr. Chamran places a flower branch on Sirvan's weapon and leaves the room. This sequence can be considered one of the key and symbolic sequences of the film. External signs such as a hospital full of injured and wounded show the dire situation in the city. After observing the dire conditions, Brigadier General Fallahi tells Chamran that if his fellow train passengers knew about the situation, they would not remain silent. Subsequently, we witness that the difference of opinion among commanders for managing the crisis they are in has also reached its peak, and none are willing to accept the other's opinion and do not accept the other's management style. At the same time, it appears there is also a difference in their perspective on the situation they are in, and from a semantic and ideological system perspective, there is also a difference in their views. The peak of this difference is observed in the challenging conversation between Vesali and Chamran. Chamran uses the term "killed" for potential casualties, which causes Vesali's surprise and questioning. Vesali believes the victims are not killed but are martyrs. Hana, the Kurdish woman who is Sirvan's wife, is also in the hospital room witnessing the

conversations, and she believes that if they fire bullets, the attacking forces will also respond with bullets, which Chamran confirms. There is also conflict between Vesali and Brigadier General Fallahi, and Vesali again accuses Fallahi of conservatism, but Fallahi tells him about his record and rejects his accusations. Chamran wants to present a more moderate opinion, but before expressing his view, Vesali firmly and decisively says, "I will not retreat one step on the blood of martyrs," which again expresses his value and semantic system and his perspective on the situation they are in. Placing the flower on the weapon by Chamran at the end of the sequence is also a symbol of fighting for peace. A movement that can show Chamran's inner gentleness and a sign of his anti-war spirit that seeks peace, not war; and even considers the weapon a tool for defense, not an instrument for violence.

Syntagmatic Relationship: Depicting such a situation can be a symbolic image of the country's situation during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency. In circumstances where global consensus against the country had reached its peak and international sanctions were making conditions worse, and disagreements about how to manage the country in this crisis had also increased among officials. The use of concepts such as retreat, martyrdom, martyrs' blood, etc., also refers to this category. During that period, some officials suggested compromise and negotiation, while opposing views existed that considered resistance against external pressures the appropriate solution and called negotiation a kind of retreat and deviation from revolutionary ideals and betrayal of martyrs' blood. During that period, the military option for attacking Iran was also raised by foreign governments, especially the President of the United States, and tensions at the international level were increasing. Hana's dialogue that "if you shoot, they will shoot too" can also allude to this same matter. Iran's geographical position and presence in a sensitive and tense region, and with the escalation of disagreements at the international level, brought the opinions of some analysts and rumors about the start of war, where the slightest military movement from either side could lead to a large and widespread conflict at the regional level. By depicting this situation at the end of this sequence, while confirming Hana's opinion, the flower that Chamran places on Hana's husband's weapon can be a symbol of peace and his belief that he considers the weapon a tool for defending the country and people, not an instrument with which actions against his country's interests are taken.

Sequence Analysis: In the value and semantic perspective that had formed after the Islamic Revolution and was strengthened with the beginning of war and the Sacred Defense, resistance against arrogance and struggle against oppression became a consolidated policy in minds. This discourse was present in society in different forms during various periods. On the other hand, in the post-war years, established governments believed that with the end of war, insisting on this discourse was unnecessary, and the country's policymaking should be different from the past and appropriate to the new era. After two periods of presence of discourses based on economic and political development in governments, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government came to power with slogans based on returning to revolutionary ideals and adopted a different approach compared to previous governments. This difference in discourse had caused different and sometimes contradictory views to form among different political groups and the country's politicians regarding engagement with the world, which occasionally manifested with new events revealing this confrontation of discourses. During this period, on one hand, the international situation became increasingly complex, and on the other hand, with the increase in tensions at the international level, the gap between political groups internally also increased. The government had gained public favor with slogans of returning to revolutionary ideals, and opposition groups to the government also could not tolerate the methods and perspectives of the then-president in managing internal and external affairs and considered it the cause of increased tensions and crisis. In such circumstances, it seemed necessary to take a middle path that neither deviated from the revolution's values and ideals nor caused increased tension and crisis in the country. The director, by designing Chamran's character as a moderate and balanced individual whose revolutionary face and background are also well-known and reliable, and at the same time who thinks of solutions for leaving hostility, seeks to present a model based on idealism and understanding of realities that are combined with each other. In fact, his solution for exiting the current situation is moderation and a middle path between ideal and reality.

Extended Analysis of the Second Selected Sequence

Sequence Description: This sequence takes place in the mountains at night. The mountain (which is also the city cemetery) is the location for negotiation between Chamran and the Kurdish opposition leader Dr. Enayati. The conversation between these two begins with private discussions and recounting shared memories in America and the period of struggle against the Pahlavi regime, and reaches a tension about the Kurds and their place in Iranian territory. Then Chamran asks Enayati to state his demands. Enayati insists that Chamran and the Guards must leave Paveh, which faces Chamran's opposition. However, Enayati persists in his position. This sequence ends with Enayati embracing Chamran, expressing the wish that Chamran would fall into his hands alive so he could ask him the many unanswered questions he has.

Social Codes

Appearance: Both Chamran and Dr. Enayati have a calm appearance in this sequence and try to keep the atmosphere friendly and peaceful. During their conversation, anger and tension sometimes also emerge.

Clothing: Chamran's appearance in this sequence is a continuation of previous sequences. Dr. Enayati also wears local Kurdish clothing.

Makeup: Dr. Enayati has a neat appearance with a smooth, clean-shaven face accompanied by long mustaches. He also wears large glasses that dominate his face, giving him an intellectual appearance.

Environment: The city cemetery, located at the top of a tall mountain overlooking the city with numerous graves, is the environment where this sequence occurs.

Behavior: Despite being on opposite sides, the behavior of Chamran and Dr. Enayati is initially friendly due to their prior acquaintance, but subsequently their behavior becomes serious and decisive.

Speech: Chamran speaks calmly and logically with a sorrowful tone. In Dr. Enayati's speech, there is also ecstasy and enthusiasm, and he speaks with a triumphant tone.

Head and Hand Movements: In one shot, Dr. Enayati, to point to the negotiation location which is the city cemetery, stomps on the ground with his foot and considers this a sign.

Sound: At the beginning of the sequence, sounds of loudspeakers and the murmuring of Kurdish forces present at the bottom of the mountain are used. The sound of crickets is also present in the background of the images, indicating the location and time.

Representational Codes

Camera: The camera uses wide shots to show the cemetery space and environment, and during dialogue delivery, long shots and medium shots are used.

Lighting: In one shot, a flare is fired to illuminate the space and capture the cemetery. In another shot, the first view showing Dr. Enayati, he shines a flashlight on his own face.

Editing: In editing this sequence, efforts have been made to first introduce the geographical position with several different shots, and then continue with the conversation between Chamran and Dr. Enayati.

Music and Sound Recording: No music has been used in this sequence.

Narrative: This sequence involves recounting shared memories between Dr. Enayati and Dr. Chamran in America and their negotiation about the issues in their current circumstances.

Conflict: This sequence is a conflict between Dr. Chamran and Dr. Enayati and the difference in their perspectives and worldviews.

Character: Dr. Enayati's character as one of the Kurdish opposition leaders is present in this sequence.

Dialogue: The conversation between Chamran and Enayati begins with discussing shared memories and continues with debates about the difference in their worldviews and the different ideology they hold.

Time and Place: This sequence takes place in the darkness of night in the mountains where the city cemetery is located.

Actors: In this sequence, Dr. Enayati is added to the film, whose role is played by Mahdi Soltani Sarvestani.

Ideological Codes

Paradigmatic Relationship: In this sequence, the director depicts a situation for negotiation, the location of which is in the city cemetery. Upon entering the cemetery located at the top of the mountain, Dr. Chamran sees the Kurdish armed attackers, and their number and equipment astonish him. The Paveh school principal, who acts as a liaison between the attackers' leaders and Chamran, asks Dr. Chamran to think of the city's people in negotiation with them, not the central government's demands. Dr. Chamran and one of the attackers' leaders who has come to negotiate know each other. This acquaintance creates questions that go beyond the city's issues and conflicts, manifested in concepts such as the meaning of negotiation, reference to presence in other countries like Lebanon due to ideological ties, guarantees for withdrawal from positions, Israel's role in tensions, and martyrdom. Through the dialogues, the director alludes to various issues also occurring in the country. Reference to the resistance-or-negotiation duality, which was among the country's current and important debates at the time of the film's production, and on the other hand, Iran's aid to resistance forces in the region is also discussed in the film, and through a dialogue Chamran says, it becomes clear the director believes "understanding this issue is not easy for everyone." At the end, Chamran also refers to Israel's role in these tensions, which was also among the topics discussed at the time of the film's production.

Syntagmatic Relationship: During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, the dispute over Iran's nuclear activities had reached its peak at the international level. Due to these disputes, the severest international sanctions had been imposed on the country, and these issues had caused direct confrontation and increased face-off between Iran and America and Israel. American officials also spoke of options on the table and military attacks on Iran, and Israel also considered Iran's nuclear activities contrary to its security. This issue had created the resistance-or-negotiation duality in the country's political literature and discourse among different groups. On one hand, the country was in a political and economic strait that had caused problems in the country, and on the other hand, many high-ranking officials of the country had no trust in the other side and believed this negotiation would mean Iran's surrender and disarmament, and there was no guarantee for Western parties' commitment to the negotiation terms. One of the matters raised by Western parties was Iran's aid to countries such as Lebanon and Palestine, which Iran attributed to ideological ties, but this issue was not acceptable to Western parties. During this period, the nuclear issue had become one of the important components in political discourse and, by linking it with national and patriotic issues and religious and revolutionary values, had taken on a completely different character.

Sequence Analysis: In fact, by depicting the complex situation of the city under siege in Paveh, Hatamikia, in addition to reconstructing a historical narrative, also makes direct symbolic reference to the country's current issues, and by linking those conditions to the contemporary era, tries to raise issues about the situation in which the country finds itself. In his view, negotiation is a type of solution that, if there is no convincing guarantee behind it, leads to surrender. He emphasizes preserving the country's integrity and considers concepts such as people and government and the link between them as the key to overcoming the crisis, so that even if this negotiation does not succeed, preserving integrity and unity and non-fragmentation of the country under various pretexts against foreign conspiracies should be the priority. The reference to "the scent of Israel reaching the nostrils" is in fact a reference to these very conspiracies to disrupt the country's security and integrity.

Extended Analysis of the Third Selected Sequence

Sequence Description: This sequence begins with Chamran's presence on the balcony of the "Guard House" beside Asghar Vesali. After the announcement of the half-hour opportunity that Dr. Enayati has given for Chamran and Vesali to surrender, Vesali starts the conversation with a sarcastic remark to Chamran about surrender, and continues by telling Chamran that he sees him more like Bazargan (the then Prime Minister) than Ayatollah Khomeini (the leader of the Iranian Revolution). In response, Chamran, while appreciating Vesali and his bravery, reminds him that fighting is the last resort.

However, Vesali loudly declares that the Red Bandanas (the Guards under Vesali's command, famous by this name because of the red bandanas they wore around their necks) have sworn to continue the martyrs' path. Vesali angrily fires toward the Kurdish opposition. This sequence ends with this very shot from Vesali.

Social Codes

Appearance: Both Chamran and Vesali are distressed in this sequence.

Clothing: In this sequence, Chamran has removed his jacket, and Vesali has worn a military overcoat.

Makeup: The makeup in this sequence is a continuation of previous sequences.

Environment: This sequence takes place inside the balcony and courtyard of the "Guard House."

Behavior: Chamran has calm behavior, and Vesali is initially distressed and subsequently behaves with passionate excitement in front of his fellow comrades.

Speech: Chamran's tone of speech is calm but distressed, and Vesali also initially speaks sorrowfully and with emotion, and then goes among his comrades and declares his position with excitement.

Head and Hand Movements: No special codes have been used.

Sound: In the scene's background, the sound of crickets and dogs howling can be heard.

Representational Codes

Camera: The camera uses medium close-up shots to show two-person conversations, and sometimes over-the-shoulder shots are used. When Vesali goes into the courtyard, the camera view changes to a long shot.

Lighting: No special codes have been used.

Editing: In editing, the two-person conversation between Chamran and Vesali begins with cuts on their faces, and then the plan of Vesali's speech addressed to his comrades begins.

Music and Sound Recording: When Vesali's sorrowful words begin, calm emotional music is also played in the background to increase the impact of his words.

Narrative: In this sequence, Chamran and Vesali discuss decision-making about the half-hour deadline and their perspective on the circumstances.

Conflict: In this sequence, a conflict forms between Chamran and Vesali about their attitude toward the circumstances and situation they are in.

Character: Chamran and Vesali are the two main characters of this sequence.

Dialogue: This sequence begins with a two-person conversation between Chamran and Vesali and ultimately continues with Vesali speaking addressed to his fellow forces.

Time and Place: The time of this sequence is in the darkness of night, and its location is inside the Guard House courtyard.

Actors: In this sequence, Fariborz Arabnia appears in the role of Chamran and Babak Hamidian in the role of Asghar Vesali.

Ideological Codes

Paradigmatic Relationship: In this sequence, we witness that the city has been completely captured by Kurdish armed forces, and their voices are broadcast through loudspeakers, giving the Guards and people inside the Guard House only half an hour to surrender. After this ultimatum is announced, Asghar Vesali converses with Chamran. During this conversation, the difference of opinion between Vesali and Chamran becomes apparent again. Vesali believes this ultimatum should not be heeded, but Chamran says he wishes they could trust the armed forces' words and surrender, but there is no trust in their words. Vesali, who loves Chamran at heart, is surprised by his behavior and tells him that sometimes he doesn't understand the meaning of his behaviors and sees him more as "Bazargan's Chamran" than "Khomeini's Chamran." Chamran tells Vesali, "Fighting is always the last resort." Vesali, who is a passionate and excited commander, is surprised by Chamran's words and says he doesn't understand him because he believes coming to this dead-end was wrong from the beginning, and they should have continued fighting in the streets so everyone would witness that "Khomeini's soldier is a man of martyrdom, not

surrender." Chamran tells him that fighting in such circumstances gives them an excuse to massacre the people. However, Vesali believes they have also sworn to follow the martyrs' path, and now is the time to answer those who want their humiliation, and ultimately by leaving the Guard House and firing toward the Kurdish armed forces, he declares his position, which is non-surrender and struggle until the last moment.

Syntagmatic Relationship: In this sequence, reference is again made to the difference in perspective and the relationship between idealism and rationality with each other. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency and the contradictions that had formed over the nuclear issue at the international level, this difference in perspective had become more apparent than ever before. With the imposition of severe international sanctions, the country's economy had been severely damaged, and in a way, the country was under siege. This situation had led to the confrontation of two perspectives regarding managing the country in crisis conditions. The established government believed that positions should not be compromised and must be insisted upon until the last moment, and considered negotiation as surrender to global powers. On the other hand, opponents of the government's discourse also believed that the Islamic Republic of Iran should enter into dialogue and negotiation with the so-called P5+1 countries to emerge from the circumstances that had challenged the country. In this sequence, an attempt has been made in a way to address this confrontation of perspectives in the negotiation-and-resistance duality.

Sequence Analysis: The resistance-or-negotiation duality had become a serious debate at the country's high levels, and even at the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, it had become the most important component in the new government's presidential campaign. In this sequence, Hatamikia attempts to interpret this duality not in opposition to each other, but in alignment and alongside each other. Despite the difference in perspective they have, Chamran and Vesali are not against each other but are both on one front and fighting for one goal, but each has a different opinion according to their position and perspective. Given the strengthening of debates around this duality at the time of the film's production, Hatamikia is actually attempting to negate the view that believes resistance and negotiation are in contradiction, and to show that these two perspectives can interact with each other and are not necessarily opposed to one another.

Conclusion

This research was conducted with the aim of analyzing the representation of the resistance-negotiation duality in Iranian cinema, focusing on Ebrahim Hatamikia's film *Che* within the context of the political discourse during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency. The research findings indicate that cinema, as a cultural-media tool, plays an important role in representing and giving meaning to society's political tensions and can transform historical narratives into metaphors for contemporary issues. The semiotic analysis of three key sequences from the film based on Fiske's code system showed that Hatamikia, through intelligent use of social, technical, and ideological codes, has been able to represent the resistance-negotiation duality not as two contradictory approaches in opposition to each other, but as two complementary strategies within a unified front. The characterization of Chamran and Vesali as the two poles of this spectrum has been done with particular subtlety; Chamran represents a moderate, pragmatic, and negotiation-oriented approach that nevertheless remains committed to revolutionary values, while Vesali symbolizes resistance, sacrifice, and adherence to principles, unwilling to make the slightest retreat.

The research findings indicate that the film *Che*, at the time of its production and screening (2013), precisely at the turning point of political discourse shifting from the resistance-oriented approach of the Ahmadinejad era to the negotiation-oriented approach of the Rouhani era, presents a moderate message. The director, using symbols such as placing a flower on a weapon, choosing the cemetery as the negotiation location, and key dialogues such as "fighting is always the last resort" and "Bazargan's Chamran or Khomeini's Chamran," has attempted to chart a third way between idealism and realism, while simultaneously establishing a direct link with anti-arrogance literature by referring to Israel's role and foreign conspiracies in the film. The analysis of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships in the selected sequences showed that Hatamikia, by linking the historical event of Paveh to Iran's

contemporary circumstances, has symbolically represented the nuclear crisis, international sanctions, and regional tensions. The besieged atmosphere of Paveh city is a metaphor for Iran's situation under the siege of international sanctions; the commanders' disagreement about how to manage the crisis reflects intra-elite disagreements about foreign policy strategies; and the half-hour ultimatum for surrender is an image of international pressures on Iran to accept the demands of great powers. One of the most important findings of this research is that the film *Che* ultimately endorses the resistance approach with Ayatollah Khomeini's order to recapture Paveh and the final victory, but this endorsement is accompanied by an emphasis on the importance of preserving national integrity. This research demonstrated that cinema can function beyond merely reflecting political discourses, serving as a space for negotiating meaning and producing alternative discourses. The film *Che* is in fact an attempt at dialogue between two political currents that appear contradictory on the surface but in essence are both pursuing the preservation of national interests and the country's security. This finding can be instructive for future studies in the fields of cinema and politics, media representation of political discourses, and the role of art in social dialogues.

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