Displaced allegories: post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. By Negar Mottahedeh

Having elaborated her theoretical argument in the introduction, Mottahedeh (literature and women's studies, Duke Univ.) discusses the films of Iranian directors Bahram Bayza'i, Abbas Kiarostami, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf. She demonstrates the role of cinema in the construction of the modern Iran by deciphering and analyzing the visual codes of these directors' films. Mottahedeh argues that postrevolutionary Iranian cinema invented a unique cinematic language that merges spatial/temporal boundaries and has transformed the communicative medium of the cinema. Women's screened bodies emerge as an allegory of national identity, veiled woman as a nation in need of protection from the corrupting gaze of male and/or foreign powers; the choice of village (nonurban sites) reflects a displaced allegory of Islamic modesty rules. Mottahedeh opposes the view of postrevolutionary Iranian cinema in continuity with European modernist tradition--the veiled female body and embedded Ta'ziyeh tradition do not allow modernist cinematic aesthetics--and rightly argues for historical, social, and political conditioning of "national films." Since the author bases her characterization of new Iranian Islamic cinematic language on a few films Iranian authorities view as "nonreligious" and minimally conformist, one may question the conclusiveness of some of her generalizations. But her intriguing reading of Iranian postrevolutionary cinema offers a new perspective. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty.

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