



## Sociology of cinema in Afghanistan: A Review of Films from the Last Two Decades

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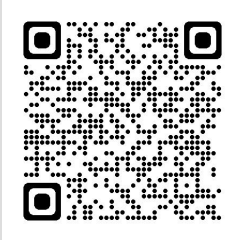
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**Abstract:** This study investigates the role of sociology in the production and analysis of Afghan cinema, with a particular focus on the representation of social issues in films produced over the past two decades. While Afghan cinema has drawn increasing attention in recent years, limited scholarly work has examined how social dynamics shape both content and form. Addressing this gap, the study employs a review-analytical method, collecting data from books, peer-reviewed articles, film critiques, and relevant documentaries. The analysis demonstrates that core social factors—including war, migration, gender relations, cultural values, national identity, and ongoing social transformations—significantly influence narrative structures, character development, and the underlying messages of Afghan films. The findings highlight that an informed understanding of sociological concepts and careful attention to local contexts can enhance the quality of cinematic production and strengthen the social impact of films. Moreover, the study reveals that Afghan filmmakers use creative storytelling and

cinematic techniques to represent lived realities, social constraints, and cultural resistance, thereby engaging both domestic and international audiences. Beyond providing a systematic framework for analyzing Afghan cinema, this research contributes to interdisciplinary discussions by linking sociology and film studies. It also offers practical insights for scholars, filmmakers, and critics seeking to better understand how cinema functions as both a mirror and a medium of social change in Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** *Sociology of cinema, Afghan cinema, film analysis, social representation and analytical review.*

### Introduction

Cinema in Afghanistan has long been more than a mere visual art; it has functioned as a powerful medium for expressing the historical, social, and cultural experiences of its people. As a nation marked by continuous political crises, prolonged wars, and profound social transformations, Afghanistan has witnessed cinema evolve not only as a tool for entertainment but also as a platform for reflecting both the bitter and hopeful realities of society.

The origins of Afghan cinema can be traced back to the 1920s, when King Amanullah Khan, inspired by his travels to Europe, sought to introduce symbols of modernity, including moving pictures, to the country. Although these early efforts were largely symbolic, they laid the

groundwork for the development of narrative filmmaking in later decades. By the 1960s and 1970s, during a period of relative political openness, Afghanistan produced its first feature-length films, which, according to Nicholas (2012, pp. 76–79), represented “an effort to inscribe national identity in the face of cultural imports.” However, the outbreak of successive wars severely disrupted this progress more than 75 percent of Afghanistan’s national film archive was either destroyed or looted, leading to a rupture in the nation’s visual memory. Despite this loss, the rupture itself spurred a new generation of Afghan filmmakers to adopt a critical lens toward both past and present realities.

The Political developments after September 11 in 2001 marked the beginning of a new cinematic phase. Filmmakers such as Siddiq Barmak, with *Osama* (2003), offered poignant reflections on Afghan society, particularly the struggles of women under Taliban rule. The film received international acclaim, winning the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film (Rashid, 2004, pp. 210–212). Similarly, international productions like Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s *Kandahar* (2001) and Marc Forster’s *The Kite Runner* (2007) brought Afghanistan to global cinematic attention during the 2000s (Coll, 2004, pp. 12–30).

Over the last two decades, numerous films—such as Roya Sadat’s *Three Dots* (2003) and *Tar wa Zakhmeh* (2008), Marzia Meshkini’s *Stray Dogs* (2003), Atiq Rahimi’s *Earth and Ashes* (2004) and *The Patience Stone* (2012), Barmak Akram’s *Kabuli Kid* (2008) and *Wajma: An Afghan Love Story* (2013), Siddiq Barmak’s *Opium War* (2008), Homayoun Morouzi’s *An Apple from Paradise* (2008), Sam French’s *Buzkashi Boys* (2012), Asad Sikandar’s *School* (2013), and Jamshid Mahmoudi’s *A Few Cubic Meters of Love* (2014)—gained recognition at international festivals and earned critical acclaim.

One of the most significant developments during this period has been the emergence of women directors in Afghanistan. For the first time, women not only participated as filmmakers but also introduced a distinctly female perspective into Afghan cinema. Their works often focused on women’s lives and struggles, offering deeper, more intimate portrayals of Afghan women to both local and international audiences. As many critics argue, the lens of these filmmakers captured women’s pain and resilience in ways that may be inaccessible—or at least far more difficult—for male directors. Equally, when their cameras turned to women’s agency, creativity, and aspirations, they presented authentic and nuanced images that challenged stereotypes and enriched cinematic discourse.

Despite this progress, Afghan cinema still faces significant challenges. Few scholarly studies have systematically analyzed Afghan films from a sociological perspective, and existing literature often emphasizes either political disruption or external representations rather than the creative agency of Afghan filmmakers themselves. This research addresses that gap by exploring the intersection of sociology and Afghan cinema, specifically examining how social realities such as war, migration, gender, culture, and identity are represented in films produced over the past two decades. The study aims to contribute to the literature by offering an analytical framework that highlights cinema as both a mirror and a catalyst of social change, thereby advancing interdisciplinary research between sociology and film studies.

## Research Method

This research was conducted using a **review-analytical method**. Data were collected from library sources, scholarly articles, film critiques, and documentaries related to Afghan cinema. The review-analytical method enables a systematic and qualitative analysis of social

representations, the role of sociology in film structures, and cultural messages. The advantages of this method include: providing a precise theoretical and analytical framework for the study of cinematic works; facilitating the comparison and alignment of findings with similar studies at the international level; and offering comprehensive and well-documented insights into the influence of social and cultural factors on film production. In this method, all information was organized thematically and analyzed systematically to clearly demonstrate the relationship between sociology and cinema.

### **Significance and Rationale of the Study**

Understanding the role of sociology in cinema enables filmmakers to convey social and cultural messages more accurately and to provide audiences with a genuine awareness of society. Moreover, this study can serve as a scholarly reference for the analysis of Afghan films, cinema education, and interdisciplinary research between film studies and sociology. The importance of this topic is particularly heightened in contemporary Afghanistan, where films can act as tools for raising awareness, promoting social critique, and reinforcing national identity.

Cinema, as both an art form and a mass medium, not only reflects the culture and values of society but also plays a direct role in shaping attitudes, identities, and social representations. Despite its significance, sociological research on Afghan cinema remains limited and scattered, especially over the past two decades, during which political and social transformations have directly influenced film production and representation.

This study is necessary because, firstly, it addresses the lack of sociological studies on Afghan cinema, as existing analyses are largely technical and aesthetic. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of identity and gender representation in films, showing how sociological approaches can reveal cinema's role in reinforcing or challenging social norms. Understanding the interaction between art and social structure, as demonstrated by sociological analyses of cinema, clarifies how films contribute to both the reinforcement and critique of social norms. Additionally, analyzing production networks, institutions, audiences, and economic and political conditions helps illuminate the interplay between art and social structures. The findings of this research not only enhance the understanding of Afghan cinema but also provide a foundation for effective cultural policymaking and the responsible production of cinematic works in the future. Ultimately, this study addresses a scholarly and research need in the fields of Afghan cinema and the sociology of art and can serve as a reference for future research.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary aim of this study is to examine the role of sociology in the production and analysis of Afghan cinematic works, with a focus on films produced over the past two decades. The specific objectives include:

1. To analyze how social issues such as war, migration, gender, culture, and national identity influence the content and structure of Afghan films.
2. To examine how social realities and cultural resistance are represented in films.

3. To identify the strategies filmmakers use to convey social and cultural messages through cinematic techniques.
4. To provide a scientific framework for analyzing Afghan cinema from a sociological perspective.

### **Research Questions**

This study is designed to address the following questions:

1. How have social and cultural factors, such as war, migration, and gender constraints, influenced the content of Afghan films?
2. How do Afghan filmmakers represent social realities and the cultural resistance of society?
3. How can an understanding of sociological concepts enhance the quality and social impact of films?
4. What theoretical frameworks can be applied for a sociological analysis of Afghan cinema?

### **Literature Review**

A review of the literature indicates that research on Afghan cinema has primarily focused on film history, the representation of war, and women's issues. Key sources include analyses such as *Representing the History of Afghan Cinema* (Nasr, 2019), *Representation of Afghanistan in Hollywood and Eastern Cinema* (Graham, 2010), *Cinema and Theater Transformations after September 11* (Chow & Chen, 2016), and *Documenting Lost Films and Their Social Impacts* (Ghani, 2021). Despite these studies, there remains a lack of comprehensive, sociologically grounded research that systematically analyzes the impact of social factors on film production and representation. This study, focusing on the past two decades, seeks to fill this scholarly gap and provide a defined analytical framework.

### **Sociology**

Edgar Morin, a French sociologist, in his book *Introduction to Complex Thought*, discusses an era in which humans produce knowledge through complex thinking. The challenge of complex thought lies in dealing with the endless interplay of mutual reactions, interdependencies between phenomena, ambiguity, uncertainty, and contradictions. Yet, it is only through complex thought that humans in the planetary age can civilize their understanding of themselves. This is particularly important when understanding human-social phenomena, which cannot be fully explained by the principles governing natural phenomena (Morin, 2015, p. 21).

According to Morin, humans must confront social-human complexity rather than ignore or conceal it. Especially today, when human relations differ significantly from those in earlier times, navigating life according to local conventions is insufficient for addressing contemporary issues. It is here that the necessity of understanding human thoughts and social relations emerges.

Sociology, as a branch of social sciences, assumes the task of revealing the world and social relations within it. Understanding society in sociology arises through observing, comprehending, and representing social realities. Sociology is not only a knowledge-producing discipline but also

a transformative one; it enables social construction, which in turn produces knowledge, creating a continuous feedback loop. To begin this process, familiarity with the foundational principles of sociology is essential.

Anthony Giddens, in his book *Sociology*, argues that what might seem to be natural human emotions are in fact heavily influenced by social factors. Understanding how life structures social experiences is central to sociological insight. Sociology emerged as a field to understand transformations initiated by industrialization in the West and continues to analyze the nature of social change. People in various communities rely on their knowledge of society and social behaviors, often guided by social norms. Even when unaware, all human actions are influenced by group membership. Sociology seeks to obtain accurate and sufficient understanding of social processes, not only for knowledge's sake but also to provide solutions for social problems. It aims to strengthen human control over social relationships, organizations, and institutions, while enhancing predictive capacities and logical approaches to social analysis (Giddens, 2019, pp. 2–10).

### **Sociology of Art**

The sociology of art, a subfield of sociology, studies the relationship between art and society, examining how art interacts with culture, politics, social needs, and values. It explores how art shapes identity, social change, and cultural influence, and investigates its impact across social classes (Eliot, 2008, p. 212; Lahire, 2010, p. 65).

Two main approaches dominate this field: the reflective approach and the formative approach. The reflective approach views art as a mirror of society, representing social conditions and contexts without necessarily presenting the full or exact reality. By analyzing an artwork, one can understand the society and social circumstances from which it emerged.

The formative approach sees art as exerting influence beyond merely reflecting society. Through creation and engagement, artists impact social structures, shaping concepts and perceptions within the audience. This approach is particularly evident in Marxist perspectives, where art can act as an ideological force. Neither approach is mutually exclusive; artworks often both reflect and shape society. A notable example is the social novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which both depicted racial discrimination in America and influenced anti-racist attitudes (Wolff, 1981, pp. 5–10).

Art can serve as a form of creation as well as a means of understanding, the latter being the focus in sociology of art. Unlike scientific knowledge, artistic understanding relies on emotion and intuition, occurring in three stages: discovery, expression, and reception by audiences. In this framework, sociology of art examines the artist, the social context of creation, the artwork, and the audience collectively.

### **Key Theorists in Sociology of Art**

1. **Pierre Bourdieu (1993)** – Introduced the concept of the “artistic field,” demonstrating that art production and consumption are influenced by power, cultural capital, and social position (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37).

2. **Howard Becker (1982)** – Developed the concept of “art worlds,” highlighting the collective network of artists, institutions, and audiences necessary for art production (Becker, 1982, p. 25).
3. **Jonathan Wolff (1981)** – Emphasized that art is a product of social and economic relations; distinctions between “high” and “popular” art are socially constructed (Wolff, 1981, p. 10).
4. **Frances Haskell (1993)** – Viewed art as representing history and collective identity, actively shaping cultural narratives (Haskell, 1993, p. 89).
5. **Anthony Elliott (2008)** – Considered art a form of social action capable of reflecting and transforming social structures (Elliott, 2008, p. 212).
6. **Bernard Lahire (2010)** – Saw art as both reflective and constitutive of social values, emphasizing the link between individual artists and social structures (Lahire, 2010, p. 65).

### **Sociology in Cultural and Artistic Studies**

Sociology is fundamental for analyzing culture and art as social phenomena. Bourdieu (1977, p. 215) illustrates how cultural and artistic fields are shaped by power relations, with taste reflecting unequal distribution of cultural and economic capital. Hall (1997, p. 25) similarly argues that artistic and media representations reflect dominant ideologies or social resistance. Sociology thus provides essential tools for understanding art as part of social life.

### **Sociology of Cinema**

Cinema sociology or film sociology is a specialized branch of art and media sociology that analyzes cinema as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. Unlike aesthetic or technical analysis, it examines production, distribution, consumption, and representation in films. Cinema both mirrors society and helps shape collective identity, values, and social attitudes (Ginsburg, 2012, pp. 3–6).

Sociological analysis of cinema was formed in the early 20th century. Frankfurters, like Adorno and Horkheimer, saw cinema as part of the "culture industry" that fostered the reproduction of dominant ideologies (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1947/1991, pp. 30-35). In the 1960s and 1970s, critical approaches and structural theories such as Karl Marx and Michel Foucault analyzed power and representation in cinema. In the following decades, audience studies and cultural studies investigated how films are perceived and consumed by different social groups (Hall, 1997, pp. 15-19).

### **Several foundational theories include:**

- **Bourdieu’s Cultural Field** – Films exist within a network of social actors and power relations, where positions depend on economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 29–34).

- **Becker’s Art Worlds** – Film production is a collaborative process among various actors, including artists, technicians, investors, institutions, and audiences (Becker, 1982, pp. 1–39).
- **Adorno’s Culture Industry** – Cinema can standardize and homogenize cultural products, suppressing individual creativity while promoting ideological conformity (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002, pp. 94–136).
- **Stuart Hall’s Representation** – Films actively construct social and cultural realities, influenced by power and ideology (Hall, 1997, pp. 15–25).
- **Giddens’ Structuration Theory** – Social structures and individual actions are interdependent, with human agency capable of reproducing or transforming structures (Giddens, 1984, pp. 16–20).

### **Sociology of Cinema in Afghanistan**

Cinema in Afghanistan has functioned as both an artistic medium and a tool for representing social, cultural, and historical realities. From the mid-20th century to today, Afghan films have reflected the country’s complex society—marked by war, migration, poverty, entrenched traditions, and a simultaneous aspiration for modernity and change. A sociological approach allows cinema to be studied as social texts, reflecting power relations, ethnic and gender identities, class disparities, and political structures.

As Kakar (2020, p. 53) notes, “Afghan cinema has provided a platform for raising social and cultural questions rather than merely serving as entertainment.” Afghan films, whether narrative or documentary, often carry messages beyond artistic storytelling, functioning as social documents. Analyzing cinema sociologically in Afghanistan helps understand social trends and cultural transformations.

### **Key social themes in Afghan cinema include:**

1. **Representation of Women** – Women are often depicted as symbols of suffering, resistance, and hope, e.g., *Osama* (2003) and *Hawa, Maryam, Ayesha* (2019) (Kakar, 2020, p. 56).
2. **War and Violence** – Films like *Kandahar* (2001) and *Opium War* (2008) depict war’s impact on daily life and collective memory (Nasr, 2019, p. 44).
3. **Children and the Future** – Children symbolize an uncertain and fragile future, affected by war and migration (Ghani, 2021, p. 72).
4. **Migration and Exile** – Films by exiled or migrant directors explore identity and belonging (Chow & Chen, 2016, p. 119).
5. **Ethnic Identity and Cultural Diversity** – Films address multi-ethnic narratives and the importance of coexistence (Graham, 2010, p. 133).

- 6. International Representation** – Afghan cinema challenges stereotypical depictions of the country in Western films, emphasizing humanistic and social perspectives (Graham, 2010, pp. 88–91).

Over the past two decades, Afghan cinema has faced social, political, and cultural challenges, including war, migration, gender limitations, cultural pressures, and rapid social change. Despite the significance of these factors, scholarly studies analyzing Afghan films within their social, cultural, and psychological contexts remain limited, creating a gap in understanding the social representation, cultural resistance, and national identity conveyed through cinema.

## Findings

This study aims to examine the sociological aspects of Afghan cinema, particularly focusing on films produced in the last two decades. It specifically seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How have social and cultural factors such as war, migration, and gender restrictions influenced the content of Afghan films?**

The findings indicate that over the past two decades, Afghan cinema has reflected social, political, and cultural changes. Social and cultural factors, including war, migration, and gender restrictions, have directly influenced the content of Afghan films. During this period, films have not only depicted the issues of women, children, war, and migration but have also sought to foster a sense of national solidarity and collective memory. Films such as *Opium War* (Sediq Barmak, 2008) and *Kandahar* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 2001) demonstrate that war has not only shaped narratives and characters but also represented the collective memory and lived experiences of society (Nasr, 2019, p. 44).

Films like *Osama* (Barmak, 2003), *A Letter to the President* (Sadat, 2017), and *Hawa, Maryam, Ayesha* (Karimi, 2019) serve as concrete examples of applying sociological analysis to characters and narratives, highlighting the restrictions and suffering of Afghan women while emphasizing their role as social actors (Kakar, 2020, pp. 55–56).

Afghan cinema has undergone significant transformations from the pre-civil war era to the 1990s and beyond. Exile films, such as *The Patience Stone* (Atiq Rahimi, 2012), reflect challenges of identity and cultural belonging for Afghan migrants, portraying experiences of exile and the search for identity (Chow & Chen, 2016, p. 119).

- 2. How do Afghan filmmakers represent social realities and cultural resilience?**

Findings show that over the past two decades, Afghan filmmakers have used storytelling, character development, and visual representation to depict social realities and cultural resilience. Films like *A Letter to the President* and *Hawa, Maryam, Ayesha* illustrate how women confront restrictions and how the social consequences of these challenges are reflected in society. Similarly, the documentary “*Mina Walking*” Life in Kabul (Yusuf Baraki, 2015) documents everyday life and social challenges of children, highlighting the cultural resilience of the community.

### **3. How can understanding sociological concepts enhance the quality and social impact of films?**

The findings indicate that understanding sociological concepts—such as analyzing social structures, culture, identity, and inequalities—helps filmmakers create films with social depth and impactful messages. By accurately analyzing society and real problems, films can reflect the issues faced by women, children, and minorities. *Paper Planes* (Mark Forster, 2007) is an example of representing children and the next generation in the context of social conditions (Ghani, 2021, p. 72).

### **4. Which theoretical frameworks can be applied to the sociological analysis of Afghan cinema?**

Several key theoretical frameworks can be applied:

- **Bourdieu's Field Theory:** Bourdieu considers cinema as part of the "cultural field," where power, cultural and economic capital, and the social position of actors are decisive. This theory helps explain why certain festival films in Afghanistan, such as *Osama*, *A Letter to the President*, or *Hawa*, *Maryam*, *Ayesha*, focus more on cultural values and social representation, gaining legitimacy from symbolic and cultural capital, whereas commercial films often rely on economic capital to attract general audiences. The theory shows that Afghan cinema in recent decades has mostly operated in an autonomous pole of the cultural field, emphasizing social realities and cultural resilience even if this path does not generate direct financial profit. Consequently, some films gain international recognition but face screening and audience challenges domestically (Nash, 2018, pp. 72–75).
- **Becker's Art Worlds Theory:** Becker emphasizes that art worlds are dynamic and constantly changing. In Afghanistan, social and political changes after 2001 led to the formation of new art worlds—a network of filmmakers, cultural institutions, and foreign festivals enabling the emergence of a new generation of films. This explains why Afghan cinema has reached the global stage despite severe limitations, forming its unique art world based on collective collaboration and new rules (Becker, 2008, pp. 78–82).
- **Adorno's Culture Industry Theory:** Applying this theory to Afghan cinema shows that the influx of foreign commercial films and the tendency of some local productions toward commercial formats reflect the influence of the culture industry. Many entertainment-oriented productions prioritize audience attraction and profitability over social critique and representation of complex realities. This aligns with Adorno and Horkheimer's concern about the commodification of art, designed to weaken critique and homogenize tastes. Cinematic art can thus function both as a tool of hegemony and resistance (Adorno, 1991, pp. 32–36).
- **Stuart Hall's Representation Theory:** Hall's framework allows examining how Afghan cinema represents women, children, war, and migration. Films by Sediq Barmak or

Sahra Karimi depict Afghan women not merely as victims but as symbols of resistance and social agency, contrasting with foreign media stereotypes of Afghan women as passive. Similarly, films on migration and exile represent Afghan lived experiences, which can either reinforce or challenge cultural identity depending on narrative framing. Hall's theory demonstrates how cinema constructs and conveys social identity, cultural resilience, and even ethnic and gender tensions, providing powerful tools for sociological analysis (Hall, 1997, pp. 25–28).

- Giddens' Structuration Theory: Cinema is both a product of social structures and individual action; films can reflect structures and also create opportunities for change. Afghan filmmakers in the past two decades, aware of social conditions—war, migration, and gender discrimination—have created works that challenge and reproduce these structures. For instance, *Osama* (Sediq Barmak, 2003) is both a product of the Taliban-era structural conditions and an expression of the filmmaker's creative agency in portraying Afghan women. This theory emphasizes that cinema is not only a reflection of structure but also a space for resistance, reconstruction, and social change. These findings indicate that Afghan cinema is not merely an artistic product but also a sociological document. Films such as *Osama* (Barmak, 2003) and *Paper Planes* (2007) demonstrate that filmmakers, focusing on the human experiences of war victims, strive to depict social realities (Rashid, 2004, pp. 210–212). These films show how political and military crises affect everyday life and social relations. Using Bourdieu's framework, it can be seen that films reflect Afghanistan's social field, encompassing power, gender, tradition, and modernity. Filmmakers convey social and cultural messages through thematic choices, narrative style, and character development. Cinema serves both as a tool for social representation and as an instrument of cultural transformation.

## Discussion

**In the last two decades, Afghan cinema has confronted complex social, cultural, and political transformations.** Findings indicate that films not only narrate historical and political events but also reflect societal values, identities, and cultural resilience. This suggests that cinema, beyond entertainment, functions as a sociological and media tool capable of providing deeper insights into Afghan society (Giddens, 2013; Bourdieu, 1993).

## Representation and Key Theories

Applying theories of representation (Hall, 1997), social impact (Giles, 2003, p. 29), and cultural identity (Anderson, 1983, p. 56) helps analyze Afghan cinematic works. Films such as *Osama*, *Hawa*, *Maryam*, *Ayesha*, and *A Letter to the President* serve as examples that not only reflect social realities but also, through narrative choices and film structures, shape audience perception of society and collective identities (Kakar, 2020). These works illustrate filmmakers' efforts to consolidate collective identity and maintain cultural resilience in the face of crises.

## Sociological Themes in Afghan Cinema

### 1. Representation of Women:

Women in Afghan cinema symbolize resistance, hope, and suffering. Films directed by Roya Sadat and Sahra Karimi go beyond traditional stereotypes, portraying women as active agents engaged in resistance and social change. These representations highlight social and cultural consequences and demonstrate cinema's capacity for education and awareness-raising (Kakar, 2017).

## 2. **War and Violence:**

War and armed conflict are recurrent themes in Afghan films. Works such as *Opium War* and *Kandahar* depict the destructive impacts of war on society, collective memory, and cultural identity (Nasr, 2019). These portrayals help audiences understand both collective and individual experiences in wartime and foster social empathy.

## 3. **Children and the Future of Society**

Children in films like *Paper Planes* represent the future generation and societal hope, yet they are simultaneously victims of war and migration. This focus allows audiences to comprehend the social consequences of crises on future generations and emphasizes the importance of education and social support for children (Ghani, 2021, p. 72).

## 4. **Migration and Exile:**

Exilic films, such as *The Patience Stone* (Rahimi, 2012), reflect the challenges of identity and cultural belonging for Afghan migrants (Chow & Chen, 2016, p. 119). These works demonstrate that migration and exile shape individual lives and become significant social and cultural issues.

## 5. **Ethnic Identity and Cultural Diversity:**

Cinema serves as a platform for dialogue among ethnic groups, yet it also risks reproducing social divisions. Film analysis shows how cinema can highlight ethnic identities and promote understanding and dialogue between groups—or, conversely, reinforce existing societal gaps (Graham, 2010, p. 133).

## 6. **Afghan Cinema on the International Stage:**

The participation of Afghan films in international festivals and competitions provides a lens on Afghan society and culture (Hanbury, 2017, p. 115). Such international exposure not only elevates the status of Afghan cinema but also enables cultural influence and soft diplomacy. However, the gap between domestic and global audiences remains a significant challenge that requires careful attention.

## **Critical Analysis and Challenges**

Despite the progress made, Afghan cinema faces financial constraints, cultural and political limitations, and security threats. These issues can restrict the production of high-quality films and the accurate representation of social issues. On the other hand, Afghan filmmakers have demonstrated that even under constrained conditions, they can produce rich and impactful social and cultural narratives that reflect societal realities and resilience.

A sociological analysis of Afghan cinema shows that it can serve both as a reflection of social realities and as a tool for social change. Themes such as representation, identity, cultural resistance, and social impact provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding Afghan cinema. However, the existing challenges in production and distribution affect the future of cinema in Afghanistan, highlighting the need for strategic planning, financial support, and intelligent cultural policymaking.

## Conclusion

Afghan cinema over the past two decades has served as a vivid reflection of the country's social, cultural, and political transformations. The findings of this study indicate that cinema has not merely been a source of entertainment, but a powerful tool for representing social realities, cultural resilience, and collective identity. Films focusing on themes such as the representation of women, children, war, migration, exile, and ethnic identity have depicted both collective and individual experiences, guiding audiences toward a deeper understanding of the complexities of Afghan society.

A sociological analysis of Afghan cinema shows that films have the potential not only to reflect reality but also to influence social attitudes and behaviors. Theories of representation, social impact, and cultural identity demonstrate that cinema can shape collective identity and strengthen cultural resilience. Despite numerous challenges—including financial constraints, censorship, security threats, and the gap between local and international audiences—Afghan cinema has managed to establish its presence in international festivals, offering a global reflection of the country's social and cultural conditions. This underscores the significance of cinema as both a cultural and sociological medium.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that a deep understanding of sociological concepts can enhance both the quality of production and the social impact of cinematic works. The application of sociological theories—including Bourdieu's field theory, Becker's worlds of art, Adorno's culture industry, and Hall's representation theory—provides valuable analytical tools for a deeper comprehension of Afghan cinema and allows for a more precise evaluation of representational themes and social consequences of films.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that, despite facing limitations and crises, Afghan cinema possesses a high capacity for societal representation, reinforcement of collective identity, and social transformation. Cultural support, strategic investment, and sociological training for filmmakers can create a bright future for the field, turning Afghan cinema into a powerful instrument for cultural and social development.

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