

# Contemporary Female Voices: The case study of *Our Uniform*, by Yegane Moghaddam

Vozes Femininas Contemporâneas: O estudo de caso de *Our Uniform*, de Yegane Moghaddam

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## Abstract

This article is focused on the relevance of addressing contemporary representation of women in animation films. Its main objective is to create awareness on the theme, to contribute to a global dialogue that helps to fight intolerance against women and to promote an ethical conscientization of mutual coexistence, based on human rights, with a special focus on gender equality. To achieve this objective, our research conducted an analysis of the case study, *Our Uniform* (2023), directed by Iranian Yegane Moghaddam, which reflects the problematics of women in a very expressive terms, in a geography where the extreme consequences of violence against women have not yet been resolved and which contributes to answer our objective. As a methodology of research, we combined literature review focused on the representations of women in the Islamic world, a series of three interviews conducted by the authors to the Iranian film director to determine her intentions and to understand the contemporary Iranian as a primary source of information, and the use of an animation model of analysis created specifically for animated film (Peres, 2019).

## Keywords

Female · Hair · *Hijab* · Equity · Animation

## Resumo

Este artigo tem como foco a pertinência de análise da representatividade contemporânea da mulher no cinema de animação, tendo por objetivos principais de contribuir para uma melhor consciencialização

acerca do tema, contribuir para um diálogo global de combate à intolerância e promover a necessidade ética de coexistência mútua, baseada nos direitos humanos, em especial na igualdade de gênero. Para tal, propõe-se uma análise da curta-metragem de animação, *Our Uniform* (2023), realizada pela iraniana Yegane Moghaddam, cujo filme incide sobre esta problemática de forma muito expressiva, numa geografia onde as consequências extremas de violência contra a mulher ainda não estão resolvidas e cujo debate responde de inúmeras formas aos nossos objetivos de investigação. Como metodologia, este artigo combina uma revisão de literatura sobre o tema da mulher no mundo islâmico, uma série de três entrevistas conduzidas pelas autoras à realizadora do filme para apuramento de intenções e contexto da realidade iraniana, e o recurso a um modelo de análise que se debruça especificamente sobre filmes em animação (Peres, 2019).

## Palavras-chave

Feminino · Cabelo · *Hijab* · Equidade · Animação

### 1. Introduction

A primary motivation behind this article grew from a longstanding existential debate, evident through the long timeline of history, which revealed a pattern that concerns a constant struggle of female gender to achieve equity, equality and human rights protection throughout various ages and stages of their lives. This wide problematic, reflects issues, that span from child marriage, unbalanced family structural contexts, patriarchal models of dependency, maternity leave protection and support, child care support, reduced leadership roles access, reduced education access, reduced professional and wages when compared to men, and as well within the context of intimate relationships, women face a culture of unbalanced levels of respect and inner comfort in relationships of abuse tolerated by laws and political governance. Despite the longevity and seriousness of the theme and its unavoidable relevance, its readjustment in the contemporary world has still not evolved into levels of reasonable ethical response. In this article we intend to promote the urgency of tackling this

theme by creating a dialogue and awareness, through the analysis of a relevant film about this subject, to contribute to the need for change of laws and rights which undermine women.

Recently, in 2023, the international animation festival Cinanima, in Espinho, Portugal, honored and awarded the Iranian film *Our Uniform* (Moghaddam, 2023), directed by the Iranian filmmaker Yegane Moghaddam, for its engaging and documentative approach, its pertinent theme about women representation, which presents in a first-person narrative, the director's true story, offering a profound reflection about a female experience, particularly concerning the mandatory use of *hijab* in Iran. After being nominated for an Oscar of the Academy of U.S.A, the director, who traveled to America for the event, faced herself the threat of coming back to Iran, to face consequences, having since then, decided to live in the U.S.A. revealing the serious impact of this issue. *Our Uniform* (Moghaddam, 2023) is a seven minutes short animated film, which makes use of a very intimate narration by the director, conveying a documentary and biographical approach to the film. The film unfolds the story of a young girl growing up in Iran, depicting how the mandatory use of the *hijab* restricts and deprives young girls from developing themselves fully, to express their individual views, voices, identity and freedom of choice. Additionally, it gives visibility of how the use of *hijab* deprives young adolescents to develop their full personality, not only by the imposition of the regime but as well in terms of intellectual development, by not being used to have alternatives, neither to make choices for themselves, neither being used to express themselves about different matters in various contexts and being prohibited to certain aspects of life, constraining their intellectual development to certain areas only, excluding them from even protecting themselves. On a more emotional level, the film also reveals how young female adolescents are educated to be invisible and unheard, growing muted and almost nonexistent, without an opinion on marriage or love choices, and feeling humiliated and undermined by the laws of power.

To answer the objective of this paper, which is to create awareness about the theme, we used a combined methodology that includes methods such as literature review on the theme specifically about the

islamic world and female representation, we used qualitative methods by conducting informal interviews to the Iranian director (which we prefer not to reveal in transcription, reference or direct citations, using only the content on wider terms, due to safety issues concerning the director), and also used the analytical model of animation film analysis created by Catia Peres (Peres, 2019) to reinforced the analysis on the context of animation.

The context of the informal interviews of our group discussion involved three female animation filmmakers (the two authors – a Portuguese and a Brazilian female filmmakers, and an Iranian filmmaker), conducted through zoom calls in 2024, between Portugal and Iran where the director was living at that time and also more random anonymous testimonies from people living in Iran. The conversations revealed to be both striking and unexpected on how each one of us looked at issues especially in connection with the exposition of body and hair and female role. In a first approach even European and Brazilian perspectives, although being both liberal about it, had different concerns about it, being the Brazilian view concerned with the overexposure and consequent sexualization of the female body; while the Portuguese view was more concerned with female mental health during maternity and child care periods and consequent professional financial support; while in the Iranian perspective the concerns about hair, body, education and professional life were so much more extreme to the point of not a single strand of hair was tolerated, but in opposition the children care and maternity was seen as more supportive by family members on helping the mother to raise their children.

We also discovered that the concept of orientalism (Said, 1978), an approach in which western views and perspectives represent a threat to fully understand oriental issues, in this case, in relation to a fully understanding of aspects of Iranian culture, was important to take in consideration. For this reason, the interviews were both helpful but above all surprising as it enhanced certain aspects that we were not prepared to discuss. As we got closer to an Iranian perspective, we found out that a western approach was very critical towards some issues, while on the other side we found a calm and serene discourse about how it was important to accept every culture in order to find possibilities of evolving from there. The

appeal to become neutral in the face of certain violent situations was, for the authors, brutally difficult to accept, but rather than accepting, the conversations evolved into a converged dialogue, which guided us to understand that in order to change we had to see and become emphatic with both sides of the same situation. For instance, we got to know that some women like to wear *hijab* in Iran and don't see it as a problem, restriction or negative aspect, validating that an overreaction against it was not even a starting point for a conversation. On another hand the use of *hijab* not by choice but by imposition was for all of us hard to accept as a cultural issue, when it becomes the object of criminal consequences. We came to terms that neither a neutral critical analysis in Iranian culture could be conducted and neither a neutral view on abusive laws nor forces of women could be silenced. For this reason, we approach our analysis from a "neutral" perspective, or unbiased critical view on the subject regarding our backgrounds, in order to raise more research material, more questions, more reactions, more responses, and more possibilities of change and consequently to create awareness with that debate. One of the most powerful aspects of the film we came to conclusion was that it shows more than it tells, it portrays more than it preaches, it raises more awareness rather than criticism, judgmental views or condemnation. The interviews were also punctuated with humor about the contrasts of our identities even through zoom calls, as we got to see each other's clothes, and hair style preferences among other issues. The context of the interviews was crucial to define our perspective on how to approach the analysis of the film from various angles, and to identify it as a tool to create awareness.

The use of the analytical model for animation films (Peres, 2019) reflects the research work influenced by foundational and seminal authors in animation analysis. This model uses a structure of analysis that consolidates and structures information from authors, references, key concepts in animation, themes, analysis of case studies through specific variables that are concerned with animation. The model is constructed in three levels (conceptual structures, graphical structures and sequential structures and under each one is sub-divides in different variables of analysis), which in this paper we addressed only the first level. The latter is concerned with conceptual structures of the

film, within variables of research such as the origins, the intentions of the director, the motivation, the context, the narrative, the story approach to narrative in terms of animation originality and innovation. In animation, different from other disciplines, the use of indexicality in relation with its referent (when an image matches the real representation of its object or referent) is not a concern. Despite the use of a real audio testimony by the director, the documentary and biographical approach, the symbolic approach to images, not concerned with realism, but instead trying to capture a sense of authenticity, like a capsule of time of that geography, empowers the film to address serious issues in visual symbolic approaches avoiding judgemental reactions and instead creating more awareness about the worries of young female growing in Iran in a delicate and sensitive approach.

## 2. Critical context of Islamic Female Representation

Through the history of feminist movements, the women's suffrage period at the beginning of the 20th century, which witnessed the fight of women defending their right to vote equally as men, marked a point of no return for women to foster equity. Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2011) has since early days contributed to reshape perceptions of women's roles and social expectations, gender relations and questioned the deep-rooted norms that subordinated women to a reproduction role and motherhood dependency, leaving man free to dominate, and govern, which reflect fundamental aspects that led to the intellectual foundations of feminist movements. By the 1960s and 1970s, feminist movement shifted its focus to women's rights in education, work, equal pay, and the transformation of traditional gender roles, while, during the 1990s, efforts were directed to expand the rights and agendas of women. Nowadays, feminism is focused on women's empowerment, equal rights in marriage, maternity leave and support, childcare support, using media to raise awareness and a call to action and change.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014), a contemporary Nigerian author, who wrote *We Should All Be Feminists*, expands the perception of the term feminism. Adichie advocates for a global under-

standing of feminism, one that transcends cultural and geographic borders. She argues that gender equality is not solely related to women's issues but also a social imperative and ethical group response, urging individuals of all genders to embrace feminist ideals for a more equitable world.

In the complex backdrop of Iran, the imposition of the mandatory *hijab* rule arose in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution. As outlined by Shirin Ebadi (2011) in her work *Golden Cage*, it is depicted the experiences of three brothers in Iran with distinct perspectives and ideologies, eloquently illustrated how the Islamic revolution came to power after the Shah Pahlavi dynasty, subsequently led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The turning tables on this subject, marked a period characterized by tyranny and oppression, particularly towards women and the reduction of their human rights, a condition that persists to this day, followed by his successor, leader Ali Khamenei. Within this context of power, violence and oppression raised against women, children, refugees, human rights and the criminalization of the non use of the *hijab* which has become an obsession of the regime, women were positioned at the bottom of the pyramid. This mandatory practice, conducted under a harsh public vigilance in the form of a morality police, has raised violent arrests and brutal repression towards women in accordance with the Iranian governance standards. According to Shirin Ebadi (2007) the interpretation of Islamic religions standards, under the rule of these leaders, Khomeini and Ali Khamenei, is misinterpreted and is directed to neglect and oppress women which, according to her, there's no reason for the Islamic religion not to be compatible with women's rights and human's rights in the light of contemporary society. Ebadi, was the first muslim Iranian activist women to be awarded with the Nobel peace prize in Iran, after a life dedicated to the defend the female causes such as child female abuse, female abuse, assassination, rape, and the oppression of women in general. Her work extended to intellectuals, such as the Canadian photojournalist Zara Kazemi, who faced rape, torture, and murder in Iran, and which offers us a vivid picture of the struggles of one woman against the system. She was one the first female judges in Iran, also a former lawyer,

writer, teacher who served in court from 1975 until 1979, when she was forbidden by the religious authorities and regime to continue to work, being blocked from practicing her job within accordance with the governance of Iran, under the statement that no women were fit to serve as judges. She was the founder and president of DHRC – Defenders of Human rights center, and lives in exile in the UK, after years of assassination attempts, imprisonment and after being forbidden to practice her work. She is the author of the book, *Iran Awakening: One Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Life and Country* (2007), in which she explains very clearly how during the 23 years that she was forbidden to act in the courts of Tehran, she stands for the harmony of Islam within values of equity, democracy and expression of faith without fundamentalisms and violence which target mostly female individuals. As she explains no religion and no belief can bind women from having their own human rights.

In a slightly different perspective, Azadeh Fatehrad (2019), a researcher at the Visual and Material Culture Research Centre, Kingston University, has conducted diverse projects, providing a huge contribution on demonstrating unsettling western views that consider the veil as a tool of oppression, which she doesn't deny, but to which she extends a wider perspective, such as the search of meaning about covering or not covering your hair in a culture like Iran. She also disrupted the traditional academic narrative, using a speech in a collective first person speech such as “we” and “I” point of views, as a framework to get away from a euro-centric understanding of the veil.

On another perspective, Claudia Yaghoobi, in the book *Temporary Marriage in Iran, Gender and Body Politics in Modern Iranian Film and Literature* (2020), projects a commentary about the relevance on how prescribed roles of certain political views are addressed to women and their bodies, conducting narratives of how women can behave socially and individually according with political laws and institutions of power that determine standards which degenerates into contexts of high level of violence against young and adult women, specially not having the right to choose, or to become owners of their own bodies or to live in healthy and safe environments. The book, *MeToo Movement in Iran,*

*The: Reporting Sexual Violence and Harassment (Sex, Family and Culture in the Middle East)* by the same author (Yaghoobi, 2023), brings to light a whole movement #Me too in Iran, which exposes the context of institutions of power, financial and political higher hierarchies who act to exploit and deprive vulnerable groups from their rights, acting with extreme violence free and unregulated, to perpetuate a context of segregation. According to Peter McLaren, “‘Pluralism’, as a philosophy of dialogue, should be an integral and essential part of future education” (1997, p. 16). Educating is of utmost importance and contextualizing the social and cultural reality of the learner is crucial, considering ethnic identity as just one characteristic of an individual. Paulo Freire (1976), in the book *Education, the Practice of Freedom*, conceptualizes education as reflecting on existential challenges and reality, connecting it to the deeper causes of lived events, always seeking to place particular facts within the entirety of the situation. Addressing the issue of multiple cultural identities in education is relevant because it is necessary to expand the concept of animation to broader notions of thematic and aesthetic experience.

We believe that in this article we particularly analyze this theme under the concept of pluralism, cultural diversity values, demonstrated through the film analysis within a reciprocal relationship between cultures, to foster a critical awareness of our society, while still addressing the urgent need of protection, integrity support and safety for every person.

### **3. *Our Uniform* (2023), animation short film, directed by Yegane Moghaddam**

In the film, an Iranian girl unfolds the tapestry of her school memories, navigating in the fabrics of her well-worn uniform. Amidst the nostalgia, she candidly grasps the social construction that defines her primarily as a female, delving into the roots of this perception forged in the crucible of her school years. The film while standing at times as critical, offering a poignant commentary on the clothing conventions imposed on the canvas of young lives, as well it tries to contextualize a country that resonates with a cultural context which cannot just be eradicated.



**Figure 1.** Frames of the film *Our Uniform*, directed by Yegane Moghaddam (2023)

*Our Uniform* (Moghaddam, 2023) represents literally and metaphorically what it is like to be a female child growing up in Iran and its everyday challenges. In this case, a girl questions her own reality, like young children do, by raising questions to adults, about things they don't understand and which they consider non-sense. As if, when we grow up, somehow, we lose some of these abilities, or instinctive ways of seeing the reality as it is, to normalize abusive behaviors between individuals, or to ultimately become indifferent to them. But to the eyes of the child, who still has the pure ability of asking adults why something is happening in such a weird way, philosophical and existential questions are still important. The same happens to the director in the film, who genuinely is also trying to ask the audience why these things are happening in such weird terms. The film, although never addresses a direct critical angle on the subject, maintaining a neutral tone on the film discourse, observing, not taking sides, portraying situations, rather than complaining, protesting or preaching statements against it, it becomes very effective in raising questions that seek answers in the audience. In result the film raises more empathy about

diversity, equity, co-existence than a protest form, avoiding intolerance and hate of any kind in the first place. When the film starts (Figure 1), we are presented with an initial card that reads: “This film is not criticizing *Hijab* and people who wear it. It’s a mere depiction of schools in Iran, where full *hijab* is mandatory”. While this disclaimer could be perceived as provocative and a critical approach to the subject, it might also be seen as a gesture aimed to provide comfort to individuals who embrace wearing *hijab*. This alternative interpretation has been echoed in some of the interviews with the director and by others who have viewed the film. Within this duality, which although surprising and difficult to assimilate this approach reveals to be a strategy to speak about such a sensitive subject.

As the film continues (Figure 2), a few shots later, the visual context changes, from dark tones to bright colors, when the female character travels abroad to other countries. In the narration we read: “I Like to travel, you get to see new people, different people. Each person has a different color and a different pattern, and a different texture!”

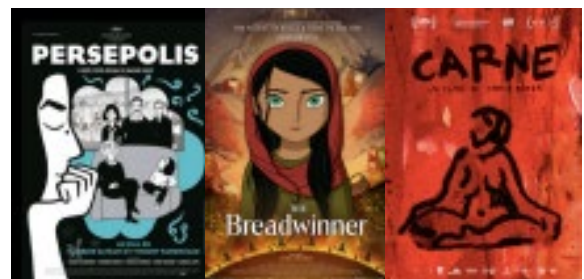


**Figure 2.** Frames of the film *Our Uniform*, directed by Yegane Moghaddam (2023)

The radical contrast between the previous collective, oppressive and mandatory dark uniform ambience, with colorful images unveiling identities, faces, hair styles, patterns and individuals with so many differences behind the uniform, brings a disruption, shock and impact on a young girl, who has never seen any other reality. In the Iranian context, traveling abroad, applying for a passport without invitation, and the censorship of expression through the internet and television is a reality, as discussed in works such as *Media in Iran: The New Wave of Censorship*, by Mahmood Enayat (2019) and *Journalism and Censorship in the Arab World*, by Najm, Ramadan, Sakr (2019). For the girl in the film, coming across to different people with different clothes, colors, patterned striped socks, people with a variety of trousers with different textures, each one of them showing off their skin, exposing naked arms, or as well touching each other in their skin, and exposing their hair with no oppression becomes a wave of fresh breeze and freedom that one cannot quite understand in the first place. One of the aspects that films bring is this idea of facing this unexpected reality and how to deal with it. How would you react if you were educated to act and become one single voice in a group, where each one speaks for the group, as a collective, the same words from a whole country, deprived from giving individual opinions, choosing different colors, textures? How could someone face the idea of being restricted to live differently? How very unreasonable to ever think that it was even a possibility? Seeing the diversity abroad gives a context but still doesn't compensate for the obliteration of one's development, such as raising a voice, an opinion of all your female childhood, and adult female life. The feeling that you live 300 years behind the clock, without being able to just change things is still hard to assimilate.

Other animated films have given context to similar aspects about the position of women in society. The French co-production, *Persepolis* (2007), directed by Marjane Satrapi (Figure 3), is one example. Based on an auto-biographical story of a teenager growing up in Iran and coming of age against the Islamic revolution, a girl sees herself under strict Islamic law, which forces women to dress "modestly" and wear headscarves. Her personality changes and she is deprived and forced to silence her own voice, taste in music, and individuality to the point of becoming depressed and desires to

become dead. In another angle, the film *Breadwinner* (2017) directed by Nora Twomey and produced by Tomm Moore, by the studio Cartoon Saloon in Ireland, (Figure 3) tells the story of an eleven years old young girl, living in Kabul, in Afghanistan under the extremist Taliban rules, where girls are not even allowed to step outside without a male companion. In this film the young female Parvana cuts her hair to look like a boy and under this disguise she succeeds to provide food for her family and ultimately to be reunited with her father out of prison. In live action and contemporary art, the Iranian artist Shirin Neshat, explores female identity and societal constraints through her impactful visual and narrative works. Internationally acclaimed for her *Women of Allah*, series and films like *Women Without Men* (2009) and *Zarin* (2005), Neshat challenges gender and political norms, sparking critical conversations about the experiences of women in Islamic societies. In a completely different tone and context, the animated film, *Carne* (2019), directed by the Brazilian animation filmmaker Camila Kater (Figure 3), explores, in a documentary-based approach, five stages of a women's lives who share with the audience their experiences through different stages of womanhood. Although this last reference is not in context within an Islamic background, it is a film that also questions and positions women against pre-conceptions, judgemental perceptions and also social criticism and which makes us think about the role of women in different parts of the world.

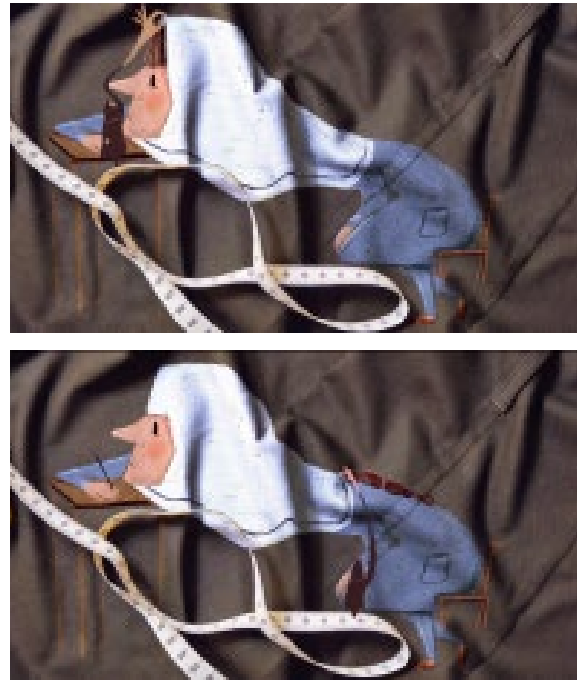


**Figure 3.** Posters of the animated films *Persepolis* (2007) directed by Marjane Satrapi, *Breadwinner* (2017) directed by Nora Twomey, *Carne* (2019) directed by Camila Kater (Source: IMDB film platform)

In the film *Our Uniform* (2023), also Yegane Moghaddam, demands change of the narrative without claiming a revolution against their own country that

also seeks to evolve. As the film progresses, the narration unfolds with the statement: “This is my city, Tehran. I grew up in this city, went to school, and became a FEMALE.” The deliberate use of the term “FEMALE” instead of “WOMAN” is defined by the director as a designated role, title, or protocol dictated by the governance standards of the country, to which women are expected to adhere and which can affect female children too and only adult women. It also suggests that one is being identified as a female group rather than an individual, depriving them of the right to have individual opinions, a voice, a perspective, freedom, by imposing responsibilities associated with this group designation. The director introduces herself in the film not with a personal name, facial identity, or distinctive patterns but rather as a female wearing a uniform identical to every woman in the country. The narrative underscores an obsessive concern about the wearing of the *hijab*, with substantial government budgets allocated to instruct girls under the age of 18 to be educated on the “proper” way to wear the *hijab*, emphasizing the meticulous concealment of every strand of hair to avoid repercussions. The critique within the narrative addresses the disproportionate emphasis on women’s appearance within the broader context of global concerns, such as financial crises, health, and overall well-being. It accentuates the irony of educational programs prioritizing global oppressive programs on how women should groom their hair – a seemingly absurd focus within the realm of policy formulation and governance, instead of learning a program of different subjects. The visual depiction of the uniform adorned with bricks around the eye area contributes to a symbolism of erecting barriers, restricting vision and freedom. This uniform transcends its literal representation to become a symbol, serving as a map or limited area of the school, a delineated path for students, a metaphorical wall, and a distinctive texture marking each girl without exception. It becomes a symbol of oppression experienced by girls since the moment they enter school, where they will not learn about math, languages or science but only about female reduced duties. In a specific sequence of the film (Figure 4), the director presents a scene that intricately grasps the strict rules related to this issue addressed in schools. A vigilant figure moves along a measuring tape, taking deliberate and resonant steps in repeated cycles to prevent even a slight

deviation of the young girl’s hair from the confines of her *hijab*. This meticulous attention to hair-related details, whether enforced by individuals such as men, religious institutions, political authorities, or educational bodies, in a context where girls and boys are segregated in schools, emerges as a problematic aspect that oppresses from early childhood.



**Figure 4.** Frames of the film *Our Uniform*, directed by Yegane Moghaddam (2023)

The context of hair exposure and its symbolic-sensual appeal is thoroughly explored by various authors, including Azadeh Fatehrad (2019), and distinguished artists such as Hengameh Golestan, Shirin Neshat, Shadi Ghadirian, Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Adolf Loos, Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, and Alison Watt. In Fatehrad (2019) research, diverse motivations drive women to choose to wear the *hijab*. The tradition of covering hair, rooted in ancient times with biblical references evoking it as a sign of virtue, is not exclusive to Islamism; Catholicism, for example, incorporates this practice among nuns who cover and occasionally shave their hair as a symbol of purity.

While religion plays a role in perpetuating this practice, in theocratic regimes, it takes on heightened severity, ceasing to be a choice or belief open to



individual freedom. Instead, it becomes a regime of imposition that exclusively impacts the development, empowerment, and independence of women. The interpretation of religious texts varies significantly between moderate regimes, which may adopt more flexible approaches to *hijab* usage, or more radical, extremist countries, where such practices are imposed with severe threats and even criminal penalties. This extremism reveals an underlying fragility, suggesting that this practice is sustained only through coercive imposition.

Hair is symbolically associated with strength, power, identity, sensuous beauty, individuality, and freedom (Almeida, 2015). The exposure or concealment of the body, as perceived in different parts of the world, coupled with the use of female uniforms restricting individual expression, reinforces sexualized concepts perpetuating inequalities between men and women. These models of dependence or restriction, promoted by institutions of power, whether in politics, religion, or patriarchal structures, reflect orders that undermine women's freedom of choice within a system of male supremacy.

In the film, the girl's passive reaction symbolically encapsulates the lack of freedom to choose and care for her own body and hair. This passive response resonates more profoundly with the oppressive act of covering someone else's hair, by revealing how reactions are neither allowed or neither considered. The pedagogical process in schools seems to underscore the complete disregard for girls as young individuals and future persons in developmental years, impacting their education and learning processes. A prominent Iranian figure who has spoken about this topic within this context is Narges Mohammadi, the vice president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC) and a renowned human rights activist, has emerged as a prominent voice in Iran, addressing women's oppression and civil disobedience against the *hijab*. Her Nobel Peace Prize, received while in detention, highlights the seriousness of her struggle and international condemnation of her imprisonment. Another incident that sparked outrage was the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini (Goodrich, 2023, p. 151), allegedly due to the brutality of the morality police for her misuse of the *hijab*. This tragedy prompted significant protests in Iran and worldwide, becoming a catalyst for global movements seeking

to protect women from systemic oppression. These events highlight the urgent need for critical reflection on oppressive practices related to the *hijab*, not only within the Iranian context but globally. The film, portraying the girl's quest for acceptance and identity, resonates the real struggles faced by women challenging restrictive norms and the persistent resistance against systems that deprive women of freedom and individuality.

In another sequence of the film (Figure 5), another demonstration of radical collective ritual routine in schools is portrayed. In rows, girls are directed to collectively shout lines of hate towards other countries, for example, shouting "down, down, with USA." The director powerfully encapsulates in the film the collective voice of an entire nation through a unified scream, unfolding a visual metaphor of how one single voice and one fist can be multiplied by millions and nullified within individual narratives to resonate as an anthem of intolerance and hate.



**Figure 5.** Frames of the film *Our Uniform*, directed by Yegane Moghaddam (2023)

The imagery transforms this collective scream into a symbolic fist emerging from the uniform, intensifying its symbolic weight by depicting an entire nation propagating hate speech against others. However, the

director maintains an observational stance, refraining from imposing an opinion on the situation, except for highlighting, through the protagonist, the perception of this reality. While the situation may seem particularly disturbing to external observers, internal participants, as shared during the production process of this article, found the experience to have a peculiar connotation. Some of the youth protesters detached themselves from the semantic weight of the uttered words, engaging collectively in an act of shouting. In our conversations with the director we recounted that this morning practice was perceived as a fun routine, providing a space where young girls could at least once, express loud, their voices. The director mentioned that it was the only time the girls could shout as loud as they wanted. Upon revisiting this issue, it becomes evident that the understanding of propaganda, indoctrination, or the obliteration of personal perspectives varied among the individuals we engaged with. The situation as a whole seems almost unbelievable: children participating in this daily ritual before classes, unaware of the inadvertent cultivation of hate speech in school. Some students even found pleasure in this disconcerting routine. Despite a limited grasp of politics, revolution, or figures like Khomeini, the oppression of exposing young minds to such practices is worthy of consideration. In our conversations, one interlocutor pointed out that even in higher education, some educators adopted conservative perspectives, selectively portraying Iran. Despite internet restrictions, external sources of information contributed to diverse viewpoints. As people encountered reports of electoral corruption, they began to question the credibility of leaders, prompting doubts and profound reflections.

In a specific scene of the film (Figure 6), the camera captures the interior of the classroom adorned with portraits of the two leaders of the Islamic revolution prominently displayed on the walls. In a subsequent shot, there is a depiction of the figure of the leader Khomeini being adorned with red lipstick. The persistent practice of displaying portraits in every classroom is a recognized strategy employed by tyrannical regimes, a phenomenon not limited to this context but prevalent in various nations. During our discussions, some individuals interpreted the act of painting the leaders' photos with lipstick as a form of satire, almost like playfully adhering to the rules by metaphorically covering their hair from these ever-present figures.

It provided amusement for them. Interestingly, this act served more as entertainment for children than a serious critique. Similar to our experiences as children, perhaps the full awareness of disrupting broader dimensions wasn't entirely present, representing a form of maturation and a subtle rebellion against established classroom activities. The allure of having Khomeini's image featured on the first page of every book must have tempted everyone involved. As the film concludes, there's a pervasive sentiment that freedom thrives within the private confines of each home, a notion that resonates beautifully. The tone transitions into one of vibrancy, musicality, and expressiveness, tapping into a shared human experience. Towards the conclusion of the film, a pivotal moment happens when the face of the central character is revealed. Numerous details come into view, signaling a significant shift from the preceding narrative, accentuating individual and intricate aspects to finally come to terms to see who this individual is. While to some the lack of seeing the face of the character was understood, it was also cathartic to finally see the person's face and with it, expression, body gesture, age, maturity, intellectual signs, colors, and a whole world behind her figure which was previously absent.



**Figure 6.** Frames of the film *Our Uniform*, directed by Yegane Moghaddam (2023)

#### 4. Conclusions and contributions

In conclusion, *Our Uniform* (2023), the short animated film directed by Yegane Moghaddam offers a profound examination on the challenges faced by female individuals in Iran, especially through the lens of an Iranian young girl's experience which need constant addressing.

The film's observational perspective, neutral and delicate approach discourse, fosters empathy into the cultural aspects of Iran instead of positioning the film in a discourse of hate or protest. At the same time, it makes the audience witness the imposed rules on young and adult women, raising critical questions about identity, freedom, and gender roles to the audience, and creating awareness about the theme in very strategic terms. The portrayal of uniformity, represented in the film, becomes a potent symbol of the oppression and limitations placed on women from an early age which starkly contrasts with the diverse and vibrant world outside Iran's borders, underscoring the tension between individuality and social expectations in this culture and as well a call for change in all areas that affects women.

The used method of an analytical model of analysis in animation proved to become an important tool of research by consolidating all aspects of information to analyze the animation film in its conceptual structures. The conducted interviews to the director and other Iranian individuals as a methodology used by the authors offered unexpected insights that guide our research into a more ethical debate and more global representation on the theme, while preserving a coexistence of different views from different geographies. The animation film analysis, due to its non-indexicality nature, helps female issues to become more and more addressed and identified by audiences, promoting other debates on this theme and not being indifferent to them. The uniform, although a real fabric, becomes a symbolic approach to represent the invisibility of females as individuals which is far from being resolved.

As a conclusion, animation offers a useful tool of debate about culture, female issues, education, which helps to generate awareness from early ages to future adults and to the next generation of individuals which is expected to deal better with such necessary changes that females ethically deserve.

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