

# THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S GENDER ROLES IN THE IRANIAN CINEMA: A STUDY OF *THE STRANGER* (2014)

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## RESUMEN

La película iraní *La forastera* (*Bigāneh*, 2014) dirigida por Bahram Tavakoli, es una adaptación libre de *A Streetcar Named Desire*, de Tennessee Williams. Tanto la obra como su adaptación versan sobre la condición de las mujeres. Pretendemos explorar comparativamente los roles de género de las mujeres, representados en el drama y en su adaptación. Tras examinar los roles genéricos de las mujeres como esposas, madres y hermanas, se concluye que el director iraní ha adaptado exitosamente el personaje de Stella a la cultura iraní, como Sepideh. Manteniendo el argumento del texto fuente, ha creado un nuevo personaje que se imbrica en la cultura iraní-islámica. En cambio, ha incorporado el personaje de Blanche-Nasrin para contrastar con una mujer ideal en el contexto iraní. Nasrin pertenecería más al mundo de Williams, debido a sus pautas de comportamiento, ajenas a los códigos culturales de Irán, de raíz islámica.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Roles genéricos, cine iraní, adaptación cinematográfica, *La forastera*, mujeres

## ABSTRACT

The Iranian movie *The Stranger* (*Bigāneh*, 2014), directed by Bahram Tavakoli is a free adaptation of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Both the play and its adaptation concentrate on the life and condition of women. In the present study, we aim to assess comparatively the gender roles of women represented in the play and its Iranian adaptation to see how these roles have been de/stabilized. After investigating the roles of women as wives, mothers, and sisters, it is concluded that the Iranian director has been successful in appropriating Stella's character to the Islamic-Iranian culture. In order to highlight her characteristics as an ideal woman in the Iranian context, he has reconstructed the character of Blanche-Nasrin so as to create a dichotomy between Iranian and western cultures. Nasrin would belong more to Williams's world because of her alien behavioral characteristics to the cultural codes of Iranians which are based on Islamic doctrines.

## KEYWORDS

Gender Roles, Iranian Cinema, Cinematic Adaptation, *The Stranger*, Women.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, adaptations of world literature have been very popular in the Iranian cinema. Dariush Mehrjui, Tahmineh Milani, Kiumars Pourahmad, and Bahram Tavakoli, to name a few, are among the many directors who adapted world literary works to make successful movies like *Long Lost Sisters* (*Khāharān-e-gharib*), Kiumars Pourahmad's adaptation of *Lottie and Lisa* by Erich Kästner;

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*Sara*, directed by Dariush Mehrjui and adapted from Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*; and *Here Without Me (Injā Bedun-e Man)*, directed by Bahram Tavakoli based on Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*.

Tennessee Williams, the famous American playwright, is among the figures whose plays gained popularity among the Iranian translators and publishers. Williams's plays are taught in the Iranian universities as a part of the curriculum as well. As Anushiravani and Ghandeharion (2013) contend,

Williams's plays reception is highly positive in Iran; there are numerous translations in various editions of his works. Furthermore, adaptations of Williams's works in Hollywood and translations of these movies to Persian Language increased his popularity tremendously . . . Iranians are greatly enthusiastic about *The Glass Menagerie*; the play has been translated three times and revised many times. (p. 12)

*The Stranger (Bigāneh)* produced in 2014 and directed by Bahram Tavakoli in Tehran, is the most recent movie adaptation of Williams's *Streetcar*. The American play and its Iranian adaptation share many similarities in plot as well as characterization, while they also constitute many differences. The two plots tell the story of a woman (Blanche/Nasrin) who is out of money and has to take refuge in her sister's house. In both cases, she creates tensions in the family and does not see eye-to-eye with her brother-in-law (Stanley/Amir). Both in the play and the movie, she has done some misdeeds as a result of which she has no way, but to leave the city she was living in. Both Blanche and Nasrin get acquainted with a man (Mitch/Davoud) whom they plan to marry, but are interfered by Stanley/Amir revealing the truth. And at the end of the two plots, both Blanche and Nasrin are sent away by their sister.

In his free adaptation of Williams's *Streetcar*, Tavakoli attempted to inject his cultural background in the work and Iranize it by employing various techniques like changing the language, clothes, and social interaction style so that Iranians can easily relate to the movie's themes and ideas. Tavakoli's work not only adds a new dimension to the American play of Williams, but it also helps us better understand our own culture because it is through understanding others that one can understand themselves (see Nojomiyani, 2013, p. 126). Naturalization of Williams's play in the Iranian adapted movie, is not limited to language, clothes, life style and social interactions. Rather, the director has also pointed to the issues like importing stone from China (00:15:32-00:16:10) and unemployment of laborers due to bankruptcy of local companies as the result of exceeding imports of goods from countries like China (00:09:55-00:16:00) and used them to naturalize Williams's play. While previously we have examined women's gender identity as the Other in feminist terms in Tennessee Williams's *Streetcar* and its most recent movie adaptation, *The Stranger* (see Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht & Movahhed, 2016), in the present study, the aim is to compare and contrast women's gender roles in the two works, in order to see how the cultural context of the adaptations can play important roles in redefining the picture of women, their characteristics, roles and responsibilities.

## **WOMEN'S GENDER ROLES IN *THE STRANGER***

Gender Identity represents itself through the gender roles that each person fulfills. Tina M. Harris and Patricia S. Hill argue that "throughout the course of life," the sexes "are socialized" to fulfill "certain gender roles" (Harris & Hill, 1998, p. 9). By gender roles, we, in fact, mean the roles each society expects men and women to accomplish. These roles are the "cultural constructs that emerge in particular social and historical contexts" (Hunt & Hunt qtd. in p. 9) and they are not chosen by the

individuals themselves as a result of which these roles can “oppress self-definition” (p. 9). As Harris and Hill argue, the expectations of one’s gender roles are exerted in the individuals through society, family, and media (p. 9). Hence, movie adaptations as a kind of media can contribute to the “socialization” of these roles (p. 9) and consequently, to the construction of gender identity. Accordingly, dividing the responsibilities in family is a critical issue in all countries around the world and Amir and Sepideh, as a couple living together, are not exceptions. In their family, Sepideh is responsible for housework and Amir is responsible for working outside and earning a living, which is in line with Islamic doctrines. This is also in line with the way Tennessee Williams has depicted the gender roles of women in the play (Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht, & Movahhed, 2016, p. 73). However, to highlight this aspect, Tavakoli shows different scenes in which Sepideh is doing housework which are missing in the play: washing the dishes, cooking, and cleaning the house. As Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht, and Movahhed (2016) contend,

In *The Stranger*, like in Williams’s *Streetcar*, the traditional gender roles are attributed to Sepideh as she is almost always busy at home washing, cooking or cleaning the house .... Like the submissive Stella in Williams’s play, she, too, is exposed to a power relationship that determines women’s position as wives who must be at the service of their husbands by doing the domestic roles. (p. 78)

The first scene that this character appears is when she holds a washtub (00:05:03-00:05:17). Sepideh is quite obsessed with cleaning the house, and as she sees any disorder, she starts to work (see 00:08:14, 00:12:24 and 00:10:11). There are many vases and flowers in Sepideh’s house (see 00:05:34 and 00:08:02); flowers seem shiny and fresh, and it suggests that she takes care of them on time. She never complains about the hard work and does each task carefully as her own responsibility.

In *The Stranger*, the gender roles of Sepideh as a wife are not limited to housekeeping; her high regard and respect for her husband are seen abundantly in Tavakoli’s frames. Sepideh greets him and takes shopping boxes immediately after he enters home (00:17:32-00:18:10). She stands behind the door of the bathroom to take Amir’s dirty clothes in order to wash them (00:21:02-00:21:24). When Nasrin appears, Sepideh who is aware of Nasrin’s background in attracting men, wears her husband’s favorite clothes to attract him (00:18:12). Thus, she attempts to play the role of an obedient wife as accurately as possible. Sepideh spends her time all day in the house and devotes no time to entertainments. She is attentive of her husband’s appearance (00:20:37) and is concerned about his health. This concern is the reason she warns him repeatedly about smoking (for instance, see 00:17:50). She has to share all the issues with her husband and if she fails to report every detail, she will be questioned (01:00:08-01:00:43). Her obedience is depicted to the extent that Amir lets himself to scheme for Sepideh’s legal paternal inheritance, and when he finds out that there is no heritage left, he starts to quarrel (00:28:37). Thus, all behavioral traits of hers are in the service of depicting an ideal woman in a system in which women’s responsibility is to provide a comfortable life for their husbands.

Nonetheless, Tavakoli’s frame depicts a picture of Sepideh that is utterly different from Tennessee Williams’s perspective of Stella’s character. In *Streetcar*, Stella spends some time on entertainment outside the house without her husband (Williams, 1947, p. 32). She is free to attend in men’s groups and watch bowling (p. 10). No reference is made to her housekeeping aspect except for a brief one (p. 32). Quarreling with her husband Stanley Kowalski, in contrast to Sepideh, she is free to leave

her husband and take refuge in the neighbor's house (p. 64). Angry with Stanley's drinking and gambling, Stella uses strong language when she talks to him; for instance, she addresses him, "drunk - drunk - animal thing, you!" (p. 62), while in Tavakoli's movie the woman does not leave and treat her husband as harshly. Stella recognizes Stanley's drinking and gambling as a part of his entertainment and contends that, "oh, well, it's his pleasure, like mine is movies and bridge. People have got to tolerate each other's habits, I guess." (p. 73). Thus, although she sometimes gets tired of Stanley's indulgence in his entertainments, she recognizes it as a natural need of any human being, and she is indifferent to its consequences. On the contrary, in Iranians' viewpoint, a woman should encourage her husband to have a healthy life and the society expects a man to put aside his negative behavior as inappropriate habits after marriage. Now, because the characteristics of Stella, which are already pointed out, are not acceptable in the Iranians' viewpoint, it can be concluded that Tavakoli attempted not only to foreground the picture of women in his culture, but also to imply the Iranian society's expectations from a woman by changing Stella's individual behavior and traits into his new character: Sepideh.

Stella points out that she loves her husband (Williams, 1947, p. 22). Nonetheless, it seems that depth of Sepideh's love is mostly evident in her action (behavior). The reader recognizes Stanley and Stella's love by their confessions; however, when one observes their verbal and physical fights one realizes that it is contrary to their claims. On the other hand, the depth of Sepideh's respect and love is beyond words to the extent that she never speaks ill of or leaves her husband. Even when Nasrin blames her sister for why she has married such a man, Sepideh asks her not to talk (01:01:09). Unlike Sepideh, Stella easily recounts her husband's bad behavior to others (Williams, 1947, p. 21). Hence, we can recognize a deeper fidelity in Sepideh, as a wife, compared to her foreign counterpart: Stella. As fidelity is an essential issue in family in the Iranian culture, Tavakoli emphasized again the important role of women in the family.

As said earlier, fidelity is the fundamental basis of marriage specifically in the Iranian culture that is based on Islamic doctrines. When men and women marry, they accept that they stay faithful to each other in any condition. Sepideh accepts this principle and sticks to it. Her deep thought on ethical issues makes her end her relationship with her mother who has left her first husband and children for loving another man (01:02:03). She does not even visit her when she is sick because she cannot forgive her betrayal (00:13:23). As Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht and Movahhed (2016) assert, Sepideh "has left her mother-in-law for the sake of fidelity and virtue" (p. 80). She refers sarcastically to Nasrin's behavior comparing her for her infidelity in relationships to her mother (01:01:37). Sepideh suffered a lot because of that, and it is the reason she prefers to live with a man who is poor, but faithful to life. One can see that she grew up in a rich family and despite dealing with harsh economic problems now, she is faithful to her husband and life, and it is invaluable to her (see Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht & Movahhed, 2016, p. 73). Sepideh tells Nasrin that, "I hate everything transitory" (01:02:27). She like to have love and fidelity forever in her life. However, Sepideh's idea of ethics is not limited to loyalty in marriage. She, as a representative of an ideal woman in the Iranian culture, applies this to her attitude towards men outside home as well (01:04:20). For instance, she wears simple and conventional clothes. She never wears thick makeup. Moreover, she is reserved and dignified while treating other people in society. Encountering strange men, Sepideh does not act unconventionally, and she does not like Nasrin to act inappropriately or unconventionally in Davoud's presence (00:45:20). Therefore, to add depth to the story of his movie, Tavakoli did not limit himself to superficial roles as housekeeping and studies characters' attitude on important issues like morality and marriage. In other words, Sepideh's roles

are not limited to her responsibilities inside her house, but her attitude plays an important role in constructing her gender identity.

Consumerism is also one of the critical aspects of the identity of every individual. Becock points out that, in the twentieth century, consumerism turned into a multi-dimensional issue that includes economic dimensions and considerations as well as great cultural implications and social considerations (qtd in Movahhed, Abbasi & Marhamati, 2010, p. 8). However, the relationship between gender and consumption has always been critical, and mostly it is treated concerning women (De Grazia & Furlough, 1996, p. 1). Hence, studying aspects of women's consumerism is important for understanding their identity. Sepideh is not working outside, but she helps her partner financially by making dolls' clothes (00:34:42; see also Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht & Movahhed, 2016, p. 80). She is aware of her husband's problems and attempts to be provident. For instance, when she is shopping layette, she chooses to spend money for essential equipment like baby carriage instead of decorative dolls for the baby (00:45:55). Therefore, in a framework of a patriarchal society, she plays a positive economic role. On the contrary, Stella in Williams's play is a mere consumer. She is not working and one can see no hints of providence in her behavior. However, one should notice that Stella and Stanley are living in a better economic condition than their Iranian counterparts; Stanley has a permanent job, and despite his low income, he can afford expenses. Thus, the woman is not compelled to cooperate with him. In contrast, the economic condition of the Iranian society makes women have a role in providing for the family and no longer is their role limited to a wife or a housekeeper. Tavakoli depicts the image of Sepideh as a provident wife, helping her partner by earning money for family, while female characters in Tennessee Williams's play are mostly consumerists.

Furthermore, family and gender are complementary, and neither can be defined in isolation (Coltrane & Adams, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, "when we talk about family values ... we are also talking of gender values" and vice versa (p. 1). For instance, when we think men should receive more income than women should, it means that we recognize men responsible for providing for family (p. 1). Consequently, it is critical to study family relationships and values to understand gender roles. However, the relationships among family members are not limited to wife and husband relationships; other relationships like the ones among brothers and sisters are as well important. In both *The Stranger* and *Streetcar*, Nasrin and Sepideh / Blanche and Stella are the only survivors of their paternal family. Thus, the relationship between these two sisters is important. In Tennessee Williams's play, Stella is happy of Blanche's presence. When they meet for the first time, they "catch each other in a spasmodic embrace" (Williams, 1947, p. 16). Williams, however, briefly points out that Stella is "anxious" in spite of her smiles (p. 16). Sepideh also treats Nasrin coldly; it is obvious she is not happy with having her in her house (00:06:20). Nasrin embraces her, but Sepideh shows no reaction (00:07:13), and there are other instances in which she is indifferent and unsympathetic towards Nasrin (for instance, 00:20:31 and 00:11:25). Hence, in both works, it is obvious that the presence of Blanche/Nasrin is not pleasant to their hosts. Nonetheless, Sepideh feels responsible for Nasrin and is concerned about her health. This differentiates the relationship between sisters in the play and the movie. When Sepideh realizes the absence of Nasrin in her house, she and her husband search for her in streets and are awake all night (00:27:41). Moreover, when Nasrin returns, Sepideh, like an anxious mother, asks angrily for the reason why she left (00:35:16). In another scene, Sepideh asks her husband to invite Nasrin so that she spends more time with them because she knows that Nasrin has no place to stay (00:20:28), and when Sepideh tells Amir about Nasrin selling the house, she asks him to treat her calmly for she is ill (00:28:43). Therefore, although

Sepideh is reluctant toward Nasrin's presence in her house, she feels responsible for her sister and cannot truly be indifferent. Thus, feeling responsible for and being protective of family members are also important as a gender role while in Williams's play the depth of this relationship is not completely evident.

Stella is not concerned about Blanche's transitory relationships. Although she is aware of her sister's negative background and her personality difference from Mitch, she consents to Blanche and Mitch's marriage, and she is unconcerned of its consequences (Williams, 1947, p. 119). Stella avoids reproaching Blanche for her background in inappropriate relationships with men. Blanche is aware of Stella's indifference to the extent that she shares her consideration of reunion with Shep Huntleigh (p. 75). Stella does not show any concerns when she finds out Blanche spent a night outside (p. 71). It is not important for Stella that Blanche goes out with Mitch in nights; she herself goes outside with her husband to have fun without any concern about Blanche (p. 103). This image of Stella is in contrast to Sepideh who is always worried about Nasrin; however, it is suggestive of American culture to which intellectual and ethical freedoms are essential and characters are not intruding into each other's lives and activities. Hence, the cultural factors in *The Stranger*, despite being an Iranian film adaptation, are not only decisive in foregrounding the role of women in family as wives, but they also determine the relationships of sisters.

Studying the social and behavioral aspects of the characters Stella and Blanche, we realize that they are in some sense similar and different to each other: Stella and Blanche's backgrounds are approximately similar; They both have met many men in their youth (Williams, 1947, p. 22); Stella wears makeup like Blanche (p. 32); she is interested in her husband's games and participates in their community (p. 10) while Blanche is also interested in participating in men's hobbies (p. 51); Stella is not unhappy at all that Blanche has an affair with Mitch (p. 119). In a scene, she even assures her sister that their marriage is plausible and tells her that, "it will happen" (p. 92) while Blanche is enjoying her time with Mitch. It is because both have been raised in similar societies where having affairs with men is not a forbidden or strange issue. Besides, Blanche is a consumerist like Stella, but unlike Stella, her excessive consumerism is harmful to others' lives. For instance, although she inherited her father's legacy and did earn some money from her job as a teacher, she is spendthrift, eventually loses all her money and resorts to others. She spends a lot of time in bath in daily basis and wastes a lot of water (for instance, see scenes two, three, seven, eight and eleven). In the same way, there are no traces of Stella being provident or working to earn money. These examples illuminate the ways in which Stella and Blanche have similar behavioral attitudes.

Stella and Blanche are also different female prototypes. As Jarekvist (2013) contends, it seems that in the play we meet "two significantly different types of women" (p. 11). Unlike Stella who is submissive towards Stanley's aggressive and abusive attitude, Blanche not only acts against the supremacy of men, but also attempts "to enlighten Stella" (p. 11). Blanche tries to rise above her prescribed gender roles in order to have a voice in the society. In Tennessee Williams's play, the qualities like "acceptance and weakness" are ascribed to Stella while Blanche is known for her "un-acceptance and strength" (p. 11). She tries to act against all the traditional conventions about being a woman, but is doomed to failure at the end of the play. As Fang (2008) observes,

Faced with Stanley's violence to her sister at the poker night, Blanche dares to express her disgust to Stanley's primitive nature and disdain openly, calling him 'an animal,' 'sub-human-something not quite to the stage of humanity yet', and 'survivor of the Stone Age' ... , and

even she encourages her sister to leave him. She is steady, brave, idealistic, bearing the Southern culture and memory in mind. (p. 106)

In scene six, Blanche emphasizes how she is irritated by Stanley's interrupting her privacy. As she declares, "It's really a pretty frightful situation. You see, there's no privacy here. There's just these portieres between the two rooms at night. He stalks through the rooms in his underwear at night. And I have to ask him to close the bathroom door" (Williams, 1947, pp. 105-106). This shows that she is brave enough to complain while Stella never complains about Stanley's behavior.

In the same manner, Sepideh and Nasrin's intellectual and behavioral characteristics are very different in the Iranian adapted movie. Since the first frame in which Nasrin appears, we can feel her difference from Sepideh. In the first scene, her hair style and dress show her difference from Sepideh who wears simple clothes and never wears any make-up (00:04:10). Unlike Sepideh, Nasrin is very untidy (00:11:10 and 00:12:30). Her clothing style implicates her social difference from her sister as well. Her clothes are in fashion and seem to be expensive, while Sepideh always wears simple colorless clothes (for instance, 00:12:06). Nasrin is very talkative, but Sepideh is a taciturn. Sepideh has chosen a simple but stable life while Nasrin is seeking transitory, passing affairs (01:02:00). This can be seen even in their simplest details of these two characters. For instance, shopping for layette, Sepideh chooses to focus on the baby carriage and blanket, which are essential for every child, but Nasrin gets excited when she sees decorative dolls (00:45:43). Tavakoli also depicts her yoga practice humorously, and the difference between her attitude and Sepideh's grave and reserved manner is evident in the scene (00:40:45). On a different occasion, Nasrin wants Sepideh to have her opinion on her marriage to Davoud. Sepideh, however, reproaches her for she regards it improper for a girl to point to this issue due to her traditional way of thinking (00:53:52). Besides, while Sepideh abhors transitory and passing things, Nasrin believes everything is transitory (01:02:29). It is important to study these details since Iranians, based on their recognition of Sepideh and feeling related to her because of the cultural similarities, categorize her in opposition to Nasrin, who is recognized as 'The Stranger'.

In spite of the distinct differences of Nasrin's personality from Sepideh's, comparing Nasrin to Blanche, her American counterpart, we recognize that they are similar to each other. Nasrin is particularly obsessed with her appearance similar to Blanche caring much about her makeup (Williams, 1947, pp. 130 & 51). When she visits Davoud unexpectedly, She runs towards her room to wear makeup and hair wig (00:24:42). She wears different makeups and hair wigs in different scenes and she is constantly changing her appearance (for instance, 00:56:58 and 00:44:20). This is because of her inclination to change her identity and to assume new ones (Sasanikhah, 2014, "The Stranger Unmasks Women"). Blanche also arranges her dates with Mitch during the nights and in dark places so that Mitch never sees her true face and real identity (Williams, 1947, p. 134). As Nasrin gets into a relationship with Davoud fast, Blanche also gets into a relationship with a stranger in the same manner (p. 57). Nonetheless, considering the intellectual and practical freedom in western countries, it is natural that Blanche, as an American woman, gets into relationships more freely, or for instance, can tell Stella freely that she has laughed with Stanley and attracted him (p. 47; see also Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht & Movahhed, 2016, p. 75).

Similar to Blanche, Nasrin is talkative in front of Davoud and gives him a happy, cheerful, active and rich image of herself (00:25:12 and 00:44:28). Besides, Nasrin shows no reluctance when Davoud wants to take a picture of her, and on the contrary, she poses coquettishly for it (00:33:08). She sometimes laughs loud frenziedly in front of him (01:15:27 and 01:16:14). Her behavior seems

strange compared to Sepideh's reserved and serious manner, and that is why Davoud states that Nasrin is different from the others (00:32:15 and 01:05:23). Although Davoud does not have a deep understanding of her difference from other typical female characters, he realizes that Nasrin is alien among other women. In a scene, Amir also maintains that Nasrin is different from the others in duplicity (00:52:20). Although there are many similarities between Blanche and Nasrin to the extent that Nasrin's behavior is alien to traditional Iranian culture, we should have one crucial point in mind: Nasrin's mistakes in her relationships with men and her whimsical manner eventually leads to somebody's death (01:10:26), while in *Streetcar*, the student's father visits her school and protects his child from harm by firing Blanche (Williams, 1947, p. 115). Thus, the harm that Tavakoli represents due to inappropriate relationships in Iranian culture is much more complex and hurtful than what Williams points out.

By adding some aspects of Iranian culture to his character, Nasrin, Tavakoli in a way created a duality in her. The most important aspect is her role as a mother which is missing in the play. Nasrin has a child whom she has left. As Sepideh mentions in the movie, the story of Nasrin is very similar to that of her mother because she also left her husband and children for the love of another man (01:01:37) and violated the code of fidelity to her family. As Linda L. Lindsey argues,

The motherhood mandate issues a command to females of all ages, instructing them that motherhood demands selfless devotion to children and subordination of one's own life to the needs of children and family. Although many other activities that she finds personally worthwhile are halted, the mandate assumes that a woman willingly submits herself to her childrearing responsibilities first. The power of this mandate instills guilt in women who have small children and work outside the home, regardless of whether they are employed because they "want to be" ... or they "have to be". (2016, p. 245)

Therefore, by choosing to involve herself in transitory affairs and ignoring her roles as a mother, Nasrin has, in fact, violated her motherhood mandate. However, her maternal feelings are still greatly intense to the point that she goes to park every night to watch her son playing basketball (00:33:51). Also, she collected a series of his photos and she is very sensitive about them to the extent that she does not let anybody touch them (00:39:08 and 00:42:02). This is where Tavakoli has replaced the love letters of Blanche's dead husband in the play (Williams, 1947, p. 44) and no traces of motherhood in the character of Blanche can be found. Hence, there is no maternal feelings in the play. One should notice that mothers are considered highly sacred in Iranian culture, and Nasrin and her mother's violation of their roles causes Iranians to have more negative feelings towards these two characters. Besides, by neglecting their important roles as mothers, Nasrin and her mother have made their children homeless; Sepideh marries a poor man although she has grown up in a rich family because she is irritated by her mother's transgression of her roles, the way Nasrin's son leaves the house. Therefore, by the inclusion of the picture of mothers in Tavakoli's adaptation, he has, in fact, added a new dimension to Williams's play and highlighted the cultural values of Iranians. This is how adaptations can appropriate the gender roles of women.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, there has been an attempt to look for the similarities and differences in the gender roles of major female characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and its Iranian film adaptation, *The Stranger*. In his adaptation, Tavakoli has attempted to appropriate Williams's play through visual and linguistic effects. By considering language, life style, people's careers, social interactions, and the gender



roles of men and women, the director has attempted to appropriate the play and its characters for the Iranian audience. After examining the role of women as wives and considering factors like domesticity, consumption and fidelity, along with their roles and responsibilities as sisters and mothers and investigating their behavioral and ethical traits, it was concluded that the director has created a new identity for the female characters in his movie. He, for instance, has made Sepideh an ideal Iranian woman, one who has a high respect in the eyes of others, but is obedient and sincere to her husband. To highlight her characteristics, the director has re-constructed the character of Nasrin so as to create a dichotomy between Iranian and western cultures. Nasrin belongs more to Williams's world because of her alien behavioral characteristics to the cultural codes of Iranians which are based on Islamic doctrines. However, the attribution of some gender roles like her role as a mother has created dualities in her gender identity in the Iranian context.

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