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Nacim Pak-Shiraz²

Shooting the Isolation and Marginality of Masculinities in Iranian Cinema

This article examines the isolation and marginality of Iranian men living in contemporary Iran with a focus on three post-2005 films. As a patriarchal society, Iran has been the subject of many studies on the subjugation and marginality of women. This study demonstrates how recent Iranian films have skilfully employed the cinematic language to narrate men's stories of alienation and despair. These filmic constructions provide a valuable and complex insight into masculine identities, challenging perceptions of the essentialized image of the Middle Eastern Male. By employing Connell's hierarchy of masculinities, I demonstrate the position of marginalized men in relation to the dominant ideals of masculinity and the influence of these discourses on the lives of such men. The films discussed here do not perpetuate the construction of the 'true' gender, but instead challenge ideas of heroism, manliness and patriarchy.

Keywords: Iranian Cinema, Marginalization, Alienation, Masculine Performances, Islamic Masculinities, Hierarchy of Masculinities.

The replacement of the figure of the Shah with that of Ayatollah Khomeini as Head of State in 1979 rendered a different hierarchy of masculinities in Iranian society. It is easy to generalize the replacement of the westernized with the religious as the new hegemonic order in post-Revolutionary Iran. The reality, however, was and continues to be far more complex. The fluidity of gender constructions and the historicity of gender, as Connell asserts, is an important aspect, as it will otherwise neglect “the massive evidence of change in social definitions of masculinity.”¹ In fact, the historical experiences of the last four decades have sharply marked Iranian masculinities. The Revolutionary period and the eight-year Iran-Iraq war that followed, resulted in the emergence of public performances of “austere masculinity”, responsible for defending the nation from enemies both within and outside. The war became the catalyst for this new definition of the warrior. Historically, the qualities of a “true warrior” and the “*pahlavan*” or champion, have been integral to the ideals of Iranian masculinity, reflected both in the religious and mythological narratives of Iran. The selfless men who sacrificed their lives in the frontline were no longer the heroes of mythical stories

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as in the *Shahnameh* or spiritual figures of religious narratives. Instead, they were ordinary men who suddenly found themselves volunteering their lives in defence of the nation and faith against the advanced Iraqi army, which had the backing of many western countries. In discussing post-Revolutionary masculine prototypes, Shahin Gerami argues that the Islamic Revolution “glorified new masculinity types” to include the clergy as the leaders of the Revolution, martyrs its soul”.² This resulted, she argues, in an emergent new genre within post-Revolutionary visual culture “devoted to the war efforts and the martyrs. The martyr is a young, unmarried (virgin, innocent) man, fearless and strong.”³

The Revolution and the eight-year war reversed many of the pre-Revolutionary constructions of masculinity in Iranian society that hinged on the interplay between the state’s vision of a modern, western-educated Iranian man and the traditional values that remained strong within the larger society. The warrior’s experience was once again tied to the articulations and performances of masculinity. The state-sponsored genre of “Sacred Defence” celebrated these performances of male sacrifice and courage during the Iran-Iraq war, participating in the creation of a post-Revolutionary admired model of masculinity. “While a ‘true’ gender does not exist, images of a ‘true’ or normative gender are constructed and perpetuated by” various media particularly “on television, in popular films and via a multitude of other media platforms.”⁴ Iranian popular culture in turn contributed to the construction and reinforcement of a traditional and natural gender.⁵ The Iran-Iraq war and the ensuing “evolution of the ‘sacred defense’ concept allowed for the most articulate elaboration of key binaries (enemy/friend, revolutionary/antirevolutionary, hero/traitor, etc.), and wartime and postwar cultural producers, bureaucrats, and theorists have all contributed to the definition of their conceptual boundaries.”⁶ However, with Iranian society entering its third decade of the post-war period and no longer demanding martyrdom as an ideal of masculinity and heroism from its male population, what are the performances of masculinity for the young war generation now living as middle-aged men in the swiftly-changing Iranian society?⁷

As a patriarchal society, Iran has been the focus of many studies on the subjugation and marginality of women. Men living within the margins of the masculine hierarchy who do not benefit from this male-centred privilege have, however, received considerably less academic attention. Hegemonic masculinity as Connell and Messerschmidt state, “was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue.”⁸ Similarly, the dominant narratives of masculinity, which focused on heroism, largely ignored other masculine

identities with anti-heroes either being absent or in contradistinction to the main hero. Even as many of the core principles of patriarchy continue to prevail in Iranian society, the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and performances of masculinity have not remained constant. Several recent Iranian films narrate tales of men's alienation and despair, presenting the diversity of performances of masculinity within Iran. Some of these films focus on middle-class men living in the midst of vibrant and crowded Tehran, whilst others have turned their lenses on the alienation and marginality of men living further out on the fringes of society, both spatially and within the social order.

I apply Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and the hierarchy of masculinities to examine the constructions of marginal masculinities in Iranian society. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, Connell argues that masculinities are socially organized. These gender hierarchies, she argues, should be studied through the dynamic relations between them. She proposes four categories of masculinities: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized.⁹ She defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answers to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."¹⁰ The dominant forms of masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt highlight, enjoy cultural consent, as well as discursive centrality whilst marginalizing or delegitimizing any form of alternatives.¹¹ However, hegemonic masculinity is not fixed and "the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity" are not necessarily "the most powerful people."¹² Filmic and mythical superheroes are examples of ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Since most men do not meet the standards required of hegemonic masculinity, they instead aspire to attain them. Thus, those who subscribe to these normative standards of masculinity are referred to as complicit masculinities. They are men who "realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being in the frontline troops."¹³ In fact, "A degree of overlap or blurring between hegemonic and complicit masculinities is extremely likely if hegemony is effective."¹⁴ Within the social constructions and gender relations of multiple masculinities, men at the very bottom rung of the hierarchy and domination are referred to as subordinate masculinities. These are men who are "expelled from the circle of legitimacy."¹⁵ Marginal masculinity in contrast to the three categories above, is not simply related to dominance but "relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity and the dominant group."¹⁶ Whilst the first three groups are "internal to the gender order," the interplay of gender with

other structures such as class and race produces further complexities within their gender relations.¹⁷

By examining the cinematic narratives of men's alienation and despair in the fringes of Iranian society I delineate the centre-periphery relations within the hierarchy of masculinities in three post-2005 art-house films all of whose protagonists are middle-aged men living in contemporary Iranian society: *A Few Kilos of Dates for a Funeral* (Saman Salur, 2006), *Parviz* (Majid Barzegar, 2012) and *Today* (Reza Mirkarimi, 2014). These tales of social marginalization provide valuable and complex insights into masculine identities of Iranian society, challenging stereotypical images of Iranian men either defined and propagated by the nation-state or imagined and constructed outside. They provide a reflection of a broader social malaise. The study will also demonstrate the diversity of the marginal experiences and the internal hierarchies marginal masculinities recreate within their own social settings. Finally, it will examine gender-relations amongst this group and their position within the patriarchal system.

Theories of social constructionism of masculinity argue that “popular texts and images are seen to be closely connected with wider relations of domination and subordination both among men and between men and women.”¹⁸ The marginal status of the films themselves evidenced by limited screenings and viewings in Iran (particularly for *Kilos* and *Parviz*), place them as peripheral texts within such social constructions. Consequently, the influence of these subversive texts that choose to focus on non-hegemonic identities is also limited. Moreover, it is important not to emphasize the “subversive potential of alternative representations, on one hand, and to underestimate the resilience of hegemonic modes of masculinity, on the other.”¹⁹ However, these films are important in providing an insight into the “circuits of culture” paradigm and the lower hierarchies of masculinities that continue to be constructed in Iranian society.

Marginality in the Hierarchy of Masculinities

In Salur's feature debut, *A Few Kilos of Dates for a Funeral* (henceforth referred to as *Kilos*), the setting of the film emphasizes the marginality of its main characters, Sadri and Yadi, living in the shell of a battered bus at the site of a forgotten petrol station²⁰. Filmed in black and white to reflect the grey and colourless dreams of the characters, the setting was inspired by Salur's travels from his hometown of Boroujerd in south-west Iran, to Tehran, where he studied. “I often thought of the petrol station that was once situated along the highway and

whose prosperity had disappeared with the building of a ring road.”²¹ The desolate and stark landscape in which Sadri and Yadi live, far from any other community and with very limited interaction with the outside world, highlights their status as outsiders living on the fringes of society, forgotten and neglected very much like the petrol station they are charged with guarding. All the characters in the film occupy marginal positions within society in general and the hierarchy of masculinities in particular. However, the positions within the hierarchy do not remain unchallenged. In fact, the men constantly attempt to renegotiate their inferior position in relation to those above them within their microcosmic social order resulting in a fluid rather than rigid hierarchy within their small, fragmented group.

The semiotics of the characters’ names reference the roles each of them plays. The epithets are likely abbreviated from loftier religious appellations, but which also reflect the position of these characters within the filmic narrative. Sadri, literally meaning prime, leading – probably from Sadr al-Din, the Leading one in Religion – had been a *pahlavan*, a champion, a wrestler and at the apex of the hierarchy of masculinities within his social group. His strength and its display had been his main source of income. The younger man, Yadi, presumably from Yadollah, “the Hand of God” is now just Yadi, “a hand”, “an assistant” and in fact the underdog of the narrative. Oruj, the undertaker, roams around the roads with his dilapidated van, assisting the state with recovering the bodies of those who have lost their lives in accidents, including from natural causes such as snowslides. Oruj, meaning “ascent”, thus aids with the ascension of the lost spirits who will only be able to rest once they have been buried. The mentally disabled Gholam lives with his elderly father who perennially tries to relinquish his parental responsibility to his older son, Abbas. Gholam, meaning “slave”, is another abbreviation, this time perhaps for “Slave of God” or “Slave” of one of the Shi‘i imams. As such, Gholam occupies the lowest rung within the hierarchy of marginal masculinities – evident in the way others, including the underdog, Yadi, mistreat him.

The hierarchy between the two men living within the small, claustrophobic space of the bus is established from the beginning of the film. Yadi has to follow Sadri’s orders not simply as his subordinate in their responsibilities as caretakers of the petrol station but in their daily existence. For example, Yadi is kicked out of the bus into the freezing cold because he dared to question Sadri’s recent obsession with the weather forecast and sudden preference for snow over sun. Yadi’s subservient role is emphasized throughout the film, as Sadri ignores, beats and accuses the latter of lying and stealing. In the absence of women in their lives, they also assume “traditional” gendered roles in relation to each other with Yadi taking on the “effeminate” character and Sadri the hypermasculine. Yadi cooks, cleans, and

weeps at the abuse he receives at the hands of Sadri, calling out for his mother and complaining about his inferior position by crying out: “I’m the weakest man on earth”.

This fragmented group of marginalized men continue to renegotiate their position within the gender order to recreate a new gender pattern – even if temporarily. “The definition of masculinity is essentially a collective process whereby men compete with other men for validation and confirmation. Masculinity is collectively enforced, protected, and threatened.”²² Yadi’s attempts at equalizing his relationship with Sadri are aggressively thwarted by the latter. In their limited social interactions, it is only in relation to Gholam that Yadi can play the dominant role. When Abbas, the postman who hand-delivers Yadi’s love letters to the woman living in the city, brings his mentally disabled younger brother with him, Yadi finally finds an opportunity to assert his authority.²³ In his attempts to reverse his subordinate role, Yadi imitates Sadri’s weightlifting exercises, treating Gholam as his minor standing to attention at his master’s side, just as Yadi has to with Sadri. Yadi’s performance of the dominant man, however, is all too brief, soon interrupted by Sadri’s appearance. The former challenges this display of superiority by nonchalantly adding weights to the improvised barbells, reducing Yadi to begging for help under the crushing weights, and thereby proving his ineligibility for any claims to the strongman role. Sadri fiercely rectifies the disrupted order by putting Yadi firmly back in his place as the wimp.

Force and violence is thus not limited to hegemonic masculinity but also assumed by those marginal masculinities re-enacting hegemonic masculinity against others within their own group, creating a further hierarchy within the category. As Connell and Messerschmidt argue, hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily “mean violence” but can be “supported by force” and “ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.”²⁴ In another sequence when Yadi tries to equalize his relation to Sadri by asking the latter to pass him his cup of tea, Sadri throws the tea in his face. When he pretends to be the alpha male in his letters to his beloved, Sadri makes it his business to read them and lashes out at Yadi for pretending to be his superior. Even in the imaginary constructed world of his letters to his beloved, Yadi is not allowed to occupy a higher rank within this marginal masculinity. Abbas’s colleague, who appears to have an only slightly superior position to him at the post office – albeit the dull job of stamping envelopes – is aggressive and violent towards Abbas. Within Abbas’s own household, this hierarchy is comically depicted, by the camera panning upwards from Gholam’s face to Abbas’s hand cutting his hair and smacking his head into position, before panning further up to show the patriarch at the top simultaneously cutting Abbas’s hair and slapping him into position. Overall, these marginal men are not just passive

victims, they also enact the injustices they suffer against each other. However, the performance of the hypermasculine man within this marginal masculinity does not ultimately translate into any real privileges within the wider society.

Hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt argue, “is related to particular ways of representing and using men’s bodies”.²⁵ Sadri maintains the strength of his body to regulate the social order by positioning himself at the top. However, this is limited to the small group of marginalized masculinities within which he lives.²⁶ Outside the confines of this group his mutilated body falls short of the image of the ideal man, relegating him to the lower ranks of masculinity. His blindness in one eye – let alone the limp in his walk – goes against long-held Iranian ideals of the strongman. A number of ancient and medieval Iranian kings reportedly blinded their enemies, rivals, and even heirs, to disqualify their claims to the throne.²⁷ Being fully sighted was and continues to be essential to the position of the powerful man and that of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, Sadri’s strength of body alone, displayed a number of times throughout the film, is insufficient to allow him any privileged position within mainstream Iranian society.

The influence of global ideas of masculinity even in a highly local context is humorously alluded to by the life-size cut-out of David Beckham that the management sends to the petrol station in a bid to attract customers. Global masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt argue, are “constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media.”²⁸ In the absence of any heroic figures or desired models of masculinity in the film, Beckham’s cardboard replica stands in for hegemonic masculinity. McKay et al. argue that “the ‘metrosexual’ epitomized by soccer player David Beckham” is a “recent rearticulation of the [new lad] archetype” in western media “whose status as a globally recognized sport star is traditionally associated with [Connell’s] ‘the frontline troops of patriarchy’”.²⁹ Sadri’s disdain for this intruder holding the championship cup juxtaposes the attitude of the *pahlavans* of the past towards the global champions of the present. International sport stars such as Beckham embody hegemonic masculinity, which subsequently challenges and even reshapes local ideas of hegemonic masculinities. In this way, local and regional ideals of championship gradually become inconsequential. The Pahlavi modernization and westernization project as well as the continued global domination of transnational ideals of masculinity have consequently rendered local champions irrelevant to Iranian society. In fact, it is not simply Sadri’s disabled body that pushes him to the fringes but more importantly, Iranian society’s loss of predilection for its old *pahlavans* that does.

Parviz (2012) is Majid Barzegar's second feature film. His debut feature *Rainy Season* (2010), explores the alienation of a middle-class teenage boy whose parents are separating and in their "progressive" attitude leave him to fend for himself for long periods of time. His third film, *A Very Ordinary Citizen* (2015), examines the alienation of an elderly man on the verge of dementia, also living on his own with no female relatives and only a son who lives abroad. Male loneliness and isolation, distant father – son relationships, and the absence of women in the lives of these men, are the main themes that bind these films. Together, they are arguably a trilogy, with each respectively examining the three stages of the contemporary middle-class Iranian man: youth, midlife and old age.

Parviz opens with the break-up of a father–son relationship.³⁰ The marginal and claustrophobic existence of Parviz is established within the first sequence of the film, which opens in the dark room occupied by the large, angry and frustrated Parviz delivering obscenities over the phone as he heaves himself around within the small space. Iranian narratives abound with estranged relationships between fathers and sons that end with the former being responsible for the tragic end³¹ of the latter's lives. These include ancient stories such as those of Rostam and Sohrab, Kay Khusraw and Siyavash, and Goshtasp and Esfandiyar to name a few. More recently, in Iranian cinema, Majidi's *Colour of Paradise* (1998) depicts the strained relationship of a father with his blind son. Desperate to rid himself of his son to make way for the arrival of a new wife into his life, the father causes the death of his son. As with Rostam, this is followed by belated regret, but without any of the legendary hero's redeeming features. Majidi's Parviz is far from the innocent young sons of the above narratives or more generally the socially admired models of masculinity constructed within the images of these heroes.

For the last thirty years, the fifty-year-old Parviz has lived in the heart of an upper-middle-class building complex, spending his time running errands for the community and taking responsibility for the upkeep of the buildings. Even though he is one of the residents he clearly holds a subordinate role. In the absence of a woman within the household for the past fifteen years, Parviz has taken on the "traditional" feminine role and been responsible for cooking, shopping and cleaning, living with his father. As such, his masculinity is already demarcated as far from the desired "traditional" male role because "patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity."³² At best, Parviz appears content with and, at worst, indifferent to occupying a subordinate masculinity in the hierarchy of power and privilege. This incorporation of non-hegemonic masculinities "into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in

the form of discredit or violence” is in fact one of the ways that “hegemony may be accomplished.”³³

However, this takes a turn for the worse once Parviz’s father forces him to leave the family home to make way for his new wife, Azar. Parviz becomes redundant in the father’s life now that he can be replaced with a wife who can cook and clean for him. This is followed by the community’s rejection of Parviz’s contributions, rendering him a complete outsider and pushing him from a subordinate to a marginal position. Parviz, who has lived in his parental house all his life, becomes the abject in Julia Kristeva’s definition as “everything that is filthy or disorderly or uncivilized is in the same ‘place’ as the left-behind mother, in the realm of the abject.”³⁴ Parviz’s obese body, and his place outside the accepted gender roles and social conventions, situate him within the abject which “does not respect borders, positions, rules” and is “The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”³⁵ Once the father rejects and banishes Parviz, the community is quick to follow. Despite his efficiency and hard work, Parviz is quickly stripped of all responsibilities, being denied both his individual as well as his social and communal identity. One of the ways that socially dominant masculinities assert their position is through the “Marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives.”³⁶ Subsequently, despite his significant contributions to the life of the community, they are seen as inferior and subordinate, and Parviz is pushed to a marginal position within the hegemonic order of masculinities.

The dry-cleaner reinforces Parviz’s marginal position within the gender order by reminding him how he is the subject of the community’s ridicule and lacks all that his father possesses. In outlining the father’s attributes, he delineates contemporary ideals of masculinity within particular sections of Iranian society: The father dresses smartly, looks after himself, is financially well-off, and at an advanced age can still remarry a desirable woman. In sum, he embodies the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, which is “related to particular ways of representing and using men’s bodies.”³⁷ In contrast, Parviz leads a feminine and infantilized existence. Even though he is a middle-aged man, he is still financially dependent on his father, smokes secretly, is not married, does not have a regular job, is obese, and dresses scruffily. This is further emphasized by showing Parviz’s limited socialization with children and teenagers: he plays table tennis with them, and later allows the teenager Ashkan to use his flat for everything the latter is restricted from doing in his own house, such as smoking, keeping a dog as a pet, and receiving phone calls from girls. The film however, does not celebrate the hegemonic masculinity of the father. Despite embodying the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, his dull existence is alluded to by the dark and cold

colours in which he appears, the deafening silence in the house, and the absence of any smiles on his face throughout the film. He retains this solemn expression throughout the film, even when returning home with his bride after their marriage ceremony. Similarly, Parviz, the embodiment of dejected masculinity, never smiles throughout the film. Instead, sadness pervades the entire film. As such the film's colour, tone and mood, such as the dark and claustrophobic opening sequence with Parviz's laboured breathing, reflect not simply the alienation of the character but the society at large; a claustrophobia reminiscent of Ebrahim Golestan's 1964 *Brick and Mirror*.³⁸

When Parviz's desperate attempts at regaining his place both with the father and the community fail, he is steeped into further dejection. For example, in a bid to appease his father who detests the neighbourhood dogs, he poisons them.³⁹ However, his efforts at starting afresh with his father fails. When he finally accepts the dry-cleaner's help at finding a job as a night-watch after being forced out of the petty jobs at the building complex, the community still refuses to recognize his efforts to comply with the social conventions and rejects him. It is as though once he has been pushed to the margins attaining even the subordinate position becomes impossible. Frustrated, he lashes out against the established social order, and in striving to lift himself out of his marginal position, he asserts force and violence over those around him with both random and pre-meditated acts of aggression. He articulates his status within the hierarchy through his response to the dry-cleaner's persistent reproaches: "Do you enjoy constantly beating me on the head?" He then bludgeons the unsuspecting dry-cleaner to his death and nonchalantly proceeds to pick a suit from the dry-cleaners, dressing finely and inviting himself over to his father's house for dinner. His final act of enacting hegemonic masculinity is only accomplished through violence. At the end, he reverses the Iranian patriarchal narrative, literally taking over his father's seat at the dinner table, ordering him to sit, smoking in his face, and for the first time speaking his mind and demanding to be heard. However, this is not a triumph over patriarchy. The film ends ambiguously with Parviz threateningly facing the father and his stepmother. It remains unclear if the Iranian narrative comes to an Oedipal conclusion. However, regardless of the final outcome, it is a tragedy without any edifying moral. Parviz's assertion of hegemonic masculinity is accompanied by violence and the use of his body as a weapon. Subordinate and marginal masculinities can ultimately only strive to embody rather than confront hegemonic masculinities.

In Mirkarimi's *Today* (2014) rather than celebrating the valour and sacrifices of the warrior in the battlefield, the hypermasculine image of the warrior is subverted not only by

presenting his broken body but also by questioning the very definition of valour, sacrifice, heroism and subsequently “masculinity” and its relevance to contemporary Iranian society. Mirkarimi is a director with an artistic flair for simple yet profound stories. Like his earlier films, *A Cube of Sugar* (2011) and *As Simple as That* (2008), the story of *Today* unfolds in less than 24 hours. Yet the narrative of the film extends beyond these few hours to tell stories of times gone by, some of which are of mythical proportions. Mirkarimi documents the extraordinary in the banal and everyday lives of ordinary people to reflect upon the traumas and challenges of a nation struggling with both its past and present. A war-veteran himself, Mirkarimi challenges the state’s dominant discourse on the hero and the warrior.

The character of the hero in *Today* departs starkly from traditional depictions of the male protagonists in Iranian cinema. Indeed, he is neither the hypermasculine hero of pre-Revolutionary commercial cinema nor the conflicted man negotiating between the contradicting demands of tradition and modernity who appears in much of recent Iranian art-house cinema such as Farhadi’s *A Separation* (2011), *The Past* (2013) and *The Salesman* (2016), nor even the anti-hero character of the two films discussed earlier in the article.⁴⁰

The departure from these traditional depictions is not in and of itself a new phenomenon. In fact, these redefinitions of the hero can be seen in numerous other cultural productions in contemporary Iran. For example, in his *Ya Ali Maddad* series he painter and war-veteran Khosrow Hassanzadeh nostalgically repositions the wrestler at the centre of his montaged photographs from the past, placing the clergy, the police and the elite in periphery to the traditional hero. Fereydoun Ave’s despondent series of *Rostam in the Dead of Winter* (2009), presents on the other hand the despair of the modern Iranian man against a background of doom filled with vultures, hyenas and wolves waiting to devour the fatigued hero. For its part, Mirkarimi’s *Today* is a cinematic redefinition of a masculinity traditionally associated with virility, manhood and warriorship.

Parviz Parastouei delivers a superb performance as the stoic middle-aged taxi-driver, Yunes, whose chance encounter with the young, pregnant and injured passenger, Seddiqeh, drives the narrative of the story. With his imperturbable demeanour, Yunes is a man of few words. Yet, the limp in his leg and his familiarity with the hospital grounds – once a major centre for treating the wounded of the Iran-Iraq war – subtly reveal him as a war veteran. Both the hospital, whose grounds and facilities are encroached on for more profitable endeavours, and Yunes, whose able and young body is now a distant memory, no longer hold the value they once enjoyed in society. Instead, memories of the past have been buried deep within each of them, neglected and forgotten, but beautifully visualized in the film through

the derelict room that stores the remnants of the past as Yunes wanders into it under a flickering light. Now, past the prime of his life and partially disabled, Yunes has been relegated to the margins of both social and male hierarchy.

Today's battlegrounds are no longer remote warfronts where soldiers like Yunes fought for their ideals. Instead, Tehran is the combat zone, reflecting a society grappling with many ills and at war with itself. The economic situation has crippled many: men work literally all hours not having seen Tehran's daytime for years, students who drive taxis at night, and women who cannot afford to pay their taxi fares or their hospital charges when in labour. All of them look like defeated soldiers returning from the battleground. Marginalization in contemporary Iran has encompassed a large segment of society. Unlike the characters in *Kilos*, Mirkarimi's hero lives at the very heart of society. But as a wounded soldier of war and a taxi driver, he is marginal to the hegemonic discourses be they constructed by the Islamic Republic, which privileges its allies or by the middle-class nurses and doctors at the hospital.

In *Kilos*, remote harsh surroundings demarcate marginal spaces. In *Parviz* it was the derelict house, which the protagonist is forced to move in. In *Today*, however, Mirkarimi depicts the entire city as hostile and marginalizing. He employs sound and camera movements such as Tehran's chaotic traffic noises, the bouncy rides over potholes, the bashing of the taxi's side mirror by an indifferent motorcyclist, and the removal of old utensils from the hospital grounds, to map the city to a warfront, with Yunes as witness to this continuing aggression. Yet Yunes remains unperturbed, whether driving in the battleground of Tehran's chaotic traffic or in the face of the accusing glances, comments and even physical abuse of the hospital staff who mistake him for Seddiqeh's violent husband.

The hostility and aggression is thus not simply limited to the busy roads but extends to people's interactions with each other. This is established from the opening scene of the film, where Yunes's passenger verbally abuses someone whom he clearly knows intimately and is taking to court. Similarly, the hospital secretary reacts aggressively towards Yunes, the head nurse, Ms Majd, is suspicious of everyone, and the doctor who believes Yunes to be responsible for Seddiqeh's injuries and eventual death, has no qualms in visiting the very same violence he accuses Yunes of against him. Mirkarimi asserted that the decision to depict this hidden violence in the film was deliberate. "Everyone is thinking and talking about the man who has inflicted such misery upon this woman and yet he is absent. However, the violence and aggression within the other characters fill in for his absence."⁴¹ As such, the violence committed by another is used to justify their own, with each displaying the capacity

to inflict the very same torment upon others.

Mirkarimi claims his film is a reflection of Iran's current socio-political context. The film was made towards the end of Ahmadinejad's presidency, under what Mirkarimi refers to as a climate of shirking responsibilities, a culture of blame and the practice of condemning others to escape accusations against oneself – all of which crept beyond the government and enveloped ordinary people. Atwood refers to post-Khatami Iran as having “been marked by the same sense of futility and hopelessness that afflicted the intellectual classes in the early and mid-1990s.”⁴²

Mirkarimi explains the reaction of audiences and critics who argued that they could relate to all but the character of Yunes, as a reflection of where Iranians are today as a society. They could relate to the characters being judgemental and aggressive but not to the alternative of violence being redundant such as Yune's character. Our *urfi* or socially accepted behaviour, Mirkarimi argues, has remodelled aggression as a socially acceptable behaviour, and when these audiences compared themselves with Yunes, they found themselves coming short of him at least in one of those situations. Interestingly, Barzegar also mentions this societal mood during Ahmadinejad's presidency, particularly post 2009 elections, as one of the main reasons for his own film's bleak depiction.

Mirkarimi's *Today* presents the marginal masculinity as the forgotten hero of Iranian values and ideals rather than as the victim of the dominant masculinities. He emphasized that in *Today* he wanted to present his role model of a man. He continued:

I wanted to find out that if there are very obvious definitions for *futuwwat* and *javanmardi* in our ancient mythical and historical stories, were these to be applied to someone today, what kind of a person would that be. Yunes becomes the manifestation of that person. Someone who has arrived at a moral agreement within himself, no longer concerned about what others may think of him. However, the main distinguishing feature between Yunes and those ancient heroes such as Rostam, Sohrab and Puriya Vali is his anonymity. It is precisely this anonymity that turns him into a hero. He remains completely indifferent to anyone's estimation of him, which elevates him to this status.⁴³

Thus, Yunes does not embody the stereotypical image of the *javanmard* as a warrior but rather as a spiritual champion. In discussing the spiritual champion in the work of Husayn Va'ez Kashifi, the sixteenth-century Sufi, Arley Loewen states:

Kashifi urges to break the power of selflove: ‘The pivotal point of *futuwwat* is to break the (*nafs*) and to abandon self and selfworship.’” This he bases on the Qur'anic verse:

“And of mankind there is he who would sell himself (*nafs*), seeking the pleasure of God.”⁴⁴

The film is not about the disappearance of the hero but a critical look at what it means to be one. It is not simply Yunes’s participation in war that turns him into a hero. In fact, it is his total silence on the matter, his refusal to invoke the special privileges the state affords to war veterans, and the absence of any sense of entitlement that endows him with heroic qualities. Unlike Haj Kazem, the protagonist of *The Glass Agency* (Hatamikia, 1998), Yunes does not impose his ideals on others. The celebrated director of the Sacred Defence Cinema, Ebrahim Hatamikia, narrates the story of a war veteran, Haj Kazem in this classic Iran-Iraq war film. Parastui, playing the protagonist in *Today*, starred as Haj Kazem, a war veteran who takes hostages in a travel agency to demand a defence of the values he had fought for in the war. In creating the character of Yunes, Mirkarimi refers to the influence of Ali Shariati’s statement about the two characteristics he deeply dislikes seeing in men. One is the inclination to seek commiseration (*dard-o del kardan*) and the second is the constant loquacious defensiveness of themselves. These are exactly the two things that Mirkarimi states that he stripped out from his character. In constructing an alternative heroic masculinity, Mirkarimi is not creating a new value system, but harking back to an older definition of masculinity, such as that of Shari’ati’s, which has since been marginalized by the domination of other competing discourses of masculinity.

In proposing a new construction of the ideal man whose marginality is integral to his idealism, Mirkarimi smashes the stereotypical image of the virile and able body of the masculine warrior not to point to a crisis of masculinity but to redefine the new Iranian hero and the traditionally associated features of virility, masculinity and warriorship. The Qur’anic film, *Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) provides the prototype of the ideal man – the prophet-king – in which the most dominant image of Solomon is that of a warrior.⁴⁵ In order to bring peace to his kingdom, Solomon’s battles are not simply limited to the people who oppose him but also extends to the nonphysical realm including jinns and demons who have to be subjugated. His virility is reflected through the fully pregnant body of his wife and his military aptitude, which is displayed through his skills in horsemanship and sword fighting, not to mention his divine appointment and supernatural abilities in controlling the wind and enslaving the jinns and the demons. In contrast, the infertile, disabled and underprivileged Yunes, however, in *Today* is the silent hero in a Tehran that breeds hidden violence.

Mirkarimi problematizes many of the long-held and widely propagated ideas regarding sacrifice, valour, virility and masculinity. In fact, it is not the display of the strong

body but ironically Yunes's disability that marks him out as a warrior. His participation in the sacred defence, however, does not define his heroism. Yunes emerges as the silent unsung hero on a different battlefield, one which has perpetuated inwardly long after the Iran-Iraq war. Valour is not to be celebrated with pomp and ceremony. It is the fortitude with which Yunes stays true to his values and sidesteps the pervasive aggression. Unlike the prevalent depictions, there is no feat of masculinity to uphold female honour through violence or control. And yet, without judgement, Yunes generously gives of his reputation to a female stranger who desperately asks for it so she can provide legitimacy to her unborn child in a society that demands female chastity. As such, Mirkarimi invites his audiences to reconsider the social conventions and constructions of masculinity and heroism, and reimagine a new hero independent of the hierarchies of masculinities.

Mirkarimi maintained that the theme of the film was also partly derived from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, which reflects upon long-held debates on the legal and moral obligations of humans to each other. This is a debate that Mirkarimi found pertinent to Iranian society during Ahmadinejad's presidency and which has once again found urgency in the recent crisis of stranded refugees and migrants on the borders of Europe. As the ex-convict Jean Valjean kidnaps Cosset to offer her the possibility of a better life in *Les Misérables*, so too does Yunes kidnap Seddiqeh's new-born to provide her with a life better than what her mother had ever enjoyed. While Javert in *Les Misérables* is the embodiment of the law, striving to create a disciplined society, it is the head nurse, Ms Majd, who takes on this role in Mirkarimi's *Today*. However, the law, Mirkarimi argues, becomes an escape from our ethical duties. For Jean Valjean and Yunes the law constitutes only the minimum of our social commitments. While the law provides us with protection from each other, it does not encompass our ethical responsibilities to each other. To test out the ideas of valour, sacrifice and true heroism, the modern day Iranian protagonist of *Today* draws heavily from the French hero rather than any specific Shi'i or Iranian icons, reminding viewers of their duty to each other, and which binds them beyond the letter of the law - whether this is of the theocratic state that does not afford its women equal rights or indeed laws outside the Islamic Republic which claim supremacy in upholding human equality and dignity. Just as *Les Misérables* is a universal story within a very French context, *Today* is a universal story about heroism within a very Iranian context.

Marginal Masculinity and Women

Dominance over women is an important criterion of hegemonic masculinity.⁴⁶ The marginal masculinities in *Kilos* and *Parviz*, however, struggle to establish any form of relationship with women. Their absence in the male homosocial space of *Kilos* is conspicuous. On the rare occasion that either of the two female figures appears in a sequence, their face is barely shown. They remain mute except for the bride's brief and formal declaration of consent to marrying Abbas. However, women's absence and silence in these films is not a deliberate continuation of certain trends in both pre- and post-Revolutionary Iranian cinema that pushed women to the margins.⁴⁷ In fact, despite the absence of women on screen, the film's narrative is driven by the compulsive need for female love. This desire for a relationship with the opposite sex becomes the only source of meaning in their otherwise banal and bleak existence.

As the film develops, the reason for Sadri's recent obsession with the weather forecast is revealed to be his desire to preserve the frozen body of a woman whose car was buried under snowdrift. With this discovery, Sadri, who had only loved once before, finds the opportunity to love again. The female corpse fills in for a real relationship that he had lacked all his life allowing him to once again find a purpose in life. He dresses up for his secret visits and speaks to her as though she were alive. Just as he has assumed the role of hegemonic masculinity in their small and fragmented homosocial group, he adopts the role of the protective male in relation to the woman. He assures the corpse that he will do everything to preserve her from the encroaching spring sun. When he realises her jewellery is missing he becomes furious and goes onto stow her car in a different location.⁴⁸

Sadri remains reticent about his personal affairs. His monologues, dressed up as conversations, with the female corpse reveal snippets of his past. He relates how he had been a *pahlavan*, and made a living by displaying his strength in street performances. However, his love for a woman whose face he had never seen but whose voice had stolen his heart, ultimately led to his downfall. The fully-veiled woman would come to his performances, complimenting him at the end of each of them. After that, he was no longer the same person. His distraction by her eventually led to his hands faltering and he dropped the car he was lifting. The crowds mocked him, after which she never returned. This public failure of performance of masculinity resulted in the loss of his position both within society and with the woman. As he puts it to the female corpse, he "now knows that he can conquer everything other than his heart." The woman is responsible for his disability downfall and broken heart. Similarly, it is a woman who causes Yadi to stoop to stealing her jewellery to impress his

own love-interest. As he tells Sadri: “I’ve only stolen once for the woman I loved but you know what I’m talking about”.

The first time Sadri fell in love, it was with the voice of a “bodiless and faceless” woman whom he did not find the courage to converse with the second time, he fell in love with a lifeless woman with whom he could finally speak. This struggle to form a relationship with a woman is a theme that can be traced in modern Persian literature. Many of Sadeq Hedayat’s non-heroic characters, for example, experience alienation from women, failing to enter a romantic relationship with them. The convenience of loving a lifeless woman appears in his short story “The Doll Behind the Curtain” in which the protagonist, Mehrdad, falls for a mannequin in a shop window for in his eyes she “transcended his wildest fantasies of love and beauty”. More importantly, she

Could not talk, so she would never pretend to love him... She would always be contented, quiet, beautiful, always wearing that smile, this was the fulfilment of his most impossible dreams. But most importantly, she would never open her mouth, never express an opinion, and he wouldn’t have to be afraid of incompatibility.⁴⁹

Referring to Hedayat’s oeuvre, Hillman asserts, “Story after story depicts alienation, rejection, antipathy toward others, unhappiness, defeat, death, a deformed society, individuals deformed by fate, dysfunctional romantic and sexual relationships, and meaninglessness of life.”⁵⁰ Similarly, in pre-Revolutionary Iranian cinema, the crisis of masculinity, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, is not so much of masculinity’s assertion of power and authority over female subjectivities but partly their struggle and ultimate failure to form a relationship with them.⁵¹ That the gendered social and political discourse within Iran magnifies these obstacles is, of course, undeniable, and many recent art house films, including those discussed here, critically examine the challenges of establishing relationships and intimacy in a gendered society.

These “bodiless” or mute women in *Kilos* are not, however, depicted as passive victims of a patriarchal society. Sadri’s first love, despite being fully covered in her chador, attended public events such as Sadri’s street performances and boldly expressed her desire. His second love is out of his league. She is an educated woman independent enough to drive alone to remote areas to take photographs. Even though each of these women belong to different social backgrounds, both are mobile, participate in the public sphere and have some independence from the patriarchal boundaries of their society. In contrast, Sadri appears imprisoned by his circumstances, only seen moving within the space between the derelict bus and the car of the lifeless woman.

The dysfunctional relationship between the genders is evident in the absence of any form of conversation between them. The men's numerous attempts at discourse with women are fraught with challenges. Yadi continues to write letter after letter without receiving a single response. He is so desperate for any reaction from the woman that after Abbas returns from supposedly delivering one of his letters, he enquires: "She said nothing? Not even a bad word?" It is finally, Abbas, the man who plucks the courage to directly approach the woman, who wins her affection. In reality, however, this victory has taken the efforts of two marginalized men. Instead of delivering Yadi's letters, Abbas copies and presents them as his own, finally resulting in the woman's marriage to the latter.⁵²

Where these marginal men fail with words, popular songs are used to express their emotions. When Abbas returns from delivering his last letter, which was enthusiastically snatched through the window by his future wife, he triumphantly sings: "*Hay hay Rashid Khan, Sardar-e koll-e Iran*" (Hail, Hail, Rashid Khan, the Commander of all of Iran). For his part, Sadri tells the lifeless woman that since he finds himself inadequate with words he has brought his cassette player with him so they can listen to music instead. The lyrics tellingly express his affection for her: "You are all I have in my life, everything I possess is yours..." However, silence is all that Yadi and Sadri receive in return. Sadri pleads to the lifeless woman: "At least you say something, they're looking for you, and the weather is getting warmer and warmer."

The presence of women in their life can be disruptive for subordinated and marginalized men. The arrival of Azar in the father's life in *Parviz* results in the ejection of the son, the subordinate masculinity, from the family home to allow the patriarch sole and complete domination over his space – and woman – away from Parviz's prying eyes. Azar's subordinate relation to her new husband is merely a replacement for Parviz's role, with the addition of sexual gratification. The cold body language and limited conversation between the father and Azar in the film is telling of the lack of any genuine companionship between the two. Indeed, from his brief conversations with her, Parviz appears to know more about Azar than his father such as her smoking habit and that her soon-to-be husband's financial prospect prove crucial to her decision to marry him. This is further evident when, at dinner, Parviz points out the silence between the couple: "You don't have anything to say to each other?" thereby enraging his father. In fact, when it comes to their relationships with women, hegemonic masculinity's success in procuring a wife is not the marker of triumph it may first appear to be in overcoming the struggles faced by marginalized and subordinated masculinities. Indeed, they can remain equally isolated, and alienated from women.

Repressed sexual desire is alluded to in Parviz's longing glances at the young couple in the lift, and later the deliberate undressing of a mannequin in a window shop that he sets up as being burgled. One of the film's references to the politics of gendered space is the newspapers covering the windows of the dingy flat that Parviz is forced to move into. He stops removing the newspapers after seeing the figure of a man/boy appear on a balcony across where a woman is hanging clothes on a line. Only later, when Ashkan's mother, a divorcee, returns the gaze, does he remove a further few newspapers. In a strictly monitored cinema where sexual liaisons are not depicted, this is briefly referred to in her summarily dismissing Parviz from her flat, and her anxiety over Ashkan finding out that Parviz had been there. Parviz is once again ejected as the "abject", this time by a woman, whom he appears to have failed to impress or satisfy. The marginal man once again fails to make an impression on the woman he desires. The teenage Ashkan – a hegemonic masculinity in the making – on the other hand, succeeds where Parviz fails, establishing a number of relationships with girls. In fact, Ashkan uses Parviz's house to enact hegemonic masculinity.

In *Today*, the mystery of the lonely Seddiqeh and her predicament points to the suffering of the many women who live under patriarchy, a recurring theme in Mirkarimi's films. Just as one of the nurses is unsure of the relationship between Yunes and Seddiqeh and asks her colleague if Yunes is Seddiqeh's father or husband, we, too, are no wiser as to whether, her three pregnancies are the result of rape or temporary marriage. In fact, it is the agony of not knowing who Seddiqeh and her story, that reminds us of the struggles of the many unknown, unheard women who suffer silently and invisibly even as they are potently burdened with shouldering the taboos of society.

Hugo's Jean Valjean might have had the strength of Rostam – and both in turn enjoyed that strength well into their middle ages – but Yunes is no Rostam. Despite his financial constraints, he refuses to invoke the special privileges that the state affords war veterans and declines the offer to use it to underwrite Seddiqeh's hospital fees. He also refuses to declare her as destitute to qualify for charitable funds and as such maintains her dignity.

Despite its parallels to *Les Misérables*, *Today* remains firmly rooted in its cultural context, critically commenting on contemporary Iranian society with the semiotics of the names Yunes and Seddiqeh referring to Qur'anic and Shi'i narratives. Like the prophet, Yunes initially flees from his mission (the hospital) only to repent (return). Seddiqeh's broken ribs, early labour and subsequent death act as a reminder of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, whose innocence and death are so venerated in Shi'ism. Mirkarimi proposes an

alternative male role model that is far from both the hypermasculine protagonists of commercial Iranian films, and the despair of the male characters, who dominate art-house Iranian films. He, in fact, calls for a new heroism that challenges the core of accepted definitions of masculinity and warriorship and their relationship to women.

Conclusions

Iranian cinema, like other cinema generally, has often delineated the hypermasculinity of the hero in contradistinction with the masculinity of the villain as the wimp. However, the films discussed in this article focus on the marginality and isolation of men across different sections of contemporary Iranian society. As such, they are either devoid of any heroes or question prevailing ideas of heroism and thereby propose a redefinition of the very term itself. *Kilos* and *Parviz* lack a hero and *Today* suggests a rethinking of the term 'hero'. None of the three films celebrate or directly condemn hegemonic masculinities. Instead, they examine the lives of marginal men on the fringes of society, whether this is literally, with men living in remote, uninhabitable surroundings as in *Kilos*, or within the heart of overpopulated Tehran in *Parviz and Today*. Salur's *Kilos* demonstrates the struggle of past heroes and champions who were admired for their strength but are no longer considered relevant to the present. There are no heroes in *Kilos* or *Parviz*, and the alternative hero in *Today* is as socially alienated as the marginal characters of the previous two films. *Kilos* and *Parviz* contemplate the marginality of masculinities living in a patriarchal society. Mirkarimi's *Today*, on the other hand, challenges prevailing values attached to masculinity and warriorship and constructs a new heroism that emerges out of a dejected masculinity.

This article demonstrated how the films problematize the idea of a normative gender propagated through cultural images by "call[ing] to attention the construction of masculinity rather than concealing it."⁵³ They subvert what Neale points out as cinema's "assumption of a male norm" and each of them challenge the conceptions of knowing "masculinity as an ideal", which does not require further investigation."⁵⁴ The emergence of dejected masculinities in post-2005 presidential elections in Iran, is a notable feature in the films studied here. This is particularly relevant to *Parviz* and *Today*, which were produced after the contested 2009 presidential elections and the defeat of a large section of the urban middle class protestors who demanded social change. Even though none of the films are directly set in that era, they reflect the mood of urban Iranian society at that time.

Finally, the study illustrated the contested nature of masculine hierarchies, with further hierarchies recreated within each category. Marginal masculinities continuously attempt to attain a higher position in relation to other marginalized men, thereby creating a further internal hierarchy within the category of “marginal masculinity” itself. However, the “hypermasculine” within marginal masculinity ultimately remains marginal within the hierarchy of masculinities, deprived of any privileged access to society. The display of hegemonic masculinity can only, therefore, be effective within the category of the hierarchy that these men occupy. *Kilos* and *Parviz*, depict the infantilized man whereas the marginal in *Today* is not the man but Iranian values and ideas of chivalry more generally. Both *Parviz* and *Today* focus on a society ridden with angst and frustration, which can suddenly unleash petty or serious violence. However, *Today* ends on a hopeful note with the triumph of marginalized Iranian chivalry over the chatter of righteousness and blame.

¹ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 838.

² Gerami, “Mullahs, Martyrs, and Men,” 264.

³ Gerami, “Mullahs, Martyrs, and Men,” 267.

⁴ Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film Performance*, 28.

⁵ For a study of the constructions of masculinity in pre-Revolutionary Iranian cinema in both commercial and alternative art house cinema, see Pak-Shiraz, “Constructing Masculinities through the Javanmards,” forthcoming.

⁶ Rastegar, *Surviving Images*, 126. For more on the Sacred Defense Cinema see Varzi, *Warring Souls*; Rahimieh, “Framing Iran”.

⁷ With the recent political turmoil in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic encourages volunteers to participate in “defending the holy shrines”, a reference to the shrines of the Shi‘i imams in Iraq, and that of Zaynab, the sister of the third Shi‘i imam, Husayn, in Syria. In this regard, a new category of “*Sinemay-e Moghavemat*” or “Resistance Cinema, has been introduced within Iranian cinema. This refers to films made about the wars and conflicts in the wider region rather than specifically within the Iranian borders. The 2017 Fajr International Film Festival hosted an entire category dedicated to films depicting these conflicts, with the prestigious Mohammad Amin Award for ethics going to *Babaie* (Mozaffar Hosseinkhani Hezaveh), a documentary about an Iranian volunteer who achieves his desire of martyrdom on the battlegrounds of Iraq.

⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 832.

⁹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79-80. In a later study, “Hegemonic Masculinity” Connell and Messerschmidt also include and examine local, national and global influences in the constructions of masculinities.

¹⁰ Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

¹¹ Connell and Messerschmidt, 846

¹² Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

¹³ *Ibid*, 79.

¹⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, 839

¹⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 80-81.

¹⁷ Ibid, 80.

¹⁸ McKay, Mikosza and Hutchins, "Gentlemen," 273.

¹⁹ McKay, Mikosza and Hutchins, "Gentlemen," 280.

²⁰ The film won numerous prestigious international awards including the Special Jury Prize of the 2006 Locarno International Film Festival.

²¹ DreamLab Films, film's distributor, <http://www.dreamlabfilms.com/a-few-kilos-of-dates-for-a-funeral/>

²² Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film Performance*, 106.

²³ The role of the postman was played by renowned Iranian composer, singer and setar player, Mohsen Namjoo. Born in 1976, Namjoo studied theatre and music at the University of Tehran and was hailed as "the Bob Dylan of Iran" by the New York Times. In 2009 he was sentenced in absentia to a five-year jail term by the Iranian revolutionary courts for allegedly ridiculing the Qur'an through his song "Shams", which is a recitation of a chapter of the Qur'an under the same title. He is currently living in New York.

²⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 832.

²⁵ Ibid., 851.

²⁶ The only person that Sadri treats as his equal is Oruj, with whom he "socializes" when they occasionally drink tea and smoke opium together. Oruj is also superior to Yadi, not only economically but also physically, displaying this through his forcible squeezing of Yadi's hand when advising him to look out for Sadri.

²⁷ In the stories of the *Shahnameh*, being fully sighted is essential to the ability and legitimacy of the ruler. For example, under Simorgh's instructions Rostam blinds the heir to the throne, Esfandiyar, by targeting his eyes. In another episode, when Kay Kavus is captured and blinded by the white demon, Rostam defeats the demon and miraculously restores the sight of the monarch by rubbing the demon's blood on his eyes. I would like to thank Chris Gow and Karim Javan for their comments on this point. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, in "Empire of the Gaze," provides an overview of the importance of the sight in Achaemenid and classical monarchy.

²⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 849.

²⁹ McKay, Mikosza and Hutchins, "Gentlemen," 284.

³⁰ The film has participated in numerous international film festivals, winning prestigious awards including the **Jury's** Special Mention at the 60th San Sebastian IFF, Spain, "for its compelling and harmonious storytelling, featuring an atypical and constantly surprising anti-hero." Levon Haftvan, a theatre actor and director, delivers a superb performance in his role of Parviz. In terms of style alone, the film is an excellent example of the maturity of Iranian cinema, combining its realist genre with long takes, natural lighting and simple narratives with the performance of both professional and non-professional actors.

³¹ In an interview in Tehran, Barzegar told me that the idea of the film occurred to him when he was working on a documentary film about the famous Iranian actress and radio presenter, Zhaleh Olov. The silent and ignored man sitting at the corner of the radio studio, carrying out sound effects during the recording of a radio drama became the inspiration for the character of Parviz.

³² Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 848.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Caslav Covino, *Amending the Abject Body*, 21.

³⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4

³⁶ Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 846.

³⁷ Ibid., 851.

³⁸ I have discussed this in detail in "Javanmards in Pre-Revolutionary," Forthcoming.

³⁹ Religiously unclean and legally forbidden in public spaces, dogs occupy a contested existence in contemporary urban Iranian society. Both the dogs, and Parviz are marginal, detested and live in a confined universe. However, unlike Parviz, the canines are loved by the families with whom they live.

⁴⁰ For a discussion on patriarchy and masculinity in Farhadi's *The Separation*, see Milani, "Haunting Obituary".

⁴¹ All references to Mirkarimi are drawn from interviews with him during my fieldwork in Iran in August 2015.

⁴² Atwood, "Re/Form," 56.

⁴³ Mirkarimi, Interview.

⁴⁴ Loewen "Proper Conduct is Everything," 551.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of Kingdom of Solomon see Nacim Pak-Shiraz, "The Divine Word," forthcoming; Nacim Pak-Shiraz, "The Qur'anic Epic".

⁴⁶ Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 832.

⁴⁷ For discussions on different representations of women in Iranian cinema, see Lahiji, "Chaste Dolls and Unchaste Dolls," 215-226; Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Vol. 4*, 93-173 and Naficy, "Veiled Vision/Powerful Presences," 44-65.

⁴⁸ On the veiling of women not being limited to her body but encompassing her life, thoughts and words to be hidden behind a wall or curtain, see Milani, *Veils and Words* as well as *Word, Not Sword*.

⁴⁹ Hedayat, "The Doll Behind the Curtain," 130.

⁵⁰ Hillman, "Hedayat, Sadeq, II. Themes, Plots, And Technique In Hedayat's Fiction," online.

⁵¹ Pak-Shiraz, "Javanmards in Pre-Revolutionary," Forthcoming.

⁵² An interesting subversion of the Islamic legal precept that two women equal one man in testimony, inheritance and blood money.

⁵³ Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film Performance*, 29.

⁵⁴ Neale, "Masculinity as spectacle," 15-16.

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