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ANALYSIS OF BEING A MAN IN SACRED DEFENSE CINEMA.  
THE CASE OF HATAMIKIYA'S BODYGUARD

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**Abstract:** The political developments in Iran at the end of the 20th century, particularly the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war immediately after the revolution in Iran, had a deep influence on storytelling in general and movie-making in particular. This gave rise to new social definitions, including a unique form of masculinity. The war, with its masculine atmosphere and Shi'ite-rooted ideology, gave birth to a new definition of masculinity, which can be seen reflected in the Sacred Defense Cinema genre. Sacred Defense Cinema has played a significant role in defining gender with Islamic roots. This paper aims to shed light on Iranian cinema, specifically the Sacred Defense Cinema, through an analysis of Hatamikiya's film "Bodyguard".

**Key words:** masculinity in cinema; Islamic masculinity; Sacred Defense Cinema; cinema in Iran; Ebrahim Hatamikiya.

## 1. Introduction

Gender representation is a ritualization of masculine domination and this representation not only creates a hierarchy in the society but also stabilizes it (Goffman 1997). As Reynolds (Reynolds 2002, 97-8) points out, gender is “largely an asset of ideological and cultural practices rather than a biological given”; in other words, it can be said that masculinity does not refer to manhood, but it is a role that a man plays in the society. Roles defining masculinity are often concealed in the epics, myths, and stories that have been handed down from one generation to the next. Epics, being as old as humanity, often define manhood in the context of the struggle between humans and nature, with the victorious human being the epitome of masculinity. The heroic ideal in Homer, for instance, is the physically strong and muscular young man who is ready to die for his fame. The heroes of the Iliad are formulaically related to the Gods that are called “digenesis” which is “of the blood of Zeus” (Miller 2000, 70). In general, “epic is the medium that defines the message which is the hero” (Negy 2006, 73) and these heroes are masculine. In ancient Greek mythologies, Gods are the symbol of masculinity. They are the winners and they happen to be men. In ancient Greek and early Hellenistic era, for instance, masculinity was not a normative standard. It was based on the virtue of ‘courage’. Spartanian men’s life in Greece was based on war. For being more masculine, they have to be more: “hairy, political, rational, hunter”, their gender identity being deeply tied to the notions of courage and the shame of cowardice (Rubarth 2014, 30). Hercules is one of the representatives of masculinity model in Greek mythology. He is the male hero with “intimidating physical dominance”, “strength”, “courage” and with “lack of emotional empathy” (Primo 2018, 8)

Iranian myths like Siavash, Arash, Babak Khorramdin, Rostam and Kaveh, who form an important part of the history of Iranian storytelling, have dynamic images of the long-held aspirations of the Iranian people. These myths or heroes are all symbols of manliness; from Arash, who puts his life in the bow in order to expand the borders of Iran, and Siavash, who goes through the fire to prove his innocence, or Kaveh, who created the Derafsh-I-Kaviani (the symbol of freedom in Iranian myths) against Zahak. All of these symbols are distinctly Iranian and patriotic, representing key characteristics of the pre-Islamic Iranian masculinity. For Nacim Pak-Shiraz (Pak-Shiraz 2017, 947) Iranian masculinity is largely influenced by religion and mythological narratives of Iran. It could be argued that since the Islamic revolution, masculinity in Iran has been further shaped by religious beliefs and myths.

Mythical stories give us a simple web of interpretation of the world around us. They give us the chance to project feelings on all phenomena and to reconsider them. It can be argued that every phenomenon is reflected in the logic of myth in an idealized manner. This is why

Durkheim stated that gods are merely the symbolic expression of society. (Durkheim 2008).

Indeed, neither religion nor political ideologies will achieve this inherent connection with meaning. The connection and the presence will explain all the moments of life such as giving birth, growing up, and going through different stages of life, sexuality, gender roles and even death. Mythologies have been one of the key elements in controlling society, serving as a strategic tool. From the first lines of creation myths, one can see the temporal precedence of man over woman and the masculine precedence over the feminine roles in the mythological series of stories. The only difference is in the values of the relationship between the two genders. In African mythology, for instance, men symbolize order and the authority to couple with spirits whereas women symbolize the barren desert, subordinate groups, and witches (Middleton 1960, 107).

Myths which are represented in the media before and after the revolution in Iran are different; the heroes before Islamic revolution were more national rather than religious but after revolution especially during the war between Iran and Iraq, they are more religious and have Shiite values. The heroes with these values in contrast with the ancient Greek heroes, are neither masculine men with muscles and the winners of the wars like Hercules, nor patriot men in Iranian myth. They are modest, spiritual men who are loyal to Islamic revolution ideologies. According to Michael Abecassis (Abecassis 2011, 392), the protagonists of Iranian war cinema, especially in Hatamikiy's third phase films, are not the typical heroes found in western war movies. Rather than being portrayed as strong and decisive, they seek someone to listen to their plight, and they all speak in a similar manner (Abecassis 2011, 393).

## **2. Religion**

Over time in Iran, religion and Shiite based ideology have replaced myths in stories and films. Religion, like myth, describes the order of the universe and the existence of society and causal relations. It includes concepts such as human relations with the universe, with God, and with others, as well as social norms including those related to gender. Similar to myths, religion also portrays desirable things. But what differentiates myth from religion is the appearance of the divine element, which presents the sacred rolls (Weber, 1967).

Social activities may not hold a transcendent meaning to a certain extent, but theological discourse is still directly or indirectly associated with all forms of social life. Both ideology and religion have dualistic aspects; ideology and political values are often viewed as either completely right or wrong, while religion is often seen as either completely good or evil. As denying religion is less common and criticizing

it is not accepted particularly in countries like Iran, it can easily become a main stream ideology.

Ideology is devoid of this guarantee and demands reasons to establish its values. On the whole, political ideology chases the attempt of myth and religion to identify individuals. Political practitioners can transform religion into a means of power (Ansart 2015, 8). A fundamental pillar of civil society is the religion that reinforces the connection between government and people. It is particularly used during the war, to encourage and keep the courage of soldiers. Ansart (Ansart 2015, 81) embodies Plato's idea of myth into ideology: the fact that myths undertake the task of integrating and ruling behavior and focusing all their thinking on domination and impact through the word can be seen in ideology, particularly in times of war and in Iranian war films. In these films, war heroes are portrayed as searching for their beliefs in a materialistic post-war world where many men are either absent, martyred, or abandoned.

### 3. Ideology

Sacred Defense Cinema is a genre full of political ideological codes. Political ideology considers its duty to demonstrate the true definition of collective action in the main lines and demonstrate the model of a legitimate society and to set up its organization to prove the goals that the *ummah* (populace) should have in front of them and the ways to realize these aims. Myths and religions have played a significant role in defining righteous deeds, legitimate powers, and social identities, each according to their respective approaches. Ideology assumes the social responsibility of defining political plans and actions and, in effect, legitimizes particular social rules and activities (Ansart 2015, 103). We can observe that the culture of martyrdom within the Shiite division of Islam constructs a framework for time and defines it, similar to ideologies. The current actions of individuals give rise to the potential for future martyrdom, which is viewed as the pinnacle of masculinity. Martyrdom is regarded as an art form of the men of God, showcasing the Shia ideology that has created a new form of heroism that is dramatically distinct from pre-revolution heroes. Death in the way of Allah (martyrdom) is the main characteristic of these heroes.

### 4. Martyrs

As it has been mentioned earlier, after Iran's revolution, the prototypes of gender have dramatically changed. The words like *Javanmardi* (Chivalry) or *Mardanegi* (Valiancy) that were based on cultural and historical issues changed to "Martyr" or "Basiji" that are based on

religious context especially Shiite. The war between Iran and Iraq created the modern myth of *shahid* which means martyrs. As Shahin Gerami (2005, 457) points out, during the war, Iranian resistance institutionalized and internationalized martyrdom by recreating the meaning of manliness and manhood based on modesty, spiritual, religion and Islamic revolution ideologies. Martyr in general means in Arabi "to see", "to witness" or "to testify" and refers to a person who sees the truth. This brief explanation clarifies the new version of masculinity based on purity and faith. Martyrdom, which is essentially the sacrifice of one's self and soul to attain closeness to God, is a prominent example of "selflessness" and "self-sacrifice", and can be considered a characteristic of masculinity.

## 5. Masculinity in The Muslim World

"There are *rijjaal* (true men) among believers who honored their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least" (Qur'an 33:23).

There are different points of view about Muslim masculinity. In their study, Arat and Hasan (2017, 788-801) mention five characteristic traits of men based on the Quran; submissive, altruist, righteous, steady and combative. Among these, combativeness is important in this study since God calls all believers to fight for Allah and also praises those who die in the way of Allah. Maleeha Aslam highlights two types of masculinity in Islam: Islamic masculinity and Muslim masculinity. Islamic masculinity is used to refer to "exemplary" masculinity in sacred texts and narratives, whereas Muslim masculinity locates Muslim men to their socio-economic and political context (Aslam 2012, 5-91). In the case of Iranian cinema both are accepted.

As it has been mentioned earlier, masculinity is dependent on cultural and social norms and religion. Islam encompasses more than just a religion, as it includes rules that have a significant impact on all aspects of its followers' lives, ranging from their relationships with their fellow citizens to their relationship with God. This relationship is referred to as faith, and its depth is known only to God (Fedele 2013, 11). These rules have given birth to a type of masculinity which is entirely based on the features of Islam in addition to the local cultural aspects which are unique to each region. Every individual region is based on its cultural norms. Islamic laws are a contributor to the formation of Islamic masculinity, since the Islamic world consists of tens of unique nations, each with its own language that covers a vast geographic area and cultures. It is impossible to consider a single definition of Islamic masculinity. The concept of masculinity in the Islamic world is not merely a set of earthly rules, but rather a combination of explicit and implicit policies and ideologies that exist within each society.

The Iran-Iraq war gave birth to a new form of masculinity, characterized by the young volunteers who enlisted in the army and went to the front lines to defend their homeland. In the Iranian media, they were portrayed as defending Islam. These soldiers are known as *Basijis*. Despite the risks, many *Basijis* sacrificed their lives to defend their beliefs against the opposing ideology, which was viewed as wrong. This form of sacrifice is considered the epitome of masculinity in their culture.

Generally speaking, the concept of martyrdom which is considered to be a way of defending the religion, is one of the fundamental concepts in the Shiite culture (Adibi 2006, 1-10) and it is this very fact that causes the masculinity which is formed in the said culture to have a direct relationship with jihad or religious war. The concept of masculinity in the Islamic world, and particularly in the culture of martyrdom in Shiism, extends beyond the traditional male-female binary. In this context, masculinity also plays a role in how men interact with other men. Sacred Defense Cinema is significant not only for its impact on reshaping Islamic masculinity, but also for its unique genre that sets it apart from previous war films.

## 6. Genre

Generally speaking, a genre is a classification of films or texts which involve the same themes. In the same genre, films have mostly the same content, form and motivation (Zarghani and Zarghani 2018, 38). Carolyn In her study, Miller (1984, 158) argues that genre is a social construct and a social action that provides artists with a socially recognizable way for making or writing films based on their aims.

Genres serve as a platform for discourse, communication, and cultural, ideological, and social expression. They connect the text to its broader context. However, the current use of the genre concept can be somewhat abstract, as it groups films together based on shared characteristics and assigns them to specific categories.

Genres can reinforce existing social and political conditions by emphasizing accepted social values, which can contribute to their perpetuation over time. Movies' genres can be seen as a type of "cultural myth". This paves the way for stereotyping. This is clear in Azadian and Ghasemi's (2017, 23-24) study. The authors believe that signifying and naturalization are two important strategies in representation. Signifying, which is one of the critical elements that defines a genre, can help create a new conceptualization of the world and society in line with the film's ideological beliefs, including its perspective on gender. Ideologies are a collection of representations, such as images, myths, ideas, or related concepts, that have a historical existence and play a role in shaping society. These cultural objects of which gender forms are also a part, are

often accepted in the society and influence people in accordance with an unconscious process. Genres use precisely the same process to convey ideologies to represent beliefs. Genres are essentially based on the overlapping of semantic and thematic components (Moine 2010, 40). For this reason, some themes, such as music or filming techniques, are repeated. It could be stated that genres essentially retain their semantic elements such as their motifs. Genre and genre studies show us what is standard or acceptable in a society or what is familiar to us and what is considered normal to us in general. Based on these definitions, Sacred Defense Cinema can be considered a unique genre due to its distinctive characteristics.

## **7. Sacred Defense Cinema, an Iranian Genre**

Among the various genres in cinema, the war genre, as a phenomenon that is inherently based on the opposition of good and evil, has always been one of the special interests of the audience. The genre of war in Iranian cinema is the most distinctive one. It is known as the Sacred Defense Cinema (Shakarkhah 2012). The heroes of the Sacred Defense genre are men who mediate between antagonistic forces and eliminate the threat. Although there is no scene of war in recent films of this genre and there may not even be much talk about war, one can well see the ideology of war along with the heroes who are the remnants of that wartime.

The development of Sacred Defense Cinema can be divided into three eras:

1. The first decade of the war, in early 1980s, was synchronized with the revolutionary feelings, hence the war movies of that period are mostly action and adventure with the typical elements of war films, and in various cases, they lack realism, and aim to encourage young people to defend their country.

2. After 1988 and the end of the war, the Sacred Defense Cinema gradually moved away from just focusing on front line of war zone issues and beautifying war. It started to promote the external realities of war and also investigated how war affected people, their problems and challenges in everyday life.

3. Since 2000, this cinema has changed significantly and given rise to new concerns. Additionally, several directors from other genres have made their debut in the Sacred Defense genre (Givian and Tavakoli 2011, 100-101).

Sacred Defense Cinema is not just limited to stories of the war between Iran and Iraq. In fact, this cinema can perfectly evoke the atmosphere of the war for the viewer without even depicting a short scene of the war in the movie. Most of the Iranian filmmakers have made war movies (Rasoul Molagholipor, Kamal Tabrizi, Seyfollah Dad, Mohsen

Makhmalbaf), but by the end of the war in 1988 and from the late 1990s onwards, movies that belonged to the Sacred Defense genre have been mostly considering the things that happened behind the frontlines. By the beginning of the year 2000, the theme of the Sacred Defense movies had changed, and these films have mostly been paying attention to the effects of war on soldiers and their families. War filmmakers start mourning for the values that they went to war for. They began making films about governmental pragmatism, hypocrisy, and corruption (Jahed 2010).

The Sacred Defense's approach of this cinema is entirely ideological because defending the homeland is not the only purpose of this war, but also to save Islam and the Islamic country. Hence, this war has an ideological dimension, and that is why the warriors and heroes portrayed in these films are not depicted as merely violent individuals, regardless of the period or genre of the movie.

The men in these films are holy and spiritual with metaphysical ideas. This genre has more religious and national symbols than the other genres, and the men who are depicted in it are the pillars of this cinema. These men are neither as powerful as the men of other war movies nor are they armed to the teeth. In the Sacred Defense films, they are considered as superheroes because of their spirituality and because they possess all of the approved moral principles of the community. They are humble, selfless and nearly flawless and the small mistakes that these men may make are easily overlooked or justified by the audience. Hence, the approach of this genre is to impose an ideology to the content of the society (Mortazavi Ghahi and Monadi 2011, 142), the religious ideology that directly affects the way of representing masculinity.

## **8. Hatamikiya's Films**

Hatamikiya is one of the former film directors in Sacred Defense Cinema genre in Iran after the revolution. His films are male oriented war films, saturated by ideological codes. "Hatamikiya's film depicts a male-dominated community of fighters who speak in the same way and look entirely identical" (Abecassis 2011, 393).

Hatamikiya's films are classified in three different phases. The first phase starts in the first year of the war and is concerned with key concepts of Islamic values, especially Shiite Islam. In the movie *Identity* (Hoviat, 1986), the concept which is emboldened was truthfulness. In the movie *Sentry* (Didehban, 1988), self-scarification is the main concept. In this phase, Hatamikiya uses Islamic clichés such as "God be with you". In the second phase of his filmmaking career, Hatamikiya incorporates the theme of carnal love into his stories, while still centering his narratives on the context of war. In *Heavenly Tower* (Borj-e Minou, 1995), for example, he narrates the "sympathy of living" not just martyrdom. During the third



phase, that started in the president Khatami's era, Hatamikiya started criticizing the post war political and ideological changes with the film *The Glass Agency* (Ajans-e Shishehi, 1997) (Nafici 2012, 28).

### 8.1. The Film *Bodyguard*

The movie *Bodyguard* (2016) is one of the most successful movies in the Sacred Defense Cinema genre and belongs to Hatamikiya's third phase of filmmaking. This movie, like various other war films, is a male-oriented movie. Masculinity in this film is not dependent on masculine body or body strength. The hero of the film, Haj Heyder Zabihi, is a middle-aged, introvert man who is one of the survivors of the war generation. He is the head of the protection team (bodyguard team) for more than 100 of political leaders after the revolution. He has special sympathy for Mohammad Ali Rajayi (Iran's second president who was martyred (assassinated) in 1980). His wife gave him a car as a gift which he drove when he was Rajayi's protector (bodyguard).

### 8.2. Analysis & Findings

The present study seeks to analyze extracts of Hatamikiya's *Bodyguard* movie, in line with the tents of Sacred Defense Cinema. The film is action/drama film with 1hour 45minets length in Persian language. The selected dialogues for analysis are purposively chosen.

The film starts with a dialogue between Haj Heyder (Heyder is a common name in Shi'ism. It means "lion" and also it is one of Ali's titles. Ali, as the first successor of prophet Muhammad, is known as the king of men in Iranian culture) and his doctor:

#### *Extract 1*

Doctor: "Are you a bodyguard?"

Haj Heydar: "No, I am a protector."

This dialogue may be seen as a simple and routine dialogue between a Doctor and Haj Heydar about his job. The keywords here are: 'Bodyguard' and 'protector'. This is the main argument of this study. Bodyguard is a rather western term used for those who protect significant and mostly famous people such as politicians or actors & actresses. However, the protector is preferred in Iran, since it has a religious and ideological basis.

Haj Heyder describes his job as a protector not as a bodyguard. He repeatedly emphasizes this in different dialogues. He tries to show his difference from others. From his point of view, bodyguards are mercenaries, while protectors are believers who do this job just because of beliefs and ideology.

Heyder has all qualities of hegemonic masculinity of the Iran war cinema. He is a quiet, introverted and conscientious person which are all qualities of “men” and masculinity in this genre.

**Extract 2**

In another dialogue, Heyder talks to his daughter about her fiancé (Elyas who is also Heydar’s assistant).

*Mother: Maryam doesn’t want to marry a man who is always in danger.*

*Heydar: “That is his job, his belief.”*

*Maryam: “It is not a belief; it is his duty.”*

*Mother: “What is the difference between these?”*

*Maryam: They are so different; in my opinion nothing valuable enough to die.*

All of the sentences and words chosen by Heyder are based on the ideology that he believes in and all of them create an atmosphere so that the viewer accepts him as a “man” with all the traits of masculinity. Indeed, Heydar is a man since “masculine ideology is people’s internalization of cultural beliefs and attitudes towards masculinity” (Levent and Richmond 2007, 131).

In this dialogue, Heydar emphasizes that his job is not a duty. Heydar’s mainstream idea is highlighted in this conversation. Heydar’s wife is from the same generation and same ideology. She has never questioned the difference between “duty” and “belief”. For him, protecting is not his job, it is his belief. During the war, he protected his country and now he is the protector of political leaders. He is a superhero with all the spiritual aspects of hegemonic masculinity. His beliefs are the basis for actions. He is represented as a hero not only because he is the main character but also because of his moral ideas and beliefs. Representations in films can construct meanings (Chavoushian and Hosseiny Rashtabadi 2010, 61). His perspective of his job is a part of the hegemonic culture in the Sacred Defense Cinema. Country, ideology and family are so valuable that he is willing to sacrifice himself for them.

**Extract 3**

Another dialogue between Heydar and his boss (after the suicide attack which leads to the injury of the Vice President).

*Heydar: “We are going to be bodyguards!!”*

*Boss: “Because this period of time needs bodyguards.”*

*Heydar: “A bodyguard is a mercenary; there is not any ideology in the background.”*

*Boss: “The 1980s have finished; we are in the 2000s”.*

Heydar’s boss maintains that the war era has come to an end and they were in a time when being a mercenary was more valuable. He uses the term mercenary for describing a bodyguard. Officially his boss should

be more powerful than Heydar but, in this film, dialogues show Heydar as more powerful and important because he has moral and non-material ideas.

For Heydar, it does not matter that the war is over. Still the ideology of that time is more valuable for him. Heydar is faced with the new generation of politicians after the revolution, these politician's diplomacy and relations are based on politics not beliefs and ideologies.

**Extract 4**

During his duty with the Vice President, when the Vice President's assistant calls him Haj Heydar, he maintains.

Assistant: "Haj Heydar?"

- "Colonel!"

- "As I remember you've never liked this title".

By emphasizing his title, Haj Heydar highlights his superiority to others. He tries to remind his priority to Vice President's assistant. He maintains that the hierarchy is not based on social class but it is an outcome of his belief.

Haj Heydar is portrayed as the epitome of modesty, but on this occasion, when confronted by someone who shares his ideological perspective, Heydar showcased his strengths based on his position. This stems from the belief that men should embody leadership qualities. (Pascoe 2015, 22). Heydar's title (colonel) is not meaningful because it was given to him by his superiors; in other words, it does not affect Heydar's masculinity. For him, being a man is not defined by titles, but rather by one's ideologies and beliefs. However, in this particular instance, he emphasized his title to assert his authority.

**Extract 5**

After the suicide attack, there is a dialogue between Heydar and his boss:

Boss: "I need a professional report, not a testament. Where is the terrorist in your report? What about his position? Where did he come from?"

Heydar: "I talk about my portion; others should be brave enough to talk about their portion."

Boss: "Why are you trying to question us?"

Heydar tries to maintain that he understands the complete story behind the attack and that he is brave enough to talk about his negligence; the others are cowards. In the last sentences of this conversation, his boss tries by using the word "us" to highlight the fact that he is on Heydar's side and hence protects him from others.

Heydar is from the war generation. For him, death is holy since the war between Iran and Iraq is not just a war. In all slogans of that time, it is

suggested that “this war opens heaven’s door to the soldiers and soldiers are Islam’s soldiers not Iran’s army”. Heydar as a believer holds that everyone should be honest. He rejects politics because politicians are not honest anymore and they prefer mercenaries. Heydar is superior because he can see the story behind all of this but others cannot. Or even if they know, they are not brave enough to talk about it.

#### **Extract 6**

Heydar decides not to be a political leader’s protector anymore. His new duty is protecting nuclear scientists. The following conversation is a very interesting dialogue between Heydar and Meysam, who is a nuclear scientist.

*Heydar: “We don’t protect everybody; she/he should be a character”*

*Meysam: “Character? Do you mean humanistic personality aspects or spiritual personality aspects?”*

*Heydar: “I hope both of them, I mean someone that if s/he dies the system (ideological system) will have a problem”.*

*Meysam: “Thank God that I am not a character”.*

Heydar again describes his view about valuable people. Before this scene, he repeatedly maintains that during this time, political leaders are not “characters” from his perspective. Again, in this dialogue, he directly highlights his concept of character which is the same as “men” here; men who have both humanistic and spiritual personality traits. Before this mission, for him, characters are political leaders, but now they are not just believers in a system, they are politicians so they are not “characters”. He has a moral perspective of the system when he looks at the new political views that are very different from his perspective of the system.

He looks at everything from the moral and sensitivity frame. He fought for this belief or concept in the war time and now he thinks this concept is not valuable any more. Meysam is a representative of the new generation. He had lost his father in the war. He doesn’t carry any of Haj Heydar or his father’s Masculine codes but he is a part of this system. He tries to show that he is different from the others by saying: “Thank God I am not a character”. On the other hand, he is the brain of this system.

#### **Extract 7**

In the following part, a conversation between Heydar and the Head of the Nuclear Power Agency is presented.

*Boss: “We have produced many politicians in these 40 years (after the revolution), if I were Iran’s enemy, I’d never think about deleting these politicians, we have many of them. But valuable characters in the 2000’s are nuclear scientists.”*

For Haj Heydar, these sentences are compelling enough to devote his life to protecting Meysam. Meysam has an important trait, he is the son of Haj Heydar's comrade who was martyred during the war. He is the new version of the men in Sacred Defense Cinema, the brain of the system. It is not important that he has the same idea with the main system, but he is valuable for the system and protecting him is crucial. His boss tried to change the meaning of the "character" in Haj Heydar's mind.

In this dialogue the main idea of the story is clear. In the new perspective of the system's ideology, politicians are not important anymore and they don't need "protectors". They need "Bodyguards" but Meysam and all nuclear scientists are the brain and the heart of the system and Heydar should protect them.

### **Extract 8**

In another part of the film, when an inspector, Heydar and his boss are reconstructing the attack, the following dialogue takes place:

*Inspector: "As I see you use the "character" to protect yourself, now we are talking about the protector who used character to protect himself instead of sacrificing himself to protect the attribute of the system."*

*Heydar's boss: "Heydar?! Why are you quiet? They forget all your favors during these years"*

*Inspector: "Mr. Ashrafi?"*

*Boos: "My brother! You are in the wrong way; Heydar's generation never understands fear. Heydar is like a person who did the suicide attack, but the key of attack is in the hands of someone else. You should find that person."*

"Brother" in the Iranian ideological and political system is a very important title. Indeed, this is a term that is used for people from the same religion (Islam), same ideology and same world view. It is a title that shows closeness. The whole conversation is based on the idea that Heydar knows the plan behind the attacks but because of protecting the system, he prefers to be quiet. Heydar is a "man" since his generation never understands fear. He just protects everybody and everything that is important for the system. Social codes are ubiquitous and present in all aspects of our lives. In this conversation, Heydar is portrayed as a superhero who is never afraid; however, he is also shown as oppressed. These are all signs of the masculine men commonly portrayed in this genre.

## **9. Conclusion**

When we say "masculinity" or when someone is called a "man", we grant him a title. Masculinity is not natural. Yet, masculinity is one of those concepts that is taught based on the culture and social traditions and with the help of the social institutions such as family, school and

media. The titles and subjects that are granted to a person during their lives will make the foundation of his/her social identity e.g., gender, sexual preferences, race, occupation and educational titles. Masculinity has different definitions in different societies and it has changed during the history. Although for most researchers hegemonic masculinity is stable, investigations show that even changes in hegemonic masculinity are based on the changes in culture and phenomena in the society. Media as a social institution can play a key role in providing and making these signs. Media can code masculinity and femininity by showing how to dress, talk, walk etc. and it can also help the subjectivity of human beings.

Iranian war movies are male-centered, with Islamic themes. They present a different definition of masculinity compared to other cinemas. The Sacred Defense Cinema genre has a specific definition of masculinity that is based on a spiritual and moral perspective, rather than simply physical strength or victory in conflicts. The masculinity presented in this genre is not based on masculine body or powerful men who are winners in all conflicts. The masculinity portrayed in this genre is rooted in beliefs such as religion and the willingness to die in the name of God. They believe that these acts elevate their spiritual level, emphasizing the importance of faith over physical attributes.

In line with the Islamic beliefs, the movie *Bodyguard* which is analyzed in this study is full of messages representing masculinity from this perspective. All signs that represent masculinity are based on the moral perspective and beliefs that were prevalent during the war. Iranian people went to war for martyrdom and jihad due to their metaphysical and spiritual view of the war, which is why the warriors on the frontlines are the main characters in these movies. What is more, these movies have a quite sacred and spiritual insight into war. In the analysis of power relations among men, in this study, it is shown that the main character of the film is represented as a superior person because of his beliefs and his point of view towards life. He has a moral perspective of the world and for him the benefits of the system and ideology are more important than his own life. He always understands the concepts behind things but he prefers to be quiet about them. He is modest, honest, conscientious and brave in all dialogues. He prefers to use the words that show how deep his beliefs are. He can even play the father role for his comrade's son. He looks at all the happenings sensibly and this is another sign that makes him "a man". Being masculine or a "man" according to the ideology of this genre is based on spiritual beliefs. At the end, Haj Heydar is masculine and superior to other men because he died for his beliefs and to save the basic pillar of society (the new generation of scientists, nuclear scientists) and, thus, he became a martyr. Indeed, it is believed that being a martyr is an art of those who are close to God.

As mentioned earlier, Iranian cinema has recently gained a new perspective. To further explore this topic, a comparative analysis could be

conducted between the Sacred Defense Cinema and other war movies, examining the perspectives of various directors. The direction of Sacred Defense Cinema is closely related to both Muslim and Islamic masculinity categories, which refer to exemplary masculine figures in sacred texts and are situated within socio-economic and political contexts.

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