The 'New Iranian Cinema' is widely recognized today both as a distinctive national cinema and as one of the most innovative and exciting in the world. Films from Iranian directors are screened to increasing acclaim. Western commentators often present this as a fascinating paradox: films of poetic and simple beauty coming from a country reputed, since the 1978-79 revolution, for religious fanaticism and political and cultural repression.

The contributors to this book, most of them Iranians, argue that this paradox is more apparent than real. They write from different perspectives but from a shared understanding of the need for deeper, more accessible, analyses of Iran's rich national cinema. They show how contemporary Iranian film has firm roots, both before the revolution and in richer and more profound Iranian cultural traditions that have survived many centuries of political and social change.

The chapters provide cultural, social, economic and political contexts for the films and their makers, including Daryush Mehrjui, Bahram Beyzai, Massoud Kimiai, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Abbas Kiarostami as well as such relative newcomers as Majid Majidi, Abolfazl Jalili, Samira Makhmalbaf and Jafar Panahi. Themes explored include the attempt to found an 'Islamic cinema'; censorship and the promotion of Iranian films at international festivals; political and social critique in Iranian films; questions of representations and realism and the portrayal of women and children.

There is a wealth of critique, insight and debate here, revealing just how important a medium a national cinema can be in terms of understanding cultural identity.

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Roxanne Varzi

The history of cinema is a long martyrlogy.1
Gilles Deleuze

It was the victory of faith over unbelief.2
MCIG

A pair of hands ties together loose wires on a row of coloured lightbulbs that dangle in the dark night. Eerie music plays as the camera pans below the festive rows of wedding lights to Da'i, who is busy tying ribbons and flowers to his car. A man dressed in a brown robe passes by. For a second he turns. He looks like Da'i.

He asks Da'i, 'Are you preparing for the return of a POW [prisoner of war]?' He is referring to the festive lights and decorated car.

Da'i is visibly surprised; shaken, he replies, 'A wedding.'

'Do you have a POW?' the man asks.

Da'i nods yes; 'Do you?' he calls after the man, 'Is he on the Red Cross lists?' Da'i starts to cough, he cannot finish his sentence: 'Be assured he will re—,' he tries to say.

But the man is gone.

The bride sits alone in the middle of a circle of family and friends. She is dressed in white. The traditional wedding mirror, Qur'an and sweets surround her. Nearby is a framed picture of the absent groom. The telephone rings, but no-one is on the line. The long drone of a cut telephone line suggests an absence, but it also presents a ghostly presence or a sign that someone or something is trying to speak.

The telephone rings again; this time it is the groom, calling from abroad. A man with a camcorder moves around the room, recording the wedding. The camera closes in on another framed picture on the wall, of another young man, Yusef, whom the bride would have married had he returned from the war. The framed pictures mark a double absence created by Yusef's flight into war and the groom's flight away from war. They are exiles and POWs waiting to return. Being waited for.

A woman places a large-framed picture of the groom in front of the bride and nonchalantly hits the speakerphone button. The groom is now present in image and voice. He is far away, but locatable. The bride puts the receiver to her cheek, as though she were having a private conversation. She seems unaware that everyone is listening, waiting for her to exchange the wedding vows with the man on the telephone.

The voice of the groom asks her, 'Are you still in love with Yusef? Are you marrying me because you want to, or because Yusef's father, Da'i, wants you to?'

She does not answer, the line is cut, and the electricity goes off. The crowd claps, as if the vows were exchanged. The camera moves to Da'i's face. He looks guilty, sad. The camera moves behind him toward the dark night. They wait all day for the call. Outside, festive, brightly coloured wedding lights blow in an increasingly gusty breeze — as if a ghost is moving through them. A lightbulb pops. Inside, everyone is silent, it is dark. Waiting. There is the sense that something beyond human perception is at play and that the empty night is charged with invisible energy. Ghosts: khyal, feelings; ruh, spirit; shabih, similar, like a shadow of one that was.

In the next scene, at the airport, the bride is about to walk through the Departures gate to go abroad to meet her groom. She turns back for a final glance at Da'i, to catch him mesmerized by a screen showing the evening news, with buses of returning POWs.

The bride comes to his side and asks: 'What are you after? When the dogtags were returned to us, I got my answer from Yusef.'

'Do you love your new groom?' Da'i asks.

'Why?'

'Do you love him? I have to know.'
Sacred Defence Cinema

A supply of images would become the equivalent of an ammunition supply. The war-film industry in Iran began in September 1980, shortly after the start of the Iran–Iraq war, with the inception of made-for-television documentaries, made by a team at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) called the War Group. In 1983, concern over the production of action-packed war films with poor scenarios, unable to show the truth about the Sacred Defence, led the MCIG to start a War Films Bureau at FCE. This new film initiative was created to depict the Sacred Defence, emphasizing experience rather than theory as a basic qualification for making movies about the war. War filmmakers had to be Muslims who had served at the front. Over 100 films were made portraying the true nature of the Sacred Defence or imposed war. About 70 amateur directors were trained as war-film directors, including several – such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Bahram Beyzai – who are now internationally recognized feature-film directors.

This project, which began as a move to appropriate critique of the war by re-contextualizing war images in a specifically religious and pious manner, opened a whole new arena – of post-Revolution Iranian cinema itself – where historical and contemporary social issues never before addressed could be brought to the surface. In war films, the very history of martyrdom and the practice of mourning in Shi’ism, and the appropriation of this history by cultural producers, work together and in conflict. In the case of Iranian cinema, the space of martyrdom and mourning becomes a space of haunting. Iranian cinema is both aided and burdened by the ghosts of Shi’a history.

In this chapter I trace the move from war-era films to the post-war generation of ‘war films’ dealing with the aftermath of the war and the return of POWs. Concentrating specifically on Rasul Mollaqolipour’s early war film The Horizon (1989) and Hatamikia’s later The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt, I shall discuss the roles of cinema and faith and the problem of visibility in the act of mourning.

After the inauguration of the War Films Bureau for the Sacred Defence, there was a clear move toward films that sought to represent the war as spiritual rather than military in character. This move from action to narrative films is marked by the presence of Islam, which serves to promote the war as Sacred Defence rather than a matter of cold-blooded strategy.
In the first action films made about the war, it is virtually impossible to differentiate between Iraqi and Iranian soldiers. The soldiers rarely mention Allah or the Imams, let alone Hoseyn, who, as the most important Shi'a martyr, became the emblematic Imam of the war. The soldiers are clean-cut and freshly shaven, unlike the bearded revolutionaries who will later come to mark Iran's war. Films made after the Sacred Defence film programme was put into effect mark a clear departure from the earlier 'action' films by providing the space for the 'sacred' in defence. These films emphasize the role of martyrdom and belief in the action scenarios of the films.

\textit{The Horizon}

In \textit{The Horizon}, the Iraqis, despite also being Muslim, are relegated to the status of non-religious infidels. They are shown as clean-cut, suave, cigarette-smoking, westernized strategists who sit in their highly technologized war machine – a battleship equipped with massive control panels and surveillance machines – watching and waiting for the Iranians. The Iranians, on the other shore of the Persian Gulf, are portrayed as bearded revolutionaries with long, shaggy hair and red bandanas, dressed in black scuba suits reminiscent of the black shirts worn during Ashura. Their very bodies and souls oppose the traditional concept of a war machine; theirs is a war of flesh and spirit. Everything about their battle suggests its connection to that of Imam Hoseyn at Karbala. Their battalion is called the Imam Hoseyn Battalion, and their little motorboat Ashura.

Ashura is the defining moment in the history of Shi'ism, re-enacted annually. In order to understand fully the war films made after 1984, one must be aware of the importance of this ritual. Ashura, the tenth day of the lunar month of Moharram, is the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hoseyn, grandson of the prophet Mohammed, who was killed in 680 CE while fighting Caliph Yazid's army at Karbala, in present-day Iraq. For Iranian Shi'is, Karbala was the battle of believers against unbelievers; and the Iran–Iraq war was for many an attempt to reclaim Karbala.

The first 10 days of Moharram are marked by ceremonies of mourning. Men march in procession through the streets, beating their chests and flagellating their backs with metal chains. In the villages and quieter parts of the cities the traditional ta'ziyeh plays are performed. These are re-enactments of the martyrdom of Hoseyn and his family at Karbala, passion plays in which performances of the events, although already known to the audience, remind them of the martyrdom of Hoseyn. 'It revives dormant feelings and rekindles an emotive, dormant fire.' In the plays 'a devoted warrior, inspired by the fire of his faith, faces a large army and a treacherous adversary. He is killed in battle and he is bitterly lamented. His death, however, fulfills a prophecy.'

Ta'ziyeh are never actually performed in the films I reviewed. Yet, the thematic use of Ashura in the war, and again in cinema, is an attempt to make the war itself a performance of ta'ziyeh, doubled in the cinema, which re-enacts the re-enactment, bringing many mimetic layers to the ghost-memory of martyrdom in Shi'ite mourning. It is an absent moment that history makes present in the very call to jihad: a call for martyrs.

War had everyone on the move, including the dead.

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War had everyone on the move, including the dead.
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Those scenes that most resemble ta'ziyeh are actually more like Sufi zevr rituals, where men gather together in a circle and move in a slow dance, bending into the circle with one arm extended then hitting their chests with the other arm. Toward the end of \textit{The Horizon}, as the troops of the Imam Hoseyn Battalion are preparing to attack the Iraqi fleet, there is a sequence that moves completely away from the plot-driven action into a trance-like music video. It begins with a young man, wearing an Ashura headband and combat gear, seated cross-legged on the beach with his arms extended to receive a blessing – the gift of death. Just as the leader begins to rub ointment on his palms, we hear the hypnotic rhythm of 
\textit{daji} (frame drums used in mystical rituals) followed by a chorus chanting Rumi's words: 'Die, die, die, go to this death, leave this earth...die, die, die.' Next we see each successive soldier receive his blessing and join the circle dance. At the end of the sequence, they are dressed in their scuba gear. Black against the black night, they pass under the Qur'an, kissing it twice as they go out into the dark water. 'People used to die for a coat of arms, an image or pennant on a flag; now they die to improve the sharpness of a film. War has finally become the third dimension of cinema.'

This filmic military operation is unique in the way the divers become eerie personifications of death as they move through the water, to attack the cold, technologically advanced, un-spirited Iraqi warship with nothing but oxygen tanks and AK47's. A storm sets in as they descend into the water. If the Iranians really are closer to nature, slaves of God, then the storm can only be a prophetic announcement of death. At the Iraqi headquarters, everyone is relaxed, certain that the Iranians will not launch an attack in bad weather. Meanwhile, the Iranians have slipped on board,
unnoticed, and, like ghosts in the machine, have begun to rewire the technology of the Iraqi leviathan. The first sign of their presence is a computer crash. ‘But the radar didn’t detect anything,’ says the Iraqi soldier. ‘The Iranians can’t possibly be on board, check the radio.’ Like ghosts, like the spirit of death itself, they have slipped right past the radar: a triumph of spirit over technology. When the Iraqis turn on the short-wave, a slow melodic voice chanting Qur’anic verses comes over the airwaves. The voice is a softer version of the religious music heard on shore. ‘They’re praying,’ says an Iraqi soldier. They are fighting, and praying and presenting death in this scene, because theirs is a war of the spirit. They are soldiers of God who can slip past radar undetected, move through a storm and amplify prayer. By amplifying prayer they are announcing death. They board the ship and, like the grim reaper, start taking people to their deaths, silently, one by one. The moment a soldier sees an Iraqi diver – tall, dressed in black, a masked apparition from the night – it is too late, he is dead. The Iraqis have literally come out of the night, only mourning music announcing them. As Virilio says, ‘War cannot break free from that magical spectacle, because its very purpose is to produce that spectacle: to fell the enemy is not so much to capture as to captivate him, to instill the fear of death before he actually dies.’

Meanwhile a shot pans the dark beach, where hundreds of Iranian soldiers sit listening to the music that is being played for the Iraqis. The soldiers are already mourning their comrades fallen in battle, even before their dead bodies are washed ashore. The very call to jihad presupposes a call for martyrs (shohada) and mourning.

While The Horizon is a battle film, it strongly anticipates the problems of mourning and the legacy of war that later haunt POW films. The relationships of the head diver, Nosrat, to the partners he keeps losing, anticipate the ghosts of war and the agony caused by missing bodies that becomes so pronounced in post-war films. The story, here, is not just one of an elite underwater military operation, but of a diver’s inability to deal with the death of his partners. As Virilio says, ‘Rest never comes for those transfixed in war. Their ghosts continue to haunt the screens or, more frequently, find reincarnation in an engine of war – usually a ship.’ The Iraqi ship becomes the repository of unidentifiable Iranian bodies – ghosts that haunt the surrounding waters and feed Nosrat’s nightmares.

The film begins with the surreal sound of bubbles underwater as the camera swims among brightly coloured Gulf fish. Suddenly, the anticipation of death – experienced through the sound of heavy underwater breathing – is realized in the form of a dead diver, unidentifiable, with his oxygen mask pulled over his head. Before the audience is able to register the scene, they are back in a bedroom, where the head diver, Nosrat, has just woken from this nightmare.

The next time Nosrat enters the water, he insists on going out alone. He is forever searching for the missing body of his dead partner, Hamid, who was killed aboard the Iraqi ship. As he powers the motorboat at top speed, alone, through the winding river out to the open Gulf, his partner Ahmad follows him. Eventually, Ahmad is shot and wounded by the Iraqis. Nosrat tries to save him, but Ahmad insists that he swim away before the Iraqis come for the bodies. They both know Ahmad is dying. Nosrat says, ‘How shall I dare to return without taking you with me?’ It is better to return with a dead body than a ghost. If Nosrat leaves before Ahmad dies, then the ambiguity of his status, dead or alive, will forever haunt him.

It is this ambiguity or invisibility that has most concerned the war films since the end of the war. The after-effects of the war are a continuation of the war from a physical and visible battleground into the realm of invisibility. Most audience members, as they view their country on the screen, are waiting for the return of a lost person or soul. The stories are of POWs and their families, and of exiles abroad. This world of lost souls replaces earlier cinema by moving the battleground from the Iraqi border and the body to Tehran and the soul. No longer do we see a replay of emotional scenes of battle or mystical scenes of trance, ‘ritual’, so often talked about in terms of the Iranian war-front. Instead, battle and trance are incorporated in the search for bodies, for POWs and for meaning after the war.

The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt

In The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt the surreal moments of the Ashura story are played out at the beginning of the film, when the lights go out and the wind kicks up. The eerie ghostliness is reminiscent of the story of Siyavush, the hero of the Shab Nameh (The Book of Kings): ‘cosmic disturbances took place when Siyavush was killed: “a violent wind began to blow, a heavy dust arose and a stagnant darkness spread.” Such phenomena could only point to the sanctity of the slain hero.’ The gusty wind and electrical blackout point to a symbolic death, the first blow to Yusef’s memory and a sign that, for one person, he must be dead. Ghosts appear when the living
begin to forget. Ghosts of the dead point to a failure. They remain invisible, yet move through space the way a spirit would through a medium.

The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt plays with the ambiguity that surrounds the question of death in relation to MIAs. Is he dead or alive? The question of presence and the need to have bodily proof are problematic for mourning in post-war Iran, where so many soldiers became MIAs or POWs. What is at stake — lacking physical proof of death — is visibility or its inverse, invisibility. A ghost is only present after death. Even if a particular POW is positively dead, there are enough ghosts in Iran to haunt the waiting family. With so many unidentified dead bodies and men MIA, the whole nation is easily haunted. The POW films, unlike battle films, are more about absence and disappearance rather than about death. The same ambiguity based on the theme of disappearance, invisibility and waiting inherent in the Shi’ite belief in the hidden Imam, comes to pass in the POW scenarios. The POWs are more than just hidden saints, they are the leftovers, the excesses of war. The ones that are most disturbing are those who leave only a trace, for whom there can be no true burial, no bodily evidence of death and only anonymous ghosts. Nameless ghosts that do not speak or identify themselves haunt The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt.

This inability to identify ghosts complicates the processes of waiting for someone or viewing unidentifiable remains. This invisibility, inability to locate a body or identify a body, makes mourning that much harder. Derrida says, ‘Nothing could be worse for the work of mourning than the confusion of doubt: one has to know who is buried where and it is necessary (to know — to make certain) that, in what remains of him, he remains there and move[s] no more.’ For Derrida, mourning begins by ontologizing remains, by making them present, by localizing the dead. Da’i’s daughters attempt to solve the problem of locating the spirit or body at a site by buying a grave in memory of Yusef. When we see the video of the memorial service, Da’i is aloof, unwilling to participate, refusing to allow that site to be a place where he could bury Yusef for good. Yusef will remain forever in Da’i’s mind, where he will continue to haunt Da’i until his body returns, dead or alive. This refusal to believe that Yusef is dead is fuelled by a doubt, which keeps him partially alive. It is doubt that haunts, regardless of actual death. Doubt is so unjust, so unsettling in post-war Iran. Doubt is the very injustice of war that will continue to haunt the scene.

We make sure that what we would like to see dead is dead. We mourn so that the dead will not return as ghosts; and yet they do return as ghosts if a body is not available to be mourned. Iranian war cinema does this work. The images on screen come to stand for the dead by making present what is absent. Like the video within the film, the ghost in the machine comes to stand for the body and becomes an object to be mourned. Yet, the cinematic images cannot bury or bring back the dead, but can only point to the impossibility of return.

Like a manifesto or a proclamation of death, cinema provides an image to be mourned, a ghostly presence: a hauntings of the after-war films that are created in the wake of the now-dead martyrs. The media, neither living nor dead, neither absent nor present, spectrallizes. While Iranian war cinema consciously provides a visual image for the mourning audience, within the film, video unconsciously creates a ghostly image of the missing person. In both of his POW films — The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt and From Karkheh to Rhine (1993) — Hatami paid uses video to represent a place of visual ambiguity. This he does brilliantly and controversially in From Karkheh to Rhine when a POW in Germany regains his eyesight and sees a video recording of the funeral of Khomeini for the first time. He grabs at the screen and begins to cry. The image of Imam Khomeini on the screen replaces the actual body. The soldier tries desperately to grab at the screen, just as other hands in the crowd frantically grabbed at the body. The sequence ends with a shot of his fleshly hand over that of the video hands reaching toward the coffin.

In The Scent of Yusef’s Shirt, Yusef is present only as a video and photo image. Even the moments of pure mourning, when Da’i cannot hide his sadness and lack of faith, are all captured on video. It is the video of Yusef which brings Shirin out of a trance, and into a realization that her brother is dead. It is only through video that she even knows Yusef, as she watches the video sequences of Yusef and others at training camp, listening to trance music as they put on their fins. She watches the sunset with them, as they descend into the water, but is unable to follow them when the video turns blank and becomes a ghost. The next shot is of Yusef’s bloody dogtags — the remains. The very dogtags they brought out of a shark’s belly, thus leading Da’i to say, ‘I should have named him Yunes,’ not Yusef.’ Da’i never believed he was dead. He did not watch the videos or allow them to replace Yusef in his imagination. Yusef was never a ghost to Da’i; he never spoke to him nor was present at his grave. Da’i’s faith is what keeps Yusef alive — as we see in the end when Yusef returns.

When someone is missing among so many dead, confusion ensues and it becomes hard to identify individual ghosts, to claim the right spirit, just as it is difficult to claim the right mutilated body. War confuses identity.
The irony is that these video ghosts, these recreations of images, are what later help to find many POWs, by identifying them in the camps. When the soldiers return, they are confronted with the ghosts of their battalion, as family members of the disappeared, half-grieving, half-hopeful, appear with now ghostly images in the form of large framed pictures. In *The Scents of Yusef’s Shirt*, Shirin and Da’i visit the home of a returned member of Khosrow’s battalion. A group of villagers sit in a circle holding their large framed pictures. They drink tea and eat halva (traditionally a sweet for mourning holidays). They ask the man if he has seen their sons or witnessed their deaths.

‘Did you see him being killed,’ they ask.
‘No, that’s what happens when they are captured by Iraqis, they kill them.’
‘If you didn’t see it, how do you know?’

Without proof, without witnesses, their deaths are not positively established, nor can they be officially mourned. We know in the film that there are wayward ghosts out there, and yet these presences in the film are never named as ghosts. They are alluded to through cinematic devices – the gusty wind, the popped lightbulb, storms, eerie music – that create an effect without ever solving the problem of presence or answering the questions that drive the film: is Yusef still alive? Is Khosrow still alive? Which one of them is haunting the film, as more than just a missing person, but a returned death? Which one will return alive?

*Return from the Front*

Hatami’s films deal brilliantly with the very different and unexpected types of return: the videotapes recovered from the front, dogtags, ghosts and, most interestingly, exiles from abroad. Through exiles, we come to understand the international scope of the war and that what binds a nation is so much more than land. By virtue of association, not a single Iranian could escape the mark of war. Every Iranian takes part in the act of mourning. ‘We have our [ghosts], but memories no longer realize such borders by definition, they pass through walls, these remnants, day and night, they trick consciousness and skip generations.’ Eventually all ghosts come home.

The task of post-war Iranian cinema becomes the task of mourning itself. It is a many-layered project, which strives to use images to beautify and spiritualize a war-torn environment. It is a project in making visible the invisible, the missing bodies, without naming ghosts, without pointing to a possible injustice or crime.

It is this problem of missing bodies and of returnees who are the legacy, the mark of failed martyrdom: a martyr is meant to return in the form of a dead body. Yet, these very ghosts haunt the cinema. The return of men sent off to war to be martyred very obviously marks the failure of martyrdom. POWs present the return of something that should have remained buried. The injustice of war is written on their fragmented bodies, in the space of a lost limb (Yusef returns with one arm missing). What is at stake is visibility. What cinema does is to re-appropriate possibly critical images and memories and place them in a space of controlled mourning, where the correct effect and proper ghostly nuances are at hand. Even ghosts permeate celluloid. Ghosts of the dead point to failure, they remain invisible, but come through, the way a spirit would, to point toward a place of injustice. Here we see a partial failure of the task of concealment, because mourning is inherently critical. As Virilio says, ‘If what is perceived is already lost it becomes necessary to invest in its concealment.’ Cinema does this by placing the emphasis in post-war films on martyrology through trance scenes. Interestingly, it is Shirin, the foreigner, who goes into trance while searching for her lost brother. It is her brother who is not found. She lacks the necessary faith to keep him alive. Her return, and her decision to stay and wait for him, point to the nationalism that cinema tries to effect in her character. It is her duty to wait, though he may never return. Cinema reinstates hope, as Da’i says, ‘If you don’t believe, who will?’ The last shot in the film is of Shirin, back at home in Tehran, taking sweets out into the street for Khosrow’s return, even though she knows deep down that he is dead. War films deflect the idea of failure and try to present an alternative image. Shirin’s lack of the faith that Da’i has points to her need to become revolutionized, to see the good. Her return to Iran represents an act of faith. What is finally at stake is one’s own survival and ability to move on.

While presenting the nation with its deaths in a beautiful and artistic way, war cinema opens up a whole new, safe realm for mourning. It is a project in controlling images, controlling emotion and regulating the boundaries of the nation – that place of ultimate return, dead or alive.
Notes on Chapter 8

5. This was also the case with the Centre for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents, which supported the careers of directors such as Abbas Kiarostami.
6. Except in the case of weapons, where some viewers will be able to differentiate the Iraqi soldiers who carry Russian guns from the Iranian soldiers with American-made weaponry.
7. A special website existed for a brief period, available to Iranians everywhere, where images of Ashura were easily accessed for ‘virtual mourning’; virtual images come to replace physical bodies in mourning.
17. Yunes is the Qur’anic form of the Biblical Jonah.

9

Negotiating the Politics of Gender in Iran: An Ethnography of a Documentary

*Ziba Mir-Hosseini*

Between March 1996 and April 1998, I co-directed the documentary film *Divorce Iranian Style* with an independent British filmmaker, Kim Longinotto. The film was inspired by my book *Marriage on Trial*, which was based on ethnographic research on Islamic family law. Almost the whole 80-minute film takes place in a small courtroom in central Tehran. There are four main characters:1 Masay, who wants to divorce her inadequate husband, Ziba, an outspoken 16-year-old who proudly stands up to her 38-year-old husband and his family, Jamileh, who brings her husband to court to teach him a lesson, and Maryam, remarried and desperate to regain custody of her two daughters. This, my first exposure to filmmaking, involved me in long series of negotiations, not only with the Iranian authorities for a permit and access, but also with myself. I had to deal with personal, ethical and professional dilemmas as well as with theoretical and methodological issues of representation and the production of anthropological narratives. The film's subject-matter inevitably entailed both exposing individuals' private lives in a public domain and tackling women's position in Islamic law, a major issue which divides Islamists and feminists.

What follows is an account of these negotiations, exploring the problem of ethnographic representation generally, as well as the complex politics