

## Document Citation

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## Beyond the Burka

The view of life in the Middle East that the SFIFF provides year after year is disproportionately feminist and consistently surprising. What shines through these remarkably understated films is not only the manifest fact that women will benefit the most from progress in their respective societies, but also an implicit declaration that the fairer (in all connotations of the word) sex is the most resourceful, determined,



*Our Times.*

and likely to produce reform. The chaotic and revealing Iranian documentary *Our Times*, for example, introduces a 25-year-old female candidate for president (one of 48 in the last election, incredibly) whose agonizing day-to-day struggles to find housing and work in sprawling-Tehran make her political and social ambitions seem both impossible and imperative. Reasons for despair also collide with grounds for hope in *Iran, Veiled Appearances*, Belgian filmmaker Thierry Michel's wide-ranging documentary.

Two steps forward, one step back is likewise the theme of Manijeh Hekmat's restrained, rewarding *Women's Prison*, an Iranian feature spanning 17 years. A strict female warden cleans up a jail in the mid-'80s, but she's limited in what she can do for her prisoners by the men above her. Unsurprisingly, the subsequent revolution fails to transform women's lives; as one caustic inmate says in 1992, "These days you're set if you have three things: money, balls, and connections." A decade later, it still holds true.

In Abbas Kiarostami's unrelenting *Ten*, which assuredly blurs all distinctions between fiction and documentary, a dashboard-mounted camera in a well-off woman's car provides intimate, candid insights into her unhappy status in contemporary Tehran. The most poignant commentary, though, comes from a passenger whose face we never see — a pragmatic prostitute whose irritated, amused, and hurtful remarks echo those of working girls anywhere.

The contentious and passionate family in the erratic feature *All Hell Let Loose* has fled Iran for the benign climes of Sweden, but despite their push to assimilate they've yet to fully shake an anachronistic vestige of home — patriarchy. Even Israelis dream of escaping; in the intriguingly layered first-person doc *For My Children*, Michal Aviad and her husband debate whether to uproot their not-yet-draft-age children and return to San Francisco, where they spent a happy decade. While Iranian filmmakers campaign for the unfulfilled promise of human rights, Aviad suggests that Israel's leaders have repeatedly betrayed a basic pledge — that the next generation won't have to make sacrifices of blood and life.

Violence and its repercussions trigger the frustratingly shallow *My Terrorist* (paired with *For My Children*), in which Israeli filmmaker Yulie Gerstel locates the still-imprisoned Iraqi who wounded her and killed another El Al stewardess in London in 1978. The Palestinian-Israeli mess also provides the backdrop for Penny Woolcock's reimagining of John Adams' opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*, as well as one of the fest's most eagerly anticipated titles, the world premiere of Hanna Elias' high-stakes romantic triangle, *The Olive Harvest*. For those who believe that art is the enemy of oppression, these missives from the Mideast are as welcome as rain. — **Michael Fox**

**Our Times:** Saturday, April 19, 4:15 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Thursday, April 24, 9:15 p.m., Pacific Film Archive; Sunday, April 27, 3:45 p.m., CinéArts

**Iran, Veiled Appearances:** Tuesday, April 22, 9 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Saturday, April 26, 11 a.m., AMC Kabuki

**Women's Prison:** Monday, April 28, 7:15 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Tuesday, April 29, 1 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Thursday, May 1, 7 p.m., Pacific Film Archive

**Ten:** Saturday, April 19, 7 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Wednesday, April 23, 6:30 p.m., AMC Kabuki

**All Hell Let Loose:** Sunday, April 20, 9:45 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Sunday, April 27, noon, AMC Kabuki

**For My Children/My Terrorist:** Saturday, April 26, 4:15 p.m., Pacific Film Archive; Sunday, April 27, 3:15 p.m., AMC Kabuki

**The Death of Klinghoffer:** Sunday, April 20, 5:30 p.m., Castro; Monday, April 21, 7 p.m., Pacific Film Archive

**The Olive Harvest:** Friday, April 25, 7:15 p.m., AMC Kabuki; Monday, April 28, 2 p.m., AMC Kabuki