

## Invisible Violence in Persian Painting

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**Abstract:** Violence has always accompanied human societies, and appeared in various forms of artworks such as movie, painting, and even cave art, but Persian painting by showing the utopian calm images surprisingly kept itself away from representing the violence, even in the scenes of war and slaughter. This paper aims to study the Persian painting –with focus on the early Safavid dynasty as the age of glory of Iranian art- on the basis of Žižek’s theory, to show that invisible violence floated in Persian painting regardless of its extreme calm beauty and its different context from contemporary philosophy. Žižek categorizes the violence into three modes: visible subjective, and two modes of objective violence -Symbolic and Systematic - which are invisible and flow in latter layers. By going to deeper level of creation and content of Persian images which were illustrated in the court and on the command of rulers of the time, it is concluded that some elements of invisible violence such as strict law, visual symbols like “Qizilbash Hat”, the issue of the language, neighbor, fear of error, repetition of historical characters, extremism and nonviolent situation can be analyzed in the content or illustration of Persian Painting.

**Keywords:** Slavoj Žižek, Invisible violence, Persian Painting, Objective Violence

## Introduction

Violence has always been associated with human being during the ages, and manifested under various ideologies, sects, and religions in all societies. Throughout the history many people such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi and so on have tried to eliminate violence and create peace in the world, and they suffered a lot in their way. But violence is not limited to a single definition of blood and flesh, and it has got various philosophical interpretations. Contemporary philosopher and critic, Slavoj Žižek, in his significant book: "Violence: Six Sideway Reflections", challenges conventional aspects of violence and represents deeper ideas about it. Žižek points to three forms of violence: First, subjective visible violence, which includes all forms of crime, terror, civil unrest, international wars and conflicts. Other aspects of violence are invisible which fall into two categories: symbolic and systemic. Symbolic violence is related to language, its forms, and the realm of meanings, resulting in discrimination, racism, hatred and so on. Systemic violence is the catastrophic consequences of political and economic systems, which is a step back from what we see, and with a pseudo-silence, it has dominated everything in today's world (Žižek 2008a: 1-2). This research aims to explore interpretation of invisible violence in Persian painting in the very important historical era of Iran: Safavid<sup>1</sup> dynasty.

The Mongol conquest to Iran in 13<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point in the history of the painting of this land. The art of painting from 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century traversed the degree of perfection and eventually ceased from dynamism in 17<sup>th</sup> century. During these four centuries the Mongols (Ilkhanids<sup>2</sup> and Jalāyirids<sup>3</sup>), the Injuids<sup>4</sup>, the Mozaffarids<sup>5</sup>, the Timurids<sup>6</sup>, the Turkomans<sup>7</sup> (Qara Qoyunlu<sup>8</sup> and Aq Qoyunlu<sup>9</sup>), the Uzbeks<sup>10</sup> and the Safavids ruled some parts of the Great Iran or across the land; in their courts painters were largely assigned to illustrate the literary books until the late Safavid era (Pakbaz 2006: 59). "Shāh-nāma"<sup>11</sup> or "Book of Kings" was one of the most popular literary books of Persian literature, which was versified history of early Persia, produced by Ferdousi<sup>12</sup> (Gray 1930: 17). A historical-narrative book full of epic and romantic poetries that had been the subjects of interest to the artists, or better to say to the rulers of the time. Most of the scholars believe that Safavid dynasty is the apogee period of Iranian art, so we focus on the paintings of this era. The reign of Shah Ismail I<sup>13</sup>, the founder of the Safavid

dynasty, passed with wars of the internal tribes and neighbor governments, including the Ottoman<sup>14</sup> in the West and Uzbekistan<sup>15</sup> in the East. So after many centuries, Iran achieved its independence by Shah Ismail I. At this time, the capital, as well as the cultural and artistic center of the country, was the city of Tabriz, and many artists from all over the world resided in the court of Shah and created the orders of court. By studying the images of Safavid dynasty as a sample of Persian painting, many questions raise in mind such as:

- How did the living context of the courtier painters and their tradition of painting influence on the creation of these images?
- How do these Paintings -with beautiful, non-violent spaces which even the scenes of war and bloodshed made viewer seduced- deal with the Žižek's theory of violence?
- What are the elements of invisible violence in the content or illustration of these paintings?

## **Research Method**

The method of this research is fundamental descriptive-analytical. The resources are achieved from library, museums and websites. The case study is the popular pieces of early Safavid dynasty, and 4 images have been chosen to analyze.

## **Research Background**

The images of Persian painting have been studied and analyzed by many scholars and artists. Most of these researches have been organized around the structure of visual elements, or philosophy and spirit of these paintings, and sometimes they are compared with Western artworks, but less attention is given to analysis of Persian paintings on the basis of contemporary philosophers' point of views. The only dissertation that seemed closely related to the subject of the present study, entitled: "The Role of the Art Training and Patrons of Arts in Creation of Safavid's Paintings" (2014) by Azadeh Amjadi, describes and analyzes the socio-political context of the creation of paintings, and concludes that these conditions were the most important reasons for the patrons of arts to support the artists.

## **Violence**

More than one century ago Sorel in his controversial book "Reflections on Violence" remarked that "It will be impossible to know exactly to what lengths violence will go" (Sorel 1999: 68), and we can see it is still true. Violence has a broad vague meaning and cannot be interpreted in just one dimension. In the physical sense, violence is a kind of "power" or force that is imposed on other phenomena, whether human or inhumane, and determines their territory. This restriction on man means a restriction on one's desire, will or freedom. For example, when a person lifts a heavy weight, violence reminds him of restriction of his territory, will and desire in the form of physical pain. Violence can thus be considered as a kind of power that pursues a specific purpose, and is intended to set limits for other powers (Fakouhi 1999: 2). In philosophical context, violence is something that is opposed to the human nature, with elements of anger and wrath. In other words, violence means stepping against nature (Navaie 2000:103).

Hannah Arendt in the book "On Violence" argues that the existence of "reason" in humankind which subordinates instincts, makes him dangerously "irrational". But violence is neither animal nor "irrational". Anger is never a reaction that spontaneously arises from suffering, but it happens when the situation changes for some reason. We react with fierce anger only when our sense of justice is disturbed. So if we historically look at it, one of the reasons that makes "engages" to "enrages" is hypocrisy (Arendt 1970: 62-65). Žižek believes that in order to be able to impartially discuss about different types of violence, we need to look at the backgrounds which generated these outbursts. A step back enables us to identify a violence that underpins all of our efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance (Žižek 2008a: 1). Here we explain three modes of violence in Žižek's theory.

### **Subjective violence**

Subjective violence is the most invisible portion of a triumvirate of violence. At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest and international conflicts. Violence that is visible and manifests in the form of war and bloodshed, terror, revolution, and so on, so it is seen as a disturbance in the "normal", peaceful state of things (Žižek 2008a: 1-4). When we are discussing about subjective and blatant violence such as the misery of African children, we find that capitalists not only deny it, but constantly refer to it and arouse the false sense of urgency that "at this

moment we must help them". Capitalist state has no fear of acknowledging the subjective violence that is taking place in the world, and considers itself a supporter and auxiliary from a safe distance. In this case, Žižek puts these questions: doesn't this focus on subjective violence seem a little suspicious? By removing other forms of violence, doesn't this attempt to divert our attention away from focusing on the situation of real problems? (Žižek 2008a: 7-10). Then he answers these questions by explaining about the forms of objective violence.

### **Objective violence**

Objective violence is hidden and invisible violence. It does not interfere with norms, and always considers to the zero level of standards. "When I talk about violence, I don't mean active and blatant violence, but violence in which there is no activity" Žižek said at a conference at the University of Loyola on November 17, 2009. "The violence that is hidden" (Žižek 2009). Then he puts two modes for this hidden type of violence: symbolic and systemic violence.

### **Symbolic violence**

The symbolic is very vague because it has spread over everything, from language to law and all social structures. The symbolic thing constitutes much of what we know as "reality". It is the impersonal framework of society, the arena in which we take our place as part of a community of fellow human beings. According to Lacan, we are in some sense imprisoned by the symbolic. For example, most of the people are inscribed on the symbolic before they are even born, because they are given a name, belong to family, a socio-economic group, a gender, a race and so on. It can be said that language is an independent system with its own world. Words constitute language, although everything is what it is, but our attitude is completely dependent on what we refer to it and what we call it. Thus, language fragments the real world and prevents us from taking an unbiased position to it (Meyers 2003: 22-24). Symbolic violence relates to language and its forms. Such violence exists in the incitement and in the relationships of social domination that reproduced in our habitual forms of speech. It is a more fundamental form of violence that belongs to a language and a world of concrete meanings (Žižek 2008a: 1-2) According to Heidegger, "essence" is something that depends on the historical context and the

historical disclosure of being that takes place in the form of language and through it. The term "Wesen der Sprache" does not mean "the essence of language", but the "essencing" which is the task of the language. This ability of language contains a fundamental violence within itself: as our world becomes a little complicated, it loses its balanced innocence, and it casts a shadow over the whole stream (Žižek 2008a: 67-68). So symbolic violence emanates from whatever cuts the reality and causes discrimination in different levels.

## **Systemic violence**

Systematic violence is counterpart to all visible subjective violence, and is hidden in catastrophic consequences resulting from the peaceful functioning of economic and political systems (Žižek 2008a: 2). Systemic violence enables a peaceful and comfortable life, one that is inherent in the nature of a system and is a subtle form of domination, wrath, coercion, exploitation and threat. This violence seems to arise "out of nowhere" and may be in line with what Walter Benjamin calls "divine violence"<sup>16</sup> (Žižek 2008a: 10). Today we ought to add the latest and perhaps most formidable form of such dominion: bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule by "Nobody", in accord with traditional political thought, we identify tyranny as government that is not held to give account of itself, rule by Nobody is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done. It is this state of affairs, making it impossible to localize responsibility and to identify the enemy that is among the most potent causes of the current worldwide rebellious unrest, its chaotic nature, and its dangerous tendency to get out of control and to run amuck (Arendt 1970: 38-39) When we look at the millions who died as a result of capitalist globalization during the history of mankind, it seems to be the result of an "objective" process that no one has planned for and has no "Capitalist Manifesto" (Žižek 2008a:14).

The dual appearance of developed countries, by "helping" and giving credits and concessions to undeveloped, shows that they have no hand in creating this miserable situation and shrewdly evade from their responsibility. Today capitalism cannot reproduce itself independently, and it needs extra-economic charity to continue this cycle (Žižek 2008a: 22). Žižek believes that the rulers are always opposed to visible violence because they are in a position of power and it is something against them. So systemic violence

provides us a calm, non-violent situation, therefore there is certainly one form of violence, which is hidden behind the scenes, to preserve the status-quo (Žižek 2010).

## **Analysis**

Any work of art, or any cultural media in general, can be understood in relation to the institutional context of the society, in which it is produced and received, and also based on its position and function within that society. Every artistic activity is a historical and social activity that directly or indirectly relates to certain institutions of society, and it constitutes a social system or subsystem that determines the mode of production, distribution, reception, implications and functions of that artistic activity. Thus, in historical periods we see three main levels for art: production, distribution, and reception. This division in the Western world has been divided into three periods of medieval, renaissance, and modern history, and the arts are divided into three categories: religious, courtier, and bourgeois art. Courtier art is a form of art produced on the order of a rulers and also received in the same court society. In courtier art, the work of art also largely reflects the values of the court, because it is in this way that the artist feeds from the court. Therefore, we can see that the Persian painting corresponds to the coordinates of the courtier art. Much of the Persian paintings - at least until the mid-Safavid era - were produced by order of the kings, princes and court elders. Painters were gathered in the library of the court, created artworks that satisfied the taste of the courtier orders, and earned financially from the court. So, we can consider Persian painting as a courtier art, because it represents the values, standards, and desires of a special institution (court) in a particular way with regard to particular personalities and events (Akhgar 2012:167-173). Courtier Miniatures were not created for a wide range of audiences. There was only one ordering person, but guests and relatives were sometimes allowed to see them. For example in Safavid era, the first orders were from the kings who were not only in the position of political power but also possessed high spiritual and customary authority. The issue of patronage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of these kings was significant for both artists and sponsors. Support might have been an important means of expressing power, but supporters had different approaches to art, some of them were geniuses or artists themselves. Scholars believe that the Safavid painters, with illustrating literary figures, were in fact depicting a part of the life of the rulers such as scenes of coronation, hunting, shooting and so on. Therefore, the paintings of this period can be considered as "documents" of that time. By

discovering and studying the language of these images one can gain insights into what the painters witnessed at that period (Nazarli 2011: 22). Since the paintings of the period of Shah Ismail I and Shah Tahmasb<sup>17</sup>'s grew during the difficult political times, so they took some special functions too: for example kings associated with artists and psychologically were relieved of their political hardships (Nazarli 2011: 151). The court society, of course, were limited, and the relation of the courtiers with the members of its library can be regarded as Hegel's theology of "Master and Slave"<sup>18</sup>. All court artists, painters, poets, etc. who were producers of the court's symbolic capital, had to play a refined and selective role between historical reality and court society, thus creating an idealized picture of the reality was the thing that the courtiers wanted to portray. It can be said that, there was some sort of "filtering" that turns reality into separate parallel layers and levels. This censorship was not limited to the court society, but occurred at other social levels as well (Akhgar 2012: 204). So we can see that the invisible systematic violence is floating behind the scene of all images of Persian painting. Now I want to go further and analyze other layers of violence in these images.

At first step I point to the scenes of battle in the images of Persian painting, for example Figure 1. "The First Joust of the Rooks: Fariburz<sup>19</sup> Versus Kalbad<sup>20</sup> in Combat" is one of the most violent images of Persian Painting. What happens here and in other scenes of war or hunting is, although these images seem to show subjective violence, but this overt violence is not unpleasant to the viewer. Even the splashing of Kalbad's blood, which should present a harsh and annoying image, is normal for us. We can see how the painter invites us to calm down with the golden sky and light blue background, so we admire the beauty of this painting.





Figure 1. The First Joust of the Rooks: Fariburz Versus Kalbad, Attributed to Shaykh Muhammad, 1540, Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper, 47.2\*32 cm, Agha Khan Museum, Toronto

(<https://agakhanmuseum.org/collection/artifact/the-first-joust-of-the-rooks-fariburz-versus-kalbad-akm497>)

Although one individual (Kalbad who is from the neighbor country) is bleeding and being killed by an Iranian warrior (Fariburz), but all can be seen is the beauty of the colors and elegance. The ugliness is obliterated and the issue of the war is shown as a beautiful duty for rulers, because behind the scene of these images, it is the will of the rulers of the time. So war, battle and hunting have become the symbol of power which are no longer bother us, but amazes us. This is a representation of reality in a way that emerges from the violent media. If I want to compare it with contemporary world, it can be kind of advertising depiction of war, for ruler's cult. There is no more ugliness for the blood of someone "who is not one of us". So the issue of neighbor's violence which is discussed further should also be considered here. The image of war and hunting in these paintings also have a theatrical form, as if the Persian kings represented their power by showing themselves in the form of mythical characters in Shāh-nāma. Corresponding to Žižek's theory wherever there is no violence, there is other form of violence behind the scenes controlling this situation. The preachers of non-violence give people a choice and that is

peace. In other word, they commit hypocrisy and forgery. They advocate peace to preserve the status-quo, so that their power is not threatened. This is exactly what happened in so-called violent images of Persian painting.

The other important aspect of violence in Persian painting is the violence of “language”. Hegel believes that reducing anything to a symbol is equal to its destruction and death, so it has violence at its heart which operates in different levels. The language simplifies everything by naming it down to a single property. The language puts the “named thing” into a semantic domain that ultimately does not belong to it, but outside of it. For example, when we name “gold” on a metal, we forcibly remove the metal from its natural context and impose our dream of wealth, power to it, which has nothing to do with the reality of gold (Žižek 2008a: 61). Language is something that pushes us beyond what really is, a desire that is infinite and insatiable, and brings us to a place that can never be satisfied. Language, which is a means of avoiding violence and mutual recognition, becomes unconditional violence. Language is the biggest and first factor of separation. It is because of the language that we and our neighbors living in an alley, are "living in a different world". Reality is not that much intolerable in its stupid existence; it is language and symbolism of language that makes it impossible for us to endure (Žižek 2008a: 65-66). So language contains invisible violence which all discrimination in human societies is derived from it. Language as a symbolic thing cuts across the real thing and carries the meaning of each word with a meaning that is interpreted differently for each individual. Someone is king when we call him king. Otherwise, in the real world that lacks symbols, there is no such thing as a king, and it is the cut of the symbolic world that makes this difference. In many of Persian paintings, for example Figure 2. (The Court of Kayumars<sup>21</sup>) we can see the obvious separation between the position of the king and soldiers or other people. The discrimination is overwhelming here. As soon as we encounter this image, we can clearly see the kingdom of Kayumars as he is sitting above in the middle of the magnificent image, displaying his power over the world. There is no doubt that his position is superior to the other beings. The king's position is portrayed as if he is the God of the earth. All the creatures and elements around him are ready to obey and praise, even the rocks and plants are worshipping him. Thus, the symbolic violence of language and the discrimination that brought into human’s life is strongly obvious here. The same violence that distinguishes the king, distinguishes black and white or male and female and discriminates against them. Violence of this image is not the violence of flesh and blood, it is mild violence that is metaphysically and symbolically expressed. And finally, like all

other paintings, the system of government required such an image to show its position in the world.

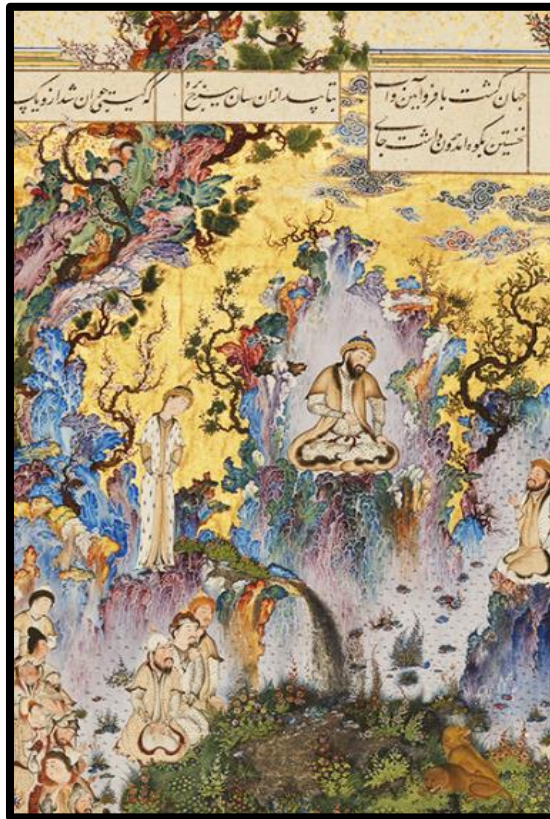


Figure 2. The Court of Kayumars, Attributed to Sultan Muhammad, 1524-1525, Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 45\*30 cm, Agha Khan Museum, Toronto

(<https://www.agakhanmuseum.org/collection/artifact/court-of-kayumars-akm165>)

Another aspect of symbolic violence in most of the images from the Safavid era is “Qizilbash hat”<sup>22</sup>, which symbolizes the Shi‘i<sup>23</sup> and followers of the Safavids. During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Safavid Tariqa<sup>24</sup> was preaching and gathering followers. Before Shah Ismail I, during the times of the Safavid’s sheikhs and sultans, one of the important issues that mattered was the actions taken by Junayd<sup>25</sup> and Heydar<sup>26</sup>. Sheikh Junayd was the first person named himself as “sultan”, and blend religion with politics. Unlike his ancestors, he was very strict and did not pursue reconciliation or peace. Heydar the son and successor of Junayd followed the path of his father and applied greater fanaticism. He ordered his disciples to wear a special hat which called "Heydari crown" or “Qizilbash hat”, it was a red velvet men’s hat with a long red tip at the end; it had twelve folds or cracks representing twelve Shi‘i Imams. The invention of the Qizilbash hat shows that Sheikh Heydar recognized the importance of uniformity in military power, thereby testing the faith

of his followers by this way. The presence of the hat on the head was a sign of doctrine brotherhood for the Heydar's disciples. Later, Qizilbash hat expressed worldly prestige and pride, and were used as formal and ceremonial hats at the king's official ceremony (Parsadoust 2008:145-151). As we mentioned to Hegel's theory, reducing anything to a symbol is equal to its destruction and death, and consequently, it becomes pregnant with violence. As language creates discrimination, signs and visual symbols which are created by governments can be considered as a factor in separating human beings and creating distinctions. For example, the flags or uniforms that a government prepare for itself, contain hidden violence that is instilled in societies in the form of image. So we can consider this important sign in most of the Safavid's paintings as an invisible violence which separates "us" from the "ones who are not one of us".

Another element of violence can be seen in the strict instructions of creating these images. The world that the courtier painter portrayed was utopian and ideal. An artist could be psychoanalytically an obsessive psychopath, depicting everything in great details and taking months and years to reach his full world. Sometimes two or more painters worked on one image for a long time to make it complete. In the world of courtier painting, even the seeds of the grass and leaves of the trees were painted individually by very thin brushes which was made of the cat's hair. There were millions of dots in each painting that could last forever. Courtier painters also had to show the kings as victorious powers who were lack of errors, and always winner of the battle in its precious way.

Again Žižek points to Hegelian belief that "fear of error", of a confusion between phenomena and Thing-in-itself, conceals its opposite, the "fear of Truth". It announces a desire to elude, at any price, to encounter with Truth (Žižek 2008b: 216). In other word, fear of error hides in itself the fear of truth, the flawless quality of a phenomenon casts doubt on the veracity of the story. So it can be said that the perfect quality of the images portrayed by Persian painters obscures the veracity of the events. This kind of delicate order and perfection in Persian painting contains violence, because it represent the fear of facing with the truth, and delays the encounter with the object, so it hides the truth in the world of idea. This idealized world reflects the "extremism" in creating the images of Persian Painting too. Extremism in depiction of details, decorations, and colors to represent a world beyond the real status-quo, the world that radiates the beauty of reality in extravagant way, is another element of invisible violence. We can also recognize the extremism in content of many Persian images.

For example in Fig 3. (Firdausi's Parable of the Ship of Shi'ism), Mohammad<sup>27</sup> the Prophet and Ali<sup>28</sup>, are sitting on a light blue mat and both of them are wearing Safavid Qizilbash hat. They are sitting on the ship with a luminous face, and the other two people, who are probably Imam Hassan<sup>29</sup> and Imam Husseyn<sup>30</sup> are standing next to them with aureole of fire and the famous Qizilbish hat. This image, which is depicted for the Shi'i, shows that reaching the shore of salvation can only be achieved by appealing to the Prophet and Imams. Extremism of the Safavid's kings in prejudice and religion allowed them to assume themselves as the Prophet of Islam and put their own symbol, Qizilbash hat, on his head. This is exactly happened in previous image too - The Court of Kayumars - which shows the similarity of Kayumars, the first king in Iranian myth, with Shah Ismail I, the first king of the Safavids. Kayumars established order on earth and taught humans how to cook and sew; Shah Ismail also created a new orders in Iranian government. So the courtier painters replaced the kings of their time with mythical kings of the Shāh-nāma, thereby consolidated their power and consented the kings.

Another thing that we can mention about putting rulers of the time on the position of prophets or character of Persian myths is "Repetition". Žižek refers to Hegel's opinion about the role of repetition in history: "a political revolution is generally sanctioned by the opinion of the people only when it is renewed", so it can succeed only as a repetition of a first failed attempt. For example in the case of Julius Cesar, the name of individual turns into title of Roman emperor, so Cesar-person repeats itself as Cesar-title. When some act repeats itself, it is finally perceived as an expression of the underlying historical necessity. In other word. Repetition is the way historical necessity asserts itself in the eyes of "opinion" (Žižek 2008b: 63-64). So "Repetition" of mythical or religious characters in the position of the kings carries invisible violence, because the rulers used it to show their power, and systematically subjugated everything under their command. This repetition of the mythical or religious character in the contents of courtier paintings, is a system that runs through the hidden layers and takes place for greater domination and consolidation of the power.



Figure 3. Firdausi's Parable of the Ship of Shil'ism, Attributed to Mirza' Ali, 1530–35, Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper, 47\*31.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452110?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&w here=Iran&ft=prophet&offset=40&rpp=20&pos=44>)

On the other hand we cannot ignore the violence of law in Persian painting. There were lots of conventions and standards in illustration of Persian images which is not fit in this article, but we can point briefly to the similar faces, dresses, golden sky, silver water, as well as special rules such as avoiding perspective, shadows and highlight and so on. Legislation also can be seen in the content of several images of Persian painting which was the reflection of Iranian culture. For example in Fig 4. (Hurmuzd I<sup>31</sup>'s Last Testament to Prince Bahram I<sup>32</sup>), on his death day, Sassanid<sup>33</sup> Hurmazd called his son, Bahram and told him:

"You my child, you must be wise. Do not deviate from the path of justice, do not overlook the guilt of transgressors. Never tell a lie, speak kindly to people,

distance yourself from vengeance and worthless whims, do not associate with unwise and ignorant people or sit with shameless and chatterers, subject yourself to the rule of wisdom yet remain a master to your anger and do not treat harshly to the people of virtue. Be not greedy for anger, for the fruits of greed are anger, fear and need ... Keep away from nitpicking people and never seek a friendly act from your enemy, though he may seek to deceive you with his fine words. Do not dwell on evil thoughts for evil-thinkers will pass through life badly... Strike fear in your enemies with your army and always consider the consequences of all that you do. Be not a slave to caprice for your plans will not end well, and avoid envy” (Ferdousi, 977-1010).

In this picture, we see Hurmuzd lying on a blue mattress and a green pillow, and his son Bahram is sitting on his bed with a pale yellow cape. Even if we don't know what the story is, we can see an old man lying on his bed, a youths on the left side of the picture looking worried, and a servant on the right side of the picture is praying. So the old man, who has a feeble appearance, is not feeling well and his death is imminent. Such an image quickly implies in our minds that there is a testament to be made. The testament is a set of advice and instructions, each containing must and mustn't and defining standards, so the symbolic violence of the law is portrayed in this image. Each of us becomes curious to hear the old man's words, and indeed the laws laid down for his son. The boy's crown shows that he is a prince, and the laws imposed on him, will change the status of each individual in society. Because law is the king's law, and he is the one who sets the standards.

The law, as the 'heterogeneous', absolute and crushing force enters into the 'homogeneous' and enjoyable stability of our lives. The preliminary matrix of the Hegelian dialectic process states: The external contradiction between the law and the criminal defiance of it becomes a contradiction within itself. Violation means something between particular and absolute disobedience that appears in opposition to itself and to universal law. When we see something as violent, we evaluate it by the pre-pared standard of non-violent and 'normal' situations. The highest level of violence is the imposition of standards, which, by referring to each of them, some events seem violent (Žižek 2008: 64). Žižek states that Our problem is not with flesh and blood, but with the law and the legislators; the problem is not only the visible laws; more important thing is something like ultra-law, the laws that place in higher level, and tells us how to behave in clear rules. That's how the laws contain violence in themselves (Žižek 2009). Every cut of the symbolic world in

the real world contains violence. Law is one of the things that severely fragment the real thing. By definition of standard, law tells us what we are allowed to do and what we are not allowed to do. The boundary that creates a mismatch between our desire and our satisfaction, so it contains a great deal of violence. When we hear the advices of Hurmuzd to his son, he unconsciously throws a frame of “Dos” and “Don’ts” into our minds, standards which define zero level, and if you step beyond them, hell is in your ambush, and if you adhere to them, you will be victorious. These “Dos” and “Don’ts” and these norms can be considered as symbolic objective violence of the law.



Figure 4. Hurmuzd I's Last Testament to Prince Bahram I, Attributed to Aqa Mirak, 1525-1530, Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper, 16.8\*18 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452167?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=bahram&offset=20&rpp=20&pos=25>)

The issue of the “neighbor” is also lied in the speech of Hurmuzd when he prevent his son from acting friendly with his enemies. Hurmuzd considered different acts towards their enemy, this is what we see in most of the images of Persian painting- as mentioned in Fig.1. Those who has got warm humanity and gentle care to their friends and family, can be very violent to their enemy. Isn't it strange that the same soldiers who slaughtered innocent civilians was ready to sacrifice his life for his unit? We are all human, with basic desires, fears and common pains, so we all claim respect and dignity. As a result, those



who are imposed by moral considerations, are in the profound inconsistent, or even "hypocritical". According to Habermas, these people have a pragmatic paradox, because they break the same moral norms that uphold their own verbal unity. It is not natural if we do not observe the ethical principles of our community for people outside this range, and this requires repression and denial of ourselves (Žižek 2008a: 48). For example, the Christian motto "All human beings are brothers" means that anyone who does not accept brotherhood is not a human being, so the universality of Christianity biasedly removes unbelievers from the circle of mankind (Žižek 2008a: 54). This is exactly what we see in the Safavid Tariqa of Junayd and Heydar, as well as in the cult of mythical and religious Persian kings and warriors.

## **Conclusion**

When Slavoj Žižek speaks of violence, he does not mean the visible violence of flesh and bloodshed, he walks through the background level and expresses the hidden violence that is underlying the social context. Analyzing the illustration, content and context of the creation of Persian Painting –in early Safavid dynasty- based on Žižek's theory of violence, reveals that:

Till the mid-Safavid era (even after that), artists had lived in the court, so a large part of Persian paintings were included the events that painters witnessed at the court. They were financially earned by working on court's orders, therefore the main task of the painters was to satisfy the taste of clients who were basically the rulers of the time or the courtier aristocracy, so they had to filter the images to represent only the glory and power of the kings. By using calming colors and elegant compositions, the courtier painters could convert the worst violent scenes to the beautiful, non-violent spaces which were seduced the viewer, so subjective violence had become invisible. As Žižek said wherever we see nonviolent situation, there is another type of violence in the background. This filtering also contained other aspects such as creating the idealized world in which all the details were painted in an obsessive extremist way, the painters were obsessed of not making any error in their painting, so they spent lots of time for completing one small piece. This fear of error was also applied for representing the rulers. Iranian rulers or warriors should have been represented confident, powerful and flawless. So reality had been distorted by utopia. In most of the cases, painters replaced the important mythical or religious characters with the rulers of their time, to consolidate the power of the kings by repetition.

This is also showed the extremism of the cult of Safavid rulers, who assumed themselves as those important historical characters. Extremism can convert any issue to violence, and we mentioned it in the tradition of painting the pieces too. The issue of neighbor is also the common element of invisible violence in both illustration and content of these painting. The Iranian warriors who were very faithful and kind in their society, could slaughter the people of other countries in a precious way, and showed their faithfulness with the special Qizilbash hat. "Qizilbash hat" in the paintings of Safavid era, was a symbol of brotherhood and faithfulness in Safavid Tariqa. By depiction of this hat, Safavid kings wanted to show the interest of their followers who were always in the scene and ready to fight with the enemy. So this visual symbol contained two aspects of violence: first the discrimination between Shia followers of Safavid and "the others"; second the Hegelian theory about the reduction everything to symbol -which is equal to its death and contains symbolic violence-.

In most of the Persian images the position of the king or the elders was obviously distinct from others. Depicting this discrimination was the result of symbolic violence of language, which separated king from others. On the other hand, there were lots of conventions in illustration of the images, courtier painters followed unified rules for showing all elements such as faces, clouds or even in using the colors. Many standards and Dos and Don'ts existed not only in the technique of the paintings, but also in the content of many images. These standards acted as a cut in the real world so contained invisible violence.

These approaches which were all reflections of the hypocrisy, helped the courtier painters to represent the values and standards of the court and to consent the rulers. So we can conclude that the invisible violence was floating in Persian painting in three dimension: living context of the artists, illustration and content of the images. Consequently, Persian painting reflected following elements of invisible violence: "nonviolence situation", "fear of error", "Extremism", "repetition of the historical character", "issue of neighbor". "Language", "law" and "visual symbols".

This research can be continued in different perspectives, for example feminist theories can study the discrimination between men and women in most of the Persian paintings, as women were generally not in the center of the images and mostly marginalized. It can also extend and categorize the different levels of violence such as economic, political, cultural, social or religious violence. Maybe by analyzing the Past

through the today's concepts, we could find solution for the present and future of the country like Iran.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Safavids was one of the most significant ruling dynasties of Iran, often considered the beginning of modern Iranian history. They rule in Iran from the early 16th to mid-18th century

<sup>2</sup> Ilkhanid was a Mongol dynasty that ruled in Iran from 1256 to 1335.

<sup>3</sup> Jalāyirid was Mongol dynasty that ruled in Iran from 1336-1432.

<sup>4</sup> Injuids was a Mongol dynasty that ruled in Iran from 1335-1357. Their capital was Shiraz.

<sup>5</sup> Mozaffarids was a Persian dynasty which came to power in Iran following the breakup of Ilkhanid in the 14th Century. They ruled in Iran from 1314-1393.

<sup>6</sup> Timurids was a Turkic-Mongol dynasty which originally descended from the conqueror Timur. They ruled in Iran from 1370-1507.

<sup>7</sup> Turkoman is a term that was widely used during the middle ages for the people of Oghuz Turkic origin.

<sup>8</sup>The Qara Qoyunlu or Kara Koyunlu also known as the Black Sheep Turkomans, were a Muslim Turkoman tribe that ruled part of the West and the South of Iran from 1378-1469.

<sup>9</sup> The Aq Qoyunlu or Ak Koyunlu also known as the White Sheep Turkomans, were a Sunni Turkoman tribe that ruled parts of present-day eastern Turkey from 1378 to 1508.

<sup>10</sup> Uzbeks were Turk origin dynasty which ruled part of Iran from 1629, they were breakup by Safavid dynasty.

<sup>11</sup> Shāh-nāma or "Book of Kings" is a long epic poem written by Ferdousi between c. 977 and 1010 and is the national epic of Greater Iran. Consisting of some 50,000 "distichs" or couplets (two-line verses). Shāh-nāma is one of the world's longest epic poems. It tells mainly the mythical and to some extent the historical past of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world until the Muslim conquest in the seventh century.

<sup>12</sup> Abu al-Qasem Mansur Ferdousī (935- 1020/1026): Persian poet, author of Shāh-nāma.

<sup>13</sup> Shah Ismail I (1487-1524) was a religious leader of Iran who founded Safavid dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> Ottoman Empire (1300-1922) created by Turkish tribes in Anatolia (Asia Minor) that grew to one of the most powerful states in the world during 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Ottoman period was more than 600 years and came to an end in 1922.

<sup>15</sup> Uzbekistan is a country in Central Asia between two major rivers, the Syr Darya (ancient Jaxartes River) to the northeast and the Amu Darya (ancient Oxus River) to the southwest.

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<sup>16</sup> Divine violence is an idea set out in Walter Benjamin's early essay "Critique of Violence" (1921) is violence undertaken by a sovereign individual, a strike at power, an attempt at the dissolution of the law in favor of justice, a decision that reaffirms the sovereignty of the self against the coercive violence of the law. In order to understand the category of "divine violence," it is critical to understand the other kinds of violence that Benjamin discusses in the essay (Kopin 2015: unpaginated).

<sup>17</sup> Shah Tahmasb I (1514-1576) was son of Shah Ismail I, Shah of Iran from 1524, whose reign was marked by continuing warfare with the Ottoman Empire and the loss of large amount of territory.

<sup>18</sup> Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic tells the story of two independent "self-consciousness" who encounter one another and engage in a life-and-death struggle. The two self-consciousness must struggle because each one sees the other as a threat to itself. Until the confrontation, each self-consciousness has seen itself as the measure of all things. Its feelings, desires, powers, etc. have been the objective standard by which all things encountered have been measured. Now, however, the presence of another self-consciousness establishes a new objective standard -the feelings, desires, and powers of each self-consciousness are subjective standards which must be measured against the new objective standards – the feelings, desires, and powers of the other (Feilmeier 1992: unpaginated)

<sup>19</sup> Fariburz was one of the Iranian warriors in Ferdousi's *Shāh-nāma*.

<sup>20</sup> Kalbad was one of the warriors from Turan (the neighbor country of ancient Iran) in *Shāh-nāma*. He was killed by Fariburz in the Joust of the Rooks.

<sup>21</sup> Kayumars is the name of the first human in the mythological cosmology of Mazdayasna (Zoroastrianism or Mazdayasna is one of the oldest religions of Iran), and the first king of Iran in the *Shāh-nāma*.

<sup>22</sup> The Qizilbash or Kizilbash or "Red Head" were formed out of several Turkish Shi'a groups that were living in northwest Persia (Azerbaijan) in the fifteenth century. These groups were oppressed by the Turks in the early years of the Ottoman Empire. Shaykh Heydar, a charismatic Sunni religious leader, attracted a large following of Shi'a from Azerbaijan. He called his most loyal Turkic followers "Qizilbash" and created a special hat for them to wear. The Heydar hat was red, and "Qizilbash" came to mean "red hats," "red heads," or "red beards". (Dupree 1984: unpaginated).

<sup>23</sup> Shi'i: also called Shi'ite, member of the smaller of the two major branches of Islam, the majority branch was Sunnis.

<sup>24</sup> Safavid Tariqa was an order of Sufism, and has a murshid (guide) who plays the role of leader or spiritual director. Şafī al-Dīn, (1253-1334, Ardabīl), was the mystic and founder of the Şafavid order.

<sup>25</sup> Sheikh Junayd (1430-1460) was the fourth head of the Şafavid order of Sufi (Islamic) mystics, who sought to transform the spiritual strength of the order into political power.

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<sup>26</sup> Sheykh Heydar (1459-1488) son of Junayd inherited the leadership of the Şafavid order, a Shi'ī Muslim movement.

<sup>27</sup> Mohammad (570-632) was founder of Islam, the prophet of Muslims, the proclaimer of Qur'ān (The Islamic Sacred book).

<sup>28</sup> Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (600-661) was the first Caliphs or Imam of Muslims. He was the cousin and son-in-law of Mohammad.

<sup>29</sup> Hassan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (625-670) was the son of Imam Ali, the grandson of Mohammad and the second Imam of the Shī'ite.

<sup>30</sup> Husseyn ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (626-680) was the son of Imam Ali, the grandson of Mohammad and the third Imam of the Shī'ite. He is an important figure in Islam.

<sup>31</sup> Hurmazd I was the third Sassanid king who ruled from 270 to 270.

<sup>32</sup> Bahram I son of Hurmuzd was the fourth Sassanid king who ruled from 271-274.

<sup>33</sup> Sassanian Empire was the last Persian imperial dynasty before the Muslim conquest in the mid seventh century. It ruled for over four centuries, from 224 to 651.

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