

# *Fictional Masculinities: Men & Manhood in Modern Iranian Literature, Culture, and Cinema*

Part I. The “Man Question” and *Gheirat*-as-Continuum in Modern Iran

## INTRODUCTION

### CHAPTER ONE. “The Vices of Men” Genre: Early Women’s Writing as the Pioneer of Modern Iranian Masculinity Studies

Setting a historical background for the book’s topic, this chapter draws on extant historiographies of gender and sexuality in modern Iran alongside lesser-studied primary sources, including the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras’ women’s poetry (e.g., Jaleh Qa’em Maqami), nonfiction (Bibi Khanom Astarabadi), and articles in periodicals (numerous titles and authors) to present them as a disparate yet unmistakable body of critical, gender-conscious literature containing varied themes related to criticism of the domestic and social manners of men. Following their most conspicuous example, i.e., Astarabadi’s late- yet fortunately discovered diatribe *Ma’ayeb al-Rejal*, the writings represented by the discussed samples will be subsumed and conceptualized as “vices of men genre” in modern Iranian women’s writing, and specifically introduced – with its enumerated *tropes* – as the pioneer of modern Iranian masculinity studies.<sup>1</sup>

### CHAPTER TWO. *Gheirat*—The Panoptical Guardian of Modern Iranian Hegemonic Masculinity

While acknowledging the continuities and ruptures of modern Iranian hegemonic masculinity, this chapter draws on scholarly works by A. Najmabadi, M. Tavakoli-Targhi, Minoo Mo’allem, H. Naficy, Z. Tizro, Raewyn Connell, and S. Balslev, among others, besides instances of three bodies of cultural text in modern and contemporary Iran—the “*hejabieh* [veiling] tracts”; the *filmfarsi*; and the contemporary social, intellectual, and war cinema—to present *gheirat* (“masculinist zeal”) as a *continuum* (i.e., both as a continuity and as a continuous discursive sequence with varied degrees of expression) that has constantly survived any reconfigurations of modern Iranian hegemonic masculinity. Studying *gheirat* alongside the extant concept of “internal veil,” I conceptualize *gheirat* as an *external* panoptical element culturally ascended and reinforced toward protecting the masculinist “affects” of hegemonic masculinity and its ideal policing of the female’s *chastity*. The movies discussed include *Gheysar* (dir. M.Kimiai, 1969); *Shayad Vaghti Deegar* (dir. B.Beyzaei, 1988); *Hamoun* (dir. D.Mehrjui, 1990); and *The Salesman* (dir. A.Farhadi, 2016).

Part II. The Pains and Perils of Hegemonic Masculinity

### CHAPTER THREE. The “Truncated” Masculinity in Al-e Ahmad’s Infertility Memoir *A Stone on a Grave*

Iranian social critic and fiction writer Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s understudied infertility memoir *A Stone on a Grave* (1963) not only reveals males’ ability to *beget* as a formative feature of modern Iranian hegemonic masculinity, but also manifests the multifaceted sufferings—including due to societal expectations around *gheirat*—awaiting the men who fall short of that criterion. The chapter contextualizes and closely reads select passages from *A Stone*, while engaging with other scholars, including Farzaneh Milani, Houra Yavari, Marcia Inhorn, and Raewyn Connell. The

<sup>1</sup> I owe the core idea of early Iranian women’s writing being a harbinger of Iranian masculinity studies to Dr. Tavakoli-Targhi, during our fruitful conversations during my SSHRC postdoctoral tenure in the NMC Department at the U of Toronto. This chapter will draw on translations of a previous publication of mine, in Persian, in *Iran Nameh* (2015).

chapter ends by an analytical overview of some later Iranian narratives depicting male (and female) infertility, including *Leila* (dir. D. Mehrjui, 1997) and F. Masoudi's *Ro'ya-ye Biqaraar* (Tehran: Neyestan, 2019).<sup>2</sup>

#### CHAPTER FOUR. Asghar Farhadi's Films and the "Trap" of Male Privilege and Entitlement

Hegemonic masculinity can also equally harm *healthy/abeled* men. Analyzing Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's male characters, the chapter foregrounds what masculinity theorists call men's "contradictory experiences of power" within a patriarchal societal structure, showing how "masculine domination" obtained through complicity with hegemonic masculinity—despite its tempting promises of offering a "patriarchal dividend"—often serves as a "trap," which "over-reward[s]" yet also "paradoxically damage[s]" the enacting male subjects. Unsurprisingly, Farhadi's men are often simultaneous beneficiaries and victims of the *male privilege* and *entitlement* into which they tap. *Gheirat* proves to be a recurring theme again.<sup>3</sup>

#### CHAPTER FIVE. Violent Policing of Non-Heteronormativity: Hunting for Hegemonic Masculinity in Modern Iranian Queer Fiction and Nonfiction

This chapter rereads select contemporary narratives of Iranian trans and homosexual persons—including *Jensiyyat-e Gomsbodeh* (Farkhondeh Aqae, 2000); *Being Like Others* (dir. T. Eshaghian, 2008); "Born in the Month of Owl" (A. Mohseni, 2009); *Ayeneh-ha-ye Ruberu* (dir. N. Azarbayjani, 2011); *Tarik-kebaneh-ye Adam* (F. Molavi, 2016); and *Pesaran-e Eshq* (Q. Rabihavi, 2011)—showing how they reveal the determining role of hegemonic masculine norms, particularly a variety of the continuum of *gheirat*—in policing transgenderism and homoaffectivity. Constantly enacted by many males as brothers, fathers, husbands, friends, lovers, and relatives, this particularly *namus*-directed, *aberru*-obsessive, cisgender masculinist sense of *gheirat* opposes/represses any queer identification or struggle for agency, through a range of disciplinary practices, from shaming to threats, or implementation, of violence.<sup>4</sup>

### Part III. Stigma, Shame, Humiliation, and the Policing of Gender Hegemony

In seeking reasons for what maintains a gender hierarchy, much scholarship in Iranian gender studies focuses on the destructive roles of coercive forces and state apparatuses at the expense of disregarding "soft" or "informal" mechanisms. The next three chapters explore the role of ridicule, shame, and humiliation—as evidenced in instances of modern Iranian jokelore, literature, and comedy—as informal social control strategies aimed at preserving the hegemonic gender order through threats of symbolic punishment for nonconforming subjects.

#### CHAPTER SIX. Of Masculinities, Men, and Mockery in Modern Iranian Jokelore and Comedy

Here, I draw on my previously published research on "Qazvini jokes" and "Rashti jokes" as the two specifically gendered corpora in modern Iranian jokelore, besides overviewing and analyzing scenes from pre- and prorevolutionary Iranian comedies (*Jabel-ha va Jigul-ha* [1964]; *Jujeh-Fokoli* [1974]; *Ezdevaj be Sabk-e Irani* [2006]; *Ekebraji-ha 1* [2007]; and *Ruzi ke Mard Shodam* [2009]) to argue for the self-regulating effects of gendered "jeer pressure" with regard to the demands of hegemonic masculinity, especially within male homosocial spaces. A recurring main concept in this chapter, *gheirat* will be shown to play an essential role in recruiting men into committing perilous/life-threatening behavior.

#### CHAPTER SEVEN. "Teased Out": Socially Devalued Embodiment and Self-Destructive Derangement in Sadeq Hedayat

<sup>2</sup> This chapter will contain revised parts from my previously published book chapter (in Persian, 2013) on *A Stone on a Grave*.

<sup>3</sup> This chapter will be a re-hauled version of a previously published article of mine in *Asian Cinema* (2019).

<sup>4</sup> The chapter will expand some of my arguments in a published article of mine, titled "Transgendered Subjectivities in Contemporary Iran" (2019).

In this chapter, I expand on the previous chapter’s emphasis on the self-regulating effects of gendered ridicule and shame, analyzing two short stories by the leading modernist Iranian author Sadeq Hedayat (1903–1951): “Abji Khanom [The Spinster]” (1930) & “Davud Guzh-Posht [Davud the Hunchback]” (1930). Both stories, I will show through textual evidence, disclose the potentially self-destructive effects of the social stigmas caused by non-normative embodiment within a hegemonically masculinist culture. The chapter ends with a comparative overview and brief analyses of pertinent sections in other narratives, including J. Al-e Ahmad’s “Zan-e Ziadi [Unwanted Woman]” (1952), Ahmad Mahmoud’s *Hamsayeh-ha* (1974); R. Bani-E’tamad’s *Rusari-Abi* (1995); and *Here Without Me* (dir. B. Tavakoli, 2011).<sup>5</sup>

## CHAPTER EIGHT. Power, Privilege, and the Fears of Losing Face: Modern Iranian Masculinity and Sexual Assault

Opening this penultimate chapter with an overview of the Iranians’ reception and reactions to the #MeToo Movement, I will focus on men’s sexual assault against women and children as a recurring theme in postrevolutionary Iranian cinema, discussing several movies including *Sag-Kosbi* (dir. Bahram Beyzaei, 2001); *Zendan-e Zanan* (dir. Manijeh Hekmat, 2002); *Asr-e Jom’eb* (dir. Mona Zandi, 2006); *Tasmeb-Hesab* (dir. Tahmineh Milani, 2007); *Hiss—Dokhtar-ha Faryad Nemizanand* (dir. P. Derakhshandeh, 2013); and *Jaddeh-ye Qadim* (dir. Manijeh Hekmat, 2018). As demonstrated by these movies, besides consciousness-raising issues, at the heart of the recurrence of sexual assault and its ensuing traumatizing experiences in modern Iran rest the institutionalized and culturally ascendant notions of “male privilege and entitlement” on one hand and the socioculturally ingrained masculinist notions of *gheirat* and gendered *aberu* (“face; social reputation”) as strong impediments to the victims’ disclosing such traumatic experiences and/or as motivators for the victims’ (self-)imposed complicity with hegemony, on the other.

### Part IV: Imagining “Mindful Masculinities”

## CHAPTER NINE. Emerging Alternative Masculinities in Contemporary Iranian Fiction and Film

Pointing to hopeful prospects, I close the book by showcasing select works by a large number of contemporary Iranian female and male writers and directors of fiction and documentary films who perceptively demand redress from the contemporary Iranian hegemonic masculinity. These artists and authors depict male characters who—in the face of extant challenging demands of hegemonic masculinity and the alluring temptations of the “patriarchal dividend” promised to complicit males in a patriarchy—*deliberately* and consciously perform what Raewyn Connell and Liz Plank call, respectively, “positive” and “mindful” masculinities. In doing so, I offer overviews and/or close readings of sections and scenes in several contemporary literary and cinematic texts, including *Rusari-Abi* (dir. Rakhshan Banie’tamad, 1995), *Cheragh-ha ra Man Khamush Mikonam* (Zoya Pirzad, 2001); *Be Hamin Sadegi* (dir. Reza Mirkarimi, 2008), *Barf-e Ruy-e Kaj-ha* (dir. Peiman Ma’adi, 2012); *Mabi-ha ‘Asbeq Mishavand* (dir. Ali Rafie, 2006); *Tala va Mes* (dir. Houman As’adian, 2010); and *Az Seft ta Sakku* (dir. Sahar Mosayebi, 2016).

## Conclusion

<sup>5</sup> This chapter will in part be a translated and revised version of a previous publication of mine in *Iran Nameh* (2012).