

Preface: Iranian Masculinities

Mostafa Abedinifard

University of Toronto

Sahar Allamezade-Jones

Independent Scholar

We are pleased to present the Spring 2018 issue of *Iran Namag* as a special issue, and the first collection of essays, on the topic of Iranian masculinities.¹ Academic studies of Iranian men masculinities mainly gained ground during the past decade or so, especially outside Iran,

¹The authors would like to thank Raewyn Connell for her invaluable comments on an earlier version of this introduction.

Mostafa Abedinifard <mostafa.abedinifard@utoronto.ca> holds a PhD in Comparative Literature (University of Alberta, 2015), and is currently a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow (2017-2019) in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto, where he is completing a monograph on humor as a signifier for affect in modern Iranian history, culture and literature, with a focus on gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Mostafa has articles published and forthcoming in peer-reviewed journals including *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*; *Asian Cinema*; *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research*; *Social Semiotics*; *de genere: Journal of Literary, Postcolonial and Gender Studies*; and *Iran Nameh: A Quarterly of Iranian Studies*.

Sahar Allamezade-Jones <allamezades@gmail.com> recently earned a doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of Maryland. Her dissertation is entitled: “Men Writing Women: ‘The Woman Question’ and Male Discourse of Iranian Modernity.” Sahar researches Persianate and Islamicate societies’ literature, film, and culture with an interdisciplinary scope. Her research interests include comparative literature and critical theory, particularly gender and sexuality in (children’s) literature and the cinema of the Middle East and Iran. Sahar’s articles have been published in edited volumes and online journal publications. She is currently transforming her dissertation into a book.

and following the global wave in masculinities studies.² Yet, critical discussions of masculinities were not unprecedented in Iran. Indeed, they go back at least to early twentieth century, when such debates were provoked by early Iranian women's rights thinkers and activists, both women and men. As one of us argues elsewhere, Bibi Khanum Astarabadi's *Ma'ayib al-Rijāl* (*The Vices of Men*), can be deemed the preliminary model of Iranian masculinities studies, on the grounds of her dealing with *male privilege* and its subsequent sense of *entitlement* among her contemporary men.³ While *The Vices of Men*

²Mostafa Abedinifard, "Ma'ayib al-Rijāl va Žarūrat-i Mardānigī-Pazhūhī dar Muṭalī'āt-i Zanān-i Iran" [*The Vices of Men and the Necessity of Studying Men and Masculinities in Iranian Women's Studies*], Iran Nameh 30, no. 3 (2015): 230-282.

³Abedinifard, "Ma'ayib al-Rijāl." In 1894, an educated and well-known woman named Bibi Khānum Astarābādi was motivated by some female companions of hers to retort the male chauvinism of *Ta'dīb al-Nisvān* (*The Education of Women*), copies of which had obviously moved around and impacted some people. *The Education of Women*—of which there exist variant manuscripts with such titles as *Ta'dīb al-Nisā'* (*Educating/Disciplining Women*), *Sulūk va Sīrat-i Zan* (*Women's Conduct*), *Ādāb-i Mo'āshirat-i Nisvān* (*Rules of Etiquette for Women*), and *Nasāyih-i Mushfiqānah* (*Affectionate Pieces of Advice*)—was written by a male upper-class author who chose and apparently managed to remain anonymous among his contemporaries. Up until recently, scholars had no conjectures about the author's identity. Lately, it has been argued that the text was most probably written by Khānlar Mirzā Ehtishām al-Dawlah (?-1287/1861), the 17th son of Prince Abbās Mirzā Nāyib al-Salṭānah (1168/1789-1212/1833). As evidenced by the manuscript variants, it is likely that the author chose to remain unknown lest he be reproached by women. The text continued to be re-inscribed, with minor changes, by other men who welcomed Khanlar Mirzā's message yet who likewise preferred to be nameless. Organized in ten short thematic chapters, *The Education of Women* addresses and prompts men to patrol and discipline the behaviour of their daughters and wives. The author's conservative and often misogynous advice, frequently garrisoned with references to the Qur'an and *hadith*, ranges from counsel on women's unquestionable obedience to their men to instructions on table etiquette and sharing a bed. Bibi Khānum, being a pro-women rights activist, and having personally tasted the patriarchal oppression in her marital relationship, complied with her friends' request. She responded by penning a diatribe she titled as *Ma'ayib al-Rijāl*, i.e., *The Vices of Men*, also known to be the first satirical piece written by an Iranian woman. As opposed to *The Education of Women*, Bibi Khanum's book is framed and informed by autobiographical information (e.g., she reveals her painful experience of bearing with her husband's contracting their female servant as a *sighah*). In her rejoinder, Bibi Khanum first paraphrases and criticizes the main arguments of her opponent, and then continues by expounding on what she believes to be the typical *vices* of men in her time. For Persian versions of both texts, see Javadi, Hasan, Manizheh Mar'ashi, and Simin

was never published during its author's time and we are not exactly sure how far and long it circulated in manuscript form, its outright critical approach towards men is easily noticeable in numerous issues of several women's periodicals published during the first decades of Iranian women's movement.

A look at the Iranian women's periodicals during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras (i.e., from the beginning of early women's movement in Iran until its decline) shows that direct challenging and critique of men and male privilege prevailed in these periodicals.⁴ Examples abound. For instance, *Shukūfih*, the first Iranian women's periodical, in three issues entitled "Warning to Inconsiderate Men and Youth," criticized men who—despite being expected by verse 34 of the Qur'anic surah *al-Nisā* to be "keepers, guides, and guardians of women"—become the "means to women's wickedness, calamity, lasciviousness, and their reprehensible deeds."⁵ *Dānish* also allocated the first article in its second issue to a similar topic, entitled "Warning to Men and Youth," while also addressing, in other issues, men's "customs of taking care of one's wife."⁶ The editorial of the fourth issue of *Nāmih-yi Bānovān*, written by Shahnāz Azad, disparagingly addressed men, showing her disappointment with "Tehran's affluent men," in reference to a previous editorial by her on the importance of men's assisting women in creating girls' schools. Apparently irritated with many unhelpful men, she posed a rhetorical question, all published in boldface, as the title of her new editorial: "Is the ambition of all rich men in Tehran not equal to three Zoroastrian women from Bombay, who donated their wealth of two

Shekarlu, eds. *Ruyārū 'i-e Zan va Mard dar Asr-i Qājār: Du Risālah-yi Tā'dīb al-Nisvān va Ma'āyib al-Rijāl* (Evanston, Illinois: 1992). See also Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Ma'āyib al-Rijāl: Vices of Men* (Chicago, IL: 1992). For English translations of both texts, with commentary, see *The Education of Women & The Vices of Men: Two Qajar Tracts*, trans. Hasan Javadi and Willem Floor (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

⁴For a classical account on the women's rights movement in Iran, which also considers men's contributions, see Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

⁵Abdulhossein Navayee et al., eds., *Shukūfih & Dānish: First Iranian Women's Journals* (Tehran: National Library of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1998), quote on 152.

⁶Navayee et al., *Shukūfih & Dānish*, 305-306, 330.

kurur [one million] tomans to the building of an all-girls boarding school?”⁷ In yet another case, Roshanak No‘dust, the founder of the periodical *Piyk-i Sa‘ādat-i Nisvān*, in a part of its first issue’s (1927) editorial, entitled “Statement of Purpose,” wrote: “Our journal will watch and criticize the unacceptable acts and behaviors of certain young men regarding women and will seriously pursue this matter.”⁸ In the same issue, in an article entitled “Reason for Women’s Wretchedness and Its Remedy,” and in an attempt to answer the question “Why have we Iranian women so far been left behind from civilization and wandering the deserts of ignorance?,” the author alludes to the impact of “men’s reprehensible mentality and their despotic beliefs.”⁹ In another article in the same issue, titled “Women in Our Society,” the author explains that “the body of our society is sick and aching” and “poverty, calamity, ignorance, and the corruption of the moral are eating us away like gangrene and threatening the people of this country to a horrible death and annihilation.” The author then identifies the main cause of this “spine-chilling disease” to be “women’s ignorance and illiteracy,” and in an attempt to respond to the question “Whose fault is it?,” s/he (unknown author) points criticism toward men, writing:

If the country’s men had not belittled and demeaned women with obstinacy and animosity to such degree; if they had not closed all the doors of knowledge and information to women; and if they had not wanted women only for self-enjoyment and for satisfying their sexual needs; had they usurped and trampled women’s legitimate rights at least according to reason and [the teachings in Islamic] *shari‘a*; had they not deemed women’s brains’ weight and their heads’ size the criterion for their weakness and inferiority; had they not composed the poem: “Women and dragons are better dead on the earth / better is the world that is clean of these two

⁷Alireza Tayrani et al., eds., *Women’s Periodicals* (Tehran, Library, Museum and Document Center of Iran Parliament, n.d.), DVD.

⁸Banafsheh Masoudi and Naser Mohajer, eds., *Piyk-i Sa‘ādat-i Nisvān* (Berkeley, CA: Noqteh, 1390/2011), quote on 2.

⁹Masoudi and Mohajer, *Piyk-i Sa‘ādat-i Nisvān*, 21-22.

filthy creatures,” our time would not have been so, and our lives would not have such quality.”¹⁰

It appears that the most notable women’s periodicals in later periods, instead of expanding on and complicating these earlier critical interventions into the “man question,” mostly forgot that approach. This remarkable oblivion is seen, for instance, in the critically acclaimed Iranian post-revolutionary women’s periodical *Zanān* (*Women*), with Shahla Sherkat as its editor-in-chief, which remains one of the most significant women’s periodicals in Iran’s modern history. Indeed, in reviewing the first thirty-five issues of this magazine (from Feb. 1991 to July 1998), we could find very few articles that directly address the topics of men and masculinity. Although, a few legal articles, particularly those written by Mehrangiz Kar, while informing female readers of certain legal issues and criticizing patriarchal laws, sometimes expose privileges that the Iranian Civil Law has disparately granted men.¹¹

Masculinities of various forms are pervasive in cultures, Iranian included, and yet they often insidiously remain *invisible* and *unmarked*, mostly to men—whom Raewyn Connell rightly deems to be “in significant ways gatekeepers for gender equality.”¹² The metaphor of the invisibility of masculinity was first conceptualized more than two decades ago by renowned masculinity theorist Michael Kimmel in order to make a case for studying men and masculinities—a field which has ever since been variously known as *masculinities studies*, *critical men and masculinities studies*, and *studies of men and masculinities*.¹³ We find the metaphor equally helpful in vindicating the acceleration of the bourgeoning research

¹⁰Masoudi and Mohajer, *Piyk-i Sa’adat-i Nisvān*, 27-28. For a more detailed discussion and further examples, see Abedinifard, “*Ma’āyib al-Rijāl*.”

¹¹For a digitized archive of many issues of *Zanān*, see www.iran-archive.com/start/258.

¹²Raewyn Connell, “Change Among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena,” *Signs* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1801–1825, quote on 1802.

¹³R. W. Connell, Jeff Hearn, and Michael Kimmel, eds., *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005); David Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2013).

on Iranian men and masculinities. As Kimmel put it back then, regarding US masculinities,

Strange as it may sound, men are the “invisible” gender. Ubiquitous in positions of power everywhere, men are invisible to themselves. Courses on gender in the universities are populated largely by women, as if the term only applied to them. “Woman alone seems to have ‘gender’ since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between the sexes in which the standard has always been man,” writes historian Thomas Lacquer. As the Chinese proverb has it, the fish are the last to discover the ocean.¹⁴

Not only that, men as men have often also escaped scholarly scrutiny. This has especially been the case with hegemonic forms of masculinity in a culture, that is, those modes of being, or enacting as, a man which have gained cultural ascendancy not only over *femininity* in general but also over other subordinated and marginalized versions of masculinity.¹⁵ Such non-hegemonic masculinities can be constructed at any given time in a culture along the lines, for example, of race, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, physical abilities, nationality, and religious identity. (And as we will see, along with discussions of hegemonic masculinity, these non-hegemonic masculinities take center stage in many of the articles contributed to this special issue.) Prior to Kimmel’s warning, another founder of men’s studies, the late US sociologist Harry Brod, had also made a strong case for the field, noting the scarcity of scholarship on men as men. In a book chapter, titled “The Case for Men’s Studies,” published in his 1987 edited

¹⁴Michael Kimmel, “Invisible Masculinity,” *Society* 3, no. 6 (1993): 28-35; quote on 29.

¹⁵It is no exaggeration to regard the theory of “hegemonic masculinity” as the most influential theory in the field of masculinities studies so far. For an overview of this theory, some criticisms of it, the main theorist’s response to them, and the theory’s probable prospects in gender studies in the future, see R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859. For a more recent article by Connell on hegemony and masculinity in relation to imperialism and neoliberal global power, see Raewyn Connell, “Masculinities in Global Perspective: Hegemony, Contestation, and Changing Structures of Power,” *Theory & Society* 45, no. 4 (2016): 303-318.

volume *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, Brod, in his attempt to “delineate” the field of men’s studies and justify the necessity of undertaking such research, drew readers’ attention to an obvious contradiction, a fundamental paradox so to speak, in human history, were we to regard it through a gendered lens. On the one hand, Brod noticed, most of what was known and recorded in human history is by and about men, implying that human history is one of men; and yet, as gendered subjects, men had not become subject to any significant thinking and analysis.¹⁶

In its early phase, second-wave feminism’s focus on women and femininity ironically ended up in *gender* becoming synonymous with the women, thus also contributing to the above invisibility of masculinity. the Women’s Liberation Movement provoked immediate debates on masculinities from the very early 1970s, often in the form of discussions on “the male role.” By 1980s, and later during the 1990s, those debates were, under the influence of gender studies, largely displaced by critical theorizing of masculinities. Thus, masculinities studies emerged as a *sympathetic*, multidisciplinary field to pose critical questions about men and their relationship to power and patriarchy. We would like to emphasize the word “sympathetic” since unlike what many—especially outside the academe, but unfortunately also within it—may think, masculinities studies “is many things, but one thing it is not: a rejoinder to, or repudiation of feminism.”¹⁷ Categorically rejecting essentialist, biologically determinist, and sociobiological justifications of gendered behaviors and relations, yet by no means overlooking the

¹⁶Harry Brod, “The Case for Men’s Studies,” in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men’s Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 39-62. Commenting on an earlier version of this preface, Raewyn Connell remarks: “There was an older European questioning of masculinity, as well as femininity, which Harry Brod misses—it’s very clear in the work of Freud and Adler.”

¹⁷Helena Gurfinkel, “Masculinity Studies: What It Is and Why Would a Feminist Care?” <https://siuewmst.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/masculinity-studies-what-is-it-and-why-would-a-feminist-care/>. For the interplay of feminist theory and masculinities theory, see especially Nancy Dowd, *The Man Question: Male Subordination and Privilege* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

role of body—in its various shapes, forms, and colors—in informing prevailing notions of gender and sexuality, masculinities studies scholars presume the constructivist theory in gender studies, therefore also deeming sex, gender, and sexuality to be socially and culturally specific. Rebuffing claims to masculinities as *natural* or *determined* traits or behaviors, such scholars understand masculine identities primarily as acts and enactments situated in a given time and place, with possible continuities and ruptures over time. Thus, in line with the its empathy with feminism, seminal to masculinities studies are attempts to clarify the connections between and among femininities and masculinities within the context of the structures of gender and sexuality or as represented in cultural productions. In addition, they examine how those inter- and intra-relations work to sustain any gender hegemony, and how such hegemony may be challenged towards promoting or constructing more democratic gender orders and relations.

To these ends, today many feminists emphasize how undertaking masculinities studies must become a part and parcel of any effective inquiry to gender and sexuality, in order to ensure more comprehensive and insightful outcomes than otherwise.¹⁸ As Judith Gardiner has put it, “feminists need to engage masculinity studies now, because feminism can produce only partial explanations of society if it does not understand how men are shaped by masculinity.”¹⁹ Similar arguments can be made for Iranian and Muslim masculinities, too. More than a decade ago, while referring to the emergence of masculinities studies in the West, Shahin Gerami remarked that “in other parts of the world, feminists and women scholars and organizations are still too involved with many problems of women’s rights to divert their attention to masculinity.”²⁰ She deems the study

¹⁸See, for example, Dowd, *The Man Question*; Judith K. Gardiner, ed., *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Peter F. Murphy, ed., *Feminism and Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁹Judith K. Gardiner, “Introduction,” in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. J. K. Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-29; quote on 9.

²⁰Shahin Gerami, “Mullahs, Martyrs, and Men: Conceptualizing Masculinity in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Men and Masculinities* 5, no. 3 (2005): 257–74, quote on 258.

of Muslim masculinities as “necessary.”²¹ Distinguishing between “Islamist identity” and “Muslim identities,” Gerami defined the former as “an abstract construct applied by others” yet the latter as “concrete, contested, and differentiated identities created through individual or group agency,” warning that “Muslim societies are never monolithic as such, never religious by definition, nor are their cultures simply reducible to mere religion.”²² According to Gerami, studying Muslim masculinities will not only help women, gender studies, and men in Muslim societies, but it also “aid[s] Western masculinity studies in going beyond self-absorption with sexuality and in further incorporating the discourse of imperialism into the mainstream of gender discourse.”²³ Aspiring similar aims in Iranian gender studies provided the primary motivation for sending out the Call for Papers for this issue more than a year ago.

During the past two to three decades, following the global development of gender and women’s studies, many Iranian studies scholars have extensively welcomed feminist theories to the extent that research on gender, as an essential identity element, is now well established in Iranian studies. Most such research has concentrated on Iranian women; however, especially during the last decade, and along with a global thriving of studies on men and masculinities, a gradually increasing number of Iranian studies scholars have also shown interest in considering masculinity within their gendered examinations of Iranian history, culture, and literature. Still, there was no separate volume directly addressing the subject. In the past, some Iranian studies scholars, including historians Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi and Afsaneh Najmabadi, had shown interest in addressing, and at least not ignored, masculinity alongside femininity when attending to gender in their various accounts of Iranian modernity.²⁴ Yet, to the best of our

²¹Shahin Gerami, “Islamist Masculinity and Muslim Masculinities,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, eds. M. Kimmel, J. Hearn and R. W. Connell (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 448–57, quote on 456.

²²Gerami, “Islamist Masculinity,” 448.

²³Gerami, “Islamist Masculinity,” 456.

²⁴For some such works by these authors, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Reading ‘Wiles of Wom-

knowledge, the first book-length projects in Iranian studies where gender is debated with conscious awareness of the relationality of masculinities and femininities are Minoo Moallem's *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Cultural Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (2005) and Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beard: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (2005), the latter recently having been followed by Najmabadi's monograph on transgendered subjectivities in modern Iran, titled *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (2016).²⁵ Lloyd Ridgeon's monograph, *Moral and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (2010) is also noteworthy. Although not much interested in analyzing *futuwwat* (javanmardi [chivalry]) as a gendered discourse, Ridgeon builds on previous research to render a very valuable general survey of the field of Persian Sufi-*futuwwat*, thus facilitating any future research

en' Stories as Fictions of Masculinity," in Mai Ghossoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds., *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), 147-68; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998); Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Naqsh-i Zan bar Matn-i Mashrutah," *Nimeye Digar* 2, no. 3 (1997): 72-121; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "The Erotic *Vaṭan* [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, To Possess, and To Protect," *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 39, no. 3 (1997): 442-67; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Digarguni-i Zan va Mard dar Zaban-i Mashrutiyat," *Nimeye Digar* 2, no. 2 (1995): 72-105; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zanha-yi Millat: Women or Wives of the Nation?," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 1/2 (1993): 51-71; Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001); Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Going Public: Patriotic and Matriotic Homeland in Iranian Nationalist Discourses," *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture, and Politics* 13, no. 2 (2000): 175-200; Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Nigaran-i Zan-i Farang," *Nimeye Digar* 2, no. 3 (1997): 3-71; Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Zani Bud, Zani Nabud: Bazkhani-yi *Vujub-i Niqab* va *Mafasid-i Sufur*," *Nimeye Digar* 14 (Spring 1991): 77-110; Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Imagining Western Women: Occidentalism and Euro-Eroticism," *Radical America* 24, no. 3 (1990): 73-87.

²⁵See, respectively, Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

also on gendered dimensions of this institution and their ramifications for studies on modern Iranian masculinities.²⁶ These book publications have also been punctuated by several scholarly articles and book chapters on Iranian masculinities, in Persian and in English, written by scholars in various disciplines, some of whom are contributing to this special issue. Recently, elsewhere, one of the authors of this Preface, while arguing for the necessity of studying men and masculinities in Iranian women's and gender studies, rendered an overview and an annotated bibliography of the emerging scholarship in Iranian masculinities studies as well as Islamic masculinities, until 2015.²⁷ Inviting scholars to join the conversation, the article also proposed a list of topics worthy of attention in Iranian men and masculinities studies, an abridged version of which we included in our Call for Papers for the current special issue. We are excited to see also some monographs, directly focused on Iranian masculinities, forthcoming or in progress in

²⁶See Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2010). Ridgeon has also brought together English translations of three medieval Persian *futuwwat-nameh* texts (books on *futuwwat/jawanmardi* [chivalry]), with a detailed introduction to the book, and with each text being preceded by a separate introduction. See Lloyd Ridgeon, *Jawanmardi: A Sufi Code of Honour* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

²⁷See Mostafa Abedinifard, "Ma 'āyib al-Rijāl." Since that article was published, more articles and book chapters have appeared on Iranian masculinities. Some include Christopher Gow, "Real Men: Representations of Masculinity in Iranian Cinema," *Asian Cinema* 27, no. 2 (2016): 165–76; Nagihan Haliloğlu, "Activist, Professional, Family Man: Masculinities in Marjane Satrapi's Work," in Uwe Bläsing, Victoria Arakelova, Matthias Weinreich, eds., *Studies on Iran and The Caucasus: In Honour of Garnik Asatrian* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 495-506; Amy Motlagh, "What Kind of Crisis?: Marriage and Masculinity in Contemporary Iranian Cinema," in Kristin Celello and Hanan Kholoussy, eds., *Domestic Tensions, National Anxieties: Global Perspectives on Marriage, Crisis, and Nation* (New York, NY: Oxford University press, 2016), 192-211; Nacim Pak-Shiraz, "Shooting the Isolation and Marginality of Masculinities in Iranian Cinema," *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 6 (2017): 945-967; Sivan Balslev, "Population Crisis, Marriage Reform and the Regulation of Male Sexuality in Interwar Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018): 121-137; Sivan Balslev, "Dressed for Success: Hegemonic Masculinity, Elite Men and Westernisation in Iran, c. 1900–40," *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (2014): 545-564; Sivan Balslev, "Gendering the Nation: Masculinity and Nationalism in Iran during the Constitutional Revolution," in Meir Litvak, ed., *Constructing Nationalism in Iran: From the Qajars to the Islamic Republic* (London: Routledge, 2017), 68-85.

this field.²⁸ Iranian men and masculinities studies has certainly gained ground and is flourishing. Currently, this endeavour is mostly taking place outside Iran, which is understandable given the current restraints within Iran regarding the institutionalization of gender and women's studies.²⁹

Finally, a few words on the scope of the contributions made by the articles in this issue are in order. By zooming in on *masculinity* in a set of texts related to Iran and the Iranian cultures, all contributors provide novel insights about their texts and wider aspects of the Iranian history, culture, literature, and the arts, from which we would have otherwise been deprived. Two articles in particular, i.e., that by Arash Naraghi as well as the one by Junaid Jahangir and Hussein Abdullatif, by nature of their particular topic and corpus, exceed Iranian studies, claiming contributions to Islamic studies, too. Moreover, we hope these articles will also be read in line with what Connell calls “a world-centered rethinking of masculinities” as they all attempt to contribute to a “world-centred, rather than metropole-centred, domain of knowledge.”³⁰

This special issue, in the familiar tradition of *Iran Namag*, includes articles both in Persian and English. The essays showcase a variety of topics and texts and are written from various disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, including in gender and sexuality studies, masculinities studies, literary studies, cultural studies, visual and film studies, cultural sociology, and Islamic studies.

²⁸Minoo Moallem has been working on a monograph on masculinities in Iran-Iraq War movies. A chapter of hers is forthcoming in 2019: Minoo Moallem, “Staging Masculinity in Iran-Iraq War Movies,” in Aaron Magnan-Park, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See-Kam, eds., *Handbook on Asian Cinema*. Sivan Balslev's monograph *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexualities in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran* is under contract with Cambridge University Press. And Wendy DeSouza's book *Unveiling Men: The Emergence of Modern Masculinity in Twentieth-Century* is forthcoming by Syracuse University Press.

²⁹See Nayereh Tohidi, “Women's Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran,” *SUR* 13, no. 24 (2016): 75-89.

³⁰Raewyn Connell, “Margin Becoming Centre: For a World-centred Rethinking of Masculinities,” *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 9, no. 4 (2014): 217-231.

The English section opens with Cameron Cross's "The Tree Atop the Mountain: Mobad Manikan and the Elusive Promises of Masculinity." This article illuminates the complex character of Mobad, the unfortunate king of Marv in Gurgani's *Vis & Ramin*. He exposes the inherent contradictions of masculinity and the code's inability to deliver on the promise of its ideology. Cross's provocative and wittily written article investigates the logic underpinning the assumption that the ideal man must perform well in matters of love and war. Cross illustrates Mobad's character as an "enigmatic" figure with innate ironies and paradoxes. He responds to the myriad studies on *Vis & Ramin* that see the figure of the king as static by suggesting to read Mobad's story through the medium of his own speech, the circumstances surrounding his actions, and the process of his demise. This way, Cross demonstrates that the certainties of the king's ideal roles as a man, a lover, and a ruler will begin to shift. Cross's article shines a different light on a classic work of Medieval Persian literature and is a timely contribution to a broader discussion around love and power, and their relation to the concept of masculinity.

Focusing on masculinity as a contested topic in the films of Iranian Oscar Award winning director Asghar Farhadi, Nikki Akhavan's article "Prescriptive Masculinity?: Deception and Restraint in the Films of Asghar Farhadi," advances an argument in the face of ongoing domestic criticisms of Farhadi's films, whose representations of masculinity such critics have often found disconcerting in a culture where male honor often enjoys a noticeable degree of authority and respect. According to Akhavan, while the critics admit the breakdown of key social institutions such as marriage and the nuclear family, they find it especially troubling to witness *inefficient* men and masculinities in Farhadi's films. Focusing on the themes of deception and collusion as the two main concepts favored by Farhadi's critics in their analyses of his films—especially *About Elly*, *A Separation*, and *The Salesman*—Akhavan shows that these films explore multiple men and masculinities, yet have no interest introducing masculinity or certain types of it as a (re)solution to the damaged institution of marriage,

particularly because the—often violent—assertions of masculinity are themselves a serious part of the problem.

Mahdi Tourage’s article “An Iranian Female Vampire Walks Home Alone and Disturbs Freud’s Oedipal Masculinity” discusses Anna Lily Amirpour’s debut feature film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), which is tagged as the first Iranian vampire feminist romance. In it, the unnamed *chador*-wearing vampire skateboards the streets of the Bad City at night, viciously attacking men who are abusive to women. Suggesting that the film exceeds “limited categorization as a vampire movie or a feminist art film,” Tourage argues that “masculinities are deconstructed and reconstituted as spectacle in this film, and in the process the patriarchal boundaries of pleasure are remapped and circulation of desire is destabilized.” While drawing on feminist psychoanalytic film theory, Tourage notes how “this theory leaves the specific contours of an alternative feminist counter-cinema unarticulated,” thus posing important questions: “Should a feminist counter-cinema embrace patriarchal techniques of representation or develop its own cinematic language? Can a feminist counter-cinema dismantle the visual regimes of patriarchal power relation and still remain faithful to aesthetics of visual pleasure?” In response, he argues that *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* enhances our understanding of feminist film theory by instantiating an example of a feminist counter-cinema. Significantly, the film’s exclusively Persian iconography, Tourage further argues, broadens debates within feminist film theory to include subjects whose epistemological roots extend beyond the horizons of Europe and the Americas.

Kaveh Ghobadi’s “On the Path to Manhood: Men and Masculinities in the Contemporary Kurdish Novel” examines sex, gender, and particularly the representations of hegemonic masculinity in two novels from Iranian Kurdistan: *Zindexew (Nightmare)* by Fatah Amiri and *Siweyla (Suheila)* in Persian, proper female name) by Sharam Qawami. *Nightmare* tells a story of a new generation of Kurdish young men during the final years of the late Pahlavi’s reign. The protagonist suffers from a recurring nightmare in which

he tortures people as a SAVAK intelligence officer. Set in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran, *Siweyla* is about a young man's stifled enthusiasm when he falls in love with the eponymous character Siweyla. Relying on Judith Butler's notion of *gender performativity* as well as on Raewyn Connell's concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, Ghobadi undertakes to show the ramifications of the naturalization of the categories of "masculine" and "feminine", while also examining patterns of hegemonic masculinity in the novels to demonstrate how this culturally ascendant masculinity "adapts itself to new conditions to guarantee men's dominant position." Ghobadi argues that while both novels feature innovative narrative styles and radical political standpoints as well as depict a "New Man" and a "New Woman", they "substantially reproduce essentialist gendered subjectivities, through reinscribing a binary opposition that defines woman as man's 'other.'"

Taking up the issue of same-sex sensuality in Islam, in their "Homosexuality—The Emerging New Battleground in Islam," Junaid Jahangir and Hussein Abdullatif look closely at a seminal essay by Scott Kugle entitled "Sexuality, Diversity and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims" and its scathing critique by Mobeen Vaid, in the aftermath of the shooting at a gay bar in Orlando. This dialogue becomes a starting place for the authors to address some "misconceptions that Muslims generally have on homosexuality." While crediting Vaid for engaging with Kugle's article in detail, the authors criticize Vaid's analysis, suggesting that his argument "emboldens conservative Muslim leaders to equate LGBT Muslims with Lot's people and downplay the legitimate human need for affection, intimacy and companionship as mere urges and whims." Through this critical intervention into Vaid's response to Kugle's essay, Jahangir and Abdullatif deconstruct the fourteen salient points which Vaid makes in his critique of Kugle. In response to Vaid, the authors put forward rebutting counter claims. Some of the main topics addressed concern consensus in Islam regarding same-sex relations, the issue of permanent celibacy as a test, the necessity of

updating traditional jurisprudence, procreation, the Qur'anic account of Lot, the *qasas* (stories) literature, and the heterosexist overtones of some Qur'anic *tafsir* or exegesis.

In the face of the paucity of research on male sexuality in Persian literature, Claudia Yaghoobi's article, "The Abject Outsider: *The Story of Two Gay Men*," introduces three texts in which male same-sex relations are brought to the fore: Amir Soltani and Khalil Bendib's graphic novel, *Yousef and Farhad Struggling for Family Acceptance in Iran: The Story of Two Gay Men*; Arsham Parsi's memoir *Exiled for Love*; and *For the Love of Mohammad*, another memoir by Jean Beaini and Mohammad Khordadian. All three narratives deal in one way or another with the "coming out" phenomenon within the contemporary Iranian culture. In her article, Yaghoobi gives center stage to the graphic novel, while occasionally drawing on the other two memoirs and their accounts of lived experiences to support some of her arguments. She examines the narratives' male characters in order to demonstrate how Iranian hegemonic masculinity directly feeds off the subordination of the gay masculinity. She maintains that this "subordination of gay masculinity normalizes heterosexuality while deeming homosexuality as abnormal." By contrast, Yaghoobi foregrounds the constructive role of the religion in the novel, demonstrating how religion is not the root of the main characters' problem. On the contrary, the authors, she posits, draw on religion, especially Islamic mysticism, to subvert heteronormative discourses about male sexuality. Finally, Yaghoobi's article highlights the role of the unique medium used by Soltani and Bendib—that is, comics as image-text—which provides unconventional expressive power by enabling the authors to create "a combination of thoughtful images and key words" to convey their message more effectively.

Finally, in her article, "Queering the Iranian Nation: *Be Like Others* and Resistance to Heteronormative Nationalism," Amy Tahani-Bidmeshki takes up the intersection of masculinity and transgendered subjectivities, which she debates through the lens of Tanaz Eshaghian's 2008 documentary *Transsexual in Iran* (also known as *Be Like Others*).

The film follows the lives of several trans Iranians, particularly Male-to-Female persons, offering “the viewer opportunities for reflection about the role of gender, sexuality, whiteness, and belonging in nation-building broadly, and in the post-1979 landscape of Iran.” Tahani-Bidmeshki employs Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined community” to argue that “Iranian regime’s acceptance of post-SRS trans Iranians as citizen-subjects presupposes the ‘imagined community’ of heteronormative Iran” and that it is an effort to “abolish homosexuality by ensuring a particular form of trans identity.” She builds on the works of Afsaneh Najmabadi regarding the historical roots of repression of public displays of homoeroticism since the Qajar Iran and in the modernization and nation-building processes to conclude that the visual arts from the time of Qajar paintings to the present-day form in the documentary *Be Like Others* highlight the tensions between the government and the Iranian polity for nation-building.

The Persian section of this special issue begins with the article “Wedding Trials of Masculinity in Iranian Fairy Tales” by Samin Espargham, Abolghasem Ghavam, and Samira Bameshki. Analyzing numerous Iranian fairy tales, the authors investigate the various types of arduous and grueling trials frequently appearing in these tales, through which men must prove their *suitability*, *manliness*, and *prowess* to marry the tales’ princesses. The authors analyze these tales from a structuralist viewpoint and with regard to their fundamental generic units of narrative structures, i.e., their *mythemes*. The trials, deemed as “trials of masculinity,” are intended to test the intelligence, physical and financial capacities as well as the courageousness of the young men involved. The frequency of these literary tests of manhood poses a series of questions such as: Why should men go through hard trials, and why should men be killed in the process? Why, in these tales, is the nobility of the suiters not significant? And finally, why do the brides and the suiters all come from different lands? To answer these questions, the authors examine myths and rites related to fertility, studying the mythemes appearing in numerous fairy tales and revealing their structural similarities. Through this comparative analysis, the authors

postulate that the wedding trials in fairy tales are rooted in the myth of the “sacred marriage”—or the story of Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love, fertility, and war (known in Akkadian as Ishtar) and the shepherd-king Dumuzi (Akkadian Tammuz), who became a god at some point, possibly through his marriage to Inanna and the fertilization of nature. According to this myth, the future king would have to be “healthy,” “strong,” and “fertile” in order to guarantee his ability to impregnate his bride. The authors conclude by posing questions for further research on the possible influence of Iranian folk literature on the conceptualization of gender, particularly masculinity, in contemporary Iranian culture.

In “The Role of the *Lāt* Figure in the Construction of Islamic Republic’s Idealized Man,” Ali Papoli-Yazdi addresses Islamic Republic discourse’s strategic revisiting a section of the Iranian traditional culture, which was initially reviled in the wake of the Islamic Revolution—i.e., the social types of the *lāt* (rogue) and the *lūtī* (tough guy). The revisiting, Papoli-Yazdi shows, is aimed at achieving a peacetime ideal of masculinity, as opposed to the male *basiji* (volunteer member of state-operated militia) heroic figure of the Iraq-Iran war period. These processes of revisiting and reconstruction, Papoli-Yazdi argues, occur via Masoud Dehnamaki’s best-selling film *Ekhrajīha I (The Outcasts I)* (2007). Analyzing the film within the context of the Iranian “Sacred Defense” Cinema, Papoli-Yazdi first shows the evolution of the image of the *basiji* into the *lāt* in *The Outcasts I*; then, putting the film in the context of pre-revolutionary *jāhīlī* movies,³¹ he demonstrates how the *jāhīlī* character is also restored. This restoration, however, is deployed to redefine a mystical-popular image of the clergy, since, amidst many allegedly religious persons’ denial of the *lāts*, it is only the clergy characters who, as if through mystical intuition, are cognizant of the eventual transformation of the *lāt* figure in the battlefield. Moreover, by reviving the *lāt* as a redefined figure, Papoli-Yazdi argues, *The*

³¹A sub-genre of the “tough guy” genre in prerevolutionary Iranian cinema. See Hamid Naficy, “Males, Masculinity, and Power: The Tough-Guy Movie Genre and Its Evolution,” in *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 2 (Durham: Duke University Press), 261–324.

Outcasts I illustrates the Islamic Republic's ideal society, one in which the *lāts* and clerics, as if within a traditional neighborhood, can bond.

Goli Taraghi's novella, *Another Place*, is the focus of Amirhossein Vafa's article, "The Predicament of Complicity with Hegemonic Masculinity in Goli Taraghi's *In Another Place*," where—drawing on Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity—Vafa sheds light on a particular mode of masculinity in Taraghi's narrative, i.e., that which becomes complicit with the hegemonic masculinity in order to benefit from what Connell deems the "patriarchal dividend." *In Another Place* is a final piece in the collection of the same title that tells the story of a wealthy but unhappy businessman living with his "affluent and assertive wife" in 1998 Tehran. Discontented with the sociopolitical status quo, the novella's male protagonist is feeling for *another place*. Vafa offers this character as "one of the author's most developed male portrayals to date, as a means both to make visible and to challenge the author's conception of urban, upper middle-class masculinities in contemporary Iran." Vafa shows that the male protagonist fails at dissent; he concludes that the character's failure "is in part informed by the novella's entrapment in the binary of two opposing but completing masculinities performed by the complicit middle and upper classes and the hegemonic state apparatus." Drawing on postcolonial feminism and masculinities theory, as advanced by such scholars as Mino Moallem and Raewyn Connell, the author criticizes Taraghi for her feminist agenda that centers exclusively on urban, upper-middle class masculinities. This exclusive feminist agenda, Vafa maintains, is limited and elitist, "potentially informed by a 'Western' notion of 'egalitarian feminism.'"

Contributed by Arash Naraghi, the last article of the Persian section tackles male homosexuality in Islam. Titled "The Male Homosexuality Problematic in the Context of Contemporary Iranian Shi'ism," the essay delves into Shi'i jurisprudence and

Qur'anic exegesis, particularly on the scripture's narration of the story of Lot, to propose a solution for the problem of male homosexuality in Islam. First, Naraghi explores the sources of discrimination against sexual minorities within Shi'i jurisprudence, while critically evaluating the views of some prominent contemporary Iranian Muslim scholars on homosexuality. Then, he introduces a rationalist tradition within Islamic philosophy and theology which provides a theoretical framework for approaching the problem. His proposed framework is based on two pillars: first, Ibn Rushd's view on the relation between demonstrative reason and Shari'a, and second, Mu'tazilites' view on the relation between God's nature and moral obligations. Finally, within the above framework, he suggests ways for how a devout Muslim might refute discrimination based on sexual orientation, and how Muslim communities could create a space tolerant, if not welcoming of male homosexuality.

Many of these contributors, along with other scholars interested in pursuing research on Iranian men and masculinities, will be gathering in the forthcoming Association for Iranian Studies (AIS) conference at the University of California, Irvine, during August 14-17, 2018, over four panels on "Iranian Men and Masculinities," organized by the editors of this special issue, in order to share their research with the conference attendees. As the first collection of arguments on the topic, this special issue and the above panels are of course a starting point, which we also plan to follow with an edited volume in the near future. We will have achieved more than what we aim for if these efforts incite similar endeavours.

At the end, we would like to thank all who kindly contributed their papers for this issue as well as the anonymous reviewers and the journal's copy editors, Susan Foster and Vahid Toloeei, for their kind help and co-operation. We are also indebted to the *Iran Namag's* Editor-in-Chief, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, for

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