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BETWEEN A LOCAL AND GLOBAL GAY:
A GENEALOGY OF GAYNESS PRODUCTION IN THE
IRANIAN CONTEXT

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For my parents, my queer community in Iran, and my beloved Davide

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ABSTRACT

Through Michel Foucault's theoretical tools in the realm of gender and sexuality, the present thesis provides a genealogical account of the transformation of same-sex relations into gay identity in Iran before and after starting modernization in the nineteenth century until the present. In this regard, this thesis focuses on the dialogue and relationships among gayness production, Iranian modernity, Western imperialism, and the Western discourse of sexuality. By doing so, this thesis shows that in contrast to the official discourse of the Islamic Republic and some academic assertion such as Joseph Massad's ideas—that identities of gays and lesbians as well as homosexuals' rights are modern and Western hegemonic project, underpinned by exporting identities of gays and lesbians to the Middle East—firstly, modernity is not simply a Western hand-made product, and Iranian modernity is not merely a process of Westernization. Instead, it is a hybrid, innovative cultural grafting derived from both modern and traditional resources. Secondly, the notion of gayness as a function of modernity is not simply a Western product exported to Iran. On the contrary, Iranian gayness is a historical evolution produced within the Iranian biopolitical *dispositif* of sexuality that entails discursive practices and nationalist impulses of the nineteenth century and the Islamic regime's use of modern technologies of power such as psychology and psychiatry. Moreover, this thesis criticizes Massad's denial of the Middle Eastern non-heterosexual's agency and transformative capacity in regards to their sexual identities and argues that Iranian gay men themselves, by drawing on the Western-oriented notion of gay identity, have contributed to the construction of their own local gayness.

INTRODUCTION

In September of 2007, controversial Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited the United States. He was in New York to attend a meeting at the United Nations. But his remarks during a conference at the Roone Arledge Auditorium at Columbia University received much more media attention than his meeting at the United Nations. Because when he was asked about the situation of homosexuals in Iran, he replied “in Iran, we don’t have homosexuals, like in your country”.¹ This denial of homosexual existence in Iran drew widespread criticism in the world. His spokesperson tried to explain that Ahmadinejad’s comment was misunderstood, that he just meant to say that Iran does not have many homosexuals compared to American society.² However, the significance of Ahmadinejad’s claim has to be understood in the local context. Because, a couple of months after Ahmadinejad’s declaration at Columbia University, in November 2007, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, during a speech, stated that “homosexuality has become a huge issue in the West” and it “now poses a painful and unsolvable problem for Western intellectuals”.³ Even before Ahmadinejad’s controversial statement, in July 2002, a grand Iranian Ayatollah, Ebrahim Amini, expressed his hostility toward the West and stated that “gay and lesbian marriages reflect a weakness of the Western culture”.⁴

Such anti-Western sentiments among Iranian officials trace back to the discourse of the toxic West or what eminent Iranian writer and critic Jalal Al-Ahmad conceptualized by the early 1960s as *gharbzadegi* (Occidentosis). Through this concept, he depicted Western influences in Iran (such as industrialization, urbanization, and sexual policies of the Pahlavi era, including women’s emancipation) as a contagious disease, like the plague that aims to corrupt the authenticity of the Islamic and Iranian culture. This antagonistic approach toward the West has been part of official discourse since the establishment of the Islamic Republic (1979), depicting foreign elements as a disease that needs to be cured. Al-Ahmad proposes a solution to the harms

¹ Brian Whitaker, “No Homosexuality Here”, *The Guardian*. (2007, September 25). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/sep/25/nohomosexualityhere>.

² Ali Delforouh, *The Iranian Chronicles: Unveiling the Dark Truths of the Islamic Republic* (USA, Bloomington: 2012), 93.

³ Quoted in Korycki and Nasirzadeh, “Homophobia as a tool of Statecraft Iran and Its Queers” in *Global Homophobia*, eds., Meredith L. Weiss and Michael J. Bosia (USA, the University of Illinois Press: 2013), 189.

⁴ Fatemeh Aman and Bill Samii, “*Iran: Is There an Anti-Homosexual Campaign?*”, (accessed June 19, 2011). Available at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/09/febbe245-8b6f-4d30-a77f-d0b40c23da05>.

of this disease that entails a return to the roots of ‘authentic’ Islamic values.⁵ From its establishment in 1979, the Islamic state, in the expression of its national interest, often draws on Al-Ahmad’s discourse of cultural authenticity, meant as pure Iranian-Islamic culture vis-a-vis the contamination of the Western values. The official discourse on homosexuality also draws heavily on this discourse of authenticity, considering homosexuality as a disease that belongs to the toxic West that aims to impure the pure Islamic-Iranian culture.⁶ Therefore, Ahmadinejad’s Columbia talk should not be assumed as a naïve, hasty, and uncalculated reaction. Indeed, rejecting the existence of homosexual individuals in Iran, calling the phenomenon that belongs and only exists in the West is a rhetorical strategy and a part of the Islamic Republic’s official discourse in addressing homosexuality.

In addition to the discourse of toxic West, the rejection of homosexuality by Iranian officials orbits around the notion of “the will not to know”⁷—a tactic that worked and still works against the enforcement of anti-homosexual laws in Muslim societies. This tactic denotes that despite strong Shari’a disapproval, same-sex desire and love has been implicitly recognized and tolerated as cultural practices as long as those men who desire such relations remain discreet while also respecting certain social conventions. In other words, in Muslim societies such as Iran, same-sex relations have been an ‘open secret’, something neither talked about nor expressed in public.⁸ Thus, when Ahmadinejad denied the existence of homosexuals, he was also referring to this cultural division between private and public spheres. Taking into account the qualification of this cultural point, Ahmadinejad’s meaning of his statement can be changed from “in Iran, we don’t have people who desire same-sex relations” into “in Iran, we don’t have people who identify themselves as homosexuals in the same way people do in the United States”. In other words, his remarks can be understood in different ways: that American gay culture does not exist in Iran, sexual identity categories are not cross-cultural, and there exists a traditional and nameless same-sex relationship in Iran that is not compatible with the Western discourse of sexuality.

⁵ Jalal Al-Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the Western* (USA: Mizan Press, 1984).

⁶ Jón Ingvar Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories: Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan: 2019), 56.

⁷ Stephen O. Murray, “The Will not to Know, Islamic Accommodations of Male Homosexuality” in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, eds. Stephen O. Murray, Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997). 14-54.

⁸ Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories: Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, 2.

However, while the audience in the Roone Arledge Auditorium at Columbia University laughed and booed at Ahmadinejad's claims, in the same year and in the same place, Joseph A. Massad, an Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History, through his book *Desiring Arabs*⁹ legitimized Ahmadinejad's remarks. Massad, in his theoretical foundations, draws on the works of Edward Said and Michel Foucault. In his critique of *Orientalism*, Said is blind to the issue of gender and sexuality in the East. However, Massad, who was his disciple at Columbia University, explores specifically the question of gender and sexuality in the Middle East. He investigates the role that sex and sexuality have played in the transformation of constructions of culture and politics in the Middle East in terms of their differences with the West. By adopting Said's trend in postcolonialism, Massad argues that in present times the West views the Middle East as culturally, politically, and 'sexually' backward, but in the past, this was different: "While the pre-modern West attacked Islam's alleged sexual licentiousness, the modern West attacks its alleged repression of sexual freedom in the present".¹⁰

Massad also reworks Foucault's concept of the *dispositif* of sexuality, which refers to a mechanism of control concerning the individual's body and management of the population as a whole. Through this concept, Foucault shows that the obsession with sexuality emerged in nineteenth-century middle-class European societies, and modern sciences of psychology, sociology, biology, and anthropology were used to understand and control 'deviant' sexual behaviors. This gave rise to the notions of sexual identity, particularly the idea that 'homosexual and heterosexual' are distinct types of persons. By drawing on Foucault, Massad goes one step forward and argues that in contemporary time, the Western *dispositif* of sexuality, particularly in the form of LGBTQ identities (he mostly refers to gay identity), has been deployed by the West as an ideological and political tool to construct a binary model by which America and Europe are depicted as civilized vis-a-vis the uncivilized societies of the Middle East with regards to the sexual/civil rights of gays and lesbians.¹¹ Thus, while Foucault's concept of homosexuality is a 'historical evolution' that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, the way Massad uses the concept of gayness is in the colonial settings within which international LGBTQI+ and human rights organizations or what he calls 'Gay International', in the name of saving Middle Eastern sexual

⁹ Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 2007).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

minorities from their societies, export and impose a Western discourse of sexual understanding to produce and universalize Western sexual identity categories in the Middle East where only “the practitioners of the same-sex contact” exist.¹² Massad, unlike Ahmadinejad, acknowledges that gay-identifying men exist in Iran and other Middle Eastern societies. But, in a shared agreement with Iranian officials, he views their gayness as a foreign element that has been exported and imposed on the Middle East by Gay International. He also produces a victimization discourse within which Middle Eastern sexual minorities are depicted as victims who blindly adopted these Western sexual identity categories.

These arguments—imposition of Western sexual identity categories and victimization of Middle East’s sexual minorities—provoked me to investigate them in Iran, my home country, where a deep-rooted tradition of homoeroticism exists in history and classical literature, but in contemporary time, homosexuality, as a Western trope of invasion, is criminalized and subjected to punishments ranging from flogging to the death penalty. In the Arab context, Massad’s argument is criticized by scholars, such as Samar Habib and Sahar Amer, who argue that Massad reduces homosexuality to the “practitioners of same-sex contact”,¹³ while instances of passionate love between men in the Arab world exist and are “documented throughout the Arabic literary canon”, from the “Abbasid period to the Andalusian and Ottoman periods”, and it is not something simply imposed through Western contact.¹⁴

In the case of Iran, however, Massad’s assertion has not been the subject of investigation. For example, Janet Afary in *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*¹⁵ and Afsaneh Najmabadi in *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*,¹⁶ generally discuss the construction and transformation of gender and sexuality in pre-modern and modern Iran, but without having a particular sensibility and critical approach toward the issue of gayness production and its relation to the issues of imperialism, essentialism, and universalism of sexual identity categories. In *Desiring Arabs*, Massad focuses on the Arab world in particular and

¹² Ibid., 177.

¹³ Sahar Amer, “Joseph Massad and the Alleged Violence of Human Rights.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, (2010), 16(4), 649-653.

¹⁴ Samar Habib, “Introduction” in *Islam and Homosexuality, Volume One* (USA, Praeger: 2010), xxx.

¹⁵ Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (California: California Press, 2005).

in the Middle East in general. He mentions ‘Iran’ several times to expand his argument—regarding the Gay International’s imposition of the Western *dispositif* of sexuality—into a non-Arab society in the Middle East. For example, he describes the efforts of human rights organizations to “stop the mass execution of homosexuals in Iran”; as an “unsubstantiated propagandistic claim” that is a part of Gay International’s “aggressive universalization campaign”. In this thesis, the main aim is to provide a genealogical account of the transformation of same-sex relations into gay identification in Iran from the nineteenth century until the present. However, since Massad’s academic assertions produce a discourse strikingly similar to that of the Islamic Republic, we need to bring his claims into an Iranian context, discuss them, and criticize them. Therefore, I investigate the production of Iranian gayness with a focus on the Massad’s account of imperialism and his critique of the Western hegemonic trajectory of the subject formation in the Middle East.

Massad reworks Foucault’s category of the *dispositif* of sexuality in order to develop his argument regarding “Gay International’s incitement to discourse”.¹⁷ He argues that incitement to talk about sexuality as the “truth” of oneself represents an instrument of Western colonialism of the Middle East. In order to answer Massad, in this thesis, I also use Foucault’s concept of *dispositif* to investigate the production of Iranian gayness. My claim is that although homosexuality itself might be considered as a form of *dispositif*—produced in nineteenth-century Europe through the intersection of power, knowledge, and discourse—, homosexuals have historically resisted within this *dispositif* to transform themselves into ethical subjects who fight for their freedom and recognition. This happened in the West and is also happening in Iran. Through this thesis, I try to show how gayness is produced and developed in Iran and how gays, through their agency and transformative capacity, have constructed their own local gayness.

This thesis includes two parts. In the first part, *Rereading Foucault, Rethinking Sexuality*, I lay out the theoretical foundation of my reflections mostly by drawing on Foucault’s theories. Foucault’s works are based on the historical development and social and cultural attributes of European societies. However, his writings on sexuality and their relations with discourse, power, subjectivity, and resistance have provided invaluable contributions to the subsequent studies of gender and sexualities, which cannot be limited merely to Western societies. His works on the history of Western desire and sexuality can be expanded to investigate the implications of gender

¹⁷ . Massad, *Desiring Arabs*,

and sexuality in the everyday life of non-Western societies. Moreover, Foucault is one of the few Western philosophers who traveled to Iran, and in his writings, he gave his exclusive support to the Islamist wing, and certain modalities of his works (such as power, subjectivity, and care of the self) resonated with revolutionary Islamist intelligentsia. In the first part, thus, I elaborate on Foucault's account of sexuality and his conceptualizations on the repressive hypothesis, confession, power, subjectivity, *dispositif*, and his insights into the constitution of the practice of self within different ethical regimes. This part mostly focuses on the concept of the *dispositif*. As argued by Foucault, prior to the end of the eighteenth century, the regulation of social life in Western societies was mediated through the *dispositif* of alliance, which was "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties". From the eighteenth century onward, instead, a new *dispositif*, the *dispositif* of sexuality—which is a mechanism of control concerning the individual's body and management of a population as a whole—was deployed by Western societies and superimposed on the *dispositif* of alliance.¹⁸ Foucault associates the *dispositif* of sexuality with the rise of scientific discourses of the nineteenth century, such as medicine, psychiatry, psychology, biology, etc. Through these discourses of science, according to Foucault, individuals are incited to talk about themselves and their sexual secrets in order to uncover the truth about themselves in relation to sex. Foucault argues that this incitement to talk about sex and the production of discourses regarding sexuality is associated with the constitution of subjectivity and the production of new categories of identity through the productivity of power-knowledge operations. However, in *dispositif*, the agency is always possible and the subject is not only affected by power relations but to a certain extent through them, the subject has the opportunity to resist such technologies of power. To formulate a form of emancipatory politics for resisting *dispositif*, Foucault goes back to Greco-Roman antiquity to propose ethical and aesthetic techniques of the self for stylizing and transforming oneself and one's life.

In part two, *Modernity and Transformation of Same-Sex Relations into Gay Identity*, I contextualize Massad's ideas and Foucault's theoretical tools in Iran; but before, by drawing on postcolonialism, the critique of, and new approaches to modernity, I rethink the notion of modernity, its Western narrative, and its representation of non-Western cultures and societies. By doing this, I am able to investigate gayness production and its dialogue with modernity, the

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

Western discourse of sexuality, and imperialism. To develop my argument that begins in pre-modern Iran, I analyze the primary and secondary historical sources, especially literature and poetry of the eleventh until the nineteenth century, that give accounts of Iranian *dispositif* of alliance in general, and Iranian traditional same-sex relations in particular. In the next step, with the beginning of Iranian modernization in the nineteenth century, I investigate the superimposition of Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality on the *dispositif* of alliance, particularly with a focus on the transformation of same-sex desire into homosexuality with regards to imperialism, the Western discourse of sexuality, and gender and sexual polices in Pahlavi era (1925-1979).

Moreover, I need to discuss how nineteenth-century Iranian intellectuals created a hybrid form of modernity—derived from both Western and traditional resources—and how Iranian homosexuality itself has also been developed within a hybridized and cultural grafting construction of Iranian modernity. When I arrive at the 1979 Iranian revolution in my account of historical events, I direct my discussion from *dispositif* of sexuality to the Islamic *dispositif* of post-revolutionary Iran, and I provide an account of gayness production within such *dispositif*. Gay International, according to Massad, launched its activities in the 80s and the 90s, exactly when the discourse of human rights entered Iran. Therefore, I should discuss the influence of Western sexual *dispositif* and imperialism in post-revolutionary Iran. But before, I give my reflection on Massad's account of Western imperialism and criticize some of his points regarding his assumption of modernity, gay space of activism, and ignorance of the Middle Eastern gay men's agency. Finally, I explore how Iranian gay men resist within the Islamic *dispositif* and respond to the Western sexual understating and universality of sexual identity categories. Moreover, I show that how Iranian gay men have transformed themselves into active agents to contribute to the construction of their local sexual identity. Furthermore, since the use of identity markers is fundamental in this thesis, in my historical account on the post-revolutionary Iran, I use the English term 'gay' and the new terminology in the Persian language '*hamjensgara*' (same-sex identification and orientation). Because firstly, both are used as the self-identification by the majority of local men in present

Iran¹⁹ (I use *hamjensgara* only in the 2000s when this term appeared for the first time) and secondly, I consider the construction of the term *hamjensgara* as a form of creative and ethical activity for localization of the Western notion of gayness. To develop the argument regarding *hamjensgarayan*'s (in plural)/gays' existence and their resistance in Iran, I draw on and analyze the secondary resources regarding the real lives of Iranian *hamjensgarayan*/gays, of their livability, resistance, activism, and their embodiment and actions in the post-revolutionary era.

This thesis was born out of my personal experiences as well as curiosity about male homoeroticism and gayness production in Iran. Therefore, I concentrate only on male homoeroticism because there is little evidence of female same-sex relations in pre-modern Iran, particularly in Persian literature. Moreover, we have a lack of lesbians' existence both in the Islamic Republic's and Massad's discourses. On the contrary, there is the hegemony of gay men in the political discourse of the West and the East. However, I have realized that one could not simply talk about male homoeroticism and particularly homosexuality in modern Iran without also addressing Iranian women's presence in society. Thus, while the main argument of this thesis is centralized around the transformation of male same-sex relations into gay identity, simultaneously, I also consider the women's issues, including their roles in the institution of family, marriage, and heterosexual intimacy.

¹⁹ Abouzar Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians" in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009*, eds., David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi (New York: State University of New York, 2015), 57; Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan: 2019); Ahmad Karimi, "Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*,(2017). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2017.128692>.

PART ONE

READING FOUCAULT, RETHINKING SEXUALITY

1. Foucault's Deconstruction of the Repressive Hypothesis

Foucault's writings on sexuality and its relations with the discourse, power, subjectivity and oppression have provided invaluable contributions to the subsequent studies of gender and sexualities; his works on the history of Western desire and sexuality can be expanded to investigate the implications of gender and sexuality in everyday life of non-Western societies. This thesis's main purpose is to investigate the transformation of Iranian gender and sexuality before and after the modernization process through Foucault's contributions to the discourse of sexuality. Thus, the first chapter elaborates Foucault's account of sexuality through his conceptualizations on the repressive hypothesis, confession, power, subjectivity, *dispositif* and his insights into the constitution of the practice of self within different ethical regimes.

1.1. The Repressive Hypothesis

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French 20th-century philosopher and historian. He also was one of the most important figures in critical theory. His theories have been concerned with the concepts of power, knowledge, discourse, and subjectivity. His earlier writings on madness and reason, the condition of possibilities for developments in medical knowledge and the emergence of the human sciences as well as his later writings on subjectivity and power-knowledge relations show a great deal of his influence in poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and politico-philosophical thought. During his philosophical studies at the École Normale, he was under the influence of the important works of his tutors, such as Jean Hyppolite's works on Hegel, the structuralist reading of Louis Althusser on Marx, and George Dumézil's analysis of discourse. In addition to the level of personal influences, Foucault's works have been developed by the influence of other intellectual figures such as the works of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche.²⁰ In Foucault's view, what connects each of these thinkers is the existence of a power-knowledge relation. For Marx, this relation took the form of a relation between ideas and economic power. For Freud, it took a form of a relation between desire and knowledge, and for Nietzsche, all forms of thought and knowledge were a form of expression of a "will to power".²¹

²⁰ Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2-3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Foucault generally has been seen as a philosopher of power, knowledge and subject; however, in addition to the problem of power-knowledge relations and subjectivity, the problem of truth is another significant and central theme of discussion in Foucault's writings. In an interview in 1981, he explicitly confirms that he has "consistently pursued the problem of knowing how truth comes to things and how it comes about that a certain number of areas are slowly integrated into the problematic and search for truth."²² Foucault is interested in how the relations of truth are integrated in the diverse fields of human activities. In an interview of 1983, Foucault points to three themes, three historical ontologies of the self he has desired to investigate:

First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as a moral agent.²³

Through the expression of these three axes—power, knowledge and subject—Foucault poses the question about truth's historicity in relation to the themes of power-knowledge-subject relations. These are "three concepts that form the three main axes of Foucault's thinking, all of them hinging on the issue of truth"²⁴ because he was interested in "how different pieces of knowledge had attained truth status over the course of history, how power had legitimated itself through truth, how people had shaped themselves via producing truth."²⁵ Accordingly, Foucault's analysis of sex and sexuality is not at all pertinent to the history of sexual acts and behaviors, but rather, in most of his writings on sexuality, particularly in the four-volume study of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality*, he analyzes the history of the discourses that the West has produced and conducted about sex. On this account, Foucault says:

²² Michel Foucault, "Interview with Jean Francois and John de Wit. May 22, 1981", in *Foucault, Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, ed., Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 253–69.

²³ Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress" in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works, vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 2000), 262.

²⁴ Marek Tamm, "Sex and Truth: Foucault's History of Sexuality as History of Truth," *Edinburg University Press Journal* 5, no. 2 (2016): 153–168.

²⁵ Ibid.

Between each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what hold it in darkness.²⁶

The relation of sexuality and truth can take place in diverse cultural and historical regimes of truth, but Foucault particularly investigates the relation of sexuality and the regime of truth in the West through genealogy. Influenced by Nietzsche's development of morals through the function of power in *On the Genealogy of Morals*²⁷, Foucault accounts the conception of genealogical analysis "for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, domains of subjects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history."²⁸ In the essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*²⁹, Foucault differentiates the conception of historical analysis, namely genealogy, from traditional history. The essay explicates that genealogy is characterized by an opposition to a pursuit of the origin of things because origin, as an intrinsic feature of traditional historical analysis, seeks to capture "the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities." In contrast, genealogy, on the other side, refutes the idea of origin as a truth and attempts to show that "there is something altogether different behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms."³⁰ To further clarify the difference between traditional history and genealogy, Foucault follows Nietzsche in contrasting the concept of *Ursprung/origin* with *Herkunft/descent* and *Entstehung/emergence*. The descent analysis dissolves the exclusive generic characteristics of an object or an idea and permits us to rediscover the myriad events that contribute to its emergence. The analysis of *descent* distrusts unity and identity in order to reveal "the subtle, singular and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel."³¹ Another dimension of genealogy is concerned with the analysis of historical *emergence*, which is conceptualized not as a process of development or as the culmination of

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 77.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

²⁸ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed., Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 117.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed., D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-164.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 145.

events, but rather it designates the moment of arising, a moment of manifestation of “the hazardous play of dominations”³². *Emergence* “takes place within the context of power relations and is always produced through a particular stage of forces”.³³ In short, genealogy as the analysis of historical *descent* and *emergence* rejects a form of linear development, stable forms, and historical dominant assumptions and hypotheses in favor of revealing discontinuities, contingencies, and complexities surrounding historical events.

One of the dominant hypotheses in the Western history of sexuality that Foucault, through genealogy, has tried to challenge is “the repressive hypothesis”. An understanding of sexuality that claims once the expression of sexual acts, both verbal and physical, were free, “sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment”. But in the course of Victorianism, “twilight soon fell upon this bright day”³⁴ and sexuality has been subject to the repressive power by the Victorian regime. This typical historical account of Western sexuality that Victorian era is marked by prohibitions on the public discussion of sexuality enables “a narrative extrapolation through the struggles of psychoanalysis with repression to the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s”³⁵ for bringing back “the bright day”³⁶ of sexual freedom. For this purpose, according to the repressive hypothesis, people need to challenge their silence and shame in order to liberate their sexualities. This is why Chloë Taylor sees the repressive hypothesis as a teleological attitude because it expresses “the idea of the sexually liberated society toward which we are striving”, “a society of free love in which we can express our sexuality both in acts and words, without the baggage of Christian morality and Victorian prudishness.”³⁷ Foucault challenges this teleological view of sexual liberation in *The History of Sexuality*, because for him sexuality is socially and culturally constituted within shifting forms of power-knowledge relations: sexual liberation movements, according to him, are a form of exchanging one kind of control for another. In an interview in 1977, titled *Body/Power*, he says that individuals in sexual liberation are controlled by

³² Ibid., 148.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 3.

³⁵ Cressida Heyes, “Subjectivity and Power” in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (UK: Acumen, 2011), 164.

³⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 3.

³⁷ Chloë Taylor, *Foucault’s History of Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 12.

An economic (and also perhaps ideological) exploitation of eroticization, from un-tan products to pornographic films. Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation.³⁸

The repressive hypothesis assumes that in the Western societies of the seventeenth century, there existed a series of prohibitions that has regulated individuals and their sexualities. According to the hypothesis, the only kind of sex that was permitted was between heterosexual married couples and any forms of sexual acts outside of marital relations have been subject to prohibition, sin and illegality. The central aim of this regulation was to confine and move sexuality into the home and absorb it into the function of procreation. According to the repressive hypothesis, the restriction of sex has created a compulsory relationship between the privacy of the home and procreative couples. In one sense, one is allowed to have marital sex leading to the expectation of procreation, whose lack would taint sexual behavior as being abnormal.

Foucault associates the repressive hypothesis with the writings of Freudo-Marxist authors such as German psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich and social philosopher Herbert Marcuse who were very influential faces in the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. From Freud's point of view, "the essence of repression lies in turning something away and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious".³⁹ For Freud, unpleasant ideas through censors are hidden from our conscious in order to ensure that they are dismissed to the corner of our unconscious. In other words, some mental contents are denied and hidden from access to conscious thought.⁴⁰ This is what Freud calls repression; psychic repression is cured only through talk about one's repressed feelings between patient and psychoanalyst. Psychoanalysis tries to deal with psychological repression in order to control patients' sexual repression rather than simply repress their *libido*. Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* argues that sexual repression is necessary for civilization. For him, a non-repressive civilization is impossible because human nature requires coercive law in order to control aggressive and destructive

³⁸ Michel Foucault, "Body/Power" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. C. Gordon, (New York: Pantheon Book, 1980), 59.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Repression. Standard Edition, vol. XIV* (London: Hogarth, 1915), 57.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

impulses.⁴¹ Freud says that sexuality must be controlled and sublimated into a form of energy needed for work.⁴²

However, Freudo-Marxists, like Marcuse and Reich, who have tried to synthesize Freud's theory of sexual repression with Marxist principles, disagrees with Freud's psychic conceptualization of repression. They see repression as social repression requiring not just speaking but a revolution to break the laws in order to have "a whole new economy in the mechanism of power."⁴³ To counter Freud, Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* claims that instinctual liberation would not only avoid chaos and disorder but would actually form a *libidinal* order that brings the enhancement of human life and non-repressed civilization.⁴⁴ In *Sexual Revolution*, Reich, by drawing on Marxism and Freudian principles, argues that a social revolution is needed to eliminate social and sexual repression. Reich writes that:

It is correct that, objectively and from the viewpoint of class, the sexual crisis is a manifestation of the conflict between capitalist decline and revolutionary ascendancy. But it is also correct that it expresses the contradiction between sexual needs and mechanistic society [...]. Objectively, the sexual crisis is a phenomenon of class distinctions; but how is it represented subjectively? What does it mean: a new proletarian morality? Capitalist class morality is *opposed* to sexuality, i.e., it creates the contradiction and the resulting misery. The revolutionary movement eliminates this contradiction by its ideological endorsement of sexual gratification, which is then strengthened by laws and a new ordering of sexual life. Thus, capitalism and sexual suppression go together as do revolutionary "morality" and sexual gratification.⁴⁵

Both Reich and Marcuse reject Freud's argument that sexual repression is needed for society, but Marcuse also rejects the way Reich rejects Freud's argument in terms of the broader scope Reich devotes for getting rid of repression through revolution. Marcuse argues that Reich's notion of sexual repression remains as an undifferentiated constant that requires liberation. Marcuse

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1990), 110.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, "Analysis terminable and interminable" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 227.

⁴³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 5.

⁴⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 46.

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1945), 8.

argues that “Reich neglects the historical dynamic nature of sex instincts and of their fusion with the destructive impulses”.⁴⁶ Reich, according to Marcuse,

Rejects Freud’s hypothesis of the death instinct and the whole dimension reveal depth dimension revealed in Freud’s late metapsychology. Consequently, sexual liberation *per se* becomes for Reich a panacea for individual and social ills. The problem of sublimation is minimized; no essential distinction is made between repressive and non-repressive sublimation, and progress in freedom appears as a mere release of sexuality.⁴⁷

Marcuse seems to be more careful in handling the notion of sexual repression. He understands repression not only in Freud’s sense but also as “oppression”. He writes that “repression and repressive are used in the non-technical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, and suppression.”⁴⁸ In contrast to Reich and instead of bolstering repression/oppression through revolution, Marcuse psychoanalytically critiques repression/oppression both in an individual and a societal level.⁴⁹

Foucault does not deny that Freud’s psychoanalysis and his conceptualization of repression is normalizing and politically conservative,⁵⁰ but he directs his critique toward those who criticize Freud for his conservative position and see themselves engaged in the project of anti-normalization and political liberalism by adapting the repressive hypothesis. For Foucault, Marcuse and Reich are the main representatives of repressive hypothesis. Foucault is concerned with refuting their Freud-Marxist ideas about power and their psychoanalytic understanding of sex, because he thinks their theories are involved in a misunderstanding of how power works. In the already quoted interview titled, “*Body/Power*” Foucault gives a remark on the problem of power as a negative and a repressive force.⁵¹ He does not deny that power often operates negatively—in the forms of censorship, exclusion, and repression—but what he argues is the

⁴⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 239.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁹ Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the ‘Confession Animal’* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 156.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 5.

⁵¹ See the paragraph 2.1 Power. Foucault’s thesis on power is presented for the first time in the volume *The Will to the Knowledge*. But in *The Will to the Knowledge*, Foucault refers only to Freud and Reich and not Marcuse.

tendentious and one-sided nature of interpretation of power in Freudo-Marxism and specifically in Marcuse's writings. Foucault also criticizes Marxism because of its "tendency to occlude" the operation of power acting upon body in favor of "consciousness" and "ideology".⁵² He says:

I would also distinguish myself from para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role—because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorships, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an ensemble of military and educational disciplines. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it become possible.⁵³

To counter Freudo-Marxism and its anti-repression and sexual liberation approach, in the *Will to Knowledge*, Foucault argues that Reich's critiques of sexual repression has "always unfolded within the deployment [*dispositif*]⁵⁴ of sexuality, and not outside or against it".⁵⁵ Thus:

The fact that so many things were able to change in the sexual behavior of Western societies without any of the promises or political conditions predicted by Reich being realized is sufficient proof that this whole sexual "revolution" this whole "antirepressive" struggle, represented nothing more, but nothing less—and its importance is undeniable—than a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality.⁵⁶

Against the repressive hypothesis, Foucault criticizes the "idea that power created sexuality as a device to say no to sex." Instead, he postulates "the idea of sex as internal to the apparatus [*dispositif*] of sexuality, and the consequent idea that what must be found at the root of that apparatus [*dispositif*] is not the rejection of sex, but a positive economy of the body and of

⁵² Foucault, "Body/Power" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 59.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See the paragraph 2.2 *Dispositif*.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 131.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

pleasure.”⁵⁷ Foucault argues that “sexuality must not be thought as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check”, but rather sexuality should be considered as:

a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasure, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.⁵⁸

Reflecting on this conceptualization of sexuality, Foucault situates both psychoanalysts and revolutionary theorists, who attempt to release “the truth of sex” through “quasi-scientific methods” as well as overthrowing the repressive capitalist system, within a general deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality. Foucault sees psychoanalysis in its Freudo-Marxism form as a form of disciplinary power⁵⁹. In the Freudo-Marxist psychoanalysis, patients are convinced that they are sexually repressed and that sexuality is identity. Moreover, patients are convinced that their sexual desire should be liberated through psychotherapy rather than bolstering its repression. What the Freudo-Marxist psychoanalysts actually do is that under the alluring guise of sexual freedom, they not only—through positing repression—place subjects in a relation of disciplinary power but also never question the notion that sex is identity and destiny.⁶⁰ Far from concealing, silencing or repressing sex, for Foucault, in the modern Western societies to which psychoanalysis belongs, sex “had to be put into words.”⁶¹ But more importantly, for him is:

The multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the fields of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.⁶²

Foucault argues that power essentially and functionally is *productive*, and its repression and prohibition are only one part of it. He claims that since the beginning of the eighteenth century in Western societies, there has been a tendency toward the proliferation of sexual discourses that

⁵⁷ Foucault, “The History of Sexuality” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 190.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 105-106.

⁵⁹ See the paragraph 2.1 Power

⁶⁰ Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the ‘Confession Animal’*.158.

⁶¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

emerged from “political, economic, and technical incitements to talk about sex”.⁶³ According to him, this proliferation of discourse on sex has produced and created sexuality “in the form of analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification of quantitative or causal studies”⁶⁴ so that talk about “sex increasingly became an object of administration, management and government”.⁶⁵ From this point, in the eighteenth century, a form in which sex was considered as an “object of administration and management” was that of the government of the population.⁶⁶ This new form of government became possible through the employment of statistical methods and techniques of analysis for understating and regulating various dimensions of the population, such as “the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration.”⁶⁷

On this account, Foucault says that in Western societies, people’s lives, from the eighteenth century to the present time, are saturated by sex because they talk and think about sex constantly, and they categorize their sexualities and see sex as a health and scientific issue. Today sex is an omnipresent theme. The trace of sex can be seen in television and advertising; pornography occupies the majority of the internet; there is sex education for adolescents, and sexologists are continually invited in radio and talk show programs.⁶⁸ In short, instead of depicting sex as an object of silence, there has been the insistence by scientific faces on the importance of opening a discourse about sex. With so much evidence about the omnipresence of sex, Foucault also argues that the repressive hypothesis has such staying power because “a solemn historical and political guarantee protects it.”⁶⁹ One of the reasons to uphold the repressive hypothesis, according to Foucault, is the correspondence of the dawn of sexual repression at the beginning of the seventeenth century with the rise of capitalism.⁷⁰ According to the repressive hypothesis, in repressive modern societies, the only form of sex that was permitted was between heterosexual married couples for the sake of reproduction, especially for the proletariat, that corresponded to the constituting of labor forces.⁷¹ This understanding of the repressive hypothesis reverberates Marxism in terms of class and

⁶³ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁵ Smart, *Michel Foucault*, 91.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 140.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Foucault’s History of Sexuality*, 17.

⁶⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 114.

economic issues. For Foucault, this Marxist interpretation of sexual repression is problematic⁷² because he believes that power is not simply directed from the above to those below; but rather it circulates; in other words, the relation between sex and power is not restricted merely to the instances of prohibitions. Moreover; Foucault observes, in contrast to Marcuse, “the working classes managed for a long time to escape the deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality”⁷³ and it was the bourgeoisies that submitted themselves, their children and wives to psychiatric and pedagogical forms of disciplinary power⁷⁴ because they thought that their own sex was “something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs.”⁷⁵ Therefore, Foucault asserts that “sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois, and that it induces specific class effects in its successive shifts and transpositions.”⁷⁶

Another reason that upholds the repressive hypothesis is what Foucault calls “the speaker’s benefit.”⁷⁷ Once we are speaking about sex under the influence of this hypothesis, we assume that sex is something condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence. Thus, we feel that we are engaged in a serious and emancipatory political task for the transgression of established laws.⁷⁸ According to Foucault, a person who is speaking about sex with this anti-repressive rhetoric

Somehow anticipates the coming freedom. This explains the solemnity with which one speaks of sex nowadays. When they had to allude to it, the first demographers and psychiatrists of the nineteenth century thought it advisable to excuse themselves for asking their readers to dwell on matters so trivial and base. But for decades now, we have found it difficult to speak on the subject without striking a different pose: we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive, and we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose day will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making.⁷⁹

⁷² Ibid., 6.

⁷³ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 121-124

⁷⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

What Foucault argues is that instead of thinking about the relation between sex and power as fundamentally negative, repressive, and silent, we need to know that the power and sexual relationship is much more complicated. According to Foucault, what is more remarkable is that there has been a proliferation of discourses about sex that led to productive effects. Instead of denying or affirming the issue of prohibition, Foucault says that an overemphasis has been placed on it in Western history of sexuality. For him, sexuality is not simply a “great central mechanism,” including negative elements—“defenses”, “censorships,” and “denials”—to repress sexuality. Instead, it is a question of the transformation of sex into the discourse.⁸⁰ Consequently; Foucault is not interested in giving an answer to the question, “why are we repressed?”, but rather his aim is to explore: “why sexuality has been so widely discussed, and what has been said about it?”, “what were the effects of power generated by what was said?”, “what are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasure that were invested by them?”, “what knowledge was formed as a result of this linkage?” In other words, for Foucault, what is at issue is to examine who, and through what positions and viewpoints, talks about sex and which institutions incite this discussion of sex. He is also concerned with the forms of power and the channels they take, the discourses they privilege, the paths they should pass in order to control and dominate everyday forms of pleasure of individuals; in short, he is interested in the “polymorphous techniques of power”.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 10-11.

1.2. Confession

By criticizing the repressive hypothesis and Freudo-Marxist conceptualization of power, which is productive, Foucault argues that despite many instances of sexual censorship and prohibition over the past centuries, modern Western societies are characterized not by negation and silence or prohibition of discourses about sex but by the proliferation of new practices and discourses about sex and their association with the system of producing truth. In describing the physicians' attitudes of the nineteenth century toward sex in the *Will to Knowledge*, Foucault writes that:

The important thing, in this affair, is not that these men shut their eyes or stopped their ears, or that they were mistaken; it is rather that they constructed around and apropos of sex an immense apparatus for producing truth, even if this truth was to be masked at the last moment. The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable: in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth.⁸²

To trace back the origin of these institutional discourses of sex, Foucault considers a historical account of the relationship between sex and truth. According to Foucault, there have been two historical "procedures" to produce the truth of sex. On the one hand, mostly in ancient Oriental societies such as China, Japan, India, and Arab-Muslim societies or even in Rome, producing the truth of sex was made possible through what Foucault calls *ars erotica*. In the *ars erotica* the truth of sex is drawn from pleasure itself; "understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden" but rather in relation to itself and it is evaluated in terms of "its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberation in the body and the soul." Moreover, the knowledge of the *ars erotica* must be "deflected back into the sexual practice itself, in order to shape it as though from within and amplify its effects."⁸³ The knowledge which is formed in *ars erotica* should remain a secret because its secrecy holds its effectiveness and only the master who holds this

⁸² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 56.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 57.

knowledge can transmit it “in an esoteric manner and as the culmination of an initiation in which he guides the discipline’s progress with unfailing skill and severity.”

On the other hand and in contrast to *ars erotica* and Oriental societies, for centuries in modern Western societies, there has been a procedure for telling the truth of sex that Foucault calls *scientia sexualis* or sex knowledge. This procedure is not driven from the pleasure itself and the secrecy that revolves around its knowledge, but rather it is interwoven with a form of power-knowledge relations derived from the examination, consultation, and research for knowledge about sex.⁸⁴ Later, however, in an interview in 1983, Foucault prefers to draw back the characteristics of ancient Western sexual practices as *ars erotica*,

One of the numerous points where I was wrong in that book was what I said about *ars erotica*. I should have opposed our science of sex to a contrasting practice in our own culture. The Greeks and Romans did not have any *ars erotica* to be compared with the Chinese *ars erotica* (or at least it was not something very important in their culture). They had a *tekhne tou biou* in which the economy of pleasure played a very large role. In this “art of life” the notion of exercising a perfect mastery over oneself soon became the main issue. And the Christian hermeneutics of the self-constituted a new elaboration of this *tekhne*.⁸⁵

Despite abandoning his division between the Oriental *ars erotica* and the Western *scientia sexualis*, Foucault continues to uphold his idea about Western civilization and its development of procedures over centuries for telling the truth of sex.⁸⁶ Debating over *scientia sexualis*, Foucault does not propose that Western societies have uniquely developed the knowledge of sex, and other cultures do not have knowledge about sex. All cultures have their knowledge about sex, but what Foucault argues is indeed the overproduction of knowledge of sex in the West which is constituted in scientific terms and emerged in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in the field of medicine, pedagogy, economy, and politics.⁸⁷ At the center of this *scientia sexualita*, there was the practice of ‘confession’ that traced back to the first centuries of Christianity.⁸⁸ Foucault

⁸⁴ Ibid., 57-71.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics”, in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. The essential work of Michel Foucault. 1954-1984*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, New press: 1997) 259.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 58.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 58.

was eager to follow a “thread through which so many centuries have linked sex” and the search for “the truth in Western societies”.⁸⁹ In an interview in 1983 titled *Critical Theory/Intellectual History*, he says:

How is it that in a society like ours, sexuality is not simply a means of reproducing the species, the family and the individual? Not simply a means to obtain pleasure and enjoyment? How has sexuality come to be considered the privileged place where our deepest "truth" is read and expressed? For that is the essential fact: since Christianity, the Western world has never ceased saying: "to know who you are, know what your sexuality is". Sex has always been the forum where both the future of our species and our "truth" as human subjects is decided. Confession, the examination of the conscience, all the insistence on the important secrets of the flesh, has not been simply a means of prohibiting sex or of repressing it as far as possible from consciousness, but was a means of placing sexuality at the heart of existence and of connecting salvation with the mastery of these obscure movements. In Christian societies, sex has been the central object of examination, surveillance, avowal and transformation into discourse.⁹⁰

In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault analyzes confession in the sense of genealogy. As I explained in paragraph 1.1, “The Repressive Hypothesis”, genealogy or what Nietzsche calls “effective history”, asserts that “what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.”⁹¹ In other words, genealogy “disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself.”⁹² In the case of confession, genealogy draws on “a field entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times”⁹³ in order to disturb the totalizing of histories and opens up spaces for transformations. To be more precise, as Chloë Taylor explains in *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault*, a genealogy of confession is “episodic and incomplete, but the episodes chosen will be selected not for their similitude with the present, but

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, “Critical Theory/Intellectual History” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interview and Other Writing, 1977-1984*, (first edit), ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (London: Routledge press, 1988), 110-111.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, 142-151.

⁹² Ibid., 145.

⁹³ Ibid., 139.

for the manners in which they put pressure on the assumption made about confession in the present.”⁹⁴ Thus, a genealogy of confession is “invested with the author’s concerns for the present, however, these are not a concern to preserve the present or to see it reflected in the past, but to show its contingency and its difference or absence in the other eras.”⁹⁵ Therefore; by drawing on genealogical historiography, Foucault asserts that confession has become a technique for producing truth only in Western culture.⁹⁶ He defines confession as a technique “to declare aloud and intelligibly the truth of oneself”⁹⁷ in the presence of another. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* Foucault describes the confession as:

A ritual of discourse where the subject who speaks corresponds with the subject of the statement it is also a ritual which unfolds in a relation of power, since one doesn’t confess without the presence, at least the virtual presence, of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the agency that requires the confession, imposes it, weighs it, and intervenes to judge, punish, pardon, console, reconcile.⁹⁸

Foucault continues by describing confession in two significant ways: as is a “ritual where truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistance it has had to surmount in order to be formulated” and as “a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrong, liberates him; and promises him salvation.”⁹⁹ Foucault traces back the origin of the religious confession in the Lateran Council in 1215, before Reformation in the early sixteenth century and Protestants’ division from the Catholic Church. After division, according to Foucault, there has been a split between methods of examination of conscience and pastoral direction between Catholics and Protestants. However, according to Foucault, we should

⁹⁴ Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the ‘Confession Animal’*, 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Christian confessional practices have continued into modernity. For example, due to globalization and the development of social media (Instagram and Facebook) confessional practices are today widely becoming part of our reality. In modern time, also confessional practices through social media contribute to the self in order to come into being. In the last paragraph, 4.3 *Hamjensgara/Gay’s Existence*, I will show how internet and social media function as confessional practices in the Iranian context and in terms of producing sexual identity categories.

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, “Subjectivity and Truth,” in *The Politics of Truth*, ed., Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 1997), 173.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 61.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 62.

not rule out a “certain parallelism” existing in both “Catholic and Protestant” procedures for analyzing conscience. In the seventeenth century, the Council of Trent made confession into a rule for every catholic.¹⁰⁰ Thus, confession turned into an ideal for every good Christian. The Christians were asked: “not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse.”¹⁰¹ By enforcing the practice of confession on the Christians and repeating it over time, confession became a habit that gained prominence in the Western and Christian societies in the Middle Ages. Confession, since then, due to “the codification of the sacrament of penance by the Lateran council in 1215, with the resulting development of confessional techniques, the declining importance of accusatory in criminal justice, [...] the setting up of tribunals of Inquisition”¹⁰² became one of the highly prominence Western techniques for producing truth with a widespread effect. It was not merely restricted to the Church rituals, but rather extended to a “central role in the civil and religious powers” so that it took the shape of procedure in jurisprudence for “criminal justice”, “the abandonment of the test of guilt” and “the development of methods of interrogation and inquest.”¹⁰³

Foucault argues that for a long time, “confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex.”¹⁰⁴ However, in addition to Protestantism and Reformation, he asserts that ‘eighteenth-century pedagogy’ and ‘nineteenth-century medicine’ caused the act of confessing to gradually be transformed in its ritualistic and exclusive localization and distributed to a numerous social relationships such as “children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists, delinquents and experts”.¹⁰⁵ Besides the extensive effects of confession on the juridical inquiries, scientists and doctors, by drawing on sexual confession, started to gather information about sex.¹⁰⁶ At the end of the eighteenth century, sex became a concern of the state—“a matter that required” “a social body as a whole” and “its individuals” who “place themselves under surveillance” of authorities because they felt that sex should be monitored for the sake of having wholesome individuals with a compatible society due to the fact that sexual diseases

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰² Ibid., 58.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 24.

can engender sick individuals resulting in the degeneration of the population and the threat of the entire fabric of society.¹⁰⁷ For this purpose, “the nineteenth-century psychiatrists”¹⁰⁸ found confession to be a source of data, depending largely on the confession of others.

Foucault indicates how, in the nineteenth century in modern Western societies, sexual confession has been scientifically developed into five methods to justify the medical interrogations into the sexual lives of patients.¹⁰⁹ First, confession through the incitement of discourse (the examination, the interrogation of the personal history, the recollection of memory, and the questionnaire) became clinically codified as a set of scientific procedures in the nineteenth century. Second, the medical interrogation into the sexual lives of people was justified through “the postulate of a general and diffuse causality”¹¹⁰ in the nineteenth century and in modern Western society. As Foucault writes, “having to tell everything, being able to pose questions about everything, found their [doctors] justification in the principle that endowed sex with an inexhaustible and polymorphous causal power.”¹¹¹ The diffuse causal power in one’s sexual behavior can be a result of an “accident or a deviation, a deficit or an excess.”¹¹² Foucault argues that, “from bad habits of children to the apoplexies of old people, nervous maladies, and the degenerations of the race, the medicine of that era wove an entire network of sexual causality to explain them.”¹¹³ For instance, in the nineteenth century, some Western sexual scientists and doctors warned parents that children’s masturbation leads to homosexuality and the population’s degeneration. As Foucault writes:

Educators and doctors combatted children’s onanism like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated. What this actually entailed, throughout this whole secular campaign that mobilized the adult world around the sex of children, was using these tenuous pleasure as prop, constituting them as secret (that is, forcing them into hiding so as to make possible their discovery), tracing them back to their source, tracking them from their origins to their effects, searching out everything that might cause them or simply enable them to exist. Wherever there was a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 161.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 64.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 65.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

chance they might appear, devices of surveillance were installed; traps were laid for compelling admissions; inexhaustible and corrective discourses were imposed; parents and teachers were alerted [...] they were kept in readiness in the face of this recurrent danger; their conduct [...] was prescribed and their pedagogy recodified; an entire medico-sexual regime took hold of the family milieu.¹¹⁴

In short, maintaining and protecting the health of the population was a justification for inquisitiveness on behalf of doctors and sexual scientists. Third, extracting the truth of sex through confession techniques was a requirement, not solely because it was difficult to tell, but also because sexuality itself was conceived intrinsically as latent. In one sense, “the ways of sex were obscure; it was elusive by nature; its energy and its mechanism escaped observation, and its causal power was partly clandestine.”¹¹⁵ Fourth, regarding the latent and complex nature of sex, producing the truth had to pass through a scientifically validated procedure. Thus, the interpretation of confession required a qualified person and expertise.¹¹⁶ Finally, after scientific extraction of the truth of sex by doctors, confession and “its effects were recodified as therapeutic operations”, and sexuality was recodified and classified as the issue of either normal or pathological and it was no longer simply “the notion of error or sin, excess or transgression.”¹¹⁷

For the first time in nineteenth-century Europe, “a characteristic sexual morbidity was defined” through which “sex appeared as an extremely unstable pathological field: a surface of repercussion for other ailments, but also the focus of a specific nosography, that of instincts, tendencies, images, pleasure, and conduct.”¹¹⁸ Thus, for almost one hundred and fifty years, a complex machinery has been in process for producing true discourse about sex.¹¹⁹ Foucault says that there has been an overproduction on the discourses of sex throughout modern Western societies. The effects of this overproduction of discourses turned sexuality into a problematic issue in need of interpretation and medicalization. Regarding the nineteenth-century assumption of Western scientists that considered children’s masturbation as a serious threat to the population, there have been attempts to convince societies about the importance of dangers of sex. Thus,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 66.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 68.

Foucault argues that discourses about sex not only produce normalizations but also produce perversions. In short, the progress in Human Sciences and the incitement to discourse construct a site for the exercise of power that in modernity resulted in the increasing social control and surveillance over individuals' bodies and their sexuality, both of which are sites for producing subjectivity. The technology of the confession is a set of procedures by which individuals are incited to produce the truth about inner selves and their. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the essential features of this sexuality are not totally "distorted by ideology or by a misunderstanding caused by taboos", but rather they functionally corresponded to a discourse that must produce its truth.¹²⁰ Consequently, for Foucault, sexuality in modern Western societies is situated at an intersection of a "technique of confession" and "scientific discursivity" where "certain major mechanisms had to be found for adapting them to one another (the listening technique, the postulate of causality, the principle of latency, the rule of interpretation, the imperative of medicalization)."¹²¹ Therefore, sexuality at the point of this intersection was defined as:

Being "by nature": a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing intervention; a field of meanings to decipher; the site of processes concealed by specific mechanisms; a focus of indefinite casual relations; and an obscure speech (parole) that had to be ferreted out and listened to.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

2. A New Analytic of Power and Resistance

2.1 Power

As explained in paragraph 1.1, “The Repressive Hypothesis”, Foucault criticizes traditional historiography, preferring instead a genealogical approach. According to him, in contrast to the traditional historians, genealogists “find that there is something altogether different behind things: not a tieless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence.”¹²³ Foucault is skeptical about the notion of historical truth because, for him, “truth, and its original reign, has had a history within history from which we are barely emerging.”¹²⁴ Through genealogy, Foucault makes the point that there is no continuity from the past to the present or from the present to the future. Genealogy is not the deduction of the past from the present. Genealogy does not “pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity ... its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present.”¹²⁵ Instead, genealogy “disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent within itself.”¹²⁶

Regarding the concept of power in Foucault’s works, one might say that if Foucault’s genealogy, in general, can be read as a critique of the transcendentalist tendencies of the traditional history of ideas, Foucault’s genealogy of power, in particular, can be read as a critique of traditional conceptualization of power as an exclusively political power possessed by some who exercise it to the detriment of others. In direct “contrast to the Enlightenment’s idea that truth and knowledge stand outside power and political and social relations, Foucault insists that truth and knowledge” are functions of power, produced by individuals occupying specific social positions.¹²⁷ In a 1977 interview, in contrast to traditional historiography, Foucault says that “truth is not outside power ... Truth is a thing of this world ... Each society has its regime of truth, ... truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution,

¹²³ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, 78.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 79-80.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹²⁷ Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21.

circulation, and operation of statements.”¹²⁸ Thus, Foucault’s genealogy indicates that the relation between power and “truth is circular; truth is produced and sustained by power, and in turn, truth produces and extends the effects of power”.¹²⁹ He also argues that “power produces knowledge ... power and knowledge directly imply one another ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”¹³⁰

Foucault’s genealogy of power criticizes traditional models of power wherein power is conceived of as limitation, repression and prohibition¹³¹. He claims that the repressive hypothesis in Freudo-Marxism is exactly drawn from this negative conception of power. He notes that in contrast to the Freudo-Marxist repressive hypothesis that assumes a pre-existing desire held down by repression, a different hypothesis (formulated by Lacan even though Foucault does not mention his name) takes law and regulations to be constitutive of “both desire and the lack on which it is predicated.”¹³² However, Foucault argues that repression and law are equivalent notions, relying on a common negative representation of power as prohibition and censorship. He calls these traditional models of power the ‘juridico-philosophical’ or ‘sovereign’ models of power, which can take different forms. For instance, the traditional liberal or juridical point of view considers power as a natural right that individuals possess and should give up to the sovereign state in a contractual exchange for peace. Instead Marxists, by focusing on class conflict and production, treat power as a political-economic apparatus of oppression, and in Hegel and Freud’s theory, power is represented as the repression of the individual nature or instinct for the sake of some higher reality.¹³³

Foucault outlines five main characteristics that these models have in common: (1) The negative relation: power is conceived as various kinds of negative relations. “Where sex and pleasure are concerned”, this power refuses, denies, and excludes them and “can do nothing but

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York, Pantheon Books: 1984), 72-74.

¹²⁹ McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, 21.

¹³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 27.

¹³¹ Larry Shiner, “Reading Foucault: Anti-Method and the Genealogy of Power-Knowledge”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1982): 382-398.

¹³² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 81.

¹³³ Shiner, “Reading Foucault: Anti-Method and the Genealogy of Power-Knowledge”, 382-398.

say no to them”. (2) The insistence on the rule: firstly, power is always thought of as a law, dictating its rule. For instance, power places sex in the binary of licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, “power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law.”¹³⁴ (3) the cycle of prohibition: by considering power as a form of negative relation, a combination of law and negativity, one might say that power deploys “nothing more than a law of prohibition with its objective that sex renounce itself” and its instrument which is “the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than suppression of sex.” (4) The logic of censorship: censorship, according to Foucault, is thought to take three distinct forms: affirming that something is banned, preventing speech about a thing, and denying that it exists. The “illicit”, the “inexpressible” and the “inexistence” are seen as connected in “such a way that each is at the same time the principle and the effect of the others.” The logic of censorship, indeed, dictates that “what is inexistent has no right to show itself, even in the order of speech where its inexistence is declared; and that which one must keep silent about banished from reality as the thing that is tabooed above all else.”(5) The uniformity of the apparatus (*dispositif*): power is conceived as operating in the same way at all levels and at all times. Power acts in “uniform and comprehensive manner” throughout its structure and “according to the simple and endlessly reproduced mechanisms of law, taboo, and censorship: from state to family, from prince to father, from the tribunal to the small change of everyday punishments ... one finds a general form of power, varying in scale alone.”¹³⁵

In other words, these traditional interpretation models, according to Foucault, understand power in terms of limitations—prohibiting certain behaviors by enforcement of laws imposed to limit one’s access to the forbidden things and ideas. Foucault says that this negative conception of power is inadequate for understanding the sophisticated forms of power in modernity. And he proposes a more complex understanding of power. Understanding Foucault’s account of power is probably the first step to understand his broader philosophico-political project. Reflections on power are made in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *The Will to Knowledge* (1976), and in his lectures at the Collège de France in the same period such as *Society Must be Defended* (1977-78), *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-78), *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1977-78) and also in many articles,

¹³⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 83.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

studies, and interviews of the 1970s-1980s. Many of his works on power, indeed, have to do with the shifting from the traditional understanding of power to a new understanding of power in terms of ‘disciplinary power’ and ‘biopolitics’.

For example, Foucault represents two distinct penal systems at the beginning pages of *Discipline and Punish*, separated by eighty years interval. At first, Foucault points out the *Gazette d’Amsterdam*’s¹³⁶ reports on torture and public execution of Robert-François Damiens¹³⁷ in 1757, and then he immediately refers to the timetable of days of the residents in “the House of Young Prisoners in Paris” in 1838. By drawing on these two documents, Foucault highlights the importance of the birth of prison for the emergence of the power mechanism of discipline. He indicates the transformation of punishment from killing or maiming—as the juridico-legal form of punishment in medieval and early modern societies in “which the force of sovereign is imposed upon a body”—to the technology of power as a disciplinary and political tactic to domesticate behaviors.¹³⁸ Through argument on the birth of the prison, Foucault attempts to show the importance of a new understating of power, which is productive and omnipresent. He refers to the concept of panopticism, or panoptic view, which is an architectural concept regarding the construction of prisons. It is a circular arrangement of prison cells and at the center of this circle is a tower by which a guard, who is stationed there, is able to observe and control the inmates while they are not able to see whether the tower’s guard is watching them. The panopticon, therefore, serves as a part of disciplinary power, as it provides a feeling of being constantly watched by an omnipresent watchful eye.¹³⁹

In the last lecture of *Society Must be Defended*, as well as the last chapter of *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault states that the traditional “theory of sovereignty” considers the “right of life and death” as the basic attributes of society.¹⁴⁰ The right of life and death, according to Foucault, means that a sovereign has absolute power over the life and the death of his subjects. In other words, in a sovereignty system, the subject’s right of life and death is a result of the will of the

¹³⁶ One of the most important European newspaper of the Enlightenment period.

¹³⁷ A French domestic servant who attempted to assassinate King Louis XV in 1757. He was the last person to be executed in France by the traditional form of death penalty.

¹³⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* (New York: Picador 2003), 237.

sovereign. As Foucault writes, “the right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live.”¹⁴¹ Foucault illustrates that this juridical form of power was connected to a historical type of society (middle age society) wherein power was exercised as a subtraction mechanism, “a right to appropriate a portion of the wealth, a tax of products, goods and services, labor and blood, levied on the subjects.”¹⁴² Foucault points to public execution, torture and slavery¹⁴³ as examples of sovereign power’s right over life, because they are operated through the right of seizure and the threat of violence to grab time, bodies and ultimately life itself.¹⁴⁴ Foucault writes that:

The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the ‘power of life and death’ was in reality the right to take or let live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword.¹⁴⁵

The model of sovereign power in its more characteristic modern form is theorized in the writings of the seventeenth-century English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In Hobbes’s account of power, “laws are of no power to protect them [people] without a sword in the hands of a man, or men, to cause those laws to be put in execution.”¹⁴⁶ He argues that:

For seeing there is no Commonwealth in the world wherein there be rules enough set down for the regulating of all the actions and words of men (as being a thing impossible): it followeth necessarily that in all kinds of actions, by the laws pretermitted, men have the liberty of doing what their own reasons shall suggest for the most profitable to themselves.¹⁴⁷

Thus, Hobbes claims that even in sovereign systems, there are not enough rules to regulate all aspects of people’s lives; as a consequence, freedom exists to some extent because “if we take liberty in the proper sense, for corporal liberty; that is to say, freedom from chains and prison, it were very absurd for men to clamour as they do for the liberty they so manifestly enjoy.”¹⁴⁸ In other

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁴² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 136.

¹⁴³ Foucault, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’, 237.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 136.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Hobbes. *The Leviathan*. (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 130.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

words, Hobbes argues that it is absurd to imagine that there is a mechanism of power in sovereign systems to dictate in detail how subjects must behave in every single aspect of life like desire, housing, children education, and diet; thus, subjects in sovereign power are also free and have corporal liberty. He elaborates more that:

The liberty of a subject, lieth therefore only in those things, which in regulating their actions, the sovereign hath pretermitted: such as is the liberty to buy, and sell, and otherwise contract with one another, to choose their own abode, their own diet, their own trade of life, and institute their children as they themselves think fit, the like.¹⁴⁹

While Hobbes claims that subjects are free in any commonwealth as far as the corporal liberty is considered, and those corporal aspects of life are outside of interests of the sovereign, Foucault argues that those aspects of life are exactly the loci of focus in modern forms of power. Since the classical age (XVII century) in the West, according to Foucault, sovereignty has ceased to operate in the form theorized by Hobbes. Political power has undergone “a very profound transformation of mechanism” and this change has led it to operate differently. “Deduction has tended to be no longer the main form of power”: it has not gone away completely, but it has become one element among others, and has been for the most part replaced by a power “working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it”. In one sense, instead of destroying, deducting and submitting, power has shifted into a productive form—a form of power “bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them.”¹⁵⁰

In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault says that although power has undergone these transformations—from the right of the sovereign to the right of social body—more people have been killed in bloody wars since the nineteenth century when many cities were bombed, and millions of people died from starvation. Foucault explains that in contemporary times war should be conceived “no longer in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital.” According to Foucault, the production of new technologies was crucial to this change in the function of power. As Foucault writes:

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality vol. 1*, 136.

The principle underlying the tactics of battle—that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living—has become the principle that defines the strategy of states. But the existence in the question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the biological existence of a population. If genocide is indeed the dream of modern power, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population.¹⁵¹

Foucault also asks: how is it possible that power exercises its “highest prerogatives by putting people to death when”¹⁵² the main role of it, in contemporary times, is to produce forces and put them in order? For such a power, Foucault says, ‘capital punishment’ was at the same time a ‘scandal and a contradiction’. Thus, capital punishment “could not be maintained except by invoking less the enormity of the crime and the safeguard of society. One had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others.”¹⁵³ In one sense, in order to maintain people’s social and biological survival conditions, the state kills those who can be dangerous to those conditions and not only through wholesale slaughters but rather by ‘disallowing’ life to the point of death. Foucault says:

Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself: it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.¹⁵⁴

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Foucault says, ‘this power over life’ was constituted around two main poles. Foucault calls the first pole ‘anatomy-politics’ or simply as ‘discipline’. Disciplinary power operates at the level of single institutions—educational (schools and colleges), medical (psychiatric hospitals), and punitive (prisons) institutions—and work through tactics such as surveillance, training, and detention. This power concerns each individual in society and produces obeying and docile bodies through normalization operations. In other words, disciplinary power works at the micro-level, and its main function is to regulate and produce

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 138.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 142.

single subjectivities through their subjugations. Instead, on the second pole, Foucault places a power that concerns humans not as individuals but as a species. This power over life or what Foucault calls biopower is a macro-level technology and works through the state's tactics and what Foucault calls governmentality. The biopolitics of population administrates the population as a whole by regulating “the propagation, births and morality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all of the conditions that can cause these to vary.”¹⁵⁵ In fact, Foucault argues that this power over life emphasizes the preservation of health and prevention of diseases as can be seen in the following quotation:

It is the body of society, which became the new principle [of biopolitics] in the nineteenth century. It is this social body, which needs to be protected, in a quasi-medical sense. In place of the rituals that served to restore the corporeal integrity of the monarch, remedies and therapeutic devices are employed such as the segregation of the sick, the monitoring of contagions, the exclusion of delinquents. The elimination of hostile elements by the *supplice* (public torture and execution) is thus replaced by the method of asepsis-criminology, eugenics and the quarantining of “degenerates”.¹⁵⁶

For Foucault, therefore, the concern of a biopolitical state is to produce “healthy and productive citizens”.¹⁵⁷ Its aim is to safeguard and enhance the health of the individual’s body in order to foster the health of the population. This means that, as argued by Foucault, in modernity “biological existence” has come to be “reflected in political existence”. In other words, since the nineteenth century, individuals as living beings have become politicalized beings through the state’s political tactics; the state’s politics have turned into a biopolitical state. Moreover, as Foucault shows in the quote above, the biopolitical state segregates and preserves productive bodies from those that can be a threat to the population's health. In one sense, biopolitics in modern states “move[s] to manage the population through strategies of fostering respectable and productive bodies while divesting in degenerate abject bodies a process of making live and letting die”¹⁵⁸. This process serves two purposes: firstly, to improve the general life of the whole population, and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 139.

¹⁵⁶ Foucault, “*Body/Power*”, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Jijian Voronka, “Slow Death through Evidence-Based Research” in *Madness, Violence, and Power: A Critical Collection*, eds., Andrea Daley, Lucy Costa, and Peter Beresford (Toronto Buffalo London: Toronto University Press), 82.

secondly, to maximize the potential productivity of a population in order to secure “the highest profit for the biopolitical nation-state”.¹⁵⁹

In *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault associates biopolitics with the development of scientific discourses on sexuality in the nineteenth century, such as medicine, psychiatry, psychology, biology, etc. He says, “it was a time when the most singular pleasures were called upon to pronounce a discourse of truth concerning themselves, a discourse which had to model itself after that which spoke, not of sin and salvation, but of bodies and life processes—the discourse of science”¹⁶⁰. The topic of sex began to take hold as the center of these discourses, and through them, according to Foucault, individuals were incited to talk about themselves and their sexual secrets in order to uncover the truth about themselves in relation to sex. Foucault argues that this incitement to talk about sex and the production of discourses about sexuality are associated with the constitution of subjectivities and identities and the production of new categories of persons through the productivity of power-knowledge operations. Foucault identified four strategies of biopolitical productivity in order to show how in the nineteenth century in the West, individuals were modeled as sexual beings. Firstly, power operations produced a medical-sexual regime with the aim of exploring family and children’s sexuality. Secondly, the increased scrutiny and control of sex is a part of what Foucault calls “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” in the sense that power achieved direct contact with the body and began to influence its pleasure experience in many ways. Foucault here argues that the exercise of power through the medicalization of sexuality brought pleasure to doctors and patients during scrutiny, or in other words, “power anchors the pleasure that it came to dig out of hiding”. On the one hand, a doctor exercises power through exploring and extracting the patient’s sexual pleasures, and this exam gives the doctor a kind of pleasure. On the other hand, the doctor highlights the patient’s pleasures, and the patient enjoys being examined. Thirdly, the increased exercise of power over sexuality is accompanied by the normalization of one particular type of sexuality: the heterosexual conjugal couple. Fourthly, the productivity of power operations creates and categorizes “new specifications of individuals” (new categories of persons) according to sexual perversion.¹⁶¹ In sum, scientists developed a “will to knowledge”

¹⁵⁹ Jon Ingvar Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories: Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Palgrave Macmillan: Switzerland, 2019), 30.

¹⁶⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 64.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 41-46.

about sex in order to categorize and cure perversions. As Foucault writes, in the nineteenth century, “a clinical analysis was made of all the forms of anomalies by which it [sexual instinct] could be afflicted; it was assigned a role of normalization or pathologization with respect to all behavior; and finally, a corrective technology was sought for these anomalies.”¹⁶² Therefore, it was the beginning for the “setting apart of ‘unnatural’ as a specific dimension in the field of sexuality”—“to marry a close relative or practice sodomy, to seduce a nun or engage in sadism, to deceive one’s wife or violate cadavers, became things that were essentially different.”¹⁶³ Of course, as Foucault argues, these acts were not new, but rather what was new in the nineteenth century was defining “new rules for the game of power and pleasure”¹⁶⁴ and interpreting these acts as identities. Regarding homosexuality, Foucault claims that the psychological, psychiatric and medical notion of the homosexual emerged in 1870,—Foucault refers to Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal’s famous article “Contrary Sexual Sensation” in 1870 that can be considered as the notion of homosexuality’s date of birth—from the moment

it was characterized...less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny...the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.¹⁶⁵

Foucault argues that in the ancient civil codes, “sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them”. In contrast, the nineteenth-century homosexual became

A personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body

¹⁶² Ibid., 105.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 48.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 43.

because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as habitual sin than as a singular nature.”¹⁶⁶

In pre-modern Europe, sex with people of the same-sex (which was defined as sodomy) was considered as a moral failure and often a crime—because it violated the laws of nature and civil society. On the contrary, the modern homosexuality was understood as a matter of someone’s very nature and not anymore as a punishable act. At the same time, according to Foucault, in the scientific works of the nineteenth century, such as Heinrich Kaan’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Legal Study*, the perverse sexual acts, such as homosexuality, came to be seen as “constitutive anomalies, acquired derivations, infirmities or pathological processes”.¹⁶⁷ In other words, homosexuality was scientifically taxonomized as an abnormal form or illness of sexuality, needing treatments to be cured or normalized. For instance, Krafft-Ebing sees homosexuals as sex deviants and situates them in the domain of medicine because for him, not only are homosexuality and other non-productive forms of sexuality considered medical afflictions, but they are also dangerous for society because they are congenital conditions, heritable traits that can degenerate future generations.

Therefore, by focusing on Foucault’s critical analysis, we understand that sexuality in general and homosexuality, in particular, should not be thought of as a “kind of natural given, which power tries to hold in check”.¹⁶⁸ Instead, they should be conceived in a power-oriented network, a network in which “the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasure, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledge, and the strengthening of controls and resistance, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power”.¹⁶⁹ According to Foucault, it was the operation of this power-knowledge network or what Foucault calls *dispositif* that made possible the establishment of the modern notion of sex and sexuality. In his analysis, the disciplinary power of individual bodies and the biopolitics of population are “two forms of *dispositif* linking technologies of power that operate” through norms to subjugate population and individual bodies to “create conditions whereby individual and population are brought or bring themselves into

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 117.

¹⁶⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 105.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

conformity with particular standards”¹⁷⁰. However, in the *dispositif*, agency is always possible. It means that the subject is not only affected by power relations but to a certain extent through them, subject has the opportunity to resist such technologies of power. To formulate a form of emancipatory politics for resisting disciplines and biopower, Foucault goes back to Greco-Roman antiquity to propose ethical and aesthetic techniques of the self that are a kind of self-stylization for transforming oneself and changing one’s environment.

By reworking Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif* of sexuality, Joseph Massad argues that identification of homosexuality and gayness are modern products produced in the Western *dispositif* of sexuality and have been exported to the Middle East. He also denies the Middle Eastern non-heterosexual’s agency and transformative capacity in relation to homosexual identity. In contrast to Massad’s ideas, in the second part of this work my aim is to argue that the Iranian gayness are constituted in the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality and specifically in the biopolitical system of the post-revolutionary era. Moreover, my aim is to argue that Iranian homosexuals are able to open a space of agency and self-transformation through ethical and aesthetic techniques of the self to resist the totalizing manner of *dispositif*. For this sake, in the next paragraph, I will explain at length the Foucauldian concept of *dispositif*, and in the subsequent one, I will elaborate on Foucault’s account of technologies of the self, and I will give the example of gay movements as a form of aesthetic resistance for the creation of new forms of life. Then, the first part of this work, on Foucault, will end, and the second part will start, where I will use the methodological tools molded by Foucault in order to answer Massad and elaborate my personal reflection on Iran.

¹⁷⁰ Tony McHugh, *Faces Inside and Outside the clinic: A Foucauldian Perspective on Cosmetic Facial Modification* (USA: Ashgate, 2013), 89.

2.2 *Dispositif*

Dispositif is a key term in Foucault's thought, representing the network of power-knowledge relations within which a "human being is transformed into both a subject and an object of power relations".¹⁷¹ Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in the essay 'What Is an Apparatus?'¹⁷² develops a "brief genealogy" to trace the Foucauldian concept of the *dispositif*. Agamben relates it to the notion of *positivity*—etymologically very similar to *dispositif*—as used by Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge*.¹⁷³ Agamben finds the first uses of *positivity* in the works of Jean Hyppolite, Foucault's teacher at École Normale Supérieure, especially his work on Hegel titled *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History*.¹⁷⁴ Thus, according to Agamben, the likely source of *dispositif* goes back to Hegel. In Hegel's thought, "positive religion" is in opposition to "natural religion".¹⁷⁵ While the primary concern of natural religion is related to the general relations of human reason regarding divinity, positive religion is concerned with a set of rules and beliefs that are imposed on the individuals of a certain society by an external power¹⁷⁶.

Regarding the concept of *positivity*, Agamben argues that Foucault's main concern is "the investigation of concrete modes in which the *positivities* (or the apparatuses [*dispositifs*]) act within the relations, mechanisms and plays of power".¹⁷⁷ Agamben then traces back the etymological root of the French use of *dispositif* and finds that it derives from the Greek term *oikonomia* that signifies the administration of *oikos* (home) and management. The term *oikonomia* at first was introduced to Christian theology and then translated into *dispositio* by Church Fathers. The term *dispositio* in Christian theology can be understood as the administration and management that God imposes on Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity.¹⁷⁸ Agamben also points out

¹⁷¹ Tom Forest, "The Dispositif between Foucault and Agamben", *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 2015, Vol. 15(1) 151–171

¹⁷² Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009). As I will explain in a while, 'apparatus' is one of the possible translations of the French term *dispositif* into English.

¹⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁷⁴ Jean Hyppolite, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 21.

¹⁷⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion", In *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1971).

¹⁷⁶ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, 13.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

etymologically the relation of *dispositif* to the Latin noun *dispositio* and the Latin verb *dis-ponere*, which correspond to the meanings: ordering, arranging, and setting out.¹⁷⁹

Unfortunately, there is not a satisfactory English translation of *dispositif*. The concept of *dispositif* in Foucault's works is often translated into "apparatus", "deployment" or "device": Despite Agamben's genealogy, even in the English edition of his essay, it is translated into "apparatus". However, in connection with Foucault's texts, these translations can be misleading. Mark G.E. Kelly, in a guidebook on *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, points out that the translation 'apparatus' is more popular among translators of Foucault, but the word can be used also for other French terms like *appareillage* and *appareil*. In particular, the use of *appareil* by Louis Althusser in the essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*¹⁸⁰ was translated into apparatus and "use [ing] apparatus for Foucault's *dispositif* makes it seem like he is referencing Althusser where he is not".¹⁸¹

The other common translation for *dispositif* is "deployment", which suggests a military context and implies that there is a process of deployment or that someone is deploying something, but this is not the case when Foucault refers to *dispositif*. The other translation is "device" that implies something much more immaterial, while Foucault's choice of *dispositif* encompasses both material and immaterial components, something linguistic and non-linguistic, discursive and non-discursive.¹⁸² Concerning discussions on the translations of *dispositif* and Agamben's genealogy, I prefer to use the French term *dispositif* in my English-language text because these translations contain meanings that are different from what *dispositif* itself implies in the philosophy of Foucault.

In an interview from 1977, Foucault is asked about the "meaning" or "the methodological function" of the *dispositif* and he gives a detailed definition as follows:

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 11-12.

¹⁸⁰ Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses, Lenin Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 127-93.

¹⁸¹ Mark G. E. Kelly, *Foucault's History of Sexuality Volume I, The Will to Knowledge. An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 132-133.

¹⁸² Ibid.

moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus [*dispositif*]. The apparatus [*dispositif*] itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus [*dispositif*] is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of positions and modifications of function, which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term ‘apparatus’ [*dispositif*] a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus [*dispositif*] thus has a domain strategic function.¹⁸³

According to this definition, the methodological function of the concept of *dispositif* allows Foucault to bring together and arrange a set of heterogeneous elements of culture to analyze and show how their interlocking connections result in historical formations that are not constant or preordained and how the subject is constituted within these historical formations. Foucault emphasizes that the analysis of changing historical relationships remains a central element in his methodology¹⁸⁴. Furthermore, by considering both discursive elements (writing and language) and non-discursive elements (institutions, laws, and administrative measures), Foucault’s strategy goes beyond epistemic statements—which are entirely language-based¹⁸⁵. In this context, Foucault “gradually replaced the notion of episteme by that of *dispositif*, moving from discursive object to non-discursive practices, strategies and institutions”¹⁸⁶. Moreover, whereas “episteme outlines the constitution of a body of knowledge, *dispositif* is entirely centered around power effects and a body of knowledge is developed in relation to power”¹⁸⁷. As noted by Stuart Elden in *Foucault’s Last*

¹⁸³ Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other writings*, 196.

¹⁸⁴ Matti Peltonen, “From Discourse to Dispositif: Michel Foucault’s Two Histories”, *Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2004), 205-219.

¹⁸⁵ McHugh, *Faces Inside and Outside the clinic: A Foucauldian Perspective on Cosmetic Facial Modification*, 78.

¹⁸⁶ Ming Xie, *Conditions of Comparison: Reflections on Comparative Intercultural Inquiry* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 88.

¹⁸⁷ Maria Tortajada, and François Albera, *Cine-dispositives: essays in epistemology across media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 38.

Decade, *dispositif* is “more than just an apparatus or mechanism, but it replaces the earlier notion of episteme as a collection of rules for the formation of knowledge, now including relations of power, practice, and action. As Foucault’s work on knowledge shifts to power-knowledge, so too does the episteme to the *dispositif*.”¹⁸⁸ As Foucault insists, “discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns of behaviors, in forms for transmission and diffusion”¹⁸⁹.

In the first volume of his trilogy on the history of sexuality, Foucault refers to a fundamental distinction that marks the rise of biopower in modern European history as the distinction between two intertwined *dispositifs*. According to Foucault, prior to the end of the eighteenth century, the regulation of social life was mediated through what Foucault calls the *dispositif* of alliance:

Relations of sex gave rise, in every society, to a deployment [*dispositif*] of alliance: a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions.¹⁹⁰

Instead, from the eighteenth century, a new *dispositif*, the *dispositif* of sexuality, was deployed by Western societies and superimposed on the *dispositif* of alliance. This modern *dispositif* has increasingly come to reduce the importance of the former *dispositif* without completely changing its efficacy over time. Foucault states that these two systems can be contrasted terms by terms.

The deployment [*dispositif*] of alliance is built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the forbidden, the licit and the illicit, whereas the deployment of sexuality operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power. The deployment [*dispositif*] of alliance has as one of its chief objectives to reproduce the interplay of relations and maintain the law that governs them; the deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality, on the other hand, engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control. For the first, what is pertinent is the link between partners and define status; the second is concerned with the sensation of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible these may be. Lastly, if the deployment [*dispositif*] of alliance is firmly tied to the economy due to the role it can play in the transmission or

¹⁸⁸ Stuart Elden, *Foucault’s Last Decade* (UK: Polity Press, 2016), 53-54.

¹⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 200.

¹⁹⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 106.

circulation of wealth, the deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality is linked to the economy through numerous and subtle relays, the main one of which, however, is body—the body that produces and consumes¹⁹¹.

One *dispositif*, Foucault claims, does not completely supplant another one, and both of them do not possess exclusive fields of forces and historical periods. Rather the *dispositif* of sexuality was based on the *dispositif* of alliance. Foucault argues that sexuality originally came into existence from the *dispositif* of alliance. As I have explained, confession, which is a central issue in the formation of sexuality, and the sexual subject, was initially a practice focused on the question of marital relations—the core point of the *dispositif* of alliance—and later expanded beyond this function. As explained in the previous paragraph, the *dispositif* of sexuality is a biopolitical *dispositif* that, on the one hand, focuses on the politics of body and how power is exercised through it in order to regulate and discipline the human body. On the other hand, this *dispositif* is concerned with the body of society and management of its life processes such as health, disease, regulation of birth and sexual relations.¹⁹²

The transition from alliance to sexuality was made possible through a common theme to both *dispositifs*. What remained as a shared locus throughout this transition was the family cell. Foucault insists that family is central to both *dispositifs* of alliance and sexuality. It is in the family that the *dispositifs* of alliance and sexuality have the most contact¹⁹³. Foucault regards the family as a traditional institution that held rights over its members. However, he argues that its power has been weakened over centuries, and it has been subjected to the infiltration by disciplinary power and biopower¹⁹⁴. In his lecture at the Collège de France 1974-1975 titled *Abnormal*, he states that the new form of family in European societies took shape during the nineteenth century and then was substituted with the traditional family. In this lecture, he compares the modern and traditional forms of family:

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the aristocratic or bourgeois family ... was above all a sort of relational system. It was a bundle of relation of ancestry, descent,

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 106-107.

¹⁹² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁹⁴ Malcolm Voyce, *Foucault and Family Relations: Governing from a Distance in Australia* (New York and London: Lexington, 2019), 5.

collateral relations, cousinhood, primogeniture, and alliance corresponding to schemas for the transmission of kinship and the division of goods and social status. Sexual prohibitions effectively focused on these kinds of relations.¹⁹⁵

In contrast to the traditional family, we now encounter a biopolitical form of family that is “a sort of restricted, close-knit, substantial, compact, corporeal, and affective family core: the cell family in place of the relational family; the cell family with its corporeal, affective, and sexual space entirely saturated by direct parent-child relationships”¹⁹⁶. He argues that the newborn family is medicalized, normalized, and panoptic, and parents function as doctors within the family cell or, in other words, as instruments of interests of the biopolitical state. Foucault writes that

In the family, parents and relatives became the chief agents of a deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality which drew its outside support from doctors, educators, and later psychiatrists, and which began by competing with the relations of alliance but soon ‘psychologized’ or ‘psychiatrized’ the latter. Then, these new personages made their appearance: the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother—or worse, the mother beset by murderous obsessions—the impotent, sadistic, perverse husband, the hysterical or neurasthenic girl, the precious and already exhausted child, and the young homosexual who rejects marriage or neglects his wife. These were the combined figures of an alliance gone bad and an abnormal sexuality; they were the means by which the disturbing factors of the latter were brought into former; and yet they also provided an opportunity for the alliance system to assert its prerogatives in the order of sexuality... the family was the crystal in the deployment [*dispositif*] of sexuality: it seemed to be the source of a sexuality which it actually only reflected and diffracted. By virtue of its permeability, and through that process of reflections to the outside, it became one of the most valuable tactical components of the deployment¹⁹⁷.

Pursuing this disciplining and biopoliticalization of the family in the modern era, Foucault investigates the manners through which the nineteenth-century family was steeped in sexuality. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault points to the three axes of biopower—pedagogy, medicine and demography—that have specific targets: pedagogy “the sexuality of children”; medicine “the sexual physiology peculiar to women”; and demography, “the

¹⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975* (New York: Picador, 2003), 248.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* 110.

spontaneous or concerted regulation of births” along with the medicine of perversions and the programs of eugenics. As a result of the sexualization of the family institution through the process of biopoliticization, according to Foucault, these four strategic unities (the sexuality of women, the sexuality of children, the regulation of birth, and the taxonomization of perversions) were developed as main domains of the *dispositif* of sexuality:

- A hysterization of women’s bodies: biopolitics targeted women’s bodies through “a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed—qualified and disqualified—as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it”. Therefore, the feminine body was placed in an “organic communication” with the social body “(whose regulated fecundity it [feminine body] was supposed to ensure)”; the family space “(of which it had to be a substantial and functional element)”; and the life of children “(which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children’s education): the Mother, with her negative image of ‘nervous women,’ constituted the most visible form of this hysterization”.¹⁹⁸

- A pedagogization of children’s sex: a paradoxical argumentative strategy stating that all children were prone to indulge in sexual activity; and that, “being unwarranted, at the same time ‘natural’ and ‘contrary to nature’ this sexual activity posed physical and moral, individual and collective dangers”. In one sense, children were defined as “preliminary sexual beings” who engage in sexual behavior, but at the same time, this was considered completely inappropriate. This double assertion led to a major attempt to educate the sexuality of children in an appropriate direction. For this reason, “parents, families, educators, doctors, and eventually psychologists would have to take charge, in a continuous way, of this precious and perilous, dangerous and endangered sexual potential”¹⁹⁹.

- A socialization of procreative behavior: Foucault describes how sexuality was deployed through what he calls the “socialization of procreative behavior” in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁰⁰ Sexual reproduction was located in the process of socialization, a way

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 104.

to socialize couples' procreative behavior as much as possible in terms of social and economic concerns. This process was composed by "an economic socialization via all the incitements and restrictions, the social and fiscal measures brought to bear on the fertility of couples"; "a political socialization "achieved through the responsabilization of couples with regard to the social body as a whole (which had to be limited or on the contrary reinvigorated)"; and a "medical socialization carried out by attributing a pathogenic value—for the individual and the species—to birth-control practices".²⁰¹

- Psychiatrization of perverse pleasure: Foucault writes that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sexuality was categorized as a "separate biological" and psychological instinct; therefore, "a clinical analysis was made of all the forms of anomalies by which it [sexual instinct] could be afflicted; it was assigned a role of normalization or pathologization with respect to all behavior; and family, a corrective technology was sought for these anomalies."²⁰² This fourth strategy is tightly related to the medicalization of sexual perversion that led to the emergence of homosexuality that I explained in paragraph 2.1 "Power".

Such strategies, as Foucault contests, are the way through which biopower works to govern life by regulating in the domain of *dispositif* of sexuality. However, Foucault claims that "resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance... resistance is the main word, the key word, in this dynamic"²⁰³. In Foucault's thought, power produces its resistance; thus there is always a possibility of resistance in the domain of a *dispositif*. Foucault argues that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."²⁰⁴ In this sense, "power and resistance are coeval: power always engenders resistance, resistance always elicits counter-resistance".²⁰⁵ The *dispositif* defines the subject and, at the same time, opens a space within which the subject has the opportunity to break free of power relations. Therefore, the subject in the *dispositif* can be seen as both affected by and affecting power relations. And freedom is not a mere resistance, in the sense of a simple negation, to power.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 105.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 167.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 95.

²⁰⁵ Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place* (UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 225.

Rather, it is a form of careful and creative deployment of power.²⁰⁶ The key task, for Foucault, is to “refuse what we are” to “promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries”²⁰⁷. The possibility of resistance, according to Foucault, lays in the ability of subjects to construct an ethical form of life through the practices of the self²⁰⁸ in order to work out the game of power.

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze is the first who devoted an essay on the Foucault’s conceptualization of *dispositif* and conceptualized his own treatment concerning this notion. In the essay ‘*What is a Dispositif?*’²⁰⁹ Deleuze describes Foucault’s concept of *dispositif* as a “multilinear ensemble” of different lines that produce a heterogeneous network of discourses, practices, subjects and objects. He considers the concept of *dispositif* as a relationship between words and things. He says that “the first two dimensions of an apparatus [*dispositif*] or the ones that Foucault first extracted are the curves of visibility and the curves of utterance”. According to him, *dispositifs* can be thought of as “machines that make one see and speak” (knowledge), “lines of force [that] come about in any relationship between one point and another, and passes through every area in the apparatus [*dispositif*]” (power), and “lines of subjectification” (subject) that allow subjectivity to “come into being or make it possible”²¹⁰. In Deleuze’s view, in Foucault’s works, “there will be always a relation to oneself that resists” against *dispositifs*”²¹¹. He almost shares a similar kind of perspective with Foucault and argues that subjects have a potential to break free of the totalizing logic of *dispositif*. According to him, “practices of freedom are not outside power relations; instead, they are a negotiation of it and the “act of freedom constitutes itself through acting at the limit” of the *dispositif*”²¹². This is why Deleuze says that power relation has a “folding” character. He writes that:

The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds, and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than outside, but precisely the inside of the outside... the inside as

²⁰⁶ Forest, “The Dispositif between Foucault and Agamben”, 151-171.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 216.

²⁰⁸ For further discussion of this, see the next paragraph *The Practices of the Self*.

²⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *What is a dispositif?* In *Michel Foucault Philosopher* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 159-168.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Forest, “The Dispositif between Foucault and Agamben”, 165.

²¹² Ibid.

operation of the outside: in all his work Foucault seems haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea.²¹³

Individuals cannot move outside of or escape from the totalizing manner of *dispositif* to achieve freedom; instead, they are able to think from the outside, from the limit of the *dispositif*. Therefore, what the *dispositif* produces is an “inside as an interiorisation of the outside”. According to Deleuze, this “folding” character of power relations in *dispositif* opens a space for individuals to transgress. In the Deleuzean reading of Foucault, the subjectification process is figured as a process of folding.²¹⁴ Subjectivity is enabled and produced by power-knowledge relations within the constraints of *dispositif*, but it is the subject who exercises power within the constraints of the power relation network for producing the transgressive freedom, which gives rise to the self-creation of the new. Thus, *dispositif*, according to Deleuze, is a heterogeneous, dynamic, and moving configuration.

Agamben also conceptualizes his own treatment of the concept *dispositif*. If Deleuze’s conceptualization of *dispositif* privileges the transformative capacity and dynamicity of *dispositif*, Agamben stresses the totalizing manner of power by which *dispositifs* produce subjects or serve to desubjectivize them. He interprets *dispositif* as a conglomeration of practices, tasks, processes, inclusions, and exclusions that together make up a great “machine of governance” that produces subjectification.²¹⁵ His definition of *dispositif* as a machine bears a close affinity to Heidegger’s notion of *machination*, whose main function is to produce subjects²¹⁶. However, according to Agamben, *dispositif* as a machine tends to desubjectivize rather than produce subjects. According to him, desubjectification is at the heart of today’s crisis of the subject. Agamben gives the example of TV watcher and mobile phone user as forms of desubjectification and writes that

what we are now witnessing is that processes of subjectifications and practices of desubjectification seem to become reciprocally indifferent, and so they do not give rise to the recomposition of a new subject, except in larval or, as it were, spectral form. In the nontruth of the subject, its own truth is no longer at stake. He who let himself be captured by the ‘cellular telephone’ apparatus [*dispositifs*]—whatever the intensity of

²¹³ Deleuze, *Foucault* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 96-97.

²¹⁴ Forest, “The Dispositif between Foucault and Agamben”, 165.

²¹⁵ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 20.

²¹⁶ Luigi Pellizzoni, *Ontological Politics in a Disposable World: The New Mastery of Nature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 181.

the desire that has driven him—cannot acquire a new subjectivity, but only a number through which he can, eventually, be controlled. The spectator who spends his evenings in front of the television set only gets, in exchange for his desubjectification, the frustrated mask of the couch potato, or his inclusion in the calculation of viewership ratings.²¹⁷

Compared to Foucault and Deleuze, Agamben sees *dispositif* in a much more totalizing manner and argues that the subject—that is produced and dominated by *dispositif*—is not able to escape the control of the *dispositif* or to utilize the *dispositif* (due to the operation of the governmental machine). But Foucault's thought is different: for him, as already explained, resistance is not exterior to power. For him, resistance is connected to an ethical and aesthetic self-creation through the practices of the self. This is the topic of the next paragraph.

²¹⁷ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 21.

2.3 The Practice of the Self

In this paragraph, I will discuss Foucault's understanding of ethics and the practices of the self, and I will show how, according to the author, within the totalizing manner of the biopolitical *dispositif*, subjects can transform themselves into ethical subjects through ethical works. Then I will propose that queer rights movements might have represented a form of ethical resistance for the creation of a new form of life. Then, in the second part of this work, I will use the theoretical tools developed by Foucault in order to understand the complexity regarding gay subjectivity, subjectification and gay community in Iran today. But first, some discussion is needed on the Foucauldian concept of subjectivity and subjectification.

In *Discipline and Punish*²¹⁸ and *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*,²¹⁹ Foucault analyzes the relation of subjectivity with power and argues that power is not just repressive, nor does it just act upon the subject from above. Rather, the subject is produced through and within power-knowledge relations. As Tina Besley states, it was Nietzsche that “inspired Foucault to analyze the different modes by which human beings become subjects without privileging either power (as in Marxism) or desire (as in Freud).”²²⁰ As Nietzsche, through genealogical narrative, Foucault argues that there is “no essence of human beings, and therefore no possibility for universalist theories concerning the nature of human beings” as a fixed human nature once and for all. Instead, he argues that subjectivity should be conceived in an intersecting relation of discourse, power, and knowledge.²²¹ And he also argues that power should be understood as “a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression”.²²² Knowledge, on the other hand, is connected to power in a productive way: “power and knowledge are joined together”. Discourse does not limit the subject at the level of language. Rather, “a

²¹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

²¹⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*.

²²⁰ Tina Besley, “Foucault, truth telling and technologies of the self in schools”, *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (2005) 76-89.

²²¹ Micheal A Peters, *Education, Philosophy and Politics: The Selected Works of Michael A. Peters* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 83.

²²² Foucault, “Truth and Power”, 61.

multiplicity of discursive elements [...] can come into play in various strategies”²²³ to shape specific knowledge, generate truth effects, construct reality and the subject itself.

In an essay titled *The Subject and Power*²²⁴, Foucault argues that the process through which human beings become subjects deals with three modes that he calls “modes of objectification”. The first are the “modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences”, for example, “the objectivizing” of speaking and living subject through discourses of linguistics and philology. Another example of these first modes is “the objectivizing of the productive subject, the subject who labors in the analysis of wealth and of economics”.²²⁵ The second mode of objectification concerns what Foucault calls “dividing practices”—practices that divide the subject either inside her or himself or from others.²²⁶ Dividing practices are “modes of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science (or pseudo-science) and the practice of exclusion, usually in a spatial sense, but always in a social one.”²²⁷ These practices are processes of “social objectification and categorization within which human beings are given social and personal identity”. For example, in these processes, the dividing practices separate the criminal from the non-criminal or sexually abnormal from sexually normal. The third mode of objectification is what Foucault calls “subjectifications”. This mode concerns the way human beings turn themselves into a subject. The third mode differs in significant ways from two other modes. While in both modes of objectification—objectivizing the subject through dividing practices and various social scientific forms of classification, both as techniques of domination—individuals are compiled in a passive position. On the contrary, the third mode is a process of self-formation in which individuals are active.²²⁸

Foucault focuses on this third mode in his later works, especially in his books *The Use of Pleasure*²²⁹ and *The Care of the Self*,²³⁰ and *Confessions of the Flesh*²³¹ where he describes how in the Hellenistic era, individuals began to take up “a certain number of operations on [their] own

²²³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 100.

²²⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 777-795.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 777.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Rabinow, “Introduction” in *The Foucault Reader*, 8.

²²⁸ Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 777-778.

²²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, (New York: Vintage, 1985).

²³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, (New York: Vintage, 1988).

²³¹ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 4: Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros, (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).

bodies, on their own soul, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and way of being” in order to elaborate and transform themselves into ethical subjects.²³² Foucault also dedicates his lectures at the Collège de France *The Hermeneutics of The Subject*²³³ and *The Courage of Truth*²³⁴ to the question of the discontinuities and changes in the construction and understanding of the self from antiquity until modernity, with a particular focus on Greco-Roman and Christian practices of the self. In connection with this topic, in an interview in 1984 titled *The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom*, he discusses the distinction between the Greco-Roman notion of the care of the self—which deals with practices of ethical self-transformation and one’s relation to oneself—and the Christian understanding of the self that is achieved through knowledge and a preoccupation with truth through the confessional mechanism.²³⁵ Early Christian practices of the self were carried out within an interconnection of power and truth through which individuals come to know the truth about themselves and gain access to truth through a process of self-sacrifice.²³⁶ In one sense, in Christianity, subjectivity is achieved only by way of sacrificing the self. By doing so, individuals “are guided toward salvation by others to whom they subordinate themselves”.²³⁷ Within this salvation-oriented relationship, the subordinate individuals should submit to certain forms of “generated truths such as doctrines and codes”²³⁸ and participate in various kinds of practices, “general rules, particular knowledge, precepts, methods of examination, confessions, and interviews”, in order to reveal the truth and inner self²³⁹.

Foucault calls this kind of subjectivity a “hermeneutic” and “confessional” mode of subjectivity²⁴⁰, which is formed through “activities of self-interpretation (hermeneutics is the art of interpretation) and self-expression (confession is the art or practice of expressing and

²³² Michel Foucault, “Sexuality and Solitude,” in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 177.

²³³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of The Subject: Lecture at the College De France 1981-82*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

²³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II; Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²³⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom.” Interview by Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Helmut Becker, and Alfredo Gomez-Muller, *Philosophy Social Criticism*, January 20, 1984. 112-131.

²³⁶ Dianna Taylor, “Practices of the Self” in *Michel Foucault: Key Concept*, 174.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 1, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 26.

²⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, 6.

communicating that which is difficult but necessary to say)".²⁴¹ Foucault's point is that the practices of hermeneutics and confession are at the service of a regulatory power that produces subjects who are compelled to decipher and discern the inner truth about their desires. He argues that the hermeneutic and confessional mechanisms have been diffused "across Western culture through numerous channels and integrated with various types of attitudes and experiences".²⁴² For example, the interpretive dialogues between a psychiatrist and patient or priest and confessor do not merely disclose inner truth, but they also produce a "self that lives a certain way, that sees itself and the world in terms of normalization, self-interpretation and self-expression."²⁴³

In response to this hermeneutic and confessional subjectivity, Foucault proposes an alternative way of thinking about and forming our lives and selves. For him, subjectivity is not something we *are*, rather he sees it as an activity that we *do*. Therefore, if subjectivity is an "active becoming" rather than a "fixed being", the desire to discover one's inner truth is vain. In order to analyze this way of understanding subjectivity, he turns to the ancient Greeks' philosophical notions of the care of the self and *Parrhesia*.²⁴⁴ In 1981-82 Collège de France course, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, he notes that in the history of Western thought, the Socratic imperative "know yourself" is considered the "funding formula of history of philosophy" in terms of the relation between subject and truth. However, he states that "you have to know yourself", in the ancient Greek philosophy, was not simply grounded in search of one's inner truth as in Christian confession. Rather it was interwoven with the "care of the self".²⁴⁵ He argues that in ancient Greek philosophy, subjectivity was based on the care of the self and knowing oneself functioned as one, among many, practices for taking care of the self. However, due to the philosophical influences of Descartes, as well as scientific achievements and influences of religion, in modernity, the imperative "know yourself" completely replaced "care of the self".²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Edward McGushin, "Foucault's Theory and Practice of Subjectivity" in *Michel Foucault: Key Concept*, 134.

²⁴² Foucault, "Technologies of the Self", 224.

²⁴³ McGushin, "Foucault's Theory and Practice of Subjectivity" in *Michel Foucault: Key Concept*, 141.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁴⁵ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of The Subject: Lecture at the College De France 1981-82*, x-xx.

²⁴⁶ McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, 148; Michel Foucault, "Subjectivity and Truth" in *The Politics of Truth*, eds. Sylvere Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext, 1997), 171–198.

Through his genealogical research on the subject, Foucault then provides a different mode of “ethical subjectivity” in “antiquity” that revolved around “the care of the self”²⁴⁷. For him, “ancient philosophy can be comprehended... as a vast project of inventing, defining, elaborating and practicing a complex care of the self”.²⁴⁸ In his book *The Care of the Self*, Foucault argues that in the philosophical and medical texts of the first centuries after Christ, there is an insistence on “the attention that should be brought to bear on oneself”.²⁴⁹ This attention, in the Hellenistic era, is linked to “the practices of self-fashioning that one takes up in order to give one’s existence a particular form”.²⁵⁰ Care of the self is an intensification and elaboration of the self and “designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms and transfigures oneself”.²⁵¹ It is a set of practices and techniques that one performs actively on oneself in order to transform oneself and to achieve a “certain mode of being”.²⁵² When Foucault talks about the care of the self, indeed, he also refers to some techniques that he calls “technologies of the self”. These techniques include writing exercises, meditations, dialogues with oneself, and *Parrhesia* (I will give the example of *Parrhesia* in the next pages). Through these techniques, the subject is able to elaborate a personal ethos.²⁵³ Foucault characterizes these techniques of the self as “the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it and transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge.”²⁵⁴ Foucault notes that in Hellenistic and Roman eras, these techniques of the self embodied a “conversion or transformation” process. He argues that in these practices “the truth is never given to subject[s] by right... subject[s] does not have the right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth”, but rather, “truth is only given to the subject[s] at a price that brings the subject’s being into play”. Therefore, in order to embody their truth, the subjects have to “be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some

²⁴⁷ Foucault, “The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom”, 112-131.

²⁴⁸ Edward McGushin, *Foucault’s Askesis: An Introduction to the philosophical Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 3.

²⁴⁹ Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, 41.

²⁵⁰ McGushin *Foucault’s Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*, 39.

²⁵¹ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of The Subject: Lecture at the College De France 1981-82*, 11.

²⁵² Foucault, “The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom.”, 112-131.

²⁵³ Karen Vintage, “Freedom and Spirituality” in *Michel Foucault: Key Concept*, 99-102.

²⁵⁴ Foucault, “Subjectivity and Truth”, 87.

extent and up to a certain point, other than himself”.²⁵⁵ Thus, care of the self is a practice of “conversion” that “may take place in the form of a movement that removes the subject from his current status and condition”.²⁵⁶ It is at this level that power is concerned. In fact, according to Foucault, “the struggle against the forms of subjection—against the submission of subjectivity” is a fundamental ethical technique of the self that leads to the process of forming oneself as an “ethical subject”.²⁵⁷

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault uses a fourfold ethical framework to designate how the subject transforms himself ethically through (1) ethical substance, (2) mode of subjection, (3) ethical work, and (4) telos.²⁵⁸ The ethical substance deals with determining an aspect of the self (an aspect of one’s identity, behavior and emotion) that needs to be problematized and worked on. For the Greeks, ethical substance equated to pleasure because a lack of restraint to exercise moderation in sexual activities represented a disrepute. In contrast, for Christians ethical substance equated to desire because, for instance, any erotic yearning was a sign of the first sin.²⁵⁹ After identifying the ethical substance, through the mode of subjection, subjects position themselves in relation to certain roles, moral codes, and norms, then they are able to recognize their obligation and different ways of obeying and conforming to rules and regulations. For the Greeks, while modes of subjection were an aesthetic-political decision to transform one’s life into a work of art, Christians viewed it as a juridico-religious injunction or divine law.²⁶⁰ In the next step, through a critical reflection on the mode of subjection, subjects can determine the specific practices that one needs to engage in to achieve one’s ethical aims. For the Greeks, ethical work included aesthetic-political techniques (of contemplation and body exercises) or self-forming activities through which one can transform oneself into an autonomous, ethical agent. On the other hand, for Christians, ethical work included uncovering of hidden desires through examination and self-deciphering that could be practiced through the use of self-renouncing and confessional techniques.²⁶¹

²⁵⁵ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of The Subject: Lecture at the College De France 1981-82*, 15.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 782.

²⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, 27-31

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

The last component of this framework is telos or teleology that deals with goals or the mode of being toward which this ethical activity is directed. In order to achieve telos, one can take different paths to change oneself into an ethical subject. For Christians, telos was self-renunciation, while for Greeks, it was self-mastery.²⁶² By drawing on ancient Greek philosophy, Foucault points to the practice of truth telling or *Parrhesia* as an ethical work to transform oneself into an ethical subject. But in order to know what *Parrhesia* is and how it functions as an ethical work, we need to know why Foucault shifts from the care of the self to it in his last lectures at the Collège de France.

Foucault's account of care of the self adheres to the idea that care of the self is ethical in itself and "ontologically" and "ethically" prior to care for others: "care for others should not be put before the care of oneself".²⁶³ As Fred Evans claims, this assertion "makes care of others appear as only a derivative concern and care of the self as narcissistic".²⁶⁴ However, by drawing on the Hellenic school of thought such as Cynics, Foucault elaborates a specific treatment of care of the self. The Cynics hold the idea that care of the self means looking after others, and caring for others is at the same time care for oneself. According to the Cynics, through the care of the self and the others "an individual bond with individuals"²⁶⁵, and this "bond" is "true political activity, the true *politeuesthai*".²⁶⁶ Foucault notes that Cynics's care of the self is a sort of solidarity with humanity: "thus it is [Cynic] solidarity with humankind which is [...] the object of [Cynic] care, concern, and supervision when [the Cynic] looks at how men act and spend their lives, and when he inquires into what they take care of". He then concludes that "the Cynic is someone, consequently, who, caring for others in order to know what these others care about, at the same time and thereby cares for himself".²⁶⁷ This way, Foucault upholds the Cynics version of *Parrhesia*—through which subjects practice care of the self as the way in which each relates to themselves and to others—as a worthy way of life also for our own time.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Foucault, "The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom", 112-131.

²⁶⁴ Fred Evans, "Murmurs and Calls: The Significance of Voice in the Political Reason of Foucault and Derrida", in *Between Foucault and Derrida*, eds., Yubraj Aryal, Vernon W. Cisney, Nicolae Morar and Christopher Penfeld (UK: Edinburg University Press, 2016), 163.

²⁶⁵ Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II; Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, 302.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 312.

Parrhesia is a Greek concept in ancient philosophy that deals with the “act of telling the truth out of one’s moral duty, even in dangerous situations”.²⁶⁸ Foucault dedicates especially his Collège de France lectures *The Courage of Truth* to this concept, but we can also reconstruct it from *Fearless Speech*, a seminar that he gave in 1983 at the University of California, Berkeley. Here, Foucault highlights five important characteristics of *Parrhesia*: frankness, truth, danger, criticism and duty: “in *Parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy”.²⁶⁹ For Foucault, even more than the care of the self, it is *Parrhesia* that as an ethos of self-transformation, represents an alternative to Christian and modern way of understanding the subject. As he says in the seminar:

I believe that with that notion of *parrhesia* – with [its] political roots and moral derivation... there is a possibility to pose the question of the subject and of the truth from the point of view of a practice that we could call the rule of oneself and of others. It seems to me that by examining a bit the notion of *parrhesia* we can see connecting together the analysis of modes of truth-telling, the study of the techniques of governmentality, and the localization, of the forms of practices of the self.²⁷⁰

In Foucault’s definition, *Parrhesia* is the courage to speak the truth: it is “linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger.” *Parrhesia* is a “form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor”.²⁷¹ In the Berkeley seminar, Foucault illustrates the public use of *Parrhesia*. For doing so, he returns to the Cynics’ tradition in which truth telling is a means of instruction.²⁷² He highlights three practices of the Cynics’ version of *Parrhesia*: critical preaching, scandalous behavior and procreative dialogue.²⁷³ Foucault states that critical preaching “is still one of the main forms of truth telling

²⁶⁸ Brad Elliott Stone, “Subjectivity and Truth” in *Michel Foucault: Key Concept*, 143.

²⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).19-20.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Stone, “Subjectivity and Truth”, 152.

²⁷³ Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 11.

practiced in our society”,²⁷⁴ “directed against social institutions, the arbitrariness of the rules, of law, and any sort of lifestyle that was dependent upon such institutions or laws”.²⁷⁵ The Cynics also used “scandalous behavior or attitudes” that “call into question collective habits, opinions, standards of decency, institutional rules and so on”. Additionally, they used procreative dialogues, which is a unique variation of Socratic dialogue by which “individuals examine and challenge each other’s most cherished beliefs”.²⁷⁶

By drawing on Foucault’s concepts, I would argue that although homosexuality itself is a form of *dispositif*—produced in nineteenth-century Europe through the intersection of power, knowledge and discourse—, and that homosexuals have historically resisted within their own *dispositifs* to transform themselves into ethical subjects through forms of care of the self and *Parrhesia*. This is exactly what Massad ignores in his argument about homosexual identification in the Middle East. Massad argues that incitement to speak about sexual identity, to speak about sexuality as the “truth” of oneself, represents an instrument of Western colonialism of the Arab world and the Middle East. But he ignores that Middle Eastern non-heterosexuals, through their agency and transformative capacity, are able to resist their *dispositifs* and construct their own local gayness. In this paragraph, I suggest that gay/queer rights movements might represent a form of collective ethical resistance as well as truth telling that have given rise to the critique of social-sexual norms and laws. Through considering the gay/queer rights movements as a form of collective ethical resistance, I will show how within the legal-social and historical context of Western societies of the nineteenth century until the present, homosexuals have transformed themselves into ethical subjects, subjects who are “capable of political acts of resistance, contestation and even revolt”.²⁷⁷

For example, in *Il Sessuale Politico: Freud con Marx, Fanon, Foucault*, Lorenzo Bernini argues that besides sexologists and psychiatrists, homosexuals themselves contributed to the historical process of construction of homosexual identity and at the same time gave rise to the first homosexual rights movements around the seventies of the nineteenth century.²⁷⁸ In this period,

²⁷⁴ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 120.

²⁷⁵ Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, 46.

²⁷⁶ McGushin, *Foucault’s Askesis: An Introduction to the philosophical Life*, 127.

²⁷⁷ Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 445.

²⁷⁸ Lorenzo Bernini, *Il Sessuale Politico: Freud con Marx, Fanon, Foucault* (Edizione ETS: Pisa, 2019), 163-165.

German homosexual activists, such as Ulrichs, Kertbeny and Hirschfeld began to problematize their ethical substance (that could be their sexuality or sexual existence) and were able to recognize and resist the moral, religious, and juridical heterosexual norms that regulated them.²⁷⁹ Additionally, through the public use of *Parrhesia* (critique of social institutions, rules, norms and collective habits), they tried to gain a sexual or a gendered state of being and construct their own homosexual subjectivity. In the 1870s, in Berlin, a movement of opinion was formed which called for the abolition of paragraph 143 of the Prussian penal code, which punished sexual acts against nature (and which would later be extended first to the Confederation of Northern Germany with the number 152, and then to the German Empire with the number 175). In this context, to advocate this movement, in 1869, the Hungarian scholar Karl Maria Kertbeny argued against the Prussian antisodomy penal code in an essay in which, for the first time, the terms “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” appeared.²⁸⁰ In the essay, he called for a modernization of social and political conditions to establish a state that no longer plays “the role of guardian, which is, anyhow, a thankless and irritating role”. He advocated the respect of one’s rights and one’s own life “with which one may do as one pleases, fully free from the start to finish as long as the rights of other individuals of society or of the state are not injured by these actions”²⁸¹.

Another German activist who contributed to the construction of homosexual identity was Ulrichs. Bernini notes that before Kertbeny’s introduction of the term ‘homosexuality’, jurist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in 1864 introduced the term ‘uranism’ (he borrowed the word—in Plato’s *Symposium*—from the god Uranos who bore Aphrodite and is the protector of love between men) to describe a man who is sexually attracted to other men. In the pamphlets that he “published between 1864 and 1879, Ulrichs not only disclosed his own homosexuality,” but also advocated an emancipationist science of same-sex love.²⁸² Doctor Magnus Hirschfeld later used the term ‘uranism’ in his own theory of ‘third sex’ or ‘intermediate sexual condition’ that also included transsexualism and transvestitism. Indeed, it was not just the terminology that made a distinction

²⁷⁹ Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories: Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, 37.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Karoly Maria Kertbeny, “Paragraph 143 and the Prussian Penal Code,” in *Sodomites and Urnings: Homosexual Representations in Classic German Journals*, ed. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006), 51, as cited in Clayton J. Whisnant, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History 1880-1945*, (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016), 20

²⁸² Robert Beachy, “The German Invention of Homosexuality”, *The Journal of Modern History* , Vol. 82, No. 4, (2010), 801-838

between Kertbeny's conception and Hirschfeld's. Through the term homosexuality, Kertbeny anticipated the current concept of homosexual orientation while, in line with the sexology of time, Hirschfeld interpreted homosexuality as a form of inversion, which is of a discrepancy between anatomical sex and psychological sex (that today is called gender)²⁸³. Hirschfeld also established the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the Institute for Sexual Science in Germany in 1897 to campaign through scientific research for acceptance of homosexuality or what he called the 'intermediate sexual condition' (up until the 1930s when Hitler came to power and stopped such advocacy and started his policy of extermination).²⁸⁴ Besides Germany, in France, prominent French writer André Gide's 1911 defense of homosexual love, *Corydon*; in England, the poet Edward Carpenter's 1894 pamphlet *Homogenic Love*; in America, the works of American writer Walt Whitman, especially his 1980 *Leaves of Grass*, all criticized and challenged their societies that forced individuals to live according to their established norms and laws.²⁸⁵

Although after World War II, a remarkable number of published researches suggested "ubiquity and normality of homosexual experience", and Kinsey's report in 1948 and 1953 concluded that "homosexual behavior was neither unnatural nor neurotic in itself but an inherent physiologic capacity"; throughout this period, homosexuality was strongly condemned by law in most European and all American states.²⁸⁶ For example, in 1952—due to the conservative version of psychoanalysis that developed in the United States—the American Psychiatric Association included homosexuality in the list of mental disorders in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).²⁸⁷ Against these laws and this regime of truth, in 1969 with the modern international gay movement was born: with the New York Stonewall Riots. Influenced by various movements—including those by women, workers, African Americans, as well as the Student's protest of 1968—²⁸⁸those who created the first gay/queer movements, I would argue, asked themselves, 'What are we making of our life?'. Their answer was that, as sexual minorities, they were oppressed and had to agitate for change and transformation. Therefore, they transformed

²⁸³ Bernini, *Il Sessuale Politico: Freud con Marx, Fanon, Foucault*, 164-165.

²⁸⁴ Clayton J. Whisnant, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History 1880–1945*, (USA & UK: Harrington Park Press, 2016), 63.

²⁸⁵ Kenneth Plummer, *Sexualities: Difference and the diversity of sexualities* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 65.

²⁸⁶ John J. Macionis and Ken Plummer, *Sociology: A Global Introduction* (UK: Pearson, 2007), 392.

²⁸⁷ Bernini, *Il Sessuale Politico: Freud con Marx, Fanon, Foucault*, 171.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

themselves into ethical subjects with the capability of political acts and revolt. On the night between 27th and 28th June 1969, the patrons of the Stonewall club located at 53 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, New York, rebelled against a police raid and prompted several days of rioting by thousands of New Yorkers.²⁸⁹ On that night, the police lost control of the raid when patrons—including working and middle-class white youths, African Americans, Latinos, drag queens, transsexuals, transgenders, and sex workers—fought back, and it soon became a gay power riot. Many described the riots as the first acts of gay and lesbian resistance ever.²⁹⁰ Since then, it has been this outburst of resistance that is remembered every year in the LGBTQIA + Pride parades. These first New York uprisings were inspiring throughout the United States and around the world. In a short time, a Gay Liberation Front appeared first in the USA and then in Great Britain; in the Francoist Spain, the Español de Liberación Homosexual Movement (MELH) was founded, which later became Front d'Alliberament Gai de Catalunya (FAGC); in France, the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) was born; in Belgium the Movement Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (MHAR); in Germany the Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin (HAW); in Italy the Italian Revolutionary Unified Homosexual Front (FUORI!).²⁹¹

It was within this context that homosexuals began to choose the “self-created term gay” instead of “scientifically imposed term homosexual”. Additionally, “medical rhetoric” was changed into “political language”. Organizations and communities for homosexuals (men and women) became widespread in many cities around the West, and millions of gays and lesbians began to “come out” and identified themselves with the positive terms “gay” and “lesbian”.²⁹² Similarly, “bisexuals” claimed their visibility in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the term “transgender” first appeared in trans movements and then in numerous others to indicate those who did not wish to undergo surgery to make their genitals in accordance with male and female standards. As a consequence of these mobilizations, in 1990, homosexuality was removed from the ICD (International Classification of Diseases), the list of diseases of the WHO (World Health Organization). And in 2018, transsexuality was removed from the chapter of mental illness of the same list. Moreover, in the 2000s, intersex movements refused the pathologizing acronym “DSD”

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 80.

²⁹¹ Bernini, *Il Sessuale Politico: Freud con Marx, Fanon, Foucault*, 174-175.

²⁹² Macionis and Plummer, *Sociology: A Global Introduction*, 392.

(Disorders of Sexual Development) introduced by doctors. Finally, other subjectivities gradually took the floor: asexual, demisexual, pansexual...²⁹³ In particular, in many countries of the world, homosexuality is becoming acceptable. In December 2019, out of 196 countries, 27 authorize same-sex marriage, 31 recognize civil unions, 57 have rules that explicitly sanction discrimination against sexual minorities, and 3 prohibit restorative therapies by law (which were condemned by the American Psychiatric Association in 2000 and by the Italian National Order of Psychologists in 2008). However, despite this progress, homosexual acts, especially in some Muslim societies, are punishable, and those who identify as homosexuals are seen as sick who should be cured. It is still criminalized in 68 countries, punished by death in 11 (among which Iran), and the promotion of LGBTQIA+ rights is forbidden in 41.²⁹⁴

This historical evidence shows that although the nineteenth century saw the ascendancy of the clinical model of homosexuality, it also saw the growth of writings and campaigning held by homosexuals as agents to challenge the orthodox heterosexual assumptions and contribute to the construction of their own sexual identity. In Foucaultian terms, I propose to consider them as subjects who have applied to themselves different forms of care of themselves to modify themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions. And as the subjects who have practiced *Parrhesia* against the pathologizing regime of truth of *dispositif* that firstly defined their existence. I would argue that the identity categories of gays and lesbians undoubtedly were born in a specific place and time in the history of sexuality, but in the Iranian context, by drawing and elaborating on these Western identity categories, the Iranian gay-identifying men have constructed their own local sexual identity and transformed themselves into ethical subjects in order to resist the regime of truth of heteronormativity and gain their own sexual and gendered state of being.²⁹⁵ In my opinion, Massad's thesis—that gays and lesbians do not exist in the Muslim world and Muslim cultures enjoy a pervasive form of nameless same-sex relations, which are not compatible with Western discourse of sexuality—on one side, are problematic and on the other side are not appropriate for the Iranian context. In paragraphs 4.2, “Reading Josef Massad” and 4.3,

²⁹³ Lorenzo Bernini, *LGBTQIA+: I movimenti oggi*, in *Parole del 21° secolo*, Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 2020

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ As I explained in the introduction, this thesis was born out of my curiosity about the gayness production in Iran. Therefore, by considering that there is little evidence of female same-sex relations in the pre-modern Iran, particularly in Persian literature, I preferred to concentrate only on male homoeroticism.

Hamjensgara/Gay's Existence", I will give a further discussion on Massad's thesis and Iranian gayness. But before, I will begin part two with a discussion on the concept of modernity.

PART TWO

**MODERNITY AND TRANSFORMATION OF SAME-SEX
RELATIONS INTO GAY IDENTITY IN IRAN**

3 Iranian Male Homoeroticism between Western and Native Modernity

In the second part, through Foucault's theoretical tools in the realm of gender and sexuality, I will release a genealogical account of the transformation of same-sex relations into gay identity in Iran before and after starting modernization in the nineteenth century until the present. For doing so, I will rethink the notion of modernity, the Western narrative of modernity, and its representation of non-Western societies. After doing this, I will be able to investigate Iranian modernity and Iran's construction of gender and sexuality. But before, by drawing on Classical Persian literature, I will show the fluidity of sexual relations in what I call, using Foucauldian terms, the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance. Furthermore, I will argue that in the nineteenth century, Iranian modernity gave rise to the establishment of a biopolitical *dispositif* within which, for the articulation of a new national identity and the building of a modern nation-state, fluid and multi-faced sexuality, particularly same-sex relations, were covered and erased from the collective memory of Iranians in favor of the heterosexualization of the eros. Regarding homosexual identification and in contrast to Massad's thesis—that argues homosexuality and gayness are modern products of the Western *dispositif* of sexuality exported to the Middle East—I will claim that the Iranian homosexuality and gayness are constituted within the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality, and particularly, within the Iranian biopolitical system of the post-revolutionary era. Finally, by bringing the Foucauldian account of practices of the self into the Iranian context, I will discuss how Iranian gay-identifying men as ethical and authentic agents have resisted heteropatriarchy to constitute their own local gayness.

3.1 Rethinking Modernity

In this paragraph, by drawing on postcolonialism, the critique of, and new approaches to modernity, I will criticize the idea that modernity has only a Western governing center to accompany it. On the contrary, modernity and its consequences have always been globally interconnected and produced within an active and creative process of cultural hybridization and diversification. Through this approach to modernity, in the next paragraphs of this part, I will argue that, firstly, Iranian modernity is not just a process of westernization. Rather, it is a hybrid, innovative cultural grafting derived from both modern and traditional resources. Secondly, the notion of gayness (sexual and emotional relationships among gay men) as a function of modernity is not merely a Western product

exported to Iran. On the contrary, it has been produced in the Iranian biopolitical *dispositif*, and Iranian gay men themselves, by drawing on the Western-oriented notion of gay identity, have contributed to the construction of their own local gayness. Thirdly, I will argue that Massad's thesis lacks an assumption of divergence in modernity and thus, reduces same-sex identification to the modern West and reinstates a Eurocentric view of modernity in the postcolonial analyses through which he equates LGBTQIA+ rights campaigns with neo-colonialist politics. Therefore, to develop these arguments, first of all, I need to rethink the notion of modernity.

It has always been assumed that modernity started and finished in Western societies, and those non-Western societies (places of otherness) were modernized as a result of interaction with Western societies.²⁹⁶ This assumption of modernity is highlighted in the works of theorists of classical sociology and philosophy such as Karl Marx (1818-1883), Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Although they have different interpretations of modernity, their interpretations are always marked by a conceptual distinction between the rational Western and traditional non-Western societies.²⁹⁷ For example, although in *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, the German philosopher and sociologist Karl Marx criticizes capitalism and colonialism, he regards both of them as necessary steps for what he calls backward societies (non-Western societies, emphasizing India and China) to change and lay the foundation for a new form of society, which they would have never achieved on their own.²⁹⁸ In *The Division of Labor in Society*, French sociologist Émile Durkheim asserts that the paradigms of modernization are highly tied to “the increasing differentiation of knowledge and social function, the expansion of state powers; and the growing density of communication through urbanization, migration and new technologies”. He also supports this idea that the Western path of modernization should be a model for other non-Western world.²⁹⁹ In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber defines one of his core research questions as, “What concatenation of circumstances has led to the fact that in the Occident, and here only, cultural phenomena have appeared which—as at least we like to imagine—lie in a

²⁹⁶ Timothy Mitchell, *The Question of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Karl Marx, “The Future Result of British Rules in India.” Marxists.catbull.com. <https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm>, cited in Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order* (UK: Polity Press, 2016), 53-54.

²⁹⁹ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1984), cited in Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: Norton, 2014), 35.

direction of development of universal significance and validity?” According to him, the “cultural phenomena” of modernity and rationalism have appeared in the West and developed only there, and then spread to other cultures to gain a universal significance.³⁰⁰

Foucault also respects this spatialisation of modernity; the modernity that he identifies is centered, as already explained, on the development of the power-knowledge regime that focuses on the welfare of the population and large-scale management of life and death by the Western states. Thus, he sees the development of bio-power as the threshold of modernity for European societies. Therefore, while Foucault’s theoretical tools have provided significant contributions to the critical analysis of the power-knowledge relations of post-Enlightenment Europe, the issue of colonialism and colonial construction of European modernity does not figure ostensibly in his writings. In this respect, in *Questions of Modernity*, Timothy Mitchell points out that it is by “relegating the non-West to the margins and footnotes of his account [that] Foucault reproduces the spatialisation of modernity. The homogeneous time of modernity, its characteristic contemporaneity, is preserved by the way Foucault respects the territorial boundaries of the modern.”³⁰¹ Thus, according to Mitchell, Foucault situates modern governmental techniques squarely within the culture, history, and geography of Europe.³⁰² Edward Said also criticizes Foucault’s Eurocentric vision and his failure to pay attention to the West’s other: “His Eurocentrism was almost total, as if history itself took place only among a group of German and French thinkers.”³⁰³

Although Said criticizes Foucault’s Eurocentrism, he applies Foucault’s notion of discourse and discursive formation to the Western representations of the Eastern world. As we have seen, Foucault argues that knowledge is constructed according to a set of discursive formations that define and construct the objects, concepts, paradigms, and theoretical formations that are available in a given culture. Following Foucault, in *Orientalism*³⁰⁴ Said argues that a complex set of representations and fabrications produced the discursive formation of the Orient. He says that

³⁰⁰ Max Weber, *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Munchen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2010), cited in *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World*, eds., Henning Trüper, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (London, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 329.

³⁰¹ Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity*, 16.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Edward Said, “Michel Foucault, 1927–1984” in *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*, ed., Edward Said (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 199.

³⁰⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

Orientalism itself is a set of complex academic forms of knowledge with institutions of power, a “system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering the Orient into Western consciousness” (in other words, a *dispositif*).³⁰⁵ Through Foucault’s concept of discursive formation and along with Gramsci’s theorization on hegemony, Said questions the validity of the Western representation of the Orient. The notion of culture is a substantial element in Said’s works. Said defines culture in two distinctive but interconnected senses. Firstly, he defines culture as those “practices, like the art of description, communication and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure”.³⁰⁶ Secondly, he also sees culture as:

a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought... You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that.³⁰⁷

Therefore, Said’s understating of culture is situated between culture as “artistic production” on the one hand and “identity”³⁰⁸ on the other. Moreover, he elaborates his account of the culture around Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. According to Gramsci, hegemony relies on “predominance obtained by consent”³⁰⁹ rather than the force of one class or group over other groups. In other words, according to Gramsci, power can be exercised and reinforced as much through cultural texts as through physical forces: hegemonic elites establish a cultural system to promote and legitimize their own state of hegemony, and when a culture becomes hegemonic, it becomes common sense for the majority of the population.

By drawing on Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, Said argues that “the relation between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 6.

³⁰⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto, 1993), xii.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., xiii.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebook of Antonio Gramsci*, eds., Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Newell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 12.

hegemony”.³¹⁰ As he explains, “insofar as it was a science of incorporation and inclusion by virtue of which the Orient was constituted and then introduced into Europe, *Orientalism* was a scientific movement whose analogue in the world of empirical politics was the Orient’s colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe”.³¹¹ In other words, *Orientalism* is the Western strategy of dealing with the Orient through “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, setting it, ruling over it: in short [...] a Western-style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”³¹². In addition, he posits that the Orient is an integral part of “European material civilization and culture”³¹³. It has helped the West to define itself; it has functioned as an imaginary figure against which Europe can construct itself by contrast. The European Orientalist discourse for Said projected on the Orient all those characteristics that Europe wanted to expel from itself, while also constructing the “Other”. In Said’s view, therefore, *Orientalism* is at the service of the West’s hegemony to produce the West as a superior civilization while constructing the East as the inferior ‘Other’. This distinction is primarily formed by distinguishing and then essentializing East and West’s identities through a dichotomizing system of representations in the regime of stereotypes, with the aim of making differences between Western and Eastern parts of the world. As a consequence of such binary opposition, in the Orientalist discourse, the East is characterized negatively as irrational, backward, voiceless and despotic. On the contrary, the West is represented positively as rational, democratic, moral, and progressive.³¹⁴

For this thesis, *Orientalism* has been criticized by many reviewers and commenters. For example, in *White Mythology: Writing History and the West* Robert Young points to a lack of theory of agency and resistance in Said’s work and finds a contradiction in this: “as we might anticipate from his retrieval of the category of the human, and his endorsement of the validity of individual experience as affording a theoretical and political base, Said rejects Foucault’s downgrading of the role of individual agency”.³¹⁵ In *Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse*, Sadik Jalal al-Azm argues

³¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

³¹¹ Edward W. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered” in *Europe and Its Others, Vol. 1* (Colchester, University of Essex Press, 1985), 17.

³¹² Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹⁴ Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Station, and Willy Maley, *Postcolonial Criticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 23.

³¹⁵ Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 173.

that Said's *Orientalism* confirms an essentializing dichotomy between the East and the West by means of a monolithic and static approach to culture.³¹⁶ In *Orientalism and After*, Aijaz Ahmad, proclaims his fundamental disagreement with Said and like others, he criticizes Said's methodological inconsistencies. According to Ahmad, Said's methodology is an ahistorical and un-Foucauldian approach because Foucault, in contrast to Said, rejects long-term continuities. Moreover, Ahmad wonders how it is possible that Said reconciles the anti-humanism of Foucauldian discourse theory and Marxism with a celebration of humanist values derives from an older tradition of Western scholarship. Like al-'Azm, Ahmad claims that Said accuses justifiably the essentializing of the Orient, but his essentializing of the West is equally remarkable.³¹⁷

Homi Bhabha, an Indian English scholar and one of the most influential figures in contemporary postcolonial studies, also criticizes Said's hierarchical dualism of the West and the East. According to Bhabha, the colonial discourse is marked by ambivalence: Said tries to resolve this ambivalence in the "most traditional literary critical way by referring to a single originating intention"³¹⁸, while Bhabha recasts the problem of ambivalence in a positive and enabling form. Through developing the Freudian understating of ambivalence, which is the coexistence of two opposite instincts, Bhabha argues that at the center of *Orientalism* there is a polarity rather than a single homogenizing perspective. This polarity, according to him, is "on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements".³¹⁹ Bhabha proposes a view of colonial discourse as "negotiation rather than negation". He also transfers and challenges the idea of modernity—the idea of scientific and material progress that marks the West as modern—, and argues that we need to look again at modernity through a postcolonial perspective drawing from the experience of colonized people and their relations with colonizers. According to him, it is not only a question of historiography: also the spatialities of modernity should not be sought outside of those produced through the project of imperialism:

³¹⁶ Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Khamsin* 8 (1981), 5–26. As cited in *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, eds., Lockman, Zachary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 196.

³¹⁷ Aijaz Ahmad, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said" in *Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, ed., Aijaz Ahmad, (London: Verso, 1992), 58–63.

³¹⁸ Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, 182.

³¹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 102.

our major task now is to probe further the cunning of Western modernity, its historical ironies, its disjunctive temporalities, its much-vaunted crisis of representation. It is important to say that it would change the values of all critical work if the emergence of modernity were given a colonial and post-colonial genealogy. We must never forget that the establishment of colonized space profoundly informs and historically contests the emergence of those so-called post Enlightenment values associated with the notion of modern stability.³²⁰

Bhabha argues that “there is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power is possessed entirely by the colonizer which is a historical and theoretical simplification”.³²¹ On the contrary, as said, Bhabha reads colonial stereotypes as ambivalent. Of course, the purpose of colonialist stereotypes is to construct the colonized as a “population of degenerate racial types with a view to justify conquest, exploitation, and civilization”.³²² But Bhabha argues that this aim is “never fully met”³²³ because “the colonial stereotype is a complex ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself”.³²⁴ In Bhabha’s reading, the stereotype declares “what is known about the native but nonetheless anxiously [restate] this knowledge as if it can never be confirmed but only reinforced through constant repetition, making it a sign of a deeper crisis of authority in the wielding of colonial power”.³²⁵

To highlight this crisis, Bhabha uses the notion of mimicry, which is “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge”.³²⁶ In his words, mimicry is a strategy of power and knowledge that “seeks the inclusion of an authorized good native, with a view to excluding bad natives”.³²⁷ For example, Bhabha focuses on the fact that in colonized locations such as India, British authorities needed to produce a class of Indians capable of taking English language,

³²⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “Caliban Speaks to Prospero: Cultural Identity and the Crisis of Representation” in *Critical Fictions: the Politics of Imaginative Writing*, ed., Philomena Marini (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 62–5.

³²¹ Homi K. Bhabha, “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” in *The Politics of Theory*, eds., Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iverson and Diana Loxley (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1983), 200.

³²² Rahul Rao, “Postcolonialism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, eds., Michael Freedon, Lyman Tower Sargent, Marc Stears, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 271-292.

³²³ John McLeod, *Beginning postcolonialism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 46.

³²⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 100.

³²⁵ Rao, “Postcolonialism”, 275.

³²⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

³²⁷ Rao, “Postcolonialism”, 275.

opinions, morals, and intellect.³²⁸ Bhabha describes this group of Indians as “mimic men” who act English but do not look English, who are Anglicised rather than English.³²⁹ By drawing on Foucault’s conceptualization of power, Bhabha further argues that the strategy of mimicry is ambivalent, embracing both mockery and a certain menace (that is a form of resistance). He contends that the presence of Anglicised people—who are not exclusively native and not quite English, but something in between—“menace the discourse of colonialism because they [Anglicised people] threaten to expose the ambivalence at its heart. Hearing their language coming through the mouths of the colonized, the colonizers are faced with the worrying threat of resemblance between colonizers and colonized”.³³⁰ Such a resemblance “threatens the racial and other hierarchies on which imperialism was premised”.³³¹ According to Bhabha, this menace in mimicry is not only acted by the colonized but is rather an effect of the colonizer’s own discourse. In this respect, the relationships between colonizers and colonized go beyond dependence, it is of interdependence and mutual construction that changes the identities of both cultures. Bhabha explains this interdependency through the concept of “hybridization”.

In Bhabha’s account of culture, hybridity refers to mixed-ness and impurity of culture. It refers to the fact that every single culture is not a discrete phenomenon; instead, each culture has always been in contact with other cultures, and this connection has led to a hybrid mixed-ness culture.³³² For Bhabha, hybrid culture is not merely the interconnection of cultures leading to a hybrid form. Rather, he insists on the hybridity of culture as an ongoing process. In other words, “cultures are the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridity”.³³³ Hybridity, Bhabha says, is not simply the “integration of two original moments from which the third emerges”. Rather, hybridity is the “third space” which provides another position to emerge.³³⁴ It “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom”.³³⁵ Therefore, hybridity is a process that leads

³²⁸ McLeod, *Beginning postcolonialism*, 48.

³²⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

³³⁰ McLeod, *Beginning postcolonialism*, 48.

³³¹ Rao, “Postcolonialism”, 275.

³³² David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 85.

³³⁵ Homi Bhabha, “The third space.” interview with Homi K. Bhabha, in *Identity; Community; Culture; Difference*, ed., J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–21.

to the creation of something new, “a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation”.³³⁶ Through mimicry and hybridity concepts, Bhabha makes visible the hidden presence of colonialism in the narratives of European modernity and progress. The narrative of modernity is not coherent and serene, and it should not be conceptualized through the East and the West's oppositions. He sees modernity as a location of shared mimics and practices: it is brought into being in response to a certain historical, political and geographical conditions and dispositions, but we cannot merely say that it belongs to one discrete culture or another.

Alongside Bhabha, other scholars have worked on the idea of the multiplicity of modernities. Scholars such as Shmuel Eisenstadt understand modernity as a global system, which is diverse, dynamic, and multidirectional. In *Multiple Modernities*, he goes beyond the structural notion of a single homogeneous modernity and proposes that

The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world—indeed to explain the history of modernity—is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural program ... Western patterns of modernity are not the only authentic modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic point for others.³³⁷

Although Eisenstadt problematizes the centrality of Eurocentrism, his interpretation of modernity is reliant on an ideal type of modernity, originated in Europe³³⁸ then spread to the non-Western world to give rise to the development of several and different modern civilizations that existed side-by-side.³³⁹ In response, Dilip Gaonkar in *On Alternative Modernities* reformulates and extends Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities and proposes the concept of alternative modernity. Gaonkar defines modernity as a process originated “in and of the West some centuries ago” that “always unfolds within a specific cultural or civilizational context”. According to him, “different starting points for the transition to modernity lead to different outcomes [...] in both outlook and

³³⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 263.

³³⁷ Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2002), 2–3.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

³³⁹ Bjørn Thomassen, ‘Anthropology and its Many Modernities: When Concepts Matter,’ *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2012), 160-178.

institutional arrangement”.³⁴⁰ According to Gaonkar, modernity is produced through “creative adaptations” by subjects who are not receivers but rather active agents.³⁴¹

In a similar way, Sanjay Subrahmanyam in *Connected Histories* challenges the Eurocentric discourse of modernity and proposes the concept of “connected histories”. Through this concept, he seeks “to delink the notion of modernity from a particular European trajectory (Greece, the classical Rome... the Renaissance)” to argue a “more-or-less global shift, with many different sources and roots, and—inevitably—many different forms and meanings depending on which society we look at it from”. He looks at the possibilities of global connections rather than the disciplinary constructions of differences; he argues that nationalism and historical ethnography have “blinded us to the possibilities of connection”; and then he concludes that historians should seek out the “fragile threads that connected the globe, even as the globe came to be defined as such”.³⁴²

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy argues that another problem with the standard definition of modernization is that it has prevented an intercultural understanding of the modernity/tradition binary. In this definition, modernity is essentially associated with the West and tradition with the rest.³⁴³ Similarly, in *Tradition through Modernity*, Anttonen points out that modern societies and institutions are full of traditions in terms of “established collective models and cognitive patterns of repetition”.³⁴⁴ And through the definition of invented traditions, in *The Invention of Tradition*, also Hobsbawm proposes that modernity includes traditions that are “actually invented, constructed and formally instituted”.³⁴⁵ Inventing traditions is a social process that establishes social cohesion, legitimizes institutions, socializes individuals and inculcates beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.³⁴⁶ In *Tradition and*

³⁴⁰ Dilip P. Gaonkar, “On Alternative Modernities” in *Alternative Modernities*, ed., Dilip P. Gaonkar (Durham Duke University Press, 2001), 17.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,’ *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1400-1800 (1997), 735-762.

³⁴³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso: London, 1995), 188.

³⁴⁴ Pertti G. Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship* (Helsinki: Studia Fennica Folkloristica, 2005), 37.

³⁴⁵ Erick Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Tradition” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed., Erick Hobsbawm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

Modernity, Gusfield argues that the modernization process should be understood as being constituted by an admixture of tradition and modernity in which “each drives a degree of support from the other, rather than [being considered as] a clash of opposites”.³⁴⁷

Another strand of thought against the standard interpretation of single homogeneous modernity suggests a revision of the genealogy of modernity in Western history and a new perspective on the transnational history of the East. For instance, in *Lost Modernities*, Woodside argues that not only do aspects of modernities not necessarily coincide with Western periodization (the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and industrialization) but they are also found independently in their own timeframes in preindustrial societies such as China, Korea, and Vietnam. For example, Woodside points to the two institutions common to these three societies: the civil service examinations and the social welfare systems that were considered as pre-modern institutions. But he argues that they should be re-examined in the light of a more comprehensive definition of modernity that no longer adheres to the Western calendar. Because the same systems were developed much later in the industrial West.³⁴⁸

In the Iranian context, in *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran*, Abbas Milani criticizes the idea of European rationalism through which Max Weber, Milan Kundera and many Western scholars have argued that all the paradigms of modernity from representative democracy and rational thought to the art of novels and essays are originally Western and are exclusively suited to Western culture.³⁴⁹ Locating the concept of modernity in a larger historical and cultural context, Milani develops his theory around the central theme that “Iran and the West have more in common than in difference”³⁵⁰ and that some quintessences of modernity such as democracy, rationalism, secularism, individualism, urbanism, and limited government are not alien ideas to Iran. In fact, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, these phenomena “began to evolve in Iran and helped shape a native Renaissance.” Milani illustrates that:

³⁴⁷ Joseph R. Gusfield, ‘Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change’ *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1967), 351-362.

³⁴⁸ Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities. China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 2006), 4-6.

³⁴⁹ Abbas Milani, *Lost Wisdom: Rethinking Modernity in Iran* (Mage Publisher: USA, 2014), 1-3.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

From the tenth to the twelfth centuries, a large group of Persian writers and poets, historians and philosophers, astronomers and mathematicians—from Khayyam and Kharazmi to Beyhaghi and Biruni—created what has been called “the most glorious era” in the history of Persian culture. The intellectual hallmarks of this era included many of the ideas that usually herald the advent of modernity in a society. Rationalism, empiricism, skepticism, pluralism of ideas, secularism, the idea of a “social contract,” development of a national language, [and] the evolution of a simple prose tailored to the contours of Ockham’s famous razor.³⁵¹

Through rethinking modernity as an active process of cultural hybridization and diversification, and by drawing on Najmabadi and Tavakoli Targhi’s contributions to the conceptualization of modernity in Iran, I will give a further discussion about Iranian modernity in paragraph 3.3, “Hybridized Homosexuality”. There, I will show that Iranian modernity was a creative process of cultural hybridization and grafting between reinventing the Iranian pre-Islamic tradition and modern European resources that eventually gave also rise to the establishment of a biopolitical *dispositif* within which—for the sake of building a modern nation-state and national identity—the memory of homoeroticism was covered or erased in favor of the heterosexualization of society. But before that, in the next paragraph, I will explore the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance with a focus on the ambiguity and fluidity of sexuality and gender in pre-modern Iran.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 29.

3.2 Homoerotic Persia

In this paragraph, I will explore the Iranian pre-modern sexual practices, using Foucauldian term, what I call the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance. In particular, I will show that in the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance male sexuality was *not* limited to the heteronormative binary system of contrasting homosexuality and heterosexuality. Instead, the construction of sexuality and gender was multi-faced and fluid, and such sexual-gender fluidity was not the subject of a harsh public's judgment. To develop my arguments, by using classical Persian literature and poetry, I will investigate male gender fluidity and dynamics of sexual relations, particularly the traditional male same-sex relations operating in pre-modern Iran. But before, I will give a short discussion on the issues of the marriage institution, the establishment of family, and procreation in the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance.

As already mentioned in paragraph 2.2 *Dispositif*, Foucault argues that in Western societies prior to the end of the eighteenth century, the regulation of social life was mediated through the *dispositif* of alliance: “a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions”.³⁵² By drawing on Afsaneh Najmabadi,³⁵³ Mohammad Tavakoli Targhi,³⁵⁴ Minoo Moallem,³⁵⁵ Sivan Balslev,³⁵⁶ and Janet Afary's³⁵⁷ contributions to the history of pre-modern Iranian society, I would argue that prior to the end of the nineteenth century, in Iran, regulation of social life was mediated through a particular kind of *dispositif* of alliance. Of course, this does not mean that after the nineteenth century, Iran became modern immediately. Rather, modernization was a long-lasting process that took shape over a few centuries and hybridized with Iranian traditions.³⁵⁸ Iranian *dispositif* of alliance was rooted in the religious

³⁵² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1*, 106.

³⁵³ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (California: California Press, 2005), 11-25.

³⁵⁴ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 54-76.

³⁵⁵ Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (USA and London: University of California Press, 2005), 31-57.

³⁵⁶ Sivan Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran* (UK: Cambridge, 2019), 23-53.

³⁵⁷ Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-21.

³⁵⁸ I will give a further discussion on the Iranian modernity in paragraph 3.3 “Hybridized Homosexuality”

discourse and the practice of Shari'a, but compared to the contemporary Iranian regime of sexuality, pre-modern Iran was less judgmental about male sexual orientations, gender fluidity and bodily expressions. For example, same-sex relations between a male adult and a male adolescent were not perceived as pedophilia. Instead, sexual relations with boys could belong to a man's repertoire of experiences, and under certain conditions, he could seek the love of a boy in homosocial spaces. Nevertheless, sexuality in the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance was mainly regulated by the practice of the arranged *nekhah* (marriage) within which the procreation, establishment of a family and transition of name and possessions took place.

Afary's *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* greatly contributes to the historical reconstruction of the institution of *nekhah* in pre-modern Iran. As she writes, parents were in charge of arranging their children's *nekhah*. Mothers often found a spouse for their son or daughter, while fathers or male guardians of family negotiated the financial details. The marriage contract was built around payment or a promise of payment of *mahriyeh*—a marriage dowry usually is in the form of money and possession that the groom should pay the bride at any time after the marriage. On the other side, the bride's family purchased their daughter's *jahizieh* (trousseau), including quilts, bedding and household items. Urban and elite families supplemented their daughters' *jahizieh* with additional gifts such as Persian carpets, jewels, or even slaves for both sexes. According to Islamic laws, boys gained legal maturity at fifteen and girls at nine. In both Shiite and Sunni laws, the father or guardian had the authority to arrange a contract on the daughter's behalf even before she reached the age of nine, although marriage would be consummated later. When she reached legal maturity, her consent in marriage was required. However, rarely did girls or even boys have a real opportunity to select their spouses, revoke the marriage contract, or take part in negotiation over *mahriyeh*. Age difference in marriage was considered mandatory. The groom was usually/always older than the bride (maybe several years, a decade, or even more), and large age gaps were also acceptable. For example, a sixty-year-old man could marry a ten-year-old girl. The opposite occasionally happened in the case of marriage between a young boy and an older widow when there were family and financial concerns to consider. A popular form of marriage was restricted to kinship relations—marriage between first cousins whose fathers were brothers. Cousin marriage played a significant role in the transition of properties.³⁵⁹ It “kept land and property within the

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 19-39.

family and also offered some protection to women through the tight web of family relationships”.³⁶⁰

Once the marriage contract was signed and the marriage ceremony was consummated, the groom's responsibility began with providing *nafagheh* (maintenance) for his wife and any children born from the marriage. The level of a woman's *nafagheh* was dependent on her social standing, and her husband had to provide for her according to the lifestyle she had been accustomed. A husband's continuation or discontinuation of *nafagheh* was based on the inability or refusal of sexual intimacy on the part of the wife. A husband's discontinuation of *nafagheh* or a wife's refusal of sexual intimacy both could provide the grounds for divorce.³⁶¹ In pre-modern Iran, marriage was an institution for the procreation and establishment of a family rather than for emotional intimacy and love. Because, on one side, marriage was a contract between families and one had no chance to choose one's own wife or husband³⁶², and on the other side, the patriarchal laws of Shari'a allow³⁶³ men to have access to sex outside marriage in legalized forms.³⁶⁴ Accordingly, man as the head in the hierarchy of power in the family had to maintain kinship ties and fulfill the public and family obligations but could look for additional forms of sexual gratification in other relations, such as *sigheh* (temporary marriage)³⁶⁵, that is the object of study of Anthropologist Shahlah Haeri in *Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran*.

Temporary marriage³⁶⁶ is a “form of contract” permitted in Shiite doctrine in which a “married or unmarried man and an unmarried woman (virgin, divorced, widowed)” privately and verbally agree upon a temporary sexual relation with a specific duration of time and sum—from one hour to ninety-nine years. Aside from this payment, a “temporary husband is not obliged to provide financial support for his temporary wife”.³⁶⁷ As Haeri argues Shiite Muslim man could make several contracts of temporary marriage, aside from four permanent wives that legally are allowed.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 25.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 19-39.

³⁶² Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*.

³⁶³ Still in modern Iran, the sexual codes of conduct come from Shari'a.

³⁶⁴ Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran*, 104.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ In modern Iran, temporary marriage still is a form of sexual gratification.

³⁶⁷ Shahla Haeri, “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality,” *Social Research*, Vol. 59, No. 1, *Religion and Politics* (1992), 201-223.

However, a Muslim woman could marry either temporarily or permanently with no more than one man.³⁶⁸

Besides temporary marriage, man could seek “friendship/love/sexuality” in a homosocial domain.³⁶⁹ In this regard, Najmabadi notes that “vaginal intercourse with wives was aimed to fulfill procreative obligations, while other acts were linked to the pleasures of power, gender [mostly men’s pleasure], age, class, and rank. It was (is) also the case that if men performed their procreative obligations, the larger community was generally not much concerned with the rest of their sex life”.³⁷⁰ This is a tactic that Murray in *Islamic Homosexualities* calls, by a rephrasing of Foucault’s title, “the will not to know”³⁷¹—a tactic that worked and still works against the enforcement of anti-homosexual laws in Muslim societies. Therefore, besides lawful heterosexual unions, fulfillment of procreative obligations and hierarchies of power in the family, male same-sex relationships also played a significant role in the Iranian *dispositif of alliance*. Homoerotic passion was in fact, common and accommodated in pre-modern Iran, and falling in love with an adolescent or youth and celebrating that love was acceptable as long as men fulfilled their public and family obligations and remained circumspect and discreet. Of course, this does not mean that pre-modern Iran should be praised as a golden era for cherishing same-sex relations. Rather, with this paragraph, my intention is to argue that pre-modern Iran fostered different forms of erotic expression and the construction of gender and sexuality was more fluid and multi-faced than in contemporary Iran. In the next paragraphs, I will show how during modernization and particularly the post-revolutionary era, such sexual-gender fluidity was reduced to heteronormativity and cisnormativity. But here, before exploring the construction of gender and sexuality, I would like to explain the theological debate revolving around same-sex relations in Muslim Worlds.

As Christian and Jewish sacred texts, the Qur’an and Islamic laws of Shiite and Sunni regard male same-sex practices as an abomination.³⁷² In the Qur’anic story about people of Lut, the prophet

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 20.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Stephen O. Murray, “The Will not to Know, Islamic Accommodations of Male Homosexuality” in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, eds. Stephen O. Murray, Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997). 14-54.

³⁷² Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 81.

Lot had been sent to the people of Lut who were engaged in sexual indiscretions. After years of preaching, the people of Lut not only ignored the prophet, but they also threatened him with punishment. Thereafter, God ordered Lot to leave the city and subsequently destroyed Lut by a rain of stones of baked clay. There are some passages in this story that Muslim scholars interpreted as a condemnation of the sexual acts of the people of Lut:

— “Will ye commit abomination such as no creature ever did before you? Lo, ye come with lust unto men instead of women. Nay, but ye are wanton”.³⁷³

— “Do you approach males of all the world and leave what God your Lord has created for you of your wives? Nay, but you are people who transgress”.³⁷⁴

— “Verily, ye approach which no one in all the world anticipated you in! What! Do ye approach men? And stop folks on the highway? And approach in your assembly sin?”³⁷⁵

Interestingly, the relevant passages of the Qur’an do not specify what sexual acts the people of Lut had committed. Nevertheless, from early on, a majority of Muslim jurists identified the act of people of Lut with anal intercourse to the extent that the Arabic juridical terminology *liwat* could be used to refer to the anal intercourse between two men.³⁷⁶ In *Neither Homophobic nor (Hetero) Sexuality Pure: Contextualizing Islam’s Objections to Same-Sex Sexuality*, by drawing on the classical interpretations of the story of people of Lut in the Qur’an, Aleardo Zanghellini argues that the Qur’anic texts refer to a very specific sexual *act* between men (anal intercourse), and not to *identities* and *orientations* (which, as Foucault explains, are modern concepts). He also comments that “indeed, even some contemporary legal scholars, although speaking of the crime of ‘homosexuality’, actually use it as a synonym for anal intercourse between men rather than in its broader usual [modern] sense”. Then, he concludes that what forbids same-sex anal intercourse in the Qur’an is its conceptualization as the practice of “subordination”. In other words, being submissive in male same-sex practices particularly anal intercourse, as Zanghellini asserts, is

³⁷³ Edward Henry Palmer, *The Koran*. (London: Watkins, 1951). 81-82

³⁷⁴ Ibid. 26.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. 29.

³⁷⁶ Samar Habib, “Introduction,” in *Islam and Homosexuality: Volume One*, ed., Samar Habib (UK&USA: Praeger, 2010), xlv

problematic and “bad because it subordinates the passive male through dishonor effected by his emasculation”.³⁷⁷

However, among Islamic scholars, there is a fluctuation of opinions and interpretations on the punishment of *liwat*. In shari‘a, forbidden acts fall into two categories: the first is *hodud*, which refers to the transgression of the limitations set by God and require fixed, mandatory punishments (*‘uqubat muqaddare*) that are based on the Qur’an and Sunna. *Hodud* includes theft, drunkenness, unlawful sexual intercourse (such as fornication or any sexual intercourse between people not married to each other) and false accusations of unlawful sexual intercourse.³⁷⁸ The other category, which is called *ta’zir*, includes those crimes where the judge has the right to apply his discretion: this is the case of, for example, manslaughter or assault. While *liwat* is forbidden in the Qur’an, there is a variance as to whether *liwat* should be seen as a *hodud* crime or as a part of *ta’zir* offense. Whereas the Shiite schools of Islam regard *liwat* as a *hodud* crime, some Sunni schools of Islam see it punishable as a *ta’zir* offense where the judge determines the punishment.³⁷⁹ The root of this variance regarding the punishment of *liwat* lies in the lack of clear Qur’anic references that result in leaving a space of ambiguity on how *liwat* should be punished.³⁸⁰ For example, some Muslim jurists have proposed the death penalty, but in *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, Afary identifies four factors that prevent such extreme punishment. First, to prove any kind of unlawful sexual intercourse, the legal system of *shari‘a* requires “solid evidence” (that entails the witness of four adult Muslim men who observed the actual penetration) before imposing punishment, which is often impossible. Second, a false accusation of *liwat* is itself a major sin and, therefore, punishable. Third, the Qur’an recognizes the possibilities of repentance, and the person who repents must be forgiven. Fourth, due to “the severity of the punishment” and the “wide practice of same-sex relations”, it would be difficult to condemn and accuse people. Hence, in the majority of Islamic

³⁷⁷ Aleardo Zanghellini, “Neither Homophobic nor [Hetero] Sexually Pure: Contextualizing Islam’s Objections to same-Sex Sexuality,” in *Islam and Homosexuality: Volume Two*, ed., Samar Habib (UK&USA: Praeger, 2010), 286

³⁷⁸ Harvey J. Sindima, *Major Issues in Islam: The Challenges Within and Without* (New York: Hamilton Books, 2018), 145.

³⁷⁹ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law: A Fresh Interpretation* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 91-92

³⁸⁰ Barbara Zollner, “Mithliyyun or Lutiyyun? neo-Orthodoxy and the Debate on the Unlawfulness of Same-Sex Relations in Islam,” in *Islam and Homosexuality: Volume One*, ed., Samar Habib (UK&USA: Praeger, 2010), 209.

communities, Shari'a laws employ the customary punishment of flogging as a less severe alternative for *liwat*.³⁸¹

In his last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that in ancient Greece, same-sex relations were not equated with immorality if these relations were regulated by self-imposed “forms of austerity”. For example, having a beloved boy was an acceptable practice for an adult man, but also he was responsible for the boy’s reputation and his future political status. It shows that in antiquity, same-sex relations under certain conditions not only were not considered immorality, but also it was acceptable cultural practice.³⁸² In the Islamic context, despite strong Shari’a disapproval, homoerotic love and male same-sex relationships in many pre-modern Muslim worlds were implicitly recognized as cultural practices as long as the men who desired such relations remained discreet while also respecting certain conventions. In particular, in contrast to the debates over the condemnation of *liwat*, there is evidence of a widespread tolerance of same-sex sexuality, such as the permissibility of sex with slaves in the pre-nineteenth century of the Islamic world.³⁸³ In *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, El-Rouayheb points out that in the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam—in order to reduce the scope of *liwat*’s punishment—for jurists, *liwat* with male or female slaves or even one’s wife was permissible. Other jurists of the same school saw *liwat* with male slaves equivalent to temporary marriage (*mut’ah*).³⁸⁴ As in these Sunni schools of Islam, also in some Shiite schools, sex with male slaves during travel was permissible when a man did not have access to his wife or female slaves.³⁸⁵ Foucault also highlights that in ancient Greece, women were associated with passivity and weakness. For this reason, men sought companionship among male homosocial spaces.³⁸⁶ In similar fashion to ancient Greek tradition, Islamic culture valued male companionship over romantic relationships between a man and a woman; loving beautiful boys was recognized as true romance, and women were considered objects of procreation and thus not worth of companionship. Therefore, because of this

³⁸¹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 81.

³⁸² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 253.

³⁸³ khaled el-rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2005), 124.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. (*Mut’ah* is Arabic equivalent of *sigheh* in Persian)

³⁸⁵ Cyrus Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi (Homoerotism in the Persian literature)* (Tehran: Ferdows Publications, 2002), 114.

³⁸⁶ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*,

gender segregation, it was not unusual that in homosocial environments such as religious seminaries, masters would fall in love with their young pupils or arrange a courtship with their male colleagues.³⁸⁷

Describing the physical features of the male beloved and falling and expressing love towards youths in verse or prose were also permissible as long as not taken realistically.³⁸⁸ As pointed out by one of the most prominent jurists of the early Ottoman period, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 1566):

Amorous verse is not an indication of having looked with lust; as a rule the poet says it by way of making his poetry more delicate and to exhibit his craftsmanship, not because he is really in love... the composition of amorous verse is a craft, and the intention of the poet is to produce discourse, not the verisimilitude of what is mentioned".³⁸⁹ The ideas that "poets say what they do not do" thus made a peaceful space of coexistence between the ideas of homoeroticism celebrated in love poetry and the austere ideals upheld by religious jurists. Poets always did not "say what they do not do", but this was an assumption that they did so, as a rule, to allow them to express their desires for male beloved, wine, or women.³⁹⁰

Many of the points I have made so far, such as Shari'a's rules regarding same-sex relations and its tolerance in Muslim societies, are also valid for the Iranian pre-modern context. As in ancient Greece, same-sex relationships in medieval Iran were based on an inequality of power in terms of age and social standings. However, in some cases, pre-modern Iran also experienced relatively symmetrical same-sex relations as well as different forms of erotic expression that I will discuss further in this paragraph. Sexual relationships between two men were not identified as homosexuality in the modern sense, nor was a sexual relationship between a man and a woman considered heterosexuality. Rather, as Afary argues, male same-sex relations were based on a "status-defined homosexuality" whereby men were identified by their "positionality" during sexual intercourse.³⁹¹ It was assumed that in the gender convention of pre-modern Iranian society, in same-sex intercourse, one partner was deemed as masculine and another as feminine. Foucault argues that in the ancient Western world, the first evidence of the ethic of love or what he calls

³⁸⁷ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 81.

³⁸⁸ Al-rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800*, 111.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 79.

“true love”³⁹² orbited around the *eraste* (active adult lover) and *paidika* (passive adolescent boy). In pre-modern Iran, male same-sex relations involved sex between an active adult man and *amrad* (passive adolescent boy).³⁹³ *Amrads* were boys who “could be penetrated without losing their potential manliness, so long as they did not register pleasure in the act which would suggest a pathology liable to continue into adulthood”.³⁹⁴ Furthermore, if the relationship was kept discreet and private, an *amrad* could overtake his passive status, marry and have children, and if he himself, as an adult, entered into a same-sex relationship, he was assumed to play an active role.³⁹⁵

In same-sex relationships, passive partners, besides *amrads*, could be labeled in two more ways. *Ma'bun* was an adult man who desired a passive role. He was considered sick and contemptible. *Ma'bun* did not copy the women's conduct, he could be a husband and father, but in the patriarchal medieval Iran and Muslim world, he was viewed as an ‘imperfect man’ or someone who suffered from the loss of ‘manliness’.³⁹⁶ The term *mukhannath*, in contrast to *amrad* and *ma'bun*, was completely recognized as effeminacy and transvestism among males. *Mukhannath* imitated a woman in the “languidness of limbs” or “softness of his voice” and usually had activities as musicians, actors, and dancers.³⁹⁷ In modern terms, maybe we can somehow identify the *mukhannath* as a transgendered person.³⁹⁸ These sexual roles—*amrad*, *ma'bun* and *mukhannath*—as well as different forms of homoeroticism (that I will discuss) greatly contributed to the fluidity of Iran's construction of gender and sexuality. Cyrus Shamisa, one of the most important Iranian contemporary scholars in Persian literature, claims that Persian poetry is essentially homoerotic.³⁹⁹ In fact, it offers an interesting commentary about same-sex relationships—an in-depth look into the construction of gender and sexuality in pre-modern Iran. The oeuvre of classical Persian poets—like Attar (d. 1220), Rumi (d.1273), Sa'di (d.1291), Hafez (d. 1389), Jami (d. 1492) and those of

³⁹² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 253.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁹⁴ Everett K. Rowson, “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed., Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Rutledge, 1991), 50-79.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), 23, 141.

³⁹⁷ Everett K. Rowson, “The Effeminate of Early Medina”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 111, No. 4, (1991), 671-693.

³⁹⁸ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 86.

³⁹⁹ Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi (Homoeroticism in the Persian literature)*, 10.

the twentieth century like Iraj Mirza–(1926) are saturated with homoerotic love.⁴⁰⁰ The first explicit examples of same-sex relations in Persian literature traces back to the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁴⁰¹ In this era, there was no incompatibility in a man’s sexual inclination toward both boys and women. Rather, a “man who penetrated both women and boys” was perceived as “hyper masculine”.⁴⁰² In this form of erotic expression that we call today bisexuality, a man could be inclined toward men, even as a married man with a family or a man could be inclined toward women and have *amrad* at the same time. The literary genre of *Andarz Nameh* (Mirrors for Princes) gives advice on the merits of sexual relationships with both women and men. For example, in the major work of Persian literature in the eleventh century, *Qabus Nameh* (Book of Kavous), the Ziyarid ruler Keykavous (1050-1087) advises his son Gilanshah that sexual relations with both men and women should be a part of a man’s life experience:

As between women and youth, do not confine your inclination to either sex; thus, you may find enjoyment from both kinds without either of the two becoming inimical to you. During the summer let your desire incline toward youths and during the winter toward women.⁴⁰³

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, besides “romantic bisexuality,” we can see a form of a relatively symmetrical same-sex relationship. In this era, Iran was ruled by the Turkic dynasty, and classical Persian poetry celebrated same-sex relationships between the Turkic sultans and their soldiers and pages. One of the best-known examples of same-sex relations of this era is the one between sultan Mahmud Ghazni (the first sultan of the Ghaznavid dynasty in 999-1030) and Abulnajm Ayaz (one of sultan Mahmud’s Turkic military commanders). Sultan Mahmud adored Ayaz until the last days, not just when Ayaz was young. Under sultan Mahmud’s reign and even during his son, sultan Masud, Ayaz was treated with great respect and endowed with many official responsibilities. Sultan Mahmud even paid his court poets to praise Ayaz’s strategic and militaristic courage and talent as well as his physical beauty in their verses and proses.⁴⁰⁴ In his notable work *Chahar Maghale* (Four Discourses), Nezami Aruzi, a court-poet in sultan Mahmud’s

⁴⁰⁰ Janet Afary, Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2005), 156.

⁴⁰¹ Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi (Homoeroticism in the Persian literature)*, 37.

⁴⁰² Rowson, “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists”, 50–79.

⁴⁰³ Kaykavus Ibn Iskandar. *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama* (London: Cresset Press, 1951), 77-78.

⁴⁰⁴ Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi*, 44.

reign, praises the love story of sultan Mahmud and Ayaz in his panegyric prose. He tells the story in a way to absolve Mahmud's sinful love for Ayaz but confirms the sultan's great fondness for the Turkic commander:

The love borne by Sultan Yamtnttd-Dawla Mahmud to Ayaz the Turk is well-known and famous. It is related that Ayaz was not remarkably handsome, but was of sweet expression and olive, complexion, symmetrically formed, graceful in his movements, sensible and deliberate in action, and endowed with all the arts of pleasing in which respect, indeed he had few rivals in his time. Now all these are qualities, which excite love and give permanence to friendship. Now, Sultan Yamtnttd-Dawla Mahmud was a pious and Godfearing man and he wrestled much with his love for Ayaz so that he should not diverge by so much as a single step from the Path of the Law and the Way of Honour. ⁴⁰⁵

Although the dominant form of same-sex relationships in pre-modern Iran was asymmetrical, I consider the case of sultan Mahmud and Ayaz as a significant counter-example in this ongoing debate over the properties of same-sex relations. This story shows that the ideal love between males was not necessarily pederasty or merely an issue of inequality in terms of age and social status at least in comparison with same-sex relations between an *amrad* and an adult man. Although Ayaz did not possess an equal status with sultan Mahmud, he was relatively powerful with the ability to rise to higher levels of power.

We can find another significant counter-example regarding the dominant debate over pre-modern same-sex relations in the Sufi's poetry. In the eleventh century, the emergence of Sufism nurtured the roots of homoeroticism from the outset. Greatly influenced by Greek philosophers such as Plato, Sufis perceived beauty as one of God's worldly manifestations. They believed that worldly love could lead to heavenly love. Loving a person as a creature of God was the first step to reaching a higher level of mystical insight and eventually to the true love or loving God.⁴⁰⁶ Much like religious seminaries and intellectual gatherings of the time, Sufi circles were male homosocial and gender-segregated spaces. Thus, worldly beauty as a sign of God was to be manifested in an adolescent youth—*amrad*—or what was termed as *shahid* (witness) in Persian literature.⁴⁰⁷ In Sufi

⁴⁰⁵ Nizami Aruzi, *Chahar Maghale (Four Discourses)*, ed., Edward Brown (London: Cambridge University Press, 1921), xiv.

⁴⁰⁶ Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi* (Homoeroticism Relations in the Persian literature), 98.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

practices, the beauty of a male adolescent was represented and venerated in paintings, poetry and Sufi parlance as an “object of desire” which was connected to “the practice of gazing” (*nazarbazi*)—a form of spiritual practice with the expressions of falling in love with the beauty of boys who reflect a testimony to divine perfection.⁴⁰⁸ Sufi tradition also brought its own style of literary language into Persian poetry—a complex and heavily symbolic language, which was in contrast to the former literary language (in the Ghazanvid era in the tenth century). This mystical and opaque language, along with genderless Persian language,⁴⁰⁹ “has made tracing homoeroticism on Sufi-influenced poetry more difficult than in the poetry of their like-minded predecessors. Nevertheless, this is a dilemma that mostly concerns the general public rather than literary critics and expert, since there is still sufficient evidence that the beloved is in the most cases male”.⁴¹⁰

One good example of these mystical homoerotic stories of this era, which I consider as a counter-example in the dominant discourse of Iran’s pre-modern same-sex relations, is the relationship between Rumi and Shams Tabriz. Rumi fell in love with Shams who was a mystic and Sufi poet. They met for the first time in Konya in 1244, exactly when Rumi succeeded his father as the religious master in the city of Konya—the capital of the Seljuk Turk Empire—whereas Shams was a well-known Sufi mystic with a large following of disciples. Shams was seeking a student of equal extraordinary qualities when he saw that spark in Rumi. About their love story, in *Sex and Spirit*, Robert Barzan writes that

In the November of 1244 an event occurred in the lives of these two different men that would be the cornerstone for a tradition that to this day inspires the lives of millions: Mevlana Rumi and Shams Tabriz fell in love. The exact details of their meeting are lost in time and obscured by legend. It would appear though that it was love at first sight... Whatever really happened, the point is that they become inseparable, and the rest of Rumi’s life and work would be a reflection of the relationship that began that day. The two men were obsessed with each other.

⁴⁰⁸ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 39.

⁴⁰⁹ Farsi (Persian language) is a genderless language—that is, there are no categories requiring morphological agreement, and the same nouns, pronouns and adjectives are used for both male and female genders. For example, the pronoun (u) is used for ‘he’, ‘she’ and ‘it’. Regarding adjectives and verbs, also there is not any gendered connotation so that it gives rise to many ambiguities in recognizing the addressee in phrases.

⁴¹⁰ Anahita Hosseini, “Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction,” *Academia*, December, 2015, <https://www.academia.edu/20308533>, (December, 2015), 38.

Rumi shocked and scandalized his family and followers by neglecting his religious and social obligations to spend as much time as possible with his beloved Shams.⁴¹¹

In the case of Rumi and Shams, there are two different interpretations on their relationships. One interpretation emphasizes that their love was a homoerotic relation, while the other considers it as heavenly and mystical. From the evidence, we cannot prove either point of view. However, including sexual intercourse in their relations is not of great significance. Regardless of the physical relationship, what remains is that Rumi's homoerotic poetry reflects their relationships as lovers.⁴¹² This love demonstrates a kind of symmetrical relationship, since both were mature and renowned masters,⁴¹³ and it indicates a lack of hierarchal relationship, as Schimmel describes a romantic scene from their meeting after Shams returned to Rumi from Syria: "they embraced each other and fell at each other's feet, so that one did not know who was lover and who was beloved".⁴¹⁴ Rumi had chosen Shams over his disciples and loudly confessed his love to Shams without considering the conventions of society:

Take love's chalice and on you go
Just choose this as your love and go
Be limpid wine, pure as spirit
unblurred by vinestalk scum, and flow
Once glance at him's worth scores of lives
Strike a bargain, sell your soul and go
Such a body: argent, fluid, fine!
Pay the silver, close your purse, and go
Let the whole world weep for you! So what?
Look up at his smiling globe and go.
If they call you hypocrite, poseur,
Say, "So I am, and ten times worse," and go
Thumb your nose at people, rub it in
Suck sugar of his lips and go
"The moon is mine, the rest is yours
I need neither hearth nor home," you go
Who is that moon?
Lord of Tabriz, it's Shams, the Sun!
Step into his regal shade

⁴¹¹ Robert Barzan, *Sex and Spirit: Exploring Gay Men's Spirituality* (San Francisco: Publication of White Crane Newsletter, 1995), 28.

⁴¹² Hosseini, "Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction," 15.

⁴¹³ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 97.

⁴¹⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 313.

Let's go! ⁴¹⁵

Regarding symmetrical same-sex relations, a question that arises is: in the rigidly hierarchal society of pre-modern Iran, can homoerotic stories of sultan Mahmud and Ayza or Rumi and Shams be viewed as a form of same-sex relation that “defines a definite cultural theme” and moves beyond “the status-defined homosexuality”? ⁴¹⁶ In response to this question, Afary refers to the case of Rumi and Shams to argue that

Some mystic poets such as Rumi may have aspired to a new and more reciprocal ethic of love within their small communities. When Rumi and his contemporaries insisted that in the most exulted state of love, the distinction between the lover and beloved disappeared ... they may have been moving beyond status-defined homosexuality, beyond a relationship that always involved an implied ‘active’ lover and ‘passive’ beloved. In ultimate love, then, reciprocity and consent were essential.⁴¹⁷

Here, my intention is not to argue that the relationship between Rumi and Shams was a homosexual relationship, which is doubtlessly a modern phenomenon; rather, I would argue that we can consider their relationship as one of the closest examples to homosexuality and the furthest form from pederasty.

From the post-Sufism era to the Qajar period (between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries), however, we can see that in Persian poetry, poets tended to discard the spiritual aspects of homoeroticism and move toward more explicit admiration of physical properties of the male beloved. In this era, the Persian literary language was overflowed with same-sex themes, such as those that symbolized homoerotic allusions. ⁴¹⁸ From then on, the *ghazal* form of poetry (love poem) was dedicated to the themes of homoeroticism, showing that the love of boys was a preferred source of poetic inspiration, though sometimes it is impossible to recognize whether the object of description is a woman or a man—once again due to lack of grammatical genders and references

⁴¹⁵ Mowlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Rumi: Swallowing the Sun*, ed., Franklin D. Lewis (UK: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 77.

⁴¹⁶ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 99.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ Hosseini, “Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction”, 16.

in the Persian language⁴¹⁹—but in the works of Sa’adi (1210-1291), for example, the object of desire in most cases undoubtedly was a male beloved.⁴²⁰ Sa’adi Shirazi is one of the major Persian poets recognized for the high quality of his writings and the depth of his social and moral thoughts. In his two major works *Golestan* (The Rose Garden) and *Bostan* (The Orchard) he depicts his same-sex and pederasty experience. In his writings, the romantic love between men and women is absent, only in some of his anecdotes he touches upon his own experience with marital discord; Sa’adi himself complains about his wife who “turned out to be ill-humoured, quarrelsome, disobedient, abusive in her tongue and embittering my life”.⁴²¹ On the contrary, he explicitly expresses his fondness of beautiful boys:

There are many pretty boys in the world, but not one of them
Possesses the sweetness of your life-imparting, heart-soothing lips.⁴²²

O heart, if that sweet boy should shed my blood,
Make it as lawful for him as his mother’s milk.⁴²³

Furthermore, he encourages love for beautiful boys that, according to him, has four benefits: “first, it makes the day auspicious; second, it adds pleasure to life; third, it inspires generosity and compassion; fourth, it augments [one’s] wealth and position ...”.⁴²⁴

The other most popular Persian poet, Hafez Shirazi, celebrates youths’ beauty by interplaying eroticism and mysticism. He is best known for his *ghazals*, regarding wine-drinking, music, and unrequited love but in a universal and transcendent scope. One of his famous *ghazals* is a poem about his unfaithful young Turk from Shiraz for whom he would give all treasures of the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.

If that Turk Shiraz gain our heart
For her dark mole, I will give Samarghand and Bukhara⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁹ See the note 56.

⁴²⁰ Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi (Homoeroticism Relations in the Persian literature)*, 143-144.

⁴²¹ Muslih-uddin Sa’adi, Shirazi, *The Gulistan Or Rose Garden of Sa’adi*, ed., Edward Rehatsek (UK: Omphaloskepsis Press, 2010), 88.

⁴²² Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, *Hafiz and His Contemporaries: Poetry, Performance and Patronage in Fourteenth Century Iran* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 127.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Minoo S. Southgate, “Men, Women, and Boys: Love and Sex in the Works of Sa’adi.” *Iranian Studies* 16(4) (1984): 413–452.

⁴²⁵ Anna Vanzan, “Traveling Translation and Orientalism in Reverse. Persian (Homo) erotic Literature and Its Translation into Western Languages,” *Communication and Culture Online*, Special Issue, no. 1 (2013): 44-54.

Wafer argues that although Hafez's poetry defines beloved as specifically male, there is no indication that he himself practiced pederasty.⁴²⁶ Shamisa also notes that Hafez's homoerotic poetry is not limited to the description of youths, since he praises the Emirs of Shiraz in the same manner and with the same poetic vocabularies that he uses when he describes his male beloved.⁴²⁷

Socially, pederasty remained the dominant form of same-sex relations during the Safavid era (1501-1736) and onwards.⁴²⁸ The pre-modern Iranian society assigned gender conventions to partners and distinguished between adult lover and adolescent beloved. According to these conventions, the beloved could be the *amrad* of an adult man as long as he is beardless, but the first appearance of a beard indicated that he was no longer suitable to be the passive object of desire.⁴²⁹ These relationships that had strong platonic tendencies were not only about sex, but also about cultivating the relationship "by placing responsibilities on the man with regard to the future of the boy".⁴³⁰ The partners were bound by "rules of courtship" such as "the bestowal of presents", "teaching of literary texts", "bodybuilding and military training", "mentorship, and the development of social contacts that would help the junior partner's career". In these cases, sometimes partners exchanged vows with homosexual tones, known as *sigheh baradar khandeghi* (brotherhood).⁴³¹

During the seventeenth century, *amrad khaneha* (male houses of prostitution) were recognized by the state, and they were tax-paying establishments. Bathhouses and coffeehouses were other common homosocial locations for same-sex sexual encounters.⁴³² French traveler Sir John Chardin in his travelogue, wrote about coffeehouses where *amrads* entertained customers. Many of them were male dancers or servants who dressed like women and performed erotic dances.⁴³³ The beginning of the Qajar dynasty (1789-1925) was quite similar to the previous centuries concerning

⁴²⁶ Jim Wafer, "Vision and Passion, The Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O. Murray, Will Roscoe, 123.

⁴²⁷ Shamisa, *Shahedbazi dar Adabiat Farsi*, 165.

⁴²⁸ Hosseini, "Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction", 18.

⁴²⁹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 35.

⁴³⁰ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 80.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid., 91.

same-sex relations and their reflection on Persian literature. Homoerotic poetry and literature moved to the explicit description of sexual acts and pederasty, and unequal relationships became the dominant form of homoeroticism.⁴³⁴ According to Najmabadi, one of the characteristics of this era was the notion of beauty, and “beautiful men and women were depicted with very similar facial and bodily features”.⁴³⁵ This was certainly “true in the case of *amrads*, who were expected to possess qualities that by today’s standards are regarded as feminine”.⁴³⁶ Even in written sources, the same feminine adjectives were used to describe men and women's beauty. For example, Rustam al-Hukama, an Iranian historian in Qajar era, described young boys toward whom Tahmasb Mirza (Shah of Iran in the Safavid Empire) was sexually inclined. He describes the young men as “young beardless men, rose-faced, silver-bodied, cypress-statured, narcissus-eyed, and coquettish, with sugar lips, wine bearers with tulip black-scented hair, and crystalline chin folds, and full of games and coquettishness.”⁴³⁷ Although relationships with *amrads* were totally common in urban or rural areas during Qajar, it was a privilege of the upper class of society and royalty to keep boy concubines.⁴³⁸ The best-known example of this era is Naser al-Din Shah of Qajar (1831-1896), who was not only inclined toward women but also kept boy concubines in his harem. One of the *amrads* toward whom Shah had developed feelings was Malijac, who was later endowed official responsibilities and finally became a charge of a cavalry regiment.⁴³⁹ In poetry and literature, Iraj Mirza was the last major Iranian poet of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who openly wrote about courtship with boys. Iraj Mirza, who also well known for his sexual affairs with *amrads*, usually begins his poems by providing an account of how he convinces the boy to bed and later gives readers a description of physical details of sexual acts.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁴ Hosseini, “Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction”, 18-19.

⁴³⁵ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 11.

⁴³⁶ Hosseini, “Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction”, 19.

⁴³⁷ Muhammad Hashim Asaf. *Rustam al-tavarikh*, ed. Mohammad Moshiri (Tehran: Amir-Kabir, 1974), 199 as cited in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 11.

⁴³⁸ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 107.

⁴³⁹ Sivan Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities: Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran* (UK: Cambridge, 2019), 97.

⁴⁴⁰ Hosseini, “Persian Literature from Homoeroticism to Representations of the LGBT Community: an Introduction”, 20.

As I have shown so far, in the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance, “vaginal intercourse with wives”⁴⁴¹ was aimed to the establishment of family and obligatory procreation. However, men could seek love and other forms of sexual gratification with other women in *sigheh* (temporary marriage) or other men or boys in homosocial spaces. In this context, one might be described as inclined toward women like sultan Husayn Safavi,⁴⁴² another as inclined toward “one Joseph-faced to thousands of Zulaykhas and Laylis and Shirin” like Shah Tahmasb II⁴⁴³ and sultan Mahmud Ghaznavid and a third as fond of both men and women like Fath‘ali Shah⁴⁴⁴ who had wives but was engaged in *Shahid bazi* (the practice of gazing).⁴⁴⁵ Sexual relations of this era did not adhere to the modern sensibilities of sex, class, mutual consent, and age. Afary argues that prior to the end of the nineteenth century, “distinctions between consensual adult sex and pedophilic or pederastic abuse or rape of a boy were less clear”.⁴⁴⁶ These male sexual activities⁴⁴⁷, along with different forms of erotic expression and sexual roles, contributed to the ambiguity and fluidity of gender and sexual construction. In the next paragraph, I will show how, to modernize Iranian society by creating a modern-nation state and national identity in the nineteenth century, Iran’s fluid construction of gender and sexuality, particularly traditional same-sex relations, was reduced to heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

⁴⁴¹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 20.

⁴⁴² He was a Safavid Shah of Iran (1668-1726) from 1694 until he was overthrown in 1722.

⁴⁴³ He was one of the last Safavid Shahs of Iran (1704-1740) from 1729 to 1732.

⁴⁴⁴ He was the second Shah of Qajar Iran (1772-1834) from 1797 until his death 1834.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 107.

⁴⁴⁷ Of course, the ambiguity of gender-sexual construction was not only due to men’s sexual activities. Women’s sexual acts also contributed to such ambiguity, for example in the case of girls who got married at nine with older men.

3.3 Hybridized Homosexuality

In this paragraph, I will discuss Iran's modern construction of gender and sexuality and its dialogue with Iranian modernity and the Western discourse of sexuality from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. For doing so, I will discuss how Iranian modernity was fashioned through a creative process of cultural grafting between reinventing Iranian pre-Islamic traditions and re-laborating modern Western resources. Furthermore, I will show how modernization gave rise to the establishment of a specific Iranian biopolitical *dispositif* within which—for the sake of building a modern nation-state and national identity—the fluidity of sexuality and gender, particularly traditional same-sex relations were erased and covered from the collective memory of Iranians in favor of the heterosexualization of Eros. But before, in order to develop my arguments, I will begin to investigate the link that exists between European colonialism and Iran's modern construction of gender and sexuality.

In *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister*, Minoo Moallem argues that “Iranian modernity is defined in significant ways by the constructions of race and gender found in the traveling notions that accompany the civilizational imperialism of Western modernity”. She further argues that since colonialism and postcolonialism are integral elements of modernity, any discussion of modernity in any society—including Iran that had never been in the zone of colonialization—without considering these integral elements is impossible.⁴⁴⁸ In the Iranian context, one of the colonial tropes linking to the modern construction of gender and sexuality is the challenging with translating of homoerotic literature into European languages. Classical Persian literature and Sufi poetry, as already explained, are essentially homoerotic. To object to the homoerotic contents of these texts, from the eighteenth century, Persian literature and Sufi poetry became the subject for a display of puritanical morality by Western scholars and translators.⁴⁴⁹ One good example of this purification is the fact that Western scholars preferred to genderize Persian literature in a socially acceptable manner that was by heterosexualizing the Eros. They translated ‘the beloved’ into ‘female beloved’ in the *ghazals* or Sufi poems, where the verses more often were dedicated to a ‘male beloved’.⁴⁵⁰ European translators

⁴⁴⁸ Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2005), 33.

⁴⁴⁹ Anna Vanzan, “Traveling Translation and Orientalism in Reverse. Persian (Homo) erotic Literature and Its Translation into Western Languages”, *Communication and Culture Online, Special Issue 1, (2013), 44-54.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

simultaneously subjugated the real homoerotic nature of Persian literature and unmasked their Orientalist approach. In other words, while constructing their own erotic Orient, European translators covered the gender dynamicity and sexual fluidity of Iranian society. This textual strategy emerged once the early circulation of Persian texts in Western countries contributed to the notion of ‘erotic Persia’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁵¹ For example, during the nineteenth century, we can see the trace of exoticization and eroticization of Persian poetry in the works of British writer Edward Fitzgerald. His translation of the classical Persian poet and philosopher Omar Khayyam’s *rubaiyat* (quatrains) in 1859 was very different from the original spirit of Khayyam’s profound philosophy. He transformed *rubaiyat* into “a sort of Epicurean Eclogue in a Persian garden”⁴⁵² and reduced Khayyam’s tone and existence to a drunk, atheistic and desperate poet. In fact, Fitzgerald’s translation of *rubaiyat* was a reproduction that was “designed to appeal to a mid-Victorian audience inclined to rebel against the restricting puritanism of the Victorian ethic”.⁴⁵³ Similarly, British translator Sir Richard Francis Burton, regardless of Christian morality in the Victorian era, celebrated the erotica of Persia in his writings. In the English translation of the stories of Sa’adi’s *Golestan* in 1888, he explicitly illustrated the significance of same-sex practices in Persian literature in which “Joseph is the paragon of male beauty”.⁴⁵⁴ The celebration of erotic Persia also emerged in the writings of some other European writers who through their fabricated “eye-witness” travel accounts contributed to the exoticization of Iranians’ sexual mores such as those Montesquieu’s *Letters of Persanes* and *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* that “exploited the public’s thirst for the exotic by about harems and hypersexualized Persian men”.⁴⁵⁵

In European views, therefore, classical Persian literature was a portal to the world in which men’s sexual activity and particularly same-sex relations were unrestricted by any social mores. Some European scholars and religious conservatives strongly reacted to the explicit expressions of

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Edward FitzGerald, *Rubāiyât of Omar Khayyâm*, ed., Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 146.

⁴⁵³ Laurence Paul Elwell-Sutton, “Omar Khayyâm.” in *Persian Literature*, ed., Ehsan Yarshater (USA: SUNY Press, 1988), 147-160.

⁴⁵⁴ Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Tales from the Gulistân: Or Rose-garden of the Sheikh Sa'di of Shirâz* (London: P. Allan & Company, 1928), 165.

⁴⁵⁵ Wendy Desouza, “The Love That Dare Not Be Translated: Erasures of Premodern Sexuality”, in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, eds., Kamran Scot Aghaie, Afshin Marashi, (Texas: Texas University Press, 2014)70.

erotic contents of Persian literature that differed from their Christian morality.⁴⁵⁶ At the end of the eighteenth century, those scholars began to remove or change the gender in their renditions of Persian literature.⁴⁵⁷ For example, in his famous *ghazal* Turk of Shiraz, as already explained in the previous paragraph, Hafez explicitly declares his love for Turkish *amrad* or the male beloved, but in many translations, such as the linguist and adventurous spy Gertrude Bell's translation of Hafez, Turk is rendered as a female beloved. Sir William Jones, who translated one version of Hafez in the eighteenth century, acknowledged that according to his sense of morality, he altered the male beloved into a female one.⁴⁵⁸ The effort to purify the Persian texts from homoerotic inclinations was not limited to rendering beloved males into charming females; the British translator Edward Eastwick in 1850 completely erased chapter five of Sa'adi's *Golestan* whose central theme was devoted to same-sex love.⁴⁵⁹

Besides the European translators' censorship of Persian homoerotic poetry, another colonial trope that was essential to the modern construction of gender in Iran was travelogues that were produced by both Iranian and European travelers, traders, missionaries, politicians, and elites.⁴⁶⁰ This trope contributed to the construction of Persia as the other of Europe. The otherness of Persia was established through producing the normative conceptions of the West as civilized, progressive, dynamic, free from any traditional bonds and through casting the image of Persia as a land, which was "frozen historically and incapable of proceeding autonomously to modernity."⁴⁶¹ For many nineteenth-century European writers (and some Iranian elites), the otherness of Persia was tied to the embracing of the Mohammedan religion, which was essential for explaining Persian backwardness.

For example, in *Sketches of Persi* in 1827, Scottish diplomat and historian Sir John Malcolm depicted Persians as intellectually backward, as people who know nothing of philosophy, metaphysics, or modern arts and sciences. He wrote, "the intellectual acquirements of the Persians

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁵⁸ Vanzan, "Traveling Translation and Orientalism in Reverse"

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 36.

⁴⁶¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Unintended Consequences of Cold War Area Studies.", in *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years*, ed., Noam Chomsky, (New York: New Press, 1997), 198-199.

are very limited indeed; consequently, their minds are not imbued with anything noble or elevated, they receive no philosophical training, and they know nothing of metaphysics. To be well-read in the Koran is the highest of their literary acquirements”. Then he associated the inferiority of Persia with the religion of Islam because he assumed that “no Mohammedan country can ever be great, or far advanced in art, science, and literature, for their religion is the great barrier that keeps them back and binds the mind in a shroud of mental darkness.”⁴⁶² According to Moallem, Malcolm’s thesis of the backwardness of Persia and its connection to the role of Islam is grounded on the “European race theory” through which religion, particularly Islam, became a “means of racialization” and a “theoretical tool” for assessment of the “backwardness” of Middle Eastern societies.⁴⁶³

In *Safar Nameh, Persian Pictures: A Book of Travel*, published in 1894, English writer, linguist and adventurous spy Margaret L. Gertrude Bell with a racial narrative, praised Western modernity and advancement as an exception in the world, and identified Persia as a “hoar conservative antiquity”, lacking progress, civilization and the evolution of race.⁴⁶⁴ As Moallem claims, the racialization of Muslim communities “works together with the representation of gender relations in Western discourse”.⁴⁶⁵ Women’s condition (*hijab*, early marriage, polygamy, divorce and rules of Islam) and sexual relations in the Muslim communities were served as a defining factor to make boundaries between the civilized West and the uncivilized, barbaric Muslim world. For example, Thomas Herbert, an English politician in the eighteenth century, while accompanying the English ambassador in Iran, explicitly expressed his disgust for Iranians’ same-sex desire as “a vice so detestable, so damnable, so unnatural as forces hell to show its ugliness before its season”.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, Jean Chardin, in the 1800s in his travelogue, linked the Iranian prevalence of same-sex desire with women’s isolation. He stressed that while *amrad-khanehe* (male house of prostitution)

⁴⁶² Sir John Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia: From the Journals of a Traveler in the East. Vol. 1* (London: John Murray, 1827), 189.

⁴⁶³ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 43.

⁴⁶⁴ Margaret L. Gertrude Bell, *Safar Nameh, Persian Pictures: A Book of Travel* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894), 29-30.

⁴⁶⁵ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 43.

⁴⁶⁶ Thomas Herbert, *Somes Years Travels into Divers parts of Asia and Afrique* (London: n.p., 1638), 235, as cited in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 34.

and young boys were available for men; Iranian women were preserved from any social interactions and education by religious prejudices.⁴⁶⁷

In *Refashioning Iran*, Mohammad Tavakoli Targhi argues that, as European travelers, the Iranians, during their journeys to Europe and in their travelogues, exoticized and eroticized the lands of the West where locals “looked upon” the travelers as “exotic aliens”. He argues that “the anxiety and the desire to represent and narrate alterity were reciprocal amongst” Iranians and Europeans. Within these ambivalent encounters, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both Iranians in Europe and Europeans in Iran gazed simultaneously at the other while returning the gaze. Within this ‘cultural looking’, the narrators (both Iranians and Europeans) of travelogues often “fetishized” and “reduced” each other to the “visible signs of otherness”.⁴⁶⁸ Through a process of “projection and introjection, the visible features of the other became loci for self-reflection and self-fashioning” for both Iranian and European travelers. Tavakoli Targhi emphasizes that in this “conjoined process,” “otherness served as a vantage for cultural mimicry and mockery”.⁴⁶⁹ In accordance to Bhabha’s account of modernity, Tavakoli Targhi argues that Iranian modernity was created through this mutation and hybridization of cultures between Iran and Europe. In one sense, he sees the project of Iranian modernity as located in a hybrid space of shared practices and mimicries. Najmabadi and Tavakoli Targhi consider the period between 1850 and 1920 as formative of what is termed Iranian modernity. According to them, relationships with the West, along with its colonial and orientalist impulses, contributed to the constitutive of this process. Transformation in the political and technological formations refashioned some social domains that their effects lasted for centuries. The nation-state as a discursive formation is at the center of this refashioning that later I will discuss it in detail.⁴⁷⁰

However, regarding the modern construction of gender and sexuality in Iran, Tavakoli Targhi argues that Iranian elites and travelers, on their journeys to Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were particularly impressed by the fact that European women had a public presence and were interlocutors with men. They were not accustomed to the appearance of unveiled

⁴⁶⁷ Ronald. W Ferrier, *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin’s Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Empire* (London: Tauris. 1996), 174 as cited in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 34.

⁴⁶⁸ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 36-37.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*.

faces and bodies of women in public parks, operas, and playhouses, and the “only cultural equivalent to this public display of male-female intimacy was the imaginary Muslim heaven”⁴⁷¹ (that was characterized and promised in the Qur’an for faithful male and female Muslims). The European women, thus, were the locus of gaze, eroticism and exoticism in the self-experience recounting of Iranian travelers. In 1810, for example, the writer and the Iranian ambassador in England, Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan Ilchi, described European women’s display in the public arenas:

if a sorrowing soul traverses these heavenly fields, his head is crowned with flowers of joy, and looking on these saffron beds—luxurious as Kashmir’s—he smiles despite himself. In the gardens and on the paths, beauteous women shine like the sun and rouse the envy of the stars, and the houris [fairies] of paradise blush with shame to look upon the rose-checked beauties of the earth below. In absolute amazement, I said to Sir Gore Ouseley: if there be *paradise on the earth*, it is this, oh! It is this.⁴⁷²

The “eroticized depiction of European women” by Iranian travelers thus led to a desire for “heaven on the Earth” in which fairy-like women could accompany men. This experience gave rise to a visualization of a society without gender segregation that turned into political contestations: “The attraction of Europe and the European women figured into political contestations and conditioned the formation of new political discourses and identities”.⁴⁷³ Tavakoli Targhi further argues that in these contestations, the *hijab* (veil) became the visible signifier of cultural difference between the self and the other (us and them). In this way, for Iranian elites, the *hijab* became a sign of backwardness, and the removal of the *hijab* became a key element for modernization.⁴⁷⁴ This Islamophobic thesis attracted more attention when Iran lost its power in foreign policies dealing with Britain and Russia.

During the nineteenth century, Iran began to slip gradually into many political conflicts. In 1914, from the north, Iran was occupied by the Russians and from the south by British India; accordingly, Iran became a “contested zone in the Great Games played by the two powers”.⁴⁷⁵ Russia, took

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁷² Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan, *A Persian at the Court of King George, 1809-1810: The Journal of Mirza Abul Hassan Khan* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1988), 78.

⁴⁷³ Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 54.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 36.

advantage of Iran's weakness and intensified its territorial grab, whereas Britain attempted to keep "the strengthening of commercial and economic ties with Iran as a bulwark against Russia expansionism".⁴⁷⁶ For its part, Iran considered the British's investments in "the Iranian infrastructures as a protection against Russian influences".⁴⁷⁷ For this reason, Iran granted many concessions to the British Empire. Just one example, in 1872, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar granted Baron Julius de Reuter, a British citizen, the rights for the construction of railroads, mining, exploitation of the national forests, banking and financing.⁴⁷⁸ This circumstance created a sense of shame and loss of confidence among the nineteenth-century Iranian intellectuals and nationalists. Some of them, such as Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, Mirza Fath'ali Akhundzadeh and Abd al-Rahim Talebof, who were radical critic of Islam, called for a "modern political order that limited the power of the Shah and reduced the European dominance of Iran".⁴⁷⁹ They believed that Iran's Islamic traditions no longer provided a "suitable guide for navigating the world". They argued for the rejection of dominant Islamic traditions of Iranian society. Instead, they advocated for an Iranian nation-state and nationalist discourse, anchored in a comprehensive modern worldview, as the first constituent of any attempt to modernize Iran.⁴⁸⁰ Iranian sociologist, Jamshid Behnam, notes that in the nineteenth century, the real intention of modernization, or what Iranian intellectuals termed *Tajadod* (renewal), was a desire for change and innovation that came from Iran's backwardness and "Western civilization's advancement". *Tajadod* was conceived as the "best incorporation of national culture with modern values and beliefs".⁴⁸¹ With that in mind, elites found a solution in a certain mimicry and adaptation of available successful models in the West. According to Najmabadi, it was not always the case of a mindless mimicry, but rather it was a form of grafting derived from cultural inventiveness.⁴⁸² Tavakoli Targhi also insists that mimesis in Iranian modernity was a strategy by

⁴⁷⁶ William W. Haddad and Jasmin Postam-Kolay, "Imperialism and its Manifestation in the Middle East", in *The International Relations of the Contemporary Middle East: Subordination and Beyond*, eds., Tareq Y. Ismael, Glenn E. Perry (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 67.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ James A. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A Story* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

⁴⁷⁹ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906–1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 25.

⁴⁸⁰ Katarzyna Korycki, Abouzar Nasirzadeh, "Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran", *Journal of Gender Studies*, (2014) Vol. 25, No. 1, 50–65.

⁴⁸¹ Jamshid Behnam, "Iranian Society, Modernity, and Globalization" in *Iran between Tradition and Modernity* ed., Ramin Jahanbegloo (New York and Oxford: Lexington Book, 2004), 3-14.

⁴⁸² Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 100.

which Iranian nationalists and modernists reconstructed Iran's history and identity.⁴⁸³ He argues that while Europeans "constructed the modern self in relation to their non-Western others" (including Iranians), Iranians began to experience the formation of the ethos of modernity in relation to their Western others.

In Iran's nineteenth-century political discourse, identification with European modernity and scientific rationality served for both disassociation with the dominant Arabo-Islamic culture and the building of a modern nation-state and national identity grounded on the reconstruction of pre-Islamic traditions.⁴⁸⁴ After all, as Anderson argues, every nation forms the national community through the reconstruction of histories and memories.⁴⁸⁵ Similarly, Hakim discusses that we can discern a continuity between pre-modern groups and modern nations as the latter "derive some of their features and vigor from ancient solidarities, traditions and myths".⁴⁸⁶ These claims touch upon Hobsbawm's suggestion that modernity includes traditions that are "actually invented, constructed and formally instituted".⁴⁸⁷ In nineteenth-century, in particular, with the rise of Iranian nationalism, there has been a growing body of historical investigation and reinvention of the pre-Islamic past that contributed to the articulation of national identity and memory. As Tavakoli Targhi states, "the selective remembrance of things pre-Islamic made possible the dissociation of Iran from Islam and the articulation of a new national identity and political discourse... that refashioned the *millat* [nation] from a religious collectively (*millat-i Shi'i*) into a national collectively (*millat-i Iran*)".⁴⁸⁸ At the centre of this process of nationalism, there was the mytho-historical work of the eleventh century Iranian poet Firdawsi. His *Shahnameh* (the Book of Kings) provided valuable "semantic and symbolic resources for dissociating Iran from Islam and for fashioning an alternative basis of identity."⁴⁸⁹ Reading and (re)citing this mytho-historical book in "a period of societal dislocation, military defeats, and foreign infiltration during the nineteenth

⁴⁸³ Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 37.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁴⁸⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁴⁸⁶ Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea: 1840-1920* (London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 5.

⁴⁸⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1983), 1.

⁴⁸⁸ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Refashioning Iran: Language and Culture during the Constitutional Revolution." *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1/4 (1990), 77-101.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

century” contributed to “the rearticulation of Iranian identity and construction of alternative forms of historical narrations and periodizations.”⁴⁹⁰ *Shahnameh*’s “authorization and popular recitation of national narrations resulted in a process of cultural transference that intensified the desire for a recovery of the forgotten history of ancient Iran”.⁴⁹¹ Najmabadi provides a brief explanation on the *Shahnameh*’s contribution to modern nationalism over monarchy legitimacy. She writes that

The two kinds of appropriation of *Shahnameh* in the nineteenth century were in competition. The nationalist appropriation centred on a story about the land, Iran’zamin [the land of Iran]. It aimed to produce a sense of persons belonging to a common land with a common history. The royal appropriation emphasized persons as subjects of a king who reigned over that land. By the twentieth century, *Shahnameh* was accepted as national rather than a royal epic, signifying the triumph of modern nationalism over the monarchy legitimacy. The Iranian had been transformed from a subject of an Iranian king to a citizen of Iran’zamin.⁴⁹²

Therefore, in the nineteenth-century, *Shahnameh*, in Dabashi’s words, became “a poetic disposition of a nationalist modernity, integral to the machinery of making modern subjects suitable for a modern nation-state”.⁴⁹³ Lewis argues that besides local resources, most of the political structure of the modern nation-state in the Middle East, particularly Iran, was informed by European emotional and ideological overtones and undertones, especially by the French notion of *la patrie* (homeland).⁴⁹⁴ Similarly, Najmabadi asserts that in the case of Iran, the modern notion of *vatan* (homeland) was an issue of “inventiveness of cultural grafting” informed by both modern European concepts—including *patriut* (patriot), *disput* (despot), *sivilisasiun* (civilization), *rivulusiun* (revolution), *piruqrah* (progress), *pulitik* (politics), and *libiral* (liberal)—and simultaneous integration and rejection of the pre-modern Sufi meaning of *vatan*.⁴⁹⁵ Najmabadi explains that in Sufi’s tradition, *vatan* was an allegorical concept denoting one’s grave or “the return to earth, to one’s original substance, marking the beginning of return to the divine”. At the

⁴⁹⁰ Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 97.

⁴⁹¹ Tavakoli-Targhi, “*Refashioning Iran: Language and Culture during the Constitutional Revolution*”, 82.

⁴⁹² Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 103.

⁴⁹³ Hamid Dabashi, *The Shahnameh: The Persian Epic as World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 170.

⁴⁹⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 40-41.

⁴⁹⁵ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 100.

same time, *vatan* was a mother figure. It expressed a “desire to return to the mother’s womb whence one had been born”, to that “original state of pure”.⁴⁹⁶ In Sufi’s writings, ‘love to *vatan*’ or ‘love to return to mother’s womb’ was also interpreted as Sufi’s attempt to reach unity with the divine. However, while appropriating the love of *vatan* from Sufi’s tradition, the modern nationalist discourse insisted on the material meaning of *vatan* as homeland and disassociated it from its allegorical and spiritual meaning. For example, Iranian intellectual of the nineteenth century, Abd al-Rahim Talibuf explicitly associated ‘love to *vatan*’ or ‘love to mother’ with ‘love of *Iran zamin* (land of Iran)’. He wrote: “we Iranians, among thousands of problems, have become alien from the holy love of *vatan*... We must understand that this *vatan*, for whose protection and progress we have the duty to make every necessary sacrifice, is Iran and its famous cities are Shiraz, Isfahan, Yazd, Kerman, Kashan, Tehran, Khurasan Qazvin, Rasht, Tabriz, Khuy and other places.”⁴⁹⁷

In the modern nationalist discourse of *vatan*, therefore, there was a shift from the spiritual meaning of the mother’s womb (and grave) to a material meaning of love to one's mother (or love to the homeland). Theoretically, in *Between Men* Sedgwick reminds us that male bonding is always mediated through a female figure.⁴⁹⁸ Najmabadi contends that in nationalist discourse, the homeland is represented by eroticized allegories of female bodies that construct a national identity based on male bonding.⁴⁹⁹ In the Iranian modernist discourse, *vatan* was portrayed as having a reciprocal relationship: a beloved mother who nurtured a nation and simultaneously required protection in return. In other words, while educating the nation, the mother (homeland) was in need of protection by her children (nation, both male and female).⁵⁰⁰ This modern notion of *vatan* evoked a new gender discourse within which women needed to be educated in order to teach future generations. For doing so, elites concluded that veiling and gender segregation were huge obstacles for women’s attainment of education and knowledge that not only did not guarantee women’s

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁹⁷ Abd al-Rahim Talibuf, *Kitab-i Ahmad ya safinah-i Talibi. Vol. 1* (Istanbul: n.n., 1893), 93, as cited in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 102.

⁴⁹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁴⁹⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “*The Erotic Vatan [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, to Possess, and To Protect*”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1997), 442-467.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

chastity but also were, in their opinion, the main reasons for the prevalence of same-sex practices in Iran.⁵⁰¹ In 1896, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani disavowed same-sex practices and argued:

Men are naturally inclined toward socializing with enjoying the companionship of women. This is so strongly evident that it needs no explication and proof. If a people is forbidden from this great blessing and is deprived of this great deliverance, then inevitably the problem of sexual acts with boys and young male slaves [*bachchah'bazi and ghulam'baragi*] is created, because boys without facial hair [*pisaran-i sadah*] resemble women and this is one of the errors of nature. It is for this reason that in the Iranian people/nation this grave condition has reached saturation. You lust after men instead of women can be witnessed in Iran.⁵⁰²

He finally concluded that the ground for the prevalence of same-sex practices was situated in women's veiling because "men's natural desire to see women is frustrated and they are deprived of that blessing, of necessary and inevitably, they turn to pederasty [*bachchah'bazi*] and making love with boys"⁵⁰³. At the end of the nineteenth century, same-sex relations became less culturally acceptable, and Iranian elites began to advocate a modern discourse of gender and sexuality, including gender desegregation in public, removal of the *hijab* and the heterosexualization of love for shifting the constitution of marriage from a procreative to a romantic contract. One marker of Iranian modernity, thus, was the transformation of homoeroticism into heteroeroticism.⁵⁰⁴ I would argue that modernists and nationalists' writings and their advocating for the modern gender discourse was a new regulatory discourse on the individual and social body, attempting to institutionalize heterosexuality as the normative ideal. From the end of the nineteenth century onward, this new regulatory discourse, or what I call, using Foucauldian terms, the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality was deployed by Iranian society and superimposed on the Iranian *dispositif* of alliance. In contrast to the traditional *dispositif*, gender and sexuality in this modern *dispositif* became more problematic and the subject of medical, political and literary investigation. For example, Akhundzadeh, who wrote important political essays on the nationalism and modern nation-state such as *Maktubat-e-Kamalaldolle* (Kamalaldolle's Letters) in 1865, wrote also some

⁵⁰¹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 56.

⁵⁰² Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, *Sad Khatereh, manuscript in Edward G. Browne Collection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library. Selections in Nimeye, 1989), 96, as cited in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 56.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 4.

essays and plays, like *Hekayat Marde Khasis* (The Story of Stingy Man) in 1874 to advocate women's rights, anti-*hijab* discourse and monogamy based on love, instead of arranged marriage, polygamy and temporary marriage.⁵⁰⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century, prominent Iranian politician and scholar, Hasan Taghizadeh, in his influential periodical *Kaveh* (1916-1922) in Berlin, advocated greater women's rights including marriage and divorce, the normalization of heterosexuality and the abandonment of same-sex practices.⁵⁰⁶ Ahmad Kasravi, another Iranian intellectual who developed normative discourses on sexuality and marriage, in his journal *Peyman*, condemned classical poets, including Hafez, Sa'adi and Rumi, for their homoerotic oeuvre and he called for their writings to be eliminated from school textbooks.⁵⁰⁷ Other Iranian journals, including *Akhtar*, *Soraya* and *Parvaresh* and particularly *Molla Nasreddin*, advocated greater women's rights and normative heterosexuality. They also criticized sexual relationships with children, including the institution of child marriage.⁵⁰⁸ The education of Iranian women appeared as another integral element of the modern Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality. Najmabadi argues that the modern educational regime, which "was deeply gendered from the beginning", aimed at producing modern women through "particular disciplinary techniques and emancipatory impulses".⁵⁰⁹ What is important to highlight is that within the modern Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality, the project of women's emancipation and promise of heterosocial space rested upon the reformist decisions of modernist men. Iranian feminists protested against modernist masculinities. They argued that modernist men did not go far enough in order to protect their own patriarchal institutions. For instance, the Iranian pioneer feminist of the end of the nineteenth century, Bibi Khanom Astarabadi, in the essay *Ma'ayeb al-Rejal* (The Men's vices), expressed anger toward modernist men who reduced women's lives and education to housekeeping and child-rearing.⁵¹⁰ In the next years, under the Pahlavis, women's bodies became the focus of much cultural and social politics.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁰⁶ Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 162.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 163.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁰⁹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 183.

⁵¹⁰ Bibi Khanom Astarabadi, *Ma'ayeb al-Rejal (The Men's vices)*, ed., Afsaneh Najmabadi (New York: Nigarish va Nigarish-i Zan, 1992).

When the Qajar dynasty was overthrown in 1925, Reza Shah established the Pahlavi dynasty. He began to build a new state characterized by two main pillars: the army and bureaucracy.⁵¹¹ Reza Shah was “antagonistic toward the clergy” and with strong repression built his new state through the adoption of “the material advances of the West” and “a breakdown of the traditional power of religion and a growing tendency toward secularism”.⁵¹² For him, the emancipation of women was an instrument to provide the state with a new form of power, a power that used gender in order to “emasculate religious authorities and transfer patriarchal power from the domain of the clergy to the realm of the state, and further, to utilize gender to accomplish its Europeanization policies.”⁵¹³ Reza Shah’s modern liberties had been accompanied by new administrative and disciplinary mechanisms. Within the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality under Reza Shah’s reign, gender and body became the subjects of the state and public concern in four specific areas: (1) he increased reforms in health and hygiene that affected the health of women and children. In fact, producing healthier children, preventing a decline of the population and reducing the spread of venereal and other contagious diseases gave rise to the control over men and women’s bodies through medical advice.⁵¹⁴ (2) Reza Shah’s government increased the number of public schools for girls in 1933.⁵¹⁵ Darius Rejali argues, in terms that remind Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power, that during the modernization in Iran, schools were a matrix that employed various measures to produce individuals who were suited for society’s needs.⁵¹⁶ (3) In 1931, Reza Shah introduced some new reforms in marriage and divorce through which women became able to ask for divorce under certain conditions, and while the Shari’a recognized the age of puberty at 9 for females and 15 for males, the 1931 law fixed the minimum age for marriage at 15 for women and 18 for men.⁵¹⁷ (4) He issued drastic reforms in dress codes to produce modern Iranian citizens in both appearances and conduct. In 1928, he enforced parliament to pass a new dress code, enforcing all males working in governmental organizations to dress more like Europeans. In 1936, Reza Shah issued a formal

⁵¹¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2008), 66.

⁵¹² Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran, 1921–1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 44-45.

⁵¹³ Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67.

⁵¹⁴ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 145-150

⁵¹⁵ Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and reveiling*, 71.

⁵¹⁶ Darius M. Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 37–40.

⁵¹⁷ Ali Akbar Mahdi, “The Iranian Women’s Movement: A Century Long Struggle”, *The Muslim World*, 94 no. 4 (2004): 427–448.

decree enforcing women to unveil and dress in European fashions.⁵¹⁸ All these modern reforms before and during Reza Shah's reign gave rise to the greater progress in the normalizing of heterosexuality and covering and erasing the fluidity of gender and sexuality typical of pre-modern Iranian *dispositif* of alliance, particularly homoeroticism from the collective memory of Iranians. This project of heterosexualization did not merely cover up the already existing notion of same-sex practices, but rather, it brought up a moment for the constitution of heterosexuality and homosexuality, a moment, I would argue, that was linked to creating a modern nation-state and national identity through a dialogical relationship between traditional and modern resources. Between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, within the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality, this reconfiguration of the structure of desire did not shape the type of homosexuality described by Foucault in the modern heterosexualization of the West; that is a deviant or criminal type produced by disciplinary technologies and medical and legal discourses. As Najmabadi claims, what this process produced in Iran was a type of individual who still engaged in same-sex practices stricken with some sort of illness but without abnormal identity.⁵¹⁹ In one sense, the notion of homosexuality as a deviant type, produced in mid-nineteenth-century Europe through disciplinary technologies and medical and legal discourses, did *not* emerge in the Iranian context.⁵²⁰ The reason is that modernist elites saw same-sex relations *not* as an attribute of a person. As already explained, they assumed that veiling and gender segregation were the main obstacles for the socializing of men with and enjoying the companionship of women. Their modernist project of heterosexualization was grounded on the premise that "once women became available to men", "homosexual practices would disappear".⁵²¹ Of course, hiding homoeroticism from cultural memory does not mean that same-sex desire disappeared. Rather, in the next years under Mohammad Reza Shah's sexual policies, we can see more or less an explicit form of same-sex relations in urban area of Tehran.

In 1941, Reza Shah, due to his support of the Third Reich, was forced to abdicate by Allies, and his son, Crown Prince Mohammad Reza, became the last Shah of Iran.⁵²² Under his rule, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian society "underwent a state-sponsored

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 57.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 97.

modernization program that affected the economic relations, social institutions, and cultural patterns”.⁵²³ These reforms dramatically transformed the urban way of life. Traditional social structures such as the “guild system (*Asnaf*), family life, religious institutions and the spatial division in the urban center all underwent a process of transformation and experienced severe tensions as a fallout of the modernization program”.⁵²⁴ For example, regarding family life, Mohammad Reza Shah increased the reforms in his father’s sexual policies. Under his reign, abortion was legalized in 1973.⁵²⁵ The Family Protection Law was introduced in 1975, which gave women greater rights in divorce. He continued his father’s reform in age restrictions for marriage and legally restricted polygamy by allowing it only with permission from the first wife.⁵²⁶ For what concerns same-sex practices, under Mohammad Reza Shah, that were neither recognized, accepted nor punished by law.⁵²⁷ Paul Vieille, who worked with a team of Iranian sociologists on the study of Iranian peasants and industrial workers from the 1960s to 1968, in an article writes that “eight out of ten boys were said to have had at least one homosexual experience of one form or another before marriage, whether with their peers or with much older men. The practice is thus transmitted from generation to generation, though it is in decline”.⁵²⁸

Najmabadi quotes a report from 1954, describing nightlife in and around *Shahr-i nau* in Tehran (Tehran’s red-light district). The report tells of the overlapping of sex work and the entertainment offered in the nightclubs, restaurants, and cafes by non-heteronormative males or by male dancers who made themselves up like women and could be defined as a woman-presenting male (*mard-i zan-numa*)⁵²⁹. Within that space, what can be defined as gay space emerged where men met and entertained with other men. However, regarding gay identity, as I explained, during modernization, the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality, compared to the Western *dispositif*, did not produce gay identity in the Foucauldian sense. Later, it was in the post-revolutionary era that gayness began to be

⁵²³ Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 73.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, 140.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.* 135.

⁵²⁷ Balslev, *Iranian Masculinities Gender and Sexuality in Late Qajar and Early Pahlavi Iran*, 186.

⁵²⁸ Paul Vieille, “Iranian Women in Family Alliance and Sexual Politics” in *Women in the Muslim World*, eds., L. Beck., N. Keddie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 451-472.

⁵²⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 130.

embraced precisely for self-identification. As Najmabadi argues, although “the term gay first appeared in Iran of the 1970s”, it was avoided by local men because “it was received as the English translation of a Persian word with a highly pejorative and dishonorable load (*kuni*)⁵³⁰ [literary means ass, referring to the act of anal sex]”. However, it seems that although those local men did not identify themselves as gay, at least they were active and create their own community as Afary argues that by the 1970s, as a result of interaction with “American and European advisors who lived in Iran”, a small “gay community” (or maybe I can call male homoerotic community if the members did not identify themselves as gay) took shape in elite circles of Tehran with some famous members such as fashion designer Keyvan Khosravani⁵³¹ and artist and architect Bijan Saffari.⁵³² The main spots of this small subculture were located in several hotels and bars, and by the late Pahlavi era, there was some talk of establishing a “gay rights organization,” even in 1972, in Shiraz University, Iranian sociologist Saviz Shafai, who after the revolution started his queer activism in the USA, for the first time gave a lecture about homosexuality and discrimination⁵³³ (that unfortunately, no further information is available on his lecture). Furthermore, some articles in the “American gay press” represented their enthusiasm about the Iranian gay subculture. The gay American anthropologist Jerry Zarit, who visited Teheran before the Islamic Revolution, in an article titled *The Iranian Male—an Intimate Look*, exoticized Tehran as a “gay paradise”. He wrote: “Iran was for me and for others like me, a sexual paradise. In terms of both quantity and quality, it was the most exciting experience of my life”.⁵³⁴

However, such an Orientalist vision from Tehran’s gay scene does not show that Tehran before the revolution was a real ‘paradise’ for non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals. Moallem argues that the transformations of masculinity under the Pahlavids also coincided with the diffusion of homophobic discourses and language as a site of everyday elaboration and construction of sexual identifies and practices. According to the author, in this homophobic language, “the geographical and cultural diversity of Iranian society was used to discipline bodies

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Abbas Millani, *The Shah* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 343.

⁵³³ Matin Mohammadi, “Saviz: Pioneer of Supporting Sexual Minorities”, *Aghaliatmagazine*, 9, 2013. Retrived from: <http://aghaliat.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>.

⁵³⁴ Jerry Zarit, “The Iranian Male—an Intimate Look” in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, eds., Arno Schmitt, Jehoeda Sofer (New York and London: The Haworth Press, 1992), 55.

by associating male homosexuality and women's perversity with certain localities in Iran and opposing them to the hegemonic model of masculinity". She gives examples from the northern part of Iran where "men were thought to lack virility (*bi-ghyrat*), Khasvini men were depicted as natural homosexuals, and men from the Azarbyjan were constructed as hyper-virile".⁵³⁵ Moreover, whereas the nineteenth-century modernist elites located same-sex relations in the domain of Arabo-Islamic culture, Islamists and religious thinkers in the 60s and 70s and later in the post-revolutionary era attached it to the domain of secular and Western culture. For example, during the 1970s, religious thinker, Ali Shariati, criticized the open homosexuality in the West. He said, "Have you heard the arguments of the British members of parliament in defense of *liwat* bill [homosexual rights]? They say this is an objective reality and it exists in our society and we must recognize it". Then he attacked the emergence of similar values in Iran as a form of imperial encroachment.⁵³⁶ However, both the nineteenth-century intellectuals and religious thinkers in the twentieth century failed to consider the homoerotic history of Iran. Same-sex relation and identification in the *dispositif* of alliance, constructing the contrast of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the *dispositif* of sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century, the emergence of gay subculture under Mohammad Reza Shah's sexual policies and gayness as a self-identification in the post-revolutionary era (that I will discuss in the next paragraphs) were not a vice rooted in Arabo-Islamic tradition or a form of Western imperialist conspiracy. In other words, the production of homosexuality in the history of Iran was neither, in Najmabadi's words, a process of implanting an "alien seed into an empty soil" nor a self-nurturing phenomenon. Rather, it has been developed within the hybridized and cultural grafting construction of Iranian modernity, the modern nation-state and Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality. In one sense, Iranian homosexuality itself has also occupied a hybrid location of shared practices and mimicries between Iranian traditional same-sex relations and the Western-oriented notion of homosexuality. In paragraph 4.3 "Hamjensgara/Gay's Existence", I will argue that within the Iranian *dispositif* of sexuality in the post-revolutionary era, at the end of the twentieth century, Iranian gay-identifying men as authentic agents have reworked the Western gay identities in order to constitute their own sexual self-

⁵³⁵ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 206.

⁵³⁶ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 242.

determination. But before, I will begin the next paragraph with a discussion on the establishment of the Islamic Republic and its impact on Iranian homosexuality.

4. Sexual Identity in Iran: From Construction to Resistance

4.1 The Rise of Islamism

The main subject of investigation in this paragraph is how within the Iranian 1979 revolution and the reinvention of Islamic traditions, the Islamic Republic emerged both as a religious and biopolitical *dispositif* within which homosexuality, in contrast to the modern Iranian nationalist discourse, is depicted as a Western trope of invasion that aims to corrupt the authentic culture of Islam and Iran. Such anti-Western sentiment—or what is known in Iran as *Gharbzadegi* (Occidentosis)—was promulgated before the revolution. Therefore, I will begin my argument with a discussion on the 1979 revolution and its ideological formations in the Shah's last years.

Shah's sexual policies were strongly condemned by Islamists and Islamic intellectuals, who considered women's emancipation and homosexuality as products of Western culture that brought immorality and unethicity to Iranian society.⁵³⁷ Furthermore, through Pahlavis' modernization project, a powerful autocratic state was built and “people who were affected by the modernization programs and policies were in large numbers alienated from the process, and in many respects, an attitude of resistance to and even hostility toward modernization developed”.⁵³⁸ All this dissidence finally resulted in an alliance among the Shah's oppositions, including clergies, Islamist thinkers and reformists, as well as some secular leftist intellectuals. With a certain degree of agreement, all these shared their feelings of resentment and frustration with the Western culture and the modernizing and secularizing trend—particularly modern gender norms—of the Shah.⁵³⁹ Despite the ideological differences in these dissentients' writings, ideological dialogue between Islamist thinkers and clerics resulted in the formation of an Islamic ideology that offered a cultural context and shared a language within which the Islamic Republic was predicated. In this paragraph, I will discuss the ideas of prominent figures who contributed to the making of Islamic ideology and the 1979 revolution.

The first steps toward developing Islamic ideology appeared in the works of political writer and critic Jalal Al-Ahamd who, by the early 1960s, laid the ground for a critique of modernization and Westernization policies in Iran. Al-Ahamd, who was a Marxist, renewed his interest in Islamic

⁵³⁷ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 242.

⁵³⁸ Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, 74.

⁵³⁹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 234.

traditions and, with a leftist lens, attacked Western imperialism and rampant consumerism as the main “causes of the defeat” of the Iranian “nationalist and democratic movements”.⁵⁴⁰ In 1962, Al-Ahamd published the book titled *Gharbzadegi* [the English translation: *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*] in which the West is depicted as a disease that infects Iranians and alienates them from their identity. Here, he argues that Iranians have been forced to be the “consumers of Western products” while being asked to “reshape their native culture to resemble a machine”.⁵⁴¹ He criticizes Iranian nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Mirza Agha Khan Kermani and Abd al-Rahim Talibuf who, in his opinion, lost their identity and assimilated to the West.⁵⁴²⁵⁴³ Moreover, he highlights industrialization and urbanization as the symbols of Western invasion.⁵⁴⁴ He also conceptualizes *gharbzadegi* in terms of Western values, lifestyle and imitation of the West. He argues that modernity and Westernization promote moral and sexual degeneracy that corrupts the authenticity of Iranian culture. For example, for Al-Ahamd, the imitation of the West regarding women’s emancipation is reduced to a display of eroticized female bodies in a public space:

So we really have given women only the right to parade themselves in public. We have drawn women, the preserves of tradition, family, and future generations, into vacuity, into the street. We forced them into ostentation and frivolity, every day to freshen up and try on a new style and wander around. What of work, duty, social responsibility, and character? ... We will have succeeded only in swelling an army of consumers of powder and lipstick—the products of the West’s industries—another form of *Occidentosis*.⁵⁴⁵

To cure *gharbzadegi*, Al-Ahamd proposes a return to the ‘roots of Islamic culture’. He sees Islam as the only remaining barrier to prevent the harm of modernity and Western invasion.⁵⁴⁶ Through romanticizing and idealizing the past, Al-Ahamd reinvents Islamic concepts and relations.⁵⁴⁷ This new trend of thinking spread the rhetoric of authenticity among other Iranian intellectuals and Islamic thinkers through which they questioned the “governmental image of

⁵⁴⁰ Jalal Al-Ahamd, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (USA: Mizan Press, 1984).

⁵⁴¹ Jahanbegloo, “Introduction” in *Iran between Tradition and Modernity*, xiv.

⁵⁴² Al-Ahamd, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, 58.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁴⁴ Jahanbegloo, “Introduction” in *Iran between Tradition and Modernity*, xiv.

⁵⁴⁵ Al-Ahamd, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, 70.

⁵⁴⁶ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, 59.

⁵⁴⁷ Jahanbegloo, “Introduction” in *Iran between Tradition and Modernity*, xiv.

progress” and “Western rationalism”.⁵⁴⁸ Although he criticizes Shah’s project of modernization and proposes returning to Islamic roots, Al-Ahamd never advocates abandoning modernity or technological modernity; instead, he supports a reconfiguration of modernity within the national context.⁵⁴⁹ “I am not speaking of rejecting the machine or of banishing it, as the utopians of the early nineteenth century sought to do... it is a question of how to encounter the machine and technology.”⁵⁵⁰ In one sense, he also saw modernity as a matter of hybridization, but in opposition to Iranian nineteenth-century intellectuals—who did a cultural grafting between Iranian pre-Islamic traditions and modern Western achievements—Al-Ahamd’s notion of modernity was anchored in a foundation in local Shi’i Islam. Al-Ahamd died ten years before the revolution, but his many ideas on *gharbzadegi* contributed to the making of Islamic ideology and revolutionary discourse. In the next years, *gharbzadegi* and the ‘toxic West’ became the dominant and official discourse of the Islamic Republic regarding the struggle against the influence of the West.

After Al-Ahamd, Ali Shariati, a French-educated social scientist and Islamic scholar, contributed to this trend of thinking. Shariati argues that Muslims’ civilization—that for several centuries had been “unparalleled in the world and had the whole world under its influence”—is now reduced to the consumer of Western products.⁵⁵¹ As Al-Ahmad, Shariati also condemns modern sexual norms. As I explained in 3.3, “Hybridized Homosexuality”, in particular, Shariati reproaches ‘Western culture’, Shah’s gender policies, and the emergence of the small gay subculture that was taking shape in the urban Iranian elites.⁵⁵² Inspired by Frantz Fanon’s calling for a “new history” and a “new man” in his *The Wretched of the Earth*,⁵⁵³ Shariati also developed his own calling for “a new thought, a new humanity, and a new and more humane modernity that did not seek to turn the Third World into another Europe, another United States, or another Soviet

⁵⁴⁸ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 188.

⁵⁴⁹ Ali Mirsepassi, “Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Volume 26, No. 3, 2006, 416-433.

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Ahamd, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, 48.

⁵⁵¹ Ali Shariati, *Reflections of Humanity: Two Views of Civilization and the Plight of Man* (New York: Book Distribution Center, 1984), 33.

⁵⁵² Ali Shariati, *Collected Works of Ali Shariati: Vol. XXI: Women* (Tehran: Ali Shariati’ Cultural Institution, 1990) as cited in Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 242.

⁵⁵³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press: 1963), 315-316.

bloc.”⁵⁵⁴ However, while “Fanon’s call for reclaiming modern humanism on the basis of the particular experience of the colonized did not engage with religious modes of thought and action, Shariati called for an alternative modernity precisely by utilizing the social and inspirational capacities of religion”.⁵⁵⁵ He claims that Islam is not just an opiate like other religions; it is “both an ideology and a social revolution” which intends “to construct a classless and free society on the basis of equality and justice, and in which would live enlightened, responsible and free people”.⁵⁵⁶ Besides Fanon, Shariati also appropriates Heidegger’s concept of ‘freedom-toward-death’. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that life is finite and comes to an end with death. Thus, if we want to experience an authentic life and be authentic human beings, we should project life onto the horizon of death, confront this finitude, and find meaning in death. This is what Heidegger calls ‘freedom-toward-death’.⁵⁵⁷ He argues that when faced with one’s own possibilities of death, one can adopt a freedom-toward-death point of view, thereby experience authentic living.⁵⁵⁸ Informed by Heidegger’s concept of freedom-toward-death, Shariati produces his own conceptualization of freedom-toward-death that is a radical version of Shiism in which ‘martyrdom’ is a privilege because a martyr invites death at a time of his own choosing. He argues that in the history of Islam, when Shiites faced with the enemy, they chose death and thus created a possibility of authentic living for other Muslims.⁵⁵⁹ Through the concept of martyrdom, Shariati calls for “a revolutionary ideology that permeate[s] all spheres of life, including politics, and inspire[s] true believers to fight all forms of exploitation, oppression and social injustice”.⁵⁶⁰ In the early 1970s, Shariati gave a series of lectures on martyrdom and the role of true believers and their sacred duty “to struggle, and if necessary to make the supreme sacrifice, in order to liberate their country from class oppression and colonial domination”.⁵⁶¹ Through his works including his

⁵⁵⁴ Siavash Saffari, “Rethinking the Islam/Modernity Binary: Ali Shariati and Religiously Mediated Discourse of Sociopolitical Development”, *Middle East Critique*, (2015)Vol. 24, No. 3, 231–250.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A political biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2000), 236.

⁵⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962).

⁵⁵⁸ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 62.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, ‘Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution,’ in *Merip Report: Washington: Middle East Research and Information Project*, (1982) 102, 24–28.

⁵⁶¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (California: California University Press, 1993), 29.

writings and speeches, Shariati became the “ideological inspiration” of the 1979 revolution.⁵⁶² Accordingly, Shariati, in the same fashion as Al-Ahmad, provides a peculiar, hybridized version of Iranian modernity, which entails Western thoughts and Iranian-Islamic traditions.

After Al-Ahmad and Shariati, Ayatollah Khomeini also, through his orthodox interpretation of Islam, contributed to the making of Islamic ideology. He was not only the leader of the 1979 revolution, but also he was also *faqih* (jurist), and as *faqih* he formulated the concept of *velayat-e faqih* (Jurist’s Governance) through which he contributed to the making of the Islamic ideology before the revolution. In 1970, through a series of lecture that later became a book (*velayat-e faqih*)⁵⁶³, he introduced the concept of *velayat-e faqih* by which he referred to the Islamic government of the prophet and Imams who had been sent by God to guide the Islamic community, particularly in the absence of the Twelfth Imam. In the Shi’ite doctrine, he did not pass away but lives in a spiritual form of existence known as occultation. According to this doctrine, he will return to the earth as a messianic Mahdi at the end of time to reinstate justice and equity.⁵⁶⁴ Khomeini contends that the senior *faqih* is the deputy in the Islamic government at the time to keep the community on the right path.⁵⁶⁵ He also argues that “the existence of a non-Islamic political system necessarily results in the non-implementation of the Islam political order”⁵⁶⁶ and that it is a Muslim’s duty to remove from his society all traces of *taghut* (paganism) and *shirk* (polytheism) and substitute them with the *faqih*’s governance. He argues that monarchies are *taghut* and *shirk* systems that bring about corruption.⁵⁶⁷ He calls Shah’s monarchy “corruption on earth” and expresses his opposition as follows:

Islam, then, does not recognize monarchy and hereditary succession; they have no place in Islam. If that is what is meant by the so-called deficiency of Islam, then Islam is indeed deficient. Islam has laid down no laws for the practice of usury, for

⁵⁶² Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 102-146.

⁵⁶³ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Velayat-e Faqih [Governance of the Jurists]* (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2010).

⁵⁶⁴ Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi’ism* (New York, State University of New York Press, 1981).

⁵⁶⁵ Khomeini, *Velayat-e Faqih [Governance of the Jurists]*.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

banking on the basis of usury, for the consumption of alcohol, or for the cultivation of sexual vice, having radically prohibited all of these. The ruling cliques, therefore, who are the puppets of imperialism and wish to promote these vices in the Islamic world, will naturally regard Islam as defective.⁵⁶⁸

In another book, *Kashf al-Asrar [Unveiling the Secrets]*, Khomeini criticizes secularism and modernization, particularly modern gender norms under the Pahlavi era. He opposes unveiling, women's education and their socializing through companionship with men. He describes women's unveiling by Reza Shah as an evil act and warns that "the unveiling of women has caused the ruin of female honor, the destruction of the family, and untold corruption and prostitution".⁵⁶⁹ When the Family Protection Law was introduced in 1967, and divorce was legalized in Iran, Khomeini issued a fatwa, declaring that "women who are divorced should consider their divorce null and void. They are still considered married. If they remarry, they have committed adultery. Men who knowingly marry such women are also committing adultery and must be punished according to religious law".⁵⁷⁰ Islamic ideology, as developed by Khomeini, Al-Ahmad, and Shariati, was thus a direct or indirect response to the modern policies of the Pahlavis and Western imperialism. These revolutionary thinkers created an Islamic ideology that, according to Dabbashi, was "the dialectical outcome of a discursive confrontation between something called the West and something essentialized as Islam".⁵⁷¹ In this 'discursive confrontation', Khomeini's archaic brand of Islamic ideas on political systems of governance and his extreme positions and radical speeches against the West and modernization articulated an anti-imperialist and populist sentiment with a strong religious casting. However, he made few compromises with modernity whenever it suited his purposes during and after the revolution.⁵⁷² For example, in 1963, Khomeini was dissent to give the right to women to be elected in the election, but after the 1979 revolution, he advised women to have more political participation and encouraged them to vote for the referendum on

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁶⁹ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Kashf al-Asrar [Unveiling the Secrets]* (Qom: Ruh Press, 1984), as cited in Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 192.

⁵⁷⁰ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 239.

⁵⁷¹ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, x.

⁵⁷² Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 239.

establishing the Islamic Republic. He also approved the election of Islamic women in parliament, stating, “they have the right to vote, to elect, to be elected”.⁵⁷³

Al-Ahamad and Shariati, on the contrary, never advocated the rejection of modernity.⁵⁷⁴ Like other nineteenth-century Iranian intellectuals, they intended to produce a hybridized form of modernity but this time not through reinventing pre-Islamic traditions, but through advocating the idea of a cultural authenticity (Islamic culture) to stand against the West and at the same time through transfiguring and localizing modernity. Their attempt was to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity by emphasizing “the dynamic, progressive, and scientific nature of Islam and the need for a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of Islam to revitalize the Muslim community”.⁵⁷⁵ What Khomeini, Al-Ahmad and Shariati produced in common was a politicized Islamic discourse (or *dispositif*) through which an ‘alternative political system’ was built. This alternative political system played a role as a force for change and for moving toward something other than what existed in the Islamic past and the Western present, a peculiar version of modernity that was laid out on the Islamic-Iranian cultural heritage and on the Western thoughts to deal with the West on an equal footing and at the same time reject what the West had to offer. This was what attracted the attention of the world, a historical rapture at the time of liberalism and communism. Foucault, among many, was one of those intellectuals who reflected his ideas on the 1979 revolution and on the work of the revolutionary Islamic intelligentsia because certain concepts of his works (such power, subjectivity and care of the self) resonate with, for example, Shariati’s conceptualization of martyrdom. Foucault traveled to Iran twice. His travels were made possible by Italian daily newspaper *Corriere Della Sera* whose editors asked Foucault to write a regular feature, *Michel Foucault Investigates*. Foucault was initially supposed to write a series about President Carter, but with growing political tension in Iran, he decided to change the project and traveled to Iran first at the end of the summer of 1978 and then in the fall of the same year.⁵⁷⁶ When Foucault arrived in Iran, he was shocked, because instead of the “terrorized city” that he expected, he found “an

⁵⁷³ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Jayegah-e Zan dar Andisheh-ye Imam Khomeini* (Tehran: Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 2005), 42 as cited in Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 239.

⁵⁷⁴ Emad El-Din Aysha, “Foucault’s Iran and Islamic Identity Politics Beyond Civilizational Clashes, External and Internal,” *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2006), 377-394.

⁵⁷⁵ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111.

⁵⁷⁶ Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 66.

absence of fear and an intensity of courage or rather, the intensity that people were capable of when danger, though still not removed, had already been transcended”.⁵⁷⁷ What he witnessed from the marching masses of people was a manifestation of collective will. In an interview in 1979 that appeared for the first time as the appendix to Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet, *Iran: La Révolution au de Dieu*, Foucault says that:

among the things that characterize this revolutionary event, there is the fact that it has brought out—and few people in history have had this—an absolutely collective will. The collective will is a political myth with which jurists and philosophers try to analyze or to justify institutions, etc. It is a theoretical tool: nobody has ever seen the collective will and, personally, I thought that collective will was like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter. I do not know whether you agree with me, but we met in Tehran and throughout Iran, the collective will of a people.⁵⁷⁸

For Foucault, the prerequisite for animating and moving this collective will was the existence of a “political spirituality” to which Foucault refers as “a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being”.⁵⁷⁹ Foucault gives spirituality “a corporeal meaning, which he directly links to the care of the self”.⁵⁸⁰ As already explained, care of the self, for Foucault, is a practice wherein individuals are able to constitute themselves as ethical subjects. Foucault, by referring a number of times to Shariati’s conception of Shiite, considers Shiite Islam as the source of this political spirituality.⁵⁸¹ Foucault was also “fascinated by the appropriation of Shiite myths of martyrdom” that turned the uprising into a revolutionary movement.⁵⁸² The political spirituality that Foucault witnessed in the streets of Tehran involved both the “political aim of overthrowing the Shah” and the “ascetic ethics of martyrdom that lies in the heart of Shiism”.⁵⁸³ Foucault considers ‘the ascetic ethics of

⁵⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, “Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit,” interview by Claire Brière and Pierre Blanche, as cited in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 250.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, “The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom.” Interview by Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Helmut Becker, and Alfredo Gomez-Muller, *Philosophy Social Criticism*, January 20, 1984. 112-131. 1–49.

⁵⁸⁰ Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*, 63.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁸² Afary, Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 4.

⁵⁸³ Igor Cherstich, Martin Holbraad, Nico Tassi, *Anthropologies of Revolution: Forging Time, People, and Worlds* (California: University of California Press, 2020), 71.

martyrdom’ as an ethical work through which Iranians constitute a new mode of subjectivity outside of the progressive scheme of the Enlightenment, liberalism, and communism. Foucault believes that the Iranian revolutionary experience, with its struggle to present a “different way of thinking about society and politics, could provide the best possibilities for the West to exist from its own intellectual exhaustion”.⁵⁸⁴ For Foucault, the Iranian revolution represents something new and unexpected in a world where the alternative was between liberalism and communism.

However, Foucault’s writings on the Iranian Revolution came under the increasing attacks of some tough critiques, especially in the case of the new regime’s execution of homosexuals and Khomeini’s decree on making the veiling of women compulsory. Didier Eribon (1953-present), a philosopher and a friend of Foucault, calls Foucault’s interpretation of Iran a ‘mistake’; Jeannette Colombel (1919-2016), who was also a friend of Foucault and a philosopher, refers to ‘Foucault’s error’ on Iran’s revolutionary event.⁵⁸⁵ Here, I would argue that the significance of Foucault’s interpretation on Iran could not be condemned or diminished to a mistake or a philosophical failure because of the bloody regime that finally gained power. As Jahanbegloo and Khatami show in *Acting under Tyranny: Hannah Arendt and the Foundations of Democracy*, the Iranian revolution in its early days was largely nonviolent in its enactment; However, it suddenly degenerated into violence and tyranny.⁵⁸⁶ Therefore, although Foucault was neither an expert in the history of Iran nor in the Muslim world, his writings on the early days of the Iranian revolution resonated with his theoretical writings on the discourse of power, subjectivity, and care of the self. He was able to see the revolution correctly as a moment of historical rupture, representing possibilities of new political engagement, but he was not able to anticipate how this revolution could lead to the establishment of a religious totalitarian State. In this paragraph, however, I will use his theoretical tools in order to show how this revolution became a religious biopolitical *dispositif*.

Islamic ideology—*velayat-e faqih*, returning to Islamic roots and othering the West—succeeded in establishing the Islamic Republic through a major referendum in 1979, but the Islamic Republic “ultimately failed to result in any enduring institutions of a democratic state apparatus or the necessary civil liberties conducive to it, and as a result, it soon lost its revolutionary legitimacy and

⁵⁸⁴ Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*, 63.

⁵⁸⁵ Afary, Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 7.

⁵⁸⁶ Ramin Jahanbegloo and Nojang Khatami, “Acting under Tyranny: Hannah Arendt and the Foundations of Democracy in Iran,” *Constellations* 20, 2, (2013) 328-346

degenerated into a theocracy”⁵⁸⁷ within which Khomeini materialized his theories on the *velayat-e faqih*. From the early days of its establishment, the new regime consolidated its power also through eliminating what the old regime brought up as a “cultural construction of gender and sexuality for the formation of Iranian modernity”. The revolutionary regime replaced nationalism, socialism and, liberalism with religious fundamentalism.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, as Lucerne argues, the Islamic Republic became a theocracy based on religious fundamentalism.⁵⁸⁹ According to Mino Moallem, religious fundamentalism should be conceived as a modern formation. In particular, the author points out the inseparable relation between state power and religion in Iran and “the complicated role of religion in shaping identities, political cultures and social relations”.⁵⁹⁰

The Islamic Republic is thus a by-product of modernity that reinvented the Islamic traditions and expanded retrogressive gender and cultural practices through modern technologies of power.⁵⁹¹ Anti-Westernization and othering the West became the official discourse of the state and “modern technologies of communication, such as posters, slogans, banners, murals, television, and cinema were utilized to counter the West and create a “we-ness” that represented all the forces involved in the revolution”.⁵⁹² Khomeini, by drawing on Al-Ahamd’s discourse of *gharbzadegi*, aimed to create a nation-state and national identity but with a very different nature than that of nationalists and modernists in the nineteenth century. Khomeini changed the definition of *millat* (national collectivity or nation) into *ummat* (Islamic collectivity). *Ummat* is an Islamic concept, referring to faithful people who have chosen to traverse one common path together to reach higher spiritual attainment or closeness to God⁵⁹³ through *imamat* (the leadership of imam or *faqih*) under *velayat-e faqih*. This historical Islamic ideal of unity aims at creating a community within which obedience to Islamic authority is the main axis of relations and any action outside of this axis is attributed to

⁵⁸⁷ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, xiv.

⁵⁸⁸ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 122.

⁵⁸⁹ Sam Lucerne, *Theocracies* (USA: ABDO Publishing Company, 2011).

⁵⁹⁰ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 9.

⁵⁹¹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 265.

⁵⁹² Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 90.

⁵⁹³ Shabnam Moinipour, *Human Rights, Iranian Migrants, and State Media: From Media Portrayal to Civil Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 53.

the enemy (which is the West and its tropes, as defined in the official discourse of the Islamic Republic).⁵⁹⁴

Within this Islamic *dispositif*, there was not any space for the modern gender norms introduced by Pahlavi. After the establishment of the Islamic state, Khomeini immediately abolished the Family Protection Laws on the February 26, 1979. He decreed gender segregation in all beaches and sports activities and later commanded that wearing the Islamic hijab is compulsory for all women.⁵⁹⁵ The revolutionary state established a new juridical discourse on sexuality through which the state gained more power over women's bodies, reduced the age of marriage for girls from 15 to 13 and boys from 18 to 15, turned the modern trend of love and marriage into a contract of marriage with specific reproductive functions, encouraged polygamy, temporary marriage, and facilitated easy divorce for men. In one sense, the restrictions of the new theocratic state on the one side encouraged motherhood and large families, and on the other side, provided cheap access to sex inside or outside of the formal marriage for men of all social classes.⁵⁹⁶ The main purpose of this new policy of gender and sexuality was to place Islamism and anti-Westernism at the head of the revolutionary's activities. Through the "us-versus-them" logic that I have already mentioned, Khomeini created a national and post-colonial narrative, propounding same-sex love, prostitution and women emancipation as the result of perverted Western sexual ethos.⁵⁹⁷ The new state, thus, removed the right to choose other lifestyles for urban women and vanished the modern 'gay' lifestyle that had emerged among elite urban circles; during this time, homosexuality for the second time found shelter in homosocial spaces such as sex-segregated schools, military garrisons, and public baths.⁵⁹⁸

The consolidation of power of the Islamic revolution also lied in the elimination of opponents. Through mass support, reinforced by assertive ideological propaganda amongst the populace, as well as the Revolutionary Guard, and an armed force that ensures the regime's survival in the face

⁵⁹⁴ Jalil Roshandel, "Evolution of the Decision making Process in Iranian Foreign Policy", in *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran since 1979*, ed., Eric Hooglund (USA: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 124.

⁵⁹⁵ Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and reveiling*, 201.

⁵⁹⁶ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 265.

⁵⁹⁷ Katarzyna Korycki, Abouzar Nasirzadeh, "Homophobia as a Tool of Statecraft: Iran and Its Queers" in *Global Homophobia eds., Meredith L. Weiss, Michael J. Bosia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 174-195

⁵⁹⁸ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 265.

of coups, domestic uprisings, and external threats, Khomeini established a centralized and coercive state.⁵⁹⁹ The marginalization and then the elimination of dissidents—such as liberal and social democrats, leftists, feminists, and ethnic and religion minorities⁶⁰⁰—was justified by condemning them as “corrupt”, “evil” and “not part of the true Islamic nation”.⁶⁰¹ Over four thousand people were executed during the first years of the establishment of the Islamic Republic.⁶⁰² According to Korycki and Nasirzadeh, this public violence served for two purposes: on one side, it accelerated the elimination of the opponents, and on the other side, it consolidated Khomeini’s position as the ultimate authority over his allies, the opposition, and society.⁶⁰³

The Islamic Republic as a modern regime of power operated to produce subjects who became docile and obeying bodies. Thus, in the post-revolutionary era, more than in other periods, the social body became the object of politics and the concern of the state. In this context, through applying regulatory control over women’s bodies and producing homosexuals as deviant, the Islamic Republic constitutes new sexual subjects.⁶⁰⁴ Dealing with homosexuality, the Islamic regime’s policy does not recognize it as an identity.⁶⁰⁵ Rather, homosexuals are depicted as those with bodies that are not reproductive, who threaten the well-being of the general population, and are opposed to Islamic culture: therefore, they should be regulated within the biopolitical regulatory system.⁶⁰⁶ The process of regulation of homosexuality occurred through both medical power that led to the pathologization of homosexuality and juridico-legal power that labeled homosexuality as a capital crime under the Islamic state’s rules.

The pathologization policy of homosexuality traces back to Khomeini’s fatwa on the lawfulness of sex reassignment surgery.⁶⁰⁷ He issued this fatwa in 1987, and in the case of Maryam Khatoun Molkara, who was a trans woman. After many struggles, she met Khomeini and asked him about

⁵⁹⁹ Korycki, Nasirzadeh, “Homophobia as a Tool of Statecraft: Iran and Its Queers”, 174-195

⁶⁰⁰ Afary, Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 163.

⁶⁰¹ Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolution in Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 252.

⁶⁰² Shaul Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 221-222.

⁶⁰³ Korycki, Nasirzadeh, “Homophobia as a Tool of Statecraft: Iran and Its Queers”, 185.

⁶⁰⁴ Korycki, Nasirzadeh, “Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran”

⁶⁰⁵ Farrah Jafari, “Transsexuality under Surveillance in Iran: Clerical Control of Khomeini’s Fatwas,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2014), 31-51

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Raha Bahreini, “From perversion to pathology: discourses and practices of gender policing in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2008).

her condition. Khomeini responded, “there is no Islamic obstacle to sex change surgery, if it is approved by a reliable doctor”.⁶⁰⁸ From that moment, as Najmabadi argues, the fatwa on sex reassignment surgery became a policy of the Islamic state to manipulate gender and sexuality.⁶⁰⁹ The Islamic Republic is built around a heteronormative belief system originating from the Shari’a’s conceptualization of men and women’s roles that God has prescribed in the Qur’an.⁶¹⁰ Under this binary regime, legal gender recognition procedures in Iran have created a “fundamental dichotomy between concepts of perversion and deviation [*enheraf*] on the one hand, and pathology and disorder [*ekhtelal*] on the other”. Homosexual behaviors under this dichotomy are “treated as crimes, while homosexual desires are taken as symptoms of transsexualism”.⁶¹¹ It is interesting to remind that, as I have explained in paragraph 2.3 “Practices of the Self”, in nineteenth century Europe, homosexuality was interpreted as a form of inversion that is of a discrepancy between anatomical sex and psychological sex. Doctor Magnus Hirschfeld used the term ‘uranism’ in his own theory of ‘third sex’ or ‘intermediate sexual condition’ that also included transsexualism and transvestitism.⁶¹² However, Hirschfeld and other scientists in the next years differentiated the concept of homosexuality from transsexualism⁶¹³, and both were removed from the list of WHO’s mental disorders (World Health Organization) in 1990 and 2018, respectively. In the case of Iran, however, transsexuality is still recognized as a ‘disorder’ and used as a “medicalization device” to “enforce sexually normative behavior among homosexuals through state-sanctioned and governmentally implemented SRS, in order to demonstrate how the state shapes sexual desires and gender subjectivities to structure self-cognition”.⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁸ Zara Saeidzadeh, “Transsexuality in Contemporary Iran: Legal and Social Misrecognition,” *Fem Leg Stud* (2016) 24, 249–272

⁶⁰⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing selves: Transsexuality and same-sex desire in contemporary Iran*.

⁶¹⁰ Paula Sanders, “Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law” in *Women in Middle Eastern History* eds., Beth Baron and Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 74-95.

⁶¹¹ Justice for Iran and Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang) 2014, *Pathologizing Identities, Paralyzing Bodies: Human Rights Violations against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran*, available at: <http://6rang.org/english/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-IdentitiesParalyzing-Bodies.pdf>

⁶¹² Lorenzo Bernini, *Il Sessuale Politico: Freud con Marx, Fanon, Foucault* (Edizione ETS: Pisa, 2019), 163-165.

⁶¹³ Arlene Istar Lev, *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant People and Their Families* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 74.

⁶¹⁴ Jafari, “Transsexuality under Surveillance in Iran: Clerical Control of Khomeini’s Fatwas,”

With respect to this dichotomy, if homosexuals fail to conform to “socially constructed gender expectations”, they have to either classify themselves as “transpatients” or “homo-perverts”. The first category signifies those “individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations” who accept their gender variance as a pathological and psychiatric disorder and bring themselves to undergo “hormone therapy, sterilization and genital reassignment surgery within the bounds of gender normalcy”. In contrast to the first category, the second category refers to those who “insist on expressing their experienced sexual orientation and gender identity without undergoing hormonal and surgical treatment”.⁶¹⁵ Homosexuals are thus considered an existential threat to the regime’s gender binary and challenge “the established definition of correspondence between sex, gender and sexual orientation.” As I explained in paragraph 3.2, “Homoerotic Persia”, even contemporary Islamic legal scholars use homosexuality as a synonym for *liwat* rather than for naming an identity and an orientation. In the Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran, homosexuality is also reduced to anal intercourse and is “criminalized with punishments ranging from flogging to the death penalty”.⁶¹⁶

A new Penal Code was ratified on 21 April 2013; Article 233 yet defines that *liwat* is the penetration of “a man’s sexual organ [the penis], up to the point of circumcision, into another male person’s anus”. Article 234 declares that the insertive/active partner will be sentenced to death if he has imposed *liwat* by coercion, or if he “meets the condition of *Ihsan* [i.e. he is married and can have vaginal intercourse with his wife whenever he wishes]”, otherwise he will be punished by one hundred lashes. The receptive/passive partner, on the other hand, will be sentenced to death under any condition (whether he meets *Ihsan* or not).⁶¹⁷ Article 235 “states that if penetration does not reach the point of circumcision”, it should be regarded as *Tafkhiz* [putting a man’s sexual organ between the thighs or the buttocks of another male person]. In this case, Article 236 specifies the punishment of one hundred lashes for both passive and active partner with no difference on whether or not they meet *Ihsan* or have resorted to coercion. Acts such as kissing or touching a person of one’s same-sex, according to Article 237, is punishable by thirty-one to seventy-four lashes that are equally applicable to men and women’s homosexuality.⁶¹⁸ It is interesting to note that although

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ This punishment does not apply in the case of rape to the passive partner.

⁶¹⁸ Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Book II) 2013, available at: <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/news/show/845002> . English translation available at: <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human->

homosexuality in post-revolutionary Iran has become the subject of medical and legal regulations, and the Islamic Penal Codes can be seen as a harsh reaction to male homoeroticism, the covert practice of bisexuality or same-sex love has not disappeared. Rather, male homoeroticism has remained in the private sphere, orbiting around the tactic of “the will not to know”. In this context, identities of gays and lesbians are not officially recognized in Iran and therefore, they do not exist and any struggles for their visibility is considered as a political act against the official rhetoric of the Islamic state and then attributed to the enemy, which is the West. The official authorities, as I mentioned in the introduction, such as the Supreme Leader, the former Iranian President and some grand Ayatollahs call gayness a Western phenomenon exported to Iran as one of the tropes of Western imperialism. Here, I argue that there is a shared argument between Iranian official authorities and Massad who both claim that identities of gays and lesbians, as well as homosexuals’ rights, are a modern and Western cultural encroachment, underpinned by exporting identities of gays and lesbians to the Middle East. In the next paragraph, I will elaborate on Massad’s thesis and I will argue that such academic assertions are problematic and foster the roots of homophobia in Muslim communities.

4.2. Sexual Imperialism: Reading Josef Massad

Although the main purpose of this thesis is not to discuss and criticize Massad's ideas, since his updating and reworking of Foucault's theory of sexuality are in accordance with the Islamic Republic's official discourse, we need to bring his ideas into the Iranian context and discuss them. For doing so, in this paragraph, I will elaborate on Massad's thesis of the "Gay International" and the diffusion of modern homosexual identification in the Middle East. Then, I will give my reflection on Massad's account of Western sexual imperialism and I will detect some flaws in his assertions, including the essentializing dichotomy between the East and the West, flattening out spaces of queer activism and overlooking of agency and transformative capacity of non-heterosexual subjects concerning homosexual identity.

Joseph Andoni Massad is a Palestinian Christian, born in Jordan in 1963. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science in 1998. He teaches about modern Arab politics and intellectual history in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. Massad has particular interests in the theories of identity and culture that entails the theories of sexuality, race, nationalism, and religion. When established a vigorous critique of Orientalism, Said was perhaps willfully blind to the issues of gender and sexuality in the Orient. Instead, Massad—who was a disciple of Edward Said at Columbia University—explores exactly the question of gender and sexuality in the Middle East. Using Foucault's genealogical method, he examines same-sex desire in the intersection of power, production of knowledge, geopolitics and culture in order to investigate the role that sex and sexuality have played in the transformation of constructions of culture and politics in the Middle East. He is also interested in the modalities by which Arab intellectuals have produced and contributed to such constructions.

In his outstanding volume *Desiring Arabs*, Massad compiles an archive of medieval and contemporary literature on sexuality in the Arab world to examine "the influence and impact that Orientalism has had in shaping the Arabs' own perceptions of themselves and each other since the Arab Renaissance to the present".⁶¹⁹ He argues that the "anxiety" of Arab intellectuals and their debates from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century were concerned with the cultural revival and modernization in response to Orientalism.⁶²⁰ Examining Arab fiction and non-fiction

⁶¹⁹ Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 48.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

literature, Massad reveals that in order to defend Arab culture and civilization against Orientalism, the Arab intellectuals, instead of developing their own concepts from their experience and context, uncritically embraced the Western understanding of culture, civilization, and moral values. In other words, by adopting Western views of modernity and progress, Arab intellectuals, according to Massad, internalized Western criteria to assess their own culture and moral values.⁶²¹ In Massad's opinion, without any reflection Arab intellectuals internalized the moralistic attitudes of the Victorian era toward sexuality that privileged heterosexuality and devalued all forms of non-heterosexuality. For example, Massad attempts to show how Orientalist ideas of culture and civilization have been hegemonic in the works of Arab intellectuals, such as nineteenth century journalist Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914) and Egyptian intellectual Taha Husayn (1889-1973), who tried to censor some parts of Arab history according to the heterosexist and moralistic vision of Europe.⁶²²

By spending much time reviewing classical Arab poetry, Massad asserts that when the West saw ascending the practices of Victorian morality, the historical tradition of same-sex relations in Arab poetry began to be suppressed or condemned as degeneration and civilizational decadence. For example, he refers to the eighteenth-century Arab poet Abu Nuwas whose life and homoerotic *ghazals* (love poem) were dismissed by Arab intellectuals. According to Massad, this critical perspective on homoerotic literature is linked to the reaction or response to the imperial project of the superiority of the West in the realm of gender and sexuality.⁶²³ Massad makes another point regarding the position of Arab intellectuals in modern times. He contends that whether they reject or defend same-sex desire, their reactions have always been in accordance with the colonial discourse. He argues that “while the premodern West attacked Islam’s alleged sexual licentiousness, the modern West attacks its alleged repression of sexual freedom in the present”.⁶²⁴ Arab intellectuals, as Massad asserts, re-categorized their own sexuality according to the Western *dispositif* of sexuality and its conceptualization of the natural and the deviant. Massad further argues that there is an ‘Oriental sexuality’—or a typical Arab *dispositif* of alliance, particularly in terms of traditional same-sex relations or what he calls “the practitioners of same-sex contact”—

⁶²¹ Ibid., 51-57.

⁶²² Ibid., 57-60.

⁶²³ Ibid., 54-60.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 175.

which is different from that of the West and there has always been an attempt by certain Westernized Arabs and intellectuals—such as Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), Egyptian novelist Sun'allah Ibrahim (1973-present), and Egyptian feminist writer Nawal al-Sa'dawi (1931-present)—to blur this difference in favor of universalizing the Western model of heterosexuality and homosexuality (Western *dispositif* of sexuality).

Desiring Arabs raises a huge debate among gender and queer scholars. For instance, in a chapter significantly titled “The Past is a Foreign Country?” in the volume *Islamicate Sexualities: Translation across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, Valerie Traub states that Massad’s critique of Western imperialism and its relation with sexual identity is a part of a “conflicted project of modernity”:

Its [the conflicted project of modernity] problematic repercussions have been amplified in our current political situation wherein neoimperialism, globalization, and the so-called war on terror pit much of the West against much of the East. Massad’s critique responds to and partakes in these geopolitical conflicts about the meaning of modernity and tradition, the global and the local, including the role of contemporary state in regulating the sexuality of its citizens and the state’s implication in neoimperial and transnational flows of bodies and capital.⁶²⁵

Considering homosexuality as a part of this conflicted project of modernity, Massad argues that the notion of homosexuality as a ‘function of modernity’ produced in the *dispositif* of sexuality in nineteenth-century Europe (according to Foucauldian periodization) and thereafter, in modern times, has been deployed by the West as an ideological tool to establish a contradiction, for example, between Western freedom and Eastern repression.⁶²⁶ Along with Massad, Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray in the introduction to *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, argue that the contrast between Western and Islamic homosexuality is the issue of “containment versus elaboration, of a single pattern of homosexuality defined and delimited by institutions and discourses closely linked to the modern nation-state versus the variety,

⁶²⁵ Valerie Traub, “The Past is a Foreign Country?”, in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, eds., Kathryn Babayan, Afsaneh Najmabadi (USA, UK: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1-40.

⁶²⁶ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 6-9.

distribution, and longevity of same-sex patterns in Islamic societies”.⁶²⁷ Massad, Roscoe, and Murray do agree that the emergence of homosexuality in the West positions non-East as pre-modern, traditional, and inferior. However, their arguments also reduce the histories of homosexuality to a single pattern of the modern West. In other words, their account of the historiography of sexual identity evokes an Orientalist perspective that not only confirms an essentializing dichotomy between the East and the West but also renders homosexuality and other forms of same-sex identifications as alien concepts to non-Western cultures.

Above all, what makes Massad’s thesis highly controversial in the modern discourse of gender and sexuality is his criticizing of LGBTQI+ politics and the universalist, essentialist, and Orientalist approach of LGBTQI+ rights organizations and NGOs. Massad calls attention to the need to interrogate Western sexual epistemology when applied to the Muslim context. For doing so, he raises some crucial questions such as: Is Western discourse of sexuality applicable to Middle Eastern societies? Is homosexuality a universal identity category applicable to Middle Eastern societies? Massad answers these questions in *Desiring Arabs*, but the strategy he adopts and the conclusions he draws are problematic. His main argument is that a modern form of Western colonialism began to impose its power on Muslim world, particularly in the realm of gender and sexuality in the 1980s and 90s. For the first time, Massad posited this thesis in the article “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World” published in 2002.⁶²⁸ In this article, that later was extended into *Desiring Arabs*—by drawing on Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif* of sexuality—, Massad contends that the incitement to speak about sexual identity or to speak about sexuality as the “truth” of oneself has a specific value in the context of colonialism of the Middle East.⁶²⁹ Then, he raises another question: how do homosexual rights organizations intervene in the sexual life of existing subjects who do not identify themselves by modern Western sexual identity categories? and he answers that sexual identity categories of gays and lesbians, as well as the agenda of homosexual rights, are a modern and Western cultural encroachment that—in the name of saving Middle Eastern gays and lesbians from their societies—exports Western understating of sexuality to the Middle East through what he calls Gay International”, that is an

⁶²⁷ Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray, “Introduction” in *Islamic Homosexualities*, eds., Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray (New York, London: New York University Press, 1997), 6.

⁶²⁸ Joseph A Massad, “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World.” *Public Culture* 14(2), (2002) 361-385.

⁶²⁹ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 171-172.

ensemble of European and the United States' institutions, organizations, political formations and NGOs for LGBTQI+ rights.⁶³⁰ To summarize Massad's main argument about the Gay International, I would like to quote this passage from *Desiring Arabs* in length:

By inciting discourse about homosexuals where none existed before, the Gay International is in fact heterosexualizing a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary. Because most non-Western societies, including Muslim Arab societies, have not subscribed historically to these categories, their imposition is eliciting less than liberating outcomes: men who are considered the 'passive' or 'receptive' parties in male-male sexual contacts are forced to have one object choice and identity as homosexual or gay, just as men who are the 'active' parties are also forced to limit their sexual aim to one object choice, either women or men. As most 'active' partners see themselves as part of a societal norm, so heterosexuality becomes compulsory given that the alternative, as presented by the Gay International, means becoming marked outside the norm—with all the attendant risks and disadvantages of such a marketing. Also, most Arab and Muslim countries that do not have laws against sexual conduct between men respond to the Gay International's incitement to discourse by professing antihomosexual stances on a nationalist basis. This is leading to police harassment in some cases and could lead to antihomosexual legislation. Those countries that already have unenforced laws begin to enforce them. Ironically, this is the very process through which homosexuality was invented in the West. It is not the Gay International or its upper-class supporters in the Arab diaspora who will be persecuted, but rather the poor and nonurban men who practice same-sex contact and who do not necessarily identify as homosexual or gay.⁶³¹

Massad challenges the orientalist tendencies of some LGBTQI+ organizations and rightly questions “the teleology of a putative international gay liberation because the liberal human rights discourse defaults to an essentialist understanding of sexual identity”.⁶³² However, he flattens out the politics and space of LGBTQI+ activism. In his view, it seems that there are not any positive contributions from human rights and LGBTQI+ organizations. For example, Massad not only

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 161-162.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 188-189

⁶³² Momin Rahman, “Sexual Diffusions and Conceptual Confusions: Muslim Homophobia and Muslim Homosexualities in the Context of Modernity”, in *Sexualities in World Politics: How LGBTQ Claims Shape International Relations*, eds., Manuela Lavinias Picq and Markus Thiel (New York: Routledge, 2015), 97.

neglects the positive and important contributions of international activism and the politics of LGBTQI+ organizations—such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and Human Rights Watch—in terms of the rising of awareness regarding abuses and persecutions of those living non-normative lives both in Europe and non-Western countries but also he reduces their activities to a form of conspiratorial mission for universalizing the categories of gay and lesbian and transforming the “practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay”.⁶³³ Reading Massad’s works, one gets that in the Middle East and the Arab world prior to the launching of the Gay International in the 80s, there was not any same-sex identification or even romantic love but just same-sex conduct. Besides the claim that Gay International imposes a Western sexual ontology on Muslim societies, Massad argues that expression of sexual desires in the forms of Western sexual identities, including LGBT identities and politics, makes the sexual minorities visible, and then it brings the violation of the Middle East’s governments toward sexual minorities and spaces of same-sex practices. To prove his claim, he refers to incidents such as ‘Queen Boat’ in which 25 men in Cairo, Egypt in 2001 were arrested and prosecuted for allegedly ‘practicing debauchery’ (same-sex practices).⁶³⁴ Massad concludes that homosexuals are the ‘victims’ of Gay International, and it is responsible for spreading homophobia in the Middle East.⁶³⁵

His argument becomes more troubling firstly when he confirms that those Islamists and anticolonial nationalists correctly have perceived the Gay International “as part of Western encroachment cultures”, and secondly when he not only dismisses non-heterosexual individuals as unrepresentative, passive victims of Western sexual imperialism, but also he refers to them as ‘native informants’.⁶³⁶ In *Third World Protest*, Rahul Rao argues that there is something amiss in Massad’s argument that dismisses Middle Eastern LGBTQI+ people as “native informants to Western activists”, a “phrase that is loaded with colonial memories of indigenous elites engaged in traitorous collaboration with colonizing powers”⁶³⁷. By ‘native informant’, Massad intends to

⁶³³ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 162.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 172-175

⁶³⁷ Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176.

say that those individuals working in both Western and Middle East LGBTQI+ organizations and identifying themselves as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans and queers are organic to and a parcel of the Gay International. He believes that Gay International found the native informants in the “richer segments of society”, however “although members of these classes who engage in same-sex relations have more recently adopted a Western identity (as part of the package of the adoption of everything Western by the classes to which they belong), they remain a minuscule minority among those men who engage in same-sex relations and who do not identify as gay nor express a need for gay politics”.⁶³⁸ Rao comments Massad’s statement that contends that most of Arabic non-heterosexual people identifying themselves with Western sexual identities belong to privileged classes. For Massad, coming out as a gay in the Arab world and in the Middle East, Rao argues, is less about the agency and more akin to consumerism and buying the latest Calvin Klein underwear, while, according to Rao, although “class position certainly gives such individuals access to Western sexual ontologies, it cannot be assumed a priori that the motivation for identification on these terms is a consumerist one rather than say something that stems from a deep dissatisfaction with the traditional sexual ontology”.⁶³⁹ In Rao’s view, in “criticizing cosmopolitan rescue politics and its local interlocutors, Massad slips into a reinforcement of communitarian authenticity narratives that police how sexual preferences ought to be expressed”.⁶⁴⁰ In fact, one part of Rao’s antipathy towards Massad’s argument stems from his failure to problematize the “traditional sexual ontology”:

As in many parts of the non-Western world, this ontology permitted some space for same-sex behavior, but condemned any expression of homosexual identity. The physical, mental, and emotional costs that such an ontology exacts in the form of broken relationships, sham heterosexual marriage, suicides, lack of legal and social recognition of what are otherwise deeply fulfilling personal relationships, lack of access to health care, etc. are well documented in many countries, but remain unknowledgeable in Massad’s argument.⁶⁴¹

In contrast to Massad, Rao suggests that in a context where “rebellion against the traditional sexual ontology has the potential to incur grave sanctions,” we can consider it as a rebellion motivated by

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 173.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 178.

a sense of “grievance against that ontology—a feeling of victimization by its patriarchal assumptions and expectations—than as part of an impulse to consume all things Western”.⁶⁴² Like Rao, in the article “Joseph Massad and the Alleged Violence of Human Rights”, Sahar Amer questions the denial of agency in Massad’s works. She argues that in Massad’s writings, non-heterosexual Arabs are depicted as passive objects and “always in a reactive position vis-à-vis the West, never actors or in charge of defining their own lives or sexualities”.⁶⁴³ While Massad points to the Gay International as responsible for producing violence and homophobia in the Middle East, Amer denounces the violence that Massad himself perpetrates through “excluding Arabs altogether from the category homosexuality”. She writes that “if for the Gay International, an Arab who rejects the label gay is the victim of self-hatred or internalized homosexual homophobia, it would appear that for Massad, an Arab who assert a gay identity is a victim of orientalist fantasies, of colonial imposition, and of the universalizing claims of Western gay rights groups”.⁶⁴⁴

In the article “Queer as Intersectionality: Theorizing Gay Muslim Identities”, Momin Rahman adds that Massad’s characterizations of the “Gay International and its institutional power are overly determinist” and his argument “lacks any evidence of actual lived experience”. Rahman suggests that in order to understand the epistemological differences between traditional same-sex relations and modern homosexuality, “we need more evidence on homoeroticism for gay Muslims globally and for those living in the West”. He further argues that many gay Muslims would challenge “the exclusive identification of homosexuality and homo-eroticism with Western culture, simply by first acknowledging that there are those from Muslim cultures who are, as we understand it, gay”.⁶⁴⁵ Rahman does agree “with those like Massad who criticize the current political formations of gay politics as conceits of Western modernity”. However, he resists “the argument that the antidote to Western impositions can be culturally exclusive and authentic non-Western traditions of gender and sexual organization”.⁶⁴⁶ Moreover, Massad’s conceptualization

⁶⁴²Ibid., 177.

⁶⁴³ Sahar Amer, “Joseph Massad and the Alleged Violence of Human Rights.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, (2010), 16(4), 649-653.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Momin Rahman, “Queer as Intersectionality: Theorizing Gay Muslim Identities”, *Sociology*, (2010), Volume 44(5): 944–961.

⁶⁴⁶ Rahman, “Sexual Diffusions and Conceptual Confusions: Muslim Homophobia and Muslim Homosexualities in the Context of Modernity”, 97.

of queer rights campaigns as tropes of Western imperialism, according to Rahman, dangerously reinstates a “Euro-centric view of modernity in postcolonial analyses” that equates LGBTQI+ politics with neocolonialist politics. Rahman, instead, suggests that “we need to acknowledge both the global intersecting sociological and political formations of sexuality across cultures of the East and West, and the legitimacy that certain postcolonial states derive from deploying homophobia as a nationalist tool, exemplified by, but not limited to, Muslim cultures”.⁶⁴⁷

In order to claim that we should not flatten out all spaces of queer activism to supposed imperialistic Western NGOs, I will refer to the case that Rao has already commented in *Third World Protest*: the hanging of two young Iranian men, Ayaz Marhuoni and Mohammad Asgari. They, who were 16 and 18 years old respectively, were hanged on charges for an alleged crime involving homosexual intercourse in the city of Mashhad in 2005. Western activists and international LGBTQI+ organizations responded immediately to the hanging but differently. Some of them publicized the case. They claimed that Marhuoni and Asgari were hanged because of their sexual orientation. Members of the US conservative gay and lesbian group Log Cabin Republicans announced that “in the wake of new stories and photographs documenting the hanging of two gay Iranian teenagers, Log Cabin Republicans re-affirm their commitment to the global war on terror”.⁶⁴⁸ The British gay activist Peter Tatchell, the executive director of OutRage, claimed that “this is the latest barbarity by the Islamo-fascists in Iran ... the entire country is a gigantic prison, with Islamic rule sustained by detention without trial, torture and state-sanctioned murder”.⁶⁴⁹ The Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBTQI+ civil rights organization in the US, called upon the State Department of “the world’s greatest democracy” to issue an “immediate and strong condemnation” of the execution of two homosexual teenagers who were “hanged in a public square after being tortured for 14 months, simply for being caught having consensual sex”.⁶⁵⁰

While these organizations asserted that Marhuoni and Asgari merely had consensual sex, several human rights groups, including Amnesty International, IGLHRC, and Human Rights

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁴⁸ Log Cabin Republicans, ‘Log Cabin Republicans Denounce Execution of Gay Youth by Iran’, http://online.logcabin.org/news_views/log-cabin-republicans-denounce-execution-of-gayyouth-by-iran.html.

⁶⁴⁹ OutRage!, ‘Execution of Gay Teens in Iran’, <http://www.petertatchell.net/international/iranexecution.htm>.

⁶⁵⁰ Human Rights Campaign, ‘Secretary Rice Urged to Condemn execution of Gay Iranian Teens’, <http://www.hrc.org/1945.htm>.

Watch, refrained to cast the execution of Iranian teenagers as a gay issue. They announced that this case lacked credible information about the teenagers' sexual orientation and the reason for their execution. For example, Scott Long, a human rights activist, argued that there is not any evidence to conclude that Marhuoni and Asgari were gay. He also said that there existed different reports claiming the teenagers were executed for raping a 13-year old boy.⁶⁵¹ In this way, Long and Amnesty International, IGLHRC, and Human Rights Watch reframed this case as an issue of execution of minors, which is a violation of international conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁶⁵² According to Rao, the different reactions to this execution show that the space of the Gay International is not homogeneous, but on the contrary, is an "extraordinarily fractious space". Its "constituents span the entire political spectrum,... and while some of its constituents seem eager to use gay rights as a means of consolidating Western hegemony in ways that remind us of the heyday of the civilizing mission, others seem wary of contributing to such an outcome".⁶⁵³

In this way, Rao demonstrates that, by ignoring this fractious space of Gay International, representing queer rights campaigns as tropes of Western imperialism and essentializing the dichotomy between the East and the West, Massad's thesis hinges on flawed assumptions. But, from my perspective, the main faultiness of his assertions backs to the lack of a critical understanding of the concept of modernity. He sees it through a Euro-centric view, which either imposed on the East or non-Europeans blindly adopted it through a process of westernization. Thus, his postcolonial stand in the critique of Western imperialism lacks a divergence assumption of modernity. As I have shown in paragraph 3.1 "Rethinking Modernity", the most recent approaches to the notion of modernity have revealed commonality and overlapping rather than differences between the European and the Middle East and Asiatic contractions of modernity. In particular, Bhabha's postcolonial trend of thinking, in contrast to Massad's, revolves around the idea that the narrative of modernity is not coherent, and it should not be conceptualized through the oppositions of the East and the West. Dilip Gaonkar proposes that alternative models of modernity have been produced in non-Western countries through creative adaptations by subjects

⁶⁵¹ Interview with Scott Long, New York, 21 September 2009

⁶⁵² Human Rights Watch, 'Iran: End Juvenile Executions', <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/07/26/iran-end-juvenile-executions>.

⁶⁵³ Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World*, 189.

who are not receivers but rather active agents. Sanjay Subrahmanyam offers the concept of “connected histories” in order to look at the possibilities of global connections rather than the disciplinary constructions of differences.

These approaches emphasize that with the rise of modernity in the nineteenth century, “a body of common concepts, ideas and ways of thinking emerges which renders inter-societal communication between Europe and the Middle East”.⁶⁵⁴ Massad’s conceptualization of modernity totally lacks such global construction, suggesting instead an assumption of “ownership of modernity”⁶⁵⁵ that equates modernity with the colonialism of the West—as in his view, Arab intellectuals were passive subjects, following the West blindly in the construction of Arab modernity, and the emergence of LGBTQI rights and homophobia in the Middle East was a part of this view of “modernity as colonialism”.⁶⁵⁶ Such an approach to modernity is not appropriate to all Middle Eastern societies, particularly Iran, where, as I have demonstrated, we cannot just blame Western imperialism for the heterosexualization of society in the nineteenth century and for homophobia in contemporary time. Rather, what emerged in Iran from the transformation of sexuality and gender was a product of modernity created by Iranian intellectuals who, with a degree of agency, mimicked Western modernity in order to reinvent the pre-Islamic traditions and build a modern nation-state and national identity.

Massad’s thesis, however, is not totally wrong. I do agree with Massad that homosexuality, in the Foucauldian sense, itself is a form of *dispositif*—produced in nineteenth-century Europe through the intersection of power, knowledge, and discourse—however, I have shown in paragraph 2.3 “The Practice of the Self” that homosexuals historically have resisted within their own *dispositifs* to transform themselves into ethical subjects through the care of the self and *Parrhesia*. Thus, the subject’s transformative capacity is exactly what Massad ignores in his argument about homosexual identification in the Middle East. According to Rahman, we cannot explain “homosexualization” as a process that is a “one-dimensional continuation of colonialism in

⁶⁵⁴ Katerina Dalacoura, “Homosexuality as cultural battleground in the Middle East: culture and postcolonial international theory”, *Third World Quarterly*, (2014), 35 (7) 1290-1306.

⁶⁵⁵ Momin Rahman, *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 123.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

contemporary times”⁶⁵⁷ ; rather, we should consider that the social forces and historical events that have produced modern homosexuality are spreading throughout the world—in other words, homosexual identity has been developed in a global communication wherein preventing the transmission of ideas and influences is impossible. This does not mean that people are incapable of making critical judgments about themselves in terms of sexual identity; on the contrary, they actively contribute to the construction of their sexual identities. The internet, in particular, is making a great impact on this global communication. In societies where any public discussion of homosexuality is taboo or an openly gay community does not exist, the internet circulates many ideas and information for those whose sexuality isolates them and allows them to have social contacts. As Scott Long argues, the internet “has become a way for people to connect who would absolutely never have connected before”, and “it has been happening in the Middle East, and the same thing has been happening in Africa”.⁶⁵⁸ In the next paragraph, besides bringing Massad’s thesis into the Iranian context, I will contextualize the use of the internet and its impact on the development of homosexual identity in Iran.

⁶⁵⁷ Momin Rahman, *Sexual Diffusions and Conceptual Confusions: Muslim Homophobia and Muslim Homosexualities in the Context of Modernity*, 98.

⁶⁵⁸ Brian Whitaker, “Distorting desire”, a review article on the *Desiring Arabs*, (2007) Retrieved from: <https://al-bab.com/distorting-desire>.

4.3 *Hamjensgara*/Gay's Existence

After a prolonged discussion on the pre-modern and modern construction of Iranian gender and sexuality and an elaboration on Massad's thesis on the diffusion of homosexual identification in the Middle East, in this paragraph, I will bring Massad's ideas into the Iranian context and through a comparative analysis of different researches on the real lives of Iranian gay men, I will show that they, in Foucauldian sense, have transformed themselves into ethical agents to contribute to the construction of their own local gayness and resist within the Islamic biopolitical *dispositif*. Moreover, since in this thesis the use of identity markers is fundamental, in this paragraph, I will use the English term 'gay' and the new terminology in the Persian language '*hamjensgara*' (same-sex identification and orientation), because firstly, both are used as the self-identification by the majority of local men in the post-revolutionary Iran⁶⁵⁹ (I will use *hamjensgara* only in the 2000s when for the first time this term appeared in the Iranian sexual discourse) and secondly, I will consider the construction of the term *hamjensgara* as a form of creative and ethical activity for localization of the Western notion of gayness. But before, I will begin this paragraph with giving a reflection on the important events in post-revolutionary Iran that have all contributed to the process of gayness production—particularly the presidential election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, the rapid development of the internet and, the achievement of socio-political expression of freedom and discussion of human rights.

As I have explained in paragraph 4.1 "The Rise of Islamism", under the Islamic regime, constituting a new woman subject, othering the West, pathologizing homosexuality, and deploying anti-same-sex rhetoric all in the name of tradition contributed to the establishment of a modern system of governance. The state reinvented and employed pre-modern forms of punishments ranging from flogging to the death penalty in order to restore Shi'i rituals of purity and penance and produce particular notions of religion and religious identity.⁶⁶⁰ As Minoo Moallem notes, in the late twentieth century, in the Islamic world—and in particular post-revolutionary Iran—the binary of tradition and modernity established a need for "the renewal of the industry around the

⁶⁵⁹ Abouzar Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians" in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009*, eds., David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi (New York: State University of New York, 2015), 57; Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*; Ahmad Karimi, "Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, (2017). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2017.128692>.

⁶⁶⁰ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 323.

colonial discourse of a civilizing mission (on the part of the West), while provoking, in return, a desire to claim authenticity on the part of Muslims".⁶⁶¹ In other words, the Islamic Republic, through "the return of Islam" and a "biopolitical logic" has attempted to create a nation-state and a national and religious identity in opposition to Western culture. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, immediately what emerged from "religious and ideological fervor" and a "return" to the Islamic past was the suppression and constraint of civil rights, the increase of executions, and the arrest of many dissidents, liberals, leftists and, even Islamists.⁶⁶² In this context, although the revolutionary regime doubtlessly was repressive toward women and gay men, the turn to recovering spaces and voices of resistance began amongst women's movements and communities of homosexuals in Iran and diaspora. In this paragraph, I will briefly discuss how women's mobilizations for volunteer work, coupled with a less radical political atmosphere of the 1990s, and finally gave rise to concessions for women's rights. Then, I will return to my argument concerning gays' resistance in Iran and diaspora with a focus on the spread of the internet all over the country and the beginning of the human rights discussion that began in the 1990s.⁶⁶³

From a social perspective, in the new constitution, it was stressed that the main place for women is home. They came to be seen just as mothers and faithful wives. All legal reforms supporting women's rights under the Shah were reversed and replaced with rules that were an orthodox interpretation of Islam. After the revolution, upper- and middle-class women—who mainly played social roles during the Pahlavis era—had to leave their jobs due to the pressure of a new constitution and gender norms. While the Islamist regime attempted to ban upper- and middle-class women from certain professions, such as judges and lawyers; for low-income and working-class women, particularly in rural areas, the situation did not change drastically; they

⁶⁶¹ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran*, 13.

⁶⁶² Touraj Daryaei, "Introduction" in *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, ed., Touraj Daryaei (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-12.

⁶⁶³ As I have explained in the introduction, in this thesis, I concentrate only on male homoeroticism, due to the hegemony of gay men in the political discourse of the West and the East, the lack of lesbians both in the Islamic Republic's and Massad's discourses, and little evidence of female same-sex relations in pre-modern Iran, particularly in Persian literature. However, it is impossible to talk about homoeroticism and particularly homosexuality in modern Iran without also addressing Iranian women's presence in general in society. Thus, I have to consider the women's issues, including their roles in the institution of family, marriage, heterosexual intimacy and their relations with male homoeroticism.

“continued to remain in the jobs they had been employed for decades”.⁶⁶⁴ In other words, the ideology of the new regime disagreed with those women and female employments that were affected by the Shah's trend of modernization.

Women's participation in society, however, increased with the starting of the ‘Iran-Iraq war’ in 1980, ‘falling oil prices’ and ‘economic sanctions’.⁶⁶⁵ As already argued, the Islamic republic as a by-product of modernization, established a modern state with important features of modernization such as urbanization and industrialization. Therefore, the revolutionary regime, in order to accomplish its modern purposes, called women's support to help the country. Women, particularly religious women, responded to this invitation in a large number. Khomeini called for “volunteer organizations, [*Basij* and *Pasdaran*] and many religious women joined”. Along with these organizations, Khomeini “mobilized mosques to set up literacy campaigns and many middle-class, educated women joined the campaigns as volunteers”.⁶⁶⁶ Between 1983 and 1987, women occupied 1.5% of Parliament seats and defended “women's Islamic needs and rights”. The majority of women parliamentarians came from religious families: they viewed women “primarily as houseworkers, child-bearers,” and child-rearers and believed that by “following the teachings of Islam, the Islamic Republic has been attentive to women's rights”.⁶⁶⁷ With the end of the war in 1988, a new age called the ‘period of reconstruction’ began: a socioeconomic and political development that also led to a change in women's status. In fact, the reconstruction policies and economic liberalization “induced more women to join the labor market”.⁶⁶⁸ This provided an opportunity for “a new generation of gender-conscious Islamist women to seek allies among secular women, to present a modern reading of Islam, and make radical demands for change in women's status by using politics as a potent agent”.⁶⁶⁹ More significantly, the social organization of the economy transformed the area of education. Substantial governmental funding was used for school construction in villages and poor neighborhoods. The accessibility of schools made possible

⁶⁶⁴ Rokhsana Bahramitash, “Women’s Employment in Iran: Modernization and Islamization” in *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, 161-168.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Azadeh Kian, “Women and politics in post-islamist Iran: the gender conscious drive to change”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24:1, (1997) 75-96.

⁶⁶⁸ Sedghi, *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and reveiling*, 221.

⁶⁶⁹ Kian, “Women and politics in post-islamist Iran: the gender conscious drive to change”.

girls' participation in educational settings so that female literacy drastically rose from 36 % in 1976 to 72 % in 1996.⁶⁷⁰

At the end of the 1980s, there was an explosion of births in the population. The state employed a U-turn policy in family planning, particularly regarding birth control.⁶⁷¹ Although the new state immediately instituted its own religious sex education and adopted a natalist policy in 1979,⁶⁷² poverty, lack of services, frequent childbearing and high rates of infant mortality contributed to some changes in family planning after the war in 1988.⁶⁷³ By learning from other countries, and with the help of those who were involved in pre-revolutionary family planning, Iran developed "the world's most effective programs" that encouraged "birth spacing of three to four years, discourage[d] early and late pregnancy, and limit[ed] family size at first to three and later to two children".⁶⁷⁴ Different forms of contraceptives such as condoms, birth-control pills, the IUD were widely available for married couples. The new family planning also organized classes and seminars to teach couples about sex before marriage, including the ways of obtaining and giving pleasure. Abortion was also reauthorized and legalized with some conditions: only up to the fourth month of pregnancy and only if it threaten the mother and child's life.⁶⁷⁵ In this context, the state authorized relative freedom of press. Among several hundred magazines and newspapers, some women's magazines, such as *Zanan* and *Farzaneh*, were published and expanded the scope of women's issues. Moreover, some conferences began to be organized regarding different aspects of women and family issues. The other shifts in social and economic trends, including greater urbanization, contributed to the dramatic changes in gender relations and sexual mores.⁶⁷⁶

At the end of the 1980s and in the course of the 1990s, therefore, Iran experienced a unique set of political, social and economic issues that steadily drew the country into the tide of globalization. One of the most important causes of integration of Iran into global communication in the post-revolutionary era was the presidential election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997.⁶⁷⁷ He

⁶⁷⁰ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 286.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶⁷² Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 339.

⁶⁷³ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 339.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶⁷⁵ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 340-341.

⁶⁷⁶ Kian, "Women and politics in post-islamist Iran: the gender conscious drive to change".

⁶⁷⁷ Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, (London & New York: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 2009), 39.

was a liberal president, studied theology in Qom and philosophy at Isfahan University. After the revolution, he sat in Parliament and later became the minister of culture. After resigning from ministry, he began to teach political philosophy at Tehran University.⁶⁷⁸ In 1997, Khatami appeared at the scene of the presidential election, and with promises of freedom for civil society, tolerance, and sociocultural openness, he won the election with almost 70% of the vote.⁶⁷⁹ Khatami's political project, regardless of whether or not it resulted in profound changes, attempted to depart from the past paradigms.

He realized that transformation is essential. He did not intend to dismantle *velayat faghieh*; instead, he attempted to breathe a new life into the existing theocratic system and transform Iran into a modern-day democracy predicated on Shi'ism. For doing so, he adopted an integrative, hybrid approach to modernity, developed in the middle ground of Islamic theocracy and globalization. Although the Islamic Republic from the early days was established as a by-product of modernity and deployed modern means of communication for its propaganda, its approach toward both international relations and civil freedom was a highly conservative backlash. Khatami, on the contrary, believed that modernity and western-inspired practices were compatible with Iranian culture and successfully could be woven into Iran's national, religious and historical tapestry.⁶⁸⁰ He immediately ran on a platform of liberalization and reform. Khatami's platform, with its call for global unification, market expansion, greater civil freedom, internationalizing the economy, fostering global dialogue and international relations, was especially popular among women, youth, the new middle class and ethnical and religious minorities, including the neglected Sunni Muslims.⁶⁸¹ In his foreign policy, Khatami is well known for his advocacy of an inclusive global discourse through the thesis of *Dialogue of Civilizations*, which was a kind of antidote to Samuel Huntington's theory of *Clash of Civilizations*.⁶⁸² Khatami's thesis called for a global discourse of tolerance and peace. He proposed Iran's rapprochement with the international community as an alternative to the discourse of *gharbzadeghi* to build a bridge between Iranian

⁶⁷⁸ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, xxi.

⁶⁷⁹ Abbas Amanat, *Iran: a Modern History*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 875.

⁶⁸⁰ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 33.

⁶⁸¹ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 270.

⁶⁸² Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking World Order* (London and New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks:, 1996)

tradition and Western civilizations and modernity.⁶⁸³ In his book, *Islam, Liberty, and Development*, Khatami argues that "we must concede that incompatibility of modern civilization with our tradition-bound civilization is one of the most important caucuses of crisis in our society. What is to be done? Should we insist on remaining immersed in our tradition, or should we melt fully in to Western civilization? Or is there another way of removing this contradiction?"⁶⁸⁴ For him, civilizations have always been dynamic, constantly changing and evolving. He also viewed the dialogue among civilizations as a strategy to "free human rights from the bounds of diplomatic negotiations with a discourse for defending human life, dignity and culture".⁶⁸⁵ During his presidency, he assured international organizations and lawyers that the Islamic courts would no longer deploy the stoning and restrict corporal punishments.⁶⁸⁶ His claim for human rights also gave more strength to the voices of lawyers, journalists, college students, actors, film directors, literary writers and intellectuals who, before Khatami's election, fought for a more tolerant and equal society. For example, Iranian film directors—particularly female directors such as Tahmineh Millani (*Hidden Half*, 2001; *Unwanted Woman*, 2005), Rakhshan Bani E'temad (*Under the skin of City*, 2001; *Gilaneh*, 2005), Samira Makhmalbaf (*The Apple*, 1998), and some of their male colleagues, like Bahram Beyza'i (*Bashu: The Little Stranger*, 1988), Dariyush Mehrjui (*Leila*, 1997), and Jafar Panahi (*The Circle*, 2000)—helped to redefine gender roles, call attention to the nurturing roles of women in society, and criticize Iranian Islamic patriarchal cultures, particularly the division of labor and traditional marriage.⁶⁸⁷

Within this more tolerant context, the discourse of human rights opened up a liberal space for gender relations through which women's rights advocates attempted to reinstate greater social freedoms. Under Khatami, Women gained "some rights to initiate divorce and Parliament exempted women's *mahriyeh* from taxes", single women were permitted to study abroad on government fellowship and reformists managed to "reduce the severity of the *hijab* for children and high-school students by allowing more colorful uniforms and scarves".⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, during Khatami's presidency, the rapid expansion of the internet in Iran provided another forum for new

⁶⁸³ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 1.

⁶⁸⁴ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty, and Development* (UK, Institute of Global Culture Studies: 1998), 24.

⁶⁸⁵ Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, 82.

⁶⁸⁶ Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 189.

⁶⁸⁷ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 334-335

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 329.

development in gender relations. The internet offered a new sphere where many new ideas were openly shared and discussed—the young generation used the internet as a liberal tool, aspiring for more personal freedom and further political changes. The dominant discussion on the Iranian blogs revolved around freedom of speech, political reforms, freedom of assembly and gender equality.⁶⁸⁹ One example is the *One Million Signatures Campaign*, an online petition organized by Iranian feminists calling for repealing the discriminatory marriage and divorce laws, which spread over the country through the internet.⁶⁹⁰ As argued by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, an Iranian feminist, regarding this campaign, "the rise of the internet and related forms of rapidly scalable global communications has "allowed women within Iran to tell the world—including the Persian-speaking diaspora—about their quest for justice as never before".⁶⁹¹

The discourse of gender and sexuality in post-revolutionary Iran has never been limited to heterosexual relations; it also has significantly touched upon the emergence of gay identification and gay subculture. In the rest of this paragraph, I will turn to my main argument regarding Iranian gay-identifying men and their voices of resistance and transformative capacities in constructing their own local gayness. Moreover, since in this thesis the use of identity markers is fundamental, in this paragraph, I will use the English term 'gay' and the new terminology in the Persian language '*hamjensgara*' (same-sex identification and orientation), because firstly, both are used as the self-identification by the majority of local men in the post-revolutionary Iran (I will use *hamjensgara* only in the 2000s when for the first time this term appeared in the discourse of sexuality in Iran)⁶⁹² and secondly, I will consider the construction of the term *hamjensgara* as a form of creative and ethical activity by gay activists for localization of the Western notion of gayness. To develop my argument, I will categorize gay's resistance and activism into activities of community organizing in Iran and diaspora. Then I will draw on non-formal outreach work⁶⁹³ and individualistic

⁶⁸⁹ Elham Gheytauchi, "Iran Green Movement, Social Media, and the Exposure of Human Rights Violations" in *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age*, ed., Mahmood Monshipouri, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 177-195.

⁶⁹⁰ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 333.

⁶⁹¹ Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story* (?), Women's Learning Partnership: 20019), 78.

⁶⁹² Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians"; Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*; Karimi, "Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran".

⁶⁹³ Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*.

resistance of Iranian gay-identifying men who position themselves as active agents in taking care of 'the self' and 'the other' to resist the dominant norms in their socio-religious environments through their sexual embodiment and actions. Since the end of the 90s and at the beginning of the 2000s, despite the Islamic Republic's adaptation of the harsh penal code regarding homosexuality, there has been growing visibility of gay individuals in Iran, particularly in metropolitan centers such as Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz.⁶⁹⁴ The emergence of this modern Iranian gay community has been associated with several factors. One factor has to do with the socio-political freedom of expression and human rights discourse under Khatami's presidency.⁶⁹⁵ In *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, Shahram Khosravi argues that although the discourse of *gharbzadeghi* has been the dominant discourse of the Islamic state, Khatami's liberation policy gave rise to the integration of young people into the stream of 'global consumerism'.⁶⁹⁶ This is another factor that has been linked to "a growing of consumerist culture with its emphasis on individual expressionism in public spaces, which rejects the imposition of hegemonic identities by the Islamist government in Iran and defies Islamic legal restrictions".⁶⁹⁷

The other factor, or maybe the most important one among the others, which has facilitated the gay subculture's transformations, has been pervasive internet access.⁶⁹⁸ Nowadays, we know how the internet can be used for making social control and manipulating information, but certainly, at the beginning of its spread, it was used as a "democratizing instrument" as Manuel Castells in *Network of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, argues that "the internet social networks ... are spaces of autonomy largely beyond the control of governments and corporations". In other words, especially at the beginning of its spread, the internet has been used as a democratizing instrument, which expands freedom, lowers the transaction costs of collective actions, and reduces the barriers for internal and international communication and transmission of information.⁶⁹⁹ In addition, Iranian gay communities that were barred from participating in

⁶⁹⁴ Abouzar Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians" in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009*, eds., David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi (New York: State University of New York, 2015), 57.

⁶⁹⁵ Korycki, Nasirzadeh, "Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran".

⁶⁹⁶ Shahram Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁶⁹⁷ Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 57-75; Korycki, Nasirzadeh, "Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran"; Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 351-355.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 2.

political and social discourses found a new way to express their voices through the internet social networks. Concomitant with the diffusion of internet access throughout the country, in European and non-European countries, there has been a growing number of Iranian diasporic LGBTQ associations and groups, established by Iranian gay immigrants and refugees. In this context, the internet played as an intermediary in transmitting ideas regarding modern conceptions of gay identities between gay activists and their community in diaspora and the gay community inside of the country.⁷⁰⁰

The use of the term gay as a self-identification also has been associated with greater internet penetration in Iran.⁷⁰¹ As already mentioned, Najmabadi argues when "the term gay first appeared in Iran of the 1970s", it was avoided by local men because "it was received as the English translation of a Persian word with a highly pejorative and dishonorable load (*kuni*)".⁷⁰² However, it was in the 1990s—particularly at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of 2000s, along with the spread of the internet—⁷⁰³ that this term began to be embraced as a self-identification: "it had come to provide distance from the Persian pejorative assignation and helped those who so identified to connected to a global imagined community."⁷⁰⁴ The term gay still has been used widely as a self-identification among Iranian non-heterosexuals. In "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", Abouzar Nasirzadeh, in 2011, interviewed 213 Iranian Facebook users who identified themselves as gay. He concluded that "what was remarkable about these individuals was that they literary identified themselves by using the English word 'gay'. Being 'gay' was not only an important part of their identity, but for some, it was the main marker of their identity and not just merely a sexual practice".⁷⁰⁵ By drawing on this conclusion as well as Rahman's critique of Massad, that his argument "lacks any evidence of actual lived experience", I argue that only Middle Easterners and, in this context, only Iranian gay men should answer for themselves whether their identity is imported from the West or, with a degree of agency, they have

⁷⁰⁰ Shahram Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, 160-161; Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 61.

⁷⁰¹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 351; Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 57.

⁷⁰² Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex desire in Contemporary Iran*, 9.

⁷⁰³ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 351; Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 57.

⁷⁰⁴ Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex desire in Contemporary Iran*, 9.

⁷⁰⁵ Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 60.

adopted their sexual identities. Moreover, claiming a Western-oriented sexual identity should not be simply depicted as a neocolonial imposition infringing upon local and indigenous forms of sexuality. As pointed out by Sami Zeidan, "the universalizing of gay terminology, which is often condemned as Western hegemony, can in fact have a local liberatory function".⁷⁰⁶ Therefore, adopting this Western sexual-identity label by Iranian gay-identifying men should be taken into account as a self-identification and not simply as an imposition of Western sexual understating.

The growing visibility of gay-identifying men has also coincided a growing of Iranian LGBT communities in the diaspora.⁷⁰⁷ Jahangir Shirazi, a gay activist, argues that for the first time, by the beginning of the 1990s, Iranian LGBT immigrants and refugees in Sweden decided to publish the first Iranian LGBT magazine. They published a periodical magazine called *Homan* that attempted to raise Iranian awareness about sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular, such as giving information about HIV and AIDS to Iranians who did not have access to this type of information or providing advice and help to many individuals who had struggles with their coming out process.⁷⁰⁸ With the diffusion of internet access among Iranians, *Homan*, in collaborating with other gay activists inside and outside of Iran, in 2004, published *MAHA*: the first Iranian LGBT e-magazine.⁷⁰⁹ From the early days, *MAHA* extended its area of activism into the domain of language. As already mentioned, in Iran, homosexuality was surrounded by derogatory references in the Persian language such as *kuni* (ass), *evakhahar* (effeminate gay) and *hamjensbaz* (faggot). Jahangir Shirazi claims that *MAHA* and other gay groups inside and outside of Iran employed the Western 'gay' label to resist the dominant discourse and negative language on homosexuality.⁷¹⁰ Although Shirazi and other Iranian gay activists such as Saviz Shafai advocate a more modern gay culture, they also believe in articulating a localized and authentically Iranian gay identity.⁷¹¹ In other words, they insist on elaboration and localization of the Western notion of gay identity into an Iranian context in order to resist both the hegemonic Western understanding of sexual identity and the dominant legal-religious discourse of the Islamic Republic

⁷⁰⁶ Sami Zeidan, "Navigating International Rights and Local Politics Sexuality Governance in Postcolonial Settings" in *Global Homophobia*, eds., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 196-217.

⁷⁰⁷ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 351; Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 57-75.

⁷⁰⁸ www.homan.com, accessed November 2002, as cited in Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, 160-161.

⁷⁰⁹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 351.

⁷¹⁰ Jahangir Shirazi, "Chera man 'Hamjensbaz' Nistam, Vali 'Hamjensgara' Hastam?" *MAHA* 6 (June): 25-30.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

that represents homosexuality as a Western trope of invasion and homosexuals as non-authentic Iranians. For doing so, they began their effort to redefine homosexuality in the Persian language. Foucault reminds us that "psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized".⁷¹² In other words, in a Foucauldian perspective, it is the act of naming through language and discourse that brings identities into being and then produces subjectivities. By drawing on Foucault's conceptualization of resistance, that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power",⁷¹³ Judith Butler argues that individual subjects are able to resist at the discursive and linguistic level because the diversity and multiplicity of language creates a possibility of resistance to destabilize the hegemonic discourses.⁷¹⁴ This resistance is possible through the resignification of particular terms and labels or through the construction of new terminology. In Western societies, discursive or linguistic resistance has been a part of gay and lesbian activism. Queer as a word, during in the seventeenth century, was a label for people or things that were considered strange or perverted. In the twentieth century, with the consolidation of sexual orientation as a cultural identity indication, queer turned into a derogatory substitute for homosexuals and gender subordination. However, it was during the 80s that queer received political and cultural refashioning. Many gay and lesbian groups, activists and organizations while retaining its non-normative functions, reinvented and re-signified queer as an identity category and positive frame in order to politically deploy it against violent homophobia of the state and diverse sectors of society.⁷¹⁵ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Iranian gay activists, particularly those who collaborated with *MAHA* such as Jahangir Shirazi and Saviz Shafai articulated the positive and respectful term *hamjensgara* (same-sex orientation and identification), instead of the term *hamjensbaz*, which is a negative and pejorative term denoting a lustful same-sex act and sometimes pedophilia.⁷¹⁶ In addition, they invented the term *degarbashan jensi* for the term queer and *degarbash setizi* for homophobia.⁷¹⁷ This terminology in Persian language can be considered as a form of a strategy of resistance against othering of

⁷¹² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 43.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁷¹⁵ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-2; Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, K. Scott Wong, Linda Trinh Võ, *Keywords for Asian American Studies* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), 198.

⁷¹⁶ Shirazi, "Chera man 'Hamjensbaz' Nistam, Vali 'Hamjensgara' Hastam?"

⁷¹⁷ Nasirzadeh, "The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians", 68.

same-sex desiring subjects as "non-authentic Iranians because of their self-identification as gay."⁷¹⁸

As I explained in paragraph 3.2 "Homoerotic Persia", individuals in same-sex relations were defined by their "positionality" during sexual intercourse. In one sense, in the gender convention of pre-modern Iranian society, in same-sex intercourse, one partner was deemed as masculine and another as feminine.⁷¹⁹ *MAHA*, in the article "Hamjensgarayan-e Mosalman" (Muslim Homosexuals), is also a critic of rigid regulations of 'status-defined homosexuality' that maintained active and passive identities. Although this article is written before *Desiring Arabs* (2007), I can consider it as a response to Massad's claim that gays and lesbians do not exist in the Muslim world and Muslim cultures enjoy pervasive traditional and nameless same-sex relations or what he calls "the practitioners of same-sex contact".⁷²⁰ This article contends that Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay communities adopted more flexible sexual-gender identities that are not merely based on sexual acts; instead, they are constructed according to a more modern understating of *hamjensgarai*/gayness, which is a mutual and respectful relationship. Moreover, this article argues that once people talk about homosexuality, they reduce it to the level of mere same-sex physical relations (mostly a sexual relationship between an active adult man and a passive adolescent boy). However, they should notice that firstly, physical-sexual relations reflect one's exchanging of love and affection and sharing of feelings and emotions, regardless of one's sexual orientation. Secondly, these are the very same things that take place in heterosexual relationships.⁷²¹

However, what makes this journal such a pioneer publication in terms of Iranian gay issues, is the discussion of homosexuality in the context of contemporary Iranian society. *MAHA*, in the article "Hamjensgarai: Darkha va Bardashtha." (Same-sex identification: Perception and Impression) criticizes Iranian artists, intellectuals and leftists whose works lack a discussion regarding homosexual rights. Referring to Oscar Wilde's imprisonment due to his homosexuality and those artists and intellectuals who refused to sign the petition for his release, this journal argues that in Iranian society, if an artist is sent to jail for his homosexual orientation, other artists and intellectuals cannot speak out in his or her defense. *MAHA* argues that they criticize and condemn

⁷¹⁸ Korycki, Nasirzadeh, "Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran", 50-65.

⁷¹⁹ Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, 79.

⁷²⁰ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 177.

⁷²¹ "Hamjensgarayan-e Mosalman." 2005. *MAHA 2* (January): 15-18.

the right of man to have sex with an underage girl under the name of marriage, but they are silent in the case of consensual and mutual relations between two adult men because still they think homosexuality is a perversion or they, out of fear, do not dare talk about or support it.⁷²² *MAHA*, in another article "Halqeh-ye Gomshodeh" (The Missing Link), directs its attack also toward the silence of religious and Islamist intellectuals and reformists regarding homosexuals' rights. This article argues that Muslim thinkers and reformers, such as Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, who speak of the Protestantization of Islam and religious and cultural pluralism, should not be silent regarding diversity in sexual orientation, particularly about the homosexual orientation of Muslims who form a significant social, cultural and religious foundation out of which the religious thinkers have emerged. This article claims that the homosexuals of the two other Abrahamic religions (Christianity and Judaism), through a rational moderation, reached a consensus between their religious beliefs and their sexual orientations. In Islam, as this article suggests, Islamic thinkers also should reach such rational moderation by offering a more tolerant reading of the Qur'an through a new reading that ought to begin with reinterpretations of the Qur'anic story of the people of Sodom.⁷²³

In the next years, in the academic area, a new perspective to the story of the people of Sodom was proposed by academic and religious intellectual Arash Naraghi. In contrast to the traditional and patriarchal understating of the Qur'an, Naraghi argues that firstly, the verses in the story of the people of Sodom do not stand for the prohibition of same-sex desire and the God's wrath that descended upon the people of Sodom was not due to their sexual inclinations, rather it had to do with a range of crimes such as murder, robbery, coercive sex and rape. Secondly, he reminds us that 'justice' is the spirit of the Qur'anic culture and "it is one of the pillars around which Muslims must develop their understating of religion". Therefore, according to Naraghi, any interpretation that approves or tolerates discrimination based on sexual orientation is inappropriate. To develop this argument, he emphasizes several principles: Naraghi argues that in Islam, morality precedes religion; it means that the approval of religious authorities is not a necessary condition for moral validity. Then, the Qur'an states that all humans are equal, and a violation of this equality is only permitted if there is a moral reason (a non-religious defining factor) that is sufficient enough.

⁷²² Jamshid, "Hamjensgara 'i: Darkha va Bardashtha.", 2005, *MAHA* 2 (January): 21–27.

⁷²³ "Halqeh-ye Gomshodeh" 2004, *MAHA* 1 (December): 11–12; "Hamjensgarayan-e Mosalman." 2005. *MAHA* 2 (January): 15–18.

Moreover, there is no "morally and rationally sufficient reason to condemn homosexual identity and orientation as such". Therefore, discrimination against homosexual identification and orientation is against "the principle of justice and thus morally unjustified". Hence, according to him, "any commentary on the Qur'an that discrimination against people on the ground of sexual identities and orientation is morally inappropriate." Finally, he concludes that homosexuality is permissible or at least consistent with Islam.⁷²⁴

As I have explained in the 2.3 paragraph "The Practices of the Self", like Western homosexual activists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that contributed to the construction of their own homosexual identifications through their writings and campaigns, Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay activists through their writings and community organizing not only have constructed their own sexual beings but also have articulated an authentic conceptualization of Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay identity produced between local realities and global influences. Furthermore, as I have shown in the theoretical part of the thesis, Foucauldian ethics is not a submission to the 'regimes of truth'; instead, it is an undoing of such regimes. In the space of this undoing, there is a relatively autonomous personal-political ethos that reproduces not social norms and normative ways of being, but a space of agency and transformation and, in Allen's words, "a form of resistance involving the crossing of limits or boundaries"⁷²⁵ through which one is able to attain a certain mode of being. By drawing on Foucault's conceptualization of ethics, Naisargi Dave, in *Queer Activism in India*, sees activism in general as the "undoing of social moralities" and queer activism in particular, as an ethical practice, which is "the creative, practical struggle against the drive to normalization".⁷²⁶ Regarding Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay activism in the post-revolutionary era, I argue that Iranian gay activists have applied different forms of ethical practices, such as *Parrhesia*, in order to, on the one hand, criticize and problematize the Iranian society, its social rules, norms and collective habits, and on the other hand, refashion and improve themselves as the ethical subjects of their own actions.

⁷²⁴ Arash Naraghi, "The Quran and Human Rights of Sexual Minorities" in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Iran: Analysis from Religious, Social, Legal and Cultural Perspectives, *International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission*, 2015.

⁷²⁵ Julie Allan, *Rethinking Inclusion: The Philosophers of Difference in Practice* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 92.

⁷²⁶ Naisargi N. Dave, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.

The emergence of online Iranian LGBT magazines has not been reduced to the *MAHA*'s contributions. Between the 1990s and early 2000s, other groups such as *HASHA*, *Iran Shadman*, *Khaneh-ye Doost*, and *Gay Iran* "held conferences, produced magazines, and provided moral and legal support to Iranian LGBTQI+ who lived inside and outside of Iran".⁷²⁷ In paragraph 4.2. "Sexual Imperialism: Reading Josef Massad", by drawing on Foucault's periodization, Massad argues that the notion of homosexuality produced in the *dispositif* of sexuality in nineteenth-century Europe and thereafter, in modern times, the Western *dispositif* of sexuality, particularly in the form of LGBTQ identities (he mostly refers to gay identity), has been deployed by the West as an ideological and political tool to construct a binary model by which America and Europe are depicted as civilized vis-a-vis the uncivilized societies of the Middle East with regards to the sexual/civil rights of gays and lesbians.⁷²⁸ I sympathize with Massad that LGBTQI+ rights have become a politically opportunistic tool by some LGBTQI+ groups and organizations (or in Massad's words, Gay International) to depict Iranian *hamjensgarayan*/gays as sexually oppressed victims who are in need of being saved by liberal and gay-friendly West from their homophobic Islamic-Iranian state. However, I sympathize with Rao Raul's argument as well that we cannot flatten out the space of queer activism and reduce LGBTQ+ politics at the level of neocolonial politics.

Regarding Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay activism and LGBTQ+ politics, while *Homan*, *MAHA*, and other e-magazine and gay groups deployed their politics through critical and creative practices, some activists and groups have given hypervisibility to the Iranian gays and produce images of so-called *hamjensgara*/gay hangings in Iran during the war on terror. Arsham Parsi Pour, the founder of both the Persian Gay and Lesbian Organization (PGLO), a small group registered in Norway in 2003 and the Iranian Queer Railroad (IRQR), a Canada-based organization established in 2008, has been criticized for repeating the "pre-existing normative narrative of hegemonic discourse of home of oppression in Iran and home of freedom in the West".⁷²⁹ On his website, he writes:

⁷²⁷ Sima Shakhshari, "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, (2012), 14-40.

⁷²⁸ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 6-9.

⁷²⁹ *Shakhshari*, "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer", 14-40.

Now living in a safe country, I still consider myself first and foremost an Iranian. I can never forget that I am in exile due to my own sexual orientation. This situation is both a burden and a tremendous personal responsibility for me. In May 2005, as I crossed the border out of Iran into Turkey, I promised myself, my nation and my people that I would one day return to a free, open and democratic Iran. To that end, I promised that I would fully devote my labors toward achieving for myself and my fellow citizens in Iran the treasured dream and desire of so many millions around the globe, and which so many in the West take as for granted as breathing: freedom.⁷³⁰

By the representation of Iran as a grand prison for homosexuals, Parsi, through the use of the internet, including his e-magazine *Neda*, YouTube, and weblogs, has cultivated his self-promotion as the representative of Iranian queers and as an expert on the persecution of homosexuals in Iran. Although his organizations have provided valuable legal and moral supports for Iranian queers inside and outside of the country, he depicts them as sexually oppressed victims of the Islamic state, who are in need of being saved by Western democracies, without considering their agency and resistance against the official discourse of homophobia. Sima Shakhsari, in "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer", critically argues that "while former groups used cautionary methods in 'outing' gay life in Iran, Parsi does not hesitate to produce and publicize exaggerated accounts of gay persecution in Iran".⁷³¹ For example, Shakhsari refers to "the widely publicized case of the hanging of two young men, Ayaz Marhouni and Mohammad Asgari" (that I discussed in paragraph 4.2 "Sexual Imperialism: Reading Joseph Massad") in which Parsi "is instrumental in producing highly sensationalized accounts of gay persecution in Iran".⁷³² While some human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, IGLHRC, and Human Rights Watch, claimed that the case of the hanging of two young Iranian men lacked credible information about their sexual orientation and the reason for their execution, other groups like the Human Rights Campaign, Log Cabin Republicans, British Outrage, and some Iranian queer diasporic organizations, particularly Parsi's groups, circulated inaccurate news about their hangings in Iran, representing them as the

⁷³⁰ See Arsham Parsi's biography on his personal web site at: <http://www.arshamparsi.net/17101.html> (accessed on January 12, 2011)

⁷³¹Shakhsari, "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer", 14-40.

⁷³² Ibid.

case of gay executions. For instance, Parsi as executive director of IRQO and PGLO appeared on several radio and television shows and was interviewed with some international press, claiming that two young Iranian teenagers were arrested at a gay party.⁷³³

By bringing the issue of gay hangings and Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay activism, organizations, magazines, and groups into the discussion in this paragraph, I have tried to respond to Massad that although some LGBTQI+ groups and activists have approached Iranian and Middle Eastern gay subjects via a universalist lens to underpin Western sexual epistemology or, in the case of Parsi's organizations, have used LGBTQI+ politics as an opportunistic tool to promote the home of oppression in Iran and home of freedom in the West, firstly, we should not consider Gay International, at least in the case of Iran, as a single entity. Secondly, an individual's sexual self-determination should not be ignored. We cannot see gay identity or the adaptation of the Western notion of gayness simply as an effect of neocolonial imposition or as having complicity with imperialist norms and expectations. In the rest of this paragraph, I will direct the discussion from community organizing among *hamjensgara*/gay activists toward non-formal and individualistic resistance of Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men.

By drawing on Rahman's critique of Massad, that his argument "lacks any evidence of actual lived experience", I argue that only Middle Easterners and, in this context, only Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men should answer for themselves whether their identity is imported from the West or, with a degree of agency, they have developed their own sexual beings. For doing so, I will draw on and go through several secondary ethnographic data and sources, representing the reality of *hamjensgara*/gay men's lives in Iran. These data not only prove a certain level of *hamjensgara*/gay livability in contemporary Iran but also uncover a significant *hamjensgara*/gay underground world, which is invisible to local and international communities. For example, in the article "Iranian Gay/Queer Activists and Activism", Jón Ingvar Kjaran shows how Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay individuals and activists build up a community of support and learning through underground or online outreach work in a society that criminalizes same-sex sexual acts. Kjaran shows that in contrast to the dominant paradigm regarding the politics of visibility and outreach discourse in the West—instead of employing the Western notion of 'coming out' as a political strategy—Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay activists and individuals have taken alternative approaches in

⁷³³ Ibid.

order to resist within the *dispositif* of the Islamic Republic of Iran and "avoid being dismissed as Westernized".⁷³⁴

In Kjaran's research, participants' ages range from 20 to 50 and they came from the low or middle classes of society. For example, Ramtin, one of the participants, introduces himself as a gay activist and believes that what is important is not the "recognition or being visible as gay, we don't have that here in Iran anyway. It is more about support, building a community and helping others, without thinking about who you are or how you define yourself". To contribute to Tehran's invisible *hamjensgara/gay* community, Ramtin began his activism by disseminating information about *hamjensgara/gay* issues among other young *hamjensgarayan/gays* who were unaware about *hamjensgarai/gayness* or underground *hamjensgara/gay* communities. He also got involved in some activities like taking photos in public places, in buses, on the streets, and in the hills surrounding Tehran, with *hamjensgara/gay* symbols, such as the rainbow flag, or slogans about ending homophobia and heterosexism. These pictures were posted on the *hamjensgara/gay* website Hamjesgara with the purpose of showing "other gays and lesbians inside of Iran that there is a community out there and that we as queers can claim or queer the public space with our presence".⁷³⁵

Nima, another participant in Kjaran's research, started his activism as a agent of PGLO inside Iran and his tasks for the organization included supporting the fellow Iranian *hamjesngarayan/gays* within the country and disseminating information through online publications particularly through writing blog posts on LGBT issues: "I wanted to tell Iranian gays that they are not alone. God does not hate you because you are different". According to him, another of his important tasks is disseminating and deploying the positive Persian term *hamjensgara* instead of the Western notion of homosexuality and the Persian pejorative term *hamjensbaz*. Giving an account of his activism, he says that through establishing a connection with popular TV channels, such as VOA (The Voice of America), which broadcasts from USA in Farsi and is watched by many Iranians, he and other Iranian *hamjensgara/gay* activists sent emails to these channels and asked them to use the positive term *hamjensgara*, instead of the offensive word

⁷³⁴ Kjaran, "Iranian Gay/Queer Activists and Activism" in *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan: 2019), 134.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

hamjensbaz. Referring to the movie *Broke Back Mountain*, he says that when it won the Oscar, "we asked them to use *hamjins-gara*' in the description of the plot." Nima also points out that the identification with the positive word *hamjensgara* opened up the possibilities for Iranian *hamjensgara*/gays to express their feelings and identities in a positive way particularly confronting families and parents; they can identify themselves in their own language, without having to use the Western term gay or the offensive term *hamjensbaz* that conjures up an image of the pedophile. As a result of *hamjensgara*/gay activism inside Iran and wide dissemination and circulation of the term *hamjensgara*, Nima says that "through their activism, they were able to influence the official discourse and terminology in terms of sexual categories, despite the limits to public debate in the Islamic Republic, given the official medico-religious-legal disavowal of homosexuality and criminalization of same-sex sexual acts". As an indication of this, he draws our attention to the new penal code that substituted *hamjensgara* with *hamjensbaz* in order to describe all same-sex acts, including kissing and touching.⁷³⁶

After the 2009 Iranian presidential election, immediately a protest movement, or what is to be called the Iranian Green Movement, took shape within which people protested against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for the 2009 presidency and for what they regarded as a fraudulent election. Under Ahmadinejad (2005-2009, re-election in 2009-2012) Iranian society became more repressive and civil freedoms underwent more restrictions. The presidential election of 2009 created a space of hope for the young Iranian generation who sought changes and more personal freedoms. They supported the reformist and the former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who was the competitor of Ahmadinejad. The election was held on 12 June 2009 and immediately caused a significant controversy over the result. The government announced that Ahmadinejad was re-elected by 60% of the votes, but the supporters of Mousavi believed that the results were manipulated. They took the streets and through peaceful protests, they managed to find political spaces to express their dissent. However, the protests turned into a battleground between protesters and security forces aiming to suppress people's voices of dissidence.⁷³⁷ The Green Movement possessed a polyphonic nature that entailed different groups of people with diverse social and economic backgrounds. Among others, *hamjensgarayan*/ gays participated with

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 139-141.

⁷³⁷ Hamid Dabshi, *Green Movement in Iran*, (New York, Routledge: 2011); Debra A. Miller, *The Iranian Green Movement*, (New York, Greenhaven: 2011).

the aim of seeking change and creating spaces of gayness and a more personal freedom in a more politico-social atmosphere.⁷³⁸

Farhod is another participant in Kajar's research who draws our attention to the fact that "many gay and lesbian identifying Iranians participated in the protest, not demanding recognition or visibility within the public sphere, but focusing more on personal freedom in general". He started his activism with organizing and attending meetings and protests against the government. Farhod got arrested several times and the last time he was sent to jail. The authorities asked him to sign a statement in which he declared he would never participate in any protest again. "I signed it but I knew immediately after I did so that I could never stop taking part in protests against the authorities. It was just in me to protest and express my views." He believed that through participating in protests, the young generation, particularly *hamjensgarayan/gays*, could open up society. Farhod pointed out that a lot of *hamjensgarayan/gays* took part in the Green Movement, but he noted that "the security forces, for example, the *Sepah*, made some false video clips showing *hamjensgara/gay* people in the line of protest. Their aim was to ruin our reputation—saying that the protests were inspired by *hamjensgarayan/gays* and Western agents who want to destroy Iranian culture." When the Green Movement was crushed with brutal force, Farhod saw emigration as his only option for constructing his sexual life.⁷³⁹ Further, I will discuss that leaving one's own country might be considered as a form of self-transformation through which Iranian gay-identifying men transform themselves into ethical agents in order to construct their gayness. But before insisting on this point, by returning to the cases of Ramtin, Nima and Farhod, I would argue that they embraced and problematized their ethical substance, which is their sexuality and their sexual existence. Then, they positioned themselves in relation to certain norms, rules and moral codes to recognize their modes of subjection that entail the medical regulations within the religious biopolitical *dispositif* of sexuality (pathologization of homosexuality), religious-juridical norms and regulations (criminalization of homosexuality), the political and official discourse of the Islamic state (homosexuality as a trope of western invasion) and hegemonic linguistic discourse (pejorative and stigmatized labels for homosexuality). To resist their modes of subjection, they, in Foucauldian sense, transformed themselves into ethical subjects through creative and ethical

⁷³⁸ Kjaran, "Iranian Gay/Queer Activists and Activism", 142-144.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

practices to change the discourses and carve out a *hamjensgara/gay* space to pursue their life as sexual beings. For example, Ramtin and Nima positioned themselves as active agents in taking care of the self in terms of being aware of various modes of subjection as well as resistance against the domain norms and social environment to not only gain a sexual state of being, but also create a community of support for other gay brethren. Farhod also as an active agent, took a critical and truth telling position toward dominant socio-political discourse in the hope of changing the discourse and creating a space of support within the limit set by the government. Moreover, I consider their activism as efforts for localization of the Western notion of gayness. Ramtin and Farhod's accounts of *hamjensgara/gay* activism draw our attention to their resistance within Iranian *dispositif* through *Parrhesia* and ethical works. Their activism places less emphasis on the Western paradigm of visibility and coming out. Instead, they focus more on personal freedom, opening up society and building a community of support and help for their fellow *hamjensgara/gays* and taking a critical stance toward their homophobic society. The case of Nima reminds us that *hamjensgara/gay* activism as an ethical practice can also be a creative practice that changes the hegemonic discourse and produces the space of *hamjensgarai/gayness* through not only building community and offering mutual support, but also through constructing terminology and introducing positive words in Farsi for same-sex desires.

Apart from inventing terminology and building a community of support, integration into family structure is another way to localize the Western notion of being gay. In the article "Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran",⁷⁴⁰ Ahmad Karimi, in accordance to Kajarn, emphasizes that in Iran where homosexuality is criminalized and any formal queer activism is considered as a political act belonging to the Western imperialism, Iranian *hamjensgara/gay* men are following less-politicized channels. Interviewing Iranian *hamjensgara/gay* men from the ages of 22 to 35 and along with middle- and low-class backgrounds, Karimi argues that in Iranian and Middle Eastern cultures, family is the central space of subject formation and Iranian *hamjensgara/gay* men use family emotional bonding as a survival strategy to negotiate their in-process sexual identities. By taking this approach, "in a way different from that of Western LGBT activities", Iranian *hamjensgara/gay*

⁷⁴⁰ Ahmad Karimi, "Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, (2017). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2017.128692>.

men "are trying to portray a positive image of their sexuality in relation to local family standards so they can be integrated into the Iranian family structure". Karimi argues that in the absence of human LGBT politics inside of the country, the language has been used as an apparatus to imagine, speak about and shape a world for themselves. He refers to the terminology of *hamjensgara* through which Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men have attempted to define themselves in terms of "commitment, responsibility, morality and enduring emotions", in order to "locate themselves back into society and family structure by attaching their sexuality to values, such as passion and commitment". For example, one of the participants in Karimi's research says that:

I first try to explain to them that people are different and we should accept differences, then I tell them more explicitly about sexuality. I first use *hamjensgara* to show how positive it means, and in future, if the topic comes up and I need to say something, I use Gay. I think it is safer because they may have some negative stereotypes attached to Gay because of what they hear in Western and Iranian news and media.⁷⁴¹

In the same manner, another participant mentions, "I prefer to use *hamjensgara* because it is *gara* to show the orientation. I prefer to use *hamjensgara* because it has less negativity. You know when I want to talk about sexuality with a friend or even I want to come out to someone I prefer to use *hamjensgara* because it is quite positive compared to the old word [*hamjensbaz*]". Therefore, as revealed by Karimi, while wiping out the sexualized, demonized picture depicted through *hamjensbaz*, the participants of this study have deployed the terminology of *hamjensgara* to express and emphasize their sexual identity and orientation. Karimi also shows that in order to "keep a balance between kinship and sexuality", and to "keep parent-child relationship intact", Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men create their own "family-friendly image of sexuality" and come out to some friends and their younger siblings but not discuss about their sexual orientation with their parents.⁷⁴²

Another example of this selective coming out practice can be seen among the participants in Yadegarfarid's research, described in the article "How are Iranian Gay Men Coping with

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

Systematic Suppression under Islamic Law? A Qualitative Study".⁷⁴³ In this research, many *hamjensgara*/gay participants, who came from middle- and low-class backgrounds with ages ranging from 19 to 52, mention that they built their own 'family of choice' among people they could trust. According to Yadegarfar, Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men "who have never been supported by their own biological family create a new and modern sense of family among themselves". In this second family, *hamjensgara*/gay couples who have been together for a long time become the source of emotion, support and even finance for the younger members. For example, one of the participants explained that:

one of the older gay guys who is financially stable, has his own dependency, has lots of experience with gay people, and can host people in his house usually becomes the head of our so called family. People get together around him. Some people might call him 'mamman' (mother) or 'malakeh' (the queen) or 'amme bozorg' (great aunty), or other names which depend on the person's personality in this group of friends. Some call him big brother, sister, uncle, grand mom and so on and so forth.⁷⁴⁴

Thus, the family of choice develops a union among *hamjensgara*/gay men beyond the biological bond and through providing a sense of belonging as well as a source of support and information. Integration into family structure or alternatively, creating a family of choice shows that Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men are aware of their existential limits but they also resist against their subject position constituted by the official discourse of the Islamic Republic in order to construct their own subjectivities. Telling the truth about themselves (in terms of their sexuality) and confronting their parents and friends on these issues was the beginning of transforming the self. They also have employed different strategies in order to make their life much more meaningful, such as having sex, dates or intimate relationships with boyfriends. In this regard, Yadegarfar points to the engagement in sexual relationships through which Iranian gay men take the risk because, "firstly, having sex is an act of rebellion and non-conformity"; secondly, "sex gives them a sense of identity and who they are". Thirdly, "sex helps them to connect to other gay men and engage in social networking as a coping strategy for social isolation and loneliness".⁷⁴⁵ The participants in his

⁷⁴³ Mohammadrasool Yadegarfar, "How are Iranian Gay Men Coping with Systematic Suppression under Islamic Law? A Qualitative Study", *Sexuality & Culture* (2019) 23:1250–1273.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

research reported that they found their sex partners in dating apps, social media or public spaces such as parks. Others mention that traveling to different cities gave them more opportunities to meet new people and have more sex. Although many mentioned that they were aware of the risk and death penalty that such action could bring about, they still were committed to doing it.⁷⁴⁶ In the regime of heteronormativity, having same-sex sexual practices, as an act of non-conforming, particularly in public spaces, show that Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men have recognized their modes of subjections, such as religious-judicial norms and regulations (criminalization of homosexuality) and positioned themselves as active agents to take care of themselves through other modalities of transformations such as sexual embodiments, and actions.

Traveling between cities to meet other *hamjensgara*/gay men and having more sex is not always an ideal coping strategy since it is costly and time-consuming. However, both Yadegarfar's and Kjaran's participants mention that instead of traveling, they would rather leave the country and seek asylum in another country. Sexual identities, practices and desires have always been factors that contribute to people's motivation to migrate. The term 'sexual migration' is broadly associated with the relocation and movement of *hamjensgara*/gay men seeking for their sexual emancipation with regard to their practices, identities and subjectivities.⁷⁴⁷ For Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men, it is the restrictions imposed by Islamic law and society that push them to migrate. One of the Yadegarfar's participants says that "as a gay man, you can have everything and nothing here (in Iran). When you cannot be yourself, what's the point? You can have the best job, best car, best house but you cannot be yourself. You have to lie all the time, just not to get into any trouble."⁷⁴⁸ On the other side of the coin, however, some Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men reject the idea of Iran as a 'grand prison' for homosexuals, and they take a critical stance toward those who left Iran. Mehrdad, one of Kjaran's participants, opposes migration to the West. In his view, migration of Iranian gay men to the West has to do more with a better economic existence and getting a European citizenship than with religion and government. Mehrdad said that "when I have a chat with my friends that have left, they tell me that they miss Iran and they[d] like to come back. Why? Because it's difficult to live in the West, even in terms of [having] sex, it can be

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ Martin F. Manalansan, "Queer intersections: Sexuality and gender in migration studies", *The International Migration Review*, (2006), 40, 224–249

⁷⁴⁸ Yadegarfar, "How are Iranian Gay Men Coping with Systematic Suppression under Islamic Law? A Qualitative Study"

difficult to find your 'type' outside of Iran. So many of them wish to come back to Iran, for example, when their family gets older and they can maybe live more of an independent life". As Mehrdad experienced through his friends, leaving Iran is not "always the best solution", because it takes time to adapt to a new country and being there without the support of one's family can be difficult.⁷⁴⁹ Additionally, he commented that

in Tehran, you can be gay and nobody will kill you [laughter]. Even if they know that you are having sex within the privacy of your home they cannot arrest you. Even in Islam, the rule is that four adult men must see you in [an] act of sex before the authorities can arrest you and take you to court. So it is not easy to hang you or kill you for having sex with men.⁷⁵⁰

However, he acknowledges that family pressure sometimes is unbearable and it is another reason for which Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men leave the country. Mehrdad himself has never experienced such a pressure because he has kept his private life secret to his family, but Morteza, another participant, took the drastic decision to leave Iran and his mother because coming out of the closet and confronting his mother was unbearable for him. He explained that "finally, I decided to talk to my mother and tell her everything about myself because she had only heard things about me from somebody else. I however, wanted to tell her after 22 years of [lying about] who I was so, I started to talk to her about homosexuality and explain what it meant to be gay." Morteza's sexual orientation for his mother was "outside of grids of intelligibility".⁷⁵¹ For her, in line with the official discourse of Islamic Republic, homosexuality is a disease and then unacceptable. For this reason, Morteza left Iran to construct himself as a sexual being. Morteza's story can be interpreted in terms of ethics of being and care of the self. Telling his mother about his sexual orientation and inner self can be interpreted as truth telling and as the first step in his self-transformation into a subject of truth and sexual being, which in the case of Morteza meant adopting *hamjensgara*/gay identity. Telling the truth, thus, was a strategy for Morteza to resist within his subject position (for example, as a heterosexual son who would get married one day) in order to expand the liminal space within which he can be himself with regards to his feelings and identity.⁷⁵² These narratives indicate that

⁷⁴⁹ Kjaran, "Transforming the Self: Emigrate to the West or Live as a Gay Subject in Iran", 126.

⁷⁵⁰ Kjaran, "The Construction of the Iranian Gay Subject Outside of Iran", 77.

⁷⁵¹ Kjaran, "Transforming the Self: Emigrate to the West or Live as a Gay Subject in Iran", 124

⁷⁵² Ibid.

Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men and their embodied experiences are not unified and simple; instead, they are more complicated and multifaced, or in Kjaran's words, they should be considered as a "complex process of adjudication and being and becoming".⁷⁵³ Leaving the country is not the main focus of all Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men; however, those who leave the country in order to construct their own space of agency and self-transformation in one of the European countries, as Mehrdad mentioned, usually experience discrimination and racism and find themselves in a stressful condition, filled with uncertainty, and lacking the support they expect to receive from political and human rights organizations and groups. For example, those who directly migrate to the first destination in one of the Western liberal democracies usually experience discrimination and racism within LGBTQI+ communities. This discrimination or what is to be called 'homonationalism' is "an understanding and enactment of homosexual acts, identities, and relationships that incorporate them as not only compatible with but even exemplary of neoliberal democratic ethics and citizenship".⁷⁵⁴ This incorporation establishes that certain respectable LGBTQI+ subjectivities now have been included as a part of national imaginary and they owe this tolerance, openness and their rights to the liberal, democratic Western states. Therefore, they should support their national and military campaigns against terrorist others. The homonationalist discourse has justified the exclusion of others and incited racism toward (im)migrants and particularly Muslims that are portrayed as homophobic, uncivilized and barbaric.⁷⁵⁵ In "Sexuality and Integration: A Case of Gay Iranian Refugee's Collective Memories and Integration Practices in Canada",⁷⁵⁶ Ahmad Karimi shows that although Canada is a multicultural society, which as a model of policy and practice, emphasizing the integration of differences with the goal of social inclusion and cohesion, racism is a part of, and inherent to, the Canadian nation-state. In this context, Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men are "generally sexualized, racialized, and marginalized within Canadian gay communities". For example, one participant says, "I feel like they [Canadian] want me, sorry, but only for a one-night stand because I'm darker, I know they say I'm exotic". He continues "I feel wanted, for sex, but not for anything more. They have their own friends and

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 126.

⁷⁵⁴ Don Kulick, "Can There Be an Anthropology of Homophobia?" in *Homophobias: Lust and Loathing Across Time and Space*, ed. David A. B. Murray (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 28.

⁷⁵⁵ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷⁵⁶ Ahmad Karimi, "Sexuality and Integration: A Case of Gay Iranian Refugee's Collective Memories and Integration Practices in Canada", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1550207>

communities and I do not think I have any place there". Another participant who had worked at a gay club recounts that he was "hit on by white Canadian gay men only to be later insulted by them through racial slurs such as camel rider and terrorist". These stories echo in the narratives of other participants. One participant says "I was on Grinder for a while, and you do not know how many times they told me to go back and bomb my own country as soon as they realized I was Iranian".⁷⁵⁷ These narratives come along with experiences of Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay asylum seekers who are faced with assimilationist impulses and essentialist violence that are set by some human rights and UNHCR's offices (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in Turkey. In the article "The Queer Time of Death: Temporality, Geopolitics, and Refugee Rights",⁷⁵⁸ Sima Shakhsari, through ethnographic data from interviews with Iranian LGBTQI+ refugee applicants in Turkey, points to "inconsistencies in the universality of human rights" and argues that "while the designation of an act as a violation of human rights committed by states or citizens, is arbitrary and contingent on the place and time of the act, the recognition of the refugee in the human rights regimes relies on essentialist and timeless notions of identity that travel in the teleological time of progress". She explains that the UNHCR in Turkey processes the LGBTQI+ cases faster and with a low rate of rejection. This has made the reputation of asylum based on sexual orientation as a golden case but prone to allegations of fraud. For this reason, UNHCR staff cross-examine refugee applicants to assess the 'authenticity' of their sexual identities, in this context, their *hamjensgarai*/gayness. The measure that has been applied for the credibility of an applicants' claim is based on "the authenticity of their sexual identity" and the "country profile (the accumulated knowledge about human rights violations in the applicant's home country)". Shakhsari criticizes the normative notions of sexuality, gender and desire by which human rights organizations assess the authenticity and rightfulness of gay refugee applicants. For example, she points to one of these organizations, "ORAM [Organization for Refugee, Asylum, and Migration] a refugee rights organization, [that] relies on the UNHRC's interpretation of membership in a particular social group." Shakhsari writes that "membership in a particular social group is interested in the UNHCR as either sharing a characteristic that is 'immutable or so fundamental to human dignity that [one] should be compelled to forsake it' or 'a characteristic which makes a group cognizable or sets it

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Sima Shakhsari, "The Queer Time of Death: Temporality, Geopolitics, and Refugee Rights", *Sexualities* 2014, Vol. 17(8) 998–1015.

apart from society at large. The characteristic will often be one which is innate, unchangeable, or which is otherwise fundamental to identity, conscience, or the exercise of one's human rights'." Then ORAM explains that "gay men have the immutable characteristic of being sexually and emotionally attracted to men, and lesbians to women". This "assumption of refugee's immutability" is problematic because it ignores the conditions and multiple and complex subjectivities of applicants (for example, due to some complexities that come from family pressure or society norms, some gay men are married to a woman and some lesbians have children from a heterosexual marriage). Therefore, this "immutable characteristic" is not applicable and valid criteria for all refugee applicants' various narratives and conditions. On this account, Shakhari argues that the assumption of refugees' immutability produces "essentialist juridical discourses" to reduce applicants' narratives, "conditions, and multiple and complex subjectivities to rational and linear definitions to match the acceptable immutable identity" by defined human rights regimes.⁷⁵⁹

Besides reifying essentialist notions of sexual identity, some of these organizations measure the authenticity of applicants' gayness through their claims for a "well-founded fear of persecution". These organizations "often consider sexuality in Iran to be backward, repressed, and in need of liberation". Therefore, they accept and support those whom they consider authentic gay individuals with "immutable characteristics" and fear of persecution in the homophobic state. However, the stories of Iranian refugees for leaving their country are a lot more nuanced (as already mentioned such as pressure from the family or society) than the usual, hegemonic narrative of leaving homophobic Iran for a gay utopia in the West. Therefore, Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay applicants often "repeat stories that inevitably demonize the home-country". For example, Pejman, a Shakhari's participant, who passed the UNHCR refugee test, says that:

I left because I was fed up with the situation in Iran. I knew that you could become a refugee for being gay. Many of my friends had left. I didn't have problems with the state for being gay. So, I made up a story in my interview, just to make sure that the UN would not reject me. But it doesn't mean that I didn't have a good reason to leave. In fact, the way that this [the economic situation in Iran] is going, all 70 million Iranians have legitimate cases to become refugees.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

The recognition of refugees in what Shakhsari calls "human rights regimes" works to "erase difference (thus universalizing sexual identities) while emphasizing difference (third world versus the first world)." These facts, which are based on the real lives of Iranian gays and queers, show that Massad's thesis is not totally wrong, particularly with regards to the issue of "Western LGBT solidarity politics" and some (of course not all, as I have claimed that LGBTQI+'s politics is a fractious space) human rights and LGBTQI+ organizations that have an essentialist and assimilationist agenda. However, the same facts simultaneously reveal the agency and transformative capacity of Iranian gay identifying men who, despite being faced with many impediments and difficulties such as discrimination, racism, having limited or no access to financial support, consistent harassment from local people and work and housing discrimination,⁷⁶⁰ still struggle for their sexual self-determination. Moreover, in contrast to Massad's claim that those non-heterosexual Middle Easterners who identify themselves as gay belong to privileged classes, I have shown that most of the participants in these researches came from the low or middle classes of society. I have also tried to show that these identifying *hamjensgara*/gay men are most concerned about the question of sexual identity and articulating localized Iranian gayness, and for doing this, they have chosen, depending on their social positions and geographical locations, different forms of resistance and activism from those of the West in order to navigate their identities within the restrictions set by the government, family and society. This shows that Iranian *hamjensgara*/gay men themselves are a heterogeneous group and therefore, in depicting the picture of gay life in Iran, their different embodied actions and experiences inside Iran and their different resistive strategies and activism within the limits of homophobia and the harassment of Iranian state and society should be taken into consideration. However, this picture is at odds with the discourses of victimization produced both by Massad and some LGBTQI+ groups and organizations. They both, not in the same manner, ignore the agency of Iranian gay men. While, for Massad, a non-heterosexual Middle Eastern man, and particularly in this context, an Iranian man who expresses his sexual differences in the form of LGBT identities, is a victim of colonial imposition and of the universalizing claims of Gay International, for some human rights and LGBTQI+ organizations, Iranian gay men are victims of their society and in the need of liberation through Western gay movements.

⁷⁶⁰Ibid.

CONCLUSION

As I have reconstructed in the first theoretical part, *Rereading Foucault, Rethinking Sexuality*, Foucault claims that homosexuality is the result of a ‘historical evolution’ specifically inscribed in nineteenth-century Europe and produced through a proliferation of discourses. A crucial component of Foucault’s assertions about the historical transformation of ‘deviant’ sexual behaviors (or sodomy) into homosexual identification was the vision that sexual identities are the products of the *dispositif* of sexuality developed in the discourses that spun out the new disciplines and sciences of the modern period, such as biology, psychology, sociology, and anthropology.⁷⁶¹ In other words, he attempts to show that sexual categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality are historical constructions that are intimately bound up with ‘modernity’ and ‘modern regimes of power’. By drawing on Foucault's method, in part two, *Modernity and Transformation of Same-Sex Relations into Gay Identity*, I have shown that the emergence of homosexuality in Iran is also a ‘historical evolution’ produced through discursive practices. This thesis has provided a Foucauldian genealogical account of this historical discursive construction regarding the transformation of same-sex relations into gay identity in Iran before and after starting modernization in the nineteenth century until the present.

At the same time, in contrast to Foucault, who sees modernity through a Eurocentric vision,⁷⁶² I have taken a critical position toward its Western narrative. By redefining and rethinking the notion of modernity with authors like Homi K. Bhabha, Dilip Gaonkar, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, I have adopted a globally interconnected understanding of it, which is grounded on the process of cultural hybridization and diversification.⁷⁶³ By taking this approach, I have realized that there has always been a historical tension between modernity and tradition in Iran since the nineteenth century. This tension has been a crucial and pivotal component in the cultural and social development of modern Iranian society. In other words, Iranian modernity, by using Joseph R. Gusfield’s words, is an “admixture of tradition and modernity”⁷⁶⁴ in which each drives a degree of support from the other, rather than being considered as merely a clash of opposites.

⁷⁶¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, 46.

⁷⁶² Mitchell, *The Question of Modernity*, 16.

⁷⁶³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁶⁴ Joseph R. Gusfield, ‘Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change’ *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1967), 351-362.

Moreover, Iranian modernity is not constituted spontaneously. Instead, it is a ‘hybrid space of shared practices’ and ‘mimicries’ between Europe’s and Iran’s cultural-historical experiences and dispositions. As Tavakoli Targhi argues, while Europeans constructed the “modern self in relation to their non-Western others” (including Iranians), Iranians began to experience the formation of modernity’s ethos in relation to their Western others.⁷⁶⁵ In nineteenth-century Iran, this ‘admixture of tradition and modernity’ as well as identification with European modernity and scientific rationality served for both disassociation with the ‘dominant Arabo-Islamic culture’ and the ‘building of a modern nation-state and national identity’ grounded on the reconstruction of ‘pre-Islamic traditions’.⁷⁶⁶

Within this hybridized and cultural grafting construction of Iranian modernity, and by drawing on the Western discourse of sexuality and nationalist impulses, the nineteenth-century Iranian elites proposed a modern gender discourse in which ‘heterosocial spaces’ and ‘heterosexualization of eros’ were represented as the markers of modernity and progress. This discursive move prepared the ground for the state to recast the traditional same-sex relations and gender segregation as the signs of backwardness belonging to the Arabo-Islamic culture. In other words, the nationalists’ advocacy for modern gender norms was a regulatory discourse on the individual and social body that was linked not to the modern sciences, as happened in the nineteenth-century West, but rather to the nationalist discourses regarding the establishment of the modern nation-state and national identity. However, not unlike the West, in nineteenth-century Iran, gender and sexuality served as sites of social engineering and governmentality by which Iranian elites and the state were able to establish a society’s normative grid of intelligibility in the name of modernity. This historical account—regarding the recasting of same-sex relations as backward and heterosexuality as modern and ideal—was the first step toward the constitution of an Iranian gay identity.

The second step coincided with the Islamic Republic’s establishment in 1979 when admixture of Iranian tradition and modernity and its dialogue with the West in a hybrid space were used to create the Islamic-Iranian nation-state and identity. Before the Islamic regime’s establishment, there was a rise of Islamism in society—a shift from the hybridity of modernity

⁷⁶⁵ Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 37.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

with pre-Islamic traditions to the hybrid of modernity with the Islamic cultures and values. During the 1960s and 1970s, by romanticizing and idealizing the Islamic past, members of the Islamist intelligentsia, such as Al-Ahmad and Shariati, proposed returning to the Islamic roots as the only remaining defense against the harm of Western invasion. After its establishment, the Islamic regime constituted itself as a religious biopolitical *dispositif*, capable of interpolating new subjects through deploying modern sciences such as psychology and psychiatry. In this context, in line with the notion of ‘the will not to know’ and the discourse of *gharbzadeghi* and toxic West, the Islamic state depicts homosexuality as a deviancy or a foreign element that—contrary to nineteenth-century elites who located it in the domain of Arabo-Islamic cultures—belongs to the Western values and lifestyle. The aim of the Islamic state, the same as nineteenth-century European states, is to create homosexuality as a category of person *in lieu* of a deviant act. In this official discourse, homosexuals are depicted as those who have bodies that are not reproductive, who threaten the well-being of the general population, and who oppose Islamic culture. Furthermore, they are considered as an existential threat to the regime’s gender binary that challenges “the established definition of correspondence between sex, gender and sexual orientation.”⁷⁶⁷ The process of regulating homosexuality occurs through both medical power that led to the pathologization of homosexuality and juridico-legal power that labeled homosexuality as a capital crime under the Islamic state’s rules.⁷⁶⁸ According to the biopolitical state’s logic, homosexuality should be eliminated or normalized with surgery as a heterosexual form of transsexuality.⁷⁶⁹

While the historical evolution of Iranian gayness in the first step deals with nineteenth-century modernization and state consolidation and the second step with the Islamic regime’s use of modern technology of power; in the third step, Iranian gay men themselves participated in the construction of their own sexual beings. This third step took place in the 1980s and during the politico-social liberalization of the 1990s that provided broad access to the internet and brought the discourse of human rights to Iran. During this period, Iranian gay men tried to transform themselves in a Foucauldian sense within the limit of their own subjugation to express their

⁷⁶⁷Justice for Iran and Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang) 2014, *Pathologizing Identities, Paralyzing Bodies: Human Rights Violations against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran*, available at: <http://6rang.org/english/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-IdentitiesParalyzing-Bodies.pdf>

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Farrah Jafari, “Transsexuality under Surveillance in Iran: Clerical Control of Khomeini’s Fatwas,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2014), 31-51

resistant voices. Following Jøn Ingvar Kjaran's research, I have divided their resistance in two categories: community organizing and non-formal outreach work⁷⁷⁰ or individualistic resistance. Regarding community organizing, Iranian gay activists and scholars published magazines and articles through which they did the following: they criticized both leftists and religious thinkers' silence toward the violation of gay men's human rights; they proposed a more tolerated reading of the Qur'an with regards to diversity in gender and sexuality, and they contributed to the raising public awareness regarding the diversity of sexual identifications and orientations. More importantly, they produced new terminology with two goals in mind: to replace stigmatizing words (*kuni*, *evakhahr*, and *hamjensbaz*) with positive terms such as *hamjensgara* (same-sex identification and orientation), and to redefine and localize the Western notion of gayness in the Persian language and culture. I have considered this recent attainment as a creative resistance against both the hegemonic Western understanding of sexual identity and the dominant legal-religious discourse of the Islamic Republic that represents gayness as a Western trope of invasion and gays as non-authentic Iranians.⁷⁷¹ In non-formal outreach work, Iranian *hamjensgarayan/gays* position themselves as active agents in taking care of their self to resist the dominant norms in their religious-social environments through their embodiment and actions. To make their lives meaningful, to go on dates, and to spend time with their boyfriends, they employ different strategies such as making underground communities of support, leaving the country and making new families of their choice. Iranian *hamjensgarayan/gays* are aware that they are not officially recognized as a category of person. On this account, they do not 'come out of the closet', in the Western sense of the term, because they are aware that they cannot seek out any recognition and rights neither from society nor from the government. In this context, they come out only to their parents, siblings, and close friends by defining themselves in their language through the term *hamjensgara* to attach their sexuality and identification to a sense of "commitment, responsibility, morality, and enduring emotions".⁷⁷²

My analysis of the historical evolution of Iranian *hamjensgaran/gays*, their agentic self, and resistance aims to answer the discourses of victimization produced by Joseph Massad and some

⁷⁷⁰ Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan: 2019).

⁷⁷¹ Korycki, Nasirzadeh, "Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran".

⁷⁷² Karimi, "Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran".

LGBTQI+ groups and human rights organizations. As I have argued in part two, some LGBTQI+ groups and human rights organizations depict Iranian *hamjensgarayan*/gays just as sexually oppressed victims who are in need of being saved by the liberal and gay-friendly West from their homophobic Islamic-Iranian state. With respect to these groups and organizations' efforts to condemn the Islamic Republic's violation of the sexual minorities' human rights, I have shown that their discourse has been produced through a one-dimensional perspective where the victimization of Iranian *hamjensgarayan*/gays is hypervisible while their agentic self is not taken into consideration. Massad directs his attack toward the imperialist and orientalist impulses of the same organizations, but while criticizing them, he also produces a victimization discourse within which non-heterosexuals in the Middle East are depicted as victims who blindly adopted the Western sexual identity categories. Massad agrees with Foucault about the evolution of homosexuality and considers it as a *dispositif* produced in the intersection of power, knowledge and discourse; however, while Foucault's concept of homosexuality is a 'historical evolution' that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, Massad uses the concept of gayness in the colonial settings within which Gay International in the name of saving Middle Eastern sexual minorities from their societies, export and impose the Western *dispositif* of sexuality to produce and universalize Western sexual identity categories. In contrast to Massad, I have shown that Iranian *hamjensgaragai*/gayness is neither an imposition of colonialism nor of Gay International. Rather, it is a result of a historical evolution produced through nationalist discourses of the nineteenth century, the Islamic regime's use of modern technologies of regulations, and *hamjensgarayan*'s/gays' agency and transformation capacity. Therefore, "homosexualization" should not be represented as a "one-dimensional continuation of colonialism in contemporary times";⁷⁷³ instead, we should consider that the social forces and historical events that have produced modern homosexuality are spreading throughout the world—in other words, homosexual identity has been developed in a global communication wherein preventing the transmission of ideas and influences is impossible. Moreover, an individual's sexual self-determination should not be ignored. We cannot see gay identity or the adaptation of the Western notion of gayness simply as an effect of neocolonial imposition or as having complicity with imperialist norms and expectations. By drawing on Abouzar Nasirzadeh, Ahmad Karimi and Jón Ingvar Kjaran, I have

⁷⁷³ Momin Rahman, *Sexual Diffusions and Conceptual Confusions: Muslim Homophobia and Muslim Homosexualities in the Context of Modernity*, 98.

shown that since the 1990s, the English term ‘gay’ has been used as the self-identification by the majority of local homosexual men in post-revolutionary Iran.⁷⁷⁴ As argued by Nasirzadeh, “identifying by using ‘gay’, is not only an important part of their identity but for some, it was the main marker of their identity and not just merely a sexual practice”.⁷⁷⁵ Moreover, I have shown that besides the English term ‘gay’, since 2000s, the new Persian terminology, *hamjensgara*, has been used not only as a self-identification but also as an ethical and creative activity for localization of the western notion of gayness.

⁷⁷⁴ Abouzar Nasirzadeh, “The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians” in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009*, eds., David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi (New York: State University of New York, 2015), 57; Kjaran, *Gay Life Stories Same-Sex Desires in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan: 2019); Ahmad Karimi, “Hamjensgara Belongs to Family; Exclusion and Inclusion of Male homosexuality in Relation to Family Structure in Iran”, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*,(2017). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2017.128692>.

⁷⁷⁵ Nasirzadeh, “*The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Gay Iranians*”, 57-75.

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