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Chronopolitical Assemblages:
Race/ism, Desire, and Identification in Iranian Contexts

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Culture and Theory

by

Maryam Shadee Malaklou

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Nasrin Rahimieh, Chair
Professor Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan
Professor Elizabeth Freeman
Associate Professor Jared Sexton

2016

DEDICATION

This project is borne from my attempts and failures to reconcile the many and unexpected ways in which I found myself betrayed as a child by the racial schemas that hailed me—an anxiety figured most prominently in the person of my maternal grandmother, Mamanjan, who was also my primary caretaker. I remember the shame of taking my grandmother’s hand each morning on the way to school as classmates stared at her hijab and whispered; and I remember the white gaze of their parents, which wrote my grandmother into being not as an agent with the power to effect history, but as its artifact. I was just beginning to understand the ways in which their perceptions interpellate me when, one day in kindergarten, my five-year-old neighbor gave me an ultimatum: she would thereafter extend her friendship to me on the condition that I stop speaking Persian and dissociate from my grandmother. Desperate for a little whiteness in my life, I diligently worked to effect those changes I could. For two excruciating days and nights, I neither spoke Persian to nor acknowledged my grandmother—when she walked me to school, when she fed me, when she bathed me, when she put me to sleep, when she held me, when she loved me. As a child, I was ashamed to claim Mamanjan as my home. I claim her now, belatedly but with full hands and a fuller heart, and dedicate this dissertation to her.

And for my brothers, Amir and Bijan, who were also ashamed.

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Finally, I am grateful to the immediate members of my family, namely, my mother Nahid Nassiri, who nourished my health during the research and writing of this dissertation, and brothers Amir and Bijan, who nourish my spirit, indeed, who give my life's work its meaning.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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B.A., Cultural Anthropology and Women's Studies, Duke University (May 2007)

Grade Point Average: 3.8; Dean's List (2003-2007)

Study Abroad: **Bogazici University** in Istanbul, Turkey (Summer 2005);
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ACADEMIC POSITIONS

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FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2015 Graduate Student Research and Travel Award, UC Irvine (500 USD)

2011 Dean's Gateway Award in Persian Studies, UC Irvine (1,500 USD);
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2009 – 2010 Regents' Fellowship, UC Irvine (27,261 USD with teaching and research assistantships for three additional years of financial support: 2011 – 2013)

- 2009 Hammed Shahidian Critical Feminist Paper Award, Iranian Women's Studies Foundation and the Looli Group in Germany (250 USD)
- 2007 Judith McDade Prize in Cultural Anthropology, Duke University

PUBLICATIONS

Academic journals

“‘Teaching Trayvon’ at Irvine: On Feminist Praxis, Afro-pessimism, and ‘Woke Work’.” *National Political Science Review*, National Conference of Black Political Scientists. Volume 18:1. (Fall 2016).

“On the Chronopolitics of Skin-ego: Antiblackness, Desire, and Identification in Bravo TV’s *Shahs of Sunset*.” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*. Special Issue: “Black Holes: Afro-Pessimism, Blackness, and the Discourses of Modernity.” Volume 29 (Spring 2016).

“On the Chronopolitics of Black Social Life, or How Mister Winfield ‘Sends Go.’” *Black Camera: An International Film Journal*. Close-up: “Fugitivity and the Filmic Imagination.” Volume 7:1 (Fall 2015).

“Thinking Activism at UC Irvine: Remembering Christien ‘Glitch’ Rodriguez.” *Trans-Scripts: An Inter-disciplinary Online Journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences at UC Irvine*. Volume III (Spring 2013).

Public scholarship

Book Review: “New interdisciplinary resource, *Black Lives Matter*, introduces 6-12th graders to antiblack violence in U.S. law and society.” *The Feminist Wire*. August 17, 2015. Linked to *Fox News* August 23, 2015, *The Daily Caller* August 21, 2015, *Fusion* August 27, 2015, and *Public Philosophy Journal* August 18, 2015.

“Understanding anti-Black racism as species-ism: Reflections on Richard Sherman’s affective excess and the Twitterverse’s response.” *JFCB: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and the Limits of a Liberal Humanist Discourse*. January 22, 2014. Republished in *Racialicious: The intersection of race and popular culture*. Jan. 29, 2014. Linked to *The Nation* January 23, 2014.

“Trayvon Martin nativity scene co-opts Black erasure, urges victims to be ‘nonviolence, loving, [and] forgiving’.” *JFCB: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and the Limits of a Liberal Humanist Discourse*. December 27, 2013.

“Justine Sacco tweet not wrong, because we would never let white people die at those rates.” *JFCB: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and the Limits of a Liberal Humanist Discourse*. December 21, 2013.

“Kanye West I.Q. petition reeks of scientific racism.” *JFCB: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and the Limits of a Liberal Humanist Discourse*. December 17, 2013.

“Reading Beyonce’s ‘Superpower’ as a love letter to Black radical insurgency: An open letter to white feminists who want to remind us that Beyonce’s music is just ‘art’.” *JFCB: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, and the Limits of a Liberal Humanist Discourse*. December 15, 2013. Republished in *Racialicious: The intersection of race and popular culture*. December 23, 2013. Linked to *Hiphocracy* January 6, 2014.

PRESENTATIONS

Invited Presentations and Guest Lectures

- 2015 Panelist, “Women’s Voices Now” film festival, Levantine Cultural Center (June 6-7, 2015)
- 2015 Black History Month Speaker, “Richard Sherman, the Sports-Media Complex, and How Black Lives (Don’t) Matter,” Glendale Community College (February 24, 2015)
- 2014 Roundtable with Hortense Spillers, “Some Speculations on Sentiment: Women and Revolution,” Koehn Lecture and Undergraduate Conference in Critical Theory, UC Irvine (May 27-28, 2014)
- 2013 Speaker, Day of Action at UC Irvine in support of public education (October 16, 2013);
- Moderator for the third annual *Trans-Scripts* launch event, UC Irvine (May 13, 2013)
- 2012 Moderator for the second annual *Trans-Scripts* launch event, UC Irvine (May 16, 2012)
- 2011 Respondent to Heather Love, “The Stigma Archive,” UC Irvine (May 20, 2011)

Conferences

- 2016 Panelist, “Racialized Violence and Disavowal,” Annual American Studies Association Convention (November 2016).
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- 2011 “Queer Oppositional Politics: ‘Coming Out’ as Narrative Failure,” Annual Cultural Studies Association Conference in Chicago, IL (March 24-26, 2011) and Annual Northeast Modern Language Association Convention in New Brunswick, NJ (April 7-10, 2011).
- 2010 “Queering Iran: Economies of Sexual Quarantine,” Culture and Theory Conference in Irvine, CA (April 30, 2010) and Annual *Midwest* Popular Culture/American Culture Association Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota (October 1-3, 2010).

EDITORIAL POSITIONS

- 2015 – 2016 Editor, *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*. Volume 29, Special Issue: “Black Holes: Afro-Pessimism, Blackness and the Discourses of Modernity.” 2016.
- 2012 – 2013 Editor-in-Chief, *Trans-Scripts: An Interdisciplinary Journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences at UC Irvine*. Volume III: “Thinking Activism” (Spring 2013).
- 2010 – 2012 Editorial Board, *Trans-Scripts: An Interdisciplinary Journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences at UC Irvine*.
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SERVICE

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- 2009 – 2011 Member, Graduate Student Association, PhD Program in Culture and Theory, UC Irvine

LANGUAGE

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PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Cultural Studies Association;
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A yearlong, nationally recognized, multidisciplinary literature and composition course that emphasizes close reading practices and critical thinking skills. Students learn how arguments are evidenced in different humanist disciplines, including but not limited to History, Philosophy, English, Comparative Literature, and Film and Media Studies, and must work to similarly defend arguable claims in writing assignments in which they are tasked with literary analysis, conceptual analysis, historical analysis, film analysis, literary journalism, op-ed and blog writing, and independent research.

2013 – 2015 Instructor, **Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies**, UC Irvine:

- “Gender and Feminism” (Summer 2014): The first course in a three-part introductory series. Emphasis on black womanist interventions, intersection-al and transnational assemblages of sex and gender, and the impact of these discourses on/for critical humanism(s). Responsibilities include overseeing one teaching aide.
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- “Transnational Feminisms,” (March 3, 2011)
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Founder and instructor, House Course, Duke University: **“Dating and Mating: The Hookup Culture at Duke”** (Spring 2004 – 2007). In Spring 2007, this popular student-run class was integrated into the university’s liberal arts curriculum as a cross-listed course in Women’s Studies and Cultural Anthropology entitled, “Hookup Culture at Duke.”

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Chronopolitical Assemblages:
Race/ism, Desire, and Identification in Iranian Contexts

By

M. Shadee Malaklou

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Theory

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Nasrin Rahimieh, Chair

This research enumerates a contrapuntal relationship between race/ism, sexuality, and time in the discourse that overdetermines structures of relationality in contemporary Iranian contexts as they have been/are affected by encounters with European and American peoples and cultures. In Chapter 1, I examine how Euro-Enlightenment social and political constructions of time negotiate the making of Iran's imagined community; in Chapters 2 and 3, I further intervene in self-narrativizations of Iranian gay and trans sexualities in Western media, specifically, in documentary film (Chapter 2) and reality television (Chapter 3), to elaborate how Iranians in the diaspora and Islamic Republic alike, as constitutive members of Iran's imagined community, appropriate Euro-Enlightenment social and political constructions of time to make their same-sex attractions known as the mark of racial modernity. I suggest that their self-narrativizations betray a chronopolitical anxiety symptomatic of Iranian nationalism, which as a *gharbzadeghi*—a Weststruckness I elaborate as whitestruckness in Chapter 1—seeks to redress Iranians' station (i.e., social and political coordinates) in Enlightenment Europe's metaphysics of Man.

Enlightenment metaphysics, authored by modern continental philosophers of history like Hume, Kant, and especially Hegel, abstract Man as a becoming-white figure who slowly stands

upright, progressively moving through time to invariably arrive at what Foucault enumerates in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1976) as sexual identities and types. I argue that Iranians who participate in the making (if not the production) of Western media about their gay and trans sexualities—well-aware, I suspect, of how their testimonials will circulate in the West—intuit and further seek in their self-narrativizations to redress, even as they deny, their chronopolitical station in Europe's metaphysical discourse. Their accounts, which spatialize sexual differences as Historical-*cum*-racial ones, are thoughtfully tailored; in them, Iranians manipulate a knowledge-power regime that authorizes white viewers to do the looking that interpellates brown and black Others in time, to curry recognition for their Iranian persons as modern/izing subjects.

INTRODUCTION

Chronopolitical Assemblages

My research intervenes in the contrapuntality or “bi-laterally constructed totality” of Enlightenment Europe’s race science (forged in the colony) and its *scientia sexualis* (forged in the clinic, on the continent) as a chronopolitical order in which positivism and progress typify psychosexual behavior as a symptom of racial difference/s.¹ I elaborate Ann Stoler’s observation in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995) that “sexual promiscuity [and] restraint” in imperial Europe are not “abstract characteristics attached to any persons who [exhibit] those behaviors, but [...] post-hoc interpretations contingent on the racialized...categories to whom individuals [are] already assigned” to query how assignments of sexual licentiousness *qua* depravity sign racial degeneracy.² My analysis of social and political constructions of time suggests that modern epistemology—Stoler explains, conceived in Western Europe but curated in empire’s periphery or “laboratories of modernity” to “[classify] colonial subjects into distinct human kinds”³—

1. Radhakrishnan, Rajagopalan. *A Said Dictionary* (Blackwell Publishing, 2012) 24.

Contrapuntality is a musical metaphor in which two modes of listening are active simultaneously. This is Edward Said’s term, elaborated by Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan in his book of Said’s concept-metaphors, for a “forum where every point can be counter-pointed argumentatively, not with the intention of creating a schism but with the objective of realizing shared, bi-laterally constructed totality” (Ibid. 24).

Joseph Allen Boone elaborates contrapuntality as a mode of reading that “allows for one to attend, as in music, to ‘various themes [playing] off one another with no privileging of the one over the other, in order to grasp a composite built of atonalities’” (*The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (Columbia University Press, 2014) xxi).

2. Stoler, Ann. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995) 115.

3. Ibid. 75, 4.

Stoler develops the metaphor of the colonial laboratory from Mary Louise Pratt’s usage. Quoting Pratt, Stoler posits that “Europe’s aggressive colonial and imperial ventures served as ‘models, inspirations and testing grounds’ for Europe’s eighteenth century bourgeois order” (Ibid. 75).

narrativizes Man's ascension from a state of nature (pace Hobbes) as a person of the bush associated with base carnality, denied Human faculties like reason, to the Cogito (pace Descartes) as a self-mastered subject who can control his corporeal appetites, more to the point, who can move through time to arrive at the restraint appropriate to modern sexual typology.

I argue that social and political constructions of time inscribed by philosophers of history like David Hume (1711 – 1776), Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831) spatialize time as a moving marker to measure the progress of Europe's and not a universal or generic man. As social scientists of Enlightenment Europe's race science, they narrativize Man's transcendence of mind *qua* reason over matter (body *qua* flesh) as the triumph of racial whiteness. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837), for example, name Europe as "the subject of the progressive teleological development of World History."⁴ Which is to say, as "the sovereign subject of *all* histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Kenyan,' and so on," including Iranian, Europe is "the silent referent"⁵—not a constant but a moving marker—against which all histories are known (judged). Dipesh Chakrabarty explains, the dominance of Europe as the subject of all histories is part of a much more profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world. ... The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that *we* find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us,' eminently useful in understanding our societies.⁶

Tiffany Willoughby-Herard elaborates the colony *qua* laboratory as the site of a "global racial development scheme." Her analysis like mine reads for the racializing effects of progress narratives (*Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability* (University of California Press, 2015) 18).

4. Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015) 139.

5. Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000) 28.

6. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* 139; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* 29.

My findings complement Chakrabarty's assessment that modern historicism, which privileges European social and political thought (I argue, racial whiteness) as a "mode of thinking about history in which one [assumes] that any object under investigation [retains] a unity of conception...through a process of development in secular, historical time," is hegemonic.⁷

While racial whiteness marks Man's ascendance to the Cogito, the bush (Africa) marks the site of Man's species-*cum*-racial cut. Black persons are especially mythologized by Western metaphysical philosophy as "the missing link between the ape and man;" as history's constitutive outside, they are "precluded from any possibility of progress."⁸ Hegel thus describes the African person in *Lectures* as "natural man in his completely wild and untamed state;" in his own words,

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle [that] naturally accompanies all *our* ideas—the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God, or Law—in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. The copious and circumstantial accounts of Missionaries

7. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* xiv.

8. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press: 2008) 67; Purtschert, Patricia. "On the limit of spirit: Hegel's racism revisited," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36:9 (2010) 1039 – 1051.

completely confirm this, and Mahommedanism appears to be the only thing [that] in any way brings the Negroes within the range of culture.⁹

Hegel thus suggests that African persons and cultures (not cultures at all) are inconsequential to the world's teleological developmental. Only by participating in the Arab-Islamic or "Mahommedan" cultures that colonize Africa, that is, by forsaking Africa/ns to count themselves as members of the Muslim *ommat* (a community of believers I elaborate in Chapter 1), Hegel suspects, can black persons *qua* Africans access Historical time as a moving marker to curate the socio-political life Giorgio Agamben describes as *bios*.¹⁰ Hegel writes about Africa that it

[has] no historical part [in] the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it—that is in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European World. ... What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.¹¹

The assumption that the black persons of African descent are relics or artifacts of (and not agents with the power to affect) History was already in circulation by the time Hegel ossified Africans as an undeveloped people. In "Of National Characters" (1753), Hume writes the following in a footnote almost an entire century before Hegel narrates (historicizes) Man's racial hierarchy,

I am apt to suspect the Negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. ... Not to mention our colonies, there

9. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover 1956) 93.

10. Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

11. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. Sibree 99.

are [Negro] slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; [...] low people, without education...like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.¹²

Hume designates black persons first (principally) and nonblack persons of color second (subsequently, presumably, because they approach or proximate racial blackness) as inferior peoples—a triangulation productive of chronopolitical anxiety for nonblack persons of color, I argue in Chapter 3. Kant, especially influenced by Hume, makes a similar observation about African persons in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), writing,

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises about the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of black who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was every found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color. The religion of fetishes so widespread among them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply into the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature. A bird's feather, a cow's horn, a conch shell, or any other common object, as soon as it becomes consecrated by a few words, is an object of veneration and of invocation in swearing oaths. The blacks are very vain but in the Negro's way, and so talkative that they must be driven apart from each other with thrashings.¹³

12. Qtd. in Green, Thomas Hill and Thomas Hodge Grose, eds. *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* (London, 1882) 253.

For a robust analysis of this footnote see Popkin, Richard H. "Hume's Racism," *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, eds. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980) 251 – 266; and "Hume's Racism Reconsidered." *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992) 64 – 75. See also Immerwahr, John. "Hume's Revised Racism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53:3 (1992) 481 – 486.

13. Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (University of California Press, 2004) 111.

Social and political constructions of time in Western metaphysical philosophy Hume and Kant introduce and Hegel canonizes thus abstract social—racial—categories as civilizational nations constructed (constricted) by a definitive spatialization of time in which Europe is the subject of a teleological development and Africa is the constitutive Other of this developmental narrative. Black persons access socio-political life or *bios* in this space-time by associating with nonblack persons of color like Arab-Islamic people whose social-national (racial) station, suspended between the absolute dereliction of racial blackness and the absolute transcendence of racial whiteness, outranks Africa's.¹⁴ Which is to say, black persons are only e/legible as modern subjects in Enlightenment Europe's space-time when they deny affiliation with racial blackness.

While “Mahommedanism” makes black persons and cultures Historically relevant, its nation of Arab-Islamic people moves (if at all) at a significantly slower pace than European nations (stalling, for example, in Orientalist discourse). I merge two concept-metaphors in this study to explain the impermanence of Historical coordinates for nonblack persons of color: “chronopolitics,” a neologism I inherit from Johannes Fabian and Elizabeth Freeman, who intervene in racist and sexist social and political constructions of time, respectively; and “assemblage,” coined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and popularized by Jasbir Puar, which I use to describe the distribution and arrangement (stratification) of racial difference/s in a space-time (constellation) that as a narrative of teleological development entrenches racial whiteness on the continent and compels white mimicry in Europe's periphery. As an example of white mimicry, Iranian nationalism (by now a trans/nationalism) acquiesces to a teleological narrative in which Europe is the arbiter of all Historical knowledge, even (especially) of knowledge about Iran. My research in Chapter 1 finds that since at least the late nineteenth century, Iranians have mimed white social and political forms native to Europe to claim (an)

14. Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

Indo-European nation/alism, forging (forcing) a philological place for Iran in the modern historicism Walter Benjamin describes as “empty homogenous time”¹⁵: a “constellation of the past and present” that induces “the time of the now” as Europe’s present/now.¹⁶ In Chapters 2 and 3, I elaborate how Iranians are hailed by this spatialization of time to negotiate not (just) their intersectional identities but (also) their relational identities vis-à-vis imperial Europe and its successor¹⁷: the United States, which Hegel names as “the country of the future,” in other words, of History’s *postmodernity*.¹⁸ As nonblack persons of color, Iranians like Arab-Islamic or “Mahomedan” people occupy contingent Historical coordinates, meaning, they can relationally and/or situationally access time as a moving marker, I explain in Chapter 3, when black persons are materially or rhetorically present to bear the weight of Man’s chronopolitical anxieties. However, the black subject-that-is-not one *qua* African, representative of man in his natural state—Greg Thomas elaborates in his study of the “enormous black penis hysteria of European empire,” of gratuitous and licentious sexuality¹⁹—cannot make Historical time work for Africa/ns. Europe remains History’s “silent referent” (I have suggested, its moving referent) but Africa is its absolute constant. Africa as Europe’s constitutive Other is proscribed from movement; more to the point, racial blackness is the timeless constant against which the subject

15. Benjamin, Walter. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations* (Schocken Books, 1968) 253 – 264. (Original publication date: 1940)

16. Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015) 139.

17. See Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (Columbia University Press, 1983); Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Duke University Press Books, 2010); Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007).

18. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1981) 170.

19. Thomas, Greg. *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (Indiana University Press, 2007) 88-89.

of History, in shades of white, comes to know and instantiate himself as a metaphysical being. With no past and no future, in other words, without access to time as a moving marker, black persons *qua* Africans are always already untimely, Frantz Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), because Africa as the site of Man's genesis, that is, a threshold for Historical knowing, arrives too soon to the table of civilization and too late, which is to say, not at all.²⁰

I thus explain the relationship between space (peoples) and time (movement) inscribed by Enlightenment thought-*cum*-metaphysical philosophy to explain how this relationship makes sexual differences knowable as racial differences. My research develops Stoler's suspicion that race and sexuality [are] ordering mechanisms that [share] their emergence with the bourgeois order of the early nineteenth century, "that beginning of the modern age." Such a perspective figures race, racism, and its representations as structured entailments of post-Enlightenment universals, as formative features of modernity, as deeply embedded in bourgeois liberalism, not as aberrant offshoots of them.²¹

The nineteenth century as "that beginning of the modern age" makes race and sexuality into the same chronopolitical "ordering mechanism," not just in Enlightenment Europe but also and notably its periphery. It is there, in the outposts of empire that are "laboratories" for Europe's race science, where race/ism and sexuality—race/ism *as* sexuality, I argue, because race science abstracts Man as a becoming-white figure who slowly stands upright to progressively move through time, emerging from the bush as a person of color associated with base carnality and sexual obscenity to arrive at the metropole as a white/r person who can cultivate the Oedipal sexuality (sexual restraint) appropriate to bourgeois personhood, suggestive of discipline and self-control, more to the point, of self-mastery, that essential Humanist characteristic—acquire

20. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox.

21. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* 9.

the hues that “[classify] colonial subjects into distinct human kinds.” A study of chronopolitical assemblages clarifies how imperial Europe catalogues sexual differences in “laboratories of modernity” to induce a taxonomy (pace Foucault, *scientia sexualis*) on the continent that pairs sexual differences “with a wider set of psychological and invisible characteristics that [gloss] the categories of bourgeois respectability, whiteness, and true Europeans.”²² In my summation of Europe’s chronopolitical order, outposts of empire supply the raw materials, by which I mean, the unsignified flesh necessary to substantiate the scientific knowledge that engenders Humanism as a racism. The metaphysics made in Europe’s laboratories purposefully boomerang; this science implements positivism to measure (choreograph) the progress of Europe’s and not a generic or universal Man, administering what Sylvia Wynter describes as “the normative ‘tape of the world’” in one direction to activate “post-Enlightenment universals” as unassimilable white forms, pace Stoler, at once racist and sexist, I further suggest, sexist because they are racist.²³

My study picks up where Stoler leaves off to think about how peoples Othered by this chronopolitical order appropriate and/or subvert it. While I describe structures of relationality in Iranian contexts, my concern, like Lisa Lowe’s in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), is not with a particular space and time but with space-time as a structure or grammar that engenders the “existing conventions for knowing and representing ‘modernity’ through narratives of progress and development.”²⁴ As a map of the world (History) and its making (Historicism) that uses a “scientific treatise on the aesthetics of race,” that is, “on the erotics of the exotic” to assign sexual differences to Europe’s Others, which is to say, to peoples

22. Ibid. 190.

23. Wynter, Sylvia. “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations,” *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) 56, 60.

24. Ibid. 136.

of color, modern social and political constructions of time cohere relationality even in the places we least expect them to and in the hearts and minds of people who otherwise oppose Euro-Enlightenment cultures.²⁵ Indeed, “Europe’s colonial imperative has compelled... normative forms of modern subject, society, and state”—in my summation, a chronopolitical order—that by now “[operates] in practical spheres for the discipline, subjugation, and organization of peoples” in the third world, more to the point, which overdetermines how third world peoples “[receive knowledge] about those processes” and as well, their “limits of what can be thought and imagined”—in Iran as I suspect elsewhere, even after revolution, meaning, after imperial Europe (officially) leaves.²⁶ Though Europe’s Others can petition for a different world, they cannot make one, I argue, because their “limits of what can be thought and imagined” are inscribed by psychosexual universalisms in which sexuality as the mark of “the essence of what [kind] of human [being one is]” is “indexical of the social category to which [one] truly [belongs].”²⁷

25. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* 185.

26. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* 136 – 137.

27. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* 184.

CHAPTER I

***Gharbzadeghi* and Iranian Nation/alism: Reading for alternative modernity in Googoosh “Behesht” (Paradise)**

This chapter elaborates the birth of Iranian nationalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as a racial alienation or *gharbzadeghi*. In the genealogy I sketch, Pahlavi nationalization and statecraft (I argue, nationalization as statecraft) in twentieth century Iran institutionalized not (just) modernist or “Weststruck” identifications, which is how the charge of *gharbzadeghi* circulated on the eve of revolution, but (principally) *whitestruck* identifications, which I want to suggest were already in robust circulation by the time Reza Shah ascended to the throne in 1925.²⁸ Popularized by Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923 – 1969) in 1961/2 to describe national alien-ation in an Iran industrialized by European and American markets, *gharbzadeghi* was coined in the 1940s by oral philosopher Ahmad Fardid (1909 – 1994), who derived the term from Martin Heidegger’s assessment that “the threat to man... has already affected man in his *essence*.”²⁹ Fardid enumerates *gharbzadeghi* as the alienation specific to modern Man, effected by the metaphysical philosophy that tasks Man to know himself as a sovereign agent. Reza Davari-Ardakani (1933 – present), a prominent ideologue in today’s revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state, privileges Fardid’s original usage to elaborate *gharbzadeghi* as a Human-centrism, I suggest, as the *logos* of Enlightenment Humanism, which Sylvia Wynter describes in another (I

28. Nationalists had traced the origins of the Persian people to an Aryan bloodline by the 1890s. See Marashi, Afshin. *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940* (University of Washington Press, 2008) 66.

29. Al-e Ahmad, Jalal. *Gharbzadeghi*, trans. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh (Mazda Publishers, 1982).

Originally written and presented as a report for the Commission on the Goals of the Iranian Ministry of Education on 29 November 1961 and 18 January 1962, *Gharbzadeghi* is also sometimes translated as *Weststruckness* or *Occidentosis*.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977) 28 (my emphasis).

argue in Chapter 3, not unrelated) context as that grammar which “law-likely [functions] to semantically-neurochemically induce the performative enactment of our ensemble of always already role-allocated individual and collective behaviors.”³⁰ I turn to Davari-Ardakani’s usage here not to break to Al-e Ahmad’s assessment of British and American economic imperialism but to contextualize the bourgeois *qua* white identifications he enumerates as the sociopolitical cancer of competitive markets and global flows of capital, as a critique of Enlightenment Humanism, thus repositioning Al-e Ahmad’s critique of capitalist modernity as a critique of racial modernity.

The scholarship to emerge from Iran’s intellectual and political encounter with Euro-Enlightenment social and political thought in the nineteenth century had by the time of Fardid’s birth mythologized Iranians as prototypical Aryans, collapsing the ethnic and linguistic particularities native to Iran to fashion an image of its imagined community as always already white. I want to suggest that this strategy, which I further suspect is by now a nationalist sensibility, persists despite the constitutional (1905/6 – 1911) and Islamic revolutions (1978/9) to transpire since its inception, and for good reason. The assignment of white forms to Iran/ians is a defensive move that anticipates History’s wounding. As the handmaiden of Enlightenment race science, modern historiography—History as a social science—inscribes racialized notions of progress to typify Iran/ians *qua* Orientals not as kin to Western Europe/eans but as its/their unassimilable Other. I suspect that the white identifications born in nineteenth century Iran as a defensive posture endure in native (presumably, Islamist) and diasporic (presumably, pluralist) contexts alike as a *chronopolitical* sensibility, by which I mean, as a hyper-sensitivity about how the modernist historiography affected by Enlightenment Europe positions Iran/ians in its metaphysics of Man. I argue that despite regime change in which clergy took issue with Pahlavi-

30. Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe” 32–33.

era self-representations of Iran/ians as secular and modern, white identifications endure in the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state and as well, though less surprisingly, in Iranian contexts inclusive of diaspora, because white identifications are a cultural inheritance or “structure of feeling” essential to what it means to be or to know oneself as a modern Iranian, even as an alternatively modern Iranian or what Hamid Dabashi describes as a “cosmopolitan” Iranian.³¹ As an upwardly-mobile, class-conscious people, Iranians at home and in the diaspora, as intelligentsia, clerics, and laypersons, are racially alienated irrespective of their avowed politics, citizenship status, or relationship to the *polis*, including but not limited to who they recognize as Iran’s legitimate sovereign: a puppet monarch loyal to European and American interests or Marxists-*cum*-Islamists who claim to want to save Iran from what they suspect is the cultural degeneracy Euro-American interests invariably induce. (To be sure, some rally for something else entirely, like the democratic socialism evinced by Mosaddegh’s short-lived but promising efforts to nationalize Iran’s oil industry (1951 – 1953)). Their partisan politics are symptomatic but inessential, I argue, to the racial alienation inscribed by nationalist literatures in the nineteenth century, consolidated by constitutional reforms in the early twentieth century, and later still, institutionalized by Pahlavi programs. The constitutional reforms to precede Pahlavi

31. “Structure of feeling” is Raymond Williams phrasing for vernacular responses to cultural texts and official discourse, like the Pahlavi policies and programs I describe. Structures of feeling are “as firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests” but “[operate] in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities.” Williams, Raymond and Michael Orrom. *Preface to Film* (Film and Drama, 1954).

“Cosmopolitanism” is Hamid Dabashi’s catchphrase for an alternative model of modernity that need not reproduce colonial modernity’s binary opposition of East (“tradition”) and West (“modernity”). However capacious he intends its usage—Dabashi enumerates cosmopolitanism as a catchphrase for the plurality of Iran’s political culture, which he claims is irreducible to any one single articulation (Pahlavi, Islamic, Marxist, etc.)—his reference is to Pahlavi Iran specifically, by which I mean, Weststruck (whitestruck) Iran. He writes extensively to this effect, for example: “There was a cosmopolitan worldliness in the air when I was growing up in the Pahlavi period, a deeply cultivated sense of our global whereabouts—a catholicity of learning that knew not where ‘the West’ was or where ‘the East’ began on the bipolar axis of power.” The cosmopolitanism he invokes cannot be realized without adherence to a bourgeois order; it does not an alternative modernity but a euphemism for the Enlightenment modernity exported to outposts of empire as colonial modernity, under the auspices of positivism and progress. Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran: A People Interrupted* (The New Press, 2008) 133.

rule (1925 – 1978) erected social and political structures to respond to mounting pressure from the British and Russian Empires, but especially from the British Empire, which maintained its influence well into the twentieth century and especially after the 1953 American-backed coup that ousted the democratically elected Mohammad Mosaddegh from power. Constitutional reforms culminated in changes like the addition of a parliament, anticipating Pahlavi nationalization *qua* statecraft insofar as the governmental apparatus erected by constitutionalism inscribed modernity and nationalism at once and with the same broad stroke of the Humanist brush as a racism. Constitutionalism consolidated institutions and infrastructures but (I suggest) did not import white ideologies, already in wide circulation by the *fin de siècle*.

In the next two chapters, I intervene in expressions of racial alienation in twenty-first century Iranian contexts. My research elaborates the perceptions and prejudices by which Iranians recognize each other as kinfolk or don't, including the sensibilities (for example, Dabashi's "cosmopolitanism") they name as their own but which I argue are whitestruck, dubbed or sampled from white cultural forms that are unassimilable and thus can only ever induce the *logos* of Enlightenment Europe. To clarify, mine is not a bounded analysis of *polis* in the wake of regime change or a pluralist account of diaspora; in this chapter, I intervene in how the structures of feeling engendered by the nineteenth century nationalism are inherited, more to the point, intuited by revolutionary-*cum*-Islamist and diasporic Iranians alike. I further intervene in the literature that galvanized civil unrest in 1978/9 to elaborate what architects of regime change prescribed in their pursuit of Iranian "authenticity" as an alternative modernity that, in my summation, has not come to pass. I suggest an alternative modernity to be born from an Other, politically vigilant Islamic *qua* Shi'ite enlightenment (in Persian, *rushanfekri*), has not

materialized to replace Euro-Enlightenment infrastructures and ideologies in today's Iran—an argument I preface here and pursue in my study of sex change as reparative therapy in Chapter 2.

While native and diasporic nationalist particularities are important, I do not sufficiently enumerate them here because mine is another, though not entirely unrelated problematic: nationalist identifications in which “being white” and “being modern” are indistinguishable qualities of Iran's body politic, not just in the Pahlavi historiography prototypical of Al-e Ahmad's *gharbzadegi* but also and notably in the nineteenth century nationalist literature that first thought up what the category (persons and politics) of the Iranian might look like. I suggested in the introduction, in large part elaborating Lisa Lowe's intervention in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), that Western metaphysical philosophy canonizes Enlightenment race science to impose “‘Europe’ [as] the subject of the progressive teleological development of world history,” stated another way, to assign modernity as the singular province of Western Europeans and their kin (Americans).³² In this chapter, I query how imperial Europe exports modernist historiography to its outposts, not just to the settler colonies it occupies but also and notably to those places where imperial Europe wields an “invisible hand,” for example, in twentieth century Iran, to impress Humanism as a racism.

Iranian nationalists in the nineteenth century like poet, playwright, and polemicist Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh (1812 – 1878) invoked “the progressive teleological development of world history”— Enlightenment Europe's chronopolitical arrangement, carefully calibrated by Hegelian cosmologists to measure (engender) the movement of time as a signpost for the progress of Europe's and not a universal or generic Man—to inscribe Iranians as prototypical Aryans. At best, their institutional and intellectual projects forced a cleavage in Hegel's nationalism to make room (however slight) for Iranians to propagate a race science for which

32. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* 139.

they can never be the proper subjects. Their invitation to participate in Enlightenment universals malleable (manipulative) enough to incorporate (recruit) Iranians *qua* Others as junior agents of racial modernity's human-making project, required Iranians to replace native sensibilities with Euro-Enlightened ones. Iranians were thus already alienation from self and society by the time Pahlavi policies and programs elaborated white identifications as bourgeois sensibilities to make Iran/ians especially receptive (vulnerable) to European and American commercial interests. I want to suggest that in Iran as in other outposts of empire, where persons proscribed from racial whiteness can accrue (purchase) its markers nonetheless, "bourgeois identity [is] tied to notions of being 'European' and being 'white.'"³³ My research elaborates Ann Stoler's suspicion, which is Frantz Fanon's as well—Fanon recounts, "one is white, so one is rich, so one is handsome, so one is intelligent"³⁴—that bourgeois sensibilities are the trace of a racial alienation or *gharbzadeghi*, to argue that the Iranians who pursue bourgeois legibility seek not the capitalist modernity these identifications index in Western European contexts, but to organize their persons "in relation to the telos of modern European form" that is essentially white.³⁵

Gharbzadeghi

In Al-e Ahmad's assessment, Euro-Enlightenment "'isms' and ideologies" are not incidental to the capitalist program of free trade; they are the "pathways to the exalted throne of 'machinism' and machines."³⁶ In *Gharbzadeghi* (Westoxification), his 1961/2 report to the Commission on the Goals of the Iranian Ministry of Education, Al-e Ahmad laments,

33. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* 11.

34. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 34.

35. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* 137.

36. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 14.

Machines are talismans for us. ... We drag ourselves into the shadow of their protection, and in their shelter we think ourselves immune to the evils of the time, oblivious of the fact that this is a talisman others have hung around our necks to intimate and milk us.³⁷

While his expressed concern is global capitalism's "vigorous industrial expansion and [...] search for new markets to export goods," which keeps Iran/ians in the position of "needy purchasers" of U.S. industrial technologies, one senses a critique of "the colonial order of things" in Al-e Ahmad's assessment of organizations like UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).³⁸ As Sharareh Frouzesh, a scholar of Iranian resistance literatures who reads for Al-e Ahmad's analysis of the colonial imperative in his critique of Euro-American industry—an imperative that was as much about gaining access to Iran's raw materials as it was about using Iran as a pivot to the East³⁹—surmises,

Noting that the supposed ideological divide between the United States and the Soviet Union ultimately represents a single pillar of corporate and colonial interests, Al-e Ahmad locates the complicity of Western imperial powers and the primacy of larger economic interests as a determining factor in Iranian political maneuverings. Isolating the problem of power as one premised on what he coins the "logic of the machine," he argues that the spectrum of production and consumption of Western machines is the real determinant of Iran's power structures. Arguing that Iran remains fundamentally and simply a consumer of Western machines in that is subjugated and dependent on technologies and the ideologies on loan from without, Al-e Ahmad characterizes Iran as a fundamentally *occidentotic* society (it suffers from the disease of the West). In this way, he

37. Ibid. 97.

38. Ibid. 166, 105.

39. This ideological tug-a-war dates back to the "The Great Game" (1813 – 1907), the name for the British Empire's economic and political rivalry with the Russian Empire, and persisted well into Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1906 – 1911), which did not make Iran independent of British and Russian interests.

points to the ethos of a time in which Iran has yet to acquire the knowledge of the machine but is forced, through the logic of the marketplace, to consume it nonetheless.⁴⁰

The machine can be read metaphorically in Al-e Ahmad's polemic as a synonym for Euro-American (essentially, white) interests or literally as an implement of industry. To be sure, one signals the other; his critique of machine consumption is a critique of white humanist empire, though he does not call it that. Embedded in Al-e Ahmad's historical materialist analysis of Euro-American modernity⁴¹—a modernity that engenders vast economic disparities between producers in the West/North and consumers in the East/South, by which I mean, unequal access to goods and resources in “an era when machines themselves are not only the most powerful feudal lord of all, sitting in the seat of the Lord of lords, but when they are also demanding security, open borders, no walls”⁴²—is a cultural Marxism, specifically, a concern about the cultural effects of capitalist modernity (i.e., “security, open borders, no walls”) on the Iranian people. In Al-e Ahmad's own words, “The basic thesis of this short essay is that we've not been able to retain our own cultural/historical personality during our encounter with machines and in the face of their inevitable assault.”⁴³ He bemoans, “We're like a nation alienated from itself, in our clothing and our homes, our food and our literature, our publications, and, most dangerously of all, our education.”⁴⁴

40. Frouzesh, Sharareh. “Guilt and the War on the State: Resistance and Deliverance in the Literature of the Iranian Revolution” in *The Use and Abuse of Guilt* Dissertation (University of California, Irvine, 2013) 176-177.

41 Al-e Ahmad concedes in the early pages of his book, “It's true, as Marx said, that we now have two worlds in dispute, but these two worlds have become somewhat more extensive since his time, and that dispute has much more complicated characteristics than a dispute between workers and management. Our world is a world of confrontation between the poor and the rich in a worldwide arena” (*Gharbzadeghi* 15).

42. Ibid. 78.

43. Ibid. 16.

44. Ibid. 59.

I want to suggest that it is precisely because Al-e Ahmad (who at the time of his writing *Gharbzadeghi* was at least familiar with Fanon's scholarship) intuitively the "key operation of dialectical sublation [*Aufhebung*] and teleology" at work in empire's bad faith invitation to participate in Western Europe's Enlightenment modernity, stated another way, because Al-e Ahmad intuitively that something gets lost in the slippage effected by a synthesis whereby Iran/ians presumably arrive to be/come Europe/eans, that he prescribes cultural and political divestment from the West, describing *gharbzadeghi* as a disease with two heads:⁴⁵ "One is the West, the other is ourselves who are Weststruck."⁴⁶ My research elaborates the temporal analysis inherent to Al-e Ahmad's assessment, in which he warns Iran/ians who reproduce Euro-American "'isms' and ideologies" that they are not "immune [from] the evils of time" but are instead especially vulnerable to humanist prescriptions/proscriptions coded in a language of time, as positivism and progress. Al-e Ahmad bemoans, "Western industry [has] controlled us, plundered us, and managed our fate," specifically, Iran's lot in History. He understood and wanted his countrymen to understand as well the Humanist significance of a modernist historiography in which Iranians are scripted as non-agents of their own *historia*. For Al-e Ahmad, who bemoans that the world of machines has "[created] a new kind of human being," a regime of Man alienated from himself, "identical and all of a piece," "the ultimate manifestation of *gharbzadeghi*" is a "tagging along, socially, politically, and economically, [a] tagging along behind the West, behind the oil companies, and behind Western governments."⁴⁷ I thus explain that Al-e Ahmad seeks a way out of a particular construction of time that locates Iran/ians (as Other/s, despite white identifications naturalized in nineteenth century Iran) even in progressive articulations as not-there-yet, never-

45. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* 140.

46. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 11.

47. Ibid. 64, 172, 173.

there-yet, always already denied coevalness with (i.e., the time of) Europe/eans and America/ns.⁴⁸ That is, he seeks an alternative to the teleological time of modern historiography—what Walter Benjamin describes as an “empty homogenous time”⁴⁹—which yields positivism and progress on the continent but atavism and stagnation in its periphery or outposts of empire.

Even under optimal conditions, for example, in Pahlavi Iran, Iranians who identify with white “‘isms’ and ideologies” to ascend empty homogenous time can only ever begin to arrive at where Europeans and their American kin have already arrived or conquered, which is to say, marked. Coincidentally, conditions socially and politically ripe for their ascension to white forms permit Iran/ians to sample or dub—mime—racial modernity but not to author or master this modernity, likewise typifying Iranians in modern historiography as developmentally delayed. Al-e Ahmad, who ascribes *gharbzadeghi* to countrymen who foolishly pursue the cultural forms to which they are categorically proscribed, implores,

What should we do about this [*gharbzadeghi*]? Should we continue to be mere consumers as we have been in the past? Should we close the doors of our lives to machines and technology and withdraw into the distant past, with national and religious traditions? Or is there a third alternative? ...Until now, the course we’ve taken is to be mere consumers of machines and to simply submit ourselves to the fate of the twentieth century. That course has led us to this current situation, a Weststruck situation in which we await

48. “Coevalness” is Johannes Fabian’s term for the temporal distancing devices of anthropological discourse: “Beneath their bewildering variety, the distancing devices that we can identify produce a global result. I will call it denial of coevalness. By that I mean *a persistent and systemic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*” (31, original emphasis). Fabian continues: “Coevalness aims at recognizing cotemporality as the condition for truly dialectical confrontation between persons as well as societies. It militates against false conceptions of dialectics – all those watered-down binary abstractions which are passed off as oppositions: left vs. right, past vs. present, primitive vs. modern. Tradition and modernity are not ‘opposed’ (except semiotically), nor are they in ‘conflict.’ ...[We] are not the same societies at different stages of development, but different societies facing each other at the same time” (Fabian *Time and the Other* 155).

49. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

Western alternatives in a daze, waiting for them to come and give us credit or aid every few years so we can buy their products and replace worn-own machinery.⁵⁰

He continues, suggesting an alternative to blind consumption of Euro-American industry,

A third alternative ... is to put the genie of machines back in his bottle and make him work for us, like a beast of burden. Machines are a natural springboard for us, one that we must use to make the longest possible leap. We must adopt machines, but we must not remain slaves to them. We must not become entangled with them. Machines are a means, not an end. The aim is to eliminate poverty and to see to the spiritual and material welfare of all of humanity.⁵¹

For Al-e Ahmad, his contemporary, Ali Shariati (1933 – 1977), and other social and political critics who galvanized revolution in 1978/9, Islam offers a way out of Enlightenment modernity's social and political constructions of time, promising an alternative space of progress that does not imitate the West. In the next chapter, I explain why Islamism has failed to effect ways of being and knowing in today's Iran untethered to racialized positivism, the province of Europe's empty homogenous time, as Al-e Ahmad et al. expected it would.

My concern in this chapter as in the larger project is with how Enlightenment racism orders social and political constructions of time to model cultural, political, and material progress. Al-e Ahmad and Lowe alike concede but for different reasons and in different contexts (the breadth of their combined works testifying to the structure and reach of Enlightenment metaphysics) that the *logos* of racial modernity is especially buoyed by discourses of capitalist modernity (i.e., “security, open borders, no walls”). Weststruckness as a shorthand for the bourgeois identifications levied by capitalist modernity, like whitestruckness as a racial

50. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi* 95.

51. *Ibid.* 96.

alienation, qualifies Iranians for recognition as modern subjects. Theirs is what Tony Brown describes as an “enlightenment problematic,” relevant in Iran after its encounter with the West because while Iranians before this contact perceived themselves as an enlightened people progressively moving through time as proper subjects of their own *historia*, colonialist discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries assigned Iranians a-temporality, denying them the privilege of time as a moving marker in World History.⁵²

Nationalizing Iran

If we read Al-e Ahmad’s “Weststruckness” (Westoxification) as “whitestruckness” (whitetoification), a different genealogy materializes: one in which the Pahlavi programs that made Iran/ians especially receptive (vulnerable) to European and American industries exploit but do not invent the “‘isms’ and ideologies” Al-e Ahmad bemoans. It is my argument that Iran’s “claim to a core identity,” in other words, “a national essence, born in a barely perceptible mythic past and remaining pure down to the present, despite [vicissitudes]” has, from its inception, dubbed or sampled white forms to make Iran/ians legible as racially modern.⁵³ Specifically, social and political thought in nineteenth-century Iran “[grafted] Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment modes of thought onto a Persianate cultural idiom and in the process recast Iran into modern national form.”⁵⁴ Akhundzadeh’s scholarship, credited with “[founding] modern literary criticism in Iran,” notably, “his seminal treatise, *Alefba-ye Jadid* (1863) [...] in which he decried the deficiencies of the Arabic alphabet and proposed a modification of the

52. Brown, Tony C. *The Primitive, The Aesthetic, and the Savage: An Enlightenment Problematic* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

53. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 64.

54. Ibid. 66.

script or its complete substitution by either the Latin or Cyrillic alphabet in the writing of Ottoman and Persian,” is especially influential to this effect.⁵⁵ I invoke Akhundzadeh by name because his research locates Iranian essence in Aryan mythology; rather than equip the emergent nation/alism of nineteenth century Iran with an emic *logos*, he leans on Euro-Enlightenment race science—recall that the instruments of this science are calibrated to measure the progress of Europe’s and not a universal or generic Man—to enumerate Iranian nation/alism as race/ism (as Human/ism), passing the buck of race pathology (Humanist pathology) to Arabs and to Islam, in his genealogy, Iran’s Other. I want to suggest that Akhundzadeh’s historiography resonates today to make Iranians legible (to themselves and to others, *pace* not Hegel but Fanon) as racially modern, more to the point, as essentially white. Akhundzadeh’s nation/alism was choreographed by a chronopolitical concern about how to “[construct] Iran as a modern subject of history”:⁵⁶

Akhundzadeh’s association of Arab cultural and ethnic characteristics with what he decried as undesirable and anti-modern practices in Islam reflected the synthesis of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought in his construction of Iranian political-historical consciousness. From Enlightenment thought came an abstract notion of civilization and progress, while from post-Enlightenment thought he seems to have borrowed a racialized understanding of modernity in which traits he designated ‘Arab-Islamic’ were labeled antimodern. The lack of progress and civilization that he argued were endemic to Iranian society were said to be caused by Iran’s long association with Arab-Islamic culture.⁵⁷

55. Parsinejad, Iraj. *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran, 1866 – 1951* (IBEX Publishers, 2006) 44; Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 66.

56. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 76.

57. *Ibid.* 71.

Akhundzadeh, who was ethnically Azeri (Turkic)—as well, “his mother was descended from an African slave in the service of Nadir Shah”⁵⁸—bemoans the “lack of progress and civilization” in Iran, enumerating the stagnation of Iran’s social and political structures in *Maktubat-e Kamal al-Dowleh* (1863), a text in which he intervenes in “the [...] institutions of monarchic despotism and clerical legalism...to carve out a new public sphere ruled by reason and unencumbered by religious or political despotism and absolutism,” as the effect of regional influence from “the barefoot and hungry Arabs” who “twelve hundred years ago produced [Iran’s] misery.’ It was their ‘violent assault,’” he asserts, “that ‘caused [Iran’s] backwardness.’”⁵⁹ Akhundzadeh “seems to have followed the logic of nineteenth-century racial thought” born in Hegel’s Europe, “which classified national groups according to a hierarchy of racial attributes.”⁶⁰ While he “made no direct reference to the Aryan theory,” he “did periodically refer to the work of Ernest Renan, who, along with Max Muller and others, was amongst the most important popularizers of the Aryan theory in nineteenth-century Europe.”⁶¹ Historian Afshin Marashi thus deduces that “the racialized undertones of [Akhundzadeh’s] polemic against the Arabs and his romantic descriptions of Iranian antiquity can best be understood as extensions of [the] broader, popularized Aryan mythology.”⁶² I agree with Marashi that Akhundzadeh’s was a strategic

58. Ibid. 67.

Nasir Shah was the monarch of Iran between 1736 and 1747 known for his military prowess, sometimes described as the “Napoleon of Persia” or the “Second Alexander.” See Axworthy, Michael. *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (I.B. Tauris, 2009); Tucker, Ernest. *Nadir Shah’s Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (University of Florida Press, 2006); and Tucker, Ernest. “Nadir Shah and the Ja’fari Mazhab reconsidered,” *Iranian Studies* 27: 1-4 (Routledge, 1994) 163 – 179.

59. Dabashi, Hamid. *Persophilia: Persian Culture on the Global Scene* (Harvard University Press, 2015) 75; Akhundzadeh, Mirza Fath ‘Ali. *Maktubat-e Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzadeh*, ed. M. Sohbdam (Mard-e Emruz, 1985) 20, 31, 32, qtd. in Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 72.

60. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 73.

61. Ibid. 73.

racism; “race science was no abstract scientific pronouncement” in his treatment “but a way of asserting Iran as an equal and authentic member of [the] trans-European modernity” that was taking shape in the nineteenth century.⁶³

More than half a century before the structuralist critique of Jacques Lacan, Iranian intellectuals like Akhundzadeh understood the linguistic-ontological assembly of social and political constructions like racial differences. They looked towards the ordering mechanisms of Enlightenment Europe to qualify Iran/ians as a player on a world stage, merging the tenets of race science (“scientific knowledge”) with the Indo-European classification of languages (“ethno-linguistic genealogies of humankind”) to identify a new ontological category specific to Iranian and Indian persons: the Indo-European.⁶⁴ Marashi elaborates,

Although Aryan theory is most often remembered as part of the history of European anti-Semitism, its importance also extended for the formation of Iranian and Indian national consciousness. The discovery of the Indo-European family of languages by Sir William Jones in 1786 suggested that languages such as Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Persian, German, and Celtic were all descended from a common linguistic ancestor. Although somewhat displaced by the controversies surround the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1850), the Indo-European hypothesis became widely accepted in the mid-

62. Ibid. 74-45.

63. Ibid.75.

64. Marashi explains, “Iran and India were the only two extra-European cultural zones positioned at the peak of the nineteenth-century racial hierarchies, alongside the advanced European states and in contradistinction to the Semitic, Turkic, Mongol, and Aboriginal ethno-linguistic families. Nineteenth-century cultural science implied that Iran and India, unlike other groups, possessed a proto-Aryan national essence that could be reformed and redeemed by modernity” (Ibid. 75).

This strategy seems to have worked. Marashi notes, “Since the formation of the Indo-European hypothesis in the nineteenth century, Indian and Iranian nationalists, as well as European anthropologists and philologists, had noted the cultural continuity between the two nations in the pre-Islamic period. Not only a common linguistic bond but also a common religious history was perceived to tie India and Iran together” (Ibid. 116).

nineteenth century, popularized as the most advanced form of scientific knowledge accounting for the ethno-linguistic genealogy of humankind.⁶⁵

Persian-*cum*-white nationalism in the nineteenth century collapsed ethnic and linguistic particularities to obscure a record of non-Persian native peoples like Arabs, Balochis, Kurds, Gilanis, Mazanderanis, Loris, Qashqais, Bakhtiaris and Armenians, and as well, non-Persian native languages like those belonging to “Semitic, Turkic, Mongol, and Aboriginal ethno-linguistic families” from its national profile.⁶⁶ I want to suggest that this nationalism, which grabbed at the universalism of Humanist genealogy (epistemology), not unlike nationalization in Pahlavi Iran, appropriates the chronopolitical order of Hegel’s Europe. Marashi’s analysis invites us to imagine what was required of Iranians to write themselves into modern historiography as its proper subjects, stated another way, to participate in a universalism that is actuality a particularity: racial whiteness. Iranians understood and reproduced, because modern historiography *qua* epistemology required them to, the Enlightenment *logos* whereby “the subject, to be a subject, needs an object.”⁶⁷ To make themselves legible as proper subjects of History effected by Enlightenment cartography, Iranians objectified Others as they had been objectified by a metaphysics in which “the subject of modernity—namely, the male, white, middle- or upper-class Euro-American—in order to become the subject, has objectified the ‘subaltern’ inhabitants of the world, women, Third World peoples, the indigenous proletariat,

65. Ibid. 73.

66. Ibid. 75.

67. Vahdat, Farzin. *God and Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse University Press, 2002) xiv.

Davari-Ardakani characterizes colonial modernity as the political arm of Humanism *qua* racism, writing that “domination is an inherent part of the culture of [Euro-Enlightenment] modernity.” He further speculates that to count as a subject in this humanist regime, “every subject needs an object of domination” (Ibid. 189, 190).

immigrants, and minorities,” assuming Europe’s white gaze to curate a national image in contradistinction to the “Arab-Islamic”.⁶⁸

Constitutionalizing Iran

The conceptual framework for nationalist identifications engineered by Akhundzadeh and his ilk “circulated within only a narrow stratum of society,” among the elite and intelligentsia.⁶⁹ It was the constitutional movement of the early twentieth century that politicized and popularized “the cultural and philosophical process of reconstruction that [Akhundzadeh] and others pioneered” by using media technologies, specifically, “the burgeoning of a journalistic print culture [to circulate] nationalism beyond the culturally heterodox elites.”⁷⁰ I want to suggest that constitutionalism escalated Weststruckness *qua* whitestruckness insofar as “the national project that began to take shape after 1911, succeeding and responding to the politically ecumenical interlude of the constitutional era, was directly descended from the version of Iranian nationalism first conceived by Akhundzadeh’s generation.”⁷¹ Constitutionalists like politician and polemicist Syyyed Hasan Taqizadeh were likewise “steeped in [...] European historical and philosophical scholarship.”⁷² Taqizadeh, not ethnically Persian but Azeri, wrote regularly about Iranian nationalist culture from his post in Berlin, where he founded the first modern pro-German Iranian political party, *Ferqeh-ye Demokra-e Iran*, in 1909 and the influential periodical *Khaveh* (1916 – 1922), a political and literary journal that contributed to the popularization of Iranian

68. Ibid. xv.

69. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 76.

70. Ibid. 76.

71. Ibid. 77.

72. Ibid. 79.

national consciousness. Taqizadeh's writings advised Iran/ians to mime European (white) forms, "[typifying] the prevailing sentiment" in constitutional Iran that "for Iran to be prosperous, it must outwardly and inwardly, in body and in spirit, become Europeanized, and unconditionally promote European-style civilization."⁷³ Iranians in his account must become and are not essentially, as Akhundzadeh et al. suggest, racially modern. The civilizational discourse he invokes is none other than the chronopolitics of Enlightenment Europe's race science. But while Akhundzadeh names Iranians *qua* Aryans as a modern people who can lead the charge of human progress, Taqizadeh accepts Iran's stagnation in modern historiography.⁷⁴ Praising Europe's positivism and progress, which he claims Iran/ians essentially lack, Taqizadeh writes in 1918,

Some have argued that those who study the nations of Asia and Africa do so with the political political motives of the European powers and work to prevent the freedom and independence of the societies. ...But others in my opinion do so for the greater good of knowledge. ...Some of them have been heroes of the weak nations and done great service to them against the interest of their own nations. They have rescued objects by archeology. ...Manuscripts have been edited and published...all of this has helped the nations of the East to regain their identity. ...They (Europeans) know more about our history and cultural than we do. ...Not one Iranian knows Pahlavi...it is only because of Europeans who deciphered the old scripts of Avestan, Sanskrit, and Pahlavi that today we know about our kings and ancestors. ...Iranians must become aware of their ancient culture and their thinkers, artists, and kings so that they will be aware of their great nation

73. Nasr, Vali. *The Rise of Islamic Capitalism: Why the New Muslim Middle Class Is the Key to Defeating Extremism* (Free Press, 2010) 94.

74. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 79.

in the past before Islam and for what race they derived from, how they have reached their current condition, and how to regain their original greatness as a nation.⁷⁵

In Taqizadeh's account, Europe/eans are the arbiters of all knowledge, even (especially) of knowledge about Iran, which boomerangs to effect (alienate) self-knowledge. I agree with Marashi that "Taqizadeh's construction of Iran's national past [is] entirely derivative of European scholarship," especially with his analysis that Taqizadeh appropriates "the cultural and philosophical apparatus [of Orientalism]...to forge [the image of a] reconstructed Iran capable of participating in modernity"⁷⁶ as Humanist-*cum*-racist genealogy. Despite the differences inherent to their political and intellectual projects, Taqizadeh like Akhundzadeh locates Iran as a coordinate in the space-time assembled by Enlightenment Europe; that is, neither Taqizadeh nor Akhundzadeh untether Iran from Europe's social and political constructions of time or chronopolitical schematic. They concede that Europe/eans authors the/ir world, dispensing its tape in one direction, and consequently, that only Europeans (in Akhundzadeh's summation, inclusive of Indo-Europeans) can arrive at the kind of self- mastery and knowledge (as mastery and knowledge of the Other) appropriate to modernity.

Farzin Vahdat explains that the period following Constitutional Revolution (1906 – 1911) was typified by a national unification program (*vahdat-eh melli*) that sought the political, ethical, and social unification of the peoples living within the contemporary boundaries of Iran. ...Unity entailed not only preserving Iran's political independence and territorial integrity but also universalizing the Persian language, abolishing regional differences in clothing and mores, removing the decentralized sovereignty of local

75. Qtd. in Ibid. 80 – 81.

76. Ibid. 80, 81.

magnates (*mulak al-tavayef*), and homogenizing the different ethnic and tribal groups.

...Thus the idea of national unity implied a strong and centralized state.⁷⁷

The nationalization underway by the time Reza Shah Pahlavi assumed power in 1925, in an Iran overrun by the instability, disease and famine induced by British and Russians infighting during the First World War, like the nationalization prescribed by Akhundzadeh et al. decades prior, was animated by “a growing awareness of Iran’s technological and economic backwardness vis-à-vis Europe and the United States.”⁷⁸ Its project catered to (reproduced) the chronopolitical sensibilities of positivist modernity, especially in the period between 1911 and 1925, during which time “Iranian intellectuals became almost obsessed with industrialization, science, technology, and the ideology of developmentalism” in their writings about nation and state.⁷⁹ They suggested changes to the state like the “[creation of] a unified national military” and the “[expansion of] the streamlining the national bureaucracy,” and as well, a national unification

77. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 79.

78. Ibid. 75.

A 1920 report submitted by the Iranian delegation to the General Assembly of the League of Nations reads, “At the beginning of the war of 1914 – 1918, the Persian government, anxious to continue its historic traditions, solemnly declared its neutrality. ...Despite her neutrality, Persia has been a battlefield during the world cataclysm. Her richest provinces in the north and northeast have been ravaged, divided and disorganized by the Turco-Russian forces. ...Towns and villages have been pillaged and burned, and hundreds of thousands of men were compelled to say a lasting farewell to their beloved homes to find death from hunger and cold far from their native provinces. [In] Tehran, a city of about 500,000 inhabitants, 90,000 persons died of famine for want of bread; since the big lines of communication were cut by the invaders. All [of the local] governments which followed each other during the war were faced with insurmountable difficulties which arose from the violation of Persian neutrality. The food providing provinces of Persia—such as Mazenderan, Gilan, Azerbaijan, Hamadan and Kirmanshahan—which were rich in corn, rice other cereals, were unable to produce anything, owing to the lack of labour and the want of security: family, that pitiless scourge, ruled over the great part of the country and spread ruin and death among its people. ...It is with deep emotion that we mention the high figure of our loss in man-power—a cruel loss of 300,000 men, massacred by the sword of the invader” (qtd. In Majd, Mohammad Gholi. *The Great Famine and Genocide in Persia, 1917 – 1919* (University of Press America, 2003) 8).

79. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 80.

project that, I want to suggest, reinforces the racial (racist) modernity of nineteenth century nationalist thought.⁸⁰ Vahdat elaborates,

[An] essential element in the transition to a positivist approach to modernity was the emergence of a monolithic nationalism. Among previous generations of Iranian intellectuals, nationalism had consisted of a duality, with nostalgic notions about Iran's past—especially its pre-Islamic past—and Iranian identity, on the one hand, and democratic notions and the rule of law and popular sovereignty on the other. ...During this period of transition, however, a nostalgic nationalism that cast Arabs and Turks as the 'other' gradually eclipsed any democratic notion of nationhood.⁸¹

Programs for positivism and progress in constitutionalist Iran were not without their detractors. Cleric and historian Seyyed Ahmad Kasravi (1890 – 1946), like Akhundzadeh and Taqizadeh, ethnically Azeri, a “theoretician and activist in the unification and integration [of Iran] and a foremost theorist of utopian nationalism in Iran,” was one prominent critic.⁸² His writings were especially prescient insofar as they preempt Al-e Ahmad's call for an alternative cosmology or worlding—I elaborate in the next section, a different enlightenment or *rushanfekri* that might yield an/Other *qua* Islamic modernity—two decades later. In *Varjavand Bonyad* (in

80. Ibid. 80.

81. Ibid. 80-81.

82. Ibid. 85.

Vahdat biographizes Kasravi thus: “Seyyed Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946) was born into a clerical family in Hukmavar near Tabriz. His father, though he was an orthodox (*mutishar'i*) mullah, maintained good relations with the lesser dogmatic mullahs. ...Because Kasravi was expected to continue the clerical line in his family, his upbringing was highly disciplined and he received a traditional religious education. Later, in 1915, while teaching Arabic at an American missionary school, he would also study English. ...During this period, he developed a sympathy for the Constitutional movement; indeed, he would begin to work on his history of the movement while employed by the Ministry of Justice (1920–30), whose mission...was the secularize and codify legal procedures in Iran” (Ibid. 85-86).

English, *The Sacred Foundation*), first published in 1943, “written in a pure Persian that Kasravi described as ‘prophetic’ language” and which “contains many of his philosophical views,” he⁸³

criticizes Western modernity and the violence prevalent in Europe, especially the bloodshed during the Second World War. The “movement of science” or progress, he argues, has wreaked havoc in its European birthplace; indeed, “it has given rise to much harm. In Europe, which is the cradle of this movement, ever since these sciences have become prevalent and new gadgets for living...are employed, life has become so much more difficult, to the point that many people escape not only the sciences but also civilization and seek to return to the simple life of the nomadic era. In Europe there is either war, insecurity and slaughter for the youth or unemployed and poverty for the masses.”⁸⁴

But even this reproach entrenches Euro-Enlightenment “‘isms’ and ideologies”. Instead of dispelling with the social and political structures inherent to Western Europe, Kasravi incorporates them into his schematic for alternative modernity. To substantiate the argument that although “the human species...belong at the top of the hierarchy of creation...the ultimate will belongs to the creator,” in other words, that human persons might better understand their place as “[‘overseers’] (*jahanban*) of the orderly world created by God,” Kasravi elaborates mind-body distinctions derivative of race science in Enlightenment Europe. His distinctions pivot on “‘isms’ and ideologies” that typify persons of color in imperial Europe as peoples governed by senses and appetites (sins) of the flesh; these “‘isms’ and ideologies” further reserve designations of

83. Ibid. 86; Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran* 189.

“*Varjavand Bonyad*” is also sometimes translated as “*Sacred Principles*”.

84. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 86; Kasravi, Ahmad. *Varjavand Bonyad* (The Sacred Foundation) (Tehran: Elmi, 1961) 87.

capacity of reason for the white body of Humanist universality as that site of transcendence.⁸⁵

Kasravi writes, “the mind (*ravan*) [stands] for ‘reason, thought, understanding, modesty, humility, and similar commendable characteristics’—he lists the pragmatic and bourgeois sensibilities that in imperial Europe (and as well, I argue, in *gharbzadeh* Iran) signify mastery as a white inheritance—“whereas the body (*jan*) [represents] ‘evil qualities,’ namely, caprice, avarice, envy, wrath, spite, ostentation, sycophancy, and tyranny.” Indeed, Kasravi figures

the body and mind [as] opposite essences, always in conflict. When one side [grows] stronger, the other side [becomes] weaker. The person whose mind [is] in control over the body [keeps] the body in line and [averts] desire (*hava*) and other evil qualities.

Conversely, when the body became dominant, base qualities [take] over, and truth [is] shunned. ... This is what happened in Europe, where, “as the sciences advanced, the blunder of materialism occurred, and this blunder became a great deception, with [grave] consequences. The pundits who considered the universe [to consist of] merely this tangible material system, did not view man but as corporeal and sensual. They believed the wellspring of mans’ wants and deeds, just like [that of] animals’, to lie in selfishness and thus [they] believed conflict and struggle to be inevitable.” ... To overcome the problems of the modern world and rectify the tragic consequences of materialism, Kasravi laid down the principles of a cosmology... dominated by [the] notion of order and organization: “This is a systematized world in which needs are satisfied. It rotates and does not rest; it is never impaired. If we observe the rotation of the earth and the stars, if we look into the birth of humans and animals, if we consider the growth of trees and plants, they are all based on an order and everything has its place. The [reason why] the sciences have advanced so much and each has created a great space for itself [is that],

85. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 87.

more than anything else, they discuss the order and orderliness of the world. And the more they advance, the more the order and greatness of the world comes to light.”⁸⁶

Kasravi’s concern is not with the “deceptions” and “consequences” of a materialist culture that, in his estimation, has “blundered” Enlightenment Europe, but with the positivism and progress Enlightenment Europe ascribes to Man’s willed ascension from a state of nature (pace Hobbes) to the Cogito (pace Descartes). Rather than abandon the language of positivism and progress inherent to Humanist *logos*, he recalculates positivism and progress as manifestation God’s will. In the cosmology he enumerates, Man is not the agent or master of his world but the “overseer” or manager of the orderly world created by God. Kasravi thus does not simulate a break between the divine and natural worlds as Enlightenment modernity does (in ideology, if not in practice); instead, he marries the divine and natural worlds by assigning a social role to religion, Vahdat explains, by “[calling] for religion to serve the cause of social integration,” that is, national unification.⁸⁷ Kasravi writes, “Many see no need for religion. But there is much need for it. Religion is the highest road of life. If it did not exist, each group would take up a different path and become misled and dispersed.”⁸⁸ He appropriates, despite a disdain for Western Europe’s materialist culture, Euro-Enlightenment constructions of time to conceptualize a cosmology in

86. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 86-87; Kasravi, *Varjavand Bonyad* 38, 3.

87. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 88.

88. Kasravi, *Varjavand Bonyad* 75, qtd. in Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 88.

Vahdat elaborates, “The upshot of Kasravi’s preoccupation with order and social integration was the form-ulation of an extreme puritanical rationality in which the category of ‘reason’ as order enjoyed the highest status. Kasravi became infamous for his extreme criticism of those elements of Persian culture he found at odds with his notions of order and ‘rationality.’ Throughout his works, he denounced mysticism, intuition, poetry, metaphysics, and lyrical and Dionysian ideas as these were expressed in Persian poetry and even in philosophy. He even organized book burnings, in which those books he and his followers deemed harmful to a rational social order were destroyed. There was no place for his extreme ‘disenchanted’ world for imagination (*pendar*), which ‘is one of the basest human facilities. It is a bane [*asib*] in the world. All confusions arise, more than anything else, from imagination. ...Sciences must be followed and their results must be accepted. ...Following imagination and speculation [*gaman*] and speaking of unfathomable categories [misleads] people” (Kasravi, *Varjavand Bonyad* 164 – 165, qtd. in Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 88).

which Iranians are led by the hand of God towards a single, seemingly enlightened path. Kasravi's cosmology instructs Iranians to walk a tape that can only dispense the world in one direction: forwards—onwards and upwards—indeed, to assemble their persons in a teleological march. To be “misled and dispersed,” which is to say, to walk an/Other path or no path at all in a world overdetermined by Europe's social and political constructions of time, as we shall see in Googoosh's music video for “Behesht” (in English, “Paradise” or “Eden”), is to meet with a “dead end.” That he associates the material or sensual body with base carnality and the mind as that implement of reason with transcendence further suggests that Kasravi leans on social and political constructions of time born in Hegel's Europe to narrativize religion's social function.

Pahlavi Nationalization

Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925 – 1941), who as a military officer in the Cossack Brigade, a unit that until 1920 was commanded by the Russian army, led the British-backed coup in 1921 that ousted Ahmad Shah, the sitting Qajar monarch, from power, sought in his governance

to affirm the existence of an Iranian nation characterized by a congruence of state institutions, social structures, and cultural forms—a congruence that was the defining characteristic of modern nations. The shah was thus conjuring up, in what Benedict Anderson called “the magic of nationalism,” an intangible yet vivid abstraction, linking together a set of implicit social, cultural, and political assumptions. . . . The shah's referencing of ancient Iranian culture implied a return to a primary authenticity associated with that period.⁸⁹

Marashi characterizes the nationalism to emerge in Reza Shah's Iran, during “the first political era in which the [Iranian] state self-consciously used nationalism as its ideology,” in other words,

89. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 4.

the first political era in which it fashioned an “imagined community” to facilitate bureaucratic interests, as essentially *gharbzadeh*, overdetermined by a grammar of relationality imported from Western Europe.⁹⁰ While the era of Reza Shah’s Iran did not introduce white identifications to the body politic —nationalists influenced by Akhundzadeh had traced the origins of the Persian people to an Aryan bloodline by the 1890s⁹¹—it standardized racial whiteness as a “style of imagination”, more to the point, as a “mode of consciousness” tethered to the nation as “a viable and tangible social abstraction” that “[assumes] the congruence of state, society, and culture in a uniform set of institutional arrangements and as a coherent system of representation.”⁹² Marashi elaborates that the nationalization of this period was “made possible by, and premised upon, the emergence of the nation as a conceptual category and the more profound structural transformations at the level of state, society, and culture which the new category signifies.”⁹³ Recall that nationalism as a “style of imagination” or “mode of consciousness” untethered to institutions was conceptually underway by the time Reza Shah ascended to the throne in 1925, germane to the “literary and philosophical [patterns] among late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Iranian intellectuals.”⁹⁴ Akhundzadeh’s “discovery” of inherently modern values in a pre-Islamic past became the site of Reza Shah origin story or “the philosophical sleight of hand [he] needed to reconstruct Iranian culture in terms of [the] universalized values of modernity” born in Hegel’s Europe.⁹⁵ Marashi enumerates Reza Shah’s revisionist impulse thus:

90. Ibid. 7.

91. Ibid. 66.

92. Ibid. 10, 11.

93. Ibid. 11.

94. Ibid. 136.

95. Ibid. 85, 13.

Decidedly modern benchmarks of progress such as universal education, advanced scientific knowledge, and the equality of women were inscribed into the past as part of the attempt to reform and strengthen Iranian society in accord with the cultural demands of modernity. Nationalist intellectuals agitated to make this version of Iran's past the official culture of the state, a reservoir of symbols to be shared by all Iranians.⁹⁶

Like Akhundzadeh, who bemoaned the chronopolitical (racial) pox of Arab-Islamic culture on Iranian lands and peoples more than half a decade earlier—his seminal texts, *Alefba-ye Jadid* and *Maktubat-e Kamal al-Dowleh*, were transcribed in 1863—the historiography commissioned by Reza Shah figured pre-Islamic Iran as the “template for a national history” that could be ossified as a natural history. In this genealogy, “nineteenth-century standards of progress and modernity” born in Hegel's Europe are innate to Iranians as Aryans. Reza Shah's accounting of the “imagined community” thus elaborated what Iranian nationalism has since its inception identified as a “them”: the “Arab-Islamic”, to construct Iran's “us” as Indo-Europeans.⁹⁷ I have already suggested that the chronopolitical calculus intuited by Reza Shah's (Akhundzadeh's) nationalization strategy, which collapses ethnic differences to make Iran/ians *qua* Persians eligible for racial modernity, is an implement of a race science that spatializes time to measure the progress of Europe's, not a universal or generic Man.

Reza Shah institutionalized this genealogy in the first history textbook his government commissioned. Marashi explains that “the production of textbooks was important” in Reza Shah's “pedagogic state” for “a number of reasons”:⁹⁸ While, “on a practical level, it enabled the state to standardize the education of its citizens,” figuratively, “textbooks were markers of

96. Ibid. 136.

97. Ibid. 85.

98. Ibid. 98.

modernity [and] also of nationalism. Written in the national language [Persian] and distributed [by] the institutions of the state,” and sometimes “adorned with national symbols” like images of Reza Shah “on the book’s frontplate,” textbooks in Pahlavi Iran “became conspicuous markers of modernity just as they were conspicuous markers of nationalism.”⁹⁹ Marashi elaborates, “In keeping with the broader knowledge of educational policy under Reza Shah, the nationalization of education” enacted by standardized textbooks “was a strategy meant to negotiate between the parochialism of national identity and the universalism of modern knowledge.”¹⁰⁰ Which is to say, as Marashi does, “Textbooks allowed Iranians to participate in a universal modernity but also placed that participation within the framework of a distinctive national culture;” Pahlavi textbooks, specifically, married emic (Iranian) forms to etic (*gharbzadeh*) forms by inscribing etic forms as native to Iranian lands and peoples, plainly put, by writing European (Aryan) ancestry into Iran’s origin story.¹⁰¹ Hasan Pirniya (Moshir al-Dowleh), author of the three-thousand page “definitive Persian-language account of Iran’s pre-Islamic history” *Iran-e Bastan* (in English, *Ancient Iran*), a condensed version of which, *Iran-e Qadim* (1928), “[became] the most important work of historiography produced during the Reza Shah years”¹⁰²—Pirniya wrote *Iran-e Bastan/Iran-e Qadim* on assignment for the Commission on Education, a special committee of Iran’s Ministry of Education—canonized the revisionist historiography Reza Shah required to make Iranians legible, to themselves and to others, as racially modern.¹⁰³ As “the first history textbook published under the auspices of the Ministry of Education,” made standard for

99. Ibid. 98.

100. Ibid. 98.

101. Ibid. 98.

102. Ibid. 99.

103. Ibid. 101.

students in middle school, Pirniya's text "[weaves] together and [negotiates] between different styles of historical writing, such as traditional Persianate myth-history and modern rationalist historiography, European scholarship of the nineteenth century and the new sentiment of nationalism emerging under Reza Shah" to effect "a unique text that combined these elements in a new framework" that both "[acknowledged] the dominance of a universal modernity while situating that modernity within an Iranian context."¹⁰⁴ He

[begins] his narrative [...] with geography, describing the rivers, mountains, lakes, and vegetation of the Iranian plateau, much in the style of nineteenth-century European natural history. ...He then [describes] the Aryan migration that had populated the land, digressing into a discussion of the racial characteristics of the early Iranians. He used a common European fivefold racial system consisting of the categories white, yellow, red, black, and 'mixed', and he explicitly used the Indo-European theory to situate the early Iranians. The 'white-skinned race', which he made clear included the Iranians, was the Indo-European peoples. He [even] brought in anthropological theories about Indo-European migration onto the plateau: "On the subject of the migrations of the Aryans to Iran, many scholars believe that they arrived on the plateau two thousand years B.C., but more recent scholars argue that it was fourteen hundred years B.C." We observe Pirniya, therefore, directly appropriating the vocabulary and categories of nineteenth-century anthropological theories of race and geography as a new beginning for his narrative of Iranian history. ...In doing so, he took Iranian myth-history and resituated it within a modernist historiography of nationalism. For him, as perhaps for us, this new narrative point of departure did not seem to be an act of replacing one set of myths with another.

104. Ibid. 101-102.

His intention was instead to infuse Iranian history with the most advanced forms of knowledge in order to restructure Iranian historical consciousness.¹⁰⁵

The marriage of anthropological knowledge and geographical knowledge as cartographical knowledge in Pirniya's (Reza Shah's) mapping of space-time thus sampled or dubbed "the style of nineteenth-century European natural history"—natural history is the historiography effected by Enlightenment race science—to suggest that Iran is always already, by which I mean, essentially a white nation of Indo-European (Persianate-*cum*-white) people.

The historiography Pirniya penned and the Ministry of Education distributed in Reza Shah's Iran greased Iran's emergence as a coeval player on the world stage, including diplomacy efforts like Reza Shah's 1935 petition to the League of Nations, in which he requested the League's mostly European member states to formally recognize Persia as Iran. As "a transliteration of the French *aryen*," "Iran" identified its modern nation-state as a natural "land of Aryans"¹⁰⁶—a move that (re)classified Persia in Western discourse (the only discourse to circulate globally as knowledge) as an Aryan homeland but did not effect nationalist identifications inside Iran, which were already whitestruck. Name change institutionalized the white nationalism already in circulation inside Iran, remaking the image of the Iranian nation in a vernacular receptive to Hitler's race war. Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–1978), who held the title *Aryanmehr* (in English, "Light of the Aryans") during his precarious tenure as Iran's monarch, further launched a "White Revolution" between 1958 and 1963 to save Iran/ians from the social and political degeneracy associated with racial differences

105. Ibid. 103.

106. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi explains, "The now ubiquitous concept of the 'Aryan race' first appeared in Iran in the 1890s. Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, one of the ideologues of a particularly bigoted version of Iranian nationalism, was the first to ever refer to it in writing. Interestingly, he spelled it *àriyàn* (آریان), a transliteration of the French *aryen*. Later, Sadegh Rezazadeh Shafagh came up with *àriyâyi*, the term now usually used in Persian." See "Iranian Identity, the 'Aryan Race,' and Jake Gyllenhaal," Tehran Bureau, *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, 06 August 2010. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/08/post-2.html>>.

in the representational (citation) practices of Enlightenment historiography. Of his many reforms, Mohammad Reza Shah imposed mandatory dress and hygiene codes, built public schools and libraries, extended healthcare to rural communities, invited unveiled women to vote in elections, and privatized industry to create a resilient middle class of factory owners, to say nothing of the sweeping reforms he sought as part of a land redistribution program engineered to gain favor with the Iranian peasantry. Like his father before him, who built a modern transportation system (by 1941, the country's railroads spanned the full length of north to south and east to west) and the manufacturing plants that birthed Iran's robust industrial working class, Mohammad Reza Shah orchestrated nationalization and statecraft (I argue, nationalization *qua* statecraft)

not only [as] an exercise in internal political consolidation and cultural homogenization; it was also an attempt to project an image outward to the world, declaring a nation's compatibility with and desire to join the new universalisms of modernity. This authenticity or worthiness of a national culture was inherently measured in terms of its status within, or its contribution to, 'world civilization.' It was this reasoning that made the Indo-European theory so attractive to Iranian nationalists in the nineteenth century and encouraged cultural bureaucrats during the Reza Shah period to find elements of Iranian tradition that would be deemed worthy by international standards.¹⁰⁷

The Alternative Modernity That Never Was

Although Islam and the Middle East have been mostly analyzed in juxtaposition and opposition to the modernity of the West, this modernity has always been posited in a linear and unidimensional fashion.

—Farzin Vahdat¹⁰⁸

107. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 129 – 130.

108. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* xviii.

Ahmad Fardid, a secular Hegelian philosopher, first coined the term *gharbzadeghi* in the 1940s, during Reza Shah's reign. It was adopted by Jalal Al-e Ahmad in 1961/2, and later, by professor of philosophy Reza Davari-Ardakani, who privileges Fardid's original usage to characterize Westoxification as anthropocentrism—the blind faith in Enlightenment Humanism—focusing his social and political critique on the discursive-material relations induced by the abstracted Human/ism of Enlightenment universals. Vahdat explains,

Davari-Ardakani dismissed Al-e Ahmad's notion of [Westoxification] as a disease incidental to science, industry, and modern culture, viewing modern science and technology as inseparable from modern culture. ... Davari-Ardakani returned to Fardid's original conception of [Westoxification] as the preponderance of 'egotistic' and 'narcissistic' over all other aspects of human existence. In the rise of the West, he maintained, a world had been created in which humans considered themselves the center and axiom of everything. The rise of subjectivity in the West had brought about the rise of modern science and the fall of the Truth (*Haq*), which had become occluded ever since Western humans had advanced their hubristic claims.¹⁰⁹

Davari-Ardakani, who published his seminal text, *Falsafe Chist?* (in English, *What is Philosophy?*) in 1980, during the time in which the Islamic Republic was just beginning to assemble itself, suspects that Al-e Ahmad never "understood that the Western tradition of 'humanism' constituted the core element of [Westoxification]," in other words, that "[Westoxification is] an affliction, first and foremost, of Westerners," which by the twentieth century and for reasons related to the economic imperialism Al-e Ahmad enumerates, "had come

109. Ibid.187.

to engulf all of humanity.”¹¹⁰ He specifically bemoans the Enlightenment mandate to know “humans as the Truth [*Haq*],” elaborating *gharbzadeghi*’s origin story thus:

[Westoxification] began when man arrogantly claimed the status of the Truth [*Haq*] for himself and in the West this claim, knowingly and unknowingly, became the foundation of all ideologies, views, rules, institutions, and norms.¹¹¹

Davari-Ardakani suggests and I agree that *gharbzadeghi* is “the ontological [problem] of modernity,” stated another way, a *logos* for being and knowing in a globalized world that inherits its “‘isms’ and ideologies” from Hegel’s Human, a figure abstracted as white and male, who is the proper subject of the socio-political life Giorgio Agamben describes as *bios*.¹¹² He sought in his writings, which spanned more than a decade (1980 – 1995), “solutions” to this ontological problematic.¹¹³ He hoped that in turning away from the West, Iran’s revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state would also turn away from anthropocentrism, more to the point, would “[eradicate] subjectivity altogether,” seemingly, to induce a new human/ism untethered to Enlightenment metaphysics—one that accepts God’s (not capitalism’s) invisible hand—or, dispensing with the language of the human altogether (all language), to curate a new materialism.¹¹⁴ In his 1982 treatise, *Enqelab-e Islami va Vaz’-e Kununi’ Alam* (in English, *The Islamic Revolution and the*

110. Ibid. 187.

111. Davari-Ardakani, Reza. *Falsafe Chist?* (What is Philosophy?) (Tehran: Iranian Academic of Philosophy, 1980) xix, qtd. in Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 187.

See also Davari-Ardakani, Reza. *Enqelab-e Islami va Vaz’-e Kununi’ Alam* (The Islamic Revolution and the current conditions of the world) (Tehran: ‘Alame Tabatabai Center for Culture, 1982); *Nasionalism, Hakemiyat-e Melli va Esteqlal* (Nationalism, National sovereignty and Independence) (Esfahan: Poresh, 1985); *Falsafe dar Bohran* (Philosophy in Crisis) (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1994); and “Rahbordha-ye Jadid-e Falsafe: Goftegu ba Doktor Reza Davari-Ardakani” (New Paths to Philosophy: Interview with Doctor Reza Davari-Ardakani), *Kayhan Farhangi* 12:124 (1995).

112. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 190; Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

113. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 190.

114. Ibid. 190.

current conditions of the world), Davari-Ardakani thus surmised (if demonstratively) that “the only true and effective anti-imperialist struggle is the one the Islamic movement in Iran has embarked on, which aims at eradicating the notion and practice of human autonomy.”¹¹⁵

In Davari-Ardakani’s reading, the economic imperialism Al-e Ahmad’s bemoans is a symptom and not the root cause of disease—in Al-e Ahmad’s assessment as well, alienation of self and society—which Davari-Ardakani attributes to a humanist genealogy that makes “domination [...] an inherent part of the culture of [its] modernity.”¹¹⁶ He speculates that economic imperialism—all imperialisms—function(s) as the political arm of Humanism as a racism, warning “the peoples of the Third World” that “by emulating the modern nations of the West,” I suggest, by succumbing to the chronopolitical order of Man, they “will at best become imperialists themselves.”¹¹⁷ While Davari-Ardakani intervenes in “ideologies, views, rules, institutions, and norms” induced by an epistemological mandate to know Humans as “the Truth”, Al-e Ahmad interrogates “pragmatism”, “scientism”, “positivism”, and other similar ‘isms” characteristic of Humanist epistemology. He suspects, in his own words, that

115. Ibid. 195.

Vahdat explains that Davari-Ardakani “was chiefly guided [...] not by Islamic sources, but by European counter-Enlightenment philosophers. Despite his hostility toward them, Davari-Ardakani has demonstrated a remarkably accurate understanding of the primary philosophers of modernity. Paraphrasing Heinrich Heine, he drew a direct line from Kant to Robespierre, portraying Kant as the designer and teacher and Robespierre as the journeyman who put Kant’s designs into practice. ... On many occasions, Davari-Ardakani has also referred to Hegel and the enormous but unrecognizable influence of his ideas on modernity. ... But he has found even Hegel’s philosophy of no use in ultimate, perfected expression of the revolution of subjectivity. ... For Davari-Ardakani, Nietzsche is the transitional figure in the quest to overcome modernity. Whereas, in Hegel, humans are self-conscious first and belong to nature, to which they must be reconciled, second, in Nietzsche, humans are animals [bare life] first and conscious second. ... He credits Heidegger with reversing ‘metaphysics’ altogether. ... The plight of modern humans, reflected in their inauthentic existence, is rooted in the fact that they are alienated from the Being (*Vujud*) and cannot hear its summons. ... It was Heidegger who demonstrated that the proper station of humans is to be attentive and heedful toward the Being. ... Indeed, by plumbing the depths of Western philosophy, Heidegger revealed the inner truth of the West, which can help liberate Iranians from the prison of [Westoxification]” (Ibid. 190 – 191).

116. Ibid. 189

117. Ibid. 190.

fascism and war-mongering [...] apart from the fact that they appear as the sequel to vigorous industrial expansion and the search for new markets to export goods [...] basically derive their manners and customs from machines, machines that are themselves the harvest of “pragmatism”, “scientism”, “positivism”, and other similar ‘isms.’”¹¹⁸

Which is to say, rather than challenge Al-e Ahmad’s interpretation, Davari-Ardakani’s elaboration of *gharbzadeghi* expounds what it might mean (indeed, what it might take) to instantiate the different world order Al-e Ahmad prefigures—one that, by his own account, resolutely “[aims] to eliminate poverty and to see to the spiritual and material welfare of all of humanity.” To clarify, Al-e Ahmad’s is not the humanity of Euro-Enlightenment but an altogether different human/ism, suggestive of an alternative modernity in which Iranians are neither slaves to nor (pace Davari-Ardakani) subjects of Humanist *logos* but occupants of an/Other distribution of space and time.¹¹⁹ Al-e Ahmad observes that alternative modernity requires alternative enlightenment as its condition of possibility. Vahdat explains,

To fill the empty self and restore authenticity to it, Al-e Ahmad proposed a concept he referred to as “rushanfekri”, a relatively recent Perso-Arabic coinage composed of *rushan*, meaning “enlighten,” and *fekr*, meaning “thought.” Whereas *rushanfekr* in modern Persian is roughly equivalent to “intellectual,” *rushanfekri*, at least as used by Al-e Ahmad here, may be translated as “enlightenment.” Indeed, explaining what he meant by *rushanfekri* in *Dar Khedmat va Khianat Rushanfekran* (On the services and treasons of intellectuals [*sic*]) [1969], he offered almost a textbook definition of the Western Enlightenment: “...*Rushanfekri* is a period in which man is cut off from natural elements... and his destiny is separated from that of nature. [He] finds himself alone vis-à-vis his destiny, without any celestial or terrestrial support... forced to act relying on

118. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 166.

119. *Ibid.* 96.

himself only, without any expectations from the Outside or the Sublime world... to choose, to be free and responsible.”¹²⁰

Indeed, “among the most important meanings [Al-e Ahmad] attached to *rushanfekri* was an ideal representing both the exact opposite of, and the antidote to, [Westoxification].”¹²¹ His student, Ali Shariati, drew on Al-e Ahmad’s formulation of *rushanfekri qua* enlightenment to “[insist] that each society should achieve modern enlightenment (*rushanfekri*) based on its own history, culture, and language,” and as well, its own *time*.¹²² His writings, which incited popular support for Ayatollah Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini as Iran’s Supreme Leader,

assailed the West for attempting to impose its own kind of enlightenment on the rest of the world [writing,] “Since the eighteenth century, the West, with the aid of its sociologists, historians, writers, artists, and even its revolutionaries and humanists, has imposed on the world the thesis that there is only one kind of civilization, and that is the Western form.”¹²³

As imagined Shariati and Al-e Ahmad—clearer still in Davari-Ardakani’s reading, not inconsequentially, because he impresses the Humanist significance of “the Western form” of modernity—alternative enlightenment can induce a different civilizational order: one that does not inscribe Enlightenment modernity’s *logos*, in which Man is a sovereign and self-mastered subject, but that acknowledges human agency as an implement of God’s will. In *What is to be done: The Enlightened Thinkers and an Islamic Renaissance*, a collection of lectures he delivered in the 1970s, Shariati describes the *rushanfekr* (alternatively enlightened) person as someone who recognizes the disastrous effects of secularist modernity, specifically, as

120. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 117.

121. Ibid. 118.

122. Ibid. 139.

123. Ibid. 139; Shariati, Ali. “Bazgasht be Khish” (1976), qtd. in Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 139.

one who is aware of the existing social conflicts and real causes, who knows the needs of his age and his generation, who accepts responsibility for providing solutions as to how his society can be emancipated, who helps his society to shape and define its collective goals and objectives and, finally, who takes part in mobilizing and educating his static, ignorant society. In a world, a contemporary enlightened person should continue in the path of the prophets. His mission is to ‘guide’ and work for justice, his language is compatible with his time, and his proposed solutions conform to cultural values of his society.¹²⁴

Like Al-e Ahmad before him and Davari-Ardakani after him (but unlike Akhundzadeh and Pirniya, who admonish Islam as anti-modern), Shariati finds in Islam the sustenance for an alternative enlightenment-*cum*-modernity—one “compatible with [Iran’s] time.” And yet, the Shi’ite grammar he endorses as the *logos* for a new Iran, like Akhundzadeh et al.’s historiography, discerns Iran’s time from the time of its “Arab-Islamic” *qua* Sunni neighbors. Another project might intervene in the Sunni/Shi’ite distinction. I do not attempt this intervention; to clarify, mine is not an interest in Islamic jurisprudence but in the *gharbzadeh* identifications it accommodates despite ideological opposition to Euro-American forms.

Shariati further differentiates between Shi’ism as a political hermeneutic of the emergent revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state and classical Shi’ism, advising Iran/ians on the cusp of regime change to break with a Safavid or “Black” Shi’ism that opiates the masses as a religion of institutions and clerics, mourning and “the constant historical struggle,” which is to say (as Marx does), dialectical materialism.¹²⁵ Shariati champions an Alavi or “Red” Shi’ism instead, which as the religion of Imam Ali is a movement of grassroots revolution and martyrdom, primarily

124. Shariati, Ali. *What Is To Be Done: The Enlightened Thinkers And An Islamic Renaissance*, trans. A. Alidust and F. Rajaei (Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986) 17.

125. Shariati, Ali. “Red Shi’ism: The Religion of Martyrdom, Black Shi’ism: The Religion of Mourning.” <<http://www.shariati.com/english/redblack.html>>.

concerned with issues of social justice.¹²⁶ Khomeini, who disparaged Shariati's distinction, favored the political vigilance he assigns to Alavi *qua* "Red" Shi'ism; when Khomeini spoke and/or wrote about what the Islamic state might look like, he followed Shariati's lead, "[deemphasizing] the purely devotional aspects of religion and [highlighting] the practical-political aspects."¹²⁷ The political vigilance Shariati breathes into Shi'ism made it legible to Michel Foucault as well, who as a correspondent for *Corriere della serra*, *Le Monde*, and *Le Nouvel Observateur* "walked the streets of Tehran and Qom" with "the single question in mind"—"What do you want?"—as the vehicle for a global insurrection that might yield an/Other cosmology or worlding, not just in Iran but as a matter of fact. In his October 1978 article for the French newsmagazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* "What are Iranians Dreaming About?" Foucault writes about the Islamism he saw unfolding as a political sensibility thus:

One thing must be clear. By "Islamic government," nobody in Iran means a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control. To me, the phrase "Islamic government [seems] to point to two orders of things. A "utopia," some told me without any pejorative implication. "An ideal," most of them said to me. At any rate, it is something very old and also very far into the future, a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet, but also of advancing forward toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience.¹²⁸

126. Ali, the first Shi'ite Imam, is the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law.

127. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 149.

Vahdat elaborates, "As early as 1944, [Khomeini] pointed out that 'the ratio of the social issues to the devotional verses in the Quran is more than one hundred to one'" (Ibid. 159).

128. Qtd. in Afary, Janet and Kevin B. Anderson. *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) 206.

In revolutionary Iran, as in Marx's description of the catastrophe that will disarticulate modern Europe, the content of peoples' demands exceeded their expression, indeed, their realization.¹²⁹

In a November 1978 article for the Italian daily *Corriere della sera* "The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt," Foucault writes extensively to this effect, describing

[the Iranian] political will [as] one of breaking away from all that marks their countries and their daily lives with the presence of global hegemonies. ... It is the insurrection of men with bare hands who want to lift the fearful weight, the weight of the entire world that bears down on each of us, but more specifically on them, these oil workers and peasants at the frontiers of empires. It is perhaps the first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane.¹³⁰

In Foucault's summation, Iranians on the eve of revolution sought a world order that was at once (meaning, at the same time) "the most modern and the most insane." His reading of the Iranian Revolution differs little from mine insofar as he names its potential to effect an/Other world as its capacity to upset and displace empty homogenous time, which as a unidirectional and teleological (overdetermined) time is the motor of modern historicism. The intellectuals who galvanized civil unrest, conceivably, in conversation with Fanon—certainly, as Fanon's interlocutors (Shariati met with Fanon in the 1950s in France when he translated *Wretched of the Earth* from the original French into Persian, during which time both were active members of the

Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson translate and examine Michel Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution, which span from September 1978 to May 1979 and appear in three European newspapers: the Italian-language newspaper, *Corriere della sera*, and the French-language newspapers, *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. They note that Foucault's observations "take the form of newspaper reports, interviews, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor," and were dialogical insofar "Iranian student activists translated at least one of his essays into Persian and posted it on the walls of Tehran University in the fall of 1978" (Ibid. 181, 3).

129. Marx, Karl. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *Die Revolution* (1852).

130. Qtd. in Afary and Kevin, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* 222.

Front de Libération Nationale of Algeria)¹³¹—sought to “eradicate subjectivity” as the privileged site of metaphysics, advising Iranians, as Davari-Ardakani does, to give up the Humanist ruse of sovereignty in a world ordered by God. Fanon, who is disinterested in questions pertaining to religion and divinity but who like Davari-Ardakani interrogates national alienation as a racial alienation, uses the language of “occult instability” to describe the order (the non-order) of an/Other world inhabited by new humans (non-Humans): those made wretched, (pace Agamben) reduced to bare life or *zoe* by Humanist *logos*. As the prescription for uninterrupted insurgency, “occult instability” upsets the cosmology inscribed by a “colonialism [that] is not content to merely impose its law on the colonized country’s present and future” but which also “turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures, it, and destroys it.”¹³² In “On National Culture,” Fanon advises nationalist movements like Iran’s to foreclose stable social and political forms, indeed, to indefinitely delay the (re)constitution of a civil society:

It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystalized and our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light.¹³³

Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, who translate Foucault’s writings for an English-speaking audience, suspect he “deemed the Iranian Revolution ‘insane’ because it transgressed the Western borders of rationality,” in other words, Humanist reason, further speculating that

131. Shariati and Fanon were both thoroughly influenced by the life and works of Jean Paul-Sartre. Shariati’s politics diverge from Fanon’s insofar as they are spiritually informed, but both seek a society that refuses to organize itself along Western coordinates of modernity and intelligibility (i.e., ways of being and knowing).

132. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 149.

133. *Ibid.* 183.

“perhaps, as Foucault expressed the hope in *Madness and Civilization*, such a transgression, not only in the realm of discourse, but also in reality, could break down the binary logics of modernity”¹³⁴—the either/or (either backwards or forwards) “logic of the machine” against which Al-e Ahmad sought a “third alternative.” Foucault actively resists characterizing Shi’ism as religious ideology; he describes it instead as a political spirituality that refuses to reduce the multitude’s demands to discourse (I want to suggest, to *logos*). In “A Revolt with Bare Hands,” his November 5, 1978 article for *Corriere della serra*, he writes,

Iran is currently experiencing a generalized political strike, which is really a strike *in relation to* politics. This has two aspects. There is a refusal to sustain in any manner the current system, to allow its apparatus, its administration, or its economy to function. But there is also a refusal to step aside in favor of a political battle over a future constitution, over social issues, over foreign policy, or over the replacement of officials. To be sure, these issues are discussed, but in such a way that these questions cannot give rise to political manipulation by anyone. All of these spines, the Iranian people, transform themselves into a hedgehog. The Iranian people’s political will is to prevent politics from gaining a foothold.¹³⁵

Foucault, thus betraying his inner Fanon, commends the revolution’s non-arrival, its “refusal to step aside in favor of a political battle over a future constitution,” or in Marxist parlance, to reduce the content of its demonstration to an expression overdetermined by dialectical materialism. Afary and Anderson, who suspect Iran’s revolution appealed to Foucault because its agitators would not yield, deduce that Foucault finds in revolutionary Iran the blueprint for a radically different distribution of space and time, one that, as in Dabashi’s rendering of

134. Afary and Kevin, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* 99.

135. *Ibid.* 212 (original emphasis).

anticolonial modernity, “[abandons] the Euro-centricity of a singular idea of modernity, which privileged a white brand of predatory colonialists in Europe and disenfranchised the rest of humanity (including the disenfranchised classes inside Europe)” to pursue “an open-ended hermeneutics” untethered to “the teleological narratives of any metaphysics of absolutist certainties.”¹³⁶ Afary and Anderson specify that Foucault’s “interest in the Iranian Revolution was tied to a search for alternate forms of non-Western modernity that could rejoin spirituality and politics.”¹³⁷ In a September 1978 interview with writer Baqir Parham, Foucault thus narrativizes Shi’ism as a language which “[incites] and [foments] political awareness.”¹³⁸ He elaborates one month later, in a October 1978 article for *Corriere della sera*, entitled, “Tehran: Faith Against the Shah,” that Shi’ism “in the face of the established powers, arms the faithful with an unremitting restlessness...[breathing] into them an ardor wherein the political and the religious lay side by side.”¹³⁹ Indeed, Foucault was impressed by the political vigilance Islamism inspired in Iran, speculating that the “unremitting restlessness” of its movement was enough to “[transform] thousands of forms of discontent, hatred, misery, and despairs into a force” for the

136. Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* 98, 256.

I reject Dabashi’s assessment of cosmopolitanism as “the modus operandi of the anticolonial modernity that has been the result of more than two hundred years of fighting against colonialism.” In his summation, cosmopolitanism *qua* alternative modernity engenders “a new historical person...who is neither European in modernity nor Islamic (Oriental) in the presumptions of any tradition [...] but a historical person with at once local and global agency, and in this particular case with a proverbial Persian accept to her or his prose and poetry of dissent and defiance.” Dabashi names constitutionalist Iran (1905/6 – 1925) as the birthplace of cosmopolitanism as an alternative modernity, but in the genealogy I sketch, constitutional reforms, influenced as they were by Akhundzadeh et al.’s racist nationalism, codify whitestruck infrastructures and ideologies, inducing not alternative modernity but Enlightenment modernity. Dabashi’s assessment is *gharbzadeh*, I suggest, especially beholden to Euro-Enlightenment structures (strictures) of time, insofar it enumerates cosmopolitan Iranians not as free from modern historiography but as “historical persons,” who he further ossifies as “always syncretic, always cosmopolitan, always multicultural, always irreducible to one fictional authenticity or another,” denying cosmopolitan Iranians the privilege of time as a moving marker (Ibid. 255, 254).

137. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* 10.

138. “Dialogue between Michel Foucault and Baqir Parham.” *Nameh-yi Kamun-I Nevisandegan* 1 (Center of Iranian Writers, Spring 1979) 9-17, qtd. in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* 186.

139. Qtd. in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* 201.

global “insurrection of men with bare hands who want to lift the fearful weight, the weight of the entire world that bears down on each of us.”¹⁴⁰ In a March 1979 interview with Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet, Foucault elaborates that “demonstrations were repeated” on Iran’s streets while “the machine guns fired yet again.” Little changed from one demonstration to the next; he writes,

[Demonstration] occurred in an almost identical way, with, of course, an intensification each time, but without any change of form or nature. It’s the repetition of the demonstration. The readers of Western newspapers must have tired of it fairly soon. Oh, another demonstration in Iran! But I believe the demonstration, in its very repetition, had an intense political meaning. The very word *demonstration* must be taken literally: a people was tirelessly *demonstrating* its will.¹⁴¹

The Iranians who “tirelessly demonstrated” for what Foucault describes in his interview with Brière and Blanchet as “the promise and guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity,” indeed, that would eradicate subjectivity altogether, “risked everything for an entirely different world”¹⁴²—one in which indexes of modernity (in Davari-Ardakani’s reading, of humanism) do not singularly correlate with Enlightenment universals propelled (in my reading) by social and political constructions of time that anticipate an arrival that can only ever materialize as white mimicry, indeed, as a forgery, rendering Iran/ians inauthentic to themselves and to others (to themselves as Others).

Architects of the Islamic Revolution counted Iranians as members of an/Other nation/alism: the *ommat*, that Muslim “community in the process of ‘becoming’ and ‘moving’

140. Qtd. in *Ibid.* 202.

141. Foucault, Michel. “Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit,” *Iran: la révolution au nom de Dieu*, eds. Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet (March 1979) 227 – 241, qtd. in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* 254 (original emphasis).

142. *Ibid.* 255, 261.

toward absolute transcendence.”¹⁴³ Their social and political interventions query what it means to be authentically—indivisibly or essentially—Iranian. Writing extensively about the “self-loss” (in Persian, *khud bakhtegi*) Iran/ians endured under Pahlavi rule but uncritical of what I argue is its “cancer”—white identifications introduced by Akhundzadeh et al., productive of racial alienation—“Shariati, like Al-e Ahmad, referred to cultural imperialism as the ‘emptying’ of the self.”¹⁴⁴ As much Shariati’s student as his critic (Khomeini condemned Shariati’s valuation of clerical Islam in his description of Black/Safavid Shi’ism), Khomeini elaborates Shariati’s concept of self-loss to prescribe Islamic subjectivity as remedial therapy for Iran’s alienated body politic. Marrying (inferentially if not citationally) Shariati’s metaphysics, in which “the ‘perfection’ of society (*ommat*; in Arabic, *umma*; literally, community)” requires not mastery but movement away from *being* as a “comfortable stagnation of existence,” that is, a reaching or *becoming* that “[moves] toward absolute perfection, absolute self-consciousness, and the constant creation of sublime values,” with Davari-Ardakani’s formulation, which intervenes in Humanist discourse, Khomeini elaborates a metaphysics in which the “ontological movement away from nature ends, not in the self-realization, but in the annihilation of the sovereign subject.”¹⁴⁵ Vahdat explains,

Whereas Shariati uses the metaphors of the river and the ocean, Khomeini [1981] uses those of the “drop and the ocean” or the “wave and the ocean.” ... In Khomeini’s ‘creationist’ worldview, beings were brought into existence by ‘something external to them.’ [...] Although he appeared to reject any pantheistic interpretation of existence, he did not absolutely deny the possession of subjectivity by humans. Rather, he made human

143. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 151.

144. Shariati, Ali. “Bazgasht be Khish” (Return to the Self), qtd. in *Ibid.* 137.

145. Shariati, Ali. *Ommat va Imam* (Community and Leadership) (Tehran: Qalam, 1979) 50-51, qtd. in Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* 150; *Ibid.* 156.

subjectivity contingent on the subjectivity of the Supreme Essence: “Beings that are subordinate to the Supreme Name also possess perfection, but to an inferior degree, one limited by their inherent [limited] capacity” [1981].¹⁴⁶

In Shariati’s and Khomeini’s assessments alike, alienated or “emptied” (*gharbzadeh*) societies endeavor to know Humans as “the Truth”; they privilege a conception of *being* as existence or ontology (in Heideggerian parlance, *Dasein*) over a *becoming* that as the “open-ended hermeneutics” of alternative modernity *qua* “occult instability” cannot induce ontology.

Regime change has not sustained (could not sustain, as the condition of its assembly) the momentum required for alternative modernity *qua* “occult instability.” By sedimenting the dust, indeed, the demands of demonstration to induce civil society, clerics ascended not to dismantle but to inhabit and wield the modernist infrastructure constitutional reforms introduced and Pahlavi statecraft institutionalized. In the next chapter, I elaborate how “the ontological [problem] of modernity,” pursuant to my argument in the introduction, a problem of/for time, abides in the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state, underwriting medical and legal discourses to authorize sex reassignment as reparative treatment for Iranians with same-sex sexualities. My findings verify Vahdat’s suspicion that while “Iran’s presumed revolt against modernity after 1979 is often thought to represent the culmination of a backlash to the process of modernizing undertaken since the coup d’état that overthrew Mossadeq and restored the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1953,” the “Islamic revolutionary movement of the sixties and seventies should [instead] be seen as a dialectical attempt to seriously challenge the discourse of modernity.”¹⁴⁷ In Vahdat’s

146. Ibid. 156.

See Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan, 1981) 383 – 384, 396, 406.

147. Ibid. xi – xii, xii – xiii.

summation, “the development and vigor of the revolutionary Islamic discourse,” that is, its popular appeal, “were not only a response to the strength and appeal of secular discourses and modernists, but also a reaction to their weakness and failure.”¹⁴⁸ The sedimentation of their demonstration/s made Iranians especially vulnerable to the teleological effects of sublation, which in addition to the dialectical materialism Vahdat enumerates (Vahdat intervenes in the state’s Islamic jurisprudence to elaborate its accommodation of Euro-Enlightenment tenets like universal subjectivity and democratic political participation) narrativizes Man in a language of time. The marriage of Humanism and time in the Western metaphysical philosophy imperial Europe exported to its outposts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has by now metastasized as the “occult primary tumor”—the name in Western medicine for a cancer irreducible to its parts, typified by more than one malignant site, for which the primary or original tumor cannot be identified¹⁴⁹—of *gharbzadeghi* as a cancer, for which another site is “machinism”. I thus develop Vahdat’s claim, which he evinces in the epigraph as well, that “[Euro-American] modernity in Iran, reflected in attempts to build modern institutions, specifically those of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, has never been eradicated from Iran’s cultural soil,” more to the point, that “the Islamic revolutionary discourse contains elements of this aspect of modernity and, as such, cannot be dismissed as simply negating [the]

Vahdat elaborates as the thesis of his study that “Iran’s century-and-a-half-experience with modernity” is “a dialectical process involving aspects of modernity conducive to emancipation, on the one hand, and those more conducive to domination, on the other.” He further suspects that “the lopsided augmentation of selective aspects of modernity by various social groups in Iran, such as the emphasis on instrumental rationality and collectivity by Pahlavi technocrats, Communists, and Socialists, has worked to impede the overall development of a viable modernity there” (Ibid. xii).

148. Ibid. 132.

149. “Occult primary cancer” or “Occult primary tumor” is the term used in/by Western medical discourse to describes a cancer for which the point of origin (i.e., where the cancer first formed in the body) is unknown. This kind of cancer is alternatively described in medical literature as “Cancer of unknown primary” (CUP).

modern thought” of Enlightenment Europe.¹⁵⁰ Regime change as a swapping of the guards has failed to effect alternative modernity in today’s Iran, Vahdat explains, because

in its own discourse [the Islamic] movement was very much affected by the discourse and the phenomenon it set out to challenge. The Islamic discourse can [...] be seen as an internal dialogue, chiefly at the theoretical and philosophical level, with regard to cultural aspects of modernity. In its own peculiarly dialectical manner, this discourse has not completely abandoned the principles of modernity. Indeed, the contradictions it has engendered can be viewed as driving the dynamic search for modernity since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979.¹⁵¹

In the genealogy I construct, and in Vahdat’s as well, today’s Iran still searches (wants) for alternative modernity as that spark kindled by a *rushanfekri* that is, as Al-e Ahmad’s describes it, “the exact opposite of, and antidote to [Westoxification].” In the next section, and before I intervene in *gharbzadeh* structures of governmentality to argue in Chapter 2 that Euro-Enlightenment “‘isms’ and ideologies” endure as the grammar of Iran’s biopolitical state, I read pop star Googoosh’s 2014 music video for “Behesht” (in English, “Paradise” or “Eden”), a song from her 2012 album *E’Jaz*, for structures of relationality proscribed by nationalism—in the twenty-first century (arguably, since Taqizadeh founded *Ferqeh-ye Demokra-e Iran* (in English, the Iranian Democratic Party) from Berlin in 1909), a transnation/alism—as a *gharbzadeghi*.

What’s (lesbian) love got to do with it?

Az in biraheye tardid (Of this unknown road of doubt)
Az in bonbast mitarsam. (I fear its dead end.)
Man az hesi ke beyneh ma (I have a feeling about this love between us)
Hanozam hast mitarsam. (And which still persists; it scares me.)

150. Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut* xvi.

151. *Ibid.* xii – xiii.

Takeh in rah roshan nist (The end of this road is not lit)
Manam mesleh to midonam. (And I, like you, am scared.)
Nagoo bayad borid az eshgh (Don't tell me to cut this love)
Na mitoni, na mitonam. (You can't cut it, nor can I.)
Na mitonim bargardim (Nor can we turn around)
Na r'ad shim az tu in bombast. (Nor can we pass this dead end.)
Manam midonam in ehsas (I, too, know that this feeling)
Nabayad basheh. (Shouldn't exist.)
Ammah hast. (But it does.)

— Googoosh¹⁵²

The music video for “Behesht,” released on social media by Googoosh on February 14 2014, follows the life and love of two Iranian women living in Berlin, that familiar site of dialectical nationalism, where despite a happy homonormativity (the video opens with a marriage proposal in bed and light frolicking in the Charlottenburg Palace gardens) they are harassed by strangers and rejected by family.¹⁵³ This diegesis, shot entirely from a first person perspective that assigns viewers the gaze of an unnamed (same-sex) partner, is crosscut with another. In this other diegesis, which uses short, medium, long-range and panning shots to tell its story, Googoosh gives an intimate concert at a nightclub for an audience dressed in formal wear and seated in pairs, as affectionate couples, coincidentally, on Valentine’s Day. We learn in the final reveal that the two diegeses are one; the nightclub’s tableau of heteronormative cisgender couples includes the protagonists of the video’s other world, now legible as lesbians, who we see together for the first time as they rise from their seats to give Googoosh a standing ovation.

In addition to Navid Akhavan, the Tehran-born, German-based actor who wrote and directed its music video, “Behesht” has two other makers: Alireza Afkari, who composed the

152. Googoosh, “Behesht.” *E’Jaz* (Blue Arts Production, 2012) minute mark 0:30 – 1:30. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbN2bUgg1ws>>.

The song’s lyrics are written by Roozbeh Bemani.

153. Iranian-born actresses Pegah Ferydoni and Yasmine Azadi (but Western bred; at least Ferydoni grew up in Berlin) portray the unnamed protagonists. As the object of Azadi’s *qua* the camera’s gaze, Ferydoni enjoys significant screen time. Azadi appears on screen only for a moment, at the video’s close, but the audience is meant to see the video’s dietetic world/s from her perspective.

song's musical arrangement, and Roozbeh Bemani, who wrote its lyrics.¹⁵⁴ I intervene in the video and not the musical arrangement for “Behesht” to study how visual media coheres Iran's imagined community across generations, time zones, and partisan politics. Since at least the late nineteenth century, when Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1848 – 1896) was inspired by “the wonders of European progress” he saw on diplomat tour (the monarchy's first) in 1873 (he made a second trip to Europe in 1878, and a third in 1889) to renovate Tehran, Iranian nationalism as a *gharbzadeghi*—a racial alienation that is at once Humanist and Historical—has used a regime of the image to negotiate Iran's chronopolitical station.¹⁵⁵ The changes Naser al-Din Shah Qajar effected almost half a century in advance of constitutional reform, including the addition of “boulevards, monuments, squares, and public gardens” to Tehran's cityscape, “reflected an obsession with appearances.”¹⁵⁶ He curated Iran in the image of “the ascendant nations of Europe [that] were characterized by a particular style of urban life that featured legitimating festivals of display and representation,” Marashi explains, to redress “the primarily *visible* experience of [Iran's] backwardness” vis-à-vis imperial Europe in modern historiography.¹⁵⁷

While Googoosh had no part in authoring “Behesht”, her aesthetic and brand editorialize its message. The nightclub in the video's second diegesis invokes the stage that interpellated her as a child performer in Pahlavi Iran—in Al-e Ahmad's summation (and mine), that especially *gharbzadeh* iteration of Iran's *polis*. Googoosh's career started on tour with her father, a

154. Afkari and Bemani both live in Tehran, where they are regularly persecuted by the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state for their work with diasporic musicians like Googoosh. They were arrested in 2013, according to a semi-official Iranian news network, as “notorious gang members,” charged with the “illegal production and distribution of underground music for Los Angeles-based musicians and satellite channels” (“Iranian songwriter arrested with four other musicians, says poet,” *The Guardian*. 14 January 2013. < <http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/jan/14/iran-musician-arrested-tehranbureau>>).

155. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran* 22.

156. *Ibid.* 20, 21.

157. *Ibid.* 31, 21 (my emphasis).

comedian and gymnast on the nightclub circuit, who put her on stage as a professionally paid entertainer at age three. Beloved in native (presumably, Islamist) and diasporic (presumably, pluralist) contexts alike as “Iran’s daughter,” Googoosh was born Faegheh Atashin on May 5, 1950 in Tehran to Azeri (Turkic) parents. Her celebrity is emblematic of a nation/alism that requires the ethnically diverse peoples of Iran’s homeland to divest from mother/land. Googoosh had no relationship with her mother until age thirteen. No more than two years old when her parents divorced, she had a childhood inscribed by the knowledge that her mother was dead, which is what her father, her manager and guardian, told her to make life on the road bearable.¹⁵⁸

Googoosh by her twenties was a trendsetter, adept at navigating the deterministic relationship between space and time that hailed her as “Iran’s daughter” and as well, at curating new space-time relations. Her style was at once bohemian and cosmopolitan; she wore short miniskirts and funky hairstyles and accessories, and set classical Persian poems ablaze to jazz and disco sounds. Despite her celebrity as an icon of Pahlavi modernity, Googoosh is fiercely admired today for her loyalty to home and country in spite of regime change. Citing homesickness (pace Al-e Ahmad, the alienation of self and society) as her reason, Googoosh decided to leave Los Angeles, where she was on vacation during the revolution, to return to Iran in 1979, to what she knew would be a constrained life.¹⁵⁹ Given a choice between her career and her country, she chose the latter. For the next twenty-one years, Googoosh would not perform; she was not allowed to perform in Iran and would not risk leaving the country without a valid passport to perform elsewhere. She explains in an interview with Cairo’s *Al-Ahram Weekly*, “I

158. “Googoosh: The most celebrated Iranian pop artist of all [time],” *Iran Chamber Society*. <<http://www.iranchamber.com/music/googoosh/googoosh.php>>.

159. Googoosh tells Azadeh Moaveni in an interview for *Time Magazine*, “I was [...] abroad because I had gone to Switzerland to pay for my son's schooling. Three months later, on a slight detour to Los Angeles, the revolution came, and everyone told me you can't return [*sic*]. But I hadn't taken anything with me, so despite all the pressures, and this talk of the dangers of what would happen to me if I do, I went back” (“Don’t Cry for Me, Iran,” *Time Magazine*. 23 March 2001. <<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,103628,00.html>>.)

worried [that] I would never have the chance...to come back,” because the Iranian state would deny her re-entry.¹⁶⁰ It wasn’t until Mohammad Khatami’s liberal presidency (1997 – 2005) that the Islamic Republic issued a passport to Googoosh and further authorized her travel outside of the country to perform in what would become her “comeback tour”. The first concert in her eight-month tour was a sold-out show in Toronto on July 29, 2000. During an interview with Azadeh Moaveni for *Time* after her final concert in Dubai—other concert destinations included Los Angeles, Chicago, Las Vegas, Stockholm, Frankfurt, London, Paris, and Vienna—Googoosh, who Moaveni flatters as “the symbol of an entire nation,” enumerates Iran’s imagined community as a trans/nationalism. She says about touring, “I feel like I’m singing in Iran.”¹⁶¹

The music video for “Behesht” seems to me a cipher for Iran’s trans/nationalism as a *gharbzadeghi*, and as well, for alternative modernity as an undetermined distribution of space and time—an “open-ended hermeneutics”—generative of an/Other world. While Iran’s disciplinary apparatus has reprimanded Googoosh over the video’s message: “Freedom to Love for All”, superimposed onto an extreme close-up shot of the protagonists hand-in-hand in the video’s final act¹⁶²—*Enghelab News*, for example, has denounced Googoosh as “anti-revolutionary”¹⁶³—I want to suggest that “Behesht” stages a pointed critique of *gharbzadeghi* as

160. Qtd. in Coleman, Sarah. “Googoosh: Iran’s High Priestess of Pop.” *World Press Review* 48.06 (June 2001). <<http://www.worldpress.org/article.cfm/Googoosh>>.

161. Moaveni, “Don’t Cry for Me, Iran.”

“Iran’s queen of pop” is how Western media, for example, *The Guardian* and *The Huffington Post*, have described Googoosh in their coverage of “Behesht” as a “gay rights” video and “poignant LGBT message” (respectively). See Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. “Iran’s queen of pop promotes gay rights in new music video.” *The Guardian*. 18 February 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/18/iran-googoosh-gay-rights-music-video-behesht>>; and “Googoosh, Iranian Pop Queen, Sends Poignant LGBT Message with ‘Behesht’ Video.” *The Huffington Post*. 18 February 2014. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/18/iran-behesht-lgbt-video-_n_4809682.html>/.

162. Googoosh, “Behesht” minute mark 5:05 – 5:08.

163. Qtd. in Dehghan, “Iran’s queen of pop promotes gay rights.”

a “dead end” for Iranian persons, irrespective of their sexuality, as History’s Others. I further suspect it gestures towards alternative structures of relationality that are made possible by a distribution of space and time that is “the exact opposite and antidote to Westoxification.”

Rather than dramatize homophobia in the Islamic state, as a religious fundamentalism, “Behesht” narrativizes (spatializes) homophobia as a Euro-Enlightenment “ism”, typical of Iranians insofar as they are *gharbzadeh*. In the first of the video’s two homophobic exchanges, three cisgender men, racially diverse—white, black, and Iranian (a triangulation I elaborate in Chapter 3)—but ideologically of a piece (dressed in blue jeans, sneakers and fashion scarves, and accessorized with designer headphones), heckle the protagonists on a subway train. Two of these men, notably, the men of color, proceed to physically assault the women after they disembark. That all three men instigate homophobic violence but only the men of color perpetrate it endows white men as the proper subjects of this space-time with self-mastery. In this world like in ours, white men (white society) can uniquely transcend homophobia to ascend to the seat of post/modernity. Racial Others as a non-modern or still-modernizing peoples cannot make this ascent (in our world, because they are just now beginning to curate Euro-Enlightenment “isms”).

To stage this scene, Akhavan superimposes Bemani’s evocative lyrics, reproduced in the epigraph, which abstract Iranian culture as a “road” (in Persian, *rah*) that proceeds in one direction, towards an end that is “not lit” (in Persian, *roshan nist*) for Iranians *qua* Others, onto moving images that narrativize (spatialize) one day in the life of an Iranian lesbian couple. The video’s frame elaborates the teleological thrust of this narrativization; in the final scene, the women arrive at Googoosh’s Valentine’s Day concert, in the time of our now—the unnamed

Akhavan’s creative direction arguably does not calculate into their reproach because he is not the video’s public face, more to the point, because a slap on his wrist isn’t legible to the video’s Iranian consumers, for whom this disciplinary gesture from state media is really intended. In a press statement, Akhavan reflects, “We knew from the start that because of its topic the video is going to be very controversial among Iranians, that’s why we expected negative feedback too, but that hasn’t bothered me, nor Googoosh” (qtd. in Dehghan, “Iran’s queen of pop”).

protagonist procures tickets in the video's eleventh hour—where they have ostensibly been all along, interpellated by the bourgeois attitudes of the concert's diverse but passing-white peoples, who are seated in cisgender pairs, dressed for the part: the men in tuxes and bow ties and the women in formal gowns (Googoosh is especially glamorous in lavish drop diamond earrings and a sequined black gown). While the video's final statement—"Freedom to Love for All"—names the nightclub as a site of arrival for same-sex couples, the addition of Bemani's lyrics narrate it as a "dead end" (in Persian, *bonbast*), elaborating its bourgeois culture as one that stymies same-sex sexualities even or especially as it recognizes the respectable, conjugal couple. In the diegetic world and ours, Iranians *qua* Others who walk the tape of *gharbzadeghi* are stalled by its forward-movement; they can simulate its teleological march but they cannot arrive at its destination, which for them materializes as the same "dead end" that stalls them. More to the point, they cannot "turn around" to curate a backwards and/or circuitous movement like the occult ("insane") relationship between space and time that, Fanon and Foucault agree, will not stall or stymie (exasperate) their social and political possibilities. Googoosh narrates a day in the life of the video's lesbian protagonists in real-time from a concert the women attend in a future-time, suggestive of an occult world that is possible yet, in which the viewer, who occupies the camera's first person perspective (but not the protagonists, who I have suggested are bound to the teleology of the video's diegesis and frame), can inhabit two spatiotemporal planes at once.

In the second homophobic exchange, the on-screen protagonist is intercepted by her father *qua* patriarch when she unexpectedly brings her betrothed home (not to Iran, but to a residential neighborhood in Berlin) to meet her family. His body language—hands planted firmly at the hips, lips pursed, eyebrows raised, gaze stern—is unwavering as he listens (for a moment, collecting his rage) to his daughter plead her case. Before she can make it, he reprimands her and

then marches off indignantly, towards the house. She follows in his direction, closing the door on her partner as Googoosh narrates their love in a first person stream-of-consciousness voice,

Daram mitarsam az khabi ke shayad hardomon didim.
(I am afraid of the dream that maybe we both saw.)

Az in ke har2mon baham khalafe kabe charkhidim.
(That we both walked/turned against the direction of the Kaaba.)

Vase kandan az in barzakh
(To be plucked from this purgatory)

Gorizi gheyre donya nis
(There is no other way to escape this world (than).)¹⁶⁴

Googoosh (Akhavan/Bemani) thus suggest(s) that at least one of the protagonists seeks an/Other distribution of space and time that can “pluck” (dislodge) them from the muck and mire of *gharbzadeghi*—not the world’s “purgatory” but theirs, not (just) because they pursue same-sex love but (as well), I want to argue, because as Iranians they are Othered by *gharbzadeghi*’s (Humanism’s) *logos*. They locate in political Islam, specifically, at Islam’s holiest site: the Kaaba, around which pilgrims on *Hajj* make *tawaf*: the circumambulation seven times in a counter-clockwise direction, an alternative space-time capacious enough to accommodate even those movements that oppose its direction. The *ommat*, that community in the process of becoming, for which modern historiography (in theory if not in practice) is irrelevant, while opposed to same-sex sexualities, needs not deny its Others access to time as a moving marker.

164. Googoosh, “Behesht” minute mark 2:40 – 3:20.

CHAPTER II

(Don't) *Be Like Others*: How gender reassignment makes racial genus in the Islamic Republic

Although I use the term “race,” and I have to use the term “race,” “race” itself is a function of something else which is much closer to “gender.” ... So I coined the word “genre,” or I adapted it, because “genre” and “gender” come from the same root. They mean “kind.” ... I am trying to insist that “race” is really a code-word for “genre.” Our issue is not the issue of “race.” Our issue is the issue of the genre of “Man.” It is this issue of the “genre” of Man that causes all the “-isms.”

—Sylvia Wynter¹⁶⁵

When then-Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was asked on September 24, 2007 about the treatment of Iranian homosexuals at Columbia University during a UN visit to the United States, he responded that there were no homosexuals in Iran. While liberals keen on prosecuting Iran's human rights abuses ascribe Ahmadinejad's statement to radical Islam, I want to think instead about the Orientalist subtext of his claim, specifically, about how he perverts a gaze that tasks Iranians with chasing their “Oriental reflection in the eyes of the Other.”¹⁶⁶ The suggestion that gay sexualities mark the arrival of a modernity to which Iran is not privy resonates not with the teachings of Islam but with those of Hegel. Consider Ahmadinejad's wording: “In Iran, we don't have homosexuals, *like in your country*.” He does not suggest that queer attractions and attachments are absent in Iran but that homosexual identities and types aren't recognized in Iranian contexts. Which is to say, he ingeniously mimes empire's assumption that an Iran cut off from the West—from white patronage and interests—is barred from the space-time of modern homo- sexuality, which as the space-time of the now induces coeval relations with Western,

165. Wynter, Sylvia. “*Proud Flesh* Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter.” *Proud Flesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness* 4 (Africa Resource Center, 2006): 23-24.

166. Homayounpour, Gohar. *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* (The MIT Press, 2012): xix.

presumably white nations and persons. His statement also deploys a distinction that stands on the radical differences he and other clerics attribute to Islam as inherently superior to anything the West has to offer. While I do not have the space to expound these other epistemologies and genealogies, I recognize their role in the stories (mythology, gossip, etc.) Iranians tell, to others and to themselves about sexuality as desire (activity) and as a kind of identification (typology).

Ahmadinejad's statement has goaded the Iranian intelligensia: a bourgeoisie tasked with shaping popular and not specialized discourse about Iran and its people, to counter with seemingly factual representations of its sex and gender relations, specifically, to curate or facilitate the making of documentaries-*cum*-confessionals in which Iranian informants with same-sex or trans sexualities testify to a racial genus (*jins*) that is categorically white. In other words, I suspect that the Iranians who narrate their same-sex or trans sexualities in this media seek recognition from the gatekeepers of empire not for their nonnormative genders and sexualities but for their modern human types.¹⁶⁷ I intervene in two iterations of the liberal media Ahmadinejad's statement has set into motion, distributed by Home Box Office Inc. (HBO) for an American audience, to make this argument: the documentary *Be Like Others* (director Tanaz Eshaghian, 2008) and Season 3, Episode 5 of the news series *VICE* (correspondent Thomas Morton, 2015). This media exploits what its audience intuits as a contradiction: that the Islamic Republic of Iran criminalizes homo sexualities but financially supports sex reassignment, providing grants to trans patients undergoing sex reassignment to pay for half their costs, and further institutionalizes trans care and rights.

While Iran's homophobia corroborates the orthodoxy American audiences expect from a brutish people stuck in time, the Islamic Republic's support for gender reassignment suggests

167. See Mark Rifkin's forthcoming *Indigenous Temporalities: Native Sovereignty Beyond Settler Time*, which makes the argument that "coevalness" acquiesces to Euro-Enlightenment (Humanist) modernity.

that its legal and medical institutions are modern, or at the very least, *modernizing*; indeed, that Iranians are, as they have claimed all along (for example, in defense of the state's nuclear energy program) innovators who must be allowed, following Jalal Al-e Ahmad's recommendation in *Gharbzadeghi* (1961/4), to pave their own path forward, or otherwise. I added a temporal analysis to Al-e Ahmad's critique in the last chapter to argue that his report, formally an indictment of technology consumption in twentieth century Iran, is committed to imagining a way out of a particular construction of time that locates Iran, even in progressive articulations, as not-there-yet, never-there-yet, always already denied coevalness with Europe and America. Iranians who are Weststruck, sexually and otherwise, "value the approval of the Europeans observing [them]" as "suckers for praise, sadly trying to be great"¹⁶⁸—which is why Al-e Ahmad, who at the time of his writing *Gharbzadeghi* was at least familiar with Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), describes Westoxification as a disease with two heads: "One is the West, the other is ourselves who are Weststruck."¹⁶⁹

Ideologues of the 1979 revolution anticipate/d that an Iran cut off from Western economic, social, and political interests would transcend what Greg Thomas describes as empire's "original, racist standards of gender."¹⁷⁰ As Al-e Ahmad described him,

the Weststruck man is prissy. He takes very good care of himself. He's always fussing with his personal wardrobe and grooming. He even plucks his hair under his eyebrows some-times. His shoes, his clothing, his vehicle, and his house, are extremely important

168. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 58.

169. *Ibid.* 11.

170. Thomas, *Sexual Demon* 86-87, 30.

to him. He always looks as if he just came out of the box, or out of some European fashion house.¹⁷¹

The revolutionary state induced by Al-e Ahmad's writings arguably criminalizes same-sex sexualities because homosexual-identified persons (specifically, men) are ideologically and commercially aligned with the West, in other words, because they assume personalities learned from the global gay mediascapes that fund European and American economies, and not (just) because the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state is opposed to same-sex attractions and attachments. In her study of how sex and gender were refashioned in the early twentieth century to make the project of Iranian modernity legible to European spectators, a Pahlavi project the Islamic Republic publically (if not practically) opposes, gender historian Afsaneh Najmabadi corroborates that the revolutionary state "is set on eradicating ...especially male same-sex practices, in the name of eradicating Western cultural and secular corruption."¹⁷²

171. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 118-119.

172. Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005): 57.

National modernity in the twentieth century as a Pahlavi program attempted to make the project of Iranian modernity "legible for the already modern," specifically, "recognized by the Europeans." It required the new Iranian man to shave his beard—an obligation that the average Iranian found suspect because adult masculinity was (is) associated with the beard, which "was not so much a sign distinguishing man from woman, as implied by the modern interpretation of beardless men as effeminate." Rather, a shaved beard made adult men look like the abject figure of the *mukhanna* or *amradnuma*: "an adult man who made himself look like a young beardless man, displaying a wish to remain the object of desire of adult men." National modernity thus made adult men resemble feminized male youths who do not (cannot) arrive at adult manhood (Ibid. 137, 16).

In *Professing Selves*, Najmabadi elaborates the "two important shifts in gender and sexual notions [that] had emerged in the course of 'achieving modernity' in Iran. A process of disavowing homoerotic desire had set into motion seemingly contradictory, yet enabling, dynamics. It marked homosociality as empty of homoeroticism and same-sex practices, and by insisting on that exclusion it provided a homosocially masqueraded home for homoeroticism and same-sex practices. This masquerading move could not but affect homo- and heteroeroticism. The *amrad* (young male adolescent object of desire for adult men), for instance, had been a distinct figure, both as an object of desire and as a figure of identification. By the end of the nineteenth century, both positions of desire had become feminized. To desire to be desired by a man, or to desire a man, both became positions able to be occupied only by women. This gender-dimorphic dynamic emerged in tandem with the marking of same-sex desire as unnatural." See Najmabadi, Afsaneh *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Duke University Press Books, 2013): 59-60.

In spite of hostility towards same-sex desires and identifications, the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state carries out more gender reassignment surgeries than any country in the world besides Thailand; and, sex change surgeons are often Western-trained.¹⁷³ Doctor Bahram Mir-Jalali, for example, is a Paris-trained surgeon who claimed in 2008 that he has performed over 450 gender reassignment surgeries in Tehran in the last 12 years—ten times the number of surgeries he suspects he would have performed in Europe. His numbers, which are especially staggering for male-to-female transitioning patients, suggest that reassignment regulates the genitalia of natural-born men to non-therapeutic ends. Another doctor, with the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran, reported in 2008, “About 80 sex reassignment surgeries are carried out in Iran every year, 90 percent of which involve cases of male-to-female transitions.”¹⁷⁴ Iranian men with same-sex sexualities, narrativized in medical and legal discourses as the proprietors of an inert and unviable male *jins*, are especially pressured by families and communities, and as well, by governmental institutions (including those responsible for health care and education) to

173. According to the *Guardian*, “Iran carries out more gender change operations than any country in the world besides Thailand.” Iran’s official numbers indicate between 15,000 and 20,000 transsexual residents, “although unofficial estimates put the figure at up to 150,000.” Tait, Robert. “Sex change funding undermines no gay claims.” *Guardian* 26 September 2007. <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/sep/26/iran.gender>.

While compelling, comparisons to Thailand are dangerous given what Jennifer Terry describes as the potential for white feminist henchmen of empire to celebrate (appropriate) Iran’s financial and institutional support for trans reassignment. My research clarifies that Iran is not a Shangri-La of sex change, meaning, Iran is not the utopian future of post-gendered or post-sexed bodies—because in addition to Orientalist proscriptions that read Iran as always already delayed, emic discourse, notably, the religio-legally discourse that authorizes trans reassignment, is in fact heavily invested in reinforcing the gender and sexual binary. See Terry, Jennifer. Directed reading course. “Literature in Transgender Studies.” University of California, Irvine. Fall 2011.

174. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran.” *Justice for Iran and Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang)*, 2014: 22.

Racializing biomedical technologies of sex reassignment make science and religion or God compatible in Iran. Najmabadi describes the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran as “an important site for the current procedures for changing sex.” As its name suggests, the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran is composed of Iranian professionals in the field of legal medicine. Legal medicine is itself “the convergence of criminology, law, and medicine.” It includes the fields of “psychology and sexology...under the umbrella of ‘legal psychology and psychiatry’” and “provides the conceptual ideas to do with sexual offenses and crimes” (*Professing Selves*, 74).

pursue sex reassignment as reparative treatment for their adult same-sex sexualities. Najmabadi explains that male-to-female sex change “[emerged]...as distinct from other categories of male non-normativity” and “was an intensively post-1979 phenomenon. A similar urgency in marking [female-to-male transitions] as distinct from other categories of female non-normativity was neither present [at the turn of the revolution]” she elaborates, “nor does it mark the distinction as sharply in today’s living practices.”¹⁷⁵ If, as the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network’s (6Rang’s) and Justice for Iran’s evocative 2014 report “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran” suggests, medical and legal practitioners advise “lesbian, gay and transgender people, on a routine basis, that their same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity is a sign of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) [*ekhtelal-i hoviat-i jensy*] that must be treated with ‘reparative’ therapies of sex reassignment surgeries,” then as a state program that means to realign “social” gender with “biological” sex, reassignment makes queer persons appropriate for public consumption and heterosexual pairings while brutally dispossessing them of their sense of self.¹⁷⁶

This chapter thus queries how and why religiously devout and socially conservative Iranians—persons publically opposed to Euro-American modernity and its *-isms*, namely, ideologues of the revolution and especially its leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini—authorize sex change. I elaborate my thesis in Chapter 1, to suggest that the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state has not abandoned Euro-Enlightenment modernity as the structuring logic of its *polis*. Biopolitical institutions in the new state continue to deploy Euro-Enlightenment “‘isms’ and ideologies” to consolidate knowledge about Iran’s body politic. For example, the field of “legal medicine,” instituted after regime change to make medical science (meaning, Iran’s

175. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 272.

176. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 13.

community of medical scientists) accountable to Islamic jurisprudence, conflates the discourses of physiological medicine and of psycho-behavioral sexology—a strategy Michel Foucault attributes to modernization in Western Europe in his study of sexuality as an object of knowledge in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1976). My research in this chapter as in the last elaborates Farzin Vahdat’s suspicion that despite regime change in which clergy took issue with Pahlavi-era self-representations of Iran as secular and modern, the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state selectively appropriates Western notions of what it means to be—appear—as modern, performing what Michael Herzfeld describes as “practical Occidentalism.”¹⁷⁷ Najmabadi likewise deduces, “While the 1979 regime change involved some important revisions of legal codes and judicial structures, there were also significant continuities that consolidated, expanded, and enfolded some of the late-Pahlavi trends. A most important mediating domain in this transformation was the field of legal medicine.”¹⁷⁸

I begin with a series of questions yoked from Eshaghian’s documentary, Morton’s episode, and the human rights literatures that corroborate their reports: *By what logic does the Islamic Republic criminalize homosexuality but subsidize and accommodate gender reassignment? Are Iranians with nonnormative genders and sexualities pressured by legal and medical institutions to pursue sex change? How does gender reassignment induce heterosexualities and cis-genders?* The task at hand is to understand what incentivizes clerics and other implements of the Islamic state to endorse sex change as a “wondrous [spectacle] of nature and [achievement] of medicine,” as well as how news of their support gains traction in popular discourses outside of Iran, specifically, in the United States.¹⁷⁹ I focus on American media to

177. Herzfeld, Michael. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (Routledge, 2004).

178. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 170.

elaborate what Nasrin Rahimieh describes as the contradictions and ambivalences of Iranian understandings of the self as they have been influenced or *affected* by encounters with the West.¹⁸⁰ My study, influenced as well by Fanon’s life and works, intervenes in how “moments of self-cognition are . . . narrated as a process of seeing oneself in terms of characters presented in media representations: newspapers reports, magazine articles, radio programs, and quite frequently satellite television programs and documentary videos.”¹⁸¹ This research thus accounts for the modern episteme’s knowledge-power regime, which authorizes white viewers to do the looking that locates—interpellates—brown (and black) Others in a historical matrix that spatializes sexual differences as racial ones. Iranians are especially sensitive to modern scopic regimes; they intuit that “a key component of ‘achieving modernity’ and ‘becoming civilized’” in the Europeanized optic is the “‘eradication of unnatural love’ among men,” and perform accordingly for the white gaze that hails them.¹⁸²

I argue that sex reassignment is a practically Occidental technology of race science that endeavors not to make trans subjectivities, which in Susan Stryker’s summation are characterized by departure—“movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place” and not “any particular destination or mode of transition”¹⁸³—but to innovate a new Iranian: one presumably eligible for racial modernity because s/he occupies sexed

179. Ibid. 38.

If, as Guy Debord famously argues (1967), modern human relations are mediated by a regime of the image, then the media about transsexualities I describe literally facilitates—greases—social and political relations between American viewers and Iranians, because it characterizes Iranian persons as (at least) open to the ideologies of their (Euro-American) modernity. See Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red, 1977).

180. Rahimieh, Nasrin. *Missing Persians: Discovering Voices in Iranian Cultural History* (Syracuse University Press, 2001).

181. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 32.

182. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* 163.

183. Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History* (Seal Press: 2008) 1.

and gendered modernity. In the religio-legal discourse erected to codify trans care and rights, persons don't *become* trans (despite the fact that sex reassignment requires multiple surgeries and that hormonal and other somatic changes require the passage of time) but are instead imagined as already already trans. After initial surgery, the state changes a person's name and gender designation on their birth certificate to effect trans subjectivities as the point of arrival *and* of departure, in a closed loop that narrativizes scientific progress as God's will. Despite this, the trans women interviewed by Eshaghian and Morton seem to "[create] order and meaning out of...a life lived out of synch with norms and normative expectations," which is to say, "a life pressured incessantly by 'what are you?' and 'why can't you *be like others?*'" by anticipating sex reassignment as rebirth, that is, as a cut in the fabric of their being.¹⁸⁴ The accounts of their families and partners, as well, corroborate this alternative narrative, suggesting that male-to-female sex reassignment in Iran is not experienced as the site of a continuity or process of *becoming* but instead resolves to contain (negate) a person's phenomenological or "felt sense" of sex and gender difference.¹⁸⁵

That "setting up a life that wipes out all traces of one's earlier life is the ideal goal" of sex change for trans women further suggests that its technologies *make live*, in the biopolitical sense Foucault enumerates, by emptying the pre-operative body of its person.¹⁸⁶ It is to this effect that Dr. Mohammad Reza Mohammadi, a medical practitioner affiliated with the Office of Islamic

184. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 233 (my emphasis).

185. In *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, Gayle Salamon examines "the lived experiences of the non-normatively gendered"—trans persons living in pre-operative bodies—in an attempt to differentiate biological or material sex from phenomenological sex, or what she calls "felt sense" (*Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (Columbia University Press, 2010) 168).

186. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 273.

See Michel Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France, specifically, *Society Must Be Defended* (1975 – 1976), *Security, Territory Population* (1977 – 1978), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978 – 1979).

Studies in Mental Health who, Najmabadi reports, prescribes “spiritual therapy” for trans patients he suspects of “character disorders,” contends that trans-identified persons “[can] be talked into heteronormativity” through ““a concept that [is] broader than death as the end of life””—one in which ““being born is at the same time a death” and in which “dying is similarly a new birth.””¹⁸⁷ He identifies the pre-operative trans body marked for reassignment as a vessel evacuated of its subjectivity, as an amalgamation of flesh that can be cut and differentiated anew, making it an ideal canvas for the re/writing of Iranian genus (*jins*) in shades of white.

Reassignment functions to construct Iran’s nation or “imagined community” as a modern body politic. This congruence is not incidental; I argued in Chapter 1, Iranian nationalism has since its inception in the late nineteenth century and especially after the onset of the constitutional reforms in the early twentieth century sought to inscribe the nation as a modern assemblage, specifically, as Euro-Enlightenment modernity. As a strategy for making Iran/ians modern, sex reassignment is an essentially *gharbzadeh* project; it endows human men and not God with the power of *making live*.

A critical return to Fanon

The Iranians interviewed by Eshaghian and Morton anticipate an objectifying racial-*cum*-sexual gaze not unlike the gaze Fanon enumerates in another context (the black Antilles) for its atomizing affects, by testifying to transsexuality as a sign of the times—of progress, deliverance, and redemption: a forward movement that induces civilizational development. Theirs is a defensive posture in response to modern historiography, which uses the spectre of bestial Sodomy to racialize Iranian male same-sex sexualities. I suspect that the association of racial degeneracy with sodomy necessitates a Fanonian (sociogenic) analysis of psychosexual

187. Ibid. 196.

universalisms. The alternative: Freud's (ontogenic) analysis, which naturalizes an evolutionary model of psychosexual development, greases empire's efforts to abstract Other sexualities as fluid and non-directional, occult and unstable, un- or under-developed, without a proper object of fixation.¹⁸⁸ Freudian psychoanalysis too easily lends itself to the characterization of contemporary Iran as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during a time in which male same-sex sexualities were idealized in art and poetry as a phase before arrival into adult heterosexuality, in other words, "as what men do before they settle into heterosexual procreative sex with wives (or even as they so settle, so long as they perform their reproductive obligations)." While men's transitional attractions to other men did not mark them "as a particular human type," empire's etic representations (reproductions) of their attractions and attachments de-contextualized the *amrad* love between an older (bearded) man and a younger (beardless) male adolescent¹⁸⁹—between a penetrative man and a penetrated youth—to correlate "the depiction of sodomy [with] dehumanizing bestiality," thus racializing Iranian men with same-sex sexualities as beast-like.¹⁹⁰

Gohar Homayounpour, a practicing psychoanalyst in Tehran, reproduces the chronopolitics I enumerate, in her account of Iranian persons as artifacts of Freud's Europe:

I have found sexuality in Tehran. In Tehran, today's sexuality is still Freud's sexuality. Since the very beginning my couch has been full of good old hysterics, and various other kinds of neurotic. In short, in Tehran I have encountered a kind of patient who is very much *in line* with the kinds of patients Freud was seeing during his time, a kind of patient that reminds me of a time when psychoanalysis was still in its early days. I have also

188. Freud, Sigmund. "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," *SE* 7 (1905): 125-245.

189. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* 57.

190. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*; and Boone, *Homoerotics of Orientalism* 4.

been astonished at the candor and willingness of patients in expressing sexual material openly within the sessions. Especially considering the traditional Iranian cultural base, where sexuality is supposed to be a lot more repressed and taboo than within Western cultures.”¹⁹¹

Homayounpour reduces an entire people to “a kind of patient” who lag at least one century behind Europe; she describes Iranians as sexually repressed and partial to the confessional in the same or similar ways to European persons at the *fin de siècle*. (The alternative reading she obscures and which counters the Euro-American hetero-sexualizing chronopolitical ideology I enumerate is that Iranian persons as practicing Muslims are actually sexually freer than their European counterparts.¹⁹²) Homayounpour further uses teleological language—“in line”—to correlate the image of present-day Iran with an image of the West becoming modern at the turn of the century. In this image, repressed Iranians are eager for enlightened persons to witness (recognize) their nonnormative genders and sexualities. There is a candor Pardis Mahdavi, who also subscribes to a liberal chronopolitical order, in which Iranian persons can only ever begin to arrive at coordinates white persons have formerly conquered and/or occupied, mimetically describes as a “sexual revolution.”¹⁹³

Social and political constructions of time induced by Enlightenment Humanism are chronological and continuous; they privilege persons with access to the social, political, and economic capital to move forward (literally and metaphorically) towards an identity or type that is whole, polished, and perfected. If, as Foucault describes it, “to be modern” is “not to accept

191. Homayounpour, *Doing Psychoanalysis* 129-130 (my emphasis).

192. See Mernissi, Fatema. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Indiana University Press, 1987). Mernissi’s text compares Christianity and Freudian psychoanalysis, which assume passive female sexuality, to Islam, which assumes active female sexuality. See also Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* 132.

193. Mahdavi, Pardis. *Passionate Uprisings: Iran’s Sexual Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 2008).

oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments,” but rather “to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration”¹⁹⁴—to “[occupy] an imagined place at the new end of a sequence”¹⁹⁵—then to be atavistic or uncivilized, as Iranians are caricatured in literatures of empire, is to be chronopolitically queer. Queer time arrests the ebb and flow or “roll and moil of Event,” what Sylvia Wynter describes as “the normative ‘tape of the world,’” which can only ever dispense in one direction.¹⁹⁶ Notably, the new scholarship to emerge on sex change by historian-ethnographer and endowed professor of History and Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Harvard University Afsaneh Najmabadi, while a landmark study, obscures these chronopolitics, which triangulate racial differences to code sexual perversity as racial degeneracy and racial degeneracy as sexual perversity. Specifically, Najmabadi’s research on sex reassignment does not interrogate the Historical context in which a racial calculus is used to gauge Iranian sexualities as non- or pre-modern, and thus the strategy by which contemporary Iranians measure their sexed and gendered modernities. Her research likewise does not consider how Iranians must discipline their dense, unruly bodies of color to petition for inclusion in sexed and gendered modernity, that is, for recognition as modern human types. I intervene in her findings to argue

194. Foucault, Michel. “What is Enlightenment?” (1984).

195. Freeman, *Time Binds* xii.

196. Spillers, Hortense. “‘All The Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race,” *Critical Inquiry* 22:4 (University of Chicago Press, 1996): 86; Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?” 56, 60.

Queer time occupies what Kath Weston describes as the moments between moments; it is “what you become in the moment of doubt before reclassification”—“the ‘it’ before the ‘she,’ the ‘what’ before the ‘dyke,’ the ‘huh?’ before the ‘butch,’ the ‘chola,’ the ‘society lady,’ or the ‘watch out, a weird guy in boots.’” Instead of *being*, queer genders and sexualities *become*. Elizabeth Freeman clarifies that “queer time elongates and twists chronology. ... Queer time overtakes both secular and millennial time. And within the lost moments of official history, queer time generates a discontinuous history of its own.” She elaborates queer time as “moments of asynchrony, anachronism, anastrophe, belatedness, compression, delay, ellipses, flashback, hysteron-proteron, pause, prolepsis, repetition, reversal, surprise, and other ways of breaking apart what Walter Benjamin calls ‘homogenous empty time’... [which consists] not only of history ‘proper’ but also coming out, consummation, development, domesticity, family, foreplay, genealogy, identity, liberation, modernity, the progress of movements.” See Weston, Kath. *Gender in Real Time: Power and Transience in a Visual Age* (Routledge, 2002): 28; and Freeman, *Time Binds* x-xi, xxii.

that Iranians narrate their non-normative genders and sexualities as identity and type to negate (for themselves as Other, not pace Hegel but Fanon) the racial schemas that atavistically hail them in modern historiography.

Not homosexuality, but sodomy

According to Article 234 of the new Islamic Penal Code, which came into effect in 2013, the receptive/passive partner in *livat* (sodomy) will be sentenced to death while the insertive/active partner will be sentenced to death if he meets the conditions of *ihsan* (i.e., is married and can have vaginal intercourse with his wife whenever he wishes) and to one hundred lashes if he does not. *Livat* is defined in Article 233 of the Islamic Penal Code as “penetration of a man’s sex organ, up to or beyond the point of circumcision, into the anus of another man.” If penetration does not take place, the lesser crime of *tafkhez* may apply, which is defined in Article 235 of the Islamic Penal Code as “placing a man’s sex organ between the thighs or the buttocks of another man.”

— *Justice for Iran and the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang)*¹⁹⁷

Sodomy is an ideologically though not empirically homosexual act in the Islamic Republic punishable by death, but women suspected of “placing female genitalia on the genitalia of the same sex” are sentenced to a punitive, in other words, non-lethal 100 lashes.¹⁹⁸ Thomas Erdbrink, *The New York Times*’ bureau chief or its “Man in Tehran,” explains that

contrary to what some might think, there is no law against homosexuality [in the Islamic Republic of Iran]. There is, however, a law against sodomy, which carries the death penalty. It is very difficult to prove. The law requires at least four eyewitnesses who must be pious Muslims and who must also explain what they had been doing to witness such an act. They are required to explain why they didn’t leave the room or why they didn’t

197. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 56.

198. “The Execution of Women in Iranian Criminal Law: an Examination of the Impact of Gender on Laws Concerning Capital Punishment in the New Islamic Penal Code,” *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center*. <www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/legal-commentary/1000000102-the-execution-of-women-in-iranian-criminal-law.html>.

cover their eyes or, if they had their hands and feet bound, why they didn't turn their heads to look away. ...Any perception in the West that people are hanged regularly on every street corner for their sexuality or gender identity is far from reality.¹⁹⁹

Like women suspected of same-sex sexualities, men “convicted of *tafkhez*” or non-penetrative sex acts “are sentenced to one hundred lashes. The punishment on the fourth conviction”—again, like for women suspected of genital sex with other women—“shall be the death penalty.”²⁰⁰ I suggest that the Islamic Republic sentences all persons suspected of sodomy but not all persons suspected of homosexual activities to immediate death because sodomy signals racial degeneracy in the Orientalist lore that is still very much a part of liberal humanist discourse about Iran and its people.²⁰¹ (Take, for example, the lobby group Iran180's float at the 2011 San Francisco Pride

199. Erdbrink, Thomas and Roel Van Broekhoven. “Our Man in Tehran Answers Your Questions About Iran,” *The New York Times* 15 May 2015. <www.nytimes.com/2015/05/16/world/middleeast/questions-about-iran-ask-our-man-in-tehran.html?_r=0>.

200. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 56.

201. It is worth pausing here to reflect on what Foucault locates as the potential of Shi'a Islam to instantiate a radically different world. The revolution was not imagined as a break with (from) Euro-American modernity or a return to pre-modern forms of life; it was, as Foucault articulates in his writings on the “collective will” of the Iranian people, a move towards becoming Otherwise. Even in its Islamic articulations, revolutionary efforts agitated for (towards) a global insurrection—a commitment Foucault witnessed on the streets of Iran:

Iran is currently experiencing a generalized political strike, which is really a strike *in relation to* politics. This has two aspects. There is a refusal to sustain in any manner the current system, to allow its apparatus, its administration, or its economy to function. But there is also a refusal to step aside in favor of a political battle over a future constitution, over social issues, over foreign policy, or over the replacement of officials. To be sure, these issues are discussed, but in such a way that these questions cannot give rise to political manipulation by anyone. All of these spines, the Iranian people, transform themselves into a hedgehog. The Iranian people's political will is to prevent politics from gaining a foothold (qtd. in Afary and Anderson 212, original emphasis).

Foucault expresses admiration for the ways in which Iranians endlessly demonstrated against the Shah in the months leading up to the revolution. It was “the repetition of [their] demonstration” that impressed Foucault; he wrote that Iranians had taken “the very word *demonstration*...literally: a people was tirelessly *demonstrating* its will” (254, original emphasis). He suspected that their efforts “transgressed the Western borders of rationality,” in other words, “could break down the binary logics of [Euro-American] modernity” (99). They agitated for something that would radically change the world order and their place in it—for “the promise and guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity” (255). In his October 1978 article, “What are the Iranians Dreaming About?” published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Foucault clarifies:

parade, in which a nuclear missile sodomizes Ahmadinejad's effigy.²⁰²) I further suspect that even religiously devout and socially conservative Iranians reproduce empire's associations of sodomy with bestiality for Historical, in other words, secular and not (just) religious reasons. The Iranians who appear in Eshaghian's documentary and Morton's episode seek to manipulate empire's racism to gain recognition for their modern human genus (*jins*). Iran carries out more gender reassignment surgeries than any country in the world besides Thailand; and, surgeons are often Western-trained.²⁰³ Doctor Bahram Mir-Jalali, for example, is a Paris-trained surgeon who claimed in 2008 that he has performed over 450 gender reassignment surgeries in Tehran in the last 12 years—ten times the number of surgeries he suspects he would have performed in Europe. His numbers, which are especially staggering for male-to-female transitioning patients, indicate that sex reassignment surgeries strictly regulate genitalia to non-therapeutic ends. If, as the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network's (6Rang's) and Justice for Iran's evocative 2014

One thing must be clear: By "Islamic government" nobody in Iran means a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control. ... "A utopia," someone told me without any pejorative implication. "An ideal," most of them said to me (206).

In Iran, Foucault saw a movement in which "one risked everything for an entirely different world" (261). His writings on the Islamic Revolution are reproduced (translated) by Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (University of Chicago Press: 2005).

202. Iran180 is a coalition of pro-Israeli groups curated to appear as a grassroots human rights organization. See Doherty, Benjamin. "Israel lobby group Iran180 'sodomizes' Ahmadinejad effigy with nuke at San Francisco Pride," *The Electronic Intifada* 11 June 2012. <electronicintifada.net/blogs/benjamin-doherty/israel-lobby-group-iran180-sodomizes-ahmadinejad-effigy-nuke-san-francisco>. One could argue that sodomy as racial terror also motivated the sexual assault of Abu Ghraib prisoners in Iraq and generally haunts U.S. imperialism.

203. According to the *Guardian*, "Iran carries out more gender change operations than any country in the world besides Thailand." Iran's official numbers indicate between 15,000 and 20,000 transsexual residents, "although unofficial estimates put the figure at up to 150,000." Tait, Robert. "Sex change funding undermines no gay claims." *Guardian* 26 September 2007. www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/sep/26/iran.gender.

While compelling, comparisons to Thailand are dangerous given what Jennifer Terry describes as the potential for white feminist henchmen of empire to celebrate (appropriate) Iran's financial and institutional support for trans reassignment. My research clarifies that Iran is not a Shangri-La of sex change, meaning, Iran is not the utopian future of post-gendered or post-sexed bodies—because in addition to Orientalist proscriptions that read Iran as always already delayed, emic discourse, notably, the religio-legally discourse that authorizes trans reassignment, is in fact heavily invested in reinforcing the gender and sexual binary. See Terry, Jennifer. Directed reading course. "Literature in Transgender Studies." University of California, Irvine. Fall 2011.

report “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran” suggests, medical and legal practitioners advise “lesbian, gay and transgender people, on a routine basis, that their same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity is a sign of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) [*ekhtelal-i hoviat-i jensy*] that must be treated with ‘reparative’ therapies of sex reassignment surgeries,” then as a state program that means to realign “social” gender with “biological” sex, reassignment makes queer persons appropriate for public consumption and heterosexual pairings while brutally dispossessing them of their very (queer) sense/s of self.²⁰⁴

This program invests the work of thinking race and the work of thinking sex with the same social and political constructions of time: forward-moving and teleological time, which anticipates a whole body that is polished and perfected. That is, sex change as therapy or cure for homo sexualities activates what Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks describes as the fantasy or promise of wholeness: the fantasy or promise of being wholly white or wholly human, wholly male (man) or wholly female (woman)²⁰⁵—but mostly, wholly male (man), because, “as in many other places, in Iran conceptions of female-female desire and relationships have a different historical trajectory, which only very recently and very partially have come into categorical affinity with male-male sexual desires and practices (under the rubric of homosexuality).”²⁰⁶ Unlike male same-sex desires, which amplify colonial caricatures of national impotence—as the measure of national virility, male sexualities are a cipher for “the health of the nation,” specifically, a yardstick for Iran’s civilizational development²⁰⁷—female same-sex desires are not a source of

204. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 13.

205. Seshadri-Crooks, Kalpana. *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (Routledge, 2000).

206. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 5.

207. *Ibid.* 4.

national shame. (They are instead historicized through national coverage of nineteen-year-old Mahin Padidarnazar from Lahijan, who murdered girlfriend Zahra Amin in 1973 in a fit of rage.²⁰⁸)

I argued in Chapter 1 that regardless of their adherence or opposition to Islamic values, Iranians imagine themselves as a people who are progressively moving through time to arrive at what Homi Bhabha describes as colonial mimicry, which I elaborate as white mimicry.²⁰⁹ Here, I want to suggest that socially conservative and religiously devout Iranians, including representatives of the Islamic state as well as a trans person's family and/or community (one informant's mother, Shahin, brought her work supervisor to a transsexual support conference) pathologize male same-sex practices because they are especially sensitive to the chronopolitics of modern historiography—that is, because the spectre of sodomy as willful de-humanization undercuts the image of Iran as progressively (if alternatively) modern/izing and (in the language of race science) its people standing upright to arrive at a human form that is abstracted in shades

208. Najmabadi explains, “Unlike modern male homosexuality in Iran, which had come to live (and in important ways continues to live) under the weight of its association with pederasty, rape, and murder,” female same-sex sexualities were historicized through coverage of nineteen-year-old Mahin Padidarnazar from Lahijan, who murdered her girlfriend Zahra Amin on November 27, 1973 in a fit of rage. Specifically, “the two national dailies, *Ittila'at and Kayhan*, as well as their affiliated women's weeklies, *Ittila'at-i banuvan* and *Zan-i ruz*, gave front-page headlines and substantial inside space to the story, extensively reporting and analyzing both the initial crime and the later trial. Through this coverage, a sustained discussion of ‘female *homosexualité*’ took place in a national space, perhaps for the first time.” *Zan-i ruz* ran a series on the *homosexualité*, inviting doctors and other medical experts to testify because, the editors wrote, “in the current atmosphere of openness and curiosity in today's Iran, such education matters must be explained in scientific language and in the words of experts so that families and youth become informed and are not led astray through ignorance,” as Zahra was believed to have been. The magazine, however, was “against the categorization of ‘Mahin's condition’ as a biopsychology one; it insisted that the condition was caused by ignorance and the failure of parental care, the irresponsibility of school authorities, and outdated social norms. Beyond ‘individual treatment,’ it called for radical social rethinking and reform of the sex/gender life of the country through enlightened policies such as introducing sex education and coeducation in the country's schools” (Ibid. 82, 75, 99-100, 115). The aggressor in this national coverage-*cum*-historiography of female same-sex sexualities is a male-presenting (cross-dressing) Mahin, who the media characterized as not just sexually deviant, but dangerously (murderously) so. Mahin, who reportedly wrote to her brother: “‘I want to change sex. ...I can't be a woman,’” became a public personality spectacularized to associate female same-sex sexualities with crime. This association thereafter “prefigured, and continues in the present to configure, different perceptions and sociocultural reception of [male-to-female] and [female-to-male] transsexuality” in Iranian contexts (Ibid. 115, 101).

209. Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

of white. Even socially conservative and religiously devout Iranians are Weststruck insofar as they imbue scientific knowledge and measure scientific progress (i.e., sex change technologies) with Enlightenment ideology.

Adult Iranian men who pursue sex with other men are additionally pathologized by their own (emic) cultures, that is, their subjectivization is compounded by local prejudices. In contexts evacuated of Enlightenment chronopolitics, and if globalized mediascapes permit (I suggest they don't), conservative and devout Iranians liken adult men with same-sex desires to the *amrad* or beardless, adolescent male youth. They infer that these men simulate vaginal intercourse in sex acts with other men (presumably, as the active agent) as a substitute for the real thing. More to the point, they assume (hope) that adult men with same-sex attractions will soon pass from “an object of desire” to “the desiring man,” which in Hegel’s metaphysics is a paradigmatically white (human/ist) position. Adult men with same-sex attractions are thus reassured that theirs is a transitional love that anticipates hetero- sexualities, or (if it must deviate from the telos of the Euro-Enlightenment modernity) is a pre-operative transsexuality.²¹⁰

A Supreme Ruler’s Fatwa

Imam Khomeini has addressed this issue of changing gender with complete confidence. He states: It is not a sin. An action is allowed, unless it states specifically in the [Quran] that an act is a sin.

—Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia²¹¹

Ayatollah Khomeini, the country’s first supreme leader, wrote about sex change before he swept into power in 1979. In *Tahrir al-wasilah*, a 1967/8 ruling he composed while in exile in Iraq, Khomeini devotes an entire subsection to “The Changing of Sex” in “The Examination of Contemporary Questions,” wherein he tacitly supports transsexualities, writing:

210. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* 16.

211. Eshaghian, Tanaz, dir. “Be Like Others”/“Transsexuals in Iran.” 2008. Film, minute mark 09:39 – 09:56.

The prima facie (*al-zahir*) view is contrary to prohibiting the changing, by operation, of a man's sex to that of a woman or vice versa; likewise, the operation [in the case] of a hermaphrodite is not prohibited in order that s/he may become incorporated into one of the two sexes. Does this [sex change operation] become obligatory if a woman perceives in herself, the inclinations which are among the type of inclinations of a man [literally, the root/origin inclinations of a man], or some qualities of masculinity; or if a man perceives, in himself, the inclinations or some qualities of the opposite sex? The prima facie view is that it [sex change] is not obligatory if the person is truly of one sex, and changing his/her sex to the opposite sex is possible.²¹²

While Iran's first trans reassignment surgery took place in 1973—at least two hospitals, one in Tehran and the other in Shiraz, accommodated trans reassignment by the mid-1970s²¹³—the practice for intersex patients as a kind of “wondrous spectacle” has reportedly been underway in Iran since the 1930s. By the 1950s, “transsexual surgeries emerged as a variant of the larger scientific marvel of sex change,” as a testament to Iran's scientific progress.²¹⁴

Sex change as trans reassignment was halted in 1976, after approximately thirty known surgeries had been performed, when the Medical Council of Iran (MCI) banned the practice for ethical reasons, except for in cases of intersex patients. The MCI rejected trans surgeries because the “changing of the apparent sex through surgical operations and the like *is not possible*,” they

212. Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhullah. *Tahrir al-wasilah*, two volumes. Najaf: Matba 'at al-Adab, 1967 or 8 (1387 AH); qtd. in Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 174-175. Translation by Maryann Shenoda and Afasneh Najmabadi.

213. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 19.

214. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 38.

By the 1970s, “the diverse and increasing reports of sex change in Iran and internationally provided important occasions for the merging conversation on the scientific understanding of ‘sex’ and contributed to the production of two important and related effects. The first was the shifting of the discourse on sex change from wonders of nature/creation to scientific sexology; the second was the dislodging of sex in sex change from sex as it related to the anatomical distinction/ambiguity between male and female to sex as it related to sexual desire and practices” (Ibid. 49).

claimed, “‘neither from a psychological nor from a physiological respect.’ Since this type of young man”—the concern (again) is with male-*cum*-national virility—“cannot become a perfect woman.”²¹⁵ In Najmabadi’s succinct summation, the MCI “implies that to be a ‘perfect woman’ is to be a perfect ‘hole, and that surgically modified [male-to-female] trans individuals are deficient in womanhood to the extent that the surgeries they receive produce unsatisfactory holes.”²¹⁶ Curiously, the MCI’s opposition to and the state’s support for trans surgeries likewise pivot on “an image of the whole body” that is “polished, perfected and sealed up in the symbolic order, for the other’s gaze.”²¹⁷

The practice was not reconstituted until after 1985, when Khomeini issued a second fatwa as the country’s first Supreme Ruler, that is, when his political authority on the topic could be buoyed by his “unique position as leader of the most massive revolution in the late twentieth

215. *Newsletter of the Medical Council of Iran* 12 (July 23, 1979): 29 (original quotation); qtd. in Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 152 (my emphasis).

216. *Ibid.* 153.

217. Stephens, Michelle Ann. *Skin Acts: Psychoanalysis and the Black Male Performer* (Duke University Press Books, 2014) 196.

Najmabadi elaborates, her study impressing (as I have attempted to) that mediascapes and spectacle curate national and political identities in Iranian contexts, “The MCI’s insistence on the impossibility of sex change, along with the simultaneous banning of surgeries deemed impossible”—again, because in the male-to-female instance, a perfect hole cannot be constructed, in other words, patients cannot become wholly female (woman)—“combined with the prominent coverage of the decision in the national dailies, created a productive public conversation that circulated knowledge of surgical sex change on an unprecedented scale. Against the MCI’s intentions, perhaps, the very possibility of such operations received broader attention.” Likewise, “the explosion of transsexuality into the printed and electronic media” prompted “the emergence of a more visible group of trans activists. First, it gave them vocal leverage vis-à-vis various government agencies: The circulation of socially significant journalism made trans persons into subjects deserving of governmental action. Indeed, given the more open and critical atmosphere of much of the press from the mid-1990s into the first years of Ahmadinejad’s first presidential term, many of the reports not only assigned themselves the task of ‘educating the public’ but also had a critical edge, bringing under scrutiny what was seen as governmental inaction and neglect of a socially vulnerable group. Second, the concept of transsexuality became widely knowable and a concept for (self-)cognition through the publication and circulation of these reports and documentaries. As such, they served, especially for persons outside Tehran, as the medium through which they heard about transsexuality—in terms of sex change possibilities and its availability in Iran, and in terms of the right procedures to follow to get certification, but just as importantly in terms of self-cognition, of defining one’s subjectivity. The satellite television broadcast *Yad-i yaran* was mentioned specifically by several trans persons from smaller towns as a program that made them identify themselves as *trans*. The reported rise in the number of trans applications may have been an effect of this expansion of the domain of public knowability, recognition, and self-cognition” (*Professing Selves* 157, 207-208 (original emphasis)).

century.”²¹⁸ Najmabadi suggests that Khomeini’s political authority “[overrules] even his own cautionary ‘prima facie’” or hesitant support for sex change. The 1985 fatwa, which “was not issued as a result of some student-teacher exercise in theological reasoning, nor by questions sent to Khomeini by any other agent in the complicated legal and medical geography of interested parties,” but by the trans lobbying efforts of Maryam Khatun Mulk-ara, a devout male-to-female trans person who sought Khomeini’s counsel, erected the state’s current medical and legal sex reassignment infrastructure. Mulk-ara personally “went to Jamaran, to the household of [Ayatollah Khomeini]. ...Also present were Ayatollahs Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ardebili. [S/he] had a brief conversation with the Imam, but the result was really satisfactory, because there and then, the Imam issued a fatwa stating that changing sex with a doctor’s approval is not prohibited [*bila-mani*].”²¹⁹ Because sex reassignment for trans persons was not supported by the MCI in the years immediately following Khomeini’s second fatwa, medical professionals “had to turn to their Islamist-identified colleagues to introduce change” to their fields.²²⁰ That Islamists were leading the charge of scientific progress suggests an alternative modernity was underway in Iran,

218. Najmabadi, Afsaneh. “Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith: Transgender/sexuality in Contemporary Iran.” *Social Research* 78:2 (Summer 2011): 543, 542 (my emphasis).

219. Ibid. 165.

Mulk-ara elaborates, “I was in a religious conundrum’ [*az li haz-i shari ‘i sargar-dan*].” Born as the male Faridun, s/he began publically presenting (dressing) as a woman as a teenager, and by the age of eighteen, she identified as a transsexual. In the 1970s, after she had gone abroad to London for sex change, Mulk-ara “began lobbying various authorities to see what could be done in Iran, but everyone told her that because of the prevailing social atmosphere, the government could not do anything. By this time, of course, it was not some nebulous presumed social conservatism but an official scientific institution—the MCI—that had closed the emerging medical possibilities for [sex reassignment surgeries] in Iran.” Mulk-ara animated some of the earliest trans lobbying in Iran; Najmabadi recounts, “When in 1982-3 she heard that yet another friend had been arrested” for transsexuality, “she called the office of the Speaker of the Parliament Hashemi Rafsanjani. She had a meeting with him in which he promised to help. Rafsanjani also introduced her to Sayyed Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardebili, then the head of the Judiciary, and to Ayatollah Jannati, who asked Ayatollah Khomeini for a directive. Khomeini’s response was that in case of physiological disorders there was no problem for changing sex. Mulk-ara did not find this response satisfactory. As she later put it, ‘this answer was only for people who had apparently visible problems, not for transsexuals [*tara-jinsiyati-ha*] who have psychological challenges,” which is why Mulk-ara decided to approach him personally in Jamaran (Ibid. 159, 165).

220. Ibid. 168.

as Al-e Ahmad et al. had hoped. Modifications to the body like those induced by sex reassignment “were no longer seen as necessarily intervening in God’s design, opening a space for trans arguments that their surgeries were not elective cosmetic whims.”²²¹ Rather, and as in Mulk-ara’s case, sex reassignment was thought to aid (finish) God’s design.

Reassignment further resonates with devout Iranians—in Najmabadi’s reading, it is the not state but families and communities that pressure persons with same-sex sexualities to pursue reassignment²²²—because the Quran does not expressly forbid it (though, to be sure, sex change technologies like surgery and hormone therapy were unknown at the time of its transcription). According to legal Shi’ite scholar Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on transsexuality and is the leading religio-legal authority on the subject, while “there is nothing in the Quran condemning [transsexuality] as a sin,” same-sex desires and practices “in the Quran [have] been forbidden and [are] recognized as a tremendous sin.”²²³ In an interview with VICE, Karimi-nia specifically cites “the Quranic story of Lut and the passages therein that reproach men of that tribe ‘for approaching men, instead of women, lustfully’” and for “‘leaving the wives that [their] Lord created for [them] behind’” to make this case.²²⁴ That is, his authoritative interpretation—Karimi-nia is tasked with using his doctoral research to “[come] up with answers to the many questions concerning daily life for transsexual persons...on issues of marriage, divorce,

221. Ibid. 168.

222. Najmabadi deduces from ethnographic research that “family severance is a very serious social issue, as so much of one’s life is defined and made possible (or impossible) through one’s location within an intricate network of extended family members, family friends, and acquaintances. Thus, severance from family often means not only emotional hardship and homelessness for prospective transsexuals, but also a loss of education and job opportunities.” See Najmabadi, Afsaneh. “Transing and Transpassing Across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36:3-4 (2008): 31.

223. Morton, Thomas. “Transsexuals of Iran,” *VICE* (Home Box Office, 2015) minute mark 21:40; 21:04.

224. Qur’an 7:81, qtd. in “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 55.

child custody, inheritance, and so on”²²⁵—renders male same-sex desires and practices especially suspect.

The Quran’s disregard for trans subjectivities permits Iranians with same-sex proclivities who want to “be seen to be respectable” to avoid a moral reckoning by passing as trans.²²⁶ A diagnosable disease in medico-legal discourse further removes moral burdens for Iranians, mostly, men who believe that their attractions are “unnatural,” against religion or society.²²⁷ At a transsexual support conference in Gorgan hosted by Iran’s office of Health Ministry and Medical Education captured on camera by Eshaghian and her team, Karimi-nia explains in his keynote address to trans persons and their families, lightening their load,

Families repeatedly ask me, and those who want to have a sex change ask, “Is what we’re doing in accordance with Islamic law?” ...If changing your gender was to be considered a sin because you are changing God’s natural order, then all of our daily tasks would be sins! You take wheat and turn it into flour, and turn that into bread. That’s a change! There are thousands of things we do everyday that are changes in God’s natural order. Why is that not considered a sin?²²⁸

Karimi-nia abstracts changing sex as the material construction of a w/whole from raw materials, which I suggest is the unsigned flesh (recall that his interpretation of the Quran specifically admonishes male same-sex practices). Dr. Mir-Jalali, a practicing sex change surgeon who

225. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 179

226. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 29.

227. When Zahra, a female-to-male trans person, was asked “If you could live like a man from all points of view, would you be willing not to go for sex-change?” s/he poignantly responded, “I will have problems with my partner, our society will not accept it, I myself cannot accept it.” Najmabadi deduces, “While there is a growing acceptance of the medico-legal-religious notion that transsexualism is not a willing (*iradi*) condition, non-heterosexuality, in contrast, continues to be seen overwhelming as not only unnatural but a willfully corrupt practice” (Ibid. 25 or 252, 192).

228. Eshaghian, “Be Like Others” minute mark 09:27 – 10:25.

fancies himself a “pioneer” of trans care and rights but (like the state authorities and religious clerics he distances himself from) describes transsexuality as “[a] problem nature created,” testifies to Karimi-nia’s analogy. He characterizes sex reassignment surgery as “an inhumane operation,” indeed, as a violence best suited for non-human persons or animals (chattel) because it requires nothing less than being “ripped apart,” one’s bits and pieces of flesh dismembered to be put back together again, anew.²²⁹

Clarifying *Jins*

In Islam, categorical sex is bodily sex, determined by the genitals. The medical sciences have other grounds as well, such as chromosomes; that may be helpful in disambiguating the intersex, but for the purposes of religious law it is the apparent sex of the body that counts.

—Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia²³⁰

Legal Shi’ite scholars have responded to Khomeini’s ruling/s by deliberating the designations of male and female in Islamic jurisprudence. While they find that distinctions of male and female in *fiqhi* or Islamic thinking are “not identical to and do not perform the same work as biological sex taxonomies” in modernist discourse, they conclude that in “contemporary discussions,” which are the accounts Iranian persons give about themselves, to themselves and to others, on screens and off, in casual as well as formal exchanges, sex and gender distinctions, or (in the Persian) *jins* “[travel] between two distinct registers: the classical meaning of *jins* as genus of something

229. Ibid. minute mark 32:28 – 32:30, 14:12 – 14:20.

230. Qtd. In Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 181.

This statement is prompted by an exchange with Afsaneh Najmabadi, who reproduces Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia’s quote. Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia is a legal Shi’ite scholar at the Specialization Center in Islamic Law and Judiciary (*Markaz-I Takhassuni-i Huquq va Qaza-yi Islami*) in Qom who specializes on transsexuality.

and the notion of sex (*jins*) in its modern sense.”²³¹ Regardless of their expressed doubts about the permissibility of gender reassignment for trans-identified persons, most if not all legal Shi’ite scholars “consider intersex surgeries permissible because they bring out ‘the hidden genus’ of the body,” specifically, because sex change presumably clarifies the intersex person’s unspecified or *bilataklif* genus, that is, their species or kind²³²—a racial designation Sylvia Wynter describes as *genre*. Their attention to sex as genus or genre complements rather than complicates my argument that the Iran of the Islamic Republic correlates sex change with race science.

While Najmabadi translates *bilataklif* persons are those “in a conundrum,” I want to suggest that they are better understood as undisciplined and/or undifferentiated sexualities. Among *taklif*’s various meanings are assignment, homework, duty, and notably, puberty; its prefix, *bilal*, means without.²³³ In Najmabadi’s summation but not mine, “the doubling of *jins*,” in which sexual differences are known as racial ones, “provides a distinct set of affiliations for ‘sex’ in Persian that is not identical to its English chains of association.” I suspect that in Iran like in the United States and Europe, which is to say, structurally, as the grammar of human taxonomy, “*jins* is never just sex. Nor can genus be innocent of sex.”²³⁴ Reassignment cuts the

231. Najmabadi, “Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith” 544.

232. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 174.

233. Ibid. 148, 178.

Najmabadi clarifies in “Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith” that “the transformation of the sociocultural notion of sex/gender over the past century has brought into proximity the male/female distinction of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) with the biological sex taxonomies and social categories of men and women. This proximity has enabled the convergence of some *fiqhi* thinking with the biomedical and psychosexual [Euro-American] discourse about transsexuality” (544). In *Professing Selves*, Najmabadi elaborates, “It is precisely the coming together of politico-religious authority with the scientific authority of psychology/psychiatry—the coming together of biomedical and psycho-sexological discourse with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqhi*) rulings after 1979—that has enabled the sorting of different categories of sex/gender-variant persons” (20).

234. Najmabadi, “Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith” 550.

racial fabric of a flesh unsignified by puberty (*taklif*); sex change attempts to remake what Hortense Spillers describes in a different but, I argue in Chapter 3, not unrelated context (because humanist proscriptions of racial blackness inform even Iranian understandings of self and Other) as “that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.”²³⁵

Reassignment surgery makes modern sex-*cum*-gender out of undifferentiated flesh to efface the primitivizing specter of sodomy. In Iran, the word *jins*, which is used to differentiate between men (males) from women (females) in a sex/gender model not unlike our own, actually reproduces Enlightenment modernity’s human-making project, because it inscribes sexuality with racial significance. The deployment of *jins* (sex) *qua* genus (race or genre) in formal interpretations of the Islamic thought and governance Al-e Ahmad et al. prescribed as a way out of Enlightenment modernity, that is, as an alternative space of progress that does not imitate the West, suggests that even this alternative cultural landscape (also home to an insatiable demand for hair-removal and skin-lightening treatments, and an aquiline nose fetish that makes Tehran the rhinoplasty capital of the world) is over-determined by social and political constructions of time inherited from Hegel’s Europe.

Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies

I have suggested that male-*cum*-national virility is at stake for Khomeini and the legal Shi’ite scholars who have interpreted his teachings to conflate trans desires and identifications and same-sex attractions and attachments. In their 2014 report “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and

235. Spillers, Hortense. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics* 17:2 (Summer 1987): 67.

Transgender People in Iran,” human rights organizations Justice for Iran and the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6rang) suggest that Khomeini²³⁶

made sex reassignment surgery *vajeb* [obligatory] “when someone is in doubt about his manhood or womanhood and strongly suspects that he has the appearance of a man but is truly a woman or that she has the appearance of a woman but is truly a man.” According to some Shiite *hadiths* [teachings and sayings], true manhood and womanhood [*jins*] is inherently defined by opposite-sex attraction; a true man is one who is attracted to women and a true woman is one who is attracted to men. Accordingly, when women and men experience same-sex attraction, they are thought to experience the qualities and inclinations of the opposite sex. As such, the implication of Ayatollah Khomeini’s *fatwa* is that men and women are not merely *permitted* but are indeed *obliged* to resort to sex reassignment surgery.²³⁷

The product of joint research overseen by Shadi Amin, 6Rang’s founder and coordinator, who lives in Germany and consults with the United Nations about human rights violations in Iran, the report panders to liberal pluralist approaches to human rights and liberties, reminding readers, among other things, that “Iran is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 7 of which provides that ‘[n]o one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.’” Amin and her team explain, “Free consent is not ‘mere acceptance of a medical intervention.’ It is rather ‘a voluntary

236. Justice for Iran, founded in 2010 to “give a voice to the voiceless,” is a London-based human rights organization that regularly publishes research reports—for example: “Thirty Five Years of Forced Hijab: The Widespread and Systematic Violation of Women’s Rights in Iran” (2014) and “Stolen Lives Empty Classroom: An Overview on Girl Marriage” (2013)—and participates in human rights advocacy, promoting accountability and redress through the UN and EU. Its Board of Advisors includes Yakin Erturk, currently on the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), the anti-torture committee of the Council of Europe; Payam Akhavan, Professor of Law at McGill University; and Marietje Schaake, a Dutch member of the European Parliament who serves on the Committee on Foreign Affairs. See more at justice4iran.org.

237. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 20-21.

and sufficiently informed decision, protecting the right of the patient to be involved in medical decision-making, and assigning associated duties and obligations to health-care providers.”²³⁸

238. Ibid. 16.

The report continues,

Iran is also a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 12 of which guarantees “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors the implementation of the ICESCR, has stated: “The right to health contains both freedoms and entitlements. The freedoms include the right to control one’s health and body, including sexual and reproductive freedom, and the right to be free from interference, such as the right to be free from torture, non-consensual medical treatment and experimentation. By contrast, the entitlements include the right to a system of health protection which provides equality of opportunity for people to enjoy the highest attainable level of health.” The circumstances in which lesbian, gay and transgender people in Iran undergo “reparative” therapies and sex reassignment surgeries barely seem to meet the standards of free and informed consent described above. The majority of lesbian, gay and transgender persons interviewed for this report recounted that their health-care providers did not provide them with accurate information about various crosscutting issues relating to sexual orientation and gender diversity. They were, for example, kept unaware that:

- Homosexuality had been removed from the second edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II) in 1973 because it had been recognized that “homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities.”
- The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) has affirmed that gender variance is not in and of itself pathological and that having a cross- or transgender identity does not constitute a psychiatric disorder.
- International standards of care for the health of transgender, transsexual and gender-nonconforming people have recognized that not all transgender people necessarily need or want “the complete therapeutic triad [of]... real-life experience in the desired role, hormones of the desired gender, and surgery to change the genitalia and other sex characteristics.”
- Numerous countries including Canada, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Germany, India and the United Kingdom have taken steps in recent years to abolish the requirement of sex reassignment surgeries imposed on transgender individuals in order to obtain legal gender recognition, but may still require individuals to undergo hormone therapy.

They were also given types of medical advice that

- Pathologized homosexual orientation and gender variance;
- Assigned a diagnosis of disordered gender identity based on social non-conformity to gender stereotypes, including same-sex attraction;
- Gave a false or deceptive impression about the clinical or scientific basis of psychiatric efforts intended to change people’s sexual orientation or gender identity; and
- Misrepresented the efficacy and the potential for harm of sex reassignment surgeries when counseling individuals distressed by their sexual orientation and gender variance.

To be sure, the stories that gender and sexual nonconforming Iranians tell to Amin and her team—Western-trained social scientists who are collecting subjective data to share with an English-speaking audience, indeed, to circulate in empire’s racist knowledge-power regime, which (pace Fanon) functions like a feedback loop—are suspect. These stories resemble those Najmabadi and HBO collect insofar they suggest that political recognition for queer subjects is only extended to trans persons who undergo sex change to remake not (just) their sex but also and notably their genus or *genre* of being.

“Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” opens with anecdotal evidence that Iranian medical professions are advising persons with same-sex sexualities that their attractions necessitate “psychiatric, hormonal and surgical interventions inconsistent with [their] individual needs and harmful to [their] long-term physical, psychological and emotional health.”²³⁹ Like Najmabadi, Amin and her team find that non-trans persons with same-sex sexualities opt for reassignment not because they are directly pressured to do so by the state, but because they experience indirect pressures; specifically, they are “excluded from family homes, denied employment, prevented from going to school” and experience “physical and verbal attacks in public and private settings.”²⁴⁰ These are social and psychic pressures; Iranians with same-sex sexualities who are not phenomenologically trans are

distressed with the traumas sustained due to family and community violence, and

discriminated against by laws criminalizing consensual homosexual acts, prohibiting

These practices represent serious violations of the right of lesbian, gay and transgender persons to informed consent, and are attributable to the Iranian State not only because it fails to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish them but also because it enacts and enforces a range of laws and practices that severely restrict the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, perpetuating the stigmatization and discrimination of lesbian, gay and transgender persons in health-care settings and elsewhere (“Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 16-19)

239. “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies” 13-14.

240. Ibid. 15.

trans-dressing, and imposing sex reassignment surgery as a prerequisite for obtaining legal gender recognition. ... This pressure is exerted through an official discourse, enforced by various laws and policies, which [consider] homosexuality as a form of crime, sin, and deviation, but treats transsexuality as a legitimate health problem for which the sanctioned cure is sex reassignment surgery. The champions of this discourse, which include both state officials and state-affiliated mental health professionals, regularly distinguish between “disordered transsexuals” and “deviant homosexuals,” labeling those who exhibit homosexual tendencies and gender variant expressions as belonging to one of these two categories based on whether or not they agree to undergo psychiatric and surgical treatments aimed at “curing” them of homosexuality and turning them into gender conforming men or women. Examples of such treatments include electroshock therapy, prescription of mind-altering and nausea-inducing drugs, unwanted sexual intercourse with members of the opposite sex, hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgeries resulting in sterilization, unsightly scarring, loss of sexual sensation, and a range of serious and severe health problems.²⁴¹

Amin et al.’s report simplifies, indeed, flattens the dilemma of non-trans persons with same-sex attractions and attachments thus: “Obtain identification documents” in which gender expression is not fluid (both/and) but is either man *or* woman, or “[refuse] to undergo sex reassignment surgeries,” sustaining one’s emotional and physical health as a non-trans person but forgoing legal recognition.²⁴² Najmabadi’s staid, ethnographic account, while appropriately nuanced and skeptical—she suggests that persons with same-sex sexualities opt to pass for trans to receive health insurance, financial assistance, and exemption from military service, for example²⁴³—also

241. Ibid. 14.

242. Ibid. 15.

243. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 20.

obscures how sex change promises to transmogrify the material body in flux into a static and fixed body complete with matching genital parts.

Professing Selves

The genealogy I sketch, in which trans reassignment is a practically Occidental technology of race science, puts pressure on Najmabadi's findings in *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (2013) and the two articles that anticipate her manuscript: "Transing and Transpassing Across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran" (2008) and "Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith: Transgender/sexuality in Contemporary Iran" (2011).²⁴⁴

Surprisingly, Najmabadi's study does little more than acknowledge that Iran's medico-legal discourses "explicitly [frame]" sex reassignment "as the cure for a diseased abnormality" to differentiate between trans and same-sex experiences in emergent Iranian contexts.²⁴⁵ She further intimates that persons who undergo sex change are always already trans by flattening their gender dis/identifications as sexual attractions, thus obscuring the phenomenological or "felt sense" of their sexual difference/s. For instance, she writes:

Adolescence is the period in which many transsexuals, especially MtFs [male-to-females], find family life either unbearable and leave, at least temporarily, or are thrown out by families. ...MtFs are much more likely to face this predicament than FtMs [females-to-males]. Correspondingly, family reconciliation is often easier for FtMs than MtFs.

Several close relatives of (pre/non/post-op) FtMs explicitly said their acceptance of their daughter/sister becoming a son/brother would have been unimaginable if it had been the other way around. The reason for this disparity is not simply gender bias, though it is that

244. Najmabadi, "Transing and Transpassing" 23-42; and "Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith: Transgender/sexuality in Contemporary Iran." *Social Research* 78:2 (Summer 2011).

245. Najmabadi, "Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith" 535.

too—namely, the preference for a male offspring. More importantly, the disparity arises from the repugnance and shame that the culture associates with “passive” male same-sex practices. MtFs seem, sadly and ironically, to live forever under the sign of being *kunis* (literally meaning “anal,” but in Persian connoting receptive of anal penetration), even though that is precisely what in many cases they are trying to disavow and move away from through sex change. In their autobiographical narratives, many reiterate that they have never allowed themselves to be anally penetrated even with their long-time boyfriends, and that they have been patiently going through the legal and medical changes in order to acquire a vagina before they get married.²⁴⁶

Even as persons whose *jins* or genus is cut and differentiated anew, and despite that trans subjectivities are socially acceptable by virtue of an imposed distance from same-sex desires and practices, Iranian male-to-female post-operative trans persons “live forever under the sign of being *kunis*.”²⁴⁷ Recall that the Islamic state reproduces Orientalist proscriptions, which as the proscriptions of Enlightenment Europe—Ann Laura Stoler suggests that technologies of empire take continental race science on the road, seeking laboratories for its experimentations—pathologize “passive” sexualities. I have suggested that male-*cum*-national virility is at stake for Khomeini and legal Shi’ite scholars who (re)interpret Islamic jurisprudence to herd specifically men with adult same-sex attractions to the operating room. Najmabadi clarifies that “whereas *lavat* [sodomy] is sinful, being *kuni* [receptive to sodomy] is disgusting.” *Kuni* “literally means anal, but in Persian it exclusively means to be receptive of anal penetration” and is the “most derogatory word in the realm of sexuality,” evocative of disgust, I argue, because anal

246. Najmabadi, “Transing and Transpassing” 31-32.

247. Najmabadi explains, “Both the cultural abjection of ‘gay’-ness, always working under the sign of *kuni*, and the religious-legal sanctions against various same-sex behaviors and practices, which are most heavily weighted against anal intercourse between two males, set up the paradoxical situation in which homosexuals and transsexuals (especially gay men and [male-to-female transsexuals]) are simultaneously pulled together and set apart” (*Professing Selves* 274).

penetration *qua* sexual savagery is “a modernist’s nightmare of the repulsions and seductions of a repressed past.”²⁴⁸ *Kuni* sexualities conjure the image of “an ‘unmentionable assignation’”—“an abomination” to the orders of god and Man alike.²⁴⁹ Najmabadi asks but does not answer the questions, “What does that “gut” feeling of revulsion speak to? Why does the spectral threat of being/ becoming *kuni* seem to be so shattering to a modern (male) Iranian’s sense of self?”²⁵⁰

While Najmabadi and I agree that “for legal and medical authorities in Iran, sex-change is explicitly framed as the cure for a diseased abnormality, and on occasion it is proposed as a religio-legally sanctioned option for heteronormalizing people with same-sex desires and practices,” we disagree insofar as Najmabadi’s study enumerates the pluralities and paradoxes accommodated by religious, medical, and legal discourses that authorize sex reassignment to argue that the Islamic Republic has made unanticipated and unintended room for nonnormative sex and gender practices; and I remain skeptical about this inclusion, because as Julia Kristeva and others have argued, inclusion is impossible without a constitutive outside or Other.²⁵¹ The pluralism Najmabadi invokes is actually a particularity²⁵²—an abstraction in whiteface, its

248. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 140, 138, 141.

249. *Ibid.* 139-140.

Being *kuni* is associated with “young male adolescents [who] often first become familiar with the word as that which signals the edge of abjection; for instance, when parents warn their young son to stay away from certain activities (such as dance) and from certain (ill-reputed) persons, lest they become *kuni*. The equivalent word for women, *baruni*, does similar disciplinary work, but its moral load is much lighter” (*Ibid.* 140).

250. Najmabadi elaborates, “It is impossible—or, at any rate, it is not my project—to give a convincing etiology of disgust.” Najmabadi continues, surmising that, at any rate, “it is critical to ask what cultural work disgust performs. What does it do to ‘the disgusting’? What does it achieve for ‘the disgusted’?” (*Ibid.* 140).

251. Najmabadi, “Verdicts of Science, Rulings of Faith” 534-535.

See Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1982); and *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press, 1994).

252. Najmabadi, who wants to impress that institutional paradoxes and contradictions produce multiplicity, indeed, that persons with non-normative genders and sexualities are able to secure the conditions of possibility to live

metaphysics carefully calibrated to measure the progress of Europe's and not a generic or universal Man. The capaciousness of Enlightenment Humanism can only ever multiply Man's breadth (i.e., "worker, woman, man, gay, lesbian, and so on"²⁵³) by inviting Man's Others to simulate white structures of relationality and intelligibility.²⁵⁴ As ideologues of the Islamic Revolution and especially Al-e Ahmad (it appears, unsuccessfully) warned, Iranians as subjects of the revolutionary-*cum*-Islamic state should be weary about reproducing alternative genders and sexualities as white types—for example, the Weststruck "prissy" by now ensconced in global American mediascapes. In the next chapter, I examine one instance of the Weststruck Iranian prissy Al-e Ahmad warned against in contemporary U.S.-*cum*-global media.

Najmabadi also reports (and on this count, we agree) that socially conservative and religiously devout Iranians, by which I mean one's immediate family and local community as well as medical professionals and religio-legal authorities, accept trans reassignment because its technologies operate in the interest of "clarifying" *jins*.²⁵⁵ In previous sections, I argued that

otherwise (ostensibly, as fluid genders and sexualities) by exploiting institutional irregularities, characterizes this plurality in no more than three words: homosexual, gay, and lesbian. To list just two of her claims,

1. "The religio-legal framework of transsexuality has been productive of paradoxical, and certainly unintended, effects that at times benefit homosexuals;" in other words, "the very process of psychologically filtering and jurisprudential wall-building between gender and sexual categories, far from eliminating gays and lesbians (if that is indeed what the authorities hope for), paradoxically has created new social spaces. ... The very mechanisms of their project to filter and sort homosexuals from transsexuals depends on turning a blind eye on the 'space of passing' across the very walls they have tried to erect" (*Professing Selves* 32-33).
2. "Instead of eliminating same-sex desires and practices, [state support for sex change] has actually provided more room for relatively safer semi-public gay and lesbian social space, and for less conflicted self-perceptions among people with same-sex desires and practices" (Ibid. 25).

253. Wilderson, Frank. *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press Books, 2010): 100.

254. Sexton, Jared. *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 75.

255. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 149, 155.

religio-legally sanctioned sex change promises to construct a new genus or genre of being, indeed, race for *bilataklif* persons, notably because “as *fiqhi* scholars would say, the sex/gender distinction is presumed to determine virtually all [human] differences.”²⁵⁶ Here, I suggest that sex/gender distinctions, which as Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia explains, are abstracted in Islamic thought as genital distinctions—I add, further impressed by active/passive roles in same-sex activities—are actually developmental distinctions. Iranians narrativize sexuality as a developmental story in which same-sex desires anticipate and are signified as a transitional phase or adolescent dalliance before arrival into adult heterosexuality, specifically, marriage, which is “a life-cycle social expectation, without which one does not become an adult in others’ and possibly in one’s own perception.”²⁵⁷ Even without the added anticipation of white humanist social and political constructions of time, adult Iranian men who pursue same-sex activities when a wife (vaginal intercourse) is or could become otherwise available are delayed under the mark of the *amrad*—not because their same-sex attractions are suspect, which is a Euro-American (Orientalist) consideration, but because “the adulthood of everyone is bound to marriage,” which in Islam can only ever transpire between a masculine-presenting male and a feminine-presenting female.²⁵⁸ While I agree with much of Najmabadi’s analysis, which at present exists as the only

Hujjat al-Islam Karimi-nia explains why “it seems preferable to think in terms of “reforming/correcting sex” rather than “changing sex.”” According to Karimi-nia, the language of “reforming/correcting sex” skirts objections to reassignment from physicians who believe that “sex change in perfect [i.e., non-intersex] men and perfect women who suffer from no deficiency does not exist and is impossible” (Ibid. 180).

256. Ibid. 191.

257. Ibid. 123.

This “life-cycle social expectations,” which Najmabadi’s describes as emic to Iran, inferentially invokes Freud’s reading in *Three Essays of the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

Najmabadi elaborates, “Marriage as a binarized heterosexualized contract...not only has worked to define manhood and womanhood as opposite and clearly bordered categories, but it also deeply impacts one’s self-configuration as a trans person. Marriage constitutes a rite of passage to adulthood; it is an expectation that everyone must fulfill to be considered fully grown. Unmarried persons are incomplete, unfinished stories, not in any simple utilitarian sense

(other) comprehensive study of trans reassignment technologies and institutions in the Iran of the Islamic Republic, I want to complicate her conclusion that institutional irregularities accommodate multiplicity, by suggesting that Iran's religio-legal infrastructures sanction sex change to make (signify) not sexual but racial difference, which is to say, *genus* or *jins*.

Home Box Office: Female-to-Male Transitions

The opening credits of Tanaz Eshaghian's "Be Like Others" (2008) sensationalize gender reassignment thus: "In the Islamic Republic of Iran, sex change operations are legal. Homosexuality is punishable by death."²⁵⁹ Somber music follows as the camera pans a polluted cityscape plastered with mural images of Khomeini, his successor, the second and current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and presumably, the martyrs of the Islamic revolution. A woman returns the camera's gaze from behind her black chador. The camera cuts to Mirdamad Surgical Center, a modern-looking glass building in Northern Tehran sandwiched between two derelict, sand-colored buildings, where—a female narrator with a European accent reports²⁶⁰—Dr. Mir-Jalali receives patients on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

(for instance, in order to have a child or not to grow old alone). Without a child, a married person has a problem to solve, but without marriage one has failed to achieve adulthood. As Zia [an informant] once put it, 'We live in a society in which one is not counted as a full human being until one gets married. It is thought that human nature demands completion through marriage. Otherwise, you are half a human.' Indeed, marriage is what it takes to stay *in* family, to secure one's status within one's natal family rather than to leave it behind. Over and over, marriage decisions were narrated as turning points. Two self-identified *gay* men I interviewed extensively recalled that several times they had considered transitioning—each time turned out to occur at a moment of breaking up with a lover who had decided to get married. Male-male and female-female couples live under the severe threat of, and compete with, the marriage imperative." Likewise, "'failure in marriage' becomes proof that one is not a woman" or man, respectively (Ibid. 269, 271).

258. Ibid. 124.

259. Eshaghian, "Be Like Others" minute mark 00:01 – 00:10.

Learn more about the film at www.hbo.com/documentaries/be-like-others/synopsis.html.

260. The name of the narrator, we learn in the credits, is Pippi Turner (Ibid. minute mark 58:30).

Eshaghian introduces dialogue during a consultation between Dr. Mir-Jalali and an unnamed patient dressed in the obligatory veil, “that quintessential mark of public female visibility,” who has come to his clinic to inquire about female-to-male sex reassignment.²⁶¹ With great gusto, s/he gives an unsolicited account of her person not as phenomenologically male-*cum*-masculine, but as someone who is sexually attracted to other women. In her own words, “I like women, not men. I want to be gratified by a woman. ...Girls already like me. Imagine how popular I will be once I have a beard!”²⁶² That is, s/he seeks sex reassignment because its (re)genesis promises to make her attractive to women with cisgender sensibilities, thus enabling her own “felt sense” (if not theirs) of same-sex sexuality. Dr. Mir-Jalali reassures his patient that while s/he is certainly an “unusual creature,” her attractions are “perfectly natural,” specifically, that “nature has created [her].”²⁶³ He stipulates, “I can’t turn you into a complete, full male,” but this makes no difference—s/he quips, “Who said I want to be Superman?”²⁶⁴—because, I suggest, s/he seeks to pass as male, not to embody male subjectivity, specifically, phallic prowess.

Dr. Mir-Jalali instructs her to obtain government permission to operate, relaying that “the government needs to start a file on [her]. And to get it,” s/he will “need a referral from a psychiatrist.” When s/he expresses trepidations about finding an “enlightened” psychologist to make her case to state officials, the good doctor recommends s/he “say all these things,” notably, about her same-attractions and ambitions of conjugal heterosexual coupling, to a psychiatrist to

261. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* 212.

262. Eshaghian, “Be Like Others” minute mark 02:24 – 02:30, 03:14 – 03:18.

263. *Ibid.* minute mark 01:45 – 01:50, 01:30 – 01:40.

264. *Ibid.* minute mark 02:08 – 02:10

obtain the referral.²⁶⁵ It would seem that while “a key component of ‘achieving modernity’ and ‘becoming civilized’” in the Iranian present is the “eradication of unnatural love’ among men,” indeed, requires the repudiation of Iran/ians as penetrated object(s) or *kuni(s)*, non-penetrative female same-sex sexualities are inconsequential to the project of Iranian modernity. I argued in Chapter 1 that since it’s birth, Iran’s modernization project has also (primarily) functioned as a racialization-*cum*-nationalization project. Here, I elaborate that female same-sex sexualities do not invite the ire of Iran’s biopolitical state because unlike male same-sex sexualities, relations between Iranian women are not suggestive of racial degeneracy in the modernist historiography that hails Iran/ians.²⁶⁶

Female same-sex sexualities are “natural” because, to quote one male-to-female informant in Eshaghian’s documentary, they do not implicate participants as “dirty” or “corrupt.”²⁶⁷ As that “unmentionable assignation” by which not men but beasts seek sexual gratification, sodomy defiles not just God’s image or the divine order of Man but also and notably, as accounts from clerics like Karim-nia and secularists like Dr. Mir-Jalali alike testify, the natural or evolutionary order of Man, productive of species (genre) difference as well as race/isms.²⁶⁸ The natural world and the divine world resemble each other on the continent, that is, at home in Europe (and in America) as well as on loan in the outposts of empire because, as Bruno Latour and others have argued, Enlightenment modernity’s human-making project has not engendered and in some ways impedes the epistemic break it promises.²⁶⁹ Karimi-nia, too,

265. Eshaghian, “Be Like Others” minute mark 02:59 – 03:05, 03:20 – 03:22.

266. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* 137, 163.

267. Eshaghian, “Be Like Others” minute mark 49:47 – 49:52.

268. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*. 139-140.

269. Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

testifies to the natural order, indeed, to the science by which Man and not just God can create life, as an implement of God's will. Morton's informants corroborate that while Iran/ians are tolerant (forgiving) of female same-sex sexualities, the culture and not just the religion detest male same-sex sexualities, which Iran/ians abstract as a desire to be anally penetrated as the object of another man's desire, as *kuni*.

Take, for example, Ali Reza, a female-to-male post-operative trans man living in his hometown, the Caspian city of Ghaem Shahr, presumably with his family (Morton's team films Ali Reza working with his brother in their family's shop), as a case in point. Ali Reza, who was married before he transitioned and was for most of his life locally known in his small seaside community as a woman, was an appropriate candidate for sex reassignment because his phenomenological or "felt sense" of *jins* is male-*cum*-man. In his own words,

My needs and wants were [always] that of a man. Basically anything a man would want from his life, I wanted too. But when I looked at my body, I didn't see something that was in tune with my soul. It was completely the opposite.²⁷⁰

While male-to-female trans persons are frequently disowned by their families and made to live on the streets, sometimes as prostitutes—instead of violating their persons, sex work arguably affirms male-to-female trans persons as cisgender, which is why another study might intervene in their subjectivization to query how sex work (i.e., prostitution of *jins*) makes trans women feel sexually desired as natural women—trans men like Ali Reza who have never been penetrated can transition with trepid family and community support, effecting normal lives, I suspect, because their pre-operative sexualities do not invoke them as Sodomites. Which is to say, female same-sex sexualities do not threaten the image of Iran as a modern agent because non-penetrative sex acts between women do not objectify Iran/ians as *kunis*. Having never been made into an object—

270. Morton, "Transsexuals of Iran" minute mark 22:28 – 22:40.

a passive receptacle that receives but cannot effect human desire—Ali Reza’s corpus is not available as unsignified flesh that sex change can (re)make into a new w/hole. The language of rebirth typical of male-to-female transitions is absent in cases of female-to-male transitions because trans men need not be *cut* in the same way; their corporeal schemas remain intact during and after surgery because their pre-operative sexualities are not historicized under the mark of the *amrad-cum-kuni*.

When Morton’s team asks Ali Reza’s brother Mehrdad a general question about why, in his opinion, homo sexualities elicit disgust in Iran but trans sexualities do not, Mehrdad explains, “Nobody in our country can accept sex among homosexuals.” A more accurate translation, which Morton et al. obscure, is that no one in Iran can accept the idea of sexual relations between men, specifically, boys. Mehrdad summarizes, “*Hich kas nemitooneh too-yeh Iran pish-e khodesh ghabool dashtebasheh keh yek pesar bah yek pesar ein kar ra bokoneh*” (in English, “No one in Iran can accept for oneself that a boy would do this act with another boy).²⁷¹ What socially conservative and religiously devout Iran/ians cannot accept is “the thing” boys do to other boys—sodomy. Mehrdad clarifies, “If my brother was a homosexual, I would have killed him.” (The better translation is: “If my brother were to have these kinds of inclinations, I would kill him.”²⁷²) No Iranian, Mehrdad included, can accept for himself (*pish-eh khod-esh*) countrymen who elect to reduce themselves to *kunis*, assuming an Orientalist caricature that damns not just their immediate present but also the nation’s. Which is to say, Iran/ians have by now internalized *amrad* love as degenerate *kuni* lust, indeed, as “an abomination” against God and Man alike.²⁷³ In a move that anticipates the white gaze, they denounce same-sex desires and

271. Morton, “Transsexuals of Iran” minute mark 23:38 – 23:45.

272. Ibid. minute mark 23:47 – 23:53.

identifications between boys-*cum*-men to reproduce the psychosexual universalisms of white humanist empire as emic concerns.

Home Box Office: Male-to-Female Transitions

Next on Eshaghian's "Transsexuals in Iran" tour is another street, which cross-cutting implies is nearby but closer inspection, including uneven dirt roads and derelict mud-colored buildings, women bundled especially tight in their chadors, all reminiscent of a space and time untouched by modern technologies, suggests is on the city's outskirts or in another region entirely.²⁷⁴ Twenty-year-old male-born Anoosh lives here; we meet him at home with family and friends, unveiled and in a striped, unisex t-shirt but with feminine mannerisms and aesthetics, including contoured eyebrows, soft pink metallic lipstick, and feathered bangs.²⁷⁵ The front door opens and Ali, Anoosh's cisgender boyfriend of more than one year, arrives with flowers—they greet as friends, shaking each other's hands at the forearm—which he places on a nearby kitchen table, presumably for Anoosh's mother Shahin, who is celebrating her fortieth birthday.

Shahin is the first person to speak on camera about Anoosh, cheerfully but cautiously relaying her concerns. She worries that his decision to pursue sex change is short-sighted, dependent entirely on Ali's whims; Shahin suspects, in her own words, that Anoosh "thinks all [of] his problems will be solved" with sex change because he "has met someone" who is otherwise attracted to women, and will later regret the decision. Shahin, who notably raised her children alone (i.e., is alone responsible for them) in a society that requires marriage as "a life-

273. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*. 139-140.

274. Eshaghian's documentary is subtitled at minute mark 03:40, and sometimes circulates online by the name "Transsexuals in Iran".

275. The narrator explains before Anoosh can that he "was recently pressurized into leaving school because of his feminine behavior and appearance" (Eshaghian, "Be Like Others" minute mark 04:08 – 04:14).

cycle social expectation” is unconvinced that surgery will resolve their relationship, meaning, effect a marriage proposal from Ali, thus ensuring a respectable future for Anoosh. She laments (in Persian), “*Man moondam.*”²⁷⁶ A resolute Anoosh is unaffected but annoyed by his mother’s assessment, which he mimes for her and an unnamed female neighbor thus:

She calls it a ‘desire’. Her final word is that this is just a ‘desire’. . . . There’s no changing her traditional way of thinking. When the results of my genetic test arrived and it stated that I am a full male, not even the slightest chromosomal imbalance, she took the test and showed it to my boyfriend, and told him that I am a complete man and he should take his hands off me. I was fuming [She burned me]!²⁷⁷

Anoosh elaborates (but the translator does not) that their relationship changed completely –in his own words (in Persian), *kamelan*—after Shahin intervened, recounting that Ali did not receive his advances for three days. While chromosomal differences arguably do not effect sex/gender distinctions in Islamic jurisprudence, Shahin’s intervention reminded Ali that his desire to put hands on “a full male” makes him, too, suspect under the mark of *kuni*.

At Dr. Mir-Jalali’s office but for Eshaghian’s cameras, Anoosh narrativizes (finesses) Ali’s occasional distance as a fidelity, recounting, “There have been opportunities [to have sex] but we didn’t want to. My boyfriend requested that we not have sexual relations until after my surgery. He is a boy. I was ready to do it, but we controlled ourselves.”²⁷⁸ Whether or not sexual relations have actually transpired between Ali and a pre-operative Anoosh is irrelevant, because

276. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 123; Eshaghian, “Be Like Others” minute mark 04:42 – 04:46.

Eshaghian’s team curiously does not translate Shahin’s last sentence—“*Man moondam.*” In this particular context, the Persian phrase most closely approximates the English “I’m stuck” or “I’m not/un- convinced”.

277. Eshaghian, “Be Like Others” minute mark 29:46 – 20:13. Anoosh’s phrasing is “*man-o sue-zooned,*” which Eshaghian’s team translates as “I was fuming,” but which I want to suggest makes better sense in this context as “She burned me.”

278. *Ibid.* minute mark 15:16 – 15:33.

Anoosh cannot concede in the Iran of the Islamic Republic to pre-marital sex; indeed, to do so would be to expose himself as a “dirty” and “corrupt” *kuni*²⁷⁹—a designation that annuls life chances. More relevant is how Anoosh’s account substantiates Shahin’s suspicion that he seeks sex reassignment not because his phenomenological or “felt sense” of sex is female, but because sex change promises to make Anoosh sexually appealing to Ali, thus facilitating the consummation of Anoosh’s but not Ali’s same-sex “desires”.

With Anoosh sitting beside him, visibly embarrassed, his gaze cast down and body collapsed into himself, a subdued Ali corroborates Shahin’s suspicion (and Anoosh’s too, it seems) that their relationship hinges on whether or not Anoosh can pass as female—in my interpretation, on whether or not Anoosh can evolve from objectified *kuni* to a w/whole wo/Man, complete with the rights of gender recognition. Ali beseeches Eshaghian (viewers),

I’d like you to see what it’s like walking down the street with [Anoosh]. Ninety percent of people we pass say something nasty. You can’t help but hear. “Oh, they are homosexuals,” stuff like that. ... When he does go out in female clothes and has a female appearance, it is easier for me to persuade myself that he is a girl. It makes the relationship better. I [am] kind of mean to him when he [is] in men’s clothes. I [don’t] like it, but only because of the way people [treat] us. That [puts] a lot of pressure on me. After his sex change, it will be a lot better.²⁸⁰

Shahin’s intervention is thus effective because it resonates with Ali’s own sense that a public relationship with Anoosh changes how his *jins* is perceived and recognized by others in the immediate present. He recounts for Eshaghian that when he and Anoosh walk the streets, and irrespective of their assumed gender roles, they are likewise recognized and signified as *kunis*.

279. Ibid. minute mark 49:47 – 49:52.

280. Ibid. minute mark 06:15 – 06:32, 06:37 – 07:10.

To be sure, Ali wants not (just) the reciprocal recognition Hegel describes, but also and notably the self-recognition Fanon suggests is foreclosed by racial alienation. That he withdraws from Anoosh even when the two need not be surveyed by others in public (for instance, during any part of the three days Anoosh recounts, after Shahin shared the results of Anoosh's chromosomal test with him) suggests that Ali, who as the active agent in their relationship seeks recognition for his penetrative-*cum*-modern *jins*, sees himself as Other, through a racialized optic. White humanist empire's racial calculus and attendant scopic regimes, like the white gaze Fanon enumerates for its atomizing effects, are by now emic to Iran, intuited by native, even socially conservative and religiously devout Iranians who, Najmabadi and I agree, are affected by global mediascapes to perceive and signify same-sex sexualities through "the whites of their eyes."²⁸¹ Which is to say, white humanist empire's scopic regimes seduce Ali to see himself *for himself*—in Mehrdad's formulation (in Persian), *pish-eh khod-esh*—through an Orientalist lens that reads homo- sexualities between men of color as an unnatural, bestial sodomy.

When Anoosh speaks to account for his desires and identifications, on his own and not Shahin's or Ali's terms, it is to tell Eshaghian and her team that he "wants to live like everyone else. Like all the other boys and girls walking around town." He bemoans, "My goal is simply to find my identity."²⁸² Another male-to-female informant, 24-year-old Ali Askar, who has traveled to Tehran without monetary or emotional support from family to pursue sex reassignment, likewise anticipates, "If you want to find your identity, you have to do this. This is something God did. This is God's work."²⁸³ Anoosh and Ali Askar independently deduce (for different

281. Hall, Stuart. "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media" in *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, eds. George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (Lawrence and Wishart, 1981) 28-52.

282. Eshaghian, "Be Like Others" minute mark 05:45 – 05:55.

283. Ibid. minute mark 38:16 – 38:24.

reasons: Anoosh's practical and libidinal, Ali Askar's conservative and religious) that sex change as that which promises to clarify *jins*—a distinction “presumed to determine virtually all differences”²⁸⁴—will crystalize, indeed, differentiate their persons: who or what they are, because the religio-legal discourses that sanction trans reassignment narrativize it (especially for adult men with same-sex sexualities as presumably *bilataklif* persons) as a cut that constructs genus. Anoosh and Ali Askar further anticipate that sex change as that which promises to clarify sexual difference as genital difference will enable them to “pass” as natural-born women. In both accounts, sex reassignment curiously (incredibly) endeavors to clarify *jins* (genre and gender) by making post-operative genital differences accessible, presumably, visible and legible to other persons in their immediate present, which Kath Weston describes as “the time of the now”.

But it is precisely because a person's—any person's—genital differences are illegible that *jins* (as *genre* and as gender) can be “clarified”. Weston elaborates Walter Benjamin's study of homogenous, empty time to suggest that gender recognition in real time, as a structure of cognition and not just in Iranian contexts, requires the willed suspension of perceived sexual differences to discern and ascribe gender differences, surmising that gender re/cognitions in the immediate present require “being ‘called out on one's sex’ before being called into another gendered position.”²⁸⁵ Cognitive suspense as a condition of gender recognition is especially pronounced for ambiguously-gendered persons like pre-operative Anoosh and to a lesser extent those who keep their company—for example, Ali, who intuits that despite routine performances of cisgender masculinity, a public relationship with Anoosh makes his *jins* suspect. Which is to say, keeping company with Anoosh makes Ali's *jins* suspect for longer stretches of time than he might otherwise experience on his own or in the company of a female-born woman. Weston

284. Najmabadi, *Professing Selves* 191.

285. Weston, *Gender in Real Time* 28.

enumerates cognitive suspensions of gender recognition as the moments between recognizable moments in which perceptions yield “[an] ‘it’ before the ‘she’, [a] ‘what’ before the ‘dyke’, [a] ‘huh?’ before the butch,” and so on.²⁸⁶ That Weston identifies “what you become in the moments of doubt before reclassification” as a non-agential “it”, “what”, or “huh” notably suggests that even white (i.e., paradigmatically human) persons in American and European contexts must be emptied of human subjectivity before gender can be ascribed.²⁸⁷ Weston like Fanon intervenes in social and political constructions of time that make *genre* in the mind’s eye, but it is Fanon’s intervention specifically that elaborates cognitive functions as sociogenic processes—as the “law-likely semantically-neurochemically induced [...] performative enactment of our ensemble of always already role-allocated individual and collective behaviors.”²⁸⁸ In Iran, temporal suspensions of sex land on one of four sociogenic perceptions of gender: man, woman, *amrad*, or the abject figure of the *mukhannas* or *amradnuma*, who is “an adult man [that makes] himself look like a young beardless man, displaying a wish to remain the object of desire of adult men.”²⁸⁹ Trans persons who are (re)made to foreclose their adult *kuni* desires (either under the sign of the *amrad* or the mark of the *mukhannas* or *amradnuma*) can only ever be/come man or wo/Man—designations that construct *jins* as a modern assemblage.

In an interview with a state reporter captured on camera by Eshaghian and her team, Farhad, a pre-operative, female-presenting (veiled) trans woman volunteers that s/he is contemplating sex reassignment for practical reasons: to skirt bullying and harassment, and not in an attempt to match material with phenomenological sex. The reporter, who approaches

286. Ibid.

287. Ibid.

288. Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe” 32-33.

289. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* 16.

patients in the waiting room of Dr. Mir-Jalali's office to procure informants for her own (presumably, state-sponsored) documentary, quips, "Why do you think they pick on you?" She continues, further patronizing Farhad, "You people bring this on yourselves. When you're still a boy, and you haven't yet had the operation to become a girl, the law, religion, and custom does not allow you to dress as a girl." As an implement of the Islamic state (seemingly, its morality police), the reporter charges her person with the "duty to know if someone is a man or a woman." She is incredulous that Farhad might want to pass as female without sex reassignment surgery, pressing, "Make up your mind. Either you want to be a man or a woman. ...I suspect you want to have it both ways."²⁹⁰ Farhad retorts,

What do you think makes these people come to this clinic? ...I'm saying that the fact that I have to do this takes away my right to any sort of choice. ...I am forced to undergo this surgery. ...I am an Iranian. I want to live here. And this society tells you: you have to be either a man or a woman. ...I haven't decided to be a woman. Society is forcing me!²⁹¹

Farhad's response knowingly evinces that Iranians today cannot have it both ways. While classical distinctions needed not correlate gender with sexuality, modern articulations of sex and gender curated by the Pahlavi regime but which survive under the watchful eye of Shi'ite clerics enforce a binary model. Meanwhile, Farhad's childhood friend, Ali Askar, who is resolute to pursue sex change, corroborates his exasperated account, explaining to the reporter, "I don't have a right to work or live here. When I try to work with men, they sexually harass me and make fun of me. And I can't work with women because I am not officially a woman. But after my surgery,

290. Eshaghian, "Be Like Others" minute mark 37:46 – 37:50, 34:50 – 35:18, 36:24 – 36:50.

Cross-dressing without at least having started the process of sex reassignment is considered a sin because it disrupts the social order and is punishable as "un-Islamic behavior"—an in intentionally vague transgression.

291. Ibid. minute mark 36:50 – 37:38.

everything will be fine. My identity will be defined. Things will be clarified.”²⁹² An interview with Eshaghian and her team on the eve of his reassignment surgery corroborates his account to the state reporter. When asked by Eshaghian, “If you weren’t living in Iran, would you have this operation?” Ali Askar resolves, “If I didn’t have to operate, I wouldn’t do it. I wouldn’t touch God’s work.”²⁹³

Conclusion: Be a Wo/Man

Eshaghian returns a year later to follow up with post-operative Anoosh, by then (re)named Anahita.²⁹⁴ Anahita reports that she is satisfied with sex reassignment, she says, “because now when someone is attracted to me, it’s as a girl. If someone wants to have a relationship with me, now it’s with a girl, not [with] someone dirty or corrupt. Ali has witnessed it himself. I’ve had many opportunities [i.e., for marriage] this past year. I’ve traveled a lot”—she lists Tehran, Rasht, Mashad, and Esfahan as examples—“and met lots of guys. But I didn’t feel a connection with any of them. [Not because I wasn’t attracted to them but because] My heart was with Ali.”²⁹⁵ We might pause to consider how their relationship has been made better by the perceptions of other

292. Ibid. minute mark 38:42 – 39:02.

293. Ibid. minute mark 39:03 – 39:40.

A year later, post-operative Ali-Askar, by now named Negar, reports that while she initially struggled with depression after reassignment, she has “been born again.” She rejoices that despite hardships—Negar, who (the narrator reports) is “struggling to make ends meet” prostitutes herself through *sigeh* or temporary marriages—she is “in a new world.” In her own summation, “I like my new world. I don’t want anything to happen to it” (Ibid. minute mark 51:49 – 52:08).

294. Eshaghian films Anoosh/Anahita for the first time outside, seated on a park bench, presumably as a testament to her ability to now pass as female, meaning, to freely walk the streets without judgment or harassment.

295. Ibid. minute mark 49:47 – 50:18.

Eshaghian and her team do not acknowledge (translate) Anahita’s attractions to other men, which I bracket.

Iranians, especially men who recognize post-operative Anahita not as *kuni* but as a respectable, cisgender woman they might marry.

At the film's close, Anahita and Ali, who are at long last engaged—I suspect, because the advances of other men signify Anahita as a woman, and more to the point, Ali with Anahita as a cisgender man with penetrative-*cum*-modern sensibilities—sit with Shahin to plan their wedding, for which no arrangements have been made. In contrast to last year's interview, Ali seems content, indeed, satisfied by his relationship, but tells Eshaghian that he is not yet ready to commit marriage, specifically, that he feels himself too young to settle down.²⁹⁶ Eshaghian, who wonders if Anahita's natural-born sex effects his decision not to pursue marriage with Anahita, at least for now, asks Ali, “Can you accept marrying someone who [has had] a sex change?” He responds definitively, “[Yes], I can handle that.”²⁹⁷

When the state reporter who harasses Farhad and Ali Askar asks Dr. Mir-Jalali, “Do you think the men who choose these girls are psychologically healthy? I feel that those [men] who choose these girls,” presumably, as lovers, “may have strong homosexual tendencies,” he immediately forecloses this line of reasoning, responding, “Their tendency is toward females. They want a lady. A woman. But they marry these folks. Why? This is the reason. The girls that leave from my ward”—the reporter interrupts, “that you give birth to,” prompting the good doctor to respond, “Yes, those that find new birthdays because of me”—“are much more woman than you could ever be. They are much more woman.”²⁹⁸

296. Ibid. minute mark 54:00 – 56:00.

297. Ibid. minute mark 55:14 – 55:27.

Eshaghian and her team translate Ali's emphatic “Yes” as “Yeah.”

298. Ibid. minute mark 32:32 – 33:15.

CHAPTER III

On the Chronopolitics of Skin-ego: Antiblackness, Desire and Identification in Bravo TV's *Shahs of Sunset*²⁹⁹

“If we want to understand the racial situation psychoanalytically, not from a universal viewpoint, but as it is experienced by individual consciousness, considerable importance must be given to sexual phenomena.”

“Is there in fact any difference between one racism and another? Don't we encounter the same downfall, the same failure of man?”

“The problem considered here is one of time.”

—Frantz Fanon³⁰⁰

In the third season of Bravo TV's *Shahs of Sunset* (2013 – 14), gay Iranian-American reality television personality Reza Farahan makes a curious analogy when he caricatures flamboyantly queer guest star Sasha Salehi as black. Reza associates what he perceives as sexual depravity with racial blackness, I argue, to distance his person from Sasha *in time*. This essay thus enumerates Reza's homophobic antiblackness as a means by which he curates the imago of a right kind of modern or postmodern Iranian gay. I intervene in the epistemic break brokered by Enlightenment philosophy, which shifts human features from an anatomical to a physiognomical model of difference—a physiognomical model notably tasks the material skin with signifying the spatialization of time, for example, in racial schemas—to elaborate sociogenic psychic processes that distribute and arrange desire and identification. I argue that, like Frantz Fanon, who rubs up against white flesh so that it might rub off on him, Reza's is a sexuality of the surfaces in which he seeks white touch to negate the racial schemas that atavistically hail him. I thus contextualize Fanonian psycho-analysis in/as critical race theory to argue that interracial meetings of bodies

299. Portions of this chapter appear in *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledges* 29, Special Issue: “Black Holes: Afro-pessimism, Blackness, and the Discourses of Modernity” (2016). I retain the copyright.

300. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 138, 67; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (Grove Press, 1967) 226.

and secretions and intimacies level surface topographies to generate one condition of possibility for the “occult” self-invention Fanon prescribes, for black and nonblack persons of color alike.

How do you take your pleasure? “The whiter, the better.”

In a March 2012 interview with *The Daily Beast*, Reza names his type: “The whiter, the better.”³⁰¹ Tehran born and Tehrangeles bred,³⁰² Reza is a successful real estate agent with a sizeable hipster mustache (one with its own Twitter account), vigilant skin care and hair removal regimens, and an expensive penchant for designer labels and gold jewelry. He is adept at performing respectability politics for a white gaze and in the third season pathologizes Iranian queers who don’t as black. While the first season of Bravo TV’s *Shahs of Sunset* pivots on co-star GG’s volatile personality, including her curious collection of guns and knives, and the second season on the emotional abuse co-star MJ withstands from her mother, the third season (2013 – 14) spotlights Reza’s “gay rage,” which the show juxtaposes to Reza’s gay love: Adam Neely. This essay intervenes in what the show narrativizes and a clinical psychologist trained in Oedipal but not Fanonian psychoanalysis misdiagnoses as “gay rage” to suggest that Reza’s is the culmination and release of cathected energies triggered by racial and not sexual proscriptions. That he caricatures Sasha, a native not of Reza’s Iran, which “stopped existing in 1979,”³⁰³ but of the Islamic Republic as black and further, Sasha’s sexualities as an affliction of the bush is paradigmatic, I argue, of the antiblack grammar by which nonblack persons of color with *homo*-sexualities curate ethnicity-without-race to amass the passing white privilege appropriate to

301. Setoodeh, Ramin. “‘Shahs of Sunset’ Star Reza Farahan on Being a Gay Iranian,” *The Daily Beast*, 27 March 2012 <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/03/26/shahs-of-sunset-star-reza-farahan-on-being-a-gay-iranian.html>> (original emphasis).

302. “Tehrangeles” describes Los Angeles neighborhoods heavily populated with first and second-generation Iranian immigrants.

303. “Fresh Off the Boat,” Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes: 14:55.

modern homosexual typology. Reza distances himself from Sasha *in time* by resurrecting Orientalist tropes in which an Iran untouched by the West gives birth to a pansexual people of indiscriminate libidos, polymorphous pleasures and ars erotic inelible, like blacks, for racial modernity. His comments betray a self-loathing but not self-effacing “gay rage,” I explain, because Reza’s is a *hetero-* sexuality; his primal attachments are contrapuntally raced and sexed to provoke not a preference for white men but for whiter whites. They thus substantiate Fanon’s suspicion, repoliticized by the interlocations of Afropessimists, that racism, specifically antiblackness—“the wholesale repudiation of the black at work in the political and libidinal economies of the present historical juncture”³⁰⁴—governs the relationship between sexuality and the unconscious, not least of all for nonblack persons of color who anxiously occupy the lacuna of a black/nonblack colorline.

If, following Jared Sexton’s reading, sexuality is “the site where the materiality of racialization is made most manifest,” then “*racism is not an obstacle to interracial intimacy but its condition of possibility.*”³⁰⁵ We might remember Fanon’s confession (1952):

I want to be recognized not as *Black*, but as *White*. But – and this is the form of recognition that Hegel never described – who better than the white woman to bring this about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I *am* a white man. ...I espouse white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine.³⁰⁶

304. Jared. *Amalgamation Schemes* 244.

305. *Ibid.* 239, 175 (original emphasis).

306. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 45.

In love and especially in lust, Fanon replaces his dense, “fragmented, porous, sensational, grotesque [body] with an image of the whole body, polished, perfected and sealed up in the symbolic order, for the other’s gaze,”³⁰⁷ hallucinating whiteness. His is a racial calculus in which tactile sensations of whiteness “[thwart] the gaze and [complicate one’s] symbolic and imaginary position” to inaugurate “a different sense of the body” as *skin-ego*.³⁰⁸ Fanon rubs up against white flesh *so that it might rub off on him*,³⁰⁹ or so that the “felt sense” of his white psychic-ego might briefly align with the fact of his black body-ego, reterritorializing (or territorializing for the first time) the flesh of his being as skin-ego. His is a *sexuality of the surfaces* that locates the site of *jouissance* not in genital contact, where reproduction and fears of miscegenation lurk, but in/as the expansive surface of the body, where racial schemas and fleshy materiality live. Interracial “processes of mixing, meddling, or mingling between ... the ephemeral body of white universality and the strangely dense corporeality of its dark-skinned others” engender a break, suggestive of an ontological cut, in the dialectic of being and having,³¹⁰ making it possible for Fanon to “endlessly create himself.”³¹¹ He seeks new departures with no promise or possibility

307. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 196.

308. Stephens inherits and develops the concept of “skin-ego” from French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, but cites Fanon to rework it, writing, “The bodily ego or sensational ego is tied to the skin ego, to those erogenous locations on the skin of the body around which the drives circle in search of a living being, beyond a signifying consciousness. It is this intercorporeal body, subject as it is to desire and the circuit of the drive, that sits at the intersection between the sensational body relating to the other in cultural performances and the libidinal body desiring, and being desired, and desiring to be desired, as a sexual subject-object in private relations between self and other” (Ibid 24-25).

309. This is how Frank Wilderson describes his own relations with white lover Alice, about whom he writes, “You are health, honesty, cleanliness, piety, and plentitude. I rub against you that you might rub off on me. And then I can’t stand to look at you” (*Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (South End Press, 2008) 159).

310. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 25.

311. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 204.

of landing and refuses the reparative logic of synthesis to curate skin-ego as “occult instability”.³¹²

At stake is Fanon’s racial blackness but also and likewise his chronopolitical station in the evolutionary saga of *Homo Occidentalis*, which is why he clarifies that the problem of race is a problem for time. The white gaze inscribes and interpellates his corpus as the fleshy, material remainder of Enlightenment modernity’s human-making project: grotesque and invaginated, porous and permeable, uncontained and uncontainable. He is, as Frank Wilderson writes about himself, “black, big-lipped, ugly, and menacing;” he is “gargling speech,” “AIDS,” “larceny,” “dirt,” “deceit,” and “vulgarity.”³¹³ Reza vigorously labors to keep his body taut and groomed and confined or to keep his matter in place because his, too, is not a hardened body-*cum*-container of difference inaugurated by Enlightenment humanism: an epistemic break tasked with measuring the progress of Europe’s and not a universal or generic Man. Michelle Ann Stephens elaborates:

Gradually over the course of the Enlightenment, as the skin and the body both begin to harden and be seen as less and less permeable, the tying of difference to the epidermal and physiognomic also hardens the bodily surface as an impermeable container of difference. This hardening then contributes to an understanding of physiognomic difference as the marker of fundamental differences with the species.³¹⁴

312. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Farrington 183.

313. Wilderson, *Incognegro* 158-159.

314. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 14.

To be sure, the body left behind by Enlightenment modernity is a “grotesque body [...] made up of [...] ‘excrescences and orifices’ where what is inside can become outside: ‘In the grotesque body, the boundaries between body and world and those between individual bodies are much less differentiated and more open than they are in the new body canon: the very boundary of the grotesque body reveals the intermingling with the world in that protruding body parts (the nose or stomach, for example) are understood as projecting into the world, and the inside

Enlightenment modernity replaces anatomical human differences with physiognomic ones to henceforth classify the human body as a duality of insides and outsides in which material skin signifies the spatialization of time, for example, in racial schemas.

If the “paradigmatic trope of that body left behind” by Enlightenment lore is flesh “stripped of its imaginary reflections and symbolic meanings,” characterized instead by orifices and excrescences, always already black or “a threshold or meeting point of human contact,”³¹⁵ then Reza’s sexual preference for whiter whites is especially relevant in the homosexual instance because “the phallus *is* white skin.”³¹⁶ Stated another way, the phallus doubly indicts sociogeny and not ontogeny as the source of white libidinal persuasions. Lewis Gordon explains,

Consider the white man. Being pure Presence, he is equated with manliness *in toto*. The manly, or masculine, is in fact a figure of denial, a being who attempts to close all its holes and become pure, sealed flesh in search of holes. From the perspective of such a being, all holes are elsewhere; he doesn’t even have an anus; when he kisses, nothing enters his mouth—he enters the Other’s. In his presence, the black becomes a chasm to fill. But the black ‘man’ is a *hole*. ...[The penis] protrudes. It pretends not to be a hole, but instead, a filler-of-holes. ...As pure Presence, masculinity is an ideal form of whiteness with its own gradations; the less of a hole one ‘is,’ the more masculine one is; the less dark, the more white. The black man would therefore have the propensity to become slimy if it were not for the fact that he embodies femininity even more than the white woman. His skin, his eyes, his nose, his ears, his mouth, his anus, his penis ooze out his femininity like blood from a splattered body. He faces the possibility of denying his feminine situation: a black man in the presence of whiteness stands as a hole to be

of the body comes out and mingles with the world.” Protruding orifices include but are not limited to the “eyes, ears, nose, mouth, breasts, navel, anus, urinary passage, and vulva” (Ibid. 14-15, 15).

315. Ibid. 196, 29.

316. Gordon, Lewis. *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Humanities Press International, 1995) 128 (my emphasis).

filled; he stands to the white man in a homoerotic situation and to the white woman in a heterosexual erotic situation with a homoerotic twist; she becomes the white/male that fills his blackness/femininity.³¹⁷

Interracial meetings of invaginated flesh and phallic skin stimulate a sexuality of the surfaces in which human recognition and value, epidermalized because “we are used to thinking of the skin, the surface of the body, as the baseline for what it means to be human,” are bartered.³¹⁸

In *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (Sage Publications, 1996), Philip Goodchild elaborates the distinction between high, low and surface experiences of sexual pleasure. Deleuze and Guattari characterize a “sexuality of the depths” as lustful, carnal and fetishistic; “deep” sexualities contrast with “high” sexualities because the latter “aims to re-create the moral ideals of the Oedipal family or the subjectified couple,³¹⁹ founded on promises, principles, and mutual expectation.”³²⁰ Notably, both are heteronormative fantasies and tautologically fail to generate *jouissance*: a *petit-mort* that shatters and radically disorganizes the self, making the parts of one’s being (in the black instance, always already atomized) available to re-organization but not (in Fanon’s formulation) to re-sedimentation.³²¹ Sexton recommends a

317. Ibid. 127.

Gordon further explains, “The black man is caught. He cannot reject his femininity without simultaneously rejecting his blackness, for his femininity stands as a consequence of his blackness and vice versa. Standing in front of a white wall, he appears as a hole, as a gaping, feminine symbol to be filled, closed up, by the being who has being” (Ibid. 128).

318. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 3.

319. It bears noting that Fanon refutes the relevance of Oedipal relations in “The Black Man and Psychopathology,” wherein he writes that “the Oedipus complex is far from being a black complex” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 130).

320. Goodchild, Philip. *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (Sage Publications, 1996) 80.

321. Sexton explains, “The dialogic relation between a sexuality of the heights and a sexuality of the depths turns on their agreement that *sexual drives can be socially determined*, that these tendencies can be engineered to the greatest end. ...Neither a sexuality of the depths nor a sexuality of the heights offers a liberating option. Less because sexual

“sexuality of the surfaces” instead that is “critical but not utopian, planned but not programmatic, indeterminate but not irresponsible, deliberate but not definitive.”³²² A sexuality of surface disturbances responds to what Lauren Berlant describes as “the sociality of the world, its hiccups and inconsistencies,” which “are maddening” and demand “[surface] room to move,” in other words, to endlessly rearrange themselves.³²³ These exchanges

[aim] at the constitution of plateaus of intensities—a continuous, self-vibrating region avoiding any orientation toward a culminating point or external end. Such a sexuality continually enfolds its intensities into every movement, word, and touch: its aim is to isolate the event of sexuality as a phantasm that subsists in every moment, “saturating every atom,” without this phantasm being actualized in an exchange of bodies or promises. Indeed, every desire is initially of this nature, before being caught up in the depths of bodies or withdrawing into the ideal heights.³²⁴ The sexuality of surfaces operates through perversion. ... One surface is always substituted for another—the search for the phantasm yields something else of a different nature as its result, but this result can be made into a new object of desire, producing new phantasms, maintaining the plateau of intensity.³²⁵

While I do not want to obscure the contemporary afterlife of chattel slavery’s “deep” libidinal transactions or the illegibility of black material “hieroglyphics,” a term coined by

desire inevitably contains elements of both height and depth than because both height and depth rely upon a fantasy of the sexual relationship—a ruse that is affirmed and celebrated on the one hand (depth) and disowned and purged on the other (height), but posited nonetheless by both” (*Amalgamation Schemes* 180).

322. Ibid. 189.

323. Berlant, Lauren. “She’s Having An Episode: Patricia Williams and the Writing of Damaged Life,” *Columbia Journal of Gender and the Law* 27.1 (2013): 34.

324. Freud notes in “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex” (1905) that erogenous zones, themselves invaginated regions of the skin, “merely show the special exaggeration of a form of sensitiveness which is, to a certain degree, found over the whole surface of the skin” (qtd. in Stephens, *Skin Acts* 25).

325. Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari* 81.

Hortense Spillers and allegorized in writings by Saidiya Hartman and Toni Morrison, I account here for a more general economy of skin and flesh—of surface topographies—to enumerate the process by which an antiblack libido governs the law of attraction in non-black persons of color. This work elaborates what Stephens describes as “the tension between the skin as an object of the distancing, racialized gaze” and the flesh as a haptic “site for registering relational and reversible aspects of [...] touch.”³²⁶ Irrespective of chronopolitical ideologies hailed by the Enlightenment, the skin’s invagination as fleshy materiality makes it possible for bodies “[to] touch each other, [to] be touched by the other, and [to] make themselves feel touched or [to] touch themselves;”³²⁷ which is why “skin-based or skin-linked knowledges have the capacity to bring the gaze back into relation with other psychic objects.”³²⁸ What I describe as surface exchanges thus respond to an intercorporeal drive in which “smells, sights, [and] impressions of the body’s volume and size are not just scopic; they are tactile and multisensorial.”³²⁹

Stephens cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty in her study of black performance cultures to position “the touch and the gaze as interacting in a reversible, reflecting relationship to each other... a ‘double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible;’” but she leans on Fanon, whose epidermal and historical-*racial* schemas counter Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema, to clarify that “the intercorporeal drive seeks to touch (upon) the sensational body” or *the ‘I’ that feels* “rather than the body constructed by the signifier” or

326. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 9-10, 10.

327. We might remember that Derridean “invagination” implicates even the modern construct of human skin in layers of flesh that have “[the] capacity to be folded in upon [themselves].’ ... Invagination thus takes us not only backward in time, to a grotesque conception of the body and its organs as epidermal surfaces and orifices that fold back on each other, the residue of the medieval body—but also forward to the modern twentieth-century body of phenomenology” (Ibid. 16).

328. Ibid. 16, 19, 8.

329. Ibid. 22. “Intercorporeal drive” is Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s term in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968).

the 'I' that is."³³⁰ Which is to say, her study intervenes in the chronopolitical if arbitrary distinction between sensational flesh and signifying skin; she begins from a black new materialist perspective that "the outline of the skin is not felt as a smooth and straight surface" confining matter in place, because "there are no sharp borderlines between the outside world and the body."³³¹ I shift the ground of Stephens' intervention slightly to argue that interracial sex acts function as masochistic exchanges in which participants of color martyr the black or brown '*I' that is* to clear surface room for the sentient and white '*I' that feels*. Scholars in queer theory's anti-social school cite Lacan and Oedipal psychoanalysis to read masochism as the consequence of a death drive; Fanon, however, suggests that the ego's defeat in masochistic sex acts, which as "destabilizing episodes [...] suspend the effects of relentless negation so that we can look at them and reshape not only what concepts we can derive from them but how we, bodily, sensually, can *occupy* them," might also or alternatively satisfy a life drive.³³² Masochistic sex acts dissolve the body-ego in passing moments of *jouissance*, making room for the psychic-ego to territorialize the "dense" body's becoming-flesh. Surface sexualities are feats of alchemy insofar as they engender "changes which occur in the feeling of our skin and of the tactile

330. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 15, 19.

331. Schilder, Paul. *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (Routledge, 1950) 85.

About black *matters*, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes, "Given that appositional and homologous (even co-constitutive) challenges pertaining to animality, objecthood, and thingliness have long been established in thought examining the existential predicament of modern racial blackness, the resounding silence in the posthumanist, object-oriented, and new materialist literatures with respect to race is remarkable, persisting even despite the reach of antiblackness into the nonhuman—as *blackness conditions and constitutes the very nonhuman disruption and/or displacement they invite*" ("Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human'" in "Queer Inhumanisms," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21.2-3 (Duke University Press, 2015): 216 (original emphasis).

332. Berlant, "She's Having An Episode" 22 (original emphasis).

surface of our body;” in these exchanges, the skin’s “surface becomes smooth, clear, and distinct. The tactile and the optic outlines,” otherwise discrepant, “are now identical with each other.”³³³

In their collaborative text, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Duke University Press, 2013), Berlant and Lee Edelman characterize masochistic or “unbearable” sex acts as erotic meetings in which participants abdicate personal sovereignty to invoke “the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity.”³³⁴ In the preface, which presumably the authors wrote together (although it bears the mark of Berlant’s epistemological investments), they describe the project as an attempt to “account for the disturbances and anchors within relationality (to ourselves, across ourselves, to the world at large) and for the effects those disturbances and anchors have on our thinking about sociality.”³³⁵ Edelman and Berlant agree that sex constitutes a privileged site “for experiencing [an] intensified encounter with what disorganizes accustomed ways of being,”³³⁶ and likewise, that sex uniquely asks its participants to bear an “unbearable encounter with the unfinished business of being,”³³⁷ but they disagree to the extent that Edelman charges Berlant with remaining “‘bound to the world’ and thus to its conditions of possibility for undoing and rerouting.”³³⁸ Favoring instead the affective tears in social and political realities, Edelman interprets the radical undoings of sex less as the subject’s incoherence in the face of normativity than as the momentary access to a sense of its radical unrepresentability. Such negative encounters, such ruptures in the logic – which is always a *fantasy* logic – by which the subject’s objects (itself included)

333. Schilder, *Image and Appearance* 86.

334. Berlant, Lauren and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Duke University Press, 2013) vii-viii.

335. *Ibid.* xvii.

336. Edelman, *Ibid.* 64.

337. Berlant, *Ibid.* 68.

338. Edelman, *Ibid.* 64-65.

yield a sense of the world's continuity (even if only the continuity of experiencing the world as incoherent), impose the abruptness that Lauren [Berlant] calls drama and undertakes to de-dramatize. But in my understanding of how attachment binds the subject to the world, a tear in the fabric of attachment, and so in reality's representation, cannot be separated from threat or from the dramatics of undoing. ... Managing affective intensities by recognizing their status as part of the ordinary puts the emphasis on a cognitive binding of the subject to the world of its representations—the very binding under pressure of undoing in the encounters to which I refer. Such transformative self-perception achieved amid affective discontinuity implicitly presumes a mastery of, and a capacity to include in our calculations, our unknowable primal attachments.³³⁹

The question at the heart of Edelman's disagreement with Berlant is one I seek to address by way of Fanon: is it possible to account for "ruptures in the logic [of being]" provoked by unbearable sex acts in advance of those sex acts, as calculation and seduction or as a stratagem manufactured by the self's ego? Edelman understands the ego as that which "binds the subject to the world" as it is and not as it could be, disregarding the experiences of persons of color who identify with a white ego-ideal or who wear a "white mask" to neutralize or negate an epidermalized body-ego.³⁴⁰ These people calculate and anticipate, indeed, wait for their racial schemas to be radically undone in surface masochisms.³⁴¹ Black persons *live* in the radically

339. Edelman, *Ibid.* 65.

340. David Marriott explains, "The I or ego is always, for [Fanon], a question of other, of others. The implication is that sociality inscribes itself in the individual, and egoic love is inhabited by the political, and that is why power is power the condition of the subject and the reason why self-love is always a question of mastery. And this certainly seems to be the implication of the stress on narcissism, on what it means to be an alienated, divided subject, a subject unable to represent itself to itself in the racist mirror of culture" ("Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and 'the Damned,'" *The New Centennial Review* 11:3 (Michigan State University Press, 2011): 61).

341. Fanon writes, "If I were asked for a definition of myself, I would say that *I am the one who waits*" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Markmann 120). David Marriott elaborates that waiting in the Fanonian sense is a general "sense of suspended anticipation;" it is "a moment of suspension, one that delays, perhaps permanently, the timely

unrepresentable world Edelman wants unbearable sex acts to make exceptional; the black person knows instinctively, as the rule of her being and not its exception, what nonblack persons of color experience as traumatic misrecognition and whites in possession of an uncontested corporeal schema experience as voluntary if unbearable submission to “cruel optimism”³⁴²—that her being is always already unfinished, in want of conditions that will make ends meet. Unbearable sex acts with white/r others thus function for blacks as “an incision into a corpse;”³⁴³ they provoke not the undoing of being but a momentary jolt or animation from the dead, its *jouissance* testifying to what Fanon describes as the “white potential in every one of us.”³⁴⁴ This alternate staging complicates Edelman’s description of erotic submission as an encounter “with what exceeds and undoes the subject’s fantasmatic sovereignty” because to suggest that the cognitive unbinding of unbearable sex acts animates nonsovereignty is to assume a priori self-mastery, even if only as fantasy and persuasion.³⁴⁵ In a correction to the Hegelian dialectic, Fanon argues that the white gaze, we might add, omnipresent in and as technologies of surveillance, discipline and self-care, makes impossible even or especially a being-for-self.³⁴⁶ In

expression of anything that might be called one’s own. It is as if the black is permanently belated” (*On Black Men* (Columbia University Press, 2000) 81-82). Kara Keeling likewise comments, “The temporal configuration Fanon describes is that of an interval before an anticipated event and after an event that has precipitated the waiting. Under such circumstances, to exist as ‘one who waits,’ then, is to exist in an interval” (“In the Interval: Frantz Fanon’s War and the ‘Problem’ of Visual Representation,” *Qui Parle* 13. 2 (2003): 105-106).

342. Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011).

343. Wilderson, *Incognegro* 156.

344. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 30.

345. Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable 2*.

346. Fanon writes, “There is at the basis of Hegelian dialectic an absolute reciprocity that must be highlighted. It is when I go beyond my immediate existential being that I apprehend the being of the other as a natural reality, and more than that. If I shut off the circuit, if I make the two-way movement unachievable, I keep the other within himself. In an extreme danger, I deprive him even of this being-for-self. The only way to break this vicious circle that refers me back to myself is to restore to the other his human reality, different from his natural reality, by way of mediation and recognition.” Fanon’s realization that he is recognized by nonblacks as a monster and as a beast—a Negro—incapacitates and disables him, totally and completely, making impossible even a being-for-self. He

other words, the “unknowable primal attachments” Edelman labors to politicize by way of Lacan and Oedipal psychoanalysis are eclipsed in Fanonian psychoanalysis by what David Marriott describes as

the ways in which the unconscious is constituted by the real and halts and interrupts it: the imagoes and stereotypes by means of which the colonial subject hates and enslaves itself as a subject, affirms its immorality or malfeasance, and fails to know itself as anything but (a masked, white) European.³⁴⁷

I intervene in reality television because its new media collapses ego and image to spectacularize the primal wounds Edelman makes opaque. Its scopic regimes capitalize on the zeitgeist of this particular moment as one in which personal or intimate events are in fact part of a staged public record of online posts and tweets, constitutive of celebrity. While certainly an implement of advanced surveillance technologies—Jasbir Puar describes reality television as “[the] constant intimate relating [of people] with omnipotent surveillance equipment”³⁴⁸—its new media compels participants to witness and cheerlead their own life stories. The editing choices made by reality television production teams further expose and humiliate actors like Reza who gamble with their real names, real emotions and real relationships on screen. These shows are morally gratuitous and ethically ugly, but that’s exactly the point: they broadcast an actor’s reactions to persons and things before s/he can remember to collect herself (because other people are watching) and stylize an affective response. The preferences and proclivities they

elaborates, “I arrive slowly in the world; sudden emergences are no longer my habit. I crawl along. The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it’s the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 191-192, 95).

347. Marriott, “Inventions of Existence” 62-63.

348. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 164.

exploit make irrelevant how that actor “give an account” of her person.³⁴⁹ Fits and tantrums like Reza’s “gay rage” are edited for dramatic effect to be profit yielding; played on repeat, in slow motion, in clips or advertisements and on reunion episodes, these scenes artifactualize the “dirty laundry” Reza otherwise goes to elaborate lengths to hide from public scrutiny and deliberate self-reflection. Consequently, his primal attachments are knowable to a discerning audience even as they remain unknowable to him.

What’s Afropessimism got to do with it?

In the wake of poststructuralist critiques, literary and cultural criticisms have moved away from a “close reading” of the material body—the unsigned what Hortense Spillers enumerates as the *flesh*³⁵⁰—to pursue disembodied knowledges that locate sex, gender and race as the positions or identifications of our choosing rather than as the flesh or inevitably of our fates: the cosmology effected by Euro-Enlightenment social and political constructions of time. This move obscures what Fanon describes and Afro-pessimist thinkers return to as the political and libidinal economies that proscribe racial blackness; more to the point, the move to poststructuralism obscures how our modern, indeed, Enlightenment world extracts (demands) gratuitous violence from black flesh. Racial blackness as a structural antagonism makes the questions of subjectivity and sovereignty, those darlings of critical theory, irrelevant (at best, secondary) to the study of human being. Afro-pessimism, which re-politicizes the question of what it means to *be* human, in the flesh and not just in theory, thus shifts the paradigm or ground on which humanist scholars can convincingly interrogate ideologies and structures that abstract Man as a raced and sexed being in the metaphysical philosophy induced by Enlightenment humanism. In “The Social Life

349. Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Fordham University Press, 2005).

350. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”

of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism” (2011), Sexton makes the case for a black radical studies

that teaches us all how we might better inhabit multiplicity under general conditions at the global scale for which such inhabitation has become (and perhaps always has been or must be) a necessary virtue. And it does so less through pedagogical instruction than through an exemplary transmission: emulation of a process of learning through the posing of a question, rather than imitation of a form of being; which is also to say a procedure for reading, for study, for *black* study or, in the spirit of the multiple, for black *studies* ... wherever they may lead. And, contrary to the popular misconception, they do lead *everywhere*. And they do *lead* everywhere, even and especially in their dehiscence.³⁵¹

I agree with Sexton’s assessment and further want to suggest that the political urgency Afropessimism breathes into humanist critique—*Who or what counts as human? Who or what counts as sentient? Are all sentient materialisms human?*—impresses the need for a global “posing of [the] question” of ontology “rather than imitation of a form of being” across the expansive board of critical humanism. Sexton clarifies that the investments of this emergent critique must be as personal or private as they are institutional or systematic, reflecting that in a world structured by the twin axioms of white superiority and black inferiority, of white existence and black nonexistence, a world structured by a negative categorical imperative – “above all, don’t be black” ([Lewis]Gordon 1997: 63) – in this world, the zero degree of world transformation is the turn toward blackness, a turn toward the shame, as it were, that “resides in the idea that ‘I am thought of as less than human’”

351. Sexton, Jared. “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism,” *In Tensions* 5 (Fall/Winter 2011) 8-9.

([Tavia] Nyong'o 2002: 389). In this we might create a transvaluation of pathology itself, something like an embrace of pathology without pathos.³⁵²

Scholars in the black radical tradition Sexton hails—he and Wilderson are credited with inaugurating the inter-discipline that calls itself Afro-pessimism—argue that the discursive-material formations of Europe's (Hegel's) human have failed to “know” or make available a generic or universal category of the human subject to fulfill liberal humanism's promise of inclusivity and protection for the unspecified, Enlightened man. They bring to the table of critical theory an understanding of anti-blackness (“black inferiority”) and its inverse (“white superiority”) as structuring logics that define the scope and quality of human *being* with the proscription “above all, don't be black”. The symbolic currents of this proscription travel far and wide, or to borrow from Sexton, they lead *everywhere*. The anti-blackness of liberal humanism function as a kind of speciesism to inform every instantiation or evocation of the human body and of bodily materiality or excess, even ones seemingly unrelated to race, like those indicative of sex. I privilege Fanon's insights in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) because they suggest that we must interrogate our own attractions and erotic choices if we hope to disarm the psychic investments in whiteness and against blackness that make race a question of ontology not just for the black person-that-is-not-one, but for all of us. Psychic attachments are sometimes only intelligible as an affect of disgust, or to borrow from Fanon, as *nausea*; which is to say, we (Humans) must be attentive to how our instincts or viscera perceive and react to racial schemas, especially in a sexual encounter in which we want not only to coexist with difference, but to touch it, kiss it, and fuck it.

Sexton describes the ontological problematic of racial blackness in his essay “People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery” (2010), wherein he submits, by way of a

352. Ibid. 27 – 28.

pointed critique of Giorgio Agamben’s distinction of bare life or *zoe* from sovereign life or *bios* (1995), that even bodies reduced to “bare life” in what Agamben describes as the camp occupy privilege relative to the black-subject-that-is-not-one. Sexton suggests that the distinction Agamben makes between *zoe* and *bios* makes knowable only conditional experiences of “bare” life; more to the point, indeed, Agamben’s distinction disregards the unconditional, wretched and damned being of black persons in the New World, and as well, I want to suggest, the expendability of nonblack persons of color perceived as black by others, like dark-skinned Arabs.³⁵³ Refugees and other genocided subjects wounded or expended in the camp enjoy political recognition in the first instance, making the work of stripping this political life or *bios* somehow exception, an act of genocide or aggression or war, rather than *business as usual*, indeed, the big business of black social and political death.³⁵⁴ Conditions of absolute dereliction that congeal under the signpost of social death gesture towards what Hartman describes as the “afterlife of slavery,” specifically, to technologies of the Atlantic slave trade that survive, mutate, transform, inhere *still* to annul black lives, “transforming men and women into dead matter” suspended in the slow, stalled time of captivity.³⁵⁵ Social death indexes the always already bare

353. The following passage by Sexton, despite its emphasis on American institutions of racial exclusion and not on global or transnational ones, is worth citing in full because it discloses those filial and genealogical claims that make human ontology possible for white and non-black people of color, and impossible for blacks: “The *racial* circumscription of political life (*bios*) under slavery predates and prepares the rise of the modern democratic state, providing the central counterpoint and condition of possibility for the symbolic and material articulation of its form and function. If in Agamben’s analysis the inscription of nativity in Euro-America is disquieted in the twentieth century by postcolonial immigration, the native-born black population in the United States — known in the historic instance as ‘the descendants of slaves’—suffers the status of being neither the native nor the foreigner, neither the colonizer nor the colonized. The nativity of the slave is not inscribed elsewhere in some other (even subordinated) jurisdiction, but rather nowhere at all. ...Agamben overestimates the extent to which the question of nativity is displaced by the figure of the refugee. It is perhaps better to say that it is disturbed by the presence of strangers in a strange land. More simply, we might say to the refugee that you may lose your motherland, but you will not ‘lose your mother.’ The latter condition, the ‘social death’ in which one is denied kinship entirely by the force of law, is reserved for the ‘natal alienation’ and ‘genealogical isolation’ characterizing slavery” (“People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery,” *Social Text* 103 28:2 (Duke University Press, 2010) 40-41).

354. See Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard University Press, 1982).

life of the black subject-that-is-not-one: the exclusion of the black—nationally alienated, vested with sentient but not relational or filial capacity³⁵⁶—from human community, indeed, from human protections.³⁵⁷

I revisit Fanon's argument that there is in fact no difference "between one racism and another" to query the suspicion that nonblack persons of color also pursue white lovers in surface exchanges that induce short-lived but sentient ontological cuts. The story line Bravo TV erects to narrativize Reza obscures this matrix of possibility; I recover it to suggest that he cultivates a gay affect inflected with modern sensibilities in an offensive move borne from the habitual trauma of white eyes. His is an effort to preempt and redirect the experience of "existing triply," or how Reza imagines himself perceived by others who invoke History to claim a priori knowledge of him evidenced by racial schemas.³⁵⁸ The theory of time I inherit from Fanon elaborates how and why Iranians are racialized as non- or pre-modern in the literatures of empire, for example, ethnography and historiography. Iranians are a pansexual people ineligible for racial modernity in Orientalist lore because they live outside of white chronotopes in an untouched time of the bush, which is a quintessentially black time. Representational tropes in the Western canon objectify persons of color as "evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, and famine," animating them on occasion as "the Wolf, the Devil, [or] the Wicked Genie," but never as human beings.³⁵⁹

355. Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997); 355; and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 68.

356. In Jared Sexton's summation, "[black] kinship is denied entirely by the force of law ("The Curtain of the Sky': An Introduction," *Critical Sociology* 36:1 (2010): 14.

357. The black subject-that-is-not-one is defeated even by institutional protections erected to safeguard society's most vulnerable people. Theirs is "the paradigmatic condition of black existence in the modern world": "a perpetual and involuntary *openness*" (Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 149 (original emphasis)).

358. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 92.

359. *Ibid.* 167, 124-125.

Black and nonblack persons of color who likewise emerge suspiciously and belatedly from bush cultures are characterized by cannibalism, savagery, barbarism and sodomy—concurrently, as sexual savagery and bestial sodomy. They don't arrive (because they can't) at disciplinary regimes that *make live*, which is another way to say that their brown and black bodies secrete and protrude hazardous contaminants into the modern world even as they slowly stand upright (some slower than others) to move from “a sexuality of the depths” associated with base carnality to “a sexuality of the heights” mired in ideology. Antiblack racism thus reproduces evolutionary speciesism for black and nonblack persons of color alike. The latter enjoy “ontological resistance” as patronage but not right; the nonblack person of color is contingently human: when blacks are materially or rhetorically present to bear the weight of Man's ontological anxieties.³⁶⁰

While Afropessimist readings to date make a case for inanalogue experiences of racial blackness, I want to think rigorously instead or in addition about Fanon's suggestion that speciesism saturates all race discourse, or that “colonial racism is no different from other racisms.”³⁶¹ His observation that blacks are “the missing link between the ape and man” uniquely qualifies Sexton's claim that all racialization “takes place *through* blackness as its matrix or schema.”³⁶² The symbolic order that “law-likely function to *semantically-neurochemically induce* the performative enactment of our ensemble of always already role-allocated individual

360. I suspect that black persons as artifacts of History are denied access to identification as a fluid and relative process. It is Fanon's claim that the wretched live in existential crisis (because they cannot transcend the indisputable fact of their wretchedness) that throws feminist theories of intersectionality and assemblage into crisis; because feminist critiques divested of critical race theory fail to understand the impossible task of elaborating a coherent bodily schema after it has been “attacked in several places,” or after it has “collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema” in which one exists not just in the third person but *triply*. Having internalized white supremacist projections of pathological blackness—“*Look! A Negro!*”—the black man is reduced to an artifact under the weight of the white gaze; with no past and no future, s/he is always already untimely (that is, without time) arriving too soon to the table of human civilization and too late (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 92).

361. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 69.

362. Ibid. 67; Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 264 (original emphasis).

and collective behaviors”³⁶³ writes the black person into being as a beast of burden, the constitutive outside to *Homo occidentalis* or as “phobic object par excellence,”³⁶⁴ which is why, irrespective of where and notably, when in the world he finds himself, “*a black man remains a black man*”³⁶⁵ or a canvas for antiblack humanist proscriptions. Fanon bemoans, “I am not given a second chance. I am overdetermined from the outside. I am slave not to the ‘idea’ others have of me, but to my appearance.”³⁶⁶ His examples are as universal as they are specific:

In the United States, Blacks are segregated. In South America, they are whipped in the streets and black strikers are gunned down. In West Africa, the black man is a beast of burden. And just beside me there is this student colleague of mine from Algeria who tells me, “As long as the Arab is treated like a man, like one of us, there will be no viable answer.”³⁶⁷

We might update this list with the warehousing and genocide of African asylum seekers in Israel; with the constitutional discrimination of black Haitians and their mixed-race descendants in the Dominican Republic; with the black Americans cut off from access to clean water in Detroit; or with any number of occasions in which white and nonblack people of color take libidinal pleasure in the slicing and dicing of black flesh—for example, in 2012 when *Sweden's Minister of Culture, Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, cut the clitoris from a cake modeled on the body of a black woman at a World Art Day event in Stockholm.*

363. Wynter, “Unparalleled catastrophe” 32-33 (original emphasis).

364. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 244.

Fanon elaborates, “The black man has a function: to represent shameful feelings, base instincts, and the dark side of the soul. In the collective unconscious of *Homo occidentalis*, the black man—or, if you prefer, the color black—symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, and famine” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 167).

365. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 150 (original emphasis).

366. *Ibid.* 95.

367. *Ibid.* 93.

The particularities of antiblack humanism are not important, Fanon explains, because “to say [...] that northern France is more racist than the south, or that racism can be found in subalterns but in no way involves the elite, or that France is the least racist country in the world, is characteristic of people incapable of thinking properly.”³⁶⁸ In other words, to qualify antiblack humanism comparatively is a fool’s errand, symptomatic of an inability to “think properly” about how race works as an ontological cut. The wanton murder of Palestinians in Gaza; the warehousing and base treatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners in Iraq; the tyranny of the Guantanamo Bay torture camp; to say nothing of the violence nonblack people of color wage against their own people, would not be possible in the absence of an antiblack humanism that teaches us all to negotiate and index human life, at the micro level of instinct and gut, in reference to a constant, constitutive Other, even if only as spook: the black who is of no value or consequence to the species of Man, indeed, whose chronopolitical station absolves him of human relevance. To misunderstand the question is to rehearse what Heather Dalmage describes as “the acknowledgment of racial divisions without the acknowledgment of racial hierarchies,”³⁶⁹ which is why Afropessimism “teaches us all how we might better inhabit multiplicity under general conditions at the global scale.”

We’re here. We’re queer. We’re Iranian. And we’re just like you.

Reza’s bio on Bravo TV’s website likens him to a rare, gay Iranian unicorn who must “get past the baggage he carries from his upbringing,” presumably as a native of Iran, to arrive at “the

368. Ibid. 66.

369. Dalmage, Heather. *The Politics of Multiracialism: Challenging Racial Thinking* (State University of New York Press, 2004) 6.

American White Picket Fence happy ending.”³⁷⁰ The network infers that Reza is natally and filially, that is, ontologically foreclosed from the space-time of the modern homosexual (complete with marriage, kids and a mortgage) or the space-time of *the now*. Its website summons Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s statement during a UN visit to the United States in 2007 that “in Iran we don’t have homosexuals *like in your country*” to intuit gay sexualities as the mark of a modernity to which Iranians are not privy but which Reza might access as an Iranian *American*.³⁷¹ We might pause to note that Ahmadinejad dismisses homosexual Iranian types but says nothing about queer Iranian sexualities. His comments thus invoke not homophobia but *Gharbzadeghi* or “Westoxification.” In Al-e Ahmad’s rendering and Ahmadinejad’s as well, Weststruck men who are ideologically and commercially aligned with the West and presumably homosexual men characterized by a “fussy effeminacy” are one in the same:

The Weststruck man is prissy. He takes very good care of himself. He’s always fussing with his personal wardrobe and grooming. He even plucks his hair under his eyebrows sometimes. His shoes, his clothing, his vehicle, and his house, are extremely important to him. He always looks as if he just came out of the box, or out of some European fashion house.³⁷²

I want to suggest that much of Reza’s appeal to white audiences, including his appeal to Iranian viewers, is his Weststruckness, specifically, his ability (eagerness) to assume white social forms to make himself legible as the homonormative stuff of wet American dreams.

In an interview with *The Daily Beast* just two weeks after the show premiered on March 11, 2012, Reza describes receiving fan mail from other gay Iranians by the dozens: “They say

370. “Reza Farahan,” BravoTV.com, 12 June 2014 <<http://www.bravotv.com/people/reza-farahan/bio>>.

371. Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud. Columbia University, 24 September 2007.

372. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 118-119.

they love me, they are proud of, Thank God for me.”³⁷³ In another interview with the *Los Angeles Times* titled “‘It’s Not National Geographic’” Reza explains that he joined the cast

for one reason and one reason only: about a year or two ago, I just started...I don't know if it was happening more because I was living in a bubble and didn't have enough awareness, but I'm a very strong person, so it never was in my realm of possibility, but I was watching TV and reading newspapers and magazines and the Internet, and it seemed like there was one suicide a day of a young, gay teen killing themselves because they were being bullied in school. It literally broke me down and brought me to tears. I don't know if it was happening a lot before and I was just catching wind of it and I was living in my own bubble in my amazing life I was blessed to have or what, but it just seemed like it was happening way too much. And in my culture, there is such taboo around sexuality, especially. I thought if I participate and put myself out there, I'm strong enough to take whatever criticism or heat may come with it. They can call me whatever names they want, they can trash me up and down and all around. It will not impact my life one bit. But if it helps one gay teen to come out to their family or it forces one family to have a conversation, my job in life is done.

What I set out to do, I did.³⁷⁴

But rather than diversify what it means to be Iranian or signal to young viewers that queer sexualities do, in fact, exist in Iranian contexts (an argument premised on multiplicity), Reza's visibility functions to prescribe/proscribe how one should embody (as ego) and make knowable to the world (as image) what it means to be Iranian and gay at the same time, as the effect of seemingly contradicting sociocultural scripts. Reza's emergence as a gay TV icon effectively shifts how the signifiers “gay” and “Iranian” are read together and take root or circulate in global

373. Setoodeh, “‘Shahs of Sunset’ Star Reza Farahan on Being a Gay Iranian” (original emphasis).

374. “‘Shahs of Sunset’ star Reza Farahan: It's not National Geographic,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 2012 <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/showtracker/2012/04/shahs-of-sunset-reza-farahan.html>>.

mediascapes receptive to the “whites of our eyes”.³⁷⁵ Reading “gay” and “Iranian” as compatible rather than opposed subject positions is a rhetorical move as well as a political one: it positions gay Iranians as the “us”, and anti-gay, anti-American and ostensibly religiously devout Iranians as the “them” in a global imperialist project. The momentary collapse of this hard line between “us” and “them,” in which the body politic sympathizes with rather than pathologizes difference, is a trap; just as soon as it expands, the boundary simultaneously contracts to reveal Western modernity’s racialized limits of inclusion—what Sexton describes as an “increasing willingness to expand the boundaries of whiteness...whose only conditional limitation is the exclusion of racial blackness.”³⁷⁶ Coincidentally, nonblack persons of color redeem their human value in a colorblind society by virtue of “a negation of [their] own anxious ego[s]” as persons of *color*.³⁷⁷ Their passing white privilege is activated by a color line that invites racially distinct persons into the folds of liberal pluralism by entrenching racial blackness as a structural antagonism.³⁷⁸

While black persons of color do not move through time, nonblack persons of color can and do progressively (if contingently) move towards the sexed and gendered modernity natally foreclosed to them, but they cannot arrive at modern types. Reza seeks to prove himself as the right kind of modern or post-modern gay, I argue, so as not to be perceived by viewers as “tagging along, socially, politically, and economically, tagging along behind the West.”³⁷⁹ Queers of color and especially those who fail to communicate bourgeois values are doubly

375. Stuart Hall, “The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media,” *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, eds. George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (Lawrence and Wishart, 1981) 28-52.

376. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 75.

377. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 152

378. See Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness.”

379. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi* 64.

marked (from without and also from within) in ways that invest the work of thinking race and the work of thinking sex with the same politics of time. When charged with “gay rage,” Reza laments,

I wasn't just like a little Persian kid trying to fit in. I was a little Persian gay kid that had no roadmap for a life or a future. There were no gay Persian role models. I had no one to look up to. I had no one to talk to.³⁸⁰

The intersectional nexus that Reza experiences as a chronopolitical crisis invaginates him twice, as homosexual by choice and indiscriminately pansexual by Orientalist birthright, and provokes defensive posturing in episode 5, “Fresh Off the Boat,” when Reza meets Sasha, a flamboyantly gay Iranian neighbor who comfortably inhabits racial schemas.³⁸¹ Reza's on-screen identifications as a gay man constitute a strategic alignment in which he seeks to be known as something (anything) other than a person of color.

Real talk.

The show's producers want us to believe that Reza and Sasha meet serendipitously, facilitated only by Adam, who brings Sasha home for drinks and to meet Reza after striking up a conversation with him at the building's pool facility. Upon meeting Sasha, Reza sarcastically asks Adam, “You *just* met him and decided to bring him to our house because he's Persian?” Adam responds emphatically, “*And* gay,” provoking Reza to retort, “If I was black and you saw a black man at the pool, would you have brought him up[stairs] just because he's black?!”³⁸² In this juxtaposition, Reza reproduces the “enormous black penis hysteria of European empire” to

380. “Persian Pride,” Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 08 December 2013, iTunes: 41:25.

381. Sasha is 29 years old and by his own account has been living in the United States for five years.

382. “Fresh Off the Boat” 12:50, 14:20.

problematize the intimacy with which Adam receives Sasha; which is to say, he parrots white humanist ideologies in which passengers at the intersection of “gay” and “Persian” are implicated in the muck and mire of black pathology-*cum*-sexual perversity,³⁸³ stuck in a time that inscribes sex as genital difference and genital difference as racial blackness.

Reza is immediately “offended” and “disgusted,” words he uses in subsequent episodes, by Sasha’s affective sensibilities and political orientation, including his upbeat opinions about Iran, which oppose Reza’s stoic assumption that the 1979 revolution signaled the end of a golden era, reanimating Orientalist caricatures of an Iran frozen in space and time; and is frustrated by Adam’s flippant assumption that Reza and Sasha are somehow alike or share commonalities that Reza and Adam don’t. “You were born in a shithole and I was born in the imperial kingdom of Iran,” Reza barks. “The country that I was born in stopped existing in 1979.”³⁸⁴ Sasha’s irreverence—“Okay, if I’m flamboyant, *I own it. I love it.* This is who I am”³⁸⁵—upsets the imago of modern gay Iranian sexuality Reza labors to curate. He bemoans,

Your family is not here. No one has to deal with the consequences of you being *as gay* as you are,” Reza beseeches, “[but] it impacts *me*. [...] You don’t suffer because of it. I have to hear about it. [...] We suffer, the other people that aren’t as gay as you, other Iranians./”³⁸⁶

In an interview with the show’s producers edited to appear as a real-time confession, Reza further reflect (in a statement reminiscent of Fanon’s claim that “the black man is nothing but biological. Black men are animals. They live naked. And God only knows what else”) that “the

383. Thomas, *Sexual Demon* 88-89.

384. “Fresh Off the Boat” 14:40, 14:55.

385. *Ibid.* 39:45.

386. *Ibid.* 15:15, 15:30, 15:50.

way I was brought up, you don't swish around West Hollywood in daisy dukes and slinky tank tops. That is not the way a *dignified* Persian man acts.”³⁸⁷

The association Reza makes between ethnic-racial *qua* Humanist (Historical) differences and sexual-libidinal ones in Iranian contexts resonates across borders, generations, and partisan politics. Like the Iranians in today's Islamic Republic who narrativize sex (*jins*) reassignment as a cut to the fabric of flesh (genus), Reza locates (wills) a penetrative imago to feminize the Other as *kuni*, that abject figure historicized, I argued in Chapter 2, by the racialized spectre of sodomy.³⁸⁸ In an April 2012 statement to his followers, Qom-based politician and scholar Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi-Amoli similarly describes sexuality as a Humanism, bemoaning, “even animals... dogs and pigs don't engage in this disgusting act”: sodomy.³⁸⁹ In his account, sodomy is so bestial as to out-beast the most disgusting of beasts in Islamic culture: pigs and dogs. At stake for both Javadi-Amoli and Reza is thus Iran's chronopolitical station in a modern historiography that is the social science of Enlightenment Humanism's race science.

When Sasha fumbles in social etiquette (his foot grazes the furniture), Reza asks him to “get the fuck out” of the home he shares with Adam.³⁹⁰ They interact next at the episode's close, crossing paths again at a gay Middle Eastern nightclub when Reza's co-star Mike organizes a *Shahs of Sunset* appearance there.³⁹¹ Reza resigns to drinking (sulking) in a corner of *Club Nur*

387. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox 143; “Fresh Off the Boat” 15:40.

In the following episode, the *Shahs* (minus Reza) run into Sasha at gay pride, who Asa describes thus: “Now that I see Sasha in person I definitely know what Reza meant; I mean, he wasn't wearing underwear, [he was wearing this like] jock strap” (“Persian Pride,” 31:30).

388. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*.

389 Qtd. in Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. “Homosexuals are inferior to dogs and pigs, says Iranian cleric.” *The Guardian*. 18 April 2012. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2012/apr/18/iran-cleric-condemns-homosexuality>>.

390. “Fresh Off the Boat” 16:00, 16:40.

with MJ instead of socializing with the other gay Middle Eastern patrons with whom he ostensibly shares commonalities. Mike describes Reza's sour disposition thus:

I'm looking at all these Persian people, free and dancing and laughing and being themselves and not being scared to be open and gay. It's like a safe haven, man; it's a happy place with just one noticeable exception: Reza Farahan.³⁹²

When Reza spots Sasha in the crowd, he immediately turns to MJ, "Oh my god, *he's* here!" and then to Mike, "The queen I threw out of my house is here!"³⁹³ Sasha returns Reza's nonverbal cues and extends an olive branch, approaching to greet the *Shahs* with his brother, Salman, who is also a recent Iranian émigré and (closeted) homosexual indifferent to the respectability politics Reza vigilantly defends.³⁹⁴

Reza's righteous indignation—"Seeing [Sasha] brings up every negative emotion inside of me. I don't know what it is; I don't know where it comes from; [but] like, I *want to attack*"³⁹⁵—swells when he meets an awkward Salman who is still negotiating if and when and how to identify as gay. Feeling provoked for reasons that are unclear, Reza outs Salman as a "fag," hurling the insult as loud as he can despite the looks this move attracts from the club's patrons.³⁹⁶ The *Shahs* struggle to understand why their rational, well-adjusted friend cannot see

391. The cast is invited to participate in a float sponsored by *Club Nur* at the Los Angeles gay pride parade, which divides the *Shahs* in episode 6 when Mike, a recovering homophobe eager to participate in gay pride as absolution, disinvites Reza, who retorts, "How audacious are you to call me to uninvite me to a disgusting float that's an *embarrassment* to the gay community. I am disgusted" ("Persian Pride," 3:50).

392. "Fresh Off the Boat" 27:10.

393. Ibid. 29:10, 32:35.

394. Sasha claims that his brother moved to the United States 2-3 months ago.

395. Ibid. 35:30.

396. Ibid. 37:35.

Reza reflects, "I didn't think I was outing Sasha's brother. We're at a gay bar. Hello; he's standing *right there*" (37:05). Sasha righteously tells Reza to "shut the fuck up" and not to "talk to [his] brother like that," because "[if] he

himself (young, gay, Iranian) in the brothers or show these men the kindness he would have liked to receive in his early, timid interactions with other gay men.³⁹⁷ Unable to calm or reason with Reza, MJ and Adam take him home; meanwhile, Mike, a recovering homophobe, stays behind to understand what might motivate his friend to participate in a hate speech that is in fact a hatred of the self, offering a humble apology to Salman on Reza's behalf. Salman poignantly reminds Mike that he left Iran precisely not to be called a fag.³⁹⁸

In episode 7, Reza seeks counsel from clinical psychologist and author of *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World* (Da Capo Press, 2005) Dr. Alan Downs to help him process what the show and his friends mischaracterize as a self-effacing homophobia. When asked to describe Sasha, Reza caricatures him as someone who “wants to run naked up and down the street all day long,”³⁹⁹ which offends Reza because

[Sasha] is so flamboyant, and then [*with a distressed and puzzled look on his face*] he and I end up in the same category. He makes me feel shameful that I'm gay and Persian and that he's gay and Persian.⁴⁰⁰

In his own words, Reza is devastated by the “category” of being Sasha's affectations corroborate. He does not have a language with which to enumerate the particular intersectional nexus he and Sasha occupy or the tools with which to locate its psychosomatic wound, but clarifies in a confessional aside that his is not reducible to “gay rage.” Appealing instead to Iran's relevance for the History of Man, Reza reflects, “This isn't about gay or straight. This is about maintaining

doesn't want to say it,” in other words, to come out as gay, “[then] don't you fucking say it” (“Fresh off the Boat,” 36:50).

397. Reza explains, “There's something about that off-the-boat mentality and that feeling like I owe them something because we're from the same country that doesn't sit well with me” (“Persian Pride,” 5:40).

398. “Fresh Off the Boat” 41:00.

399. “The Velvet Rage,” Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 10 December 2013, iTunes: 27:00.

400. Ibid. 26:45.

a certain level of dignity because of who we are, how we were raised, what we had, and *what we were offering to the world*.”⁴⁰¹ Dr. Downs responds flippantly, “Well, it makes sense that you wouldn’t have him [Sasha] as a friend.”⁴⁰² asking him to meditate instead on the homophobia that is the good doctor’s bread and butter. A casual exchange with co-star Asa and not a high-profile meeting with Dr. Downs prompts Reza to unpack the aggression with which he receives Sasha and to locate its original wound in primal experiences of racial alienation:

Everything about him [Sasha] bothers me. And as soon as I heard his voice it like triggered this old pain inside of me. I remember [that] because I looked the way I looked [and] because I was from the place I was from, I was lumped into this category; and I’ve lived with this pain for so long. [And] multiply that by the fact that I’m gay and all this stuff, I literally took out 39 years worth of pain on him right then and there.⁴⁰³

Sasha is the spectral reminder/remainder of “a lot of pain and a lot of dark years in [Reza’s] childhood;” he is “the walking, living, breathing representation” of Reza’s ghost as a queer of color *body*, doubly hailed to communicate pathological invagination.⁴⁰⁴ That Reza endeavors to pass the buck of sexual degeneracy to blacks, the occupants of its proper Historical locus, further betrays the antiblack grammar of modern homosexual typology. Reza unravels when he begins to suspect that, despite the diligence with which he negates racial schemas to assume an ethnicity-without-race appropriate to modern homosexual typology, Adam, Mike and MJ, those people who know Reza intimately (some more intimately than others), liken him to Sasha and later, to Salman, whom Reza receives with negrophobic disgust in a bid safeguard his

401. Ibid. 27:05 (my emphasis).

402. Ibid. 28:00.

403. “Persian Pride” 38:50.

404. “The Velvet Rage” 28:15.

own ego from “the slap that will come, and that has come, from what is no longer there.”⁴⁰⁵

Black and nonblack persons of color experience different scales of racism but not unrelated racisms, I have argued, because racial schemas as “a modern skin [conditions]” epidermalize so as to pathologize nonblack persons of color in likeness to blacks.⁴⁰⁶ Antiblack humanism thus charges Reza to wait, as Fanon does, for modernity’s slap; in other words, to alternately occupy and vacate the material body, a vessel that makes sentient experiences possible but which does not house the felt sense of its person, whose “sensorium and [...] body are moving in proximity but not in sync or identity,”⁴⁰⁷ to curate desire and identification.

If the human body is epidermalized and phallicized in the same moment, during the shift from anatomy to physiognomy characteristic of Enlightenment humanism, then the white gaze invaginates Reza’s becoming-flesh twice to indict it in anachronism.⁴⁰⁸ Stephens explains,

Our understanding of the skin as a hardened, impermeable container for difference is tied to our phallic understanding of our libidinal bodies. ... The relationality or intersectionality of racial and sexual difference is inscribed on the skin literally when the epidermalizing of racial difference is understood more broadly as a phallicizing of the body.⁴⁰⁹

405. Marriott, David. “Waiting to Fall,” *The New Centennial Review* 13.3 (2013): 174.

406. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 199.

407. Berlant, “She’s Having an Episode” 32.

408. Wynter, Sylvia. “Beyond Miranda’s Meaning: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman,’” *Out of the Kulmba: Caribbean Women and Literature*, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Africa World Press, 1990) 355-371.

409. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 12.

Stephens further explains, “Gradually over the course of the Enlightenment, as the skin and the body both begin to harden and be seen as less and less permeable, the tying of difference to the epidermal and physiognomic also hardens the bodily surface as an impermeable container of difference. This hardening then contributes to an understanding of physiognomic difference as the marker of fundamental differences with the species. In this world of the body as hardened container of differences, both the anatomical differences represented in the sexual organs

Reza translates an invaginated body-ego into the phallic signifier of modern times, that “hardened container of both racial and sexual differences, inscribed onto epidermal and genital skin,” by invoking antiblack “concepts of a heterosexualist empire of Occidentalism” to bed Adam as feminine other.⁴¹⁰ In surface exchanges with Adam, Reza feels the taut, human skin of white universality. This particular kind of *jouissance* coheres body-ego (the ‘*I* that is’) with psychic-ego (the ‘*I* that feels’) as skin-ego, suggesting that the alternative world Fanon seeks finds one condition of possibility in the interracial meeting of bodies and secretions and intimacies commissioning him to serially but not exhaustively invent himself anew.

and the physiognomic differences registered in the facial features and bodily skin color of the other become naturalized. The skin is differentiated as belonging to different genders based on the shape of the sexual organs, genital skin; the skin is differentiated as marking different races based on the body’s color, epidermal skin” (Ibid. 14).

410. Ibid. 20; Thomas, *Sexual Demon* 31.

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