

## EPILOGUE

Jón I don't see any good future now for gays in Iran. I had [a] lot of hope. But now, I am not so sure. It's not about the government or politics. They do not kill us here. It is about people and society in general. They do not accept gays here—so much pressure from society, friends, and family. I have sometimes thought about death because wearing a mask and living your life in secret can be so hard. I want to have a life—not a better life but just a life. Because I don't have a life here as a gay man. I am applying for [a] visa to Europe and I want [to] apply for refuge in the Netherlands. That is my plan now. [Excerpt from a WhatsApp chat with Arash, July 2018]

More than four years have passed since I first visited Iran. In the meantime, much has changed on the political world stage, as well as for some of my informants/friends inside of Iran. When I started my fieldwork in 2014, I could sense optimism in the air following the 2013 presidential election of reformist Hassan Rouhani, who ran on the political platform of improving Iran's relationship with the West. Finally, after eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, the Iranian youth were feeling hopeful again. In line with his promises, Rouhani began nuclear negotiation with the West, and in 2015 the Islamic Republic of Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow international inspectors to monitor its program in exchange for ending economic sanctions, and freeing up tens of billions of dollars in oil revenue and frozen assets. The Iranian

public felt the effects of the agreement quickly, as inflation went down and the Iranian rial appreciated slightly. Thus, in 2015, I could sense that people were generally more relaxed and optimistic about the future. Arash, my key informant and a good friend, said to me back in 2014/2015 that things would now get better for gays. He was generally optimistic about the future even though he had, in the past, endured pressure and harshness from his family for being gay. In that sense, better relations with the West and an improved economic situation were somehow increasing the hope of young Iranians that the authorities would initiate further reforms that would increase their personal freedom. This did not happen, although you could sense that the authorities were somehow more relaxed regarding dress code and style, and the presence of the morality police on the streets of Tehran was not as obvious as before.

In 2018, three years later, Arash had changed his tone. He is now more pessimistic about his future in Iran as can be seen from the quote above. The war in Syria is still being waged, and Iran's involvement has increased with each day and month, running the risk of open conflict with Israel, its archenemy in the region. After Donald Trump came to power, Iran has been put on a list of countries whose citizens cannot enter the US. The Trump administration's latest action against Iran and its citizen was to terminate US participation in the nuclear agreement signed in April 2015 and reinstate economic sanctions. Thus, today the economic situation in Iran is getting worse every day, fuelling inflation and depreciation of the rial. Hand in hand with difficulties abroad, the authorities have become more repressive and less tolerant toward any criticism. Protests that broke out at the end of year in 2017 were rapidly quelled, and recently the social and communication application Telegram has been blocked, a medium considered to be "secure" and used by many of my informants. Many of them have switched to less "secure" applications such as WhatsApp.

All in all, the current situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran has changed the tide of optimism into deep pessimism, at least among young Iranians who expected reform and change for the better when Rouhani became president. For some gay-identifying men, the picture is even darker, as expressed by Arash. For him, the only way to pursue life as a gay-identifying man is outside of Iran. He emphasizes that he is neither worried about being killed by the authorities nor does he perceive them as an obstacle to his well-being. It is more family and society in general that force him to live in secret and put on a "straight mask" on a daily basis.

Arash is, therefore, waiting for his turn to leave Iran, hoping that he will be granted asylum in the Netherlands, which for him is a “gay paradise”—a place where gays are recognized by friends and family, included in the nation-state, and can enjoy their life in the open. Morteza and Nima have already left Iran, and are now living and studying in the West. Other informants and friends are still living in Iran, navigating between a masked existence and finding ways to enjoy life by being themselves. I dedicate this book and my research to them.

Helsinki, August 3, 2018

## APPENDIX: OVERVIEW OF THE KEY GAY-IDENTIFYING (QUEER) INFORMANTS/ PARTICIPANTS

	<i>Name/pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Socio-economic status<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Educational status</i>
1	Afshin	20s	Tehran	Low	In university
2	Ali Reza	20s	Tehran	Middle	In university
3	Amir	20s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
4	Arash	20s	Tehran	Middle	In university
5	Ardalan	30s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
6	Arman	20s	Tehran	Middle	In university
7	Armin	40s	Tehran	Middle	University degree
8	Arsham	40s	Toronto	Middle	University degree
9	Arslan	20s	Tehran	Low	In university
10	Basir	20s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
11	Farhod	20s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
12	Hassan	30s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
13	Hassan (tattoo artist)	30s	Tehran	Middle	High school degree
14	Kasra	20s	Tehran	Middle	High school degree
15	Kia	20s	Tehran	Middle	University degree
16	Mansur	20s	Tehran	Middle	High school degree
17	Mehrdad	30s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
18	Mika	20s	Tehran	Low	University degree
19	Morteza	20s	Tehran	Middle	In university
20	Muhammad	50s	Tehran	High	University degree

*(continued)*

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	<i>Name/pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Socio-economic status<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Educational status</i>
21	Nima	30s	Tehran/ Toronto	Middle	University degree
22	Pouria	30s	Tehran	High	University degree
23	Ramtin	20s	Tehran/ Istanbul	Low	High school degree
24	Saaed	20s	Tehran	Low	High school degree
25	Sharyar	30s	Mashad	Middle	High school degree

<sup>a</sup>I apply the APA (American Psychological Association, 2018) definition of socio-economic status, which is often measured as a combination of income, education, and occupation. Here I break it into three levels: high, middle, and low to describe the three categories of which my informants or their families fall into. For example, if an informant came from an educated and a wealthy family, lived in the northern part of Tehran and attended university, he was placed in the “high” category

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# INDEX<sup>1</sup>

## A

Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud, 65, 98, 142,  
147n12, 147n13, 205, 209  
Al-e Ahmad, Jalal, 54, 55

## B

*Basij*, 103, 142, 186, 190  
*Biopolitics/biopolitical*, 29, 30, 35, 37,  
40, 151, 152  
*Biopower*, 26, 29, 151, 152, 161, 166,  
176, 204

## C

Condom, 158

## D

*Dahab-ye Fajr*, 45  
*Discipline and Punish*, 26

## E

*Encyclopedia Iranica*, ix  
*Epistemology of the Closet*, 39  
Ethics, 12, 19, 34–37, 40, 123, 126,  
134, 135, 138, 139, 145, 175  
Ethnographer, 7, 8, 12, 15  
Ethnography, 12, 18–21

## F

Facebook, 7, 16, 38  
*Fatwa*, 62  
Foucauldian, vii, viii, 26–30, 34, 41n3,  
91, 108, 123, 129, 134, 145,  
151, 166, 181, 202

## G

Gay activist, ix, 79, 100, 134, 135, 152  
*Geocorpography*, 152, 170  
*Going to Iran*, 59

<sup>1</sup>Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

The Green Movement, 142–145  
*Grindr*, 15, 109, 193, 196

## H

Hafiz, 48–50  
*Hamjensbas*, 147n12  
*Hamjensgera*, 137, 146n6  
*Hamjins-bazi*, 66, 140, 141, 146n8,  
 147n12  
*Hamjins-gara'i*, 66, 140, 141, 145,  
 147n10, 147n12, 203  
 Hegemony, 66  
 Hermeneutic, 20, 26  
*Heteronormalizing obligation*, 111  
 Heterosexual, 111  
 Heterotopia, vii, 26, 33, 181, 188, 196  
*History of Sexuality*, 26–29, 35,  
 38, 40  
 HIV/AIDS, ix, 40, 105, 106, 108,  
 151–177, 177n2, 204  
 HIV-positive, 151–177, 204  
 HIV-testing, 161, 166, 170  
*Homan*, 58  
 Homoeroticism/homoerotic, 2,  
 49–53, 57, 58, 66  
 Homonationalism, 2, 80, 85, 87n7  
 Homonormativity, 83, 158  
 Homoeroticism, 80  
 Homophobia, 30, 64, 72, 137, 146n2,  
 164, 174, 176, 204  
 Homophobic, 1, 72, 78, 84, 85, 97,  
 124, 137, 138, 201  
 Homosexual/homosexuality, viii, 2, 3,  
 29, 48–50, 52–54, 56, 57, 59–62,  
 66, 67, 81, 84–86, 93, 97, 98,  
 107, 117, 124, 125, 127, 128,  
 140, 141, 145, 146n5, 146n6,  
 154, 155, 163, 165, 168, 176,  
 196, 203–206  
 Homosociality, 48–54, 57, 58  
*Hornet*, 15, 109, 193, 196

## I

*IJMES*, ix  
 Instagram, 7, 11, 38  
 Islamic Republic of Iran, ix, 1, 3, 10, 30,  
 45, 67n4, 72, 86, 92, 135, 142,  
 155, 158, 160, 161, 163, 182,  
 201, 202, 205, 206, 209, 210  
 Islamic rituals, 64  
 Islamic state, 62, 82  
 Islamification, 46, 63  
 Islamophobic, 2, 201

## K

Khomeini, Ayatollah, 5, 6, 25, 41n1,  
 45, 47, 53, 54, 59, 60, 62,  
 160–166, 168, 170, 183, 192

## L

LGBT, 85, 146n2  
 LGBTQ, 1, 2, 72, 87n1, 140, 146n6,  
 166, 170, 201

## M

Male-to-Female (MtF), 59, 62, 113  
*Manjam*, 15, 18, 21n4, 74, 196, 197  
 Massey, D., ix, 181, 191  
 MENA, 154, 156, 160, 163  
 Monogamy, 83  
*Mukhannathun*, 51

## N

Non-heterosexual, viii, 20, 60, 64, 65,  
 113, 177n3, 196

## O

Occidentosis, 54–57  
 Official aesthetic, 102, 103

Oppression, vii, 72–80, 82, 136, 138,  
146n1, 202

Orientalism, 48, 57

OutRight, 116

## P

*Panopticon*, 26, 31, 197

*Parrhesia*, 37, 124

Polygamy, 66

Protagonist, 7, 82

## Q

Queer, ix, 3, 9, 34, 50, 65, 66, 72, 80,  
82, 83, 113, 121, 129, 133–145,  
146n6, 146n7, 147n11, 181, 182,  
185, 188–198, 202–204, 206

## R

Rouhani, Hassan, 65, 74, 75, 209, 210

Rumi, 48–50, 67n1, 207

## S

Same-sex desire, viii, 2, 3, 45–67, 91,  
104, 127, 135, 138, 140, 145,  
192, 193, 203–206

SAVAK, 67n6

*Sepah*, 75, 144

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS), 62

Sexuality, viii, ix, 3, 8, 13, 26,  
28–30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 40, 47,  
48, 50, 61, 62, 64, 66, 67, 72,  
78, 84, 86, 87n3, 92, 93, 95,  
98, 102, 103, 106, 108, 110,  
112, 113, 117, 125, 127–129,  
133, 136, 137, 140, 145,  
146n1, 146n6, 146n8, 147n12,  
151, 159, 166, 168–170, 176,

182, 186, 189, 190, 194, 197,  
202, 204–206

Sexual minorities, viii, 1, 30, 47, 66,  
72–74, 76, 77, 80, 81, 85, 87n4,  
87n7, 139–141, 147n13, 170,  
189, 201, 205

Shah, 5, 8, 25, 47, 52–54, 57–62, 67,  
160, 205

*Shahed-Bazi*, 49

Shi'a, 25

Social media, 7, 11, 12, 38, 65,  
135, 166

Sovereign power, 29, 30, 41n3

Subjugation, 28, 32, 129, 161, 202

## T

Telegram, 11, 12, 16, 18, 78, 152,  
156, 162, 164–166, 177n4,  
177n5, 210

Transgender, 61, 109, 110, 190

Transgression, 32, 36, 37, 198, 203

Trans people, 18

Transsexual/transsexuality, 18, 59, 62,  
109, 110, 194

## U

UN-AIDS report, 160

US pink (gay) press, 71

## V

*Versatile*, 129n2

Victimization, 67, 72, 73, 86, 201

## W

Western paradigm, 134

*Westoxification*, 54–56, 60, 67, 144,  
152–160, 183, 184, 205