# DIASPORIC MASCULINITIES
## *Reflections on gendered, raced and classed displacements*

**Abstract**
This article is based on reflections that have grown during the ongoing research on construction of masculinities and sexualities in different diasporic spaces. By focusing on theoretical and contextual reflections regarding conditions of leaving, arrival and residency among Iranian-born men who live in Sydney, Stockholm and London, this article focuses on intersecting factors that construct masculinities in different diasporic spaces. Migratory masculine subjectivities are not only shifting and plural, but also reveal the multiple interactions of factors such as race, age, class, self and community, past and present, the political and the religious and through the continual negotiation of identity.

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*"[a] man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man"* (Fanon 1986: 114).

The subject of men and masculinity formation has become a popular topic in Western academia in the last two decades (Brod & Kaufman 1994; Connell 1995). Moreover, in multicultural contexts, the conceptualisation of the Orientalist stereotypes of Middle Eastern men as nationalist heroes, oppressive and overprotective vis-à-vis the equality-oriented and liberated Western men is vastly embedded in the Orientalist discourses (Connell 2007; Khosravi 2009). Previous writings on gender in the Middle East and Middle Eastern diasporic contexts, on the other hand, have mainly focused on women (Bauer 2000; Ghoussoub & Sinclair-Webb 2000). As a result, studies on men, masculinity and male sexuality in (and from) Middle Eastern contexts remains poorly examined. For the ongoing research, my aim is to examine the under-researched area of (re)presentation of masculinity and sexuality of Iranian men living in three heterogeneous cities: Sydney, Stockholm and London. Specifically, I will investigate the effect of Iranian Islamic cultures and socialisation, migration or displacement experiences on the men's practices of masculinity and sexuality, and how these influences may complicate their (re) presentation and perceptions of their masculinities and sexual experiences.

Through ethnographical accounts, this ongoing research aims to examine how normative values and social practices surrounding masculinity enter men's personal narratives, and how they articulate the cultural, social and religious values of masculinity and sexuality in their narrations of their everyday experiences in different diasporic contexts. Moreover, by studying the impact of Orientalist views on the Iranian/Middle Eastern/Muslim men's identity formation in the contemporary multicultural contexts, this study aims to explore how Iranian men negotiate masculinity and sexuality as they confront the variety of Orientalist stereotypes. For the purposes of this paper, however, I reflect mainly over some of the theoretical, contextual and methodological concerns that shape the current study.

The participants of this study were selected via snowball method and were chosen through existing networks known to me as a result of my inquiries, familiarity and involvement with the Iranian communities in the different cities. The study sample is vastly heterogeneous with regard to age, ethnicity, class, religious, education, political background, motivations of leaving Iran and the length of residency outside Iran. The heterogeneity of the group doubtlessly makes the writing extremely difficult but brings certainly valuable nuances into the study.

The interviews are mainly conducted in Persian and are the primary textual field for exploring the divergent and contingent intersections of the discourses that constitute the men's shifting notions of masculinity. While the empirical portion of this research is primarily based on the interviews, the analytical portion of the research stems from a diverse array of scholarly and non-scholarly media, film and literary works. As a way of bringing together multidisciplinary research, I attend a variety of Iranian cultural and social gatherings in different cities. I also follow the local Persian language TV and radio programmes, books, journals and on line magazines and newspapers and I consider them the secondary empirical material for this study. Thus, the research brings together two of the key methodologies recognised in contemporary qualitative research: textually-oriented discourse analysis and empirical ethnographic research.

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## 1 Gendering the concept of diaspora and transnationalism

Increased migration across the world during the last decades has placed the concept of diaspora and transnationalism at the centre of theoretical and analytical scholarly discussions (Glick-Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1995; Safran 1991; Vertovec 1997). This has made them the most frequently debated terms within academic discussions on imposed dispersion, displacement, refugees, globalisation, multiculturalism, (re)establishment of transnational communities and cultural politics. Consequently, one can argue that these concepts have become quite worn-out and have turned into, as Paul Gilroy puts it, "overused but under-theorised" (1997: 332) terms.

Despite the differences between the concept of transnationalism – which has mainly grown out of scholarly works that focuses on intensified movement and interconnectivity between people among and across nation states and diaspora, which mainly focuses on peoples settlement far from their ancestral homelands – these concepts are not mutually exclusive. There are transnational subjects who either temporarily or on a permanent basis are involved in constructing and/or interconnecting with the existing multifaceted and heterogeneous diasporic communities. Similarly, there are diasporic subjects and communities who benefit from transnational movements and connections, and provide financial, sociocultural actions to further promote transnational activities. For that reason, in my study on Iranian diaspora, I have noticed that not only do Iranian subjects have their experiences and reflections shaped by several movements across different national borders, but also how they talk about their imagination to move to other countries, which they think will better suit their needs and aspirations (see more on imagination in Osman and Tjapar-Bjorkert & Sanghera's texts in this volume). Moreover, they are constantly in contact with other diasporic communities through economic, social and cultural interactions. Thus, the comparative nature of this study also provides a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of the construction of masculinities across different transnational borders.

Neither diaspora nor transnationalism can stand as epistemological categories of analysis, separated and distinct from the stiflingly exchangeable intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality. A gendered understanding of the reasons, process and consequences of migration, therefore, will undoubtedly offer new aspects for understanding and conceptualising diaspora and transnationalism (Anthias 1998; Brah 2002; Espín 1999). By challenging the discourses of "fixed origins", Brah not only defies the search for a genuine and authentic identity or unsullied glorious past, but also explains how "the same" geographical place may stand for diverse histories and meanings. In her intersectional approach, not only do the circumstances of leaving play a central role but also important are the conditions of arrival and living. By focusing on the specificities of arrival and the existing social relationships in the new circumstances, Brah introduces the concept of *diaspora space* in lieu of diaspora. According to her, the concept of *diaspora space* includes the immigrants and their descendants, and those who are constructed and represented as local. Therefore, diasporic identities, as Brah declares, "cannot be read off in a one-to-one fashion straightforwardly from a border positionality, in the same way that a feminist subject position cannot be deduced from the category 'woman'" (2002: 207–8).

Migration is a profoundly gendered procedure. While the study of migration is not a new trend, focus on gender and changing gender roles, in general, and sexuality and masculinity, in particular, have been frequently neglected in studies of migration (Anthias 1998; Espín 1999; Moghissi 2005). A gendered understanding of the reasons, process and consequences of displacements will definitely provide new aspects for understanding and conceptualising diaspora. While both men and women undergo displacement, and experience its consequences differently, class, ethnicity, age and education, among other factors, have significant effects on how each goes through the immigration process. The receiving countries also process them differently and slot them into pre-determined racially gendered boxes. Therefore, men and women in the same family will experience their displacement and its consequences in different ways. Family relationships undergo drastic transformations due to the change in their environment – different constructions of femininity(ies) and masculinity(ies), unemployment, marginalisation, credential and education invalidation, to name a few – and due to each person's negotiation of, and changes in the shifting cultural, political and psychic terrains.

The changing dynamics of family relationships and gender roles among immigrant families, and the challenges faced by them in the receiving countries have gained significant attention during the last decades. In spite of the relative newness of the Iranian diaspora, research on gender imbalance among Iranian families (with a handful of reflections on sexuality and masculinity), has been the centre of several scholarly enquiries (Ahmadi Lewin 2001; Bauer 1994, 1998, 2000 who studied Germany and Canada; Darvishpour 2003; Farahani 2007, 2010 who studied Sweden; Mahdi 1999 who studied U.S.A.; Moghissi 2005, 2006 who studied Canada; Nassehi-Behnam 1985 who studied France; Shahidian 1999). However, as I mentioned earlier, since writing on gender in the Middle Eastern diasporic contexts has focused mainly on women, studies on men, masculinity and male sexuality in (and from) Middle Eastern contexts remains poorly examined. Moreover, while Shahram Khosravi's ethnographic study on Iranian born men in Sweden (2009) is one of the few studies on masculinity within Middle Eastern diasporic context, during the last few years the focus on young immigrant men/second generation has gained considerable attention in the Swedish media and academic circles (see Hammarén 2008; Jonsson 2007; León Rosales 2010). By focusing on how men's notion of masculinity and sexuality (trans) form due to the movements across national and cultural boundaries, ethnographical research on construction of diasporic masculinities will make a contribution to fill the gap on a frequently neglected issue in the existing debate on constantly changing gender roles in diasporic and transnational contexts.

The relationship between displacement and construction of masculinities, femininities and sexualities are overly complicated (Farahani 2007). Research on migration and sexuality is predominantly marked by either pervasive cultural expectations or racist and sexist prejudices against immigrants, which often place migrant subjects in vulnerable positions, socially and culturally. By putting gender and sexuality at the centre of attention for understanding transnational and diasporic subjects' experiences of displacement, as Floya Anthias accentuates in her article in this volume, the complexities of gendered (dis)belonging will demonstrate itself more accurately. A comparative and intersectional analysis of transnational and diasporic construction of gendered identities show how different locations – not necessarily across different national boarders, as Anthias significantly underscores – provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of different gendered, raced, classed dynamics (among others) with regard to transnational processes.

While the notion of border and border crossing is ingrained in the concept of transnationalism, the link is not as clear in the notion

of diaspora. However, as Brah (2002) underlines, it is impossible to tackle the concept of diaspora without taking its relationship with the idea of borders into account. The very notion of border and border crossing, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) elucidates, includes a variety of concepts such as: racial, sexual, class, psychology, spiritual and cultural boundaries wherein they shape and are shaped relationally. The very relationality of border and border crossing, thus, constructs boundaries not only from within, but also from without (Fay 2004). Therefore, "Who I am" as Michaela Fay discusses, "is constantly defined by 'where I am,' 'who I am with' and how I am defined by whom is different (or similar) to me" (2004: 173). Moreover, through conceptualisation of the notion of border as a political construct as well as an analytical category, Brah intends to address the inconsistency of and within diasporic locations and dislocations (2002: 16). By reflecting on how borders are regulated or policed, Brah aims to shed light on who the undesirable border crossers are that are kept out and why. Therefore, the very practice of filling the gaps between different parts of their lives or identities demonstrate how, as Anzaldúa (2002) also explains, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks. Different (gendered, classed and raced) subjects employ different tactics in their everyday lives in order to avoid an undesirable confrontation because of their names, accents, etc. in different locations. The tactics they employ, are shaped by where, when, and with whom they communicate or socialise. While people respond to each and every context differently, they constantly use their own experiences in order to deal with the new situations that emerge. All these considerations concerning context and location correspond fittingly with the importance of the notion of translocationality (instead of transnationality), which is also raised by Anthias in this volume.

## 2    Islamic view on sexuality and masculinity

Historically, religion has been a conservative force in terms of its impact on the relationship between the sexes (Ahmed 1992). In Western contexts, Islam has increasingly become perceived as the most notorious religion in this regard (Moghissi 1999). Similar to other religions, Islamic discourses of sex, gender and sexuality are tightly interrelated. Therefore, a study on "Islamic" constructions of masculinity and sexuality are impossible without examining gender and gender roles. One of the crucial inquiries for researching the position of men (and women) in and from the Middle East has been the necessity of (dis)associating cultural authenticity from Islam. This tension has resulted in the double bind of, as Kandiyoti (1996) asserts, either denying that Islamic practices are necessarily responsible for patriarchal practices or asserting that patriarchal practices are not necessarily Islamic. Each of the poles of this dichotomy has its own shortcomings. On the one hand, it is vastly reductionist to accuse Islam of being exclusively accountable for repressive gender practices. Doing so opens ways for ahistorical, essentialist and Orientalist stereotypes (Said 1994). On the other hand, it is problematic to entirely exonerate "Islamic doctrines" (in all of their multiplicities). Doing so leads to discounting and underplaying their hegemonic and disciplinary power in societies and communities where Islamic ideology is normative.

By avoiding monolithic assumptions that identifies Islam as the sole accountable component in the construction of gender identity, the importance of the disciplinary power of Islamic policy makes its impact indisputable. The few but significant studies about masculinity within different Islamic cultures show how masculinity is multiply constructed in complex ways in numerous and differing Islamic discourses (Bilgin

2004; Bouhdiba 1998; Ghoussoub & Sinclair-Webb 2000; Khosravi 2009; Najmabadi 2000, 2005). Therefore, it is important to veer away from generalising or giving a homogenised, fixed representation of *the* Islamic context, "or the Iranian context". Moreover, since sexuality, both inside and outside Iran, has predominantly been identified as heterosexuality (Shahidian 1999), the main focus is to examine the men's narrations of their heterosexuality. However, by employing queer analysis, it is important to pay particular attention to how and in what ways the ideal and desirable heterosexual masculine subject is already constructed in relation to the abnormal and unacknowledged masculinities. By being attentive to how men recognise, long for, challenge, avoid, negotiate, distance from (un) desirable masculinity, it will also become apparent how the normative masculinity is performed and established through shifting boundaries within a variety of historically specific social contexts.

One of the queer theories contributions in the study of sexuality has been to demonstrate how the "normal" sexuality is not only governed by the attraction between the "right" sexes, but it is also constantly constructed interestingly with class, race, age and ability among other factors. For instance, the intimate relationship between a fifty-year-old female and a twenty-five-year old male is a fully heterosexual relationship; nonetheless, it is far from being a heteronormative relationship. However, if I point out that the female subject has ethnic Swedish background and the male subject is a young immigrant from Kenya, we will conceive their relationship differently. It is not my suggestion that we should. I am merely pointing out that the general understanding of power exchange between these two individuals will be perceived differently. This shows how what we perceive as a "normative" sexuality goes hand in hand with race, class, age, right length, etc. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to how Iranian male subjects in Sydney, Stockholm and London reflect around their (im)possibilities in meeting (new) partners. Do they consider their ethnic background and transnational experiences as an asset that they can benefit from or as something that makes their lives more complicated, so they view it as an obstacle? It is also important to have the same reflection in mind concerning their experiences while they were living in Iran with regard to their ethnic, class and educational background. Once again, what constitutes the desirable, heterosexual masculine subject in different locations and contexts and how do men challenge, confirm and deal with these expectations?

## 3    Masculinity and feminist perspective

Focusing on masculinity, as Emma Sinclair-Webb (2000) points out, should not be seen as a shift away from feminist projects, but rather as a complementary endeavour. Men who have migrated are caught up in relations of gender, race and sexuality particular to their new social, cultural, economic and political environments, yet they do not leave behind their histories. "Migratory subjectivities" (Boyce Davis 1994) are plural and reveal the multiple intersections of self and community, past and present, the political and the religious, and through the continual negotiation of identity, they assert agency. Further, while emphasising the nuances and the diversity of different notions of masculinities (or femininities), it is necessary to escape essentialisation and reproduction of diverse stereotypes because total denial of their existence and power puts tangible limits on the sight of the observer. As Sinclair-Webb argues, "refusing to engage with diverse stereotypes – particularly when it comes to the popularly accepted notions of general public regarding masculinity or femininity

among other – is akin to ignoring or underplaying the power of dominant cultural values which in all societies generally prove harder to resist than to incorporate" (2000: 13). While these stereotypes are resilient, as Sinclair-Webb continues to argue, they keep reproducing and contain enormous social power. Therefore, "there is no point in simply denying their truth and wishing them away" (2000: 12).

Being reluctant to deny the history or acknowledge the presence of "truth" in stereotypes, I would argue for practices of masculinity(ies) that support and promote dominant discourses. What needs to be done is to trace the threads that interact to produce those practices. There are too many power relations at play, particularly class-based, racist, sexist and homophobic ones, and too many positions of privilege and disadvantage. As Avtar Brah argues, "difference for the most part is about difference of social condition" (2005: 435). Thus, it is crucial to study what makes people take up certain choices that they pick from. What choices are available around them and where do they pick these choices? Where do they come from? Recognising masculinity as highly complex configurations of practices, one should take into consideration the relation of rulings without turning a blind eye to their agency. By incorporating globalisation processes, Connell not only extends his conceptualisation of masculinity, but also emphasises the importance of local ethnographic studies on men (2002, 2007) in order to observe and analyse the multiple and simultaneous presence of contradictory social relations that men face.

## 4 Research on Iranian men in England, Sweden and Australia

One of the methodological concerns, with regard to this study, is to be attentive to the similarities and differences among Iranians who moved to Sydney, Stockholm and London, and to pay attention to how and in what ways different masculinities are constructed in different places. Earlier, I discussed how the condition of arrival and living in the "receiving" countries has imperative impact on how the masculine subjects are (re)constructed. In addition to the specific conditions of each and every country, different cohort of Iranians have moved to and settled in different countries. For instance, contrary to England that attracted many Iranians even prior to the Iranian Revolution (1979), the existence of the Iranian community in Sweden and Australia is a recent phenomenon. The Iranian community(ies) is young and Iranians make up one of the largest non-European minorities in Sweden, many arriving during the 1980s and 1990s due to the Iranian Revolution and the eight year long war with Iraq (1980–1988) that followed it. Due to the different migration and refugee policies, there is a difference between the social and political component and the ways that Iranians arrive in England, Sweden and Australia. While a majority of Iranians who live in Sweden arrived as refugees or later due to the international refugee family reunion policy, Iranians who live in England arrived as students, professionals, refugees, etc. However, during the last five to six years, due to the development of different Masters programmes introduced in English language within Swedish academies, for the first time we have been witnessing many foreign students within Swedish universities. Tuition free courses have attracted many students, among them are many Iranians. However, this will change since Sweden has recently enforced a tuition requirement for foreign students. These new groups of Iranians who have spent almost their whole lives in post-revolutionary Iran add expectably – but sometimes in unexpected ways – additional nuances to the already existing heterogeneous Iranian communities.

However, this is not a new occurrence in Sydney and London since due to these countries migration policies and language (English), they have always been open to a new group of Iranian students and businessmen and women.

Moreover, United Kingdom's vast colonial history, in general, and specifically, its direct and indirect influences on Iran's economy and political destiny put it in a particular position among Iranians, which Sweden and Australia lack. In the early post-revolutionary years, most of the Iranians who moved to Australia were immigrants and not political refugees, unlike in Sweden. Many Iranians in Australia also have a *Baha'i* background. During the last decade many skilled immigrants (well-educated, post-revolutionary generation of Iranians) have moved to Australia. These differences, along with their class background and specific condition in each country, are some of the reasons that differentiate Iranians in each country quite diversely. Therefore, a comparative ethnographic study of diasporic masculinities in three heterogeneous multicultural western contexts, with a focus on the specificity of different contexts, representations and practices will provide a deeper understanding of each and every circumstance, and expose how diasporic masculinities are shaped differently in different contexts. Besides, it is also interesting to examine how Iranian men relate to different concepts of "normative" masculinities in British, Australian and Swedish societies.

With regard to challenging orientalist stereotypes and employment of postcolonial approach, it is noteworthy to mention that Iran has never formally been a colony. However, in addition to the Western power's direct and indirect influences on the country's economy, culture, political destiny and the impact of global culture, Iran and the identity formations of Iranians (inside as well as outside Iran) have never been outside the colonial and Orientalist discourses (Moallem 2005). In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), Franz Fanon demonstrates the psychological impacts of colonialism on the colonised subjects, who internalise the image of the self as "other". The colonising project represents, for example, the "black" man, as everything the "white" man is not, because as Fanon explicitly declares, "[a] man is expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man" (1986:114). The consequences of the internalisation of the self as other, as historian Tavakoli-Targhi (2001) declares in a similar approach, result from the processes of *self-orientalisation*. This illustrates how the gendering and sexualising of men (and women) grows into a racialised/ethnicised self within specific diasporic spaces. Therefore, due to the intermingling of racist and sexist discourses, as David L. Eng (2001) points out, sexual and racial differentiation and marginalisation cannot be understood in isolation.

A key issue regarding the men of Iranian descent in different Western contexts (who are very often undifferentiated as Muslim or Middle Eastern men) is how they are (re)presented in comparison with (white) Western men. Moreover, by analysing how the dichotomisation of "we and them" arises in different Western metropolitans (Sydney, Stockholm and London), this study aims to understand not only what prejudices the Iranian-born men face on a daily basis, but also how the stereotypes are used to differentiate Iranian men from "liberated and equal seeking" Western men in different contexts. Considering the differences between these three cities, Sweden has one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world. Thereby, the "image" of Swedish men not only pushing prams (take parental leave), but also (supposedly) taking their share of the household duties sounds familiar to many.

Since the late 1990s, studies on men and masculinity construction in Sweden have expanded broadly (Pringle & Balkmar 2006). A majority of these studies have critical standpoints and are directly or indirectly

intertwined with gender equality projects in Sweden. However, while in the majority of these studies men are mostly observed and examined as obstacles for gender equality, several studies are attentive to ways that (the image of) "gender equal" Swedish men is constructed through and across different discourses in Sweden. For instance, Lars Jalmert, one of the Swedish masculinities research pioneers, who invented the notion of "in principle man", in his book *The Swedish Man* in the early 1980s sheds light on Swedish men's ambivalence towards gender equality. According to Jalmert, the Swedish man is positive to gender equality "in principle" but not in practice. Moreover, by focusing on numerous campaigns that aim to encourage men to take their share of household responsibility and participate in equal parenting, Roger Klinth and Thomas Johansson demonstrate how Swedish men/fathers have been caught in between political visions and real life (Johansson & Klinth 2008; Klinth 2002, 2008; Klinth & Johansson 2010).

Furthermore, by employing intersectional analysis, some studies aim to comprehend which men are keen on or reluctant to participate in gender equality projects, and in what ways these "good men" partake in the project. In sum, researches on gender equality and masculinity politics have lately focused on how masculinity politics and the reformist agenda of state feminist driven projects cooperate for constructing a national self image, and use gender equality to promote Sweden internationally (Dahl 2005; Egeberg Holmgren 2011; Järvklo 2008). These studies also explore in different ways how the gender equal good man, as Ulf Mellström (2011) points out, is constructed interwoven with Swedishness, middleclassness, whiteness and heteronormativity.

Since masculinity, as a historical and shifting phenomenon, is constructed in a power relation with femininity, and always in relation to various forms of masculinities (Connell 2002, 2007), it is interesting to focus on how transnational masculine subjects who move to, for example, Sweden (dis)relate to this image of Swedish masculine subject or how their masculinity is represented with regard to the general image of the "Swedish" man (which represents a white, young, urban, heterosexual and well-educated man) or the other sorts of masculine subjects. Even in Australia and UK, Iranian men feel that their masculinity is compared and confronted with the "liberated" British or Australian man, but the same image of gender equal (Swedish) man who stays at home and takes care of his children fails to exist in Australia and UK in the same way as in Sweden. In addition, the high cost of nursery school makes even many working Australian and British women choose to stay at home and take care of their children instead of sending them to nursery school. The same phenomenon is almost non-existent in Sweden due to the government supported nursery schools and 12–18 months long paid parental leave. In addition, Swedish women work on a part-time basis more than Swedish men do.

Generally, men have the main responsibility for the economy of the household in Iran. One of the components, which makes a responsible and thereby, a desirable heterosexual, masculine subject in Iranian contexts (which was confirmed by almost all of my interviewees) is to be a breadwinner and be able to take care of the family. Becoming a breadwinner is one of the key elements in the transition from boys to men. Due to the inefficient, unreliable and expensive nursery schools, for instance, Iranian women in Sydney and London – like many Australian and British women – tend to stay at home and take care of their children more often. Consequently, their husbands remain as a breadwinner and continue to feel responsible for their families. This is one example that shows how a different context has a different impact on how men continue to feel

as a desirable masculine subject or start questioning, confirming, (re)negotiating or challenging their pervious roles and values.

One of the few and related study that includes a similar focus is Shahram Khosravi's ethnographic study on Iranian men in Sweden. By drawing on a postcolonial theoretical debate of the irrefutable intermingling of racist and sexist discourses, Khosravi (2009) examined how, despite their satisfactory social status, the well-educated men in his study persistently negotiated the hegemonic discourses of immigrant/Muslim men. Torn between– what Khosravi calls – Iranian women's liberation process and a continuous confrontation with a variety of stereotypes of Iranian/Muslim men, the men in his study, as racially and sexually marked and discernible, "feel visible yet without being seen". Based on her ethnographic study among Iranian diaspora in Germany, Janet Bauer notes that "while it's been generalized that women refugees adapt better than men to the circumstances of exile", she emphasises that it would be unreasonable to assume that women have an easy time doing it" (2000: 186; see also Farahani 2007). While the patriarchal gender arrangements in the countries of origin differ from those of the "host" country, in the practice of everyday life, immigrant women confront and grapple with their status as an "other" within the imagined community as well as their multicultural identification" (Smith & Brinker-Gable 1997: 16; Farahani 2007).

Moreover, Khosravi shows how the notion of *mard-e sonnati* (traditional man), which is used inside Iran to identify a man who (among other qualities) is dedicated to patriarchal values, in diasporic circumstances takes on a cultural and ethnic attribute and becomes *mard-e Irani* (Iranian man). This leads to, as Khosravi explains, modification of *mard-e Irani* from a noun to an adjective that is associated with certain characteristics, which refer to the selective behaviours/performances of men that serve to assert masculine authority over their wives and daughters. *Mard-e Irani,* according to him, is linked with negative attitudes and is used as an insult (2006: 80). Acknowledging Khosravi's argumentation, I have noticed a similar phenomenon in my research among Iranian born women in Sweden (Farahani 2007). I observed how a similar judgment (with different gendered characteristics) has been passed onto women. The notion of *zan-e sonnati* (the traditional woman) is (among other qualities) allocated to housewives who prioritise the wishes of their husbands and children. This "proper" woman should also be highly concerned about her (sexual) behaviour. Like the notion of traditional man, the notion of traditional woman becomes ethnicised/racialised in the diaspora. It shifts to *zan-e Irani* (Iranian woman) and thereby becomes an adjective that implies specific (gendered) characteristics. *Zan-e Irani bāzi dar āvardan* (playing the Iranian woman) includes, among other things, women who in intimate (hetero)sexual encounters, play aloof and inaccessible. While failing to incorporate a feminist analysis of gender imbalance, Khosravi's study is also limited to well-educated, middle class Iranian men. By including working-class men as well as those who feel marginalised due to the non-accreditation or non-acceptance of their educational and vocational degrees and skills, one can bring additional nuances into the analysis.

Moreover, regarding the class backgrounds of the interviewee, it is important to point out that due to the migration, the economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu 1987, 1989) of the people undergo changes in a variety of, and at times contradictory, ways. For instance, due to the different living standards between Iranian and Swedish/British/Australian societies, while some people might gain a better economic situation, they might still be positioned in a lower class compared with other classes in the current society

and have a lower status than what they once held in Iranian society. Similarly, this often happens also to their social, cultural or symbolic capital. Nevertheless, status and class are not reducible to each other. These considerations make the notion of class and class background of the interviewee additionally interesting and complex. In general, people have different tactics in order to adjust, seize, (dis) confirm, challenge and negotiate these changes in their lives and how these might impact their masculinity.

As an example of this point, I draw on an account that a particular interviewee gave of his situation regarding employment. Not surprisingly, unemployment, non-accreditation or recognition of educational and vocational degrees and skills, racism and marginalisation were common topics that many interviewees shared with me throughout the course of the interviews. One of the male interviewees, Reza had gone through the most dramatic changes regarding these matters. Reza's high professional status and academic degree had been completely dismissed and disqualified after he left Iran. He had to start working in an unqualified, low-paid job in Sydney. I asked him if and how this drastic transformation had changed the ways, in which he viewed himself as an individual, a man, a (desirable) husband or a father. Insistently, Reza firmly declared that his feelings regarding his position as a (heterosexual desirable) man, father and husband had not changed in any way at all. He assured me that he had left Iran because of the lack of individual and social liberties, and of freedom of expression and that he wanted to offer his daughters the opportunity to live in a free country. By migrating to Australia, he achieved what he wished for. So, Reza assured me, losing his job, his status and wealth was of less significance. Later on during my fieldwork in Sydney at a gathering among Iranians, I happened to meet some people who knew Reza well and some were close relatives. While talking about the social and mental consequences of geographical and social displacements, a couple of the people in the group presented lengthy accounts of Reza's drinking problem and the deterioration in his physical and mental health in the first decade of his residency in Sydney, as an example of some of the consequences of non-accreditation or acceptance of educational and vocational qualifications and skills in the new context.

Thus, here I had two different accounts of the same person's (dis) integration in a new context. What am I, as a researcher, supposed to do with these different accounts? Should I dismiss everything that Reza had told me and "believe" what I "accidentally" happened to hear about him through others? Or should I completely "believe" his account? I will never, and can never, have the chance to verify all the details of interviewees' accounts of themselves. Nor am I interested in doing so. What interests me, however, is how Reza *positions* himself, how he *desires to position* himself *in his interaction with me* (to read a more indepth discussion regarding researchers' insider/outsider role and on positionality, see Farahani 2010a). It is also vital to examine how and in what ways Reza (and other interviewees) is capable of finding value in something different from that which he was entitled to prior to his current situation. That Reza was a highly skilled, professional man was no longer widely acknowledged, and by (re)presenting himself in new circumstances as someone who values freedom more than anything else, Reza was, I propose, attempting to reposition himself and his value system, and attain a different type of social, cultural and/or even sexual capital for gaining respect, attention and admiration. Having said that, I am not suggesting that his previous position excluded the valuing of freedom and individual liberty. Since I am interested in analysing self-presentations of masculinities, it is not my aim to determine

the veracity of the interviewees' accounts of themselves. Rather, I consider it important to look into how the interviewees (dis)related and re-told their understandings of their masculinities in light of what they consider to be, for instance, their social background. In other words, instead of saying that X *comes* from a middle class, religious or secular family, I point to the ways that X *considers* herself/himself to be from a middle class, religious or secular family and how that fact, in his/her opinion, influences his/her perception of masculinity and sexuality in specific ways.

My earlier findings based on fieldwork and interviews with Iranian men in Sydney, Stockholm and London also demonstrate how most of the interviewees despite (sometimes) lengthy accounts of racist practices were not so keen on presenting themselves as one who has been subjected to racist and discriminatory practices. While many of the interviewees, particularly the first generation, have faced degradation of their degrees and previous work experiences, they were unwilling to observe that as a sign of discrimination. Many of them lived in marginalised suburbs, their children had experienced different conflicts and problems due to their backgrounds, names, looks, accents, etc., but they were reluctant to see that as consequences of racist practices. Rather, they observed these practices as a procedure that one should be prepared to face when one leaves his/her home country. Interestingly, having moved or a desire to move from the residing country to a third country (for example, from Sweden to United Kingdom or from United Kingdom to Australia or Canada) was often presented as a solution to escape racism. While men in Stockholm talked more openly about their experiences of racism, men who lived in London and Sydney refused to see themselves as victims of racist practices. According to my opinion, men's desire to present themselves as an indisputable part of a "collective white we" lies partly behind interviewees' more rather than less collective denial of racism. According to men's narratives (even some of those who lived in Stockholm), racism was something that happens to Africans, Arabs and Turkish people who didn't know how to adjust in this society, not to the "civilised we" who are middle class, well-educated Iranians. A variety of intersecting factors such as: lighter skin, high education, age, language ability, occupation, look, wealth and social and cultural capital, among others have an impact on how one could feel closer to "normative" masculinity and "pass" in order to occupy a position of privilege. However, the problem with "passing", as Beverly Skeggs indicates in her study on working-class, British, white women who try to pass as middle-class women, "is that someone may catch you out" (2002: 86). Moreover, as Skeggs explains, the desire to pass and to be accepted and recognised by another group requires one to know how to be accepted. Skeggs adds that the uncertainties around the process of passing, without doubt, generate enormous anxiety for those who wish to pass (for more discussion on passing, see Schlossberg 2001). However, there are more nuances to discuss concerning interviewees approaches to racist practices in these three cities that require more inclusive presentation of interview material, which is beyond the scope of this paper (see Farahani forthcoming).

## 5    Conclusion

By focusing on the importance of studying construction of diasporic masculinities, in this article, I have discussed some of the theoretical and methodological concerns with regard to studying masculinity, displacement, gender imbalance and sexuality among Iranian born men in different Western contexts. I have also argued how a study

on diasporic masculinity will fill the existing gap in masculinity studies – with all its layers and nuances – that traditionally has engaged white men, as well as feminist/Middle Eastern studies – with all their complexities and differences – that have mainly focused on the situation of women. By presenting some of the historical and contextual backgrounds, such as: the Islamic view on sexuality, 1979 Iranian revolution, differences among the various groups of Iranians who moved to different countries and within each group: generation, age, ethnicity, class and reflections over the conditions of leaving and conditions of arrival, I have briefly presented some of the shifting and intersecting factors that construct Iranian transnational masculine subjects. By focusing on the conditions of arrival, I have also reflected on how the construction of Iranian men in Western contexts (who are very often undifferentiated as Muslim or Middle Eastern men) can be used to differentiate Iranian men from "liberated and equal seeking" Western men in different contexts. In examining intersecting discourses that construct diasporic masculine subjects, it is also imperative to pay attention to the different types of masculinities and the ways in which they have been ignored, marginalised, silenced or empowered.

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