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Unveiling Men: Modern Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Iran (Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East), Wendy DeSouza, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2019, ISBN 978-0-8156-3603-8 (pbk), 183 pp.

In the study of gender and sexuality in Iran, narratives on women’s rights and international law discourses have dominated the field. In this concise and thought-provoking book, Wendy DeSouza makes an attempt to fill in the scholarship on masculinities in the Middle East, Iran specifically, through a historical analysis of the late Qajar period during the reign of Reza Shah. To put it simply, *Unveiling Men: Modern Masculinities in Twentieth-Century Iran* is the first major work of its kind dealing with this time period and subject matter. In each chapter, DeSouza problematizes the idea of men and masculinity, decoupling it from the Western colonial influence and situating it in a unique Iranian identity context. At the same time, the book’s relative brevity makes for a fast-paced analysis covering multiple facets of the topics of Iranian history and studies of gender and sexuality in Islamicate societies. In navigating the difficulties of a vast and fractured time period of study, from Nasser al-Din Shah

(ruled 1848–96) to Reza Khan (ruled 1925–41), DeSouza embeds her narrative in a matrix of various media (photography, sartorial reform, journalism, and poetic translation).

Extant literature on the topic of gender in Iran—in the works of Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Arzoo Osanloo, Janet Afary, and others—has often made women the focal point, placing men into gender studies discourses vis-à-vis feminist critiques of social and political structures. In these various studies, women's issues and narratives are framed around family law and the hijab. DeSouza does not seek to replace these narratives; rather, one of her central foci is to expand the discourse on gender in Iran through the lens of masculinity and male bodies—in effect to show how the queering of male bodies has been largely ignored in the field and how it has been replaced with pejorative language indicting these cultures and societies as homophobic. Women still play a role in DeSouza's narrative, a role that DeSouza has de-emphasized in her argument, as the emphasis of this work pertains to subjugated masculinity. Through this analytical lens, DeSouza articulates how sartorial changes for men predated ones for women in the twentieth century. Central to DeSouza's argument is an emphasis on “challenging the hegemonic category of ‘men’ we take for granted and bringing to light a history of suppressed masculinities” (p. 8). In this context, suppressed masculinities are those that sit outside the dominant, hegemonic category; that is to say, queer desires, class-based understandings of masculinity, and surviving “pre-modern” descriptions of gender and gender norms.

Unveiling Men is structured in two parts and five chapters, organized temporally and spatially starting with premodern ideas of masculinity in the late Qajar period, through the nationalist changes of the rule of Reza Shah. Part I shows the cultural transformation of Iran from Nasser al-Din Shah through the reign of Reza Shah. Part II is a linguistic turn towards the production of mystical thought and translation in Europe's Orientalist fascination. In turn, each part of the book shows how Europe and Iran engage in an interplay of sexual demarcation: from influencing the performativity of masculinity in a modern uniform way, to the role that Sufism played in Europe's understanding of the beloved and how that was reified into literary discourse as heteronormative. Each chapter therefore is connected to the others through an overlapping theme of the location and definition of masculinity and the male body in the given context, and also in the “removal” of the male body, namely, as DeSouza argues in the final chapter of the book, in the intentional re-gendering of the male youth beauty as the female beloved.

Part I focuses on the transformations and developments of male bodies and masculinity through stark changes that occurred between the two successive ruling eras. DeSouza grapples with the claim that, while some sartorial laws were inspired by European men's fashion, the structuring of a more modern “Iranian Man” was built around the idea of a “nativized masculinity,” or one that encompassed a masculinity unique to Iran (p. 8). In contextualizing the historical idea of this unique masculinity, DeSouza attempts to create an alternative framework for understanding gender and sex performativity, one that is outside the European gaze. Because sexuality and especially men's

sexuality is at the forefront of this work, *Unveiling Men* advances a narrative of what could be termed “an alternative masculinity.” This narrative “seeks to deemphasize and decenter the European colonial bourgeois order in the formation of a new sexual ethics in Iran” (p. 6), one that modifies the portrayal of men and masculinity away from European archetypes.

Identifying these alternative depictions of masculinity, DeSouza draws on the development of this new sexual ethics and highlights three media forms that she historically associates with her argument. First is Nāser al-Din Shah’s use of men in women’s spaces in photography. Within this medium of photography, two distinct types of photos emerge and dichotomize our depictions of men and masculinity, the first being royal portraits, and the other being the photographs taken by Antoin Sevruguin of the royal harem. In royal portraiture, Nasser al-Din Shah would be the focal point and portrayed in full regalia; while in the (alternative) depictions, elite women—particularly those in the harem—are rendered as visible, which allows for a (male) gaze into intimate spaces (p. 20). DeSouza furthers this narrative through the military order imposed on men in the Reza Shah period, whereby military uniformity and the depictions of Reza Shah as a strong nationalistic and militaristic leader define masculinity vis-à-vis state membership. Finally, masculinity is further defined through the glorification of elite men’s values, values that were supported and propagandized through the writings of a group of modern secular intellectuals, such as Sayyed Hasan Taqizādeh, Muhammad Qazvini, Ahmad Kasravi, and Ali-Akbar Dehkhodā, each of whom purported the need for men to espouse female desire, monogamy, and sexual restraint above all else.

Each chapter in Part I builds on itself, finding more and more nuance to the argument that masculinity, male bodies, and queer desires are underexplored and therefore misunderstood aspects of the turn of the twentieth century. In chapter 1, DeSouza begins to define the prevailing “pre-modern” sexuality of men through a new analysis of the famous photographs taken of the Harem during the reign of Nāser al-Din Shah. In her analysis of these photos, DeSouza contrasts the crumbling of a nation with the *razm-o-bazm* (fight and feast) scenes depicted in the photographs. Opulence within the scope of these pictures was also meant to contrast ideas of masculinity at the time as more modest in both dress and attitude. DeSouza argues here that Nāser al-Din Shah is perceived as less masculine due to his eagerness to be in the company of women in intimate spaces. Both sexual excesses and a lack of restraint towards any measure of luxury, as we will see in later chapters, are interpreted as anti-masculine characteristics. “Indeed, much of what the king did was shaped by certain social expectations of manliness; the implication here was that seeking comfort in his female harem made him less a man” (p. 23). In this way, Nasser al-Din Shah, as the reference point, becomes the foil of non-masculinity that subsequent eras will compare against.

Building off chapter 1, chapter 2 creates the image of the modern man of Iran mirroring the often-heroic depictions of Reza Shah in obvious contrast to the previous Qajar era. Here we come to the image of the unveiled man, where traditional/clerical garb was cast off in favor of more streamlined clothing, ties and suits. DeSouza highlights how men’s garb and the male body became an obsession to the state’s idealized

male citizen. This male citizen was created in opposition not only to clerics in Qom, but also in (social class) contrast to working and lower income citizens. Sartorial choices became a law in Iran in 1928 under the United Appearance Policies, and as such Reza Shah's order pushed an unveiling of men (*kashf-e hijab*), where the male body would be exposed more prominently, not only sexualizing it, but separating men from an autonomy of moral action (Islamic morality). In other words, the rhetoric of choice regarding the hijab in contemporary discourse closely resembles how DeSouza defines the unveiling of men: as removal of choice, and the choice to dress modestly in accordance with *fiqh* (p. 50). This chapter is also an attempt to speak to the ways in which men related to other men (p.39), i.e. the emasculation of men in their unveiling by a male-led government, it also re-shifts our understanding of the patriarchal order as "we can revisit how the 'renewal' (*tajaddod*) movement in Iran displaced men both as autonomous actors allowed to make decisions about their bodies and as protectors or 'guardians' of women" (p. 54). DeSouza has framed a history that emphasizes a violence toward the male body, one that fits into a larger discourse on veiling/unveiling that, up until this point, has focused strongly on the unveiling and veiling of women both before and after 1979.

DeSouza's narrative takes a turn in chapter 3 from a historical narrative to a deep reading of Taqizādeh, the famous political writer. Situating this chapter in a particular political moment of Iranian history from 1908 to 1944, DeSouza reifies her arguments about masculinity and male sexuality through Taqizādeh's influence on twentieth century cultural reforms in Iran. Including Taqizādeh also gives DeSouza the opportunity to forge a new argument, casting off the notion that he was "the most homophobic" of Iranian reformers (p. 62—a quote attributed to Afsaneh Najmabadi). She further highlights, through Taqizādeh's writings, that western conceptions of homophobia do not really apply to our understanding of queer desires in Iran at this time, by documenting his usage of the term "unnatural love" (p. 74). In keeping to her main argument in Part I about the development of masculinity and male sexuality, DeSouza further enables a linear transformation of her conception of "premodern" sexual practices processed into the apparatus of the state. This resulted in a cultural shift whereby reformists like Taqizadeh sought to curb these behaviors in the masculinity of the nation and shape maleness to the bourgeois ideal (p. 63). Bourgeois morality therefore is one that acts not only to counter religious morality but to mark itself as an inextricable part of the modernizing project. If premodern practices revolved around excess and in particular sexual excess (p. 64), then the new bourgeois reforms linked masculinity to sexual restraint (age or consent, monogamy, heteronormativity). For DeSouza, this bourgeois turn was not a turn towards homophobic practices. Indeed, Taqizādeh wrote about sexual behaviors and sexual practices, described as "unnatural love," but did not outright condemn them. Underlying DeSouza's narratives is this idea of sexuality, queer desire, and its continual presence throughout this historical period of cultural reform.

In Part II DeSouza's argument veers into the mystical and challenges the widely held contemporary history of sexuality in Iran and in Europe as it pertains to Sufism and mystical poetry. In contesting this history, DeSouza's main argument is

that Western narratives of sex and sexuality in mysticism and mystical poetry erased the homoerotic content of classical poems in favor of divine, womanly, or brotherly love. Much of the history that she is analyzing and critiquing centers around Louis Massignon and Anne Marie Schimmel's influence on the Western literary canon and their translations of Sufi poetry. Her chapter 4 is an (ostensible) in-depth look at Massignon's influence on mysticism in Europe and how his own quest for spiritual awakening, struggle over his own sexuality, and ultimate Catholic avowal created a new philological way of approaching mysticism. DeSouza here is aiming to concretize the ways in which the Orientalists, and Massignon in particular, viewed mysticism. In the process, the scholarship of mysticism, including Schimmel's, is indicted in this idea of the divine and its mystical elements in favor of a narrative that shows how sex and sexuality were the prominent features of Sufi poetry. DeSouza develops this in some detail in chapter 5 to show how same-sex desires and expressions of beauty were replaced in European translations to show more heteronormative expressions of love, and the beauty of young men was changed to women, brotherly, or divine love. Both fascinatingly and controversially, DeSouza challenges conceptions of Sufism within contemporary discourse to address how homoerotic desires were written over and abrogated in translation in favor of divine love.¹

While this book is a riveting and quick-moving foray into the history and analysis of masculinity in Iran, many of DeSouza's claims need fleshing out. Most striking is her argument about Sufism and translation, one that does not engage with the broader literature on poetic translation and literary criticism. Although DeSouza roots much of this argument in the time period, her attention to Anne Marie Schimmel would benefit from a wider discussion. At the same time, too much material has been subordinated to endnotes, and the narrative is hindered by the presence and length of the notes, which take the reader away from the major arguments. DeSouza does make a conscious, concerted effort to engage a literature that deals with gender in Iran, most notably Afsaneh Najmabadi's works. That said, as *Unveiling Men* is a work that pertains to a growing discourse on masculinity, there are works on masculinity and sexuality in the larger field of the Middle East and North Africa that deserve more attention. Part of the historical structure of DeSouza's argument is tied to a notion of the idealized male body/male citizen, thus inextricably linking masculinity and heteronormativity to the nation-state. In much the same way, Katherine Pratt Ewing has shown how the idealized forms of masculinity and the male body negatively impacted Turkish Muslim men in Germany.² Less of a historical and more of an ethnographic portrayal, Pratt Ewing shows how stigmatization of Muslim men is in fact an emasculating process. These deeply intrinsic similarities

¹Rumi indicts the Sufi for his sexual proclivities: هست صوفی آنک شد صفوت طلب؛ نه از لباس صوف و خیاطی و دب
The Sufi is he who has become a seeker of the purest form, not of the Sufi's clothes, needlework, or spreading the diseases of that cloth (a veiled reference to sodomy which is stated more explicitly in the next verse)—M 5: 363. Translation is my own.

²See Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

point to ways in which nationalism and the nation-state have concentrated power over male bodies, leading perhaps to a greater discussion of masculinity. Lastly, although provocative, some of the arguments presented in DeSouza's book attempt to break new ground in the studies of Sufism, mystical Islam more broadly, and their translations, yet these important narratives remain under-developed.

As part of a gender studies discourse that has long incorporated sociological and historical disciplines, *Unveiling Men* is a much-needed, risk-taking book that begins an essential conversation in the study of masculinity in Iran. As DeSouza had to contend with a limited literature devoted to analyzing a history of male bodies, queer identities, and masculinity in Iran, this book breaks new ground in a number of ways. I would recommend this as a valuable work to graduate and undergraduate students alike in History, Gender Studies, and Middle East and Islamic Studies.

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The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny, Alireza Doostdar, *Islamic Studies and the Anthropology of Religion*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018, ISBN 9780691163789 (pbk), 295 pp.

Many Iranians are fascinated by the spectacular feats performed by psychics: curing a disease with a talisman, exorcizing evil spirits from a possessed person, foretelling someone's future, and encounters with the souls of the dead are just a few examples of such acts. Whether a *rammāl*, a *shaykh*, a modern spiritual healer or a motivational speaker, these socially aberrant characters have occasionally influenced modern Iranian culture. What is more, these phenomena have not only fascinated people but also impacted their worldview and belief system. Culturally significant as this case might seem, it has remained understudied by scholars of Iranian studies. This lacuna has now been filled by Alireza Doostdar's much anticipated book. This book looks into the variegated modes of "rationality" with regard to psychically charged phenomena, which he terms the "metaphysicals." The plural inflection suggests that the phenomenon under study includes a variety of individual and collective experiences, epistemic modes, historical roots and social strata. For Doostdar, this term "refers to a modern rationalized form of the unseen and the occult" (p. 9). It includes practices of "spiritual healing, sorcery, jinn possession, dream visions," and "saintly marvels" (p. 8), to name a few popular examples.

At the core of this book lies extensive fieldwork carried out over a discontinuous period of two years starting from 2006, during which Doostdar met with a number