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SILENCED IDENTITIES:
THE SUPPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION
OF IRANIAN GENDER AND SEX MINORITIES

Libraries Undergraduate Research Award

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INTRODUCTION

As we stood in the middle of the crowd at the 50th Anniversary of World Pride in New York City, my partner squeezed my hand with uncontainable excitement as her happiness overtook her. Faded and dimmed for so long, I now saw her dark coffee-brown eyes light up, sparkling with the wonderment and innocent joy of a child at the sight of all the colors of the rainbow scattered along Christopher Street. Standing across the street from the Stonewall Inn where the famous riots ignited the gay liberation movement in the US in 1969, I was reminded of my own current struggles in 2019 to “come out.” On this jubilant and liberating day, the bittersweet excitement evoked vivid recollections of my partner’s detailed accounts of her traumatic experiences growing up in Iran. The suppression and discrimination she had survived, leading her to stand here next to me as I confronted my own struggles as a homosexual in the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave. As a lesbian who was raised in a highly evangelical home and Christian nationalist community in the Buckle of the Bible Belt, I could relate to some of the micro-level societal oppressions she faced. However, I could never come close to imagining the fear, anxiety, and depression that resulted from the macro-level suppression and discrimination she endured in Iran.

SEX AND GENDER HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN TODAY

Like my partner, considered a “homosexual asylee” in the US, many Iranian gender and sex minorities face daily life-and-death decisions to cope with the suppression and discrimination in Iran. Through the analysis of ethnographic research, I discovered Iranian gender and sex minorities are often forced to choose the following three life-confirming circumstances to survive based on the body’s stress response mechanisms of fight, flight, or fawn:

1. Remain in Iran, living as LGBT permanently hidden or protesting in fear for their lives against the post-Islamic Revolutionary Regime leader, Ali Khamenei.
2. Flee Iran in search of another country with the hope of assimilation, government protection, and refugee status in a more accepting society.
3. Conform to the present-day Iranian male-female gender binary system through various society-acceptable “solutions” or “cures.”

Of these three scenarios, the first option of fight and remain in Iran has been the most prevalent within the last few years. Outbreaks of protests have surged across the nation as the cry for human rights is heard across the world, especially with across social media platforms. In 2022, the horrific massacre of Mahsa Amini, the 22-year-old woman who was brutally beaten and died in custody of the Iranian Morality Police for wearing her hijab covering incorrectly in public, has become the face of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the fight to end suppression and discrimination of Iranian gender and sex minorities.



Figure 1. *Woman Life Freedom*
Original artwork by Ernesto Yerena Montejano
Instagram @ernestoyerena (Los Angeles, CA, 2022).

From January 1, 2023, to December 20, 2023, with more than 33,335 months of prison sentences and 6,551 citizen lashes inflicted, the Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRANA) have reported at least 746 citizens have been executed by public hanging in one year ("Annual Report on the Human Rights in Iran" 2023). Striking fear into the Iranian people, the Islamic Regime continues to rule with an iron fist against all efforts, even worldwide recognition of human rights initiatives. In a CNN interview, Kiana Rahmani, the teen daughter of the famous 2023 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Iranian activist, Narges Mohammadi, spoke out about her experience with her mother in prison in Tehran, Iran, for "spreading propaganda" and having to accept the award on her mother's behalf. During the interview, Kiana discusses the pain of not physically seeing her mother for 8 years with phone calls blocked for the past 2 years. Even after her mother won the Nobel Prize, the Islamic Regime added an additional 15 months to her sentence. An award that is typically viewed by nations as prestigious, the Islamic Regime deemed a crime needing of punishment. Despite governmental efforts to silence her voice through isolation from the outside world, Mohammadi managed to get a letter out of prison that was read during the ceremony calling for action across the world that "the time has come to recognize gender apartheid as a crime against humanity" ("Nobel Peace Prize winner: The time has come" 2024).

Although the "remain and fight" response has prevailed recently, the "fawn" or "conform" option has been the expected norm in Iranian society. "Solution" or "cures" for gender and sex minorities in Iran include engaging in heteronormative relationships for the strict purpose of fulfilling expected societal binary gender roles in marriage. Other socially accepted options involve various psychotherapy methods or medical interventions like transexual surgery. After undergoing many attempts to conform to this gender binary - engaging in heteronormative relationships, fearfully hiding her same-sex relationships, and experiencing traumatic

psychotherapeutic methods - my partner was one of the fortunate ones who chose the second option to flee. With the support and guidance of her mother, she emigrated from Iran to the US, classified as an LGBTQ+ asylee. However, in many cases, Iranian gender and sex minorities are as privileged to have family support, access to resources like money and visas, and the opportunity to leave. By deconstructing the underlining societal, cultural, governmental, and religious beliefs and practices that motivate antagonism toward the behavior of these minorities and the denial of their existence, we can begin to understand why these three common responses are often the only possible, though not always accessible, options for Iranian gender and sex minorities to survive suppression and discrimination in Iran.

LIFE OF A *HAMJENSGARA* IN POSTREVOLUTIONARY IRAN

Many claim the enchanting poems of the mystics and spiritualized lovers in the works of famous Persian poets such as Rumi and Hafiz, along with ancient Persian art, contain explicit hints of homoeroticism and expressions of same-sex love that is embedded in Persian culture. In Prerevolutionary Iran, one form of tolerated same-sex behavior involved private relationships among older men and younger men. Older men were permitted to engage in same-sex behavior if they fulfilled their male gender role obligations in Iranian society by being married and by keeping their same-sex relationships discreet. Viewed as “hyper-masculine,” the older male was also obligated to perform the dominant role of penetration, while the submissive younger male received. If a man repeatedly sought the submissive position of receiving, he was labeled as a “pervert” or “ma’bun” (Kjaran, 2019, p. 51). These concealed same-sex relationships between older and younger men, as well as other behaviors among Iranian same-sex lovers, do not necessarily carry the same cultural meaning and connotations of homosexuality and gender

toleration as in the United States. Western societies often conceptualized homosexuality as a relationship between two same-sex lovers who openly create a life together and receive some form of recognition in society, similar to heterosexual couple. However, because same-sex relationships are frequently hidden and not acknowledged in Iranian society, it is culturally irrelevant to categorize Iranian gender and sex minorities under the unmarked category of homosexuality. In Farsi, the Persian language, there is not even a word with the direct translation of “homosexual.” The two words with the most relevant translations are “hamjensbaz” and “hamjensgara.” “Hamjens-” means “of/with same sex,” but “-baz” implies lust ,while “-gara” implies identity (Karimi, 2017, p. 463-464). Thus, many Iranian gender and sex minorities prefer the use of the less derogatory and culturally relevant term “hamjensgara” to describe what Westerners understand as homosexuality.

Although same-sex behavior was not openly accepted as a norm in liberal Iranian society, it was also not openly condemned nor denied before the Islamic Revolution in 1979. However, with the spread of propaganda labeling the US is the “Great Satan” and the ideology behind “Westoxification” perpetuating the Pre- and Post- Iranian Revolutionary society, the Islamic leaders who rose to power redefined the influences of the Islamic religion as the driving force behind its conservative regime and laws governing society (Kjaran, 2019, p. 54-55, 66-67). The effects of this antagonism and what could arguably be considered ethnocentric views toward Western and non-Islamic values are driving forces behind modern-day beliefs and practices centered around the male-female binary norm in Iranian society. This strict gender dichotomy significantly influences the politically suppressive and discriminatory actions of the Islamic regime toward gender and sex minorities in Iran, perpetuating the view that they are deemed “deviant” and “toxic” to society, requiring a “cure.”

The Islamic Penal Code, ratified in 1991 under the new Islamic leader of the Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, defines the laws criminalizing any gender and sex minority behavior other than the male-female binary as an illegal act and determines the extent of punishment. In Articles 108 through 126 of the Islamic Penal Code, homosexual acts between men are defined as “sodomy.” Sexual intercourse between two men who are “mature, of sound mind, and have free will” is punishable by death when proven by 4 witnesses excluding women witnesses. In the case of a mature man with an immature man, the doer is killed while the passive receives 74 lashes; in the case between two immature men, they both receive 74 lashes. One hundred lashes are given to both men who perform “Tafhiz” or “rubbing of the thighs or buttocks.” Lesbianism or “mosaheqeh” is defined in Articles 127 through 134 between two women who are “mature, of sound mind, and have free will and intention” and there is “no distinction between doer and subject.” They are both punished with 100 lashes each with proof by 4 witnesses, and after the 4th offense, the death sentence is issued (UNHRC, 1991). As seen in the Islamic Penal Code, lesbians receive a lesser of a punishment than gay men. This implies that the “female sexuality is not at the center of the discourse on heteronormative behavior” and is a more permissible behavior. By not defining a “doer or a subject,” there is assumption that no penetration occurs between two women. The act of “musahiqah” or rubbing is seen as lesser sin than penetration between males (Jafari, 2014, p. 35-36). This reveals the patriarchal views concerning sexuality and further supports the male-female binary gender roles that perpetuate the core of Iranian heteronormative society.

Although Islamic leaders claim that the Islamic Penal Code is based on the sacred Qur’an, it does not explicitly mention homosexuality or the loving relationships between *hamjensgara(s)* in its passages. However, the Qur’an explicitly states that sex is between spouses and mentions sodomy in relation to the story of Lot. (Jafari, 2014, p. 33-34). Same-sex behavior is interpreted

by Iranian clergy as a sin, and the Qur'an is widely believed to directly condemn same-sex penetration between men. Islamic religious leaders view this as substantial proof to validate the foundations of the Islamic Penal Code and the laws they pass concerning Iranian gender and sex minorities. However, they equate the act of "sodomy," which involves rape, violence, and incest in the Qur'an passage, with the identity of being a *hamjensgara*, defining it as "deviant and violent" behavior. This fundamental view that homosexuality is a sinful behavior and a crime against God is the key argument underlying the Islamic Regime's perpetuation of homophobic suppression and discriminations toward gender and sex minorities in Iranian society. Supporting these beliefs, the Iranian government often combines both rape and sodomy charges into one category. This makes it extremely difficult for LGBT and women's rights activists to advocate for homosexuals who are accused under these charges, as it becomes unclear whether the act was violent rape or consensual love between *hamjensgara(s)*. For example, in 2005, two boys were hanged under charges of rape of a minor, implying violent nonconsensual same-sex intercourse (Bucar, et al., 2012, p. 418-419). By combining charges, the Islamic Regime often condemns the love between *hamjensgara(s)* to death and criminalizes same-sex behaviors due to the presuppositions of interrelatedness to violent sex offenses prevailing in Iranian society.

Further analyzing the basis of the Islamic leaders' arguments and political actions toward gender and sex minorities, the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, openly declared the governmental stance that dictates Iranian society in two different interviews. In an interview at Columbia University in 2007, President Ahmadinejad's stated, "In Iran, we don't have *hamjensbaz* like in your country... In Iran, we do not have this phenomenon. I don't know who's told you that we have it" (AP Archive, 2007). The derogatory term, *hamjensbaz*, implying "lust," is used by President Ahmadinejad to describe same-sex behavior. Met with laughter and boos from the

crowd, what seems like a preposterous statement actually provides supporting insight into the fundamental beliefs that same-sex behaviors are crimes that have been eradicated from Iranian society through the governmental efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran since the Islamic Revolution. To immediately dismiss his statements as absurd or crazy would neglect to see the underlying argument and stance of the Islamic Regime that denies the existence of Iranian gender and sex minorities by defining them as a “phenomenon” that is foreign to Iran. In the second interview in 2012 with CNN, he stated,

Do you really believe that someone is born a *hamjensbaz*?... Is anyone given birth to through [being a] *hamjensbaz*? [It] ceases procreation. Who has said that if you like or believe in doing something ugly and others do not accept your behavior, their denying your freedom? Perhaps in a country they wish to legitimize stealing...If a group recognizes an ugly behavior or ugly deed as legitimate, you must not expect other countries or other groups to give it the same recognition (Morgan, 2012).

Defining the behavior of *hamjensbaz* as a criminal act, from the perspective of President Ahmadinejad, is a valid point, arguing that one society should not condemn another society for not giving recognition to a behavior that their society views as a crime. Following this chain of logic, if it's a crime, then it would not be denying anyone's freedom. This reveals not only the differences in stances during the interview but also exposes the key underlying argument of homosexuality defined by cultural relativism. In the eyes of the Iranian government and society, they are merely condemning another crime like stealing. This implies that the governmental and religious ideals influencing Iranian society do not classify and recognize *hamjensbaz* as a gender or “identity” but rather a crime or “lust” because it cannot fulfill the expected heteronormative roles of marriage with the purpose of “procreation.” This reveals the common misconception of gender and sex

embedded in the foundation of the Iranian binary gender system, influencing what is often perceived by foreign societies and *hamjensgara(s)* themselves as the suppression and discrimination of gender and sex minorities in Iran. In essence, it highlights a gap between the external perceptions and the internal reality of the challenges faced by Iranian gender and sex minorities, often giving rise to internalized homophobia.

IRANIAN SOCIETY-ACCEPTABLE SOLUTIONS

With the fundamental ideals clearly declared in the Islamic Penal Code and enforced in Iranian society that any gender and sex minority other than the male-female binary is “deviant,” foreign, and criminalized behaviors, many “cures” and “solutions” are considered acceptable in Iranian government, religion, and society. Since gay and lesbian behavior is considered a sin and crime under the Islamic Penal Code, the LGBT community, defined by Western connotations, is nonexistent in Iran. Claiming it’s nonexistent implies that since homosexuality is not recognized as gender under the strict gender binary system, Iranian gender and sex minorities are forced to fit into this male-female dichotomy through various methods such as engaging in heteronormative relationships for the strict purpose of fulfilling the societal expectations of the binary gender system, various psychotherapy methods, and/or medical interventions like transexual surgery.

Diane Tober, a medical and cultural anthropologist, as well as a single mother, lived in Iran for six months with her two children in 2002. This was not an easy move because a Caucasian woman from the United States trying to obtain a visa to a Middle Eastern country shortly after the terrorist attack of 9/11 was met with many obstacles (Tober, 2004). Despite the cultural challenges, she was able to research the progressive, yet controversial stances of the uses of medical technology and procedures considered acceptable by Iranian society. With the Shi’a form of

Islamic influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran that now governs after the Iranian Revolution, in an interview with a Shi'a clergy in Isfahan, Seyyed Shahnazeri states,

Intellect was the first thing created by God, so it is our responsibility to always use reason and be flexible... or Shi'a it is a duty to advance our knowledge and make scientific discoveries... be more flexible in using and pursuing new science and technology because we can adapt the religious texts to modern society through our own interpretations and intellect...there is no challenge between religion and science (Tober, 2007, p. 153-154).

Since religion and science are believed to agree, the Shi'a policymakers base their jurisdictions on religious influences and issue "*fatawa*, or religious declarations," that dictate what medical technology and procedures are permitted to "reflect local customs, cultures, and moral sentiments" considered acceptable (Tober, 2007, p. 152). Since religion significantly influences the medical field in Iran, it dictates the mental health sector. A psychotherapist who works in a government-run clinic in Iran explains in an interview that mental health workers are told what to say by the government when a *hamjensbaz* client comes to the clinic. She explains what they are demanded by the government to tell the patients and how to diagnose them:

We tell them they are sick and need treatment...they often then refer them to clerics who tell them that their religious faith is weak and you must say your daily prayers properly. Many of the medical treatments that are offered to patients are on the basis that the individual is suffering from a sexual disorder. They don't know the difference between sexuality and sexual identity... and try to tell them ...they are abnormal in the society, and they need to change their gender (Hamedani, 2014).

Since *hamjensbaz(s)* are institutionalized by the medical system in Iran as abnormal to society, they are viewed as diseased in need of treatment.

One solution imposed on *hamjensbaz* behavior among young girls who come out with same-sex feelings is quick arranged marriages. This further supports the binary gender system, as a cure for sinful behavior is fixed by fulfilling the heteronormative duty of marriage. Many *hamjensgara* women who are forced to play the role of a heterosexual woman have difficulty coping with the Iranian societal pressures surrounding marriage. Often, these *hamjensgara* women will “compartmentalize ones’s life into areas where one is known as gay or lesbian and other places and spaces where this is hidden” (Ahmady, 2020, p. 70). In essence, the binary gender system forces a *hamjensgara* woman to either conform to heteronormative gender roles in marriage and/or live a hidden double life in fear of being caught by the Morality Police.

According to the Islamic Penal Code, *hamjensgara* men have more extreme punishments than *hamjensgara* women, as they are sentenced to death after the first committed act of “sodomy.” With more pressures from society on *hamjensgara* men, “findings indicat[ing] male-to-female transsexualism is more common in Iran than female-to-male transsexualism” (Javaheri, 2010, p. 369). The practice of transsexuality, viewed as a “solution” to the behavior of *hamjensgara*(s), especially for *hamjensgara* men, reveals the confusion between transsex and transgender that perpetuates throughout Iranian society, government, education, and medicine. Since sex implies biological organs and gender is associated with the role of how someone identifies, “transsexuals, in this scenario, demand sex change in order to achieve a position as an authentic gender” (Shakerifar, 2011, p. 329). *Hamjensgara*(s) who undergo surgery to change their sex for the purpose of fitting into the gender binary system never truly change their gender. This conflict between gender and sex often leads to gender dysphoria among *hamjensgara*(s). In addition to the inner struggles of gender dysphoria, transsexuals face discrimination within Iranian heteronormative society, especially rejection within their own families. Since “human identity is

established in society by others' reactions," the "transgendering" process in Iran demonstrates the concept that gender is a social construct (Javaheri, 2010, p. 371). Thus, the construction of the "transgendered" *hamjensbaz*(s) in order to fit one of the binary gender roles becomes the product of the beliefs surrounding gender and sex prevailing in the heteronormative Iranian society.

Many Shi'a clerics and religious leaders specifically, Ayatollah Khomeini, who have come to power after the Iranian Revolution, believe that by politically encouraging "sex-change operations," it ends "the gender ambiguity" in Iranian society (Afray, 2009, p. 22-23). While political reform may seem positive for transsexuals who do not identify with the sex organs they were born with, it becomes problematic when these operations are used as solution for *hamjensgara* men and women who do not identify differently than their sex organs but feel pressure to change their sex and gender to fit Iranian binary gender system to avoid being criminalized as *hamjensbaz*(s). Today in Western culture, negative connotations are often implied when saying someone is "transgendered," as it assumes that it is not who they are but rather as if the process is being done to them. However, in this case, it appears culturally relevant to say *hamjensbaz* men and woman are "transgendered" in an effort to find a cure to conform to the strict dichotomous male-female gender system in Iranian society. Ironically, the "transgendered" life is more governmentally protected than the life of a *hamjensbaz*. "Transgendered" *hamjensbaz*(s) receive governmental support in financing the operations and receive medical certificates that protect them legally from governmental persecution (Ahmady, 2020, p. 73) Through the institutionalized "transgendered" *hamjensbaz* men and women, the government weaponizes the religious and society-accepted medical operations as another form of eradicating the abnormal *hamjensbaz* behavior from Iranian society.

FLEEING TO A NEW HOME

Due to the suppression, discrimination, and criminalization of *hamjensgara(s)* in Iranian society, many are compelled to leave Iran “out of fear of state or family punishment after being caught engaging in homosexual activity” (Jafari, 2013, p. 133). Often, many *hamjensgara(s)* attempt to seek refugee status in neighboring countries, such as Turkey, in order to be resettled abroad. However, this proves to be quite challenging due to various obstacles, which are more “stressful, filled with uncertainty, and lacking the support they expected to receive due to the conservative political environment that is only marginally better than that in Iran.” With “the Turkish placement policy of concentrating homosexual refugees in small and often highly conservative cities”, many find it more difficult to cope in Turkey and surrounding countries, with little to no support from the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as they wait to be resettled to another country (Yadegarfar, 2019, p. 1264). In an interview with a *hamjensgara* mullah or Islamic cleric, he explains that being a refugee is difficult in Turkey because migrants have no rights to work. He further elaborates that when he moved to Turkey as a refugee, “pressure from Iran increased too... with religious people name and shame me, send text messages threatening me... attack me on social media” (Brown, 2016). Living with what many consider conflicting identities of a religious cleric who held significant power in Iran and a *hamjensbaz* who was persecuted in Iran, he now must learn to survive as refugee with little power in Turkish society. This reveals the even after leaving, *hamjensgara* refugees still experience suppression and discrimination not only from Iranian society, often through social media, but also from the societies into which they are assimilating.

In Arsham Parsi’s book, *Exiled for Love*, he recounts his journey leaving Iran to seek refugee status in Turkey. Considered a well-known Iranian activist, Parsi remains a current source

of information and contact for many Iranian refugee seekers. He sought to flee Iran after establishing an underground queer organization in 2005. Parsi explains the entire interview process and the stigmatizing obstacles he faced, not just from UNHRC officers but from fellow Iranian refugee seekers fleeing Iran due to religious persecution. Parsi details his conversation with fellow Iranian refugees in the waiting room at the UNHRC interview in Turkey:

“And you? Are you Baha’i?” I looked up when I realized the question was directed at me. “No.” “Christian then.” “No.” “Well, you certainly aren’t a woman.” Cautious laughter. “I’m gay.” There was a pause. It probably didn’t last as long as it felt, but I can still remember the definite silence. “You can’t be. You are just saying that. Don’t want to tell us why you’re here?” I wasn’t prepared for the challenge. Certainly not from the someone in the waiting room, someone in the same situation as me. Before I could respond, they continued. “Well, you don’t look like it. You haven’t even shaved. More than a five o’clock shadow. And you aren’t wearing any makeup” (Parsi, 2015, p. 1-2).

This dialog between Parsi and other fellow Iranian refugees reveals the stigma in the refugee system of determining who is qualified based on the expected appearances of *hamjensbaz(s)* that are forced to leave Iran. The Iranian refugees fleeing religious persecution expected someone who outwardly could not fit into one of the binary gender roles to leave Iran and seek homosexual refugee status in Turkey. They did not expect someone like Parsi who could clearly be identified as masculine and who could disguise themselves to fit the gender role to abandon their home country. Later, during the interview with UNHRC officers, Parsi details his conversation:

“Now why don’t you tell us why you are claiming to be a refugee?” “Because I am a homosexual and, well, in Iran...” I didn’t continue. As soon as the translator said the Turkish word for homosexual the officers looked at each other and laughed loudly.

Unashamed... “You’re really gay? You are serious?” “Yes, Sir.”... “How do we know you aren’t lying? You could just be saying that to get out your country. How can you prove it to us?... I know, tell us how you have sex. So tell us. How many men have you fucked? Or do you let them fuck you? Do you even know how many? Probably too many to count, eh?” (Parsi, 2015, p. 143-144).

Through the explicit and harassing interrogation of the UNHRC officers, we gain insight into the struggle of *hamjensgara(s)* to prove their gender when their outward appearance fits the male-female binary gender roles. Like Parsi, my partner underwent scrutinous questioning and had to provide physical proof, such as photos and text messages with her current same-sex relationship and from past exes, to prove that she is lesbian during the USCIS interviews in the United States to be classified under the LGBTQ+ asylum category. While one can understand the necessity to ensure asylees or refugees aren’t lying to simply leave their country, it also reveals the overall misconception of gender and sex that often perpetuates the asylum and refugee systems. Organizations such as the USCIS in the United States and the UNHCR in Turkey define homosexual asylee and refugee status by outward appear, behavior, and social associations. While this supports the idea that gender is socially constructed, it also sheds light on the lack of cultural relativism that these organizations demonstrate when expecting homosexuals from all different cultures, countries, and backgrounds to display the same means of “proof” to define their culturally relative “homosexuality,” which might not be defined by the same symbols or use the same categories as the Westernized view of gender and sexual expression. Another gay refugee in Turkey states, “All I’ve tried to do my whole life is to hide that I am gay and now, the only stress in my life, can you believe it—is proving that I am.” (Jafari, 2013, p. 130). If asylees and refugees don’t prove that they are “gay or lesbian enough,” they risk the chance of being denied for lying,

deported, and sent back to their home country where they could be killed by their country's government.

CONCLUSION

Like my partner, considered a “homosexual asylee” in the US, many Iranian gender and sex minorities search for ways to cope with the suppression and discrimination in Iran through the following three circumstances: remain in Iran to permanently hide in the closet or protest in fear for their lives, flee Iran in search of another country, or conform to the present-day Iranian male-female gender binary norm through various society-acceptable “cures”. By analyzing these three survival options for Iranian gender and sex minorities, I have acquired more cultural empathy to better understand the struggles of my partner as well as the silenced identities of *hamjensgara(s)*. By deconstructing the underlying arguments of the governmental leaders' beliefs and practices in the Islamic Republic of Iran, I also obtained valuable insight into the antagonistic political and social actions under the influence of religion that manipulate and enforce the strict binary gender system. With the beliefs and practices of criminalizing gender and sex minorities and by continually denying their existence, the Islamic Regime perpetuates suppressive and discriminatory actions to eradicate the gender of the *hamjensgara(s)* from Iranian society.

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