# Failed Heroes: Religious/National Body and the Representation of Shi'i Martyrs

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# Abstract

While the mural paintings of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) martyrs are dominating public spaces in post-revolutionary Iran, the visual representation of saintly shi'i martyrs in posters and large-scale paintings can frequently be seen in streets, public and private courtyards during commemoration ceremonies. The thesis aims at understanding how the dominant ideology of religious nationalism and its sexual politics in post-revolutionary Iran shape, regulate, and reproduce religious/national bodies through the visual representation of Shi'i saintly martyrs in posters and the representation of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) martyrs in the mural paintings. By looking through the politics of gender and sexuality and the juxtaposition of the discourse of homosociality/homoeroticism and martyrdom in the Islamic Republic of Iran, I argue that the representation of martyred bodies is a crucial tool for the dominant ideology to regulate life and death of bodies by creating a pattern for masculine sacrificial religious/national body. I claim that the ideology of religious nationalism, by providing a hierarchical relation of transcendence as superior to materiality and unworldly love and self as superior to sensuousness and body through the politics of homosociality, constructs a non-material homoerotic love between the warriors and the Shi'i saintly martyrs. This sublimation of sensuality, in this regard, ensures the national and political goals of power. To this end, I combine close reading of the images with analysis of historical narratives by contextualizing these visual representations in the discourse of homosociality/homoeroticism and the discourse of martyrdom. I draw my argument on the Foucauldian analysis of biopower, Mbembe'snecropolitics, Mosse's discussion on nationalism and sexuality and the discussion of alternative and local modernities.

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# Introduction

Shi'i mourning rites are the most celebrated public ceremonies in Islamic Republic of Iran. In these rituals, martyrdom of Shi'i saintly martyrs is commemorated in order to revive and reprivilege the act of self-sacrifice among new generations. Figure 1 represents an adolescent, during the mourning rituals in public spaces, carrying the visual representation and icons of saintly Shi'i martyrs. Visual culture of Shi'ism in Iran seems to be challenging the relative prohibition of depicting animate life, holy figures in particular, expressed by religious authorities in Islamic countries including Iran. While the mural paintings of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) martyrs are dominating public spaces in post-revolutionary Iran, the visual representation of saintly shi'i martyrs in posters and large-scale paintings can frequently be seen in streets, public and private courtyards during commemoration ceremonies. Commemorating martyrdom, which is a crucial part of Iranian culture and has been reinforced by the 1979 Iranian revolution,is intermingled with the visual culture and public atmosphere of Iranians' everyday life (Dorraj, 1997; Flaskerud, 2013; Aghaie, 2014).

As a person growing up in Iran, martyrdom is the most visible theme of my everyday life in the public sphere. The sanctimony of martyrdom and its visualization primarily reveal the confirmation and affirmation of self-sacrifice by the dominant ideology and subsequently its political implications. What has primarily raised interest in me was that in the posters and depictions of saintly martyrs, they are often portrayed as young men with muscular bodies yet tender facial features such as big beautiful eyes with long eyelashes, trimmed beards and well-shaped lips. Are these depictions effeminized? Do they represent a combination of masculine and feminine beauty while carrying an eroticized and sexualized connotation? Why are they mass-

represented in post-revolutionary Iran despite the relative prohibition of visualizing holy figures? And what are the implications of such visual meanings for the relationships between bodies and power in Iran today? While having these questions in my mind, I was thinking of the long history of homoeroticism in Iran (Shamisa, 2002; Najmabadi, 2005a, 2005b, 2008) and the way homosocial environment after the 1979 revolution (Moallem 2005; Afary 2009) provides a dominant theme of masculine martyred bodies through the mural paintings. The relation of the sexual politics and the mass representation of martyrs who offered their lives for preserving territorial boundaries and national goals is another angle of the topic. Mosse's work on the relation of nationalism and sexuality (1985), made me eager to figure out how the mass representation of saintly martyrs in posters and the war martyrs in the mural paintings become a vehicle of dominant ideology to control over life and death of bodies.

Figure 1 An adolescent carrying the signs and icons of Shi'i saintly martyrs during the rituals of the commemoration of martyrdom, 2004, Tehran, Iran. (Color figure available online: http://www.badjens.com/ashura.html)

My thesis aims at analyzing how the ideology of religious nationalism and its sexual politics in Islamic Republic of Iran shape, regulate, and produce religious/national bodies through visual representation of Shi'i martyrs in order to create a pattern of masculine sacrificial body. To this end, I will examine the politics of life and death within the discourse of Iranian religious nationalism and the way homosocial environment, through the visual representation of masculine sacrificial body, contributes to the discourse of martyrdom. I will argue that the sexual politics of the dominant ideology of religious nationalism in Iran construct a non-material homoerotic love between masculine sacrificial bodies and Shi'i saintly martyrs which can only be reached through martyrdom. The collusion of the discourse of homosociality, which provides a sublimated image of homoeroticism, and the discourse of martyrdom, consequently, shapes bodies in order to ensure the political goals of the dominant ideology to preserve the territorial borders and the national bonds of solidarity. This work tries to shed light on the interconnection of national politics, sexuality and the way religion is crucially involved through the ideological tool of power in controlling life and death of bodies.

Despite a number of works done on the iconography of Iranian Shi'ism (Flaskerud, 2009; Khosronejad, 2011; Amir-Moezzi, 2011), as I know, there is not a singular work paying attention to the notions of gender and sexuality and their relation with the politics of mass representation of saintly figures and the gradual changes in their facial features during last two centuries. My thesis contributes to the new-born discussion on the relation of sexuality and religion in the context of Shi'i Iran (Moallem, 2005; Afary, 2005) and also to the visual analysis of Shi'i iconography while considering gender and sexuality as important elements to be analyzed. The work also shows how the notions of gender and sexuality are socially and historically constructed and how they are included into the politics of death and life in order to be applied

through the mechanisms of control and regulation of citizens. In this regard, in my thesis I pull in the Foucauldian analysis of biopower and Mbebmbe'snecropolitics to analyze the representation of martyr bodies, their meanings, and effects.

For my analysis, I make use of the images of the Shi'i saintly martyrs and the mural paintings of the Iran-Iraq war martyrs. The first group of the images is the popular imaginary visual representation of the Shi'i martyrs in modern Iran since the early nineteenth century. These images primarily appeared as paintings in coffee houses and then become omnipresent in post-revolutionary Iran as posters and mass-produced paintings for commemoration rituals. I will analyze how these visual representations are gradually changed since they entered into consumer culture as mass-produced posters. For my visual analysis, I will draw upon J. T. Mitchell's "*What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images"* (2005). I will seek to answer how the commercialized posters of saintly martyrs in consumer culture apply gender and sexual politics to combine femininity and masculinity in order to establish dialectic of power and desire. By applying Mitchell's visual analysis, I analyze two different sets of elements of these images in order to combine a close reading of visual images with analysis of historical narratives. I will contextualize the two sets of elements in the discourse of homosociality and the discourse of martyrdom and will apply them for my analysis of the mural paintings of martyrs' bodies. Tracing the mutual impacts of visual culture and sociocultural implications, the representation of masculine martyred bodies are done by visual analysis and connected to the broader picture of the ideological power of Islamic Republic and its sexual politics. The research is an interdisciplinary study which puts together historical narratives and material culture in order to give a discourse analysis of the Iranian religious nationalism.

In the first chapter, dedicated to my theoretical framework, I will start elaborating my discussion by analyzing the relation of religion and nationalism and the way sexuality is a main concern and the ideological tool of power in order to discipline bodies. For better understanding of the disciplinary and regulatory features of power and the ways in which body becomes the major focus of power, I will talk about Foucault's discussion on bio-power, docile body and governmentality in modern western countries. Nonetheless, to provide a contextualization of the politics by which bodies are disciplined towards death, I will link the Foucauldian notion of biopower to Agamben and Mbembe's discussion on politics of death. This general framework helps me narrow down my discussion to the forms of disciplinary power over life and death in post-revolutionary Iran. While there are debates on whether the discourse of modernity and the Foucauldian analysis of disciplinary power in western countries can be applied in non-western societies or no, one cannot ignore the local forms of disciplinary, regulatory and normalizing power over bodies. Considering the deterritoralized ideology of nationalism, shaped through transnational relations of power, I will show how Iranian religious nationalism in post-revolutionary Iran adapts the disciplinary power and its techniques in order to regulate bodies and populations. Later in chapter 1, I will go further through the discussion of local modernities and Iranian religious nationalism to bring up the sexual politics and its relation with the mechanisms of control over life and death of bodies in Islamic Republic.

In order to have a clearer picture of the local definitions of sexuality and gender, in the second chapter, I will review the history of sexuality in Iran by dividing it into four main eras of homoeroticism, homosociality, heterosociality, and homosociality again. This subdivision is mainly done to reveal how the representation of sexuality is changed through centuries. Here, I will describe that the process of disguising and hiding homoeroticism in Iran, which is rooted in

the early decades of nineteenth century and the beginning of cultural interactions of Iranians and Europeans, was mainly focused on the elimination of the representation of homoeroticism in depictions and written sources as a way of legitimizing Iranian culture and morality in the eyes of western modernity. This tendency towards modernization was continued by providing a heterosocial society in Pahlavi era (1925-1979) in order to heteronormalize Iranian sexuality. However, I argue that by the 1979 Iranian revolution, the sexual politics in Islamic Iran gives a more complex picture of heteronormalization process while reprivileging a homosocial environment.

The discussion on homosociality in post-revolutionary Iran is significantly intermingled with the representation of masculine body and beauty and the way this body is introduced as stripped from sensuousness. The third chapter is concerned with the visual representation of saintly Shi'i martyrs from the beginning of the nineteenth century and the way the facial features of these martyrs are changed in post-revolutionary Iran. I argue that the facial features of homoerotic beauty in the paintings left from early Qajar era, before the interaction with Europe in nineteenth century, reemerges gradually in the posters of saintly Shi'i martyrs in post-revolutionary Iran. I will analyze the complex relations of different discourses playing role in the mass-representation of saintly Shi'i martyrs in posters. In this analysis, we will see how the discourse of religious nationalism, which is rooted in Iranian Sufi-shi'ism, is not a monotonous, repressive power; rather it includes the discourse of homosociality, disguised homoeroticism, juxtaposed with the discourse of martyrdom, to represent masculine beauty in martyred body. In other words, instead of repressing homoeroticism, the dominant ideology redirects homoeroticism to its goals by including it in its sexual politics.

In chapter four, I will trace the work of the juxtaposition of the discourse of homosociality and martyrdom in the mural paintings of the Iran-Iraq war martyrs to show how the politics of life and death and the sexual politics of the dominant ideology work together. By a close reading of these murals, I will examine how the visual characteristics of these images imply the subjugation of life to the power of death (Mbembe, 2003). I argue that, the discourse of homosociality, which is the disguised form of homoeroticism, is preserved and reinforced as a tool for the dominant ideology to sublimate sexual energy of youth to the predominant goals of religious nationalism by giving a romanticized, and debatably eroticized, picture of martyrdom as oneness with the lover, or saintly martyr Imam after death. Then, in order to shed light on the way mural paintings of the war martyrs play a crucial role in creating a pattern of religious masculine sacrificial body, I will argue that the politics of the representation of martyred bodies in public sphere exert an exclusionary logic in order to categorize dead bodies into the binary of official/unofficial or sacrificial/bare life. By this logic, those martyrs who fit inside the definition of the religious/national body are considered as sacrificed lives and subsequently celebrated by playing the role model of the sacrificial masculine body on the mural paintings in public spaces.

In conclusion, I will put all different angles of the discussion together to illustrate a clearer picture of my argument. I will connect the discussion of religious nationalism and the politics of life and death to the representation of masculine martyr body and the implications of gender and sexuality in post-revolutionary Iran. In this regard, I identify the visual representation of Shi'i martyrs' bodies the vehicle for the dominant ideology to create a pattern of masculine sacrificial religious/national body as a way of regulating life and death of bodies.

# Chapter One- Religious/National Body

In his study on the 1979 Islamic revolution of Iran, Foucault expresses his fascination for the "political spirituality" in the revolution as "a dream that had been abandoned by the west and could be reborn as a result of the Iranian revolution" (Afary, 2005: 132). What Foucault was seduced by, in Afary's words, is the way he interpreted the Islamic revolution as an authentic movement against western modernity, colonialism and imperialism (2005: 39). The enormous fascination with death and martyrdom, through the demonstrations of millions of people in the streets of Tehran during the 1979 revolution, was for Foucault, a mystified Shi'i/Islamic movement.

In this chapter, I will seek to answer the questions of how and why power relations within the discourse of the Islamic Republic cannot be analyzed through a monolithic, top-down, and anti-modern understanding of power; rather I will argue that Iranian revolution adapted and localized the discourse of modernity while preserving its traditional traits. Through a discussion of alternative modernities and the interconnected notions of nationalism and transnationalism, I will show how the ideology of religious nationalism in post-revolutionary Iran controls and regulates lives and deaths of bodies. Later in this chapter, I will briefly give a definition of nationalism and the role of religion in the survival of nationalist discourse.

To open the discussion on the ways in which power keeps the body in control and how Iranian modern nationalism embraces religion to shape social norms and ideals, it is necessary to look at the theoretical background of the intersection of nationalism, body, sexuality, and religion in

order to trace their effects and consequences and the ways power directs bodies to its political goals while normalizing sexualities and legitimizing itself by religion. For the production of national bonds of solidarity and police the territories of power and the borders of the nation, religious nationalism and its sexual politics discipline and regulate bodies and behaviors. Regarding this combination, I will examine the power over life and death of bodies which helps me articulate the concrete consequences of controlling bodies by sexual politics and the ideological tool of power in the context of post-revolutionary Iran.

## 1.1. Anti-Modernities or Alternative Modernities?

Foucault's interpretation of the 1979 Iranian revolution looks more like an abstract understanding of Islam which disregards the political and military interpretations of Islam and Shi'ism (Afary, 2005: 42). In fact, the combination of traditional Shi'i Islam and modern western ideologies generated an Islamic modern discourse rather than an anti-modernist one, which reappropriated traditional Shi'ism while adapting modern ideologies to complicate its power structure (Afary, 2005). This adaptation, as Mirsepassi also points out, shows that the debates on the authenticity of social movements are internal to the discourse of modernity and are the means used for localizing modernity (2003: 129). He argues that the claim for authenticity "as a revolt against the rationalism and universalism of modernity" is coming from within modernity. The idea of spirituality also can be seen as a political mode with the powerful ideological and intellectual background which is part of the process of modernizing nation.

Nonetheless, in analyzing localized, or alternative, modernities we cannot abandon the legacy of western discourse of modernity. The term alternative modernities refers to the localization of modernity by non-western societies as a consequence of globalization. This phenomenon

engenders hybrid modernities which work on pluralizing and contextualizing modernity in different social and cultural configurations while inevitably dealing with the western tradition of modernity due to the fact that the discourse of modernity is shaped by and travelled from the west (Gaonkar, 2001: 13-19). The western discourse on modernity, which is itself shifting and conflicting by embracing different and contesting ideologies and discourses, becomes more complex through globalization. As the ideology is deterritorialized and goes beyond its territorial boundaries, the genuineness of nationalist discourses is questionable. Nationalism can only be defined with its interaction with transnational concepts and notions.

In the same vein, Iranian religious nationalism is definitely not an authentic self-sufficient monolithic unity which has genuinely been constructed on the basis of its internal roots. On one hand, it emerges from the very modern notion of nation-state transferred to Iran, from the west, only one hundred years ago. On the other, by opposing the orientalist attack of westerners which considers religious context of Orient as not rational enough for political action (Van Der Veer, 1993), religious nationalism in Iran differentiates itself from the discourse of western modernity and the binary understanding of rational/irrational as a production of enlightenment. In a sense, "the dialectic of nationalism and transnationalism" (Van der Veer, 1993), transgresses national borders in order to produce new social formations (Ali Khan, 2005). It shows us how the concept of national identity is not homogenous or innate and increasing transnationalism results in heterogenization and hybridization.

## 1.2. Religion, Nationalism and Sexuality

There are debates on whether nationalism can be discussed separately from religion and be categorized as religious nationalism and secular nationalism, or whether nationalism, in either

case, has its roots in religion and morality. In my analysis of the ideological roots of Islamic Republic government I will argue that there is an amalgamation of religious implications in the political arena and the emergence of nationalist discourse in modern Iran. [Religious] nationalism determines a collective sacred and divine subject that ensures its power, identity and solidarity (Friedland, 2002). In this regard, by highlighting the similarity of religious practices among different ethnic communities and religious branches, it tends to juxtapose nationalistic goals and religious beliefs in order to expose its antagonism towards the threats to its unity.

Shaping norms such as ideals of masculinity and manliness by representing specific bodies, while defining sexuality within these norms, produces a category of normal, acceptable, and useful bodies with an exclusionary attitude towards bodies that stand outside this category. As body becomes normalized and useful, it is the vehicle and the target of power. The life and death of bodies are controlled and shaped by the ideological tool of power.

Friedland argues that, contemporary nationalist discourses are "suffused with the religious". He claims that religion engages centrally in the political realm of nationalism by representing a collective solidarity in religious beliefs of nation-state through the institutionalized family (Friedland, 2002). Public religion, in this sense, is affirmed and reinforced by private sphere and by family. It focuses on ordering and regulating bodies to control eroticism and sensuousness. Human bodies, in religious nationalism, therefore, are the subjects of materiality of the symbolic power of religion (Friedland, 2002). In other words, they represent the social order of cultural symbols within the public discourse of religion. In an almost similar argument, McGuire talks about the body as the symbol of cultural and social meanings. She sees the human body as a construction of social order, by asserting that "Society inscribes itself upon the concrete bodies of its members" (McGuire, 1990:284). Like Friedland, she also emphasizes the symbolic power

of religion and its focus on human body in order to shape it as an ideological subject. Therefore, the body is affected by and changed through interactions of every day human's life and shaped by symbolic power to be constructed in line with power's principles. Religion has played a crucial role in struggles for symbolic power to affect and define bodies. The legitimation of power and its modes of control in disciplining bodies are strongly connected with the relations of power and religion. Nonetheless, she acknowledges the biological fact of the body by defining it as a "natural symbol" (McGuire, 1990). The emphasis on the natural or biological fact of the body reveals a key tension in theorizing body within its social context. The danger of this approach is that this biological fact of human body plays a crucial role in the techniques of power and ideology in order to take control over the lives and deaths of bodies. I will discuss this in the next section in the framework of biopower and necropolitics.

To develop the connection of nationalism and religion concerning the shaping of the body, sexuality and gender are crucially at the center of the picture due to the fact that morality is basically preoccupied with these implications. Morality, as Foucault (1990) argues, controls and defines gender and sexuality in order to normalize, discipline, and regulate bodies to make them useful for the sake of power. In this regard, we can see how the national body is defined, both aesthetically and morally, through the revival and reinforcement of religion in nationalism (Mosse, 1985). In his study on the relation of sexuality and nationalism, Mosse examines how the civilizing process led to the resurgence of religious values within the modern manners and morals of nationalistic discourse in Nazi Germany. His study draws upon the visual culture of nineteenth century Europe, Germany in particular, to put emphasis on the body as the site of power. He powerfully engages us with Foucauldian notions of the docile body, disciplinary and regulatory power over bodies and sexuality in one hand, and the way national iconography is

influenced by transnational implications of beauty, sexuality and body on the other. Through he defines respectability, the moralities of the new-born bourgeoisie, the human body and sexuality were reread and redefined in order to be sublimated to nationalistic goals. This new reading of the human body through respectability, which aimed to control and regulate sexuality, was ensured by nationalism (Mosse, 1985).

In order to control the human body and sexuality, the ideology of nationalism created a pattern "a stereotype of supposedly passionless beauty for both men and women" (Mosse, 1985: 10). The visual representation of the beautiful male and female in nineteenth century Germany were dominated by the idea of passionless beauty which had roots in the classical aesthetic of ancient Greece. The understanding of national body and aesthetics, in a sense, was borrowed from a non-nationalist classical aesthetic, albeit adapted to the context of nationalism by redefining masculine beauty stripped from sensuousness in order to reinforce the stereotype of virility as being able to control passion. However, the representation of the beautiful man modeled by ancient Greek sculptures "was potentially a homoerotic symbol" (1985: 16). Masculine beauty was normalized and heterosexualized by the triumph of the modern notion of the nuclear family. The borders between normal/abnormal and healthy/sick were drawn and the respectable body was represented as a beautiful sexless and muscular body. The stereotype of manliness, around which nationalism was shaped, was mainly concerned with the young masculine body. Youth were seen as closer to sickness and destruction due to their sexual energy and passion (Mosse, 1985: 7-13).

While Mosse argues that the national body during Nazi era Germany was normalized and stripped of its sensuousness, Herzog claims that Mosse's argument on the hostility of Nazism to nudity and sexual attitudes seems to neglect the fact that Nazis "used sexuality to consolidate

their appeal" (2002: 6). By emphasizing Foucault's warning about the repressive hypothesis, she asserts that in the analysis of nationalist ideology we should not forget the positive part of power. Her work shows how power does not work in a monolithic discourse of repressing sexuality; rather the debates among the actors of power give us a complicated picture of sexual politics in the nationalist discourse of Nazi Germany. Herzog also addresses, in her words, "incompatible interpretive paradigms" such as secular-liberal, Foucauldian and Freudian terms deliberately in order to demonstrate that none of these paradigms are able to give a thorough explanation of the history of sexuality (2002: 20). Here, it seems worth mentioning Theweleit's work, Male Fantasies, on sexuality and masculinity in Nazi era. In his work, based on psychoanalysis, Theweleit examines the ideal of manliness and virility in Nazi Germany as male fantasies which are the outcome of narcissistic wounds. Manliness, in his thesis, emerges from a phallocentric and misogynist discourse which ascribes abjectness and inferiority to femininity and produces fear and hatred of the feminine (Theweleit, 1989, Vol. 2).There are many critiques to Theweleit's work, due to its essentialist account by examining manliness beyond its historical context (Sanos, 2013; Golsan and Hawthorne, 1997). However, through militarized environment, the body was constructed in an explicitly "homophobic and implicitly homoerotic" discourse (Ravetto, 2001: 81).

By looking at Mosse's and other studies on German Nationalism, we can see how the representation of beauty in the national body is stripped of sensuousness. Despite all the debates on whether sexuality is repressed or implicitly reinforced through sexual politics of the dominant ideology; Mosse's argument on the ways visualization of beautiful man, rooted in the aesthetic of ancient Greek, was adapted within the middle-class morality and heteronormalized by the triumph of nuclear family seems undebatable. Later, in this study, we will see how Iranian

religious nationalism in post-revolutionary Iran, represents a picture of religious/national body which is a conflation of Christian aesthetic and Iranian homoerotic figure of *Shahid* in the religious desexualized beauty of saintly martyr Imams.

## 1.3. From Biopolitics to Necropolitics:

### 1.3.1. Foucault's Discussion on Biopower and Docile Body

New ways of controlling bodies, as one of the particular aspects of modern power relations in western societies, are part of what Foucault draws upon in order to elaborate a new model of power which better defines the complexities of techniques of power. The operation of power in Foucault's model is "…not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control…" (1990: 89). Foucault argues that the previous model of power, a juridical system of representation, which defines power as repressive, top-down, negative and comprehensive is useful but not exhaustive and adequate (1990). Instead, a new understanding of the mechanisms of power, by which the human body becomes the object of politics, is needed in order to better realize the transforming concepts of sexuality and gender. This ensemble of techniques is what Foucault calls biopower.

As Phelan notes, the apparatus of sexuality is "a major focus" of the notion of biopower (Phelan, 1990: 426). In Foucault's words, Biopower is "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (1978: 1). Therefore the body is simultaneously the instrument and the target of the apparatus of power/knowledge. These "Strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge" (1980, 196) control and regulate the human body by defining it as a species regarding its basic biological facts (Foucault, 1978). Especially from the beginning

of eighteenth century and the emergence of scientific discourses and knowledge production in medical, psychological, and statistic discourses in western countries, the power applied positive elements in order to make the population productive and reproductive by putting sexuality at its center and shaping bodies as normal and docile. The docile body is self-disciplined, subjected, efficient, and controlled body which is the site of politics and is "directly involved in the political field" (Foucault, 1979). While docility manipulates bodies through disciplinary power, the collectivity of individuals and the calculation of the population as a whole are established by the work of regulatory power. As Foucault asserts, "…discipline only exists insofar as there is a multiplicity and an end, or an objective or result to be obtained…" (1978:8). In other words, individual's body is disciplined as the target of the mobilization of biopower.

The connection of individual and population with biopolitical government leads us to the notion of governmentality. For Foucault, governmentality is what shapes both individuals and population as a collective. Through the activities of governmentality, individuals are known and governed by themselves. The concept of governmentality moves beyond the monolithic and totalizing forms of power, where individuals practice the process of self-government (Dean, 1999: 10-12). Here, we see how individuals are simultaneously modern subjects and the objects of knowledge. The development of scientific discourses and the complexities of modern power relations shape subjects who are "the product of subjection, of a particular production" (Phelan, 1990: 424); who are docile bodies of the disciplinary power and the modern knowers (subjects).

By the better understanding of the notions of biopower, the docile body and governmentality, we can go through the discussion of the transforming concepts of gender and sexuality. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault elaborates how these notions are changed by the end of the seventeenth century and through the substitution of sovereign monarchies by the modern forms

of power. To analyze the complexity of power relations toward sexuality, the binary system of power, as Foucault restates from political analysis of power, seems to be over simplistic. In this apparatus, a dictating attitude towards sex is considered; which defines "licit/illicit and permitted/forbidden" and the only logic of power is prohibition with assuming sex as taboo (1990: 83). Power, with its new technologies and its disciplinary and regulatory form in modern western societies, performs as a multiplicity of relations which cannot be legitimized and obeyed if its only instrument is oppression. There should be a hidden part which makes it tolerable (Foucault, 1990:86). This part authorizes so-called illicit sexual activities to "come out". As Foucault argues, the target is normalization rather than punishment, as a way of controlling sexuality (1990:89). Excessive attention toward sexuality produces a discourse which is, simultaneously, "an instrument of power" and a way to resist and oppose it (Foucault, 1990:101).

The discourse of sexuality in the apparatus of power/knowledge reveals how the biological fact of life is included within the politics of power in the process of the transition of sovereign monarchies to modern forms of power in the late seventeenth century. By this transition, the politics toward death turned to the politics of life. "…a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from its obedient subjects" (Foucault, 1990: 144). According to Foucault, biopower ought to set boundaries between life and death constantly by regulatory mechanisms. Nonetheless, biopower does not mean that sovereignty and its attitude towards deduction and

death did not continue to be points of the function of power (Foucault, 1990); rather power over death in his model is not primary and central in power operations.

### 1.3.2. Death as a Biopolitical Paradigm

The historical shift of sovereign power (politics) to modern form of it (biopolitics) in Foucauldian perspective is challenged by Agamben in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1988). Agamben claims that Foucault's arguments "have to be corrected, or at least completed" due to the fact that "biopolitical body" is rooted in the politics of sovereignty. He argues that there is a "hidden point of intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power" which cannot be analyzed separately (1988: 3-9).

Agamben draws upon the difference between sacred and sacrifice which is determined by the "state of exception". Sacred is a "bare life" which can be killed yet not considered as sacrifice. Bare life is an "expendable life" the killing of which is not committing homicide and is not celebrated as a sacrifice. This bare life, in Foucauldian words the biological fact of life, is included in politics yet excluded at the same time. This is how the state of exception determines an exclusionary inclusion of lives which are not worth living, nor worth being sacrificed (Vaughan-Williams: 2009; Fuggle: 2013). We will turn back to this point briefly in the fourth chapter while analyzing the figure of martyrdom and the excluded dead bodies in port-revolutionary Iran.

### 1.3.3. Mbembe's Discussion on Necropolitics

By locating death at the center of biopolitics, Mbembe brings the analysis of death in Agamben's vein to non-western societies by articulating the discussion of power in post-colonialism. In the

reconceptualization of bio-power, Mbembe introduces the notion of necropolitics, or the politics of death, to show how in postcolonial discourse some lives are regulated to death. He argues for "centrality of death in subalternity, race, war and terror" for populations who are "marked for death" (Mbembe, 2003). Through "the subjugation of life to the power of death" the implications of sacrifice, war and resistance is dramatically changed. Necropolitics blur the boundaries between life and death; the boundaries which are reestablished and redrawn by biopower in its disciplinary and regulatory attitude towards life. He provocatively articulates that "Underconditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred" (Mbembe, 2003: 40).

Looking at the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, though in a different manner, Mbembe asserts that for certain population to live, there is always a regulatory power leading other population to death (Mbembe, 2003). As we have already seen in Agamben's thesis, there is an exclusionary inclusion within biopolitics. Regarding the ideological tool of religious nationalism in the previous part of this chapter, the focus on youth and the politics over their lives and deaths, cannot merely be seen as a regulatory power which, in a collective manner, puts disciplined individuals in line with the population; rather the inclusion of biological facts of life is a target of the exclusionary manner of power towards certain populations.

Mbembe establishes an account for understanding of martyrdom as a sign of the blurred boundaries of life and death, self and other. One's suicide is the homicide of other. While approaching to other, or enemy in war, in order for killing, the boundaries of self and other as well as the boundaries of the death of self and killing of the other become blurred by the subject who "overcomes his mortality". In this "moment of supremacy", the martyr's body seeks eternity by being transformed into a weapon, metal, which in the confrontation with death is sublimated

and eternalized. In a sense, the martyr's body gains its power and subjectivity through self-sacrifice which results in its eternity (Mbembe, 2003: 37-9). His existence is not a bare life; rather is celebrated as a sacrifice. In chapter four, I will examine whether the self-sacrifice of martyr can be seen in line with the religious background of martyrdom, or in the conflation of modern goals of nationalism, martyrdom appears as a sacrifice for secular targets of dominant ideology.

## Conclusion

Overall, in this chapter by focusing on the politics of life, death, and sexuality and the way ideology regulates bodies, I examined different angles of the ideological tool of power in the making of body as its tool and its target. Starting with the 1979 Iranian revolution and Foucault's discussion on "political spirituality" and his interpretation of the Islamic revolution as an anti-modernist movement, I argued that by the revolution the discourse of modernity in Iran got more complex due to the conflation of the techniques of western modern power and the ideology of Iranian religious nationalism. In this regard, a new form of modernity is shaped which is not a western modernity, rather is a localized alternative form of it with its own complexities. While dealing with the alternative modernity in post-revolutionary Iran, I will identify the power over bodies which is not, in the Foucauldian discussion, merely focused on the lives of bodies. My argument on the representation of martyred bodies and the politics of death in Islamic Republic requires a modification to Foucauldian understanding of power, which is how I linked Foucauldian biopolitics to Mbembe's necropwer. In the next chapter, I will look at the historical changes in the politics of gender and sexuality in Iran to trace the roots of the discourse of homosociality in post-revolutionary Iran.

# Chapter 2-From Homosociality to Homosociality

Going through the representation of male beauty in Iran, we can see how the notions of masculinity, desirability and beauty are dramatically changed and reconceptualized during the centuries. Almost two hundred years ago, beautiful men and women were depicted with the same features of beauty (Najmabadi, 2005a). While, due to a number of religiopolitical and historical events, the features of masculine and feminine beauty became distinguishable after the first decades of nineteenth century in Qajar Era and during Pahlavi era (1925-1979). The ongoing process of redefining gendered beauty after the Islamic revolution, in 1979, shows the complexities of the implications of masculinity and beauty in contemporary Iran. In this chapter, I will make use of the figure of *Shahid*, witness, in order to figure out how the concepts of beauty and sexuality are melted into different moulds in different eras. I will examine how the images of saintly martyrs emerged through a historical discourse of masculine beauty and how the understanding of gender as a binary affects the representation of these figures. To this end, I will look at the history of sexuality in Iran while translating the Foucauldian perspective on sexuality and the disciplined body in bio-power into the context of modern Iran.

Looking through the literature and the images regarding beautiful men, I will examine the interconnection of the discourse of homosociality after the Iran-Europe encounter in the early nineteenth century and the homosociality in post-revolutionary heteronormalization. The chapter is divided into a chronological order of three eras. The first is the Shi'i Iran from the Safavid dynasty to the early Qajar era, which is described as premodern Iran by many historians. The second part is focused on Iran after the encounter with Europe from the early nineteenth century to Pahlavi Era and the last part is dedicated to post-revolutionary Iran. By the end, we will have

a complete picture of how homoeroticism in premodern Iran was introduced as Homosociality after the encounter with Europe and how the path toward western heteronormativity during the Pahlavi era was substituted by an Islamic discourse of heteronormalization in post-revolutionary Iran which revitalized homosocial environment. These substitutions in the public/political representation of sexuality in Iran is helpful for the identification of politics of homosociality in post-revolutionary Iran and the way these politics contribute to the control and regulation of bodies.

## 2.1. Homoeroticism

The term homosexuality, as the sexual orientation from which identity is derived, is not how we can read same-sex practices and eroticism in pre-modern eras. "Homosexuality as a way of life" in its Foucauldian parlance is how sexual orientation goes beyond the purview of private sphere and shapes modern subject's whole aspects of life (Foucault, 1981). Yet, sexual practices before modern era were not a way of self-identification and subjectivity. In this sense, the term homosexuality seems unhelpful in this context. Concerning what has been said, in this part, to avoid the essentialist understanding of homosexuality, as a historical continuous concept, I will use the term homoeroticism to cover both same-sex inclinations and activities without claiming the identification of homosexual. El-Rouayheb (2005) argues that the tolerance of Islam towards homoeroticism, before the nineteenth century in Arab countries, was in the "expressions of passionate love for a youth" (2005: 3) rather than sexual tolerance towards same-sex practices. Yet in pre-Shi'i and more dominantly in Shi'i Iran, there are extensive official records of same-sex practices among men which were not executed or strictly prohibited.

Homoeroticism has a long history in Iran which goes back to more than thousand years ago. Loving a man has two different origins in Iran which both came after Arab conquest and Islamization of the country; one came from ancient Greek and the other from Turkish territories and each connotes to different implications. The former was interpreted as a "pure love" which entered into Islamic philosophy and then Iranian Sophism; the latter rather was known as pederasty and implied sexual practice with beautiful boys (Shamisa, 2002: 9-14). By the sixteenth century when Shi'i became the official religion in the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722), homoeroticism was more prevalent and explicitly practiced by men. As Shamisa notes, in the Safavid Dynasty official *amradkhanihs* (a place like brothel, in which men could have sex with young beardless boys), were prevalent and the government taxed them. Not only ordinary people, but the kings of Safavid Dynasty had same-sex sexual practices despite being known as Shi'i religious men (Shamisa, 2002: 228).These prevalent sexual activities between men, which continued to be frequent in the Qajar era as well, are keeping other studies on pre-modern cultures in the fact that the sexual relations were hierarchized.

In his study on ancient Athens, Halperin shows how the sexual relations are organized by social status and age. Unlike the common assumption of understanding the democracy in Athens as merely political, sex and gender systematically shaped the hierarchical positioning of individuals in Athens.In the phallocentric discourse of sexuality, in which sex has been defined symbolically and practically as "phallic action" (1990: 102), the ideal citizen was superior in relation to other social types who were receptive; the prostitute woman, their wives and daughters, and also young men who were politically inactive including the male prostitute, slaves and foreigners. Afary argues that in pre-modern Iran sexual practices were also arranged by social hierarchies and age. Same-sex relations have been condoned and tolerated while the relation was not public

and the social hierarchy was considered and maintained (Afary, 2005: 156). Both Halperin and Afary regard the receptive partner as effeminized due to the lack of dignity and their lower social status. However, Najmabadi argues for a reading of gender in pre-modern Iran beyond our modern binary understanding as man/woman. Therefore, the assumption of the receptive partner as effeminate seems unhelpful for defining the complexities of sexual types before modernity.

Same-sex love and desire in Iran was known with different expressions and metaphors. *Amradbazi* and *Shahidbazi* are the most known; both implying the same concept while in different contexts. Both *Amrad* and *Shahid*, are "beautiful beardless adolescent teenager" from the age of fifteen to early twenties as the object of love and desire for an adult man (Najmabadi, 2005a:59), while *Shahidbazi* is also used in Sufi literature and Persian poems which connotes to *Shahid*, means witness. In some Islamic mystics, there is a practice of gazing at the beauty of adolescent boy, *Shahid* or *Amrad*, which is the witness of the beauty and goodness of God. This practice is relatively an old one prevalent among many Sufi branches since mid-ninth century (Rowson, 1995: 24). However, the representation of the practices has been eliminated since the early decades of nineteenth century which I will elaborate later in this chapter. The term *Shahid,* which is the same as *Amrad* while being used in both popular and Sufi poems and literature, is preferred in this study due to its connotation of the Sufi-Shi'i practice of gazing at the images of Shi'i Imams as a way of perceiving the eternal beauty of God. This same rite is practiced from almost the same period, to ninth century, and resumed to be common among many Sufi-Shi'i branches in present day. The practice of gazing and the appreciation of beauty, notably, have not been confined to Sufism and Islamic mysticism; rather it penetrated popular culture and prolonged in contemporary and post-revolutionary Iran. The religious act of gazing at the images of Shi'i Imams will be discussed in the next chapter.

The figure of *Shahid*, as the symbol of beauty until late eighteenth century Iran, is not bared from passion and sexual attitudes; rather the portraits and descriptions in written sources witness the erotic characteristics of the beauty of an adolescent in that era. The practice of *Shahidbazi* by itself was not sinful and even the desire aroused by gazing at a beautiful face was recognized as part of it. Yet the practice was acceptable as long as the believer does not "engage in sinful acts" (Najmabadi, 2005 b, 18) or the practice was not publicly displayed (Afary, 2005). As we see, the prohibition of homoeroticism, as El-Rouayheb expresses, is conditioned by some factors which imply that the condemnation of sodomy is not explicit and straightforward in the Quran. The reason can be the ambiguity of the Quranic language and also the contradictory parts concerning same-sex relations.

In the Quran, sodomy is mentioned once concerning the story of Lot tribe and the consequence of their vice which led to the deconstruction of their city by God's wrath (Shamisa, 2002:25). This story is expressed in the Quran containing some striking points to define the sinful act of sodomy. They were wearing clothes like women and had long hair while singing and dancing in streets. Women had left and men were doing with each other what should have been done to women (Soorabadi, 1968). The act of sodomy was considered a vice due to the fact that it caused the failure to reproduce offspring among them. Until the early nineteenth century, love and sexual relation between adults and *amrads* in Iran was not defined as vice in Iranians' view point (Najmabadi, 2005:61). Iranian homoeroticism was partly considered acceptable in the sense that same-sex relation was not a way of life among men, as we saw in its Foucauldian terms in modern era; rather it was beside or before the reproductive relation of marriage and subsequently men involving in same-sex practices were not identifying themselves as 'homosexual'. Sodomy

or *lavat*, which is used in the religious and historical context of Islamic Iran, however, has had a vague moral definition.

In some other stories in the Quran, there are descriptions of beautiful menservants for the pious Muslim man who are the symbols of "paradisiacal pleasures" (Najmabadi, 2005).These servantsin the Islamic written sources and Hadiths, are promised to be given to the pious Muslim man in the heaven. The ambiguous role of these servants generated several interpretations and contradictory or arbitrary judgments around the issue of homoeroticism. This accounts for flexibilities or strict prohibitions expressed by religious authorities towards homoseroticism during the Islamic era in Iran and specifically in Shi'i Iran after the Safavid Dynasty. While there is a relative consensus among religious authorities regarding same-sex practices, homoerotic love seems more controversial.

Subsequently, the figure of *Shahid* is ambiguous as simultaneously a medium for beauty of God in an allegorical level and an object of desire in somatic level. Nonetheless, same-sex desire and love is not limited to the somatic level; in chapter four of this study we will see how the object of desire is dematerialized and transformed to transcendence. This exoteric beauty, which is the witness of esoteric goodness in Sufi parlance, is "simultaneously the most desired and a figure of imminent loss" (Najmabadi, 2005b: 15). Several advices in written sources assert the hazardous beauty of *Shahid* which should be controlled and moderated. In the advice for moderation, the emphasis is on avoiding bodily practices. Despite the fact that *Shahid*'s beauty was eroticized, it was not gendered. In the depictions left from Qajar era, the beauty is not gendered in a sense that beautiful men and women had the same features of beauty in portraits. This gender-undifferentiated aesthetic was not only visible in the portraits but also in the poems and written sources left from that era (Shamisa, 2002). Moreover, the portrayed bodies have the same

features of heavenly bodies, women and menservants, described in the Quran and Islamic written sources, promised to be given to pious Muslim men in the garden of heaven.

## 2.2. Homosociality

There is a turning point in the revelation of homoeroticism from the early years of the nineteenth century in Iran and the beginning of "cultural interaction" with Europe. The common and acceptable sexual relation among older men/younger men and the portraits and description of eroticized adolescents, from then, has been judged in "European's gaze". According to Najmabadi, this interaction with Europe, seen as a sign of modernization, which emerged primarily in West, made Iranians disguise and hide homoeroticism by introducing homosexual practices among men as homosociality (Najmabadi, 2005a:61). Indeed, it is worth mentioning that this cultural interaction on Iran was double-sided. While modern Europeans, in the era of heteronormalizing society, were accusing Iranians of the prevalence of sexual practices among men, they were also under Iranian's scrutiny. For Iranians, beardless European men were interpreted in the same way as beardless Iranian men (2005a:64). This mutual anxiety can be seen as the exoticization of both orient and occident as outsider.

The interaction of Iran with European modernity dates back to the early decades of the nineteenth century and interaction with Europe by many historians (Mirsepasi 2003; Najmabadi 2005; Afary 2009). The western notion of nation-state and a collective identity within the boundaries of the territory combined with the sense of otherness in front of the domination of Eurocentric modernity, as well as political and economic domination of West over East, made Iranians to redefine their traditional cultural identity in order to resist the abjection of "traditional other" ascribed to them by Europeans (Mirsepassi, 2003).Nationalism flourished due to the idea

of nation-state within the contradictions of celebrating Shi'i-Iranian "cultural authenticity" (Mirsepassi, 2003) and embracing universal values of modernity such as binary-understanding of gender, heteronormativity and sexualized other. By the triumph of heteronormativity and the binary-understanding of gender in western modernity, same-sex relationships and practices has been devalued and the orient as the traditional or non-modern "other" has been degraded in Europen's eyes. Najmabadi, however, argued that since the nineteenth century and the interaction with Europe, the efforts to purify Iranians' sexual activities were less focused on the eradication of homoeroticism; rather homoeroticism remained as a periodical sexual relation authorized for men who were not yet married or for those who fulfill their duty of reproduction beside their same-sex practices (Najmabadi, 2005a:67). Nonetheless, by refining the public sphere, Iranian long-term homoerotic culture was pushed into private lives and was presented as homosociality to the judging gaze of Europeans.

The authorities and intellectuals tended to demonstrate a purified picture of sexual activities prevalent among Iranians in spite of the persistent practices declared as homosociality such as embracing and kissing among men. The gender-undifferentiated portraits have been revised and replaced by explicit characteristics of heterosexual couples with visible and detailed different features, to reconcile Iranians' sexuality to European expectations (Najmabadi, 2005a: 61-62). In fact, the way Iranians responded to European's attacks was to conceal and reshape personal relationships and their social representations that had existed for a long time.

However, the banishment of homoeroticism was not only a self-defense against European judgment. Along with the idea of the nation-state and constructing a unified territory, in order to produce the modern citizen, the emergence of patriotism seemed necessary due to the fact that the transfer of notions of nation-state and patriotic citizens from West was simultaneously the

only way of resisting European political and economic domination. In Najmabadi's words, Socially hierarchized same-sex relations were considered inconsistent with "patriotic brotherhood" which was encouraging modern ideas of equality and political homology (2008: 288). Rather than the Foucauldian perspective over the modern history of sexuality, in which the technologies of the production of governmentalized bodies function as a regulatory power to classify sexualities as normal/abnormal; thus excluding bodies engaged in same-sex practices (Foucault, 1990); Najmabadi, in a post-colonial parlance which situates modernity within the context of Iran, argues for another understanding of the negation of homoeroticism in Iran. In a more localized definition of the birth of modernity in Iran with a gender analytical framework, Najmabadi attributes the sanctioned public visibility of homoeroticism to two major impacts; first, the interaction with Europe, as we went through it above and second, the threat of same-sex practice and gender-undifferentiated love and desire for patriotism. Thus, same-sex relations were less labeled as abnormal than being sublimated to new-born nationalistic goals. The gender-differentiating process defined homeland as mother, "female beloved", and the politically equal men ought to be the protectors of their innate love for "soil-womb-mother" (Najmabadi 2005 & 2008).

## 2.3. Heterosociality: A Path toward Heteronormalization

The efforts toward heteronormalizing society in Iran, as Najmabadi (2005) examines, were started by Iranian intellectuals who traveled to Europe and also through the interactions with Europeans who came to Iran in late Qajar era. Despite the conflicts in the years of Qajar and Pahlavi (1925-1979) dynasty, who ruled Iran until the 1979 revolution, the general attitude toward western modernization among authorities was positive. The prevalence of same-sex practices in Iran was presumed to have strong bonds with the subjugation of women. Elites tried

to socialize women to alter the image of immorality in Iran to a purified homonormative society. The creation of governmentable docile body, in Foucauldian terminology, emerged during the Pahlavi dynasty through the efforts of Reza Shah and his son Mohammad-Reza Shah in order to westernize Iranian society (Paidar, 1995). Reza Shah, who was fascinated by the technologies of western societies while dreaming for an Iranian independent nationalism, started adapting the European modern citizen "in both appearance and in conduct" to Iranians. While during the first decades of the encounter Iranians were mostly occupied by introducing homoeroticism as homosociality, in this period, as I differentiated as heterosociality, the path towards heretonormalization was more focused on socializing women and subsequently heterosocializing the society as a way of achieving heteronormativity.

One of the most striking reforms was the ban of veiling for women in January 1936 (Afary, 2009). The very implication of unveiling women in public sphere was a way of veiling homoeroticism in first Pahlavi era. Gender reforms continued to be a central concern of modernizing Iranian society for both Pahlavi Shahs. What was understood as emancipatory project for women was mainly regarding the heterosocialization of the society which presumably could heterosexualize it as a consequence. As Najmabadi points, "the history of the disappearance of the *amrad*cannot be told without the history of the culture wars over the veil" (Najmabadi, 2008). She precisely puts the gender politics of Iranian modernization under the title of "compulsory heterosociality" (2008: 289) which prolonged until the Islamic revolution. Similarly, Afary asserts that the homosocial environment of Iranian society existed through the early 1930s. Yet, she goes further than a mere homosociality by implying to the erotic relations between "a guild master and his apprentice boy concubine" which was still socially hierarchized albeit in a more companionate way. This new form of relationship had more commitment and the

sense of ownership which prohibited the practice of gazing at other boys while one was in a relationship (Afary, 2009: 160-2).

As I referred to the practice of gazing in *Shahidbazi* and we can see it here, the visual attraction in homoeroticism in Iran is a persisting part of a long-term cultural practice rooted in Sufi-Shi'ism in Islamic Iran. The gradual changes in the representation of homoeroticism to homosociality and later on to heterosocialization of Iranian society altered the subject of this attraction in depictions and written sources. While homoerotic desire and relations were mostly practiced, and are still practiced, for decades in homosocial environments, such as public baths in Islamic countries (El-Rouayheb 2005: 43) and also coffee houses in Iran (Najmabadi, 2005b: 20); I argue that the changing of sexual politics and the path towards heteronormalization of Iran substituted the images of religious figures for the disappeared depictions of *Shahids*. By Islamic revolution and the reinforcement of homosocial environment, as I will discuss below, this substitution functioned as a popularization of a new kind of beauty as passion-less and divine beauty which has its legitimation by religion. As I examined in the first chapter, the national de-sexualization as a way of sublimating sexual passions to national goals (Mosse, 1985) and the religious transcendence of sensuousness, which I will identify in the next chapter, contribute to the popularization of sexless masculine beauty within the representation of saintly figures.

## 2.4. Homosociality again: An Islamic Heteronormalization

The politics of Pahlavi governors toward modernizing Iranian sexuality, heterosocialization as a way of heterosexualizing the society, was mainly focused on the public sexual politics. Desegregation of public spaces, such as public transportation and schools, in order to "emancipate women", was a path towards modernity and progress. Gender reforms were the

main concern of the policies of modernization (Abrahamian 1982; Paidar 1995; Najmabadi 2008). Through this path, cultural resistance against the process of modernization was engendered by resistance to the imposed westernized regulatory politics. Yet, the consequence of the resistance, the Islamic revolution of 1979, did not come out as an anti-heteronormative discourse of a progressively authentic state against modernity and imperialism; rather, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the Islamic Republic appeared as a conflation of the techniques of modern power and the traditional social environment of pre-modern era (Afary, 2005). Gender segregation in public spaces and polygyny revived while homosexual acts have been strictly executed (Afary, 2009: 287).

The segregated public spaces and the strong bonds of same-sex socialization encourage same-sex attractions and simultaneously stigmatize any sexual orientation towards the same sex. The apparentlyrefined society, which discourages pre-marital or marital public expression of love and desire of heterosexual relations, authorizes homosocial manifestations in public while denying any same-sex sexual attractions. Kissing, hugging and holding hands in public is allowed and normalized for same-sex relations while it is introduced and defined as a non-sensualrelation which reveals social bonds. The revival of the homosocial environment in post-revolutionary Iran, though, arguably, is the acceptance of "covert homosexuality" (Afary, 2009: 289).

The homosocial environment was reinforced mostly through the years of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The celebrated heroism and manhood in the war and the religious national bonds among men as the protectors of homeland, the mother, and the staminate of the subjecthood in confrontation with death, the Hegelian understanding of subjectivity which I will discuss later in the next chapter, constructs a celebrated homosociality under the heteronormalizing policies of Islamic Republic. "The war zone is a place between death and life, a land without women,

enabling the expression of homoerotic desire. In this homosocial world, men live in proximity to each other and take care of each other. Women do not exist; this is a city of men of different generations living in harmonious contiguity" (Moallem, 2005: 115).

The emergence of homosociality in post-revolutionary Iran and during the war reiterated and reproduced homoerotic descriptions and depictions in poems and portrayals albeit in a religiomystical veil. The "romanticized and eroticized" process of martyrdom as a path of being unified with Husayn, the lord of martyrs and the beloved, who is waiting at the end of the road, declares a passionate love for sacrificing oneself to unite with the beloved. In the next chapter, we will see how the beloved, the saintly martyr, is depicted and in chapter four I will argue that through the visual representation of martyrdom, the discourse of homosociality meets the discourse of martyrdom.

# Chapter 3- Saintly Martyrs in Shi'ism and the Politics of Representation

"…When individuals are shown within a work of art (no matter how broadly defined) the ideologically charged iconographic nature of the representation dominates."

(Gilman, 1985: 204)

The posters in figure 2, which are mass represented in post-revolutionary Iran, depict the scenes of martyrdom of Imam Huseyn, on the left, the third Shi'i Imam known as the Lord of martyrs in the Twelver Shi'ite worldview, and martyrdom of his son Ali Akbar, on the right, with his father weeping on his dead body. In this image, Imam Husayn is depicted a young man with bow-shaped eyebrows, long eyelashes, trimmed beard with his head turned to a dim green light shining on him from the sky. There is a white shroud under his coat of mail which connotes to the white shroud, *kafan*, in which Muslims are draped to be buried. On the right, Ali Akbar and Imam Huseyn are surrounded with a white nimbus which indicates their holiness. Ali Akbar is presented with arched eyebrows and large bright eyes and without beard. He is dressed with a torn shroud with exposed and naked muscular arm and a fallen helmet.

The representation of holy figures of Shiite Islam, in modern era, is prevalent among almost all Shi'i communities (Luaibi, 2011). In Iran, depicting Shi'i holy figures has a long history dating back to the early ninth century (Khosronejad, 2011). Yet, in the late Qajar era (1785-1925) these depictions became popularized and entered to popular culture with the emergence of coffee house paintings and in post-revolutionary Iran mass produced and represented in posters and large-scale paintings. The issue of the embodiment and conspicuous representation of Saintly figures, however, is dramatically controversial. Despite the common assumption regarding the strict prohibition of depicting saintly figures, the colorful painting prints of Shiite Imams'

portrayals, with visible facial features, are produced and disseminated widely with affordable prices in poster shops, stationaries and book shops in Iran. The government does not prohibit these depictions, rather allows their mass production and circulation among people. These images decorate the walls of houses and public places for commemorations, the rituals of remembering Shiite saintly martyrs which are the most celebrated ceremonies and encouraged by the government in Iran, as posters, and also are being used as "portable icons", small portable images of Imams, by dervishes since ninth century (Amir-Moezzi, 2011: 25). Although the Imams are portrayed in most of the posters and popular paintings with visible facial features, representing their faces in mural paintings and national television is prohibited. This ambiguous and heterogeneous attitude towards the sensitive issue of embodiment and visualization in Islamic Iran is important to elaborate in this study in order to understand the complexities of power relations in the representation of masculine sacrificial body.


Figure 2.(on the left) The scene of martyrdom of Imam Husayn and (on the right) martyrdom of his son, Ali Akbar, and a grieving Imam Husayn.Color posters in post-revolutionary Iran. (Available online: http://shia-ali.deviantart.com/gallery/41178293/ART)

In this chapter, I will first briefly talk about the background of Iranian Sufi-Shi'ism and the complexities of visual practices in order to give a contextualized analysis of the popularized practice of representing the sacred men in contemporary Iran. As it is concerned with the issue of popular culture, I examine whether the process of visualization, representation of saintly martyrs with visible facial features, can be seen as a resistance against the dominant binary understanding of material/transcendental, feminine/masculine and so on in Islamic and Shi'ite worldview or whether it comes out of the complexities of a non-homogenous, productive power which adopts different tools in different situations. Following this, I will seek to identify the impacts of Christianity and orientalism, the intersection of the discourse of homosociality with the discourse of martyrdom, and the dialectic of power and desirability in order to analyze the facial features of these imaginary portraits. I will argue that the represented facial features of saintly martyred Imamshas not been effeminized, rather their representation is rooted in the discourse of homosociality and connotes to the figure of Shahid, witness, which stands outside the gendered binary of feminine/masculine. Nonetheless, as we saw in previous chapters, the ideology of religious nationalism and its sexual politics in post-revolutionary Iran, by providing a homosocial environment, while desexualizing beauty, aims at sublimating sensuousness, and particularly homoeroticism, to its political goals (Mosse, 1985). My argument is that, the mass production and circulation of imaginary portraits of sacred martyrs, who lived approximately over 1300 years ago, represent the martyr as image, as a pattern to be reproduced. Through the politics of representation, masculine sacrificial religious/national body is constructed for predetermined goals of dominant ideology; the ideology which aims to shape a collective identity in order to ensure the national bonds of solidarity and police the borders of the nation.

These images are the representation of the disciplinary and regulatory power over bodies which aim to control and regulate life and death of bodies.

The transformation of a gender-undifferentiated representation of body in the discourse of homoeroticism to a gendered homosocial body in post-revolutionary Iran, as I discussed in the previous chapter, will be revealed through the materialized and visualized body of saintly martyrs. Their visualization emerges through the conflation of Sufi practices in Shi'ism with the ancient visualizing culture in Iranian miniatures. Below, I will discuss the way in which the visualization of Shi'i martyrs blurs the boundaries of material/non-material of scholastic Shi'i ontology and show how Sufi practices enter popular culture. In this regard, I will argue that considering the practice of visualization as a resistance against an authoritarian power, as Abu Lughod says, is a "tendency to romanticize resistance" (1990: 42). Rather, in a Foucauldian vein, visualization of saintly figures reveals and also participates in the production and diffusion of the non-monolithic and complex apparatus of power.

## 3.1. Blurred Boundaries of Binaries: Iranian Sufi-Shi'ism

The very notion of the veils and curtains of the truth in the real world which covers God is how the distinction between material and transcendental level is known in Shi'i ontology. Visibility is associated with exoteric and the outer world, while what is the inside or the essence is the secret, the esoteric (Amir-Moezzi, 2011: 29). The more a personality is known as closer to God, the less he is associated with materiality and subsequently visibility. The visual representation of Shi'i Imams with their facial features seems problematic and raises the question of resistance in the picture of Shi'i discourse due to infallibility and transcendence of Saintly figures. In Shi'ism, materiality is associated with degradation and sinfulness. Moreover, there is another explanation

that reinforces the hypothesis of resistance against mainstream Shi'i Discourse; the roots of the contemporary images of Shi'i Imams in coffee-house paintings of Qajar era (1785-1925).

Figure 3. The Battle of Karbala, Coffee-house painting of Qajar Era (late nineteenth-early twentieth), commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Oil on canvas, 72 x 118in. Brooklyn Museum

Coffee-house painting emerged in Qajar era despite the taboo of figurative and portrayal visualization of sacred men in Islam. These large-scale canvas paintings on walls of coffee houses, see figure 3for instance, were mainly focused on depicting Shi'i religious men in their battles and the scenes of their martyrdom (Chelkowsky, 1990: 98). This visual opposition against strict Islamic rules of representation during the Qajar era developed through a simultaneous impact of two currents of painting; the Safavid (1501-1722) miniature and European realism. The Persian miniature in Safavid era is well-known for avoiding perspective in order to illustrate unworldliness of timeless beauty and perfect order. The miniature in this era was mainly concerned with Iranian epics and romantic stories (Chelkowsky, 1990). However, the encounter with Europe in the early nineteenth century changed the subject of the paintings dramatically.

The popular depictions of genderless beauty, as we saw in the previous chapter, were remarked as the sign of prevalence of homoeroticism in the early Qajar era and were replaced with the portrayals of Shi'i martyrs. While there are paintings of Prophet Mohammad and Shi'i Imams in previous eras(Gruber, 2011: 48-53; Luaibi, 2011: 32-51), whether veiled or with visible facial features, the notable difference in this new school of painting, coffee-house painting, is the combination of the characteristics of Persian miniature and realism.

Figure 3 represents a coffee house painting of the Qajar era which is a narrative of the battle of Karbala. In the center of the painting, Imam Husayn, known as the Lord of martyrs, is depicted. He earned his martyrdom in the battle of Karbala, in Iraq, in 680. According to the Shiite worldview, Husayn rebelled against the injustice of Umayyad dynasty, who denied the rightful guardianship of the members of the Prophet's family. This bifurcation is reinforced during the centuries, as Sunni and Shi'i the two major branches of Islam, and maintained by revitalizing Shi'i martyrs, mainly by representing their images (Amanat, 2009). As we see, there is no perspective in this painting. On the left, we see the same scene of the martyrdom of Ali Akbar and the grieving Imam Husayn. Although the facial features are changed due to the historical changes in understanding of beauty, there are significant differences in the gestures and clothes. In this painting, comparing to the posters in figure 1, saintly martyrs' bodies are carefully covered and gestures are less tender and more firm and solid. Here, the enemies are bald, naked and not bearded. The contrast between good and evil is revealed as the battle of beauty and virility against ugliness and disproportion. This revelation of divine beauty in coffee-house painting, as I mentioned, has also roots in the use of portrayals of Shi'i saints in Sufism as a way of passing the boundaries of materiality to transcendence. This Sufi practice, by hierarchizing materiality as inferior to transcendence, affects the understanding of self and goes hand in hand

with the politics of death in post-revolutionary Iran. In chapter four, I will examine these effects on selfhood and politics of death.In this section, however, I will talk about the significance of beauty and its role in making of the saintly martyrs the objects of desire to discuss the discourse of homosociality and its contribution to sexual politics.

### 3.1.1. Mediational Images

Sufi-Shi'i dervishes in Iran make use of portrayals, called *Shama'il,* as visualization aid for mystical contemplation. The belief is that by gazing at the portrait of the first Shi'i Imam, Ali, and repeating his name, the distance between exoteric and esoteric worlds is passed and the dervish achieves the "interior Imam" by his heart(Amir-Moezzi, 2011:28). In other words, the Imam is visualized in order to help the dervish to pass beyond the exoteric world. The logic here is to look at Imam as the representation of God; the mediation of the other world. Notably, there are Hadiths and religious narratives asserting the immortality of all Shi'i Imams' faces due to the fact that their faces are the face of God(al-Bahrani, 1695-6: 88).This archetypical image of Imam is ultimately the oneness of the Imam with God. This specific form of theophany is not only prevalent in radical Sufi orders; rather this is the base of many arguments expressed by religious authorities, in post-revolutionary Iran, justifying the legality of the visualization of Imam's faces (Mohammadzadeh, 2008: 100).As Amir-Moezzi notes, the correlation between Shi'i popular portrayal art in contemporary Iran and Sufi mysticism blurs the boundaries of a new approach of painting in popular art and an ancient Sufi practice. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the popularization of Saintly figures' portrayals seems to be challenging for the so-called authoritarian power of Islamic Republic.

Considering the fact that this religious pictorial art is only practiced among Shi'i cults as well as the historical process of its popularization and continuation for more than two hundred years despite the Islamic prohibitions, the complexities of power relations and the heterogeneity of different authoritarian systems are reveled. A historical overview of Shi'ism in Iran acknowledges its capability for functioning in different modes of power according to the necessities of time. This approach is reinforced by its role as a blanket to cover the diversity of religious and ethnic communities in Iran. Sufism and scholastic Shi'ism as well as the popular religion are all gathered under the label of Iranian Shi'ism by the central government in order to provide a collective identity which consolidates the national bonds. This inclusion legitimizes the power and at the same time positions itself against it. Through this attitude, Iranian Shi'ism generates a conflation of actuality and mystical world through internalizing diverse, and apparently contesting, worldviews by making them its tool. While there is the possibility of looking at the contesting ideological beliefs as resistance, this resistance, as Abu-Lughod asserts in a Foucauldianvein, should be used "as a diagnosis of power" (1990: 42). Different representations of saintly martyrs, with conspicuous faces in Omni-present posters in popular culture and with veiled faces in the mural paintings as the official propaganda of Islamic Republic, show diverse strategies of power in order to reinforce mechanisms of control of the state over all contesting religious and ideological communities. One of the strategies to gather different communities is commemoration ritual which is strongly linked to the visual culture in Shi'ism.



## 3.2. Transferring Concepts

The commemoration rituals for martyrs are the common motives which gather different Shi'i communities. For centuries, these commemorations have been held for martyred Shi'i Imams,

Imam Ali and his son Imam Husayn particularly. They function through resurrecting and reiterating the memories of resistance and sufferings of Shi'i during the centuries (Amanat, 2009:2). However, commemorating martyrdom is not imported to Iran by Islam. In pre-Islamic Iran, and in ancient Iranian mythical stories, the purification of the soul is achieved only through asceticism (Dorraj, 1997: 491). Iranian culture provided a fertile ground for the ideology of martyrdom to flourish and cultivate over the centuries. The roots of Iranian asceticism can be found inpre-Islamic Manichaeism as the incorporation of the "Hindu Stoicism and Christian unworldliness" (1997: 492).

Nonetheless, asceticism was not the only impact of Christianity on Shi'ism. Even more strikingly, the aesthetic of Christianity affected the facial features of martyr Imams (Luaibi, 2011: 90-101) after the beginning of the nineteenth century, the cross-cultural encounters with Europe. The portrayals of martyr Imams are influenced by the depictions of Jesus Christ in Orthodox Christian spiritualty. The effect of asceticism on the aesthetic and the definition of beauty creates the saintly martyr's spiritual beauty.This type of beauty asks for empathy by showing the weakness of the martyr's body. This weakness is crucially linked to femininity through centuries.

## 3.3. Effeminization or Homoerotic Beauty?

In Sufi worldview, a "vision of divine beauty" is possible through the portrayals of Imams (Amir-Moezzi, 2011: 34). It is interesting that this divine beauty, in contemporary Iran, is associated with femininity and also conditioned and temporalized by the definition of beauty in different eras. Regarding the beauty of saintly Shi'i martyrs, one should consider the historical changes and the contributors to these changes. As it is noted by some critics and scholars, in the

process of popularizing the images of Shi'i martyrs, the facial features of Islamic saints have been gradually effeminized since the 1979 revolution. Flaskerud points to the combination of "masculine (facial hair) and feminine traits (long eyelashes)" in the portraits of Ali Akbar, Imam Husayn's son, who was martyred, just like his father, by Umayyed Caliph Yazid in the battle of Karbala(2013: 27). This combination can be seen in all contemporary portraits ascribed to Shi'i Imams, Martyr Imams in particular. Due to our modern understanding of feminine and masculine beauty which is gendered and strictly separated, to analyze these features more precisely, we should first have a general understanding of the concepts of feminine/masculine beauty in their historical context and the way it is changed by time.

The concept of beauty in Iran has been changed dramatically during the last two centuries. Before nineteenth century and in the beginning of the Qajar era (1785-1925), beauty was not gendered in the sense that beautiful men and women had the same features of beauty in portraits. The descriptions of moon-forehead, narcissus-eyes, ruby-lips and bow-eyebrows were common to depict both male and female beauties in an erotic sense (Najmabadi, 2005: 59). The portraits of men and women similar to each other, who have the same features of heavenly beauty described in the Islamic written sources and Hadiths, were the illustrations of pleasurable bodies both promised to be given to pious Muslim man in the heaven. The man in the portraits of that era is a "beautiful beardless adolescent teenager" (Najmabadi, 2005:59).However, through the "cultural interaction" with Europe, as I already discussed in the second chapter, homoeroticism has been disguised and introduced as homosociality (Najmabadi, 2005:61). As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the visualization of the facial features of saintly martyrs began in the early nineteenth century in Iran. While keeping the same depictions of beauty, albeit with adjunct beard as the sign of manliness, the representation of Shiite martyrs is repositioned as a visual

rhetoric of the discourse of Iranian homosocialism. By the representation of homosocialism, I mean the features which are rooted in homoeroticism but introduced as de-sexualized beauty (See figure 4).

Figure 4 (On the left) Young Man with Falcon, Qajar art, late 18th – early 19th century, Oil on canvas, 158.5 × 80.5 cm, Art Museum of Georgia, (in the middle) Girl with tambourine, Qajar Art, early 19th century, Oil on canvas,150 × 82 cm, Art Museum of Georgia, (on the right) Imaginary portrait of Ali-Akbar in post-revolutionary Iran (online color figure)

The hegemony and domination of the West over the East, as Said (1978) describes, played a significant role in the changing attitudes towards beauty and eroticism. The inferiority ascribed to the East by orientalism recognized the blurred distinction between feminine and masculine beauty in Iran as a sign of traditional non-modern orient. The beauty dissociated from eroticism in depictions was an effort to adopt the acceptable binary of masculinity/femininity in the discourse of western modernity. However, the features of the erotic beauty, with an additional beard as the sign of manhood, were transformed to the non-questionable religious figures and adapted to the religious nationalistic goals. Mosse argues that the aesthetic of nationalism in nineteenth century Germany emphasizes a "passion-less beauty" to transcend the sexual energy

of bodies to higher nationalistic goals. These goals were achievable only in religious revival, acting as a moral advocate to control and survey bodies and keep them away from sensuousness (Mosse, 1985:5-10). As we can see, there is an adaptation of religious nationalistic goals in Iranian modernity.

## 3.4. Dialectic of Power and Desire

Given the social and cultural context in contemporary Iran, "institutional strategies of power" (Storey, 2003: 105) and the ideological force of religion, produce canons which less reinforce the distinction between the taste of mass culture and high culture (2003:106); between material and mental value, than functioning in fetishizingthe value of the mass art. While Benjamin argues that the mechanical production abolishes, or in his words "withers" the aura of the work of art, he does not deny the commodity fetishization in the mass-production of the artwork. In this sense, the mass-produced artwork loses its aura of transcendence and at the same time is fetishized by being mass produced in its Marxian perspective (Benjamin, 1994). What I refer to as the fetishazation of the images of Imams is partly rooted in the commodity fetishization in the mechanical production of the artwork. This fetishized commodification is the way a mass artwork should be desirable in order to be sold. This desirability, connected to femininity as I will discuss below, is how the saintly martyrs become fetishized through the mass production of their posters in consumer culture. On the other hand, the aura of transcendence is not completely abolished, due to the fact that the subject of the images is a holy figure who, albeit being visualized or arguably materialized, has the values of transcendence. The mass production of the images of saintly martyrs, in this regard, is a way of creating a pattern of sacrificial bodies. The aura of holiness of saintly figures, by mass production, is transformed to the identification of ordinary people with saintly martyrs. To articulate this double and paradoxical function of a

work of art in being identified as mass art and at the same time carrying a fetishized aura of transcendence, I will analyze the visual iconography of the facial characteristics of these popular images.

There is a sharp contrast between courage, bravery, and heroism, which are all associated with masculinity, in the historical narratives, and the tender feminine facial expression of the popular widespread representation of saintly martyrs. West argues that portraits function as the signifiers of the status of the subject represented. They not only show us whether the subject was "powerful or subjugated", but they can affirm or challenge the social hierarchies in different historical periods (West, 2004: 71). Given that the representation of saintly martyrs with visible facial features is popularized in modern Iran, after the encounter with Europe in the nineteenth century, to interpret the visual signs of the images, we need to examine the coding of images through power relations and the politics of gender and sexuality in contemporary Iran. Through gestures, background and facial features and expressions, the image of sacred men is well embedded in the historical and social discourse of homosociality after the nineteenth century, and the discourse of martyrdom in post-revolutionary Iran. The combination of masculine and feminine traits in their portraits is the link of these two discourses through "the dialectic of power/lack" (Mitchell, 2005) and the way desirability works in popularizing these images. One of the images ascribed to Imam Husayn, which is very popular in contemporary Iran as both portable painting on canvas and colorful poster is shown in Figure 5.The features of this portrait are divided into two sets of elements; the first is contextualized in the discourse of homosociality and the second into the discourse of martyrdom. In the poster (Figure 5) the first set of elements in this imaginary portrait represents the saintly figure as a handsome young man with large bright eyes, long eyelashes, ticked arched eyebrows and a trimmed beard, with a moon on his

forehead. These features, by implying to the homoerotic beauty of *Shahid*, create desire and attraction.

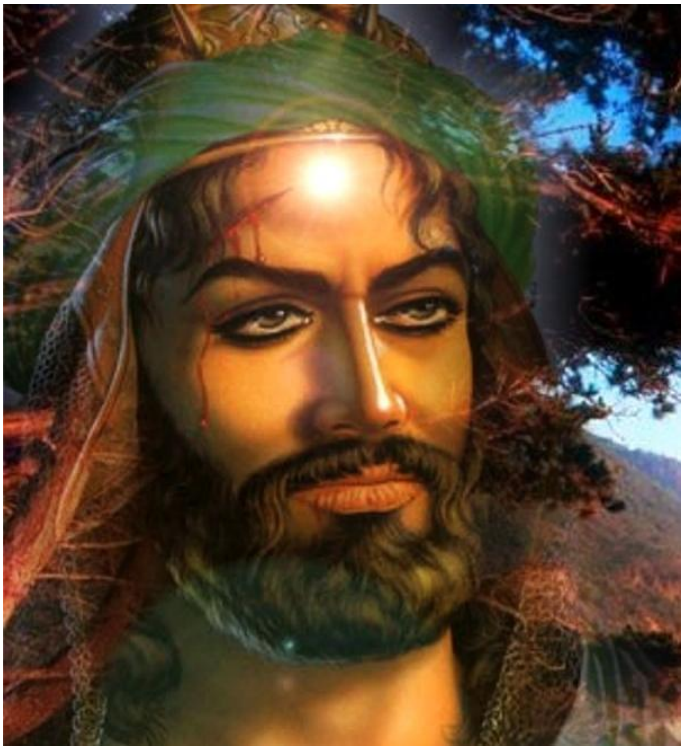

Figure 5 An Imaginary portrait assumed to be Imam Husayn in post-revolutionary Iran, (Color figure available online:http://www.shafaghicarpets.com/En/Feature/FeatureList.aspx?c=6&tmb=1)

Considering that the ideology functions in the way of struggling for power and visibility in public domain (Cinar, 2005: 8-15),we can go further to answer the question of why the religious ideology popularizes and disseminates Shiite martyrs, not other sacred men, for the sake of visibility and power. Going back to the portrait, figure 3, the second set of elements depicted in the painting are blood drips from the cut on the sacred man's forehead implying to his coming martyrdom. There also is a halo surrounding his head to illustrate his sanctity and decency. The first set of elements, which were dominantly concerned with the facial features of the saintly martyr, was connoting to homoeroticism, while the halo and the close martyrdom of the holy figure create a de-materialized and de-sexualized image of Imam.

What was argued about West's argument,earlier in this chapter, on the status of the represented subject is in the relation of the two sets of elements through "the dialectics of power and desire" (Mitchell, 2005: 34).In his study on "subaltern images" (2005), Mitchell proposes a new study of images, based on their lives. In this manner, images are studied to answer the question of what they want, rather than what they merely mean. They come alive in media, their "habitat" (2005: 36). He argues for a subaltern model in which the power of the picture depends on media and beholder. Its "overt sign of positive desire" and also, "what picture wants in terms of lack" produce the interrelation between picture and beholder (Mitchell, 2005: 37). In this sense, the depiction of saintly martyrs represents the image of homosocialism which has become the object of commercial appeal by being depicted handsomely. The sign of positive desire is what makes the consumer buy it. The beholder is faced with the fetishized image of saintly martyrs transformed to "objects of desire" (Storey, 2003: 105);the objects of desire stripped from sensuousness and defined as the sublimation of mortal carnal desire.

The portraits refer to actual characters known through historical narratives as warriors, brave men who were heroes, symbols of manhood. These heroes are failed and martyred brutally and unfairly. The appeal of the image to be sold by the overt sign of desire is conflated with the hidden sense of lack of manhood. The image, as a medium of Shi'i beliefs, carries the paradox of the failed hero contextualized in both discourses of martyrdom and homosociality. This dialectical relation between desire and power, between tender look of beauty and heroism, is how the portrait functions through its over-dissemination by media.

## 3.5. Beyond Commemorating Saintly Martyrs

The transcendental image of saintly martyrs embodied in the materiality of visible facial features crosses the boundaries of dualism to produce identification between the ordinary people and saints. This identification, in a Foucauldian perspective, is the implication of bodily subjectivity which links the disciplined individuals to the population (Foucault, 1979). The modern nationalist discourse in Iran, conflated with religion, governs bodies through the strategies of life subjugated to the power of death (Mbembe, 2003). The technologies of control over bodies not only regulate and discipline the lives of bodies but also decide on different forms of death to be taken. The Hegelian notion of "becoming subject", which is created through the confrontation with death is reinforced by the Islamic ideological concept of life after death. The subjective act of risking life, however, is shaped and constructed by the power relations of the dominant ideology. Accepting the risks of death, which is understood as the violence of negativity in becoming subject, is the subjugation of subjects by the politics of life and death. "Politics is therefore death that lives a human life" (Mbembe, 2003: 155). The dialectical relation of life and death is how the ideology produces sacrificial bodies. The celebration of martyred bodies was multiplied by the revolution (1988) and in the regime of Islamic Republic by cultivating the values of martyrdom ideology.

Commemorating the saintly martyrs became more common during the revolution and in post-revolutionary Iran, during the war with Iraq (1980-88),. The celebration of martyrdom was over-emphasized by Imam Khomeini after the revolution as a way of encouraging young men to

sacrifice their bodies both for Shiite ideology and their family; for their religion and their nation. In this sense, the visibility of the icons of religious nationalism as "perfect persons" (Shirazi, 2005: 95) was a way of producing sacrificial bodies. Religious nationalism inscribes its ideology on the bodies that are disciplined to represent a pre-defined set of behavior.Moreover, the legitimation of power and its modes of control in disciplining bodies are strongly connected with the relations of power and religion (McGuire, 1990).

## Conclusion

Overall, the substitution of the discourse of homoeroticism by homosocialism, as the impact of the encounter with Europe, and the transformation of the ascetic beauty of Christianityare the starting point for the popularization of the facially visualizedimages of saintly martyrs. Contextualizing the process within its religious and historical context reveals how and why these depictions are not the representation of a social resistance against an authoritarian power, but rather ideological tools for a politics of life and death. The dialectic of power and lack not only is definable in the way the distribution and dissemination of the image work, but also in its content and the combination of heroism and desirability in the facial features of the figure. In recent years and in post-revolutionary Iran, the receivers of these pictures played the very role of identification with saintly martyrs. The notion of life after death and the heavenly bodies promised to be given to the pious Muslim man are embedded in the sublimation of sensuousness for a non-material and immortal pleasure. The power relations involved in producing and disseminating a particular type of representation aim to manipulate and shape a specific self-image of individuals in a paternalistic sense; the sacrificial religious/national body.

# Chapter 4- Shahids of the City: Witnessing Figures of Martyrs in Mural Paintings

In one of the hundreds of the mural paintings of Tehran, located in Azadi Street, one of the crowded streets of the city, figure 6, the third Shi'i Imam, Husayn, is depicted while holding a martyr's lifeless body. The Imam's face is veiled and his hair is covered by a green scarf. The description in the painting reads: "our martyrs' blood goes a long with the pure blood of Karbala's martyrs"[1]. The main theme of the painting and the description both imply to the continuance of martyrdom from Shi'i Imams to contemporary martyrs of the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

The Tehran murals are significantly a considerable source of contemporary Iranain visual culture. While the mural paintings are mostly located in crowded public spaces, highways and main streets, which are identified as places for commercial advertisement; the post-revolutionary Iran murals' dominant theme is martyrdom. These paintings, which are all comissioned by the government, play a critical role in the Islamic republic propaganda for more than three decades. These murals illustrate the conspicuous bodies of "neo-martyrs" who are the new heroes of the community (Bombardier, 2013). New horoes who were shaped by the pattern of saintly martyrs, become patterns for the new generation of martyrs. As the medium of ideological messages, murals, however, do not carry coherent analogous features which explicitly imply to a specific understanding of martyrdom, body, and death. Rather, as we saw in the Foucauldian model of power in the first chapter, the Islamic Republic does not function as a monotonous, uniform and monolithic totality. Mural paintings of martyrdom in Iran reveal the complexities of power

[1] The field of Karbala is the place Imam Husayn and most of his family member earned their martyrdom. For the detailed story see chapter 3.

relations which function with "methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus." (1990: 89).

Figure 6. Mural painting in Azadi Street, Tehran, Iran. (Taken by Keivan Karimi, 2012)

In this chapter, I will seek for answering the questions regarding the critical role of the mural paintings of the Iran-Iraq war martyrs in representing sexual politics and the regulatory power of Islamic republic over life and death of bodies. How the sexual politics of Islamic discourse regulated the population in order to ensure its survival and what is the role of mural paintings in mobilizing masses of people through maintaining the homosocial atmosphere of the society? How hundreds of thousands of Iranian youth offered their lives for the Islamic revolution of

1979 and the ensuing Iran-Iraq war? I will examine the work of mural paintings of Tehran as a continuance of the ideological use of visualization in order to produce and reproduce masculine sacrificial religious/national body. Here, we will see how the bodies who are produced by the ideological tool of power, become patterns and role models for reproducing themselvesas well as the social relations that revolve around them.

By reinterpreting the role of mediational images, as witnessing figures, I will show how the figure of Shahid, which I talked about in the second chapter as beautiful adolscent who is the witness of the goodness of God, is interconnected with the figure of martyr. I will argue that, in the homosocial environment of Iran, the discourse of martyrdom is amalgamated with a non-material and homoerotic love between the warrior and the saintly martyr. By non-material homoeroticism, I am referring to the bonds andsimultaneously tensions between homosociality and homoeroticism. As Sedgwick articulates, the boundaries between homosexuality and homosociality are blurred. While in the homosocial environment of post-revolutionary Iran, "homosexual panic" (Sedgwick, 1985: 88) is what conceals same-sex desire, homoerotic love is interpreted as a non-material true love which is not a sinful act, as I identified in the second chapter. Saintly martyr, the lord of martyrs Imam Husayn in particular, becomes the true lover and object of desire who is waiting for the martyr at the end of the path of martyrdom. This metaphorical conceptualization of martyrdom, by interpreting the ultimate love and desire as a selfless tragic love which can be achieved merely by the death of the warrior, determines body as the barrier of true love. Therefore, reaching the true love passes through the annihilation of materiality or the body. In the second section of this chapter, construction for annihilation, I will examine the way the discourse of martyrdom in post-revolutionary Iran provides a path for self-disciplined body through biopower towards self-annihilation by defining the true self beyond the

real and materialized self. As this sacrificial masculine body is constructed through the discourse of homosociality and the discourse of martyrdom, it is produced and reproduced by being mass represented by Islamic propaganda. Nonetheless, not all martyrs are included in the category of religious/national body. In the last section of the chapter, I will identify the exclusionary attitude of the Islamic Republic of Iran's politics of life and death by analyzing the exclusion of the dead bodies of dissidents from the category of sacrificial religious/national bodies.

## 4.1. Homosocial/Homoerotic Martyrdom

Sex segregation, gender division of labour and women's veiling, contributed to the reemergance of homosocial space in post-revolutionary Iran (Moallem, 2005; Afary, 2009). In the second chapter, I analyzed that as the Islamic Republic is establishing an Islamic society by redefining public/private, man/woman, and homosexual/heterosexual, it simultaneously challenges the binary order of modernity by providing a homosocial environment defined under the title of Islamic heteronormativity. While providing the space of homosociality, tolerance towards same-sex desire diminished dramatically in post-revolutionary Iran. By putting homoeroticism out of the picture, Islamic Repulic represents homosociality stripped from eroticism and sensuality. As we saw in the first chapter through the discussion on nationalism, sensuousness is sublimated to the national goals of the dominant ideology. Yet, this so-called purified representation of homosocial space, can be read differently by looking at the visual and textual representations of camaraderie in Iran. The textual and visual representations left from the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war, shows a romanticized and, debatably, eroticized picture of the warriors in the battlefield.

Yet, there are different readings of the representation of camaradie whether these representations are witnessing homosexual practices or no. Moallem (2005) reads the homosocial environment

of the battlefield in the Iran-Iraq war a place for male homoeroticism. The close death and "the lingering moment between life and death" according to her, produces "a possibility of erotic love" (2005: 116). She sees the daily life of martyrs in the battlefield, bathing, kissing and hugging, not merely as a sign of cultural homosociality. while the warrior is somewhere between this world and the other, eroticism comes out of its religious paradigm. Indeed, how she starts this section of her book titling as "The (homo) eroticization of War", with Battaille's statement: "The meaning of eroticism escapes anyone who cannot see its religious meaning" (Georges Bataille, 1989), discloses her argument on the eroticized implication of war.

Moallem does not explicitly talk about the homosexual relationships in the war zone, although, by reffering to the daily life and intimacy between warriors, asserts homoeroticism and connotes to homosexuality. The difference between homoeroticism and homosexuality in this context goes along with what I discussed in the second chapter. As I examined, the practice of gazing and its sexual arousal was not recognised sinful in Iranian homoerotic culture as long as a "sinful act" does not happen. Afary, however, talks about the possibility of homosexual practices in the battlefield with more caution. She acknowledges the eroticized and romanticized notions of war and martyrdom, though looking forward to the future researches to see whether the narratives of "passionate scenes of love and devotion" are the stories of homosexual relationships in war zone or a metaphorical expression of homoeroticism stripped from sensuality (Afary, 2009: 288). Rather, she focuses on the same-sex attractions in sex-segregated society outside the battlefield as practices not categorized unusual and seen as part of the premarital experience of adolscents and youth. What I am concerned with in this study, nonetheless, is not whether these narratives and representations connote to homosexual practices. As I have already positioned my study

within the field of the representations which are the medium of the dominant ideology, the argument, here, deals with the work of representation and its effects on the society.

Figure 7, which is painted in 1990 and located in Modarres highway in Tehran, portraits a beardless adolescent who is leaned to his weapon which has a portrait of Imam Khomeini, the leader of Iranian revolution, on its top. On his red headband, connoting to the color of blood and the sign of his close martyrdom, is written: "O moon of BaniHashim", which invokes the beauty of Abu-al-Fazl, Husayn's half-brother who was also martyred in the battle of Karbala, and I discussed on figure 5 in chapter three. The description of the painting is: '*Basij*', Iranian volunteer para-military force, 'is the school of love and the doctrine of *Shahids* and anonymous martyrs'. In this description we see the emphasis on self-consciousness and subjectivity of warriors as volunteers of martyrdom. Indeed, almost all of the warriors were volunteer youth and youngsters who were not properly trained for the battlefield. This mural is one of the hundreds of mural paintings illustrating *Basijis*, Volunteer forces, during the war and afterwards in cityscape. The other remarkable point in the description is how *Basij* as the school of love, *Shahid*and the connotation of the beauty of saintly martyr are juxtaposed. This specific juxtaposition leads us to a better understanding of the implication of love in this context. It is dominantly interpreted as non-material mystical love which is privileged to the material and sensual love. Putting love in the discourse of martyrdom, while connoting the metaphorical concept of *Shahid* and the beauty of a saintly martyr, reveals a non-material homoerotic love.

In the hierarchical positioning of sensual inferior to transcendental, this mysticized and romanticized definition of military and war appear as an ideological tool which directs (homo) eroticism to the politics of death. The politics here are mainly concerned with the integrity of the territory and the national boundaries of the nation-state. Later in this chapter, we will see how, in

the representations of camaraderie and heroism in the war zone, homoeroticism is sublimated to the mystical understanding of "oneness with the lover" after death. At this point, the discourse of homosociality and the discourse of martyrdom meet and the politics by which the sacrificial masculine body is defined as the ideological body to be structured and reproduced is put into play.

Figure 7 Mural painting in ModarresHighway.Tehran,Iran. (Color figure available online)

*Shahid*, or witness, here seems to be two-sided. As we saw in the second chapter, the practice of gazing at *Shahid*, as the witness of the beauty and the goodness of god, has a long history of homoeroticism in Persian poetry. It has always been seen as an ambiguous figure of simultaneously erotic and mystical love. The practice of gazing has also roots in Sufism, which I have examined in the third chapter. In this practice, by gazing at the beauty of Shi'i Imams, in

portraits and depictions, one can achieve the internal Imam, which is the mediation of the transcendence. On the other hand, the term martyr, which originally comes from Greek, and *Shaheed*, which is an Arabic word and used in both Arabic and Persian, literally mean witness or *Shahid*. While, the mural paintings of martyrs are at the same time gazing and being gazed, we can metaphorically trace both practices of gazing, in Sufism and in homoeroticism, in the visual representation of young martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war. Both Moallem (2005) and Afary (2009) point to the narratives and poetries of the war which narrate the passionate love for death and union with the lover. This lover is a saintly martyr, mostly named as Imam Husayn, the lord of martyrs. We have already seen a scene of this union and oneness with Imam Husayn in figure 1. The irony here is how the tragic death of the warrior is translated to a homoerotic poetry (Moallem, 2005: 117) to be celebrated.

The martyrdom of Husayn, Imam Ali's son who died in the battle of Karbala in 680, for centuries, is regarded as "the supreme self-sacrifice" and has been commemorated and relived annually in his mourning (Chelkowsky, 1980: 32). The historical narratives and commemorating anniversaries has overloaded this figure with symbolic and mythical power. In Shi'ism, he is recognized as the myth of "dedication to pure truth" in a world in which the "oppressive tyranny" is repeatedly triumphing (Fischer, 1980: 8). By Islamic Republic, the myth of Imam Husayn and the celebration of martyrdom have been defined as "seeking for love". In this sense, only real lovers, who are drunk by the wine of love and cannot tolerate separation from their lovers, are ready for martyrdom (Cook, 2004).In this regard, the non-political understanding of martyrdom as sacrifice for God has been conflated with seeking for true love. This romantic sacrifice reinforced the detachment of the term martyrdom more and more from its historical context and stripped from its social and political factors.

Martyrdom is a term mainly defined as courageous death for the sake of religious faith "despite threats and pressures to do otherwise" (Palmer-Fernandez, 2004: 289). in the battle of good against evil. Yet, there are debates on whether martyrdom becomes politicized in the modern era or this concept is historically combined with political implications. Smith argues that while many scholars prefered the word 'self-sacrifice', he chooses martyrdom to follow the historical context of it. Adressing to the early Christian martyrs, he asserts that there has always been a political implication concerning the issue of martyrdom. He argues that the term martyrdom is always mingled with whether a secular, such as nationalism and communism, or religious faith which both are politically shaped(Smith, 2008). In the context of Iranian Shi'ism, however, Flaskerud argues that "non-politicized aspects of memorial culture" regarding the death of saintly Shi'i martyrs is politicized through the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (Flaskerud, 2013). What Flaskerud considered as apolitical memorial culture of Shi'ism is indeed shaped by political motivations.

Looking at different historical narratives of the martyrdom of Imams, we can see that crucial political controversy led to their death. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn, for instance, as Aghaie discusses, was the consequence of struggles for power between two branches of Islam,Shi'i and Sunni (Aghaie, 2004). By considering the political significance of martyrdom, there is still the question of whether the warriors are aware of the political advantages of their martyrdom for the dominant ideology or no. Dorraj argues that self-consciousness within the context of Iranian Shi'ism, is not only defined as consciousness towards personal implication of death, but also to the political one (Dorraj, 1997). In other words, martyrs of the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, according to him, are aware of the fact that they are sacrificing their bodies for the ideology. However, we cannot ignore the mystification of religious figures by meta-historical

narratives of the truth and the way emotional act of sacrifice is shaped; the emotional act which is denied by representing the act of martyrdom as a self-conscious and subjective act of annihilation. Dorraj, nonetheless, goes a step further by continuing that martyrdom which is seen as self-negation is often an act of self-aggrandizement by strengthening "the communal and personal sense of honor" as a fact of cultural and historical vitality (Dorraj, 1997: 491). By this argument, martyrdom regenerates the community. Self-negation is transformed to self-aggrandizement through self-identification with a collective identity of religious nation. In this reciprocal relation, the martyr is produced by the pre-defined religious/national identity and produces a pattern for this collective identity.

## 4.2. Construction for Annihilation

By martyrdom becoming the ultimate representation of the oneness of individual with nation, the lover with beloved, and the martyr with god (Varzi, 2006:47), a path of disciplining the individuals and regulating the population, as I brought up in Foucault's discussion on biopower in the first chapter, ends up with the politics of death. In this path, according to Dorraj, the self-awareness of subjects, who consciously offer their bodies for their religion and nation, become the tool of regeneration through self-annihilation. This argument suggests us to see how biopolitics and the politics of death fit and work together. The sacrificial death of a martyr is a tool for biopower to discipline and regulate a new generation of martyrs.

The discourse of martyrdom in modern Iran developed by Muslim intellectuals such as Ali Shariati, who was simultaneously dealing with martyrdom and the concepts of self-awareness and self-construction (Rahnema, 2000). The idea of martyrdom, which has been practically well-elaborated in revolutionary and post-revolution Iran, is conflated with the idea of collective

national identity; an identity which hesitates between life and death, construction and annihilation. National identity has been shaped by the very modern notions of conscious subjectivity, as 'self-awareness', and self-disciplined body, as 'self-construction', in Shariati's words (1989). Regarding the notions of self-awareness and self-construction, Varzi argues that within the discourse of martyrdom, "self-annihilation can only occur after a self is constructed and available for annihilation" (Varzi, 2006: 7). For Shariati, the self is constructed just by returning to self from exoteric existence to esoteric. In order to pass the exoteric stage of being and see the 'truth', one should annihilate the curtains and veils of reality, or exoteric being (2006: 6-9). Therefore, the act of returning to self as the way of self-awareness and subsequently self-construction passes through the annihilation of the self, or the materiality of self. The role of image, in the process of passing the exoteric stages to see the internal truth, goes back to what I talked about in the previous chapters as mediational images. Here is the place for visual representation to function as a mediation of these two worlds. This is how the portraits, depictions and images are imbedded in ideological contexts of Iranian Shi'ism. The depictions of martyrs in mural paintings are also the vehicles for defining the union of martyr's body with nation, god and the saintly martyr.

In one of the mural paintings located in Tehran city center, figure 8, we can see a narrative of the self-construction for self-annihilation of the ideological body in post-revolutionary Iran in order to give birth to the new generation of masculine sacrificial bodies. Reading the picture from right to left, we see the religious and spiritual leader of the Iranian revolution, Khomeini, and a mass of soldiers behind him, colored blue just like Khomeini's own face and hand. In the center of the picture, there is an anonymous adolescent, painted with life-like colors, with a weapon in his hand looking up to the skies. On the right, Khamenei, the current leader of Islamic Republic, is

depicted with his beard and turban as the continuance of the flag of Iran. Unlike Khomeini's face, his face is painted with live colors. Both leaders are depicted bigger than the adolescent and are looking to the horizon. The description of the painting is a statement by the current religious and spiritual leader, Khamenei: 'the training of god-seeker *Basiji* youth is the biggest victory of Imam [Khomeini]". While the blue-colored bodies behind Khomeini represent sacrificial masculine bodies nurtured by Khomeini to seek god, they are martyred and substituted by the young generation of *Basiji* represented in color while gazing at the skies which implies to his seeking for god. This anonymous adolescent is in the center of the picture of the Islamic Republic of Iran which is started by Khomeini and continued to Khamenei with his mediatory role. This picture shows us the romantic sacrificial mediation of the anonymous adolescents who witness the other world and become part of the cycle of regenerating new sacrificial bodies while seeking for the true self and true love.


Figure 8 Mural painting of the two leaders of Islamic Republic and a Basiji, Enghelab Square. Tehran, Iran. (Color figure available online)

By exemplifying martyrdom and sacrificial body, the common feature of the mural paintings is how this body is in the service of the ideological values of Islamic Republic. Although there are murals depicting specific individuals martyred in the war, there are a great number of paintings representing an anonymous warrior. As Marzolf points, "these portraits bear few individual traits, and their constant repetition effectively turns the martyr into a mass phenomenon" (Marzolf, 2013). He also argues that representation of martyrs' bodies, are constituted upon the claim that due to the nature of visual representation, these visualized bodies remain "to a certain extent virtual" (Ibid). In this regards, the witnessing role of the depictions as mediation between this world and the other, is emphasized by their virtual characteristic. There is also long life of the mural paintings, which connotes to the immortality of these generalized bodies and revitalizes the collective memories of war and resistance. Through this process, images are mediums for "the creation of public identity and memory in the context of the Iran–Iraq War and its ritualized remembrance, while simultaneously serving as powerful visual mechanisms through which a young and unsteady Islamic Republic struggled to define and defend itself" (Gruber, 2009: 684). Nonetheless, not all the murdered bodies of war are "officially" considered as martyrs and being represented in public sphere.

By putting the two discourses of 'homosocial/homoerotic martyrdom' and 'construction for annihilation' together, I analyzed the way true love and true self are located at the end of the path of martyrdom. True love is the homoerotic love between the warrior who seeks for martyrdom and the saintly martyr as the true lover and the true object of desire. On the other side, true self is the non-material self which is hierarchically recognized superior to the real material self. This seeking for the ultimate truth of self and love is shaped through self-awareness in the discourse of martyrdom in post-revolutionary Iran. In this discourse, by emphasizing on the conscious act

of self-sacrifice, while giving a mystified picture of truth which can only be achieved by annihilation of one's materiality, volunteer act of martyrdom is shaped and the individuals participation in the reproduction of the system of martyrdom is secured.

## 4.3. Excluded Dissidents

While the ideological bodies of Iranian religious nationalism are over-visualized in public space, there are bodies marginalized as "other" by being pushed out from the public eye. Visibility, with its close bonds with social recognition, is manipulated and shaped by power and its tools.In her work on the discriminatory and exclusionary role of power relations regarding the lives and deaths of bodies in post-revolutionary Iran, Talebi addresses to "two major camps" of people though with shifting boundaries; one is the individuals fitting in the "determined criteria of upholding unity", as "those belonging to us" and the other was including any other who is deviant from Islamic ideology, as "those not belonging to us" (Talebi, 2013: 132). This 'us' here implies the actors of the dominant ideology in Islamic Republic who are officially and politically included in the category of religious/national. The excluded ones, as "those not belonging to us", are the ideologically dissidents; for instance, Islamic leftists, Marxists, and non-Muslims. Talebi continues that this categorization exists for the martyrs of these two camps as "official" and "unofficial" martyrs. The first group of martyrs is officially recognized as martyrs and their death is sanctified and purified. In contrast, the bodies of the martyrs of the second camp are recognized as corruption and pollution (2003: 132).

The celebration of death of "those belonging to us" is how the exclusionary recognition of death treats differently with dead bodies. While, as Agamben (1988) articulates, the death of some bodies is recognized as sacrifice, there are other bodies whose death, even in the same battlefield, reveals the fact that their lives are bare, so cannot be sacrificed and celebrated. The biological

fact of life plays its role even within the regulation and categorization of kinds of death. Dead bodies of dissidents are deviant, impure , and contagious. They are not only buried in places far from cities and vilages, but also are discriminated by their invisibility in public sphere. This exclusionary and discriminatory attitude towards dead bodies, is in fact a regulatory power over the new generation of living bodies not to recognize and be contaminated by the dissidents.

The religious/national body, as we have seen in the first chapter, is defined to exclude the bodies that stand outside its purview. As the definition of religious/national body is interconnected with sacrificing for the dominant ideology, the killed bodies of the revolution or Iran-Iraq war that are ironically recognized not enough Muslim, whether Islamic leftists or Marxists, are disappeared from the public spaces, and subsequently erased from the collective memory. The visual representation of martyrs is the medium of the ideology to reproduce the predefined religious/national body. With this logic, the efforts for the elimination of the so called unofficial martyrs are in line with the reproduction of a specific ideological body.

# Conclusion

The thesis argued that the visual representation of martyred bodies, Shi'i saintly martyrs and Islamic Republic martyrs, is a crucial vehicle of the dominant ideology of religious nationalism in post-revolutionary Iran to regulate life and death of bodies. In this regard, the role of sexual politics and their contribution to the production of masculine sacrificial religious national body through visual representations is analyzed by juxtaposing the discourse of homosociality and the discourse of martyrdom.

Homosociality, which implies the representation of the Iranian homoerotic culture as non-homoerotic and non-sexual relationships, mainly emerged after the beginning of the cultural interaction of Iranians and Europeans in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Iranians started to internalize the western modern notion of heteronormalization as a sign of progress by disguising homoerotic relations and introducing them as homosociality. By differentiating homoeroticism and homosociality as two different historical eras, I emphasize on a historical shift in public/political privileging of each of these concepts. While in both historical periods there were both homosociality and homoerotic love and practices, the public representation of homoeroticism has been eliminated and substituted by homosociality. Although this historical narrative puts emphasis on the encounter with Europe as a crucial contributor to the appearance of the discourse of modernity and the emergence of the notions such as nation-state and subsequently nationalism in Iran, it neither means that the encounter is the only actor in Iranian modernity nor it would deny the mutual impacts of the interaction on both Iranians and Europeans. Nonetheless, what I dealt with in this study is how the transfer of concepts, and the reaction to and against them, shaped a local form of regulatory power which adapted the western

modern techniques of controlling and regulating bodies and sexuality. These western modern techniques combined with the patterns of culture and selfhood reveal a local form of modernity which challenges Foucault's discussion on the 1979 Iranian revolution as an authentic anti-modern movement. Instead, in this study my argument on the localized techniques of modern power, not only over life but also over death of bodies, is a modification to Foucauldian analysis of western modern power.

By this turning point in the early nineteenth century and the shift in the representation of homoeroticism, the paintings and depictions of beautiful desirable male adolescent, Shahid, as the object of homoerotic desire was eliminated. Shahid was a well-known figure in Persian poetry and Sufi tales which means testimony and connotes to witnessing the beauty of god. This figure was the object of the practice of gazing by Muslim mystics and ordinary people as a way of seeing the goodness of god in the immanence of the human body from the mid-ninth century. Notably, the same practice of gazing at the faces of the Shi'i Imams' portrayals has been common among Sufi cults since relatively the same time, ninth century. The belief here was gazing at the portrayal of Imam, makes a sight of divine beauty possible. Yet, portraying Imams with visible facial features and the practice of gazing was not popular among ordinary people until the early nineteenth century. I argued that the elimination of the representation of Shahids in the beginning of the nineteenth century is simultaneous with the popularization of the visual representation of martyred Shi'i Imams. In these imaginary portraits, Shi'i martyrs are mostly depicted young with the same understanding of beauty as Shahids were being portrayed such as arched-eyebrows, narcissus-eyes, and ruby lips. However, Shahids were beardless and young Shi'i martyrs were bearded, which was a sign of virility. This combination of facial features, as I discussed in the third chapter, is more connoting to the long history of homoeroticism in Iran,

rather than effeminization. These forms of representation through the politics of homosociality in post-revolutionary Iran are a crucial tool for regulating and disciplining bodies.

This tendency towards depicting Shi'i martyred Imams continued to exist and even intensified by the 1979 Iranian revolution and the emergence of Iranian religious nationalism under the label of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In post-revolutionary Iran, the depictions of Saintly martyrs are mass-represented as posters, affordable paintings and pocket-size icons. Entering the consumer culture, the facial features got gradually more exaggerated and beautified. I made use of Mitchel's analysis of images and the role of media as the dialectic of power and desirability in order to examine the mass production of the depictions of Saintly martyrs in post-revolutionary Iran. I argued that Saintly martyrs, as failed heroes, are the simultaneous representation of power and oppression, they are manly warriors and failed. Their faces are considered to be the sign of divine beauty while as warriors of god they seem to be having muscular and rough bodies. This combination goes along with the images being the object of commercial appeal and demanding desire in order to be sold. This is how the Saintly martyr is fetishized and transformed to the object of desire which has certain political effects that I dealt with in the last chapter.

Going further for answering the questions of why and for whom Saintly martyrs became the object of desire, in chapter two and four I examined how by the 1979 Islamic revolution and the sexual politics of Islamic Republic the politics of homosociality under the title of Islamic heteronormalization emerged. While the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) afterwards reinforced the Shi'i-nationalist discourse against the internal threats and outsiders' attacks, the mechanisms of control over bodies, started to discipline bodies and regulate population towards the nationalistic goals of preserving the borders of nation-state by interpreting it as the sacred battle against evil. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the third Shi'i imam known as the lord of

martyrs, and his family has been reinterpreted and deemed as the battle of Shi'i Iran against Sunni Iraq. The commemoration of martyrdom, mingled with the Iranian visual culture, became more and more normative. The visual representation of Saintly martyrs, Imam Husayn in particular, became the medium of celebrating martyrdom. Virility or manhood was merely celebrated if it is disciplined towards self-sacrifice and martyrdom. The discourse of martyrdom within the homosocial environment of post-revolutionary Iran has created a tragic desexualized homoerotic love between the warriors and saintly martyrs. Saintly martyr, as the object of desire, was the end of the path of martyrdom. The masculine sacrificial body could achieve his object of desire only by passing through the path and becoming one with him.

As sexual politics redirect desire and love to a non-material oneness with the object of love after death, the materiality of the body becomes the barrierof the self. One should annihilate his materiality to achieve the true love. This annihilation can only happen if one is aware of the true meaning of self. For elaborating my argument on the function of the politics of life towards death, in the second part of chapter four, I have shown how within the context of Iranian religious nationalism a selfis constructed through self-awareness, or consciousness, to learn that his materiality is the veil of the truth. In this sense, a self is being shaped in order to go beyond this constructed self which is the veil of the true self. This hierarchized relation of reality as inferior to truth, materiality as inferior to transcendence, is how the politics of life and death collude in order to construct bodies which voluntarilyannihilate themselves in order to achieve their true self and true love. The representation of saintly martyr, as the object of true love, in this regard, function to exert control, discipline, and regulation on bodies by producing a sense of self-annihilation as a way of reaching the truth. Self-disciplined body, as a modern conscious subject, becomes a self-sacrificial body through the amalgamation of modern disciplinary power

and the hierarchical understanding of materiality and transcendence in Iranian Shi'ism. This is how the localized notions of biopower/necropolitics and alternative modernity function in the political structure of Islamic Republic.

The construction of masculine sacrificial religious national body in post-revolutionary Iran is also reinforced and ensured through the mural paintings of martyrs which dominate the public sphere. The celebration of martyrdom and masculine sacrificial body, however, does not include all the martyrs of the 1979 revolution or of the Iran-Iraq war; rather, the exclusionary part of power identifies and differentiates dead bodies that are out of the purview of the pre-defined category of religious/national body. The excluded dead bodies are the martyrs of the revolution and the war who are identified as ideologically not in agreement with the dominant ideology of Iranian religious nationalism. The death of these bodies is not therefore celebrated and not recognized as sacrifice. While the visual representation of martyrs on the mural paintings, as the propaganda of Islamic Republic, is a way of structuralizing and reproducing masculine sacrificial body, the excluded dead bodies are eliminated from the public sphere and excluded from visual representations in order to be erased from the collective memory and subsequently not to be reproduced and discipline bodies out of the system.

The thesis tried to give a broad but detailed picture of the work of the ideological power and sexual politics in regulating and shaping bodies by the vehicle of visual representation in post-revolutionary Iran. However, the complexities of power relations and different angles of the issue was one of the difficulties in this research. The limitation of literature on the relation of religion, sexual politics, and visual culture in post-revolutionary Iran was another problem. This work hopes to be encouraging for more research on the area of religion, sexuality and national politics in Iran.

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