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Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine*: Home, Citizenship, and Homosexuality

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Abstract

The enforcement of sex-reassignment surgery (SRS) for Muslim homosexual and transgender individuals in Iran to confirm them into binary gender/sex exacerbates their ordeal. Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine* explores the predicament and negotiation of its Muslim lesbian protagonist, Sahar, who attempts to re-envision the cultures of citizenship and belongingness to home. This paper, therefore, examines Sahar's experience by drawing on Arthur Bradley's nihilopolitical concept of unbearable life. It explores how the homosexual identity and belongingness of Sahar are erased through the nihilopolitics of religio-cultural and Iranian state nexus, and how she deals with it and gives birth to a new politics of resistance. I argue that Sahar's deliberate continuation of her homosexuality and her decision not to emigrate to some liberal country (even when she was offered the opportunity) is a conscious attempt at fighting to redefine the conceptual and affective space of belongingness to the state and the imaginary gendered home.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Transgender, Affect, Muslims, SRS, Citizenship, Iran

Introduction

Amongst the growing call (especially from the West) to recognise transgender and homosexual dispositions as an equally respectable sexual and gender identities, Muslims (like some Christians and followers of many other religions) have put their energy into relegating the topic as taboo and erasing the recognition of sexualities other than the binary (male and female) by viewing them as an abomination and incoherent with Islamic sexual morality.[1] Unclarity and absence of modern linguistic terminologies in primary Islamic sources concerning nonbinary sexuality and gender and the stubbornness of Muslim religious scholars on heteronormativity have kept the discussion on nonbinary sexualities and genders curtailed and those belonging to them invisible, silenced, erased, and in misery.[2] Muslim religious scholars, except a few, argue that, in Islam, gender is binary (i.e.

[1] J. Mark Halstead and Katarzyna Lewicka, 'Should Homosexuality Be Taught as an Acceptable Alternative Lifestyle? A Muslim Perspective,' *Cambridge Journal of Education* 28, no. 1 (1998), https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764980280105; M. Alipour, 'Essentialism and Islamic Theology of Homosexuality: A Critical Reflection on an Essentialist Epistemology toward Same-Sex Desires and Acts in Islam,' *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no. 14 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1289001.

[2] Junaid B. Jahangir and Hussein Abdul-Latif, 'Investigating the Islamic Perspective on Homosexuality,' *Journal of Homosexuality* 63, no. 7 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1116344.

man and woman), and sexual intercourse is *halal* (acceptable) only between man and woman or male and female.[3] Instead of understanding a nonbinary sexual and gender disposition in terms of inherent emotions and acknowledging the miserable condition of those who identify as LGBTIQA+ by being categorised through an Islamic concept of humanism,[4] they reject it on medical grounds as a psychological ailment and on religious grounds as a sin and vulgar.[5] In addition to rejecting a non-binary identity, they do not consider an individual who has non-heterosexual sexuality as belonging to what I term as their religio-cultural ideological home and as an equal citizen. Sara Farizan's *If You Could Be Mine*[6] explores the case of a Muslim homosexual girl, Sahar, whose sexuality is erased as religiously, culturally, and legally derecognised and unintelligible. Home and citizenship, and a struggle to redefine them and claim belongingness are the central tropes in Sara Frizan's *If You Could Be Mine* which I intended to examine to explore Sahar's experiences of erasure and resistance. Sahar is situated in Teran, the capital of Iran, where transgender people are required by religio-cultural and state pressure to undergo surgery to make their bodies obedient to binary sex/gender conformity and where homosexuals are punished with death by the state. The novel unravels a passionate love between Sahar and her girlfriend, Nasrin, and the ensuing ordeal that they, especially Sahar, have to undergo in the face of religious, legal, and cultural norms. Despite her passionate love for her girlfriend, Sahar cannot publicly announce it. She has to undergo sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) to have her body organs converted into that of a male if she wants to be religio-culturally and legally allowed to marry a woman. After facing the painful dilemma of whether to go for surgery, she ultimately decides in the negative and to continue with her sexual relationship with Nasrin as it is. She also decides not to leave the country. The experiences of Sahar and Nasrin portrayed in the novel have urgency and currency in the sense that they invite attention to the ignored painful experiences of a sexual minority that is silenced in the name of religion in the Muslim world, in general, and in the name of religion and legal choice of surgery in Iran, in particular. By focusing on the enforcement of SRS for Sahar, her deliberate continuation of homosexuality and her refusal to emigrate to a liberal country, I examine how she resists her erasure and insists on belonging not only to the sexuality with which she was born but also to the country of her birth; I examine how she attempts to redefine the imaginaries that define the religio-cultural home and citizenship of the state. The ideological home is not geographical or built with tangible walls. It is abstract; consisting of imaginary geography constructed through discursive (b)orders of gender and sexuality sourced from religious and cultural imaginaries. Those who conform to the gender and sexuality imaginaries are viewed as belonging to the home, while others are derecognised as strangers and a threat to society. Citizenship is not only a national identity and a legal

[3] Levi Geir Eidhamar, 'Is Gayness a Test from Allah? Typologies in Muslim Stances on Homosexuality,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25, no. 2 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2013.869882; Jahangir and Abdul-Latif, 'Investigating the Islamic Perspective on Homosexuality.'

[4] For details about an Islamic concept of humanism, see Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (Oneworld, 2011), https://doi.org/10.7817/jameroriesoci.133.4.0731.

[5] M. Alipour, 'Islamic Shari'a Law, Neotraditionalist Muslim Scholars and Transgender Sex-Reassignment Surgery: A Case Study of Ayatollah Khomeini's and Sheikh Al-Tantawi's Fatwas,' *International Journal of Transgenderism* 18, no. 1 (2017): 91–103, https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2016.1250239.

[6] Sara Farizan, *If You Could Be Mine* (Algonquin Young Readers, 2013).

recognition by the state by owning its citizens, but it is also a recognition of the civilian rights of the citizen.[7] Debating conceptual and affective aspects of citizenship allows us to understand its oppression and associated cultures of belonging by diverse communities/subjects and also explore the possibilities of reframing national identity and citizenship.[8] Examining Sahar's negotiation of the imaginaries of gendered and sexualised home and citizenship, I am here engaging in conceptual and affective re-envisioning of citizenship and home in relation to non-heterosexual sexuality. Sahar is well aware of how her thinking is shaped in her cultural context, but she is also aware of her right to assert her sexuality because of by western individualist and cultural inroads. Therefore, I am also engaged in reconceptualising an epistemological canvas that can frame the homosexual subjectivity of a Muslim woman (like Sahar) who has social, cultural, intellectual, and geographical mobility and is aware and conscious of secular liberal human rights. It, however, does not mean that I present secular or western liberal thoughts as emancipatory or superior in liberating a Muslim lesbian in Iran. Instead, I emphasise the need for the reframing of the analytical canvas and perspectives beyond the set of religious and cultural ones to map the agency of a mobile Muslim lesbian subject. Such a subject has given birth to a new politics of resistance at the very moments and junctures of friction—between the set frames and newly gained individualist consciousness. Though this new politics is as yet peripheral, as it is given birth in the interstices, it is likely to have a gradual but deep transformational impact on the intelligible core/home concepts of sexuality and gender.

The religious and cultural norms and gendered laws in Iran refuse to recognise the nonheterosexuality of Sahar and, as such, deprive her of her civilian rights as an equal citizen. It is as if the religio-cultural imaginary of home and the gendered state laws join in a nexus of a sort of sovereign power that in Bradley's terms can be labelled as nihilopolitical.[9] Nihilopolitical sovereign power erases a life, without necessarily killing it. It becomes something that does not merit recognition, rights, and respect – thus rendering it vulnerable to non-grievable oppression, violence, and oblivion.[10] The experience of Sahar can be understood through engaging with the discourse on sovereign power as related to life and death. For example, the ancient Roman dictum of sovereign power 'to make die and let live' worked through decreeing who had to die and who could be allowed to live. Michel Foucault's biopolitical twist of it as 'to make live and let die' observes that the modern states have worked by dividing people into who must live (which means those who must be taken care of regarding rights and facilities), and who must be let die (which means those who are not able to be grieved for and do not qualify for attention and care). Contrary to the Roman dictum and Foucault's biopolitics, Bradley defines sovereign power as the power

[7] Vanessa Evans and Mita Banerjee, *Cultures of Citizenship in the Twenty-First Century: Literary and Cultural Perspectives on a Legal Concept*, ed. Vanessa Evans and Mita Banerjee (Transcript-Verlag, 2024).

[8] Marcus Llanque and Katja Sarkowsky, 'Citizenship of the Dead: Antigone and Beyond,' in *Cultures of Citizenship in the Twenty-First Century: Literary and Cultural Perspectives on a Legal Concept*, ed. Vanessa Evans and Mita Banerjee (Transcript-Verlag, 2024): Muhammad Safdar and Musarat Yasmin, 'Redefining Pakistani Muslim Wifehood in Hamid's and Shamsie's Fiction,' *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.2001158.

[9] Arthur Bradley, *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Political Erasure* (Columbia University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.7312/brad19338.

[10] Bradley, *Unbearable Life*.

'to make life neither live nor die.'[11] It is the power that decides not on life or death, rather it decides on what counts or should count as living (bearable) and what as non-living (unbearable). The life that is declared to be unbearable is put under radical biopolitics—rather nihilopolitics—which make life socially, politically, and even legally intolerable, non-existent, leaving the individual with no rights or the recognition that is otherwise granted to a bearable/living life. Such a life is put into oblivion, erased from public memory, and made to disappear without any trace or records because the sovereign power considers it a threat to its interests and security, an enemy of the people, and a traitor. Nihilopolitics is exercised not just on individuals, but it is also extended to religious, racial, and ethnic groups and even entire social classes and states. In contrast to the affirmative counter-ontology to nihilopolitics posited by theorists of biopolitics from Hannah Arendt to Robert Esposito that claims the irreducible and ineradicable essence of resistance/life, Bradley claims that

> unbearable life produces its own radical conjugations of political subjectivity that cannot easily be made to live or die … The nihilopolitical condition becomes less another state of abjection than the productive site for a new resistant politics [which learns] to become imperceptible …'regaining the taste for anonymity' and resisting the regime of the visible.[12]

However, the unbearable life is not a life that is unworthy of living; rather, it becomes worth living and a ground from which to fight back for those who have been rendered politically non-existent. Such a 'collective political subject position … [rhetorically at least] claims to be both nowhere and everywhere, always already there and yet to come.'[13] It is the politics of willingly being in non-recognition—the already dead—and not integrating or accepting the dominant discourse. It is the politics of insisting on getting one's victimised condition recognised by continuing to be in the same condition. The power in this nihilopolitical recurring action of negating its victims, even when they have already been marginalised into the realm of non-being, 'ironically also ends up conferring upon those victims a certain spectral resistant power or immunity: they "live on" in a state outside life and death.'[14] The violence which continues and keeps repeating over time loses its effectiveness and perpetuates the inexhaustibility of its victim. What Sahar is facing is a nihilopolitical erasure of her sexuality and gender by having been rendered into an unbearable life by the state through the derecognition of transsexuality and enforcement of SRS to align with heterosexuality. Her consistent and prolonged dissatisfaction with her gender, however, ultimately, confers upon her a spectral resistant power or immunity and she decides to continue to live with who she is and does not undergo the transformation surgery. This paper explores how it all happens—her journey from feeling rendered invisible to becoming resistant to the enforcement of the transformation. However, it is relevant here to situate and contextualise her fight in detail.

Transgenders and sex-reassignment surgery in Iran

Gender, sex, and sexuality are distinctive from each other and cannot be intermingled. A person who is male by sex cannot necessarily be man in his gender and masculine in his sexuality; the case of a female born woman is similar. If a person is male in his sex anatomy

[11] Bradley, *Unbearable Life*.

[12] Bradley, *Unbearable Life,* 195.

[13] Bradley, *Unbearable Life,* 195–96.

[14] Bradley, *Unbearable Life,* 194.

but feels like a female in his sexual desire and behaves in a way that is considered feminine, or, if a person is female in her sexual anatomy but feels like a male in her sexual desire and behaves in the way that is viewed as masculine, that person can be called transgender. In Iran, the term transsexual is usually used to refer to transgender people (this is why this paper uses the terms transgender and transsexual interchangeably). If a person feels sexual desire toward and has sexual intercourse with another person of the same sex, that person can be termed homosexual. Homosexual men can be termed 'gay' and women 'lesbian.' Similarly, those who have both male and female sexual organs by birth and feel sexual desire for either women or men or both are different from homosexuals and transgenders. The point that this paper intends to emphasise by defining these distinctions is that other sexualities and genders than heteronormative sexuality and gender can also be dispositional and recognisable—transsexuality is one among them.

In Iran, however, heterosexuality has state backing through the religious *fatwa* (decree) of Ayatollah Khomeini, and transgender or any gender other than the binary masculine/feminine has to undergo surgery to conform biological sex with gender alignment—irrespective of and pre-and post-surgery mental pressure, emotional disorders or and social stigmatisation.[15] From its previous status as being sinful in Islamic *sharia* (law), sex-reassignment surgery was transformed to being permitted in Islam in the late 1980s through the *fatwas* (religious decrees) of Iran's and Egypt's prominent religious scholars: Ayatollah Khomeini and Sheikh al-Tantawi respectively.[16] The Iranian state along with dominant social perspectives view a transgender identity as a gender identity disorder (GID) that must be diagnosed through a medico-judicial procedure and treated through surgery. However, those who have been diagnosed with the 'illness' and do not want to undergo the surgery can continue with their chosen gender identity as long as they do perform 'sinful' acts. This amounts to a derecognition of transsexual identity as dispositional, and its persecution and erasure.

Oversimplification of sexuality and gender and its enforcement into the heterosexual binary by Iranian jurists and society, like many other Muslim countries, gives little consideration to the concept that gender identity and anatomy can exist independently from each other. Such thinkers have little compassion for and do not acknowledge the permissibility of the practice of sexualities other than heterosexuality in Islam and enforce SRS. Iran is not the only state in the world, or, the only Muslim state that gives no recognition and consideration to the ordeal of those with nonnormative dispositional sexuality and gender, there are many other Muslim states that have similar norms and attitudes; however, the point under discussion in this paper is that the state can become directly and actively involved in derecognising homosexuality and transsexuality through various state-backed measures and it leaves no legal option other than to accept SRS. These religio and cultural laws amount to the erasure of those who happily want to continue with their dispositional nonbinary sexuality and gender, which, in Bradley's observations, can render a life unbearable.[17]

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[15] Bijan Pirnia and Kambiz Pirnia, 'Sex Reassignment Surgery in Iran: Re-Birth or Human Rights Violations against Transgender People?,' *Iranian Journal of Public Health* 51, no. 11 (2022): https://doi.org/10.18502/ijph.v51i11.11183; Zara Saeidzadeh, 'Transsexuality in Contemporary Iran: Legal and Social Misrecognition,' *Feminist Legal Studies* 24, no. 3 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-016-9332-x.

[16] Alipour, 'Islamic Shari'a Law.'

[17] Bradley, *Unbearable Life*.

Erasure through the set frames of belonging and resistance through their reframing

The crisis of sexual belongingness, exacerbated by the compulsion to undergo SRS, pervades Sahar's life. With a uterus, periods, womanly face, hips and breasts, and, besides this, sexuality, desires and interests that are traditionally associated with men, Sahar is perplexed and unable to understand where she belongs and why her intrinsic sex and gender are an ethical, religious and cultural vulgarity. A woman in her body but a man in her psychology by birth and through her adolescence and the rest of her life, she is unable to understand where she should claim to belong—male or female—because any nonbinary sexuality and gender have been rendered socially, culturally, and religiously nonexistent in her society. Mother tells her that homosexuality is '*haraam'* ((religiously disallowed) emphasis in original) and father is quite ignorant about her ordeal, not even having an iota that his daughter passionately loves her girlfriend, wants to marry her, and is suffering from severe depression and identity crisis.[18] The religio-cultural and state narratives and construction of gender (the gendered home) do not recognise her sexuality as belonging to the ideological gendered home and as a citizen of the state. They do not even recognize her sexuality as intelligible and subject. This erasure of her sexuality as a non-subject is even worse than the 'panoptical' and biopolitical control of a body.[19] Biopolitics at least recognises the existence of a subject and decides on whom to allow to live and whom to let die. Here, the mother's religiously sourced narrative of labelling homosexuality as '*haram'* and the father's absolute ignorance of Sahar's gender and sex contradiction is a complete negation of even the reality of her gender/sexual predicament. It is the nihilopolitics of negation, of erasure, that renders a life unbearable, a condition of being neither dead nor alive.[20] It is a condition that is worse than being dead. Because even the dead have recognition and rights. However, a life that is nihilopolitcally erased does not entail any rights.

While in this condition of existential crisis Sahar frequently thinks about committing suicide and struggles to find meanings in her life; she reflects on the reality of her inner masculine self by observing other transgenders who had gone through SRS. She observes that Jamshid, a transsexual who had undergone SRS after feeling trapped in a woman's body a, had a masculine way of taking a sip from his teacup by holding the cup from underneath. She reflects on how he knows how to do it. Her reflection on knowing the how of Jamshid's masculinity suggests she is attempting to understand the reality of her masculine ways of dressing, talking, feeling, behaving, and thinking. She frequently tries to figure out whether her masculinity in loving Nasrin is behavioural or dispositional. She also wants to stop loving her but her attempts to figure out her sexual orientation and to stop loving Nasrin end up with a voice from her inner self: 'How do you stop doing something you know you are supposed to do.'[21] Whenever she kisses Nasrin on her lips, she definitely knows that no man or woman can ever make her feel the way she does. Whenever she feels Nasrin's eyes on her, she gets sexually aroused with masculine feelings. She thinks that if that makes her gay, let it be. It signifies that her masculine desire could not be a mental illness, lustful, and

[18] Farizan, *If You Could Be Mine*, 1.

[19] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage Books, 1995), 200.

[20] Boštjan Nedoh, 'Nihilopolitics as Meta-Biopolitics? On Arthur Bradley's *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Political Erasure,' Political Theology* 22, no. 6 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2021.1944000.

[21] Farizan, *If You Could Be Mine*, 2.

misdirected. The desire is rooted inside herself and she has been unable to control the feelings despite being utterly embarrassed by them. She feels trapped by her masculine inner self which drives her to exercise love like a male even when she does not have the required male body. She is trapped between the ideologically constructed gendered/sexualised home (that has derecognised her as a non-subject) and the sexuality and gender that is home/intrinsic to her.

The fear of eventually getting caught for her homosexual desire, not knowing how to move forward, her uncertainty about Nasrin and her passionate love for her push Sahar into a traumatic condition. She says, 'Sometimes I get so angry I want to take off my *roosari* [loose scarf] and run into the streets like a madwoman' because it is increasingly becoming unbearably difficult for her to restrain from talking about how she feels.[22] Unshed tears, hisses, gasps, sobbing, feelings of guilt, anger, rage, nightmares, hate, bitterness, anxiety, and hysteria populate her daily life experience. All this happens to her because she is not sure where she belongs and how to respond to her sexual and gender contradiction.

Her internal conflict raises questions about the utility of SRS because it would neither reduce her internal emotional and psychological pain nor would it end her conflict with the social behaviours. She ultimately resolves to continue as an embodiment of shame, sin, alienation, and incompleteness. That will be a new beginning for her—to acknowledge the reality of her sexuality, live with it, and resist the erasure in whatever way she can without a public confrontation against the set norms. Her agency is shaped by multiple intersectional factors of which her intellectual and cultural mobility are worth discussing.

Though Sahar has not physically travelled to any western country, she has mentally and intellectually gained knowledge through CDs and DVDs that are censored or banned in Iran but are available to her through her cousin Ali (who himself is gay). The smuggled CDs and DVDs featuring banned and censored visuals and culture infiltrate deep into the Iranian youth's daily entertainment and dilute the normative and legal walls that have constructed the religio-cultural core/home, ethics, morality and norms of citizenship. Sahar's spatial mobility across cultural (b)orders into a western liberal and popular culture comes in addition to the one she gets through her travels to college and her studies. She frequently gives references to popular American culture by naming Julia Roberts, Cat Stevens, Madonna, and Lady Gaga. Spatial mobility reshapes patterns of thinking and subjectivity through conceptual contestations, collaborations, and innovations—producing an interstitial subjective space.[23] Sahar's mobility, too, reshapes her subjectivity to enable her to negotiate within the restrictions imposed on her sexuality. In a visit to her girlfriend Parveen Mehdi's home, she observes that though the outer columns and structure of the house are representative of the local cultural and religious aesthetics, the interior is western and modern.

> When Mrs. Mehdi lets go of me, she leads us into her home. Most people in Tehran live in newer apartment buildings, but the Mehdis have this old house. It's very Persian, with large columns and a pointed doorway like you would see in a mosque, but the inside is very Western, with all modern furniture. [24]

[22] Farizan, *If You Could Be Mine*, 4.

[23] Muhammad Safdar and Musarat Yasmin, 'Love and Marriage: Reimagining Muslim Female Subjectivity in Kamila Shamsie's Salt and Saffron,' *Cultural Dynamics* 35, no. 3 (10 June 2023), https://doi.org/10.1177/09213740231183426.

[24] Farizan, *If You Could Be Mine*, 14.

Sahar notices at Mehdi's that the old architectural aesthetics rooted in local culture and religious sensibilities along with modern western furniture have given an innovative look to the home. Further, it needs to be noted that Sahar is in love with Mehdi's daughter, Parveen, and wants to marry her. The Mehdi family are progressive and open to modern cultural inroads, as indicated by the architectural aesthetics and interior of their home. However, the home also signifies that they prefer to be connected with their local aesthetics while learning new ones. There is a similarity between the Mehdi home's architectural aesthetics and Sahar's thinking about the norms of her society when it comes to innovating and carving out a distinctive subjective space. This innovated home not only signifies Sahar's re-shaped patterns of thinking about home but also the deep aesthetic and cultural transformation that upper-class Iran has been undergoing.

In her observations, Sahar frequently refers to the freedom, diversity and human rights that homosexuals enjoy in Europe. While engaging with the concept of God's mercifulness toward His creatures, transsexuality and homosexuality in Islam and social and state behaviours in Iran toward them, her references to Europe invite Islam and the Iranian society and state to understand why Europe has ultimately recognised the human rights of homosexuals, gays and transgenders.

With an interrogative undertone, Sahar questions God's reasons, for creating transgenders with contradictory sex and gender identities and searches for meanings in their life. Sometimes she, with a suggestively questioning mood, ponders over the religious grounding of the erasure of their bodies as incarnations of sin, an aberration from God's plan, an enemy of the state and a lowlife. At others, she wonders if God, the Merciful One, wills them to suffer from what the society and the state have put them into. She knows that God is merciful and has not created them in the wrong body; it is this belief that gives her life hope and meaning against the hopelessness that emanates from within her society. However, she wants God's reason and mercifulness to be more pronounced and louder in understanding and protecting their lives.

Sahar's homosexual experience becomes complex and tormenting when there is complete silence, and no one is willing to understand her. Listening to the pre-and post-surgery experiences of transsexuals, she cannot clearly understand whether she is trapped in the wrong body or if her homosexual love is a trap for her. The condition that her body markers are feminine and easily noticeable for being so without any trace of maleness in them and her disposition masculine, makes her case different from the transsexuals, and she feels it cannot be 'fixed' through SRS. She wants it to be recognised and understood by others, decides against the surgery and continues to live in her home country (Iran) instead of migrating like her gay cousin, Ali, for fear of being caught by the morality police and punished for her homosexuality.

Despite the erasure and derecognition intersected by heteronormative religious, cultural and state imaginaries, she continues with her homosexuality, first with Nasrin and, later on, with Taraneh. Her decision against running away from Iran while calling it her home, continuing with her homosexuality (though secretly and tactfully without open confrontation with norms) and winning the covetous university admission for her medical education signify a new politics by her—the politics of continuing to live as a non-subject in the space of derecognition and unbearable life.[25] However, her way to this decision passes through confusion, feelings of shame and sin, anger, depression and trauma; and, even after

[25] Bradley, *Unbearable Life*.

she has reached the decision, her fight for negotiation and recognition continues. Her erasure confers upon her new avenues of resistance and negotiation. She has learned to move away from Nasrin, engage in love with another girl who is a fellow university student. She has also learnt how to keep her love secret from the public eye and continue with her love while also pursuing her educational and professional career.

Sahar, when she refers to the Quran and God and her belief in Islam, engages the attention of Islamic scholars to rethink and reinterpret the Quranic text from a perspective which is not patriarchal, and which attempts at finding out a place for those like her with dispositional nonbinary. She also invokes the concept of God's mercy and affection to place her sexual and gender identity in Islam. Scott Kugle observes that Muslims will have to be affectionate and empathetic toward the ordeal of dispositional homosexuals and consider their space in Islam while keeping in view Allah's affection and mercifulness.[26] He also argues that Muslims can encounter the western discursive onslaught against Islam by invoking its concept of egalitarianism and humanism centred around God's love and respect for humanity. Sahar's frequent references to Europe while juxtaposing it against Iran can be taken as referring to the need for Islam and Muslims to respond to West's accusations of Islam as being unable to meet the challenges of the modern world including the growing demand by queers for their rights. Islamic epistemologies founded in the practice of *ijtihad*[27] and a modern interpretation of the Quran can help Muslims come up with a unique and decolonial approach to understand the misery of dispositional homosexual and gays.[28] Islamic history has several established evidences of tolerance and respect towards transgenders;[29] however, the modern discourses of human rights have required Islam and Muslims to go beyond just tolerance and respect to give queer individuals recognition and equal human rights. Homosexuality, however, may get considerable supportive interpretive textual evidence from within Islam which can be sufficient to challenge the enforcement of SRS and heterosexuality. Sahar and her transsexual friends plead that Muslims' attention toward re-envisioning the constructed imaginaries of who belongs to 'home' and who can be recognized as a citizen. They situate their plea in humanity, compassion, empathy and God's love for its creatures against the brutality of the nihilopolitics of their erasure symbolised by SRS. Sahar, through her continuation with her nonheterosexuality while deciding against leaving Iran and calling Iran her home, attempts to redefine the conceptual parameters and culture of belongingness and citizenship.

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[26] Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*.

[27] The term *ijtihad* can be defined as 'the independent or original interpretation of problems not precisely covered by the Qurʾān, Hadith (traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad's life and utterances), and *ijmāʿ* (scholarly consensus).'See Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *'ijtihād,' Encyclopedia Britannica,* 11 Apr. 2018, https://www.britannica.com/topic/ijtihad.

[28] Suhraiya Jivraj, Sandeep Bakshi, and Silvia Posocco, 'Decolonial Trajectories: Praxes and Challenges,' *Interventions* 22, no. 4 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1753558; Muhsin Hendricks, 'Islamic Texts: A Source for Acceptance of Queer Individuals into Mainstream Muslim Society,' *The Equal Rights Review* 5 (2010); Sandeep Bakshi, 'The Decolonial Eye/I: Decolonial Enunciations of Queer Diasporic Practices,' *Interventions* 22, no. 4 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749707.

[29] Jahangir and Abdul-Latif, 'Investigating the Islamic Perspective on Homosexuality'; Sabine Schmidtke, 'Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam: A Review Article,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 2 (2018); Erick Laurent, 'Sexuality and Human Rights: An Asian Perspective,' *Journal of Homosexuality* 48, nos 3–4 (2005), https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v48n03_09; Asifa Siraj, '"I Don't Want to Taint the Name of Islam": The Influence of Religion on the Lives of Muslim Lesbians,' *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16, no. 4 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2012.681268.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined how Sahar is erased in her homosexuality (disowned and derecognised as a non-subject) by the imaginaries of home and citizenship formed by intersectional heteronormative discourses of religion, culture, and the state. I have also examined how she resists by claiming her right to belong to her sexuality, religion, and Iran. I have drawn on Bradley's concept of nihilopolitics to examine Sahar's erasure and resistance and argued that she gives birth to a new politics of resistance.[30] I have emphasised the need for analytical and perspectival reframing to capture the non-heterosexual subjectivities of Muslim individuals who are mobile across spaces and cultures. I have also argued that the novel, through its transsexual characters, especially its homosexual female protagonist, Sahar, has spoken about the concepts of empathy and compassion to Islam, Muslims, God, humanity, and the Iranian state, and the need to pay heed to the plight of transgender and homosexual individuals in Iran by considering their sexuality and gender as dispositional and equally respectable. In the novel, Farizan has pointed out that the problem is with the normative imaginary of gender, not with sexuality. Instead of changing sexual orientation, social norms of gender have to be changed. Sahar, along with the other transsexual characters in the novel, has questioned the utility and enforcement of SRS which, they suggest, is nothing more than a tool to implement heteronormativity and ensure the erasure of nonbinary sexuality and gender. They have given birth to a new politics of resistance by persistently narrating (in a tone that is bitter, angry, and protesting) their ordeal. Sahar, especially, has given birth to a new politics of resistance by deciding not to go through SRS and to continue living as a non-subject homosexual who does not run away from her country (Iran) and insists that she will never run away because it is her home. She has negotiated a space for her sexuality without open confrontation with current norms and hopes the situation would one day turn in her favour when Muslims/Islam recognise the need to address modern challenges including understanding the ordeal of dispositional homosexual people and recognising their rights.

[30] Bradley, *Unbearable Life*.

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