Luti Masculinity in Iranian Modernity, 1785-1941: Marginalization and the Anxieties of Proper Masculine Comportment

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LUTI MASCULINITY IN IRANIAN MODERNITY, 1785-1941: MARGINALIZATION AND THE ANXIETIES OF PROPER MASCULINE COMPORTMENT

by

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Abstract

*Luti* Masculinity in Iranian Modernity, 1785-1941: Marginalization and the Anxieties of Proper Masculine Comportment

by

Robert Joseph Bell

Adviser: Professor Samira Haj

This paper offers a genealogy of changing conceptualizations and performances of masculinity in 19th and early to mid-20th century Iran, and examines in particular a unique group of masculine subjects known as the *lutis*. The first component of the analysis traces the historical lineage of these *lutis*, situating their emergence out of Persian Sufi brotherhoods, bandit clans (‘ayyar), and guild-like organizations (*futuwwa*) from the period of the 15th to the 19th century CE. This section provides an account of the most pertinent and distinguishing rites, attitudes, and practices of the *lutis*, most notably their involvement in the tradition of Iranian wrestling (*koshti pahlavani*) as performed in so-called Houses of Strength (*zurkhaneh*). In reflecting on their specific practices, this account reveals the deep imbrication of the *lutis* with a particular spiritual and martial mode of masculinity; expressed as the state of being *javanmard* or of having *javanmardi* (literally, “youngmanliness”). The second component of the analysis demonstrates how, from the late-19th century, the *javanmardi* embodiments, social enactments and sartorial comportments of the *lutis* came to stand in increasing tension with new norms of manliness (*mardanegi*) promoted in Iranian governmental and societal discourses of modernization. The section proceeds to show how an intensification of these discourses and their accompanying
policies, particularly during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), would signify the *lutis* as a menacing, counter-normative and anxiety-provoking antipode to the (attempted) formation of a unifying national Iranian masculine gender identity, a new conception of manhood defined by compulsory heterosexuality, monogamous marriage, ‘rational’ political roles and Westernizing sartorial presentations. The significatory processes of the Qajar (1785-1925) and first Pahlavi periods (1925-1941) would gradually produce a narrative of the *lutis* as deviant, chaotic, violent, and sexually ambiguous subjects, a distinctly non-normative measure of manhood in the Iranian political and cultural imaginary. Employing critical and queer theoretical approaches to the historical formation of gender and sexuality, this paper thus attempts to draw out the phenomenologically lived experience of the *lutis* as excluded masculine subjects while also situating the development of normative conceptions of manhood and masculinity into broader histories of the critical formation of modernity in Iran.
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Introduction

As gender and sexuality studies continue to transform research within Middle East history, increased historiographical attention has been paid to the emergence, construction, and re-formation of categories and concepts of ‘masculinity’ and ‘manhood’ across the region. The gendering of historical analysis – a pressing methodological concern most notably articulated by Joan Scott – has revealed how operational categories of state, culture, and society are always already gendered entities, and how they and other institutions act to gender individuals and assign markers of sexual difference and subjectivity.¹ Reading the histories of concepts, discourses, and institutions in this light has made it possible to historicize masculinity and the socially and politically contested processes involved in the production and perpetuation of recognizable masculine identities.² In this account I aim to genealogically trace one such masculine identity, a figure in the urban landscape of late-19th and early 20th century Iran known as the luti, which I locate as historical-sociological type as well as a ‘figure of discourse’ conceived in the ‘modern’ Iranian imaginary in sometimes-contradictory ways through a variety of representational strategies.³

³ On this point of conceptual distinction I believe some clarification is necessary. My analysis takes the luti to be an identifiable social category of personhood, and as such not entirely a construct or product of
In the secondary literature, Willem Floor has produced the most notable contemporary exploration of the *lutis* as 19th century social phenomenon, though his articles rehearse pejorative interpretations of their behaviour and practices. Floor’s central thesis takes the *lutis* as an essentially conservative political *weltanschauung*, manifesting unpredictably as an undisciplined rabble of toughs and active most fervently during the Constitutional Revolution and 1953 coup. The Iranian sociologist Reza Arasteh has also written on the *lutis*, though he paints the group in a more positive light than Floor’s investigation. Like Floor however, Arasteh considers the group an archaic, though admirable, relic of pre-modern society, and referring (in the past tense) to a mythologized understanding of the *luti* as “a man who possessed noble qualities; one who had a sense of identity, that is, he carried out his promises, spoke the truth and developed such virtues as perseverance, valor, and purity in thought, desire and action.” Vanessa Martin offers a synthesis of a large variety of primary documentation of the *lutis*, including those from British colonial authorities, and focuses primarily on the role of the group in social protest and the mobilization of the urban poor in Iran at the turn of the 19th century. Martin’s definition of the discourse and representation. However, I also conceive of the *luti* as a metatextual presence in the story of Iranian modernity, as represented in literature and film. Tracing the emplotment of *lutis* as figures, or objects of discourse will enrich my characterization of group’s affective role as antagonist in the narratives of Iranian hegemonic masculinity. For a more detailed reflection on narrative emplotment in the writing of history, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).


*lutis* perhaps best reflects their contradictory character as the outcome a long process of marginalization and social exclusion, describing the prototypical *luti* as “[an] urban rough who lives on the edge of legality but is also capable of occasional acts of nobility and self-abnegation or sacrifice.” These sources provide a general outline from where to begin an investigation into the *lutis*, though none devote specific attention to the question of gender and sexuality, or the relation of the quixotic masculine identity of the group to broader gendered processes involved in the production of Iranian modernity.

Besides the accounts of Floor, Arasteh and Martin, the origins and position of *lutis* in the hierarchies of Iranian social and cultural life has, for the most part, been relegated to a footnote in the annals of Iranian historiography, a gap I hope to address in the historico-sociological component of my analysis. This first section will draw out the lineage of the group from the interwoven social formations of Sufi brotherhoods, bandit clans (‘ayyar), and guild-like organizations (*futuwwa*) in the late-Timurid and Safavid imperial periods (15th-17th centuries CE). In the following section I will proceed to give an account of the most pertinent and distinguishing rites, attitudes, and performances associated with the group, including its practice of traditional Iranian wrestling (*koshti pahlavani*), and, most notably, the deep imbrication of the group with a specific ethical understanding of proper masculine comportment; being *javanmard* or *javanmardi* (literally, “youngmanliness”). This ethical embodiment I understand to be a significant and counter-normative rendering of the understandings of *mordanegi* (manliness) employed by the modernizing Qajar and first Pahlavi-era Iranian state, and a counterpoint to modernist discourses of desired compulsory heterosexuality, monogamous marriage, and a

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gentle, disciplined, and rational approach to masculine public roles and private ethical behaviour. The distinction between the luti as a masculine identity in sociological terms, and as an object or figure of discourse is subtle, and mutually constitutive. Indeed, and as Judith Butler declares, “[o]ne ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable”. The ‘existence’ of the luti therefore cannot be analytically separated out from their perception under the changing discursive conditions of Iranian modernity (tajadod), a principle aim of which was the hierarchical codification of groups and identities in relation to new conceptual and gendered categories of homeland (vatan), nation/citizen (millat), honor (namus), and progress (tarraqi). I assert that, in the trajectory of Iranian modernity, new discourses of nationalist hegemonic masculinity ascribed the luti with a set of gendered, pejorative signifiers and that, as a result, the luti was made ‘recognizable’ as a deviant, chaotic, violent, homosexual, and distinctly non-normative measure of manliness in Iran. It is not my

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10 Reinhart Koselleck conceives of modernity (Neuzeit) as a temporal rupture wherein “time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right,” and is represented by a modern historiographical consciousness that “itself refers only to time, characterizing it as new, without, however, providing any indication of the historical content of this time, or even its nature as a period.” I find this definition compelling for considering the time (and space) of Iranian modernity, though the extent to which it can be read as a universalizing and homogenous process ‘in the last instance’ remains a subject of debate. For an excellent summation of, and postcolonial elaboration on Koselleck’s conceptual history see, Peter Osborne, “Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological, Category” *New Left Review*, 192 (1992); David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-57.
interest to firmly establish if these pejorative discourses corresponded to the ‘reality’ of an everyday *luti* (although in some respects, as we will see, the accusations did indeed align with actual acts conducted by the group). Additionally, when speaking of the *lutis* as a sociological formation, I do not imply that they constituted some reified corporate solidarity or other necessarily class-attenuated position in the social hierarchy. Rather, this survey seeks to situate the group in terms of what E.P. Thompson famously called their “plebian culture,” the traditions, institutions and value systems that, while undermined by modernity and changing mechanisms of production, were never wholly determined by such transformations.\(^{12}\)

I base my genealogy primarily in an analytic consideration of how masculinized discursive frameworks are *productive* of power relationships in a given society, while simultaneously how masculinities are themselves *produced* (or foreclosed) in the course of their historical and discursive deployment.\(^{13}\) Furthermore, I hold that construction of a subject does not represent a singular outcome of one discourse or set of discourses, but rather emerges as a “multiple and contradictory subject” that is as “contingent and precarious” as the sources of power involved in its production.\(^{14}\) The anxieties of Iranian masculinity were played out in historiography, state policy, the press, literary production, and film, and it is in these registers that my analysis will engage with the emplotment of the *luti* in the discourse of hegemonic

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\(^{13}\) This Janus-faced conceptualization of subjectivity is indebted to Foucault’s recognition that the social subject is produced discursively by the creative interaction of relations of power in a given society. In service of brevity I have abstained from providing a full characterization of Foucault’s work on power and subjectivity, which undoubtedly transformed over the course of his career and was not limited to questions of gender and sexual identity. For a comprehensive account of Foucault’s intellectual and philosophical project see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Iranian masculinity. Masculinity, like any gendered and sexed identity, is necessarily subject to, and conditional upon a complex, and often contradictory, assemblage of ideologies and narrative strategies. In the case of Iranian modernity, the dominant conceptualization of what being a proper masculine subject entails has historically been tightly bound to nationalism, whose performative and pedagogical uses were laden with novel foreign and indigenous understandings of sex and gender. As such, in addition to a historico-sociological genealogy of the lutis, this study interrogates the representational strategies employed in signifying them as figures of discourse, beyond their embodied, socio-political personages. My imbrication of historical-sociological, historiographical, and representational assemblages allows me to holistically depict as best as is possible the phenomenologically lived-experience of the lutis, as well the identity’s subjective signification and resignification over the spatio-temporal zone of Iranian modernity.¹⁵

¹⁵ Compelling arguments against assuming a reductive synonymy between power and its objects/subjects, can be found in Michael de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). As is by now clear to the reader, Butler’s theoretical understanding of gender and subjectivity has greatly influenced how I view the complex and contradictory identity of the Iranian lutî in this essay, while de Certeau has aided me in conceptualizing the survival of marginal gendered identities and ethics even amidst the apocryphal discursive and practical dominance of others.
Before I present the historical genesis of the lutis, first, a note of philological clarification. The Persian word ‘luti’, and its less-frequently used plural form of ‘alvat,’ are adopted from the Arabic term of the same name and in its original form refers to a sexual act between two men. Khaled El-Rouayheb traces the usages of the term luti in the Arab world prior to the 19th century, where he dispels its identification with a monolithic idea of “homosexuality.” Although in the jurisprudence of Islamic law the luti was simply one who carried out an act of liwat (unspecified anal intercourse with another man), in general usage the term almost exclusively meant “pederast,” thus distinguishing the luti practitioner as the active-insertive partner from those who preferred the passive-receptive role (mukhannath or ma’bun or ‘ilq).\(^\text{16}\) This usage of the term in relation to acts of penetrative anal intercourse continued under the Ottoman Empire where, “unlike other sexual acts between males, such as kissing, fondling, or intercrural intercourse, [it] was a crime subject to legal sanctions.”\(^\text{17}\) While not a pathologized category of identity, the practice of the act of liwat was by no means cause for celebration in the Arab and Ottoman world, “the luti was instead widely represented as a morally dissolute person, a libertine…[and] often spoken of in the same breath as being a drinker of wine.”\(^\text{18}\) It remains unclear exactly when the Arabic and the Persian morpheme dislocated from one another, yet by the 14th century CE the commonly utilized adjectival term for homosexual acts in Persian had modified into its currently used formation (lavat), with the (derogatory) term kuni representing a


\(^\text{17}\) Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 155-156.

practitioner of same-sex acts. Perhaps nowhere does Foucault’s dictum that, prior to the advent of modernity, the very practice of sodomy stood as an “utterly confused category” hold more apt than in untangling the meaning of the very term *luti* in its Persian context, given that, in Persian, the semantic field and connotations of the term remained essentially ambiguous.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, as Philippe Rochard notes, one cannot even view the *lutis* as solely determined in reference to a sexual formation at all, for indeed we have in other sources, like the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century Indo-Persian poet Mir Najat Isfahani, a use of the term to refer to a “companion of God.” Furthermore, in texts like the Safavid administrative treatise *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*, a *luti* was described as the head of the king’s acrobats, clowns, and entertainers.\textsuperscript{20} These multiform descriptions built into the philology of *luti* reveal a clear diversity in early semantic deployments of the term. The disputed origins of the word mirror the difficulty in defining the *luti* as sociological category in Iran, as in many regards the identity is as mutually contradictory as the vocabulary used in its signification. Yet, as we move into examining the lifeworlds and practices of the *lutis*, it remains clear that this ambiguous semantic relationship to male-male sexual practices would remain a significant trace in how they were perceived, and one that would come to haunt post-19\textsuperscript{th} century incarnations of the identity.

Although only isolated references to *lutis* appear in pre-19\textsuperscript{th} century texts, it is possible to draw out the lineage of the group through a review of a secondary literature on classical and medieval organizations in Persian society.\textsuperscript{21} In sociological terms, the *lutis* as a social identity

\textsuperscript{21} As a further point of clarification, some anthropological scholarship has claimed that *luti* refers to the tribal peoples of Luristan, or to the Iranian gypsy population. However, in the course of my research I
trace their origins to three groups active in medieval Iranian society; artisanal guilds (*futuwwa*), brigand organizations (ʼ*ayyar*), and Sufi brotherhoods (particularly those venerating Imam Ali and Abu Muslim as saints). Although there is speculation that these groups have Iranian origins prior to the Muslim conquest of Persia in 651 CE, there is little consensus on this point. Unlike the Arabic *al-futuwwa*, whose associations were sometimes linked with criminality, Iranian *futuwwa* groups occupied a relatively privileged role in the social hierarchy of classical and medieval Persian society. *Futuwwat* milieus represented a variety of professional associations, though were predominantly oriented around crafts, theatre and musical performance, literary recitation, and wrestling. Despite the artisanal and petty-producer status of the Iranian *futuwwa*, it is clear that the relation and affinity of these associations to spiritual practices, and a unique ideal of masculinity, ordered the group as socially higher in standing than comparable economic classes in Persia.

The status of the Iranian *futuwwa* is best documented in an early 16th-century ‘manual of chivalry,’ the *Futuwwat-nameh-ye Sultani* of Husayn Va’iz-i Kashefi. Kashefi’s seminal tome documents the relationship of *futuwwa* associations to the *javanmard* ethic of masculinity, and to related ideas of proper Sufi comportment (*adab*). As Kashifi writes, being *futuwwa* entailed more

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than membership in one of the artisan guilds, but rather involved a spiritual commitment to disregarding the self (*nafs*), enabled through the ethical self-cultivation of generosity of spirit, self-sacrifice, chastity, hospitality, and courage, virtues which fell under the notion of javanmardi. The ideal *futuwwa* member would display his commitment to the ethic of javanmard through diligence in his labor, the doing of good works in the community, the cultivation of martial strength and bodily improvement, and through a series of rituals and specific codes of dress, including wearing set of trousers (*shalwar*) representing the chastity of the wearer, and a special belt or sash (*shadd*) indicating the wearer’s readiness for battle.\(^{26}\) These publicly directed and outward performances of javanmard distinguished the spirit of javanmard from more ascetic and philosophical interpretations of Sufi practice (*tasawwuf*), most notably those invoked by Suhrawardi.\(^{27}\) Additionally, as Dick Davis notes, these understandings of *futuwwa* manly behaviour and ethical comportment had a distinctly Persian character, idealized in the characters of the Iranian national epic, the *Shahnameh*. In particular, a sense of being javanmard is embodied by the heroic warrior Rostam, who is presented in Ferdowsi’s text as “youthful, impetuous, trusting to the point of gullibility, eager for friendship and adventure.”\(^{28}\) What is interesting about Kashifi’s manual in particular, however, is it’s creative hybridization of Sufi theological discourse with Persian literary staples in a didactic commentary directed towards lay-individuals of the *futuwwa* guilds. This more populist reading distinguishes the text from some


earlier commentaries on being javanmard that fell into the rarefied ‘mirror for princes’ literature, directed primarily at notables and the ruling classes of Persian society.\(^{29}\)

In some respects, the relation of being javanmard to early futuwwa guilds resembles the chivalric societies of medieval Europe. This comparative study of the ethic occupied a niche for some Orientalists, however more recent explorations of the origins and development of javanmardi have critiqued the flattening and ahistorical tendencies of this mode of scholarship on the futuwwa and javanmard.\(^{30}\) The most prominent distinction between the two is demonstrated in Kashifi’s text as, unlike their European knightly counterparts, the Persian futuwwa were accessible to ordinary people, and the practice of javanmardi incorporated the workmanlike ideologies of trade and craftspeople, thus rooting the groups in the popular urban classes.\(^{31}\)

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30 The tendency of these Orientalist accounts was primarily to analogize javanmard codes of conduct to medieval European rites of chivalry, wherein the in Sufi-warrior stood in for the noble knight-errant. For a prominent example of this type of categorization see Henri Corbin, *A’ineh Javanmardi*, trans. Ehsan Naraghi (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1363/1984). Of course, the Orientalist search for chivalric antecedents and affinities itself tells a story of 19\(^{th}\) century social anxiety, particularly in the Victorian pressure to pedagogically homogenize a sense of masculine civic virtue, heroism, and personal achievement. For more literature on this topic see Norman Vance, *The Sinews of Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). This is not to say it is impossible to do a cross-cultural history of masculinities over the *longue durée*, see an interesting methodological reflection on the issue from Simon Yarrow, “Masculinity as a World Historical Category of Analysis” in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, eds. John H. Arnold and Sean Bready (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 114-139.

31 While Kashifi’s *futuwwat-name* is one of the more instructive texts showing the relationship of javanmardi to the futuwwa, and the hierarchy of the futuwwa in relation to regular guilds, it is but one of dozens of texts on the subject. For an edited volume containing many of these other *futuwwat-name*, see Mihran Afshari, *Futuwwat-name ha va Rasa’îl-i Khaksariya - The Futuwwat-name of the Khaksar Order* (Tehran: Institute for the Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2003). For English-language commentaries on other elements of the futuwwa tradition, see Khachik Gevorgyan, “Futuwwa Varieties and Futuwwat-nama Literature: An Attempt to Classify Futuwwa and Persian Futuwwat-namas” *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, 40:1 (2013).
The most paradigmatic of the public, performative javanmard rituals of the futuwwa was the practice of traditional Iranian wrestling, or koshti pahlavani, which was conducted in specially made ‘Houses of Strength’ (zurkhaneh). The somaticity of these wrestling practices reflected the self-disciplining spirit of masculinity inhabited by the futuwwa and remained the dominant cultural practice of the luti inheritors of the futuwwa tradition. As Joseph Alter notes in his study of a similar wrestling practice in North India, “the symbolic components of the body convey a set of standardized meanings on which any wrestler can build and from which he can elaborate and interpret various situations.”32 In the context of proper masculine comportment then, the somaticity of the Iranian male wrestlers body - self-regulated in a holistic fashion through specific prescriptions of diet, health, morality, and ethics - was seen by the futuwwa as the site of meaning par excellence through which the society of medieval Persia could be engaged, and their identity as exceptional masculine subjects best demonstrated to the community.33

In contrast to the futuwwa associations, the Iranian ‘ayyar held a more marginal, and renegade status in pre-Qajar Iran. While sharing many of the same customs and rites as the futuwwa, these organizations defined themselves explicitly as warriors rather than craftsman, and operated as brigands and bandits. Prior to the 15th century, references to the ‘ayyar are most common in popular literary romances, such as the Samak-i ‘ayyar and Darabnamah.34

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Historically however, it is plausible to assume the groups originated in the chaotic landscape generated by the Mongol conquest of Persia, or from the later, fractured Sarbadar kingdoms that arose from the collapse of the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty in 1335 CE. Like the fūtuwwa, ‘āyyar groups celebrated the embodiment of the ethic of javanmard as an integral component of their comportment and understanding of self, which in turn elevated the group in the popular imagination above common ruffians and low-lives in the urban milieu of Iranian cities. The identity of ‘āyyar, which in the Arabic root literally translates to “scoundrel,” also entailed a behavioral character of ‘shrewdness’, a contradictory character trait to the principles of chastity, virtue, and honor within the ethical field of being javanmard. In contrast to the more domestic virtues of the fūtuwwa, the ‘āyyars prized the fighting techniques of horsemanship (fonun-e savarī), dagger juggling (khanjar gozari), swiftness (chasti va chalakī), strength (govvat-e bazu) and polo (chogan bazi), yet, like the fūtuwwa, they highly valued wrestling as a way to cultivate these martial attributes. Not only were both the fūtuwwa and ‘āyyar groups united by a shared

35 This explanation seems likely in light of the rise comparable movements, known as zu’r, in Mamluk Cairo and Damascus out of similar disruptions from the Mongol invasions. For information on these groups, see Toru Miura, “The Structure of the Quarter and the Role of the Outlaws: The Sahiliya Quarter and the Zu’r Movement in the Mamluk Period,” in The Proceedings of the International Conference on Urbanism in Islam (ICUTT), vol. 3 (Tokyo: The Middle East Culture Center, 1989) 402-437; Ira Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

36 This populist aspect of the ‘āyyar have lead some to compare the group to the ‘social bandits’ described by Eric Hobsbawm. Hobsbawm’s basic thesis is Robin Hood-like coalitions of bandits represented an early peasant form of class-based insurrection, inscribing them as ‘noble’ in the public consciousness. For Hobsbawm’s exploration of proto-class conscious brigandage, see Bandits, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). Anton Blok criticized Hobsbawm for the latter’s exclusive focus on peasant movements at the expense of their urban counterparts, as well as on the point that bandits quite regularly terrorized the poor they claimed to represent. For these critiques see Block, “The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 14:4 (1972).

affiliation with wrestling and the institution of the zurkhaneh, but also both highly valued an
overriding sense of communal living that, in their different modes, served to help members to
live up to the high standards of being javanmard. The exceptionally close fraternal bonds of both
groups also went hand in hand with a general reticence towards heterosexual partnering.
Inherited directly from the Sufi tradition, chastity of all forms was central to the ethical
understanding of javanmardi and considered a crucial to self-control and mastery of the self. As
such, even in light of the more general tolerance – even praise for – male-male partnering in pre-
Qajar era Iran, one can only speculate whether the extraordinarily close and companionate bonds
of the futuwwa and ‘ayyar indeed featured same-sex practices, or whether such practices were
attributed to the groups after the fact or because of the name of their luti descendants.\(^{38}\) Given
this ambiguity, it is therefore wise to heed the warning of scholars like the classicist James
Davidson against “sodomania” – placing an undue emphasis on the sheer physical act and strict
power dynamics between men over their emotional, ethical, and reciprocal bonds – in
understanding this particular masculine lineage.\(^{39}\) A fruitful, comparative account of the
relationship between the futuwwa, ‘ayyar, and socio-cultural landscape of pre-Safavid Persia can
be found in Rosalind O’Hanlon’s historical study of masculinity in Mughal Indian political
culture. O’Hanlon suggests that “codes of martial bravery and correct manly behaviour” were
used to ameliorate the tense political relationships between client and patron, and between

\(^{38}\) This relative toleration of male-male sexual practices in pre-modern Iran has been well documented;
see Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women With Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties
of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in
Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a particularly vivid literary
representation of medieval Persian homosociality, see, ‘Obeyd-e Zakani, *The Ethics of the Aristocrats

\(^{39}\) James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient
various local authorities in the volatile context of a declining Mughal imperial formation. That more ritualized forms of masculine comportment would take hold during times of political uncertainty, as a means of solidifying bonds of social solidarity, is an apt description of the role of the futuwwa and ‘ayyar in the turbulent milieu of pre-Safavid Persia, and the subsequent supplanting of their masculine ethic by imperial hegemony.

The rise of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736 CE) in Iran heralded an unprecedented consolidation of imperial and state power, and the institutionalization of Twelver Shi’ism as the state religion of Persia. A direct result of this administrative transformation was a marginalization of the futuwwa guilds, as their heterodox, Sufi interpretations of Islam were perceived as threat to the new political authorities. As Kathryn Babayan describes, “by the seventeenth century…many of the guilds associated with the futuvvat had lost their status in the realm of Safavi official culture. Storytellers, wrestlers, and acrobats, along with the Shahname reciters, were placed among the beggars, gravediggers, and itinerant dervishes (qalandar)” in the social hierarchy. Additionally, the renegade lifestyle of the ‘ayyar came under attack, as they were perceived by court historians as “threats to public order established power” and as embodying a “non- or even anti-courtly view of society.” With the futuwwa increasingly pushed to the margins of society it is clear that, deprived of the stability of a regulated guild structure, many turned to banditry, leading to a near synonymy of the terms ‘ayyar and futuwwa in public and administrative discourse by the 18th century. Additionally, as the Shi’itization of

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Iran continued over the 16th and 17th centuries, many of the strict codes of ritual conduct adhered to by the futuwwa groups were syncretized with popular Shi’i practices, such as the theatrical mourning rituals for Imam Husayn (ta’ziyeh). This process of sociological comingling was culminated under the Qajar dynasty (1785-1925), imbricating the futuwwa, ’ayyar - and their ethic and practices of being javanmard - under the sign of luti, a ‘new’ social type of the 19th century. I have provided a historical account of the genesis of the luti as a social class in Iran to make it clear that the group was not simply a scattered collection of thugs and criminals (awbash or rendan), but rather the contradictory outcome of a long process of identity confusion and sublimation, making the urban class at once both pietistic and combative, hypermasculine and marginal. What had begun as two distinct social identities sharing an ethic of being javanmard and a discursive tradition of public and performative Sufism was, by the 19th century, sociologically intertwined into the category of the luti, an already ambiguous and charged term of masculine presence.

43 A recent article presents the interesting thesis that Shi’ism was adopted by the futuwwa in particular earlier than the Safavid conversion, see Riza Yildirim, “Shi’iisation of the Futuwwa Tradition in the Fifteenth Century” British Journal of Middle East Studies, 40:1 (2013). For information on the broader process of Safavid Shi’itization in general, see Rula J. Abisaab, Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).
The *Lutis* as ‘New’ Social Type of the 19th Century: Medieval Manhood in Tension with a Matriotic State

The 19th century gendering of Iranian nationalism was similar to, though not synonymous with similar processes in the colonial and semi-colonial periphery. Founded in 1785 CE, the Qajar dynasty inherited established conceptualizations of gender that had evolved organically in Iranian society, and which became subject to modification under the discourse and practical experience of encountering the Occidental Other. In terms of masculinity, a predominant Iranian gendered societal form was the concept of familial honor (*namus*), which entailed and required male vigilance to defend female purity. The loss of *namus* – seen as the outcome of seduction, promiscuity, or rape - was conceived of as the root of social disorder (*fitna*), and thus was closely regulated by a variety of disciplinary and discursive apparatuses embedded in the religious, cultural, and social milieu of pre- and early-modern Iran. The encroachment of British and Russian economic and territorial ambitions into Persia, including the Iranian loss of two wars against the latter, exposed the vulnerability of the Qajars in protecting their ‘guarded domains’. This material fact of loss went hand in hand with an increasing presence of foreign ideas, technologies, and (to a lesser extent) persons in Iran, and narratives of inferiority vis-à-vis Western powers brought back by travelling Iranian intellectuals. By the 1860s, and in response

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to these pressures, an imperative discourse of social, legal, and political reform had sprung up, whose language articulated the land of Persia (vatan) in the language of a feminized, maternal body under threat of disease and penetration. This new ‘matriotic’ discourse of the Iranian nation (mellat) was invoked by prominent intellectuals like Mirza Akhundzadeh who, writing in an 1877 issue of the newspaper Akhtar (The Star), stated that “sons of the homeland” and “zealous men” were the true representatives of Iran, and of Islam. Pronouncements of this sort marked a discursive displacement of the paternal figure of the Shah in favor of stalwart and modern sons defending the honor (namus) of the maternal Iranian nation, entailing a self-fashioned intensification of the masculinist terrain of politics, state, and nation through familiar masculinist cultural idioms, and new discourses of health, hygiene, reason, and a unified, fraternal Iranian race.

At first glance it may appear that the social class of the lutis could find some sort of accommodation with the new regime of truth being created; after all, these were groups of men whose spirit of brotherly commitment was unmatched, and martial prowess well-known throughout Iran. However, the production of this new, fraternal field of politics also entailed deep sexual anxieties and moral quandaries for its subjects, which in turn would mark the lutis as outside the normative project of modern Iranian masculine identity. Afsaneh Najmabadi’s seminal study of sex and gender in the Qajar period examines visual culture to show that the

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47 See, Tavakoli-Targhi, Refashioning Iran, 113-134; de Groot, “Brothers of the Iranian Race,” 137-156.
language of Iranian nationalist modernity and the creation of a ‘rational’ public sphere (with its ‘natural’ inhabitant, the citizen) was predicated in part on the repudiation of male love by Western-oriented intellectuals. Again, the like broader aspects of gendering modernity, processes of heterosocialization under colonial pressure, or in the framing of a national body politic, were not unique to Iran, with similar processes observable in contexts including, but not limited to the Arab world, to China, to Japan, to the tribal communities of early colonial Latin American.\(^{48}\) In Najmabadi’s account, the creation of a field of Iranian heterosociability was founded on the exclusion of its supposed Other, the paradigmatic, beardless young boys (amrad) who functioned as an object of male love and desire in pre-Qajar society. In order for the vision of a fraternal Iranian nation, devoted in love to its metaphorical mother, to be realized, new categories of gender identity would have to be invented, namely a binary of modern, heterosexual men and desegregated, unveiled modern women. Iranian reformers came to understand the absence of women in the public sphere as the root cause of homosexuality (manifested in the amrads) and utilized a technique of ‘temporal boxing’ to categorize those still engaged in same-sex practices as backwards and unenlightened.\(^{49}\) In addition to its gendered components, the internalization of a temporality of modernity by Iranian modernizers was a preeminent cause of an explosion of fin-de-siècle literature, which framed the social ills of Iranians in light of the nation’s supposed

\(^{48}\) In the Iranian case, although never formerly colonized and forced to abandon same-sex practices (as English criminal law inaugurated in many of its colonial possessions), the makers of the Qajar nationalist movement were critically aware of their own perceived deviance by European observers. For other contexts see, Joseph Massad; *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950* (Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Gregory Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Peter Sigal, *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

\(^{49}\) Najmabadi, *Women With Moustaches*, 58.
lack vis-à-vis Europe. The naturalization of a male/female binary, and construction of same-sex relations as a ‘problem’ was clearly expressed by the 19th century Iranian intellectual Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, who states that “[m]en are naturally inclined towards socializing with and enjoying the companionship of women...If a people are forbidden from this great blessing...then inevitably the problem of sexual acts with boys and young male slaves is created, because boys without facial hair resemble women.”

The heterosocialization of the Iranian public would cast a significant shadow on the life-world of the lutis, stemming from both a real and imagined sense that their associations were tainted with a surplus of homosociality. While Najmabadi describes the amrads as a principal site of gendered modernization discourses, the longue durée of Safavid marginalization had spatially ordered the lutis in close physical proximity to amrads in the lower-class neighborhoods of Iranian cities. While at its height the futuwwa was a mark of societal distinction, and several of the brotherhoods enjoyed spatial preference in the layout of Iranian cities, their conflation with the ‘ayyar and transformation into the social class of the lutis was accompanied by a spatial segregation of the group into poorer quarters of Shiraz, Tabriz, Tehran, and other urban centers. These marginal spaces also housed many of the male brothels.

50 Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi refers to this fracturing between the temporality of the Persian self and that of the European Other as a ‘schizochronia,’ a turn of phrase that, given the inferiority complex bound up in it, seems indebted more to Frederic Jameson’s pessimistic outlook on schizophrenia in the postmodern consumer society than it is to Deleuze and Guattari’s emancipatory hopes for schizophrenia the ultimate form of resistance to capitalism. Tavakoli-Targhi, Refashioning Iran, 48
51 Quoted in Najmabadi, idem., 56. Emphasis added.
(amradkhane) and bathhouses, which, in the developing global registers of 19th century public health discourse, increasingly came to be understood as a deviant sexualization of the public sphere. These spaces also served as home to the swelling ranks of the urban poor, giving the close-knit professional and recreational associations of the luti an additional, classed signification of being unclean and anarchic. While a full consideration of the gendered construction of Iranian urban space remains too broad a topic for this analysis, the spatial orientation of the luti social class evidently aligns with the segregation of non-normative sexual identities into particular quarters (mahalleh) of Iranian cities, with the coffeehouses (qavehkhaneh) and other meeting places popular among the lutis also serving as host to prostitutes, gamblers, musicians, and other social forms considered as less-than-reputable. The outcome of this spatial alignment was the common comparison of the lutis with the poor, urban social class of jahel (literally, “ignorant”). Hamid Dabashi unwittingly exemplifies this conceptual conflation when he describes the jahels as “a type of lumpen who embodied the most sordid traits of patriarchy. A caricature of the medieval practice of futuwwat (chivalry), the jahel represented the basest manifestations of male chauvinism in which masculine “honor” was

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54 The Iranian historian Jafar Shahri has written an impressive, six-volume socio-historical account of the old city of Tehran, which contains many anecdotes on the flagrant and public display of transgressive gender performances in the city’s poor urban quarters. However, as Najmabadi has pointed out, the volumes also are also sadly replete with homophobic, misogynist, and anti-Semitic content. Jafar Shahri, Tarikh-e Ejtema‘iya Teheran-e Qadim -The Social History of Old Tehran (Tehran: Ismailian Publishers, 1990). For more information on the Iranian coffeehouses in particular, see also, Ali Bulookbashi, Qahvahkhahna-ha-ye Iran -The Coffeehouses of Iran (Tehran: Cultural Research Bureau, 1996), 114-142.
vested in the chastity of men’s female relatives. The jahels themselves, however, frequented the bordellos and prided themselves in pederasty.”

This conceptual comingling of ‘deviant’ sexual practices - of low-class jahels indulging in the pleasures of amrads - into the identity of the lutis gave the group an addition air of menace in the eyes of reformist and modernist masculinities in the 19th century.

However, and setting the lutis apart from their erstwhile deviant neighbors, was the way in which - on the basis of their martial prowess - the lutis would establish themselves as de facto leaders of the local communities of the urban poor, and guardians of their ‘turf’ (patoq). The violence of the lutis looms heavily in both 19th century accounts of the group, and more recent publications, with a general consensus that some portion of their membership were involved in underground criminal networks. This attitude stems from occasional luti attacks on the propertied classes (especially in times of economic hardship), and also from the occasional street battles that would break out between rival neighborhoods, and in which the lutis took an active part (ostensibly to display the strength of their masculinity in the eyes of their peers).

In particular, one adjective stuck to describe the lutis in this context, with commentators referring to the group pejoratively as knife-wielders (chaqu keshan). As Martin describes, Iranian elites frequently singled out the supposed criminal deviance, drunkenness, and vice of the lutis as

56 Prior to the 20th century, most Iranian cities were divided into two distinct quarters, known as the Haidari and Ni’mati, the residents of which would engage in friendly combat with one another. For a major study on the spatial institution, see, John Perry, “Toward a Theory of Iranian Urban Moieties: The Haydariyyah and Ni’matiyyah Revisited,” Iranian Studies 31:1, (1999), 51-70.
57 The phenomenon of knife-wielding as a display of masculine bona fides is not unique to Iran, for early modern European comparisons see, Robert C. Davis, The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Spierenburg, Pieter, “Knife Fighting and Popular Codes of Honor in Early Modern Amsterdam” in Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America, ed. Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 103-128.
particularly deleterious to society, while downplaying the criminality of subjectivities allied with the governing regime. To take one example of the hypocrisy of the stance, this singling-out stood in contrast to the treatment of the newly established members of the soldiery, generally drawn from the milieu of the urban poor, and whose arbitrary criminal activity and rowdiness often surpassed the worst excesses of the lutis.\textsuperscript{58} This relational framing of ‘acceptable’ masculine excess highlights Mrinalini Sinha’s contention that the “rhetorical and ideological efficacy” of masculinity lies in its ability to ground “various arrangements of power”, in this case the legitimacy of the modern military establishment, and not only those arrangements concerning the concept of gender itself.\textsuperscript{59}

Inherited from the futuwwa tradition, the martial masculinity of the lutis’s 19\textsuperscript{th}-century incarnation was honed in the communal socius of the zurkhaneh. Philippe Rochard has provided the most extensive history of the Iranian zurkhaneh and his consideration of the space as one of “institutionalized marginality” clearly resonates with the heteronormative gendering of Iranian space and society in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{60} The centrality of strength to the ethical embodiment of javanmard was reflected in the organization of the lutis around the zurkhaneh, and the associated virtue of chastity was reflected in the underlying belief that sex with women would sap the strength of the wrestler.\textsuperscript{61} The public and performative shows of strength undertaken by lutis

\textsuperscript{58} Martin, The Qajar Pact, 119. For an analysis intersection of the military and modern governmental power in a comparative Middle Eastern context, see also, Khaled Fahmy, All the Pasha’s Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army, and the Making of Modern Egypt (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002).


\textsuperscript{60} Rochard, “Identities,” 339

\textsuperscript{61} Of course, the ideal of chastity was coded around male-female sexual relations. However, as Shahri claims, the relation between champion lutis of the zurkhaneh (known as pahlavan), and their apprentices (nawkhwasteh) sometimes included male-male sexual relations. These relations, if they indeed occurred,
participants at the *zurkhaneh* were often interpreted in reformist discourses as representing a cult of violence, whose membership consisted of unpredictable urban strongmen, though some would continue to characterize the *javanmardi* ethic and aesthetic in more romanticized terms.\(^62\) An anecdote from Muhammad Ali Jamalzadeh, the founder of the Iranian short story, of his childhood observance of a *zurkhaneh* demonstrates the alterity embodied in the wrestler’s physical form, a source of fascination and disgust for 19\(^{th}\) century observers; “I saw physiques there that day unlike any I had ever in my lifetime seen…the thick, heavily knotted arms, broad, shieldlike chests, exercised bellies, swelling flanks, bulging oval muscles, narrow waists, taut thighs, solid frames, and hollow cheeks without flesh which are the signs of a gymnast.”\(^63\) These, and other accounts of the masculine bodies of the *lutis* would mark their presence in discourse as innately physical, and deficient in the proper, modern regulation of the self through moderate, ‘healthy’ physical exercise.

The *lutis* were also intertwined with the construction of modern Iranian political culture. Floor examines the case of 19\(^{th}\)-century Shiraz to illustrate how local leaders and notables viewed the *lutis* as toughs available for purchase, occasionally cooperating with them for political purposes.\(^64\) The details of this quixotic cooperation shows that, while considered useful by local power brokers, the *lutis* held no firm political loyalty to one faction or another due to

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\(^{62}\) The memoirs of Abdollah Mostowfi, an Iranian accountant and social historian of the interwar period, offers several anecdotes from his childhood observances of the *lutis* that echo this sentiment, and remarking on the impressive, though terrifying, showmanship, large moustaches, and burly figures of the *lutis*. See, Abdollah Mostowfi, *Tarikh-e Idari va Itjema’i ye Dowreh-e Qajariiyya ya Shahr-e Zandegi-ye Man - The Administrative and Social History of the Qajar Era, or a Story of My Life*, vol. 1 (Tehran: 1943–45).


\(^{64}\) Floor (1979), “The Political Role of the *Lutis*”. 24
their devotion to their own code of javanmardi ethics, and thus were generally mistrusted by all parties. A pejorative entrenchment of the idea of lutis as essentially thugs for hire informed much of the analysis around their role in the 1953 coup. Many outside observers of the lutis in action could offer only tentative and vague descriptions at best. Thus for Richard Cottam, an American CIA operative stationed in Tehran during the 1953 coup d’état, the lutis were but the strongest men in an apolitical mob “who can be hired for any kind of corrupt or terroristic activity” and who “control a number of brothels or gambling houses.” However, in light of somewhat shared perceptions of discrimination at the hands of the modernizing and reforming state and intellectual classes, the lutis occasionally found themselves in coalition with members of the Shi’ite religious establishment (‘ulema). As Momen describes, members of the ulema in Iranian towns would often court the lutis for personal gain or to collect religious taxes (zakat), while “the lutis in turn had a protector with whom they could take refuge if the government moved against them.” A report from the British Foreign Office in Iran even noted that some religious students (tollab) enjoyed a close enough relationship with the lutis that that they became known as the alwat-e mu’ammam, or turbaned lutis. This collaboration, however, did not entail that the lutis held an any particular spiritual reverence for the ‘ulema, as evidenced by another testimonial of

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67 Cited in Floor (1981), “The Political Role of the Lutis in Iran,” 403n48. An interesting legacy of this collaboration can be seen in Reza Mir-Karimi’s 2001 film, *Zir-e Nur-e Mah* (Under the Light of the Moon), wherein a young madrasa pupil finds himself drawn into a community of the marginalized homeless, including a former luti.
Jamalzadeh, who notes that some lutis had not hesitated to defrock and beat members of the ‘ulema with whom they disagreed during the nation’s Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911). 

The Constitutional Revolution represented a moment of heightened visibility for the lutis, though rarely positively, as dominant Iranian historical discourse described the events of the Revolution as the moment of “awakening” and “enlightenment” for the nation and, as such, vehemently castigated perceived hindrances to the arrival of modernity. Often reflecting on their own experiences during the movement, historians including Ahmad Kasravi, Mehdi Malekzadeh, and Nazem Kermani narrated this ‘awakening’ and its participants, while an explosion of publications, like the influential Habl al-Matin (The Firm Cord), described the events of the uprisings in close to real time. Johanna de Groot suggests that as the political partisanship and conflict of the revolution spread, “so the discourses of manhood, sexual honor, and sexuality itself intensified with real possibilities of political and territorial disintegration.” Subsequently, in discursive terms the evolving moral register that had divided the lutis into ‘good,’ chivalric, and virtuous types, as well as ‘bad,’ criminal, and sexually deviant ones was

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68 Jamalzadeh, Isfahan is Half the World: Memories of a Persian Boyhood, 183.
69 Although, as the historian Reza Afshari points out, views on what persons and events had priority in the telling of Iran’s ‘awakening’ (into modernity) were diverse, the school of historiography contemporary to the events of the Constitutional Revolution broadly practiced an un-gendered synonymizing of a supposedly unitary Iranian ‘people’ (mardom) with a singular Iranian ‘nation’ (mellat). The emergence of ‘histories from below’ from the 1970s onwards helped to challenge the narratives of a unified Iranian national identity, and included the stories of peasants, workers, and other subaltern groups involved in the production of state and society in Iran. This historiographical reorientation in turn opened space for accounts of the sexed and gendered components of these processes, which in some small way I aim to contribute to with this piece.
now being deployed to map the identity of the group onto the political registers of pro- and anti-constitutionalism.  

A paradigmatic example of the luti’s politicization is Sattar Khan, a self-identified luti who achieved the status of a national hero in Iranian historical discourse for leading the pro-constitutionalists in Tabriz. Kasravi describes encountering Sattar Khan, noting in particular the luti attributes of “his masculine face (chehreh-i-ye mardaneh), dexterous composure (cheboki-ye raftar), and his self-discipline (khistandari).” However, even as prominent a luti as Sattar Khan could not escape his enfoldment into the prevailing gendered discursive of proper, modern Iranian masculinity, topographically situated on the map of Iranian political culture. Khan’s background as a renegade, outlaw, and horse-thief, and his charismatic sway over the lower-classes of Tabriz allowed him to establish his position as a commander and national leader, however this luti background affirmed to those who would narrate the history of the revolution that Khan did not have the mental understanding to grasp the political or moral stakes at hand, or rational, bureaucratic consciousness capable of translating military success to statecraft. In contrast to more ‘enlightened’ champions of the constitutional cause, Khan was described almost exclusively with reference to his emotional and bodily presence, with his masculinity seen as too charged, and too virulent for the sustained work of modern political life.  


Kasravi, Tarikh-e Mashrûth, vol. 1, 328.  

and, like his *luti* brothers, as embodying the wrong sort of masculine identity for the future of the Iranian nation.

Over Iran’s 19th and early 20th centuries, it is thus fair to say that the central gendered trends were, on the one hand, the discursive and significatory association of the state as a maternal figure, who required modern, disciplined male subjects to defend her, and, on the other hand, the exclusion of gender identities and performances that did not fit into this discourse. Over the terrain of masculinity, these discourses served to create a privileged site of politics, to be inhabited by so-called “men of order,” and from which the *lutis* were constructed as a binary opposite, as “men of disorder.”  

However, and particularly from the 1940s onwards, masculinity became increasingly defined between statist and Islamicate models (although both articulated their respective masculinities in the discourse of heterosocialized modernity, and in service of the Iranian nation). To reiterate, the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” describes what John Tosh refers to as “those masculine attributes which are must widely subscribed to – and least questioned – in a given social formation, the ‘common sense’ of gender as acknowledged by all men save those whose masculinity is oppositional or deviant.”  In 1925, the nascent project of Iranian constitutional democracy was brought to an end by the Reza Pahlavi’s rise to autocratic power, though the synonmizing of fraternal masculinity with the

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75 For the sense of term “men of order” as referring to the autocratic figures of modernization state policy, see Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher, eds., *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization Under Atatürk and Reza Shah* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004). However, I have deployed the idiom in a somewhat different fashion, namely to describe a hegemonic sense of proper masculinity signified in a conservational role vis-à-vis the integrity of the state and body politic, and deploying the empirical and discursive tools (themselves gendered) of European modernity.

state, heterosocialization of Iranian society, and exclusion of alternate masculine configurations continued apace with its historical development in the Qajar period.
The *Lutis* as Impediment to National Progress: Style and Sport under Reza Shah Pahlavi

With even greater emphasis than the preceding period, the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-1941) articulated modernity with an overriding emphasis on Westernization and secularization, concepts mobilized in gender politics through such initiatives as making of civil marriage, establishment of schools for girls, and the mandating of Western dress and unveiling for women. The material role of the *lutis* in this period is small, no doubt because of the repressive military pacification of urban social unrest by the state. However, while the social type of the *luti* remained confined to their neighborhood under the Pahlavi regime, they did not cease to be factored into discourses of proper masculinity. The Pahlavi project of strict secularization dovetailed with its attempt to establish a hegemonic, ideal, heteronormative male identity, which stressed men’s composure and rationality, a bourgeois sense of interior self, and a patriotic devotion to both science and the nation-state. As readers will no doubt note, the history of the *lutis* as both a social type and a gendered specter of modernist discourse shares some commonalities with the Egyptian *al-futuwwa* - a distinct and subaltern urban class of masculine identity - documented in Wilson Chacko Jacob’s recent study. In *Working Out Egypt*, Jacob writes of how the bourgeois Egyptian effendi class performatively remade categories of masculinity in order to reproduce its own social life as the national culture. Jacob describes this

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77 While *lutis* may have played a role in occasional spontaneous demonstrations against the government in the 1920s and 1930s, they would occasionally emerge to protect their quarters from ‘unfair’ appropriation or taxation, often allying with the ‘ulema. See, Stephanie Cronin, “Popular Protest, Disorder, and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan, 1921-1925” *International Review of Social History*, 50:2, (2005): 167-201.

process as “contingent on the construction and maintenance of rhetorical, legal, and physical boundaries between the modern and respectable, on the one hand, and the archaic and disreputable, on the other.”\textsuperscript{79} This process, as has been noted, is similar to the production of gendered citizens of the Iranian nation in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. However, Jacob’s conclusion that “the politics of al-futuwwa was irreconcilable with the modern public sphere that emerged in Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s”\textsuperscript{80} - and thus faded into sometimes nostalgic, but mostly ambivalent memory - is complicated in the Iranian case, as the lutis and their ethical understanding of being javanmard continued to resonate in Iranian society, particularly in literary and filmic representational forms.\textsuperscript{81} Additionally, the normative figures of new Iranian masculinity were not unified into a singular figure of masculine discourse like the Egyptian effendiyya, and represented a range of political affiliations. Indeed, despite the hegemonic status of Pahlavi masculinities under the prevailing political order of the era, men who self-identified as modernizers, Westernizers, intellectuals, and officers, as well as other male-coded identities associated with state policy were themselves subject to critique from religious and clerical sources.

Coined by the dissident (though secular) author Jalal Al-e Ahmad during the Second World War, the adjectival moniker of gharbzadeghi, or West-struck/West-toxified, was used a catch-all to criticize the vacuous self-identification with Western cultural values practiced by advocates of secularizing and modernization policy. While accusations of gharbzadeghi were

\textsuperscript{79} Jacob, \textit{Working Out Egypt}, 259.
\textsuperscript{80} Jacob, \textit{Working Out Egypt}, 253.
\textsuperscript{81} Although this article does not address the post-1940s transfiguring of the lutis into a pop-cultural signifier, the presence of the group is clearly felt in the low-budget \textit{filmfarsi} genre of Iranian cinema. Notable films of this genre include \textit{Lat-e Javanmard (The Honorable Ruffian)}, dir. Majid Mohseni (1958) and \textit{Jahel Mahal: Shabi dar Laleh-zar (The Local Jahel: A Night in Laleh-zar)}, dir. Sardar Sagar (1964).
deployed across genders, related caricatures of Pahlavi masculinity in particular were deployed by the regime’s opponents as early as the 1920s, and were signified through the concepts of *fokoli* (bow-tie wearer) and *farangima’ab*, (in European style). The way in which these pejorative discourses conceived of style and fashion spoke to the emphasis the Pahlavi state placed on dress as a principal site of gendered masculine performance.  

Fashion had significantly figured into the life-world of the *lutis* of the 19th century, with many presenting their commitment to a javanmardi ethic through wearing of the *shalwar* and *shadd*, as had their ancestors, but also complimented by a more recent set garb including; a felt cap (*dash mashti*), duster coat (*qaba*), large patterned handkerchiefs made in the city of Yazd (*dastehmal-e Yazdi*), and woven slippers (*giveh*). The clothes were accompanied by ceremonial machetes and knives (*chaqu*), from which the aforementioned *chaqu-keshan* took their name.  

These ‘traditional’ costumes were targeted explicitly by the dress reform laws of 1928, along with the attire of the ‘ulema, leading many of the *lutis* to, grudgingly, accept more normative, Western attire in their daily lives and practices. This acquiescence was not without resistance, as the new style regime of the *lutis* artfully subverted the norms of comportment advocated by the regime through refusing to wear the mandated ties and by donning their new, mandated fedoras over top of their original *dash mashti*, giving the group a towering stature over others.  

The new ‘look’ of the *lutis* was, although Western, also distinct in the eyes of most from the reviled *fokoli*, who were

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mostly members of the lower classes aspiring to the fashion of the elite in an attempt to gain cultural capital, or, in other words, “empty wallets” in new suits.\(^{85}\)

Another central program of articulating masculinity in the Pahlavi period was the reformation of sport and sporting practices in Iran. As Cyrus Schayegh notes, classist legacies of the 19\(^{th}\) century were incorporated in the 20\(^{th}\) century into the minds of a nascent Iranian middle-class the identity, for who the identity of the *lutī* came to stand in for all of the “degenerative characteristics” of the lower classes.\(^{86}\) The centrality of the *zurkhaneh* and wrestling, being so closely associated with this milieu, was subject to special sanction a regime that, despite its self-purported celebration of a pre-Islamic Persian racial past, derided the *zurkhaneh* tradition as another aspect of backwardness afflicting the aspiration of national modernity. By contrast, the Pahlavi nation was to be represented by a new class of male bodies, honed through approved team sports, and through the various scouting associations propagated by the state. On the terrain of physical sport, the *lutīs* and their practice of *zurkhaneh* were considered, despite their strength, to be poor role models for men, as their sporting culture was seen as too individualistic, too unclean, and too undisciplined for ‘modern times’. Notably, much of this discourse, as in the 19\(^{th}\) century, was used to legitimate the normative masculinity of soldiers and the officer classes, for whom ‘proper’, team-based sporting culture was de rigueur.\(^{87}\)

\(^{85}\) Shahri, *Tarikh*, 279n14. Afsaneh Najmabadi also describes how the fokoli was also depicted as a sexual deviant who prowled the streets at night, and whose shaved face served as a constant reminded of the figure of the *amrad*. See, Najmabadi, *Women With Moustaches*, 137-141.


After Reza Shah’s abdication, the occupation of Iran by Allied forces from 1941 to 1946, and the rise of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979) to the Peacock Throne, the ‘traditional’ lutis had, like their amrad cousins, mostly faded into the collective memory of a more hegemonically consolidated Iranian nation. Marking their place was another social class that, while keeping some of the traditions of javanmard and attending the zurkhaneh, operated as a distinct social formation. The particularities of this more recent articulation of the luti masculine ethos during the 1950s and 1960s merits attention but escapes the temporal focus of this analysis. In general however, despite a resurgence during the tumultuous events of the 1953 Iranian coup, the fading presence of the lutis thus suggests both repression and a gradual assimilation of the group into more hegemonically stable socio-political coalitions and gender identities, with some actively affiliating with the infamous hezbollahis, or militant Islamist activists of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and others leaving their tradition of javanmard to nostalgic memory and joining the subsidized new Iranian working-classes, or the ranks of nationalist Iranian émigrés from Norway to Los Angeles.
Conclusion

In the course of this analysis I have attempted to introduce a new element into the narratives of gendered Iranian modernity. To this end, I have reconstructed the counter-normative history of *lutī* masculinity, founded in the medieval, heterodox milieu of Sufi theology and urban social solidarities, performed in the back streets and alleyways of Qajar and Pahlavi Iranian cities, and emploted into the national imaginary of Iranian society, through nationalist and modernist discourses of sex and gender. Writing on the vastly different context of the European Low Countries, the cultural historian Stefan Dudink notes a problematic aspect of contemporary research on masculinity, namely “the idea that somewhere ‘around 1800’ a modern regime of sexual difference emerged in which this difference was constructed as both binary and natural…continues – implicitly – to shape much work in gender history.”88 This point is no less true for the history of modern Iranian masculinity, as the lack of scholarly attention to unruly, contradictory presence of the *lutīs*, and their masculine ethic of javanmard, attests. Although the *lutīs*, and even the linguistic term *lutī* itself, have all but vanished from the landscape of contemporary Iran, the interstices carved out by the group’s counter-normative presence remain.

In an anthropological study of contemporary Iran, Fariba Adelkhah notes how, under the Islamic Republic, groups of men she identifies as *javanmards*, street toughs in the mould of the *lutīs*, have been subject to arrest and social targeting by the state. Adelkhah claims that the narrative focus of recent governmental authority on these *javanmards* shows that “the Republic

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seeks above all to establish its hegemony in populous districts and supplant rival influences,” both politically and in gendered terms. Undoubtedly the Islamic Republic employs its own understand of hegemonic masculinity, rooted in a discursive tradition distinct from the secularizing and Westernizing impulses of Qajar and Pahlavi era reformers, and even from the non-revolutionary tradition of Shi’i intellectual culture. However, Adelkhah also notes how the state has critically intervened into the ethical field of javanmard, and attempted to isolate out the qualities it perceives as virtuous from its embodied manifestation in the life-world of the javanmards themselves, inheritance from the long history of the lutis. This attempt to redeem the ethic from its more sordid past has come through its rationalization, bureaucratization, and, to a certain extent, democratization by the broader community, and the association of a javanmardi masculinity with the neoliberal demands of competitive economics and profit-making. Although the zurkhaneh as an institution continues to exist in contemporary Iran, they too are subject to the new direction of the Iranian state, whose campaign of cultural marketing has highlighted the wrestling as an ‘authentic’ national sport, and initiated public-private ventures to build new, modern facilities for the training of athletes. By contrast, Shahin Gerami notes how this (post)modern ethic of the free market coexists with a hypermasculine ideology premised on religiosity and martyrdom for the state, which privileges certain men and masculinities over others. Furthermore, as some recent ethnographic reflections suggest, masculine identities amongst Iranian youth in particular appear to be developing towards a cosmopolitan, networked,

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and globalized subjectivity, though this pattern does appear to reflect upper- and middle-class residents of Iran’s major cities more than it does the majority of the population. In only one case study could I locate a modern-day identification with the lutis, evidenced in a recent ethnography of a down-and-out neighborhood in Tehran and its relationship with a new, middle-class housing development in its midst. Interestingly, and in recursive fashion, the young men of these respective class positions articulated their problems in the language of lutis, and of fokoli, indicating a new way the understanding of proper masculinity may have been redeployed in the wake of new problems brought by privatization and the weakening of the welfare state in contemporary Iran.

What these recent developments show is that, although the lutis may have receded as a social type, and as a figure of discourse, masculinity in Iran remains a contradictory and contested domain of social and political life. Needless to say, new Iranian masculinities, should they arise, will be as much a subject to the discourses of Iranian hegemonic masculinity as an oppositional presence within them, a facet of modernity as well as, to quote Dipesh Chakrabarty, the carriers of subaltern pasts inaugurating “a disjuncture of the present with itself.”

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