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**The Journey into Adulthood:
Study of Military Service as a Rite of Passage in
Ahmad Mahmoud's *The Neighbors***

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Abstract

This paper attempts to investigate the adolescent narrator's journey into adulthood in Ahmad Mahmoud's *The Neighbor*. Considering the central character's growth into adulthood, the paper argues that the compulsory military service can be fulfilled as a certain 'rite of passage' conventionalized within the society, as represented in the narrative. That is because, through this convention, Khaled is finally approved as an adult by his society. However, he is captured by anxiety of his military service, but he finally overcomes it towards the end of the novel. He is then claimed to have achieved a status in society, the bipolar structure of which shapes social attitudes, and this experience leads to his transition from 'childhood' to 'adulthood'. Moreover, people in the storyworld are considered either grown-ups or non-grown-ups. Khaled, the protagonist, is part of the former group. The reader's knowledge about the storyworld, however, is restricted to the character-narrator's account, that is, the narrative perspective in this novel is oriented by narrating-I (Khaled-the adult), recounting retrospectively four years of his own adolescence. The act of narration does not refer to the experiencing-I (Khaled-the adolescent). According to the modern developmental models, the character in transition is supposed to be considered as an adolescent. But in the society into which Khaled was born, 'adolescence' is not 'discovered' as a stage of 'life cycle.' The so-called rite of passage, Khaled's transformation, is seemingly achieved through military service from a modernist perspective, but it is questionable to what extent

Khaled himself is aware of such transformation. Yet, it can be said that his development is affected by his political activities and his military service as well as by the other social subjects such as his family, neighbors, peers and party members.

Keywords: Ahmad Mahmoud, *The Neighbors*, Adolescence, Rites of Passage, Adulthood

Introduction

Ahmad Mahmoud (1931-2001)ⁱ published *The Neighbors*ⁱⁱ in 1974. Widely known for its exploration of the current socio-political issues of the Southern Iran during the 1950s,ⁱⁱⁱ the novel, however, can also be read considering the representation of an adolescent's struggle into adulthood in a conventional society. The storyworld is functioning with certain conventions according to which an adolescent should prove eligible as an acknowledged member of that society. In this context, for example, personal relationships (that is extra-familial ones) and political activities before passing through some certain stages of development are of prior importance. As it is only after his submission to an 'invented tradition'^{iv}—military service—that the adolescent the character-narrator finally becomes an independent adult subject. The compulsory military conscription can also be taken as an 'invented tradition' because it is based on a "continuity with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm 1). The fictional knowledge about this tradition is filtered through the mind of the character-narrator who, in a simultaneous mode, recounts his memories about his past. Narrative perspective in this novel therefore implies the bipolarity of the fictional world as well as the significance of the military service within that tradition.

Narrative Perspective in *The Neighbors*

The use of 'child's point of view' in Persian prose fiction is a common narrative technique. Nevertheless, in the early periods of modern Persian literature it is mostly used as a substitute device to recount fictional events from an adult's perspective.^v That is mostly done in order to represent adulthood longing for the childhood memories retrospectively. In other words, although the stories are 'told' through children's perspectives, it is the adult's perspective that fundamentally 'sees' or focalizes the narrative events and situations,^{vi} or, as

Kojin Karatani suggests, “children described in such literature are accused of not being “real children,” but children as imagined by adults” (114). When Karatani compares ‘the discovery of the child’ with the ‘discovery of landscapes’ in Japanese literature, he emphasizes that the internal “inversion” in the writers’ perceptions made in fact possible “the tracing of that objective existence [landscape/child]” or the “capturing of a landscape [or child] which is even more “real”” (115). Likewise, despite the fact that children are naturally part of the Persian prose literature written until 1970s, they are not yet ‘discovered’ or one can say that they are presented without any “internal inversion” on the part of the authors. During this time, although some narratives are occasionally told by children or apparently focalized through them, yet they cannot be considered as ‘children narratives;’ instead, “the author steps into the children’s safe and innocent world wherein he reveals the adults’ hidden affairs with the childish layers”^{vii} (Mir Abedini 381). Hassan Mir Abedini, in his survey of the concept of childhood in Persian prose, notes that even though the writers from 1950s^{viii} onwards applied ‘the child’s perspective’ as a narrating mode of the fictional events, yet their stories are mainly framed by an adult’s perspective keeping away from any childish mentality or imagination (379-387). Within a few stories, however, the fictional events are successfully reported from the child’s perspective as the center of the narrative consciousness.^{ix}

Furthermore, the predominance of adult’s perspective does not appear to be limited only to the children narratives but it is a general tendency in the Persian prose literature written before 1979 revolution.^x Whoever the narrator or central character may be, it is mostly an adult who focalizes the narrative events or orients the narrative progression. One good example can be Ahmad Mahmoud’s novel *The Neighbors*. It is a bildungsroman—a novel of formation—which recounts an adolescent’s four years of life illustrating his changes, development and finally growing into an adult. Despite that, it is an adult’s perspective which controls the readers’ knowledge about fictional characters and events throughout the narrative. In other words, the dominant perspective that controls the progression of the plot in this narrative belongs to a narrating-I rather than the experiencing-I. In the same way, the socio-political events in this novel are presented through a combination of point of views. Khaled’s perspective as an adolescent is mostly mixed with an adult’s

perspective.^{xi} Thus, when referring to ‘the discovery of adolescence’ in Persian prose literature, it seems very relevant to restate what Karatani said about the ‘discovery of the child’ in Japanese literature: “although the objective existence of children seems self-evident, the "child" we see today was discovered and constituted only recently” (115). However, representation of the adolescence period in *The Neighbors* suggests that the adolescent’s perspective is not ‘discovered’ within the storyworld and the period itself does not seem to exist in the conventional society. Accordingly, it is possible to suggest that the events and situations in this narrative are presented through an unreal, inauthentic and a fake adolescent’s perspective because there is no adolescence period within fictional world in this novel; instead, people are considered either non-grown-ups or grown-ups. The former is associated with lack of experience, weakness and inferiority while the latter implies experience, authority and superiority. Khaled oscillates between the two poles for a while. He finally becomes able to transcend this chaotic situation through dispatching to the military service which is at the same time his initiation into adulthood.

The combinatory nature of narrative perspective in *The Neighbors*, for example, is revealed through Khaled’s recounting of his involvement in the political activities. The political party members, according to Khaled, attempt to bring changes to storyworld by making people (the working class) aware of their living conditions. They distribute newspapers and political notes among the people in order to encourage them to take part in public demonstrations against the governmental actions in different sectors of the official system. The political party’s seminal aim is to change the living conditions of the working class in the region and their primal medium for doing that is cultural activities. Khaled, counterfactually, does not make out of anything when he gets involved with the subversive activities of the party members. That is obvious from what he recounts with confession: “They’re educated, their speech is difficult for me. I understand nothing” (170). This statement is focalized through the narrating-I or Khaled-the-grown-up who is recounting his memories retrospectively. The implied dual voice in such passages in the novel mixes the narration of the narrating-I with the “experientiality” (Fludernik 22) of the experiencing-I. In other words, the experiencing character’s discourse is colored with the now-grown-up narrator’s discourse and the distance between the two poles vary

throughout the narrative. Khaled, however, will grow out of this phase too. For example, at first he is unfamiliar with the communism and the other intellectual issues discussed in the meetings. His initial behavior inside the party meetings is comparable to his initial sexual behavior—both are adolescent. Despite that, the more he gets involved with the party members the more he understands the real nature of the activities Shafaq and his circle are involved with. This self-awareness implied in the discourse, however, is gained throughout the years and after the *story* time. Therefore, through its analysis both the now-adult character and the reader can perceive the complex structure of the storyworld, its bipolarity as well as the defining role of the military service within that.

The Compulsory Military Service as a Rite of Passage in *The Neighbors*

After the modernization of the military organization in Iran, compulsory military conscription has been considered as a turning point in a man's life. Ervand Abrahamian ascribes this revolutionary change in Iranian history to Reza Khan (1878-1944) who ruled Iran between 1926 and 1941. At the last days of The Fourth National Assembly, according to Abrahamian, Reza Khan "proposed a bill for compulsory military conscription. The bill proposed that every adult male should serve two full years in the armed forces. For Reza Khan, mass conscription would transform the professional army into a truly national army" (131). The sociocultural implications of this bill particularly its emphasis on the concepts such as nationality and national identity as well as the implied association between men, professionalism and nationalism consolidated the significance of the military service as the last phase of a man's immaturity. Because, as it is represented within the narrative, it is mainly after undertaking this duty that men are conventionally considered ready to take new roles—get married, get into a career etc. Therefore, military service, also defined as a social puberty, can be considered as a rite of passage in Iran. It is so, because after this period, an adolescent is allowed to enter into a different stage in his life—the adulthood. Furthermore, since this change brings some new cognitive and physical capabilities, it is believed to enable men to undertake new responsibilities. Likewise, Khaled's society expects him to be a mature man after his military service.

The military service, therefore, is a social change and, as stated above, can be considered a rite of passage as "first developed in the study of preliterate and

tribal societies but has, subsequently, come to be widely used in other social contexts, including those of complex modern societies” (Davis 2). It is mostly referred to as a “ritual process” which goes with “the movement of people from one social status to another, as from being a boy to a man or from being a married woman to becoming a mother” (Ibid 1). The idea of rites of passage, furthermore, implies that the “whole of human life is marked by change” (Ibid). According to Arnold Van Gennep, a Belgian anthropologist, the change in social status that a rite of passage brings about is similar to:

leaving one room, then being in no room at all while in transit before finally being received into the new room. So the total ritual process was made up of three rites: the first separated people from their original status (pre-liminal), the second involved a period apart from normal status (liminal), and third conferred a new status upon the individual (post-liminal). (In Davis 3)

Similarly, the overall changes throughout the four-year lifespan of the represented adolescent in the narrative are comparable to the ritual model, as reproduced in the previous quotation, proposed by Gennep. Having been familiar with new thoughts and different people, the sixteen-year-old character-narrator in *The Neighbors* begins moving away from his customary familial setting, then wandering for a while, since he has ‘no room,’ and finally entering into a totally ‘new room.’ The central concern in this novel, however, seems to be the *liminal* period of an adolescent’s life when, dissociating himself from the conventional customs and thoughts (‘normal status’), he has not yet found a ‘new room’ to live in. This novel, in fact, illustrates the process through which an adolescent in a traditional society, where modernization has recently begun,^{xii} enters into adulthood (post-liminal). Therefore, it is arguable that the military service is the last phase of Khaled’s journey into adulthood. It acts as the initiator of the ‘post-liminal’ phase which is supposed to be a ‘new room’ for the person recently turned into a new stage in his life.

At the beginning of the novel, Khaled is an emotional, ignorant and inexperienced young boy in his early adolescence period. He is sixteen. He does not understand the purpose and the nature of his relationship with Blour

Khanoum^{xiii} in the neighborhood. He is, moreover, part of a pre-modern world in the suburbs and as an adolescent his development, in addition to biological and psychological growth, is also:

molded by the social and cultural context in which it occurs. As the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescence is closely tied to the structure of adult society, and the expectations for youth during this period reflect, in important ways, the skills and qualities deemed important for success in adult roles. [...] The integral connection between adolescence and the societal context means that, despite universals such as puberty and cognitive development, adolescents' experiences will vary across cultures and over history. The settings in which young people develop, the skills they are expected to acquire, and the ways in which their progress toward adulthood is marked and celebrated depend on the cultural and historical contexts. [...] Thus, both macrolevel, societal arrangements and local conditions help shape adolescents' experiences and the course of their development. (Crockett 23)

In the same way, the adolescent character-narrator's development in *The Neighbors* is structured by both the local factors (from the household to the nearby societal forces) as well the macrolevel ones (historical, national, religious etc.).

Adolescence, however, is relatively a new area of study. It "did not exist before the last two decades of the nineteenth century. One could almost call it an invention of that period; though it did incorporate, in quite a central way, certain older attitudes and modes of thinking" (John Demos and Virginia Demos 2). It is referred to the years between childhood and adulthood and is often divided into early and later phases. The former is referred to the ages between twelve and sixteen and the latter covers the ages between sixteen and twenty. There is no agreement on the universality of the adolescence characteristics since, being contextual, it is principally defined by the local, cultural and social settings particular to each region. According to Chad Gordon, adolescence period is made up of two parts: early adolescence and

later adolescence. The former includes the population between twelve and fifteen and the latter those of sixteen and twenty (Gordon 3).^{xiv} Nevertheless, the social and cultural context wherein Khaled grows is far more different from the Western models discussed in nearly all of the related studies. Khaled is from a working class family living in an under-developed pre-industrial region; however, his experiences throughout the novel enable him to compare and contrast his situation with the other classes.^{xv} It also encourages him to take some revolutionary actions.

Man has always given services to the society to which he belongs in order to protect the communal properties. Together with many other things, modernity systematized this aspect too. In such a society, as a sergeant says to Gholam's mother after his dispatching to the military service, "Everybody should do his military service. [...] Keep whole your life for yourselves, give only two years to the government" (Mahmoud 21). Throughout the novel, Khaled, as the homodiegetic character, is degraded by the other social subjects within both his socio-familial relationships and the political circle to which he finally gets involved. An underlying binary perception seemingly exists between the others' idea of an adolescent and Khaled's own perception of himself in this novel. However, it is through the imposed 'rites of passage' in his society that Khaled grows up since his maturity is symbolically achieved at the end of the novel when he is dispatched to do his military service.

The pre-modern thought in the novel is mostly represented by Khaled's father, Usta Haddad (Haddad the Builder), the religious people such as Haj Sheikh Ali, Haj Seyyed Ali, Haj Seyyed Mohammad and their disciples, like most of the people in the neighborhood. There is, moreover, nothing important inside this frame of thought other than the established metaphysical and conventional beliefs. Any unconventional behavior is considered deviational and hence wrong. In such a community, education is also at the service of tradition. It is needed simply to read the religious texts and say prayers. His father says: "Khaled, did you say your prayers" (Mahmoud 15). In such a world he is considered as an immature person who cannot understand the world as well as the way it works. His mother, for example, says to him: "You still don't know the world Khaled. [...] You are too young" (248). Blour Khanom also once says to him: "You don't understand such things now" (12); she is,

however, the first character in the novel who recognizes ‘changes’ in Khaled—he is becoming a ‘man’—and in different ways she tries to make him aware of his maturity. Since she is not satisfied with her married life with a relatively older husband, she motivates Khaled into some clandestine meetings which leave crucial impacts on his growth. Her behavior, moreover, is anti-patriarchal and hence dangerous to the already defined male/female roles. Ahmad Mahmoud himself in Bahman Maghsoudlou’s film, *Ahmad Mahmoud: A Noble Novelist* (2004), describes Blour Khanom as following:

She is not a prostitute because she does not sleep with any person other than Khaled. It is the poor social conditions that have made her unfaithful. If the social conditions were suitable, she would not become disloyal. Therefore, I do not consider her action against conventions. She has a husband who leaves home at about four or five in the morning and turns back at about midnight. He eats his lunch in his coffeehouse and smokes his opium there too. Moreover, he does not sleep with her. Compared to her husband, she is younger. Khaled is becoming a man and somebody should show him his adulthood. (*Ahmad* 00:05:48-00:06:30)

As it is suggested, after his illuminating experience with Blour Khanom, Khaled grows out of his pre-modern world in which he is considered ignorant, unable and inferior. His sociofamilial context, nevertheless, does not approve his growth until he passes some defined stages.

Other than the party, some people in Khaled’s neighborhood also think and act untraditionally. Mohammad Mekanik (Mohammad, the Mechanic), for example, does not think like Khaled’s father. As Khaled says he “doesn’t say prayers. My father says even laughing at Mohammad Mekanik’s face is sinful” (26). Mohammad Mekanik, in return, refers to the pre-modern thoughts of Khaled’s father as “nonsense” (27). Moreover, the pre-modern thought already exists in the sociocultural background of Khaled’s family and society where people are generally unaware of the modern thoughts that the party members together with some other people offer him. However, the influential events in Khaled’s early adolescent life—his involvement with the party members, imprisonment and falling in love with Siah Cheshm^{xvi}—are all accidental

similar to the real life experiences; in other words, they are partly the result of his adventurous adolescent character. It is only through his biological and intellectual growth after chapter three that Khaled gradually transforms into a different person with new traits of thought and action.

One outstanding event which can be measured as the final step in his journey from adolescence into adulthood is the military service. Military service has significant impacts on a person's later development because it leaves both positive and negative effects on him/her. As Caroryn M. Aldwin in his entry to the *Encyclopedia of Adult Development* points out, the military service has physical, psychological, and social effects on the life course of a person (Aldwin 351-2). These effects, according to Aldwin, are both negative and positive:

The negative outcomes include disruption of the life course, separation from others, and painful memories. Positive benefits include increases in maturity, coping skills, self-discipline, independence, cooperation, and sensitivity to others. Men and women in the military often confront adult responsibilities at an earlier age than civilians and may develop lifelong adaptive coping strategies from their experiences in facing extreme stress. (352)

Likewise, Khaled is affected by the negative and positive outcomes of the compulsory military service. His anxiety grows in Khaled by his cousin's—Gholam's—description of the experiences he is having while being in the service. Gholam is presented as an unreliable narrator who is exaggerating in his statements in order to exhort Blour Khanoum and Khaled's mother. Despite that, Khaled gets impressed by his narrations which are accompanied by the others', particularly Khaled's mother's, covert agreement. After his imprisonment, Khaled feels ready to have the experience which has been haunting him for a while. He recollects the scene in which Gholam exaggerates to his mother: "Well dear aunt, this is soldiering, there is no 'No' in it, no 'I don't know'; if you say something, you are detained; if you counter, they'll add to your service duration; if you defend yourself, you'll be put into jail" (130). At first, he dislikes Gholam: "I've never detested Gholam so much. When he

speaks my whole body shakes. It is as if he is chewing my flesh” (131). However, when he grows up, his ideas change towards Gholam too. He thinks more rationally than emotionally.

The military service, as suggested, can be considered as the confirmation of the narrator’s maturity since in Iranian culture conscription has been changed into an outstanding social marker of adulthood. In two places throughout the novel, the reader’s attention is called towards the importance of this rite of passage. In the opening pages of the novel, Khaleh Ra’na comes to their house and “she finally speaks. In the morning they arrested Khaleh Rana’s son and took him to the military administration” (21). She asks Khaled’s parents to ask Afaq, their neighbor, to do something for him; for example she wants to know whether Afaq can help Gholam to be exempt from the compulsory military service by bribing the Captain. The obvious reason why his aunt and the others fear the military service refers to the conventional belief that it is a very difficult period unsuitable for the ‘children’. Towards the end of the novel, when Khaled and the other prisoners have gone on strike for a while, the prison administrator addresses him humiliatingly:

“How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

His voice gets violent,

“It seems that the moment you be released from the prison, you should go to the barrack.”

I’m filled with fear. I look at his cheeks, they are covered in sweat. (Emphasis added)

“If you be wise, I won’t annoy you at the end of your imprisonment, otherwise I’ll hand you over to the military service department.” (465)

Khaled’s anxiety stems from the established oral narrative of the conscription experiences like Gholam’s.^{xvii} He feels anxious about it at his early adolescent period but he finally overcomes his anxiety thinking and acting like a fully mature person:

When I come out, I become pale. Military administration officers are waiting for me. The prison administrator is

looking at me and is laughing. [...] I want to walk but I hear the prison administrator's voice:

"I hope you learned a lesson and you won't think of any riot in the barrack."

I don't respond to him. [...] I come out of the prison with the military administration officers. The street in front of the prison bends in the center. *The sun has filled it. I look at the end of the street. My eyes feel comfortable at the bottom. My mother appears from the end of the street.* (Emphasis added)
(502)

As suggested in the above passage, Khaled is no longer haunted by the anxiety of serving in the army as he used to be. He feels comfortable. After reading such an illuminating ending, the reader feels sharing the experiences with Khaled in the same way the grown up narrator re-experiences the experiencing character's or his former self's feelings and perceptions. Furthermore, the visionary closure does not imply that Khaled will be without any problems but suggests the fact that he is mature enough to encounter with the forthcoming problems. The text also shows that he is no longer the emotional adolescent as he used to be before imprisonment. Moreover, it is implied that Khaled will follow Siah Cheshm after his conscription period since his love for her is not comparable with the emotional love of an adolescent whose sexual orientations mainly control his reason. Khaled is now more rational and experienced. Therefore, not being an immature 'child,' he belongs to the 'adult' world.

Conclusion

The crucial factor in the presentation of Khaled's character seems to be the fact that his sociofamilial context resists to acknowledge him as a grown-up. In other words, he should firstly pass through some universally respected 'rites' within the storyworld before being acknowledge as a person capable of solving his human problems with his acquired experiences and world knowledge. By today's developmental standards, Khaled is an adolescent whose biological, emotional, psychological and intellectual needs are far more different than those of a child or an adult. Nevertheless, his society seemingly has not yet

‘discovered’ adolescence as a distinctive life cycle otherwise he would not be constantly anxious or forced into struggling emotionally about his compulsory military service. Instead, the fictional society in *The Neighbors* functions through some customs and sociocultural conventions that give the impression of respecting bipolarity. Thus, the central opposition set in the selected narrative appears to be the ‘child/adult’ one. Khaled finally grows out of the children’s group associated with immaturity and inferiority into the adult’s group associated with responsibility and authority. According to his narration, Khaled appears to be aware of his own growth and maturity as well as the importance of the military service only when he is grown up because some part of his knowledge suggests a lower distance between Khaled-the-character who immediately experiences the fictional events and situations and Khaled-the-narrator who retrospectively chimes on some of his own earlier thoughts and ignorant actions while recounting them. Moreover, it is obvious that his society follows its own conventions based on which people are considered and invisibly classified either non grown-ups or grown-ups. Khaled’s struggle to be acknowledged as a grown-up or an adult is finally sealed up by his dispatching to the military service which is, after all, a social contract marking, within the fictional world, the onset of a male’s journey into adulthood.

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ⁱAhmad Mahmoud (1931-2002) was a contemporary novelist and short story writer. He came from a working class family. Supporting the leftist political views, Mahmoud got involved in the oppositional activities from the early years of his life and spent some time in prison for his political views. He published several novels and short story collections and his style is social realism.

ⁱⁱBeing written between 1963-1968 and published in 1974, *The Neighbors* is a simultaneous first-person narrative recounting the four-year life story of an adolescent named Khaled. The events in this novel are presented chronologically by the novel's protagonist, Khaled. The novel is made up of six chapters. When it opens, Khaled is about sixteen years old. In the first chapter, his neighbors (about eight families living in the same house) are introduced and the chapter comes to its end when Usta Haddad, Khaled's father, leaves Ahvaz to Kuwait where he hopes to find a job and Khaled has made an intimate relationship with Blour Khanom. In the second chapter, Khaled begins his involvement in the political activities. The two middle chapters focus on the social, intellectual and

emotional development of the central consciousness—Khaled. The last two chapters are mostly narrating the heroin's political awareness together with his passage into adulthood. Throughout the novel an underlying conflict between and among the unemployment, class conflicts, promiscuousness, suburbia problems and corruption of the governmental agencies are observable. Ahmad Mahmoud sets *The Neighbors* against the backdrop of the oil nationalization crisis in Iran in the early 1950s.

ⁱⁱⁱNearly all of the studies (so far as I know there are only a few) about this novel have had political concerns as if it is a documentary text recording the socio-political condition of the story time, disregarding other textual approaches. Although political issues are constantly reflected in Mahmoud's literary works, they are not, still, his oeuvre's primary concern. He is considered as a humanist writer in Persian literature and his main concern is human beings and how they reflect to their environments. His characters are also quotidian.

^{iv}Eric Hobsbawm defines 'invented tradition' as "a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1).

^vLikewise, in English literature, for example, the child's perspective represented in Charles Dickens' and James Joyce's work does not mostly belong to children but to the children as imagined by the adults. Pip, in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and the boy in Joyce's "Araby," recount their memories of the past life mixing their experiencing perspective with their now-narrating one. Considering this problem in *Great Expectations*, Seymour Chatman holds that in narrative "The different points of view usually combine, but in important and interesting cases, they do not. Consider 'autobiographical' or first-person narration, as in *Great Expectations*. The protagonist-as-narrator reports things from the perceptual point of view of his younger self. His ideology on the other hand tends to be that of his older self. The narrator is older and wiser for his experiences" (158). Moreover, this recurs in "Araby" too. According to Rimmon-Kennan, "In this narrative, an adult narrator tells about himself as a child (of an unspecified age). His language is sometimes 'coloured' by his perceptions at the time of narration (external focalization), sometimes by those of his younger self (internal focalization), and sometimes remains ambiguous between the two" (86). Likewise, in *The Neighbors* Khaled's older self mainly controls the narrative ideology and his language is colored, at the same time, by his perceptions of the younger self, older self and the combination of the two. However, it is through the rifts between the perspectives that the reader comes to know the significance of the polarity and the defining importance of the military service within the represented sorryworld.

^{vi}Gerard Genette differentiate the two as following: "to my mind most of the theoretical works on this subject [narrative perspective ...] suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?--or*, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*" (186)

^{vii}My translation. The other Persian texts used in this study are my own translations.

^{viii}He names some of these writers: Jamal Mir Sadeghi (b. 1312), Fereydoon Tonekaboni (b. 1316), Simin Daneshvar (1300-1390), Abolghasem Payande (1292-1363), Rasoul Parvizi (1298-1356), Baba Moghaddam (1292-1366), Jalal Al Ahmad (1302-1348) and Ebrahim Golestan (b. 1301). (The dates are given in Shamsi Calendar.)

^{ix} One example is Al Ahmad's short story named "the Blessed Party" narrated and focalized through the young adolescent, Abbas.

^x This social event can be symbolically taken as a seminal cause of great changes in 'perspectives.'

^{xi} Its language is ironic. It is also colored, on the one hand, with the narrator's grown up retrospective perspective and, on the other hand, with the adult-world perspectives.

^{xii} People, for example, no longer tolerate the colonialist activities of the foreign nations (Britain in this novel). Instead, they want nationalization of the wealth (oil), pursuit of equality, freedom and reformation.

^{xiii} Mrs. Blour; Blour is a first name in Persian but in colloquial Farsi title is usually used before first names too. She is thirty one years old and a beautiful married woman. Her husband beats her every day because she does not wear as he wishes (he wants her to cover herself carefully). Khaled is attracted to her firstly out of curiosity which grows into sexual desires and lust as he gets accustomed to meeting her regularly. Later in the novel, however, he decides not to see her; instead, he falls in love with Siah Cheshm, a young girl whose name Khaled does not know and whose social class he does not belong to. He transcends the early emotional uncontrollable and spontaneous behavior when the novel gets closer to its end. He becomes more rational as an adult is supposed to be in his society.

^{xiv} According to Mariam Webster, adolescence is the period of life from puberty to maturity terminating legally at the age of majority; adolescence noun (Concise Encyclopedia): Period of life from puberty to adulthood (roughly ages 12–20) characterized by marked physiological changes, development of sexual feelings, efforts toward the construction of identity, and a progression from concrete to abstract thought. Adolescence is sometimes viewed as a transitional state, during which youths begin to separate themselves from their parents but still lack a clearly defined role in society. It is generally regarded as an emotionally intense and often stressful period.

^{xv} After his acquaintance with Shafaq and the other party members, Khaled begins reading books. We already know he has left school after the fourth grade. The more he reads the books, both at home and in prison that his party members provide, the more he understands about the nature of the party activities and their real problems. His strong character is made in this way.

^{xvi} Literally a black-eyed girl.

^{xvii} It is said that he dies at the practice field by an accidental shot. Khaled does not like him at first but when he hears his death news, in his recollections, his thoughts about him change.