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**Masculinity in *Born in the Month of Owl*  
by Azadeh Mohseni**

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**Abstract**

The concept of Iranian men and masculinities has become a strong strand of research in recent years. In the paper, the researchers try to look at this concept through the views of Raewyn Connell's theories in order to take a closer look at Azadeh Mohseni's short story *Born in the Month of Owl*. Connell rejects the gender dichotomy theory and in her book *Masculinities*, she introduces four types of masculinities: hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, marginalized masculinity, and subordinate masculinity. At any given time and place in history, human beings have different definitions for each category. The masculinity that was once hegemonic for the people of a particular society can become marginalized with the passage of time. In the first section of this study, we have defined gender from Connell's perspective and in the second section, we have focused on different types of masculinity and how they have changed continuously in *Born in the Month of Owl*.

**Keywords:** Raewyn Connell, Masculinity, Azadeh Mohseni, *Born in the Month of Owl*

**Introduction**

Human beings have always tried to understand and describe the concept of gender. In any period, gender has been defined differently. At first, it was

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believed that our sexual organs determine gender: humans were either men or women (Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 4). As time moved on, this theory evolved: biology was not the only factor determining gender. Every person was born in a particular society, so that society was also effective in forming gender (Jackson and Scott 9; Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 9). According to this theory, each one of us was like a canvas on which the society would paint images using its standards and demands, hence giving us our gender (Butler 12; Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 52). Later, this theory was also criticized, and a person was compared to a machine that would completely carry out whatever the society ordered (Butler 48; Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 54). Gender dichotomy existed in all the above theories: we were either women or men; there was no third gender (Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 9).

This is how sex role theory was developed (Biddel). In the 90s, researchers sought to find the differences between these two genders. Everyone wanted to know what differences men and women have, and many books such as *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gary were written. The psychology of that period insisted on the fact that women and men have come from two different worlds and have significant differences. As Connell states popular psychology made a dichotomy, "Women are supposed to be nurturant, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive and sexually loyal; men are supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic and promiscuous" (60). However, studying the results of the surveys closely, researchers found out that the differences between men and women were not noticeable at all. What astonished them was their remarkable similarity (Maccoby and Jacklin 349).

Rejecting gender dichotomy theory, canvas theory, automata theory, and sex role theory, Raewyn Connell illustrates gender in a different way. Using Connell's definition for gender in this paper, we aim to analyze different types of masculinity in the short story *Born in the Month of Owl* by Azadeh Mohseni.

### **Gender according to Raewyn Connell**

In her book *Gender in the World Perspective* (2009), Connell gives a comprehensive account of gender and its different definitions. She provides a more comprehensive definition for gender and says, "We are neither paintings

nor machines. People do not wait indifferently to be washed over by gender; on the contrary, we start developing our gender from the very beginning of our childhood” (96-97). Like Simone de Beauvoir who says, “one is not born but rather becomes a woman,” Connell believes that although it seems true that society influences the development of an individual’s gender, it is the individual who actively selects which pattern of the society to accept or reject (de Beauvoir 267). Although Media, school, and family, as hegemonic organizations, have an important role in the way we are shaped, it is us who actively choose, from the many gender types presented, what gender we want to be. In a family, for example, everyone has his/her own specific interpretation for gender. The child sees how the family members perceive gender and freely accepts different aspects from each interpretation reject some other. For instance, in a family in which the father always assaults the mother, the son can choose to be like the father or respect women (Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 100).

Connell believes that individuals develop their gender in their relations with others (*Gender in World Perspective* 73). The process of selecting gender is a conscious active one. A woman may display a behavior in an eastern society that she may not have at home. She may be kinder or even a little spoiled at home but look tough and serious outside and specially at work. She chooses how to behave toward others at different times and places. This applies to all of us. Depending on where we are, we exhibit different genders (*Gender in World Perspective* 87). In *Breaking the Bowls* (2005), Judith Lorber states that gender is composed of six factors; "gender identity, gendered marital and procreative status; gendered sexual orientation; gendered personality; gender processes (in everyday interaction); gender belief and gender display" (78).

Based on these factors, Connell concludes that we may have thousands of gender types (*Gender in World Perspective* 60). This is how gender hierarchy is created. In this hierarchy, women are generally considered inferior, and men dominate them (Connell, *Masculinities* 74). However, this is not the end of the story; women, among themselves, and men, among themselves, create

hierarchies too. There is a specific type of masculinity in the highest level of such hierarchy, which dominates all types of masculinity and femininity, and it is called the hegemonic masculinity (Connell, *Gender and Power* 183).

To Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a type of masculinity mastering every other type of gender without resorting to force and violence (*Gender and Power* 184). For her, this ascendancy is achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion and she considers this as the largest difference between hegemony and patriarchy (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Although, if hegemony fails in imposing its rules, it does not shy away from using violence. Connell considers dominating women and having men as superiors, as the greatest hegemonic standard (*Gender and Power* 181, *Masculinities* 74). To Connell, hegemony is a three-layered model: power, division of labor, and emotional attachment to the opposite sex; all of which play a pivotal role in forming hegemony (*Masculinities* 73-74). In today's western world, the members of hegemonic masculinity are middle-class, heterosexual white men (Noorafrooz 102; Howson 60).

In what follows, we will have an analytical look at one story in *Born in the Month of Owl* written by Azadeh Mohseni while considering the definition of gender provided by Connell. We will show that not only are all the four types of masculinity introduced by Connell, highlighted by Mohseni, they also undergo great changes throughout the story.

### **Masculinity in *Born in the Month of Owl***

*Born in the Month of Owl* (2009) is a collection of short stories. In a short story with the same name, Mohseni depicts a reporter doing research on Agha Mashalla's family and gradually the reader realizes that the reason for the reporter's curiosity is the only son of the family. Bahram is born after five girls and wins his father's heart, making Agha Mashalla coming up with ambitious plans for his one and only son. However, as he grows up, Bahram changes. He shows interest in girlish behavior, clothes and make up rather than boyish characteristics. He wears make-up, puts on his sister's clothes and goes out. These actions result in punishment from his father, which in turn makes Bahram run away from home. Bahram's "abnormal" actions cause his family to leave the neighborhood with embarrassment. At the end of the story, we realize that the

family's moving away, the father's embarrassment, and Bahram's running away from home are all due to Bahram's transsexuality. The most striking aspect of this story is the way different types of masculinity are depicted in the story.

In her book *Masculinities*, Raewyn Connell introduces four types of masculinities: hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, marginalized masculinity, and subordinate masculinity (76). These types of masculinity will be discussed and analyzed as follows.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Hegemony always tries to apply its rules and demands. To this aim, it uses different agencies to enforce its rules. Family, school, and media are among the most important agencies (Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 100). Put in other words, by turning on the TV, we let the hegemonic power of the society in our houses and by changing channels, we contribute in establishing hegemony in our everyday lives. For instance, in TV commercials, series, and movies, we always see men with strong bodies, great height, styled hair, and special clothes moving before our eyes. Soon after, we will see the same bodies, hairstyles, and clothes on young men we run into on the streets because hegemonic masculinity is an idealized form of masculinity in a society and people will act in ways to reinforce it (Kahn 31). Abedinifard brings the traditional Iranian definition of hegemonic masculinity from *Dehkhoda Dictionary* defined in adjectives such as "courageous, brave, hero, zealous, fearless, honourable, etc" (25).

Most men try to achieve the standards set by the hegemony because it benefits them and because they know that hegemony tries to defeat all the other subsequent gender types. Defeating does not mean eliminating them, rather, "it considers them to be secondary and itself to be primary" (Connell, *Gender and Power* 184). It must be noted that the meaning of hegemony is not fixed everywhere and in every period. Hegemony is different at any given time and place. For example, in Iran before Islamic Revolution, men would swear to a strand of their moustache and had excessive zeal, while helping with household

chores or taking care of babies were not customary. Today, however, moustache has lost its importance, men's clothes and facial hairstyles have changed, and helping in household chores has become acceptable, at least for some middle class men.

In the story, "Born in the Month of Owl," we come to grasp the hegemony by reading the very first lines of the story. The reporter asks a man who used to be Agha Mashalla's neighbor before moving away about Agha Mashalla and his son. The man replies:

He had lots of plans for his son. One day, he would say, "When he gets his diploma, I will teach him shop-keeping at my store and then have him marry Oos Ramezan's daughter." Another day, he would say, "I want to let him study, become a doctor, and marry Dr. Hosseini's daughter." He used to say, "I like him to carry the pole on Ashura." (36-37)

Working, studying, or attending religious ceremonies are the common factors of hegemony in the country. A young man must either work or study; otherwise, they are considered good-for-nothings. Another noteworthy point is that in Connell's opinion, the most important feature of hegemony is heterosexuality (*Gender and Power* 186). As mentioned, Bahram's father insists that Bahram has to marry one of the girls of the neighborhood. Another aspect of hegemony is that a boy is expected to marry a girl after finding a job or graduating.

The reporter then goes to the midwife who has helped Agha Mashalla's wife in labor to ask her about Bahram's birth story. The midwife also talks about the hegemony of that period: "I don't know about women in higher social classes, but those days women were not so fancy, they would give birth at home in our neighborhood" (36). Not long ago, giving birth at hospital was an unusual act. Childbirth was a normal process and did not need any specialists. Some women experienced in delivering babies, would play the role of a midwife in one of the rooms of the house since going to hospital was considered "fancy". The midwife tells of Agha Mashalla's reaction to the birth of five baby girls all of whom were delivered by her, "He seemed indifferent, he paid me, but I knew how much he

wanted to have a son; he had the right; every man likes to have an heir” (36). Seeing a son as an heir and the one who can maintain his father’s name and continue the line is not a new thing. Preferring a son and considering him superior to a daughter is still common in many Iranian families for which Agha Mashalla is a good example. After each daughter is born, he pays the midwife, but his behavior changes when Bahram is born: “When he realized that the baby was a boy, he became extremely happy, put his hand into his pocket, and handed me a bundle of notes. And I heard, he gave Ozra Khanoom, his wife, a pair of emerald earrings” (36). He pays the midwife without even counting the money, buys his wife earrings, and tells her, “if anything happens to him, I bring down the world” (36). This behavior is definitely new and did not apply to the girls; otherwise, the midwife would not describe it so enthusiastically.

Another person to be interviewed by the reporter is one of Bahram’s sisters. She talks about Bahram’s childhood and how much attention their father paid to him:

My father behaved as if we had been Bahram’s servants. Before everyone started to eat, his plate had to be filled with the best part of the food. It was Bahram who said what to eat and where to go. He was the only child whom my father fed. He wanted his son to be a tall, strong boy like a hero. (37)

As said, hegemony considers men to be superior to women. Such behavior can still be observed; there are still families that behave like this and pamper their son to make a “hero” out of him, especially the families in which a boy is born after several girls. Being a hero is one of the important criteria of hegemony especially in Iran, because power is a layer of hegemony and a hero has power and can dominate others.

Agha Mashalla, Bahram’s father, is the depiction of hegemony in the story. He boasts about having a son at first, but after some changes in Bahram’s behavior, he leaves no stone unturned to make him a ‘natural’ boy again. He is

not aware of the fact that what seems to be normal to him is very abnormal to Bahram. When hegemony cannot dominate through any other way, it resorts to violence. Agha Mashalla does the same. Even after consulting with the doctor, his viewpoint does not change. In the interview, Bahram's mother says:

Doctors know nothing dear. I would take my son to them, and they would say he was only thirty percent man! Can you believe it? ... in our last visit to the doctors, Agha Mashalla accompanied us as well. The doctor said in this situation only surgery would help him. Agha Mashalla was about to beat him to death. We pulled him out by force (45).

After visiting the doctor, Bahram runs away from home. Worried about her son, the mother asks the father to announce his escape in the newspapers. In response, Agha Mashalla says, "Shame on you! Do you want to let everyone know about our disgrace? Leave him to God and give in to destiny" (46). Transsexuality of children has always been considered a big scandal. Families are often unwilling to accept it and do not want anybody to know about this feature of their children. Although for many years that sex change surgery has become legal in Iran, it is the social and cultural climate from which transsexuals mostly suffer (Javaheri 376). Agha Mashalla talks about 'giving in to destiny', but he himself does not. He cannot accept that his son is not a "man" although he has male sexual organs, so he uses force. As soon as Bahram comes back, Agha Mashalla picks on his plucked eyebrows, but Bahram denies it and says, "They're not plucked." As always, Agha Mashalla "got so angry and started beating him violently at dinner time ..." (46). When violence does not work he is at his wit's end,

His reputation was ruined in the neighborhood. One would say he had seen Bahram wearing make-up; one would say he had seen him with some flashy boys; recently, Bahram's own father had seen him wearing his sister's clothes walking on the street. He couldn't tolerate it anymore, so he didn't leave any glass unbroken. Within a week, we sold our house and moved to another neighborhood. (46-47)



Agha Mashalla sees that no matter what he does, Bahram continues his behavior, so he leaves that neighborhood, and starts living elsewhere so that he can cover up this 'scandal'.

When questioned by the interviewer, Agha Mashalla pretends not to know anything and says, "No. I don't know him. No" (47), and when the interviewer insists. He says, "suppose it is true; that's none of your business. Seems you are looking for trouble .... God damn all international research and stuff like that. Somebody else wants to make a name; we have to fall into disgrace? .... Am I forced? I don't want to speak ... God damn humanity" (47-48), and he terminates the interview. Even after several years and a relative change made in the point of view of the hegemony toward transsexualism, Agha Mashalla cannot accept that his son's problem has not been an unforgivable sin.

### **Complicit Masculinity**

Complicit masculinity is a type of masculinity that accepts and follows the instructions of the hegemony. As Connell puts it, "if we take the hegemonic masculinity as the football players, playing the game in the stadium, the complicit masculinity will be those sitting at home in front of the television cheering for their team" (Connell, *Masculinities* 79).

The biggest advantage that the hegemonic masculinity has for complicit masculinity is that it leads to belittling women and "inferior masculinities". It means that if most men follow the hegemony ruling over a society, they consider themselves superior to women and "inferior men", which is of utmost importance in finding jobs and establishing social and cultural position (Connell, *Gender and Power* 185). It should be noted that the stability of the hegemony also depends on the existence of complicit hegemony. Since most men of any society are part of the complicit masculinity and are busy conforming to the hegemony's demands, hegemonic masculinity will be protected from any kind of damage (Howson 65). This does not mean that the hegemony is always the same. As shown in the previous section, hegemonic masculinity undergoes change in

different periods; one group creates it while another group destroys it (Connell, *Masculinities* 77). What was said, however, means that since each hegemony dominating a society is accepted by the majority of men in that society, if the minority of the society including women and inferior men intend to destroy hegemony, they will have to overcome a lot of difficulties to reach their goals, although their chance of success is limited.

In Azadeh Mohseni's "Born in the Month of Owl," some examples of complicit masculinity are observed, the most important one being Agha Mashalla. Throughout the story, Bahram's father tries to apply the demands of the hegemony dominating the society. He goes so deep into it that he becomes the hegemony of Bahram's life. The father orders Bahram around, pushes him to do things and behave in certain ways that the only choice left for Bahram is either escape or suicide. Bahram's father is a notable example of complicit hegemony; he starts boasting and spoiling his son as soon as he is born, and when faced with his 'weird' behavior, he does his best to prevent it. He uses his power and violence exactly the same way as the hegemony demands in order to suppress Bahram, and when he fails, he moves out of the neighborhood pretending not to know Bahram. In fact, he conforms to the hegemony's principles of that period until the very end.

Another example of complicit masculinity can be found in the interview with Bahram's classmates, "I don't know about now, but those days school children would not care for their wimpy classmates ... this poor boy would befriend one or another of our classmates at a time; once, he chose me and Mamal Rezaei. Mum's the word but he was kind of lunatic. He behaved in weird ways" (38-39). One classmate goes on to talk about Bahram's dancing which used to be hilarious for him. "Mamal pissed himself laughing" (39), and when Agha Mashalla arrived, not only the classmates did not defend Bahram, they also ran away from the bizarre situation. Bahram did not go to school for a week; "If you want the truth, we were so afraid of his father that we did not dare to pay him a visit" (39). If we consider Agha Mashalla as the performer of the hegemony, these two classmates did not defend or visit Bahram due to their fear from the hegemony. They simply did not care for their wimpy classmate because caring for him would mean losing the benefits of conforming to the patriarchal dividend;

as Butler states, it is the hegemony that provides us with a definition of being weak or strong and being normal or abnormal (Butler 99).

Next, the interviewer goes to a PhD student of psychology who had done a research on Bahram and other transsexuals for his dissertation. Talking about how he met Bahram, Bahram's characteristics, and how Bahram had helped him with his PhD dissertation, he describes the night Bahram asked for his hand in marriage,

I was terrified. For just one moment, put yourself in my shoes. I couldn't believe he had gone that far ... all his words were Greek to me. I was too nervous. You might know how I felt ... several times, he asked me, "would you marry me?" I wanted to tell him he was making a mistake, but I was speechless.... I was both scared and wanted to laugh. I was also feeling sorry for him.... I told him his request was unexpected and I wanted some time to think about it. He laughed and said, "oh love" I was disgusted ... on the way, I felt sick thinking about it (42-43).

He is a PhD student of psychology and his dissertation is about transsexualism; however, he is terrified by the thought of being with a transsexual and feels sick. Diane Richardson points out that gender and sexuality are formed within intersectional discourses of class, race and ethnicity that are themselves already embedded in different places, cultures, religion and forms of governmentality (470). The thought of getting married to a transsexual in Iran's hegemony is not acceptable because many people believe that transsexuals are not different from homosexuals (Doorandish). Therefore, he is also placed in the complicit category of masculinity. He avoids meeting Bahram again; he does not answer his phone calls and turns back seeing Bahram at his doorway. Within a month, he moves to another town to avoid seeing Bahram all together. In fact, like Bahram's father, the psychologist resorts to moving away and leaving Bahram behind.

### Marginalized Masculinity

In her book *Masculinities*, Connell defines marginalized masculinity as a type of masculinity related to race, social class and ethnicity. In other words, the masculinity which is marginalized due to some reasons except sexual matters is known as marginalized masculinity (Connell, *Masculinities* 80-81). In "Born in the Owl Month", it is Bahram who is marginalized by his friends, neighbors, and family before anyone knew his biological condition. In an interview with Agha Mashalla's neighbor, when the interviewer asks about Agha Mashalla's son, he avoids answering by saying, "His son? How come? Well, when he was a child, I saw him assisting his father; I don't remember anything else" (35). Like Agha Mashalla, he pretends to have forgotten everything. This reaction means that the neighbors have also abandoned him.

At school, Bahram is marginalized in another way:

Bahram Saeidi? Yeah I remember him. ... He was fun, easily beaten, and wasteful. At times he would treat the whole class with sandwiches. His father was rolling in money. He wore brand clothes. He had a small body and was not that strong. He didn't have any close friends. I don't know about now, but those days, school children would not care for their wimpy classmates. (38)

As said before, the hegemony provides a particular definition for masculinity and femininity; men should be "strong, tall, and hero-type" because power is one of the layers of hegemony. Bahram, on the contrary, is 'easily-beaten', 'small', and 'weak'. Cliff Chang introduces the concept of 'managerial hegemonic masculinity' and believes that many marginalized men who lack the normative standards of hegemonic masculinity try to compensate this loss with spending a lot of money or have higher education or find a high ranking job (Chang 299). This is why Bahram treats the entire class with sandwiches now and then to keep himself in their circle, but whatever he does, they do not care for their "wimpy classmate."

Even at home, Bahram is marginalized. His sister, who is jealous of him because of the excessive attention the father paid him in his childhood, cannot get along with him even after many years: "I don't know why I could never like

him. When my father beat him to violently, my heart sometimes went out to him, but after a while, my negative feelings toward him would come back” (37). Due to such behavior, Bahram prefers staying in his room to being with the family: “He was always secluded in his room listening to music through his headphone ... my mother would take his food to his room; though he didn’t even touch the food. He would eat three or four spoons of his food every now and then. He was nothing but skin and bones” (37-38). Even after the doctor's visit, the father’s violence does not end so Bahram runs away from home.

### **Subordinate Masculinity**

Subordinate masculinity is a type of masculinity that is considered insignificant due to sexual matters (Howson 63). Raewyn Connell believes that not only all homosexuals but also all men with any remote symbolic blurring of femininity fall into this group. Nicknames like “wimp, milksop, nerd, sissy, lily liver, jellyfish, and ladyfingers” are usually given to this group of masculinity (*Masculinities* 79). It should be noted that subordinate masculinity has been placed in the lowest level of gender hierarchy due to oppression (Connell, *Masculinities* 78).

According to Howson, “the key to the subordination of these men is the obvious presence of effeminacy and weakness that makes the clear-cut division required by hegemonic masculinity” (63). Such masculinity is rejected and considered unimportant by hegemonic and complicit masculinities. In “Born in the Month of Owl,” Bahram is tossed into the subordinate masculinity category as soon as he starts behaving like a girl, wearing makeup, her sister’s dresses, and wishing to become a mother. He, who was marginalized even in his childhood and school years, is pushed further back from the society after the diagnosis of the doctors. Not only is he not acknowledged or recognized as what he really is by the society and his family, he is also forced to run away from home and out of that neighborhood. According to Saeidizadeh, the understanding of Iranian heteronormative laws of transsexuality has amounted to the misrecognition of

transsexual people's status within law and society (249). Nancy Fraser defines misrecognition as the process of being negatively recognized and subjected to social subordination (2001, 24). This is why upon hearing the doctors' diagnosis "Agha Mashalla was about to beat the doctor" and the mother "asked every saint for their help" (45) because she believed her "son was intentionally poisoned in his childhood since he was so chubby and cute. God damn jealousy and evil eye" (47). Nobody assumes the doctors might have diagnosed correctly since they believed "doctors know nothing" (45). Maryam Hosseini, the head of Iran's Transsexuals Center, in an interview with Alipour states, "The families' reaction has a positive relationship with their degree of education, and social and cultural condition. The higher the level of the families' culture, the easier they get along with their children's situation, but the problem is that most families of our society lack such a condition." Hosseini believes that the reason the families cannot cope with this issue is that they think their children are suffering from gender bias.

Descriptions of Bahram's childhood is a key to his transsexuality: "Since he was a kid, he desired for his sisters' dolls rather than toy guns that his father had bought for him" (46). In another instance it is mentioned,

He said he liked to be a mother.... He loved my green sandals I'm wearing now. I think he liked their gold ornaments.... When we entered the room, Arabic music played too loud, and he came in through another door wearing a revealing red dress. He had wrapped a flamboyant scarf around his head and was dancing. Actually, he was performing Arabic dance.... He also had used some objects to show his breasts bigger and moved them to... Shame on him! (38-39).

Bahram even likes to have a female name, "He asked if Sheila or Shaqayeq suited him more as a name" (41-42). As Afsaneh Najmabadi points out different performances—such as the above—create a sense of being either a man or a woman – not genitalia. Najmabadi perceives transsexual gender identity as a form of self-assignment based on conduct and behavior, rather than a distinction between sex and gender (283). Going through Bahram's conducts and behavior, one can see that he is doing whatever he can to make himself as similar as possible to the

gender he believes he must have. He considers himself a woman imprisoned in a masculine cage from which nobody helps him to get out. No one helps him because no one recognizes him as the gender he is. This “institutional misrecognition” as Fraser puts it takes shape in the form of law, government policies and professional practices that constitute some categories of people as inferior members of the society (Fraser 1997, 280).

Since he is not accepted by his family and friends, Bahram runs away from home and this lets him to get to know other transsexuals. The interviewer of the story interviews two of these men. The first one is not willing to answer the questions and only says: “What do you want from me? I’m a miserable person like him” (40), while the second one says Bahram had been living in his house for two weeks before he committed suicide and their relationship had been “like two sisters.... We were both alone somehow looking for our Mr. Right” (43). Like Bahram’s parents, his parents had excluded him, had left the country, and were only willing to pay for his surgery. It is “loneliness and people’s view” that bothers him. Therefore, he starts prostitution to make ends meet. About Bahram, he says, “When my guests came over, you know, with the intention of marriage, he wouldn’t step out of his room .... But I think he misunderstood the situation, that is ... I don’t know, maybe he thought I made ends meet by my guests because my parents hadn’t been sending me any money for a while” (44-45).

In another interview with a PhD student of psychology, the interviewee talks about how he met Bahram:

First time was in the park, it was he who came and sat beside me. He was the smallest of all wearing black leather pants and a tight blue T-shirt. A gold chain was hanging from his belt. He had short hair shining with gel. While speaking, he either touched his eyebrows or played around with a small square of hair he had grown as beard under his lower lip.... He had a weird voice; sometimes too bass and sometimes too tenor” (40-41).

The PhD student states that at first, he dressed like transsexuals in order to win their trust to be accepted by them. Upon meeting him, Bahram introduces him to his peers and greatly helps him with his thesis. "He was unique. His peers had chosen either crime, trafficking or business; you understand, don't you?" (41). Although, there is an advantage of being among the people who recognize one as what one really is – in Bahram's case being transsexual – there still remains a problem that transsexual people's struggle for recognition in Iran is not really based on identity politics but on status model. That is, they want full participation in social interactions rather than group identity (Saeidizadeh 287; Fraser 2000, 23). It is due to the negative attitudes of a majority of people toward transsexuals, that they have been completely excluded and cannot find appropriate jobs because they are interested in the jobs suitable for females. As a result, they usually decide to do illegal jobs (Khorasaninia).

Believing that the psychologist is his Mr. Right, Bahram asks for his hand in marriage. In response, however, he faces a strange reaction. Having a higher degree of education and knowing transsexuals, the man abandons Bahram as well and avoids meeting him rather than giving a simple straightforward answer. Feeling disappointed in everyone, Bahram commits suicide: "His room was dark; I couldn't see anything; my socks got wet; I turned on the lights and saw my son drowned in his own blood; on the mirror, he had written with a lipstick, 'I'm going forever; now you can be relieved!'" (47) And in this way, he ends all the pressure and troubles.

### Conclusion

In the short story, "Born in the Month of Owl" written by Azadeh Mohseni, despite all the pressure applied to him by his family and society, Bahram selects transsexualism. Initially, in the Iranian society, the attitude toward such unknown genders was full of violence and hatred, but this viewpoint has changed gradually. What used to be unacceptable turns out to be the subject of a person's thesis and another person's interview after several years; hence breaking the taboo. The present society of Iran, academically and medically accepts people like Bahram, but the hegemonic and complicit masculinity shown in Agha Mashalla's character still consider them inferior and try to avoid them. Suicide



for Bahram is to get away from all the pressure. Azadeh Mohseni has dared to portray a character who has been a taboo subject for many years.

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