

**Aging Bodies, Hairy Bodies, Barely Human Bodies:
Three Essays on Contemporary Iranian Literature**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation takes the concept “contemporary Iranian literature” and considers it from a scholarly and pedagogical perspective. It comprises three essays that explore distinct moments in contemporary Iranian diasporic literature and suggest what such a topic might look like in an undergraduate class. The texts discussed in this dissertation represent a historical and generic breadth that would allow students to engage with the topic of Iranian literature from multiple perspectives. Chapter 1 looks at Goli Taraghi’s novella *khvab-e zemestani* (*Winter Sleep*) and considers moments of temporal discontinuity or malaise. I argue in this chapter that time is manifested as a loss of control that is experienced on or through the body. It is in moments of anxiety and bodily dissociation that time comes into relief, and the loss of control over time is mirrored in the loss of control over one’s body. This chapter draws from work on narrative time by Joseph Vogl. Chapter 2 explores Nahal Tajadod’s novel *Debout sur la terre* and argues that the various hair practices described in this text constitute methods of gender performativity that allow or restrict access to social groups. That belonging is in turn its own form of gender construction. Chapter 3 looks at Mana Neyestani’s graphic novel *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique*, arguing that the generic form imbues the text with a sense of humor that in turn works to resist common narratives of refugee-seekers. It draws from Judith Butler’s work on indefinite detention to consider the ways dehumanization is both present and resisted in the text.

Introduction

“L’idée d’Iran c’est le film *Jamais sans ma fille*, ou l’axe du mal qu’on va bombarder. Mais moi, je me demande, ‘de quel Iran tu parles ?’ Par la fiction historique, les lecteurs absorbent mieux, même la fiction peut réussir à changer l’opinion de la lectrice française. Pourquoi pour l’Iran la réduction est possible et pas pour la France ?”

--Nahal Tajadod (2016)

“I had to write [*Persepolis*] in French, because I was writing it for the French”

--Marjane Satrapi (2008)

Marjane Satrapi and Nahal Tajadod are two of the better known authors who emigrated to France from Iran around the time of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Both authors express a desire to write to and for a French audience, to use their literary gift to educate the French and to provide a counter-narrative to the one presented on the 24-hour news cycle. Nahal Tajadod explains how there is extremely limited content that offers a nuanced view of her home country and that it often only serves to reinforce pre-existing ideas. She began writing historical fiction because her mother, a playwright and Rumi specialist, asked her to make Rumi better known in France. Her editor then suggested she write about “modern Iran,” and she considered her own experiences going back after living abroad, writing first *Passeport à l’iranienne*. In the text, she uses humor to portray a “different version of Iran” (Tajadod 2016) to her French audience. Scholars such as Amy Malek and Laetitia Nanquette have noted the educational component of both *Persepolis* and *Passeport à l’iranienne*, where “everyday life is used as a weapon to present a counter-image of Iran, a multiple and paradoxical one” (Nanquette 86). In this way, the audience shaped both texts, providing both a guide for language and an idea of how to shape content in a maximally educational manner.

The role of audience, and the question of how much responsibility an author owes to that audience circulates in scholarly circles as well. The most well known case is Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, the publication of which caused a stir among Iranian American scholars, among them Fatemeh Keshavarz, Hamid Dabashi, and Negar Mottahedeh (Rahimieh). Their concerns were that Nafisi's work represented Iran in a way that was Neo-orientalist (Keshavarz), or that helped justify the war in Iraq (Mottahedeh), and that works like Nafisi's in general mis-represent Iran. The concern is similar to Tajadod's and Satrapi's: there is an Iran that these scholars and authors know, and it is being poorly represented by mainstream media, or by select works of fiction that reify a neo-liberal impression of the country. Their work then is to re-represent Iran, to educate the general population by providing examples that force readers or consumers of media to reconsider their impressions.

This dissertation begins with a question of audience education, approaching scholarly work with a teacherly orientation. Tajadod and Satrapi approach their work with the intention of educating an entire population, and with the goal of changing or at least broadening perspectives. I similarly approach this dissertation, though with a much smaller population in mind, by thinking about how to teach American university students about contemporary Iranian literature. This perspective brings together three components: students in the US, French literature, and Iranian literature. US Students' access to Iran is largely from a political perspective, where Iran is depicted as a nuclear threat, or a perpetrator of human rights' violations. This view flattens out the two countries, creating a binary where Iran is the "axis of evil" and the US is simply trying to prevent a nuclear crisis while also supposedly championing democracy. Similar to Nahal Tajadod and Marjane Satrapi's goal of offering a new view of Iran, the task of teaching American students about Iran involves recontextualizing the political history of the two countries. It means helping

them make sense of Iran as a more nuanced place than what is portrayed on the news. In order to help students think more critically about Iran, I have selected works that represent historical breadth as well as a range of topics and literary styles. The temporal breadth helps raise questions about the changes in literature and politics over the past half century, and it allows students to relate the political to the literary and trace the changes of that relationship over time.

Chapter 1 examines with Goli Taraghi's novella *khvab-e zemestani*. The novella was published in Iran in 1973 and translated into French by Gilles Mourier and Taraghi herself in 1986 and into English by Francine T. Mahak in 1994. It focuses on a group of friends in Tehran in the 1960's, emphasizing the way they feel powerless in the face of social changes occurring around them. The bleak prose acts as an entree to studying the historical context in which the novel was written. In 1953, the CIA led a coup in Iran, called Operation Ajax in the US and referred to as the 28 Mordad coup d'état in Iran. Its purpose was to oust the widely popular and democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. Mossadegh had called a vote to nationalize Iranian oil, which threatened to diminish foreign influence and financial gains. The US and UK conspired to oust Mossadegh and help the shah, Mohammad Reza Shah consolidate power, with the provision that he would be friendly to foreign interests. This left many Iranians mistrustful of their government, which they saw as bought by foreign governments, particularly the US. The US treated Iran like a "clinic;" following WWII, Roosevelt saw Iran as "something in the nature of a clinic--an experiment station--for the President's post-war policies--his aims to develop and stabilize backward areas... with negligible risk to the United States" (Mottahedeh 129). Part of the "clinic" involved a series of reforms implemented by Mohammad Reza Shah in the 1960's known as the White Revolution. Though he hoped the reforms would increase his popularity, the opposite happened. The clergy resented their loss of influence, the middle class continued to

mistrust and resent the Shah's overreach, corruption, and the fact that he was in the pocket of the US, and the working class felt no loyalty to him. This growing unrest, from the clergy, the educated elites, and the middle class paved the way for the 1979 Revolution. Taraghi's novella helps get at this complex historical setting by evoking the disillusionment, mistrust, and general apathy her characters feel. Powerlessness emerges as an important theme in the text and reflects of the way many Iranians felt in the face of growing foreign influence. The novella brings in the way different characters fared under the Shah's reforms--some grow wealthy while most struggle financially and find themselves helpless and at the mercy of those with more influence. Taraghi continued to write after the Revolution, and after moving to France. However, I begin with this novella because it provides critical background to the Revolution and diaspora that it precipitated.

Chapter 2 looks at Nahal Tajadod's novel *Debout sur la terre* (2010). This work offers two temporal settings, one that traces the history of a Kurdish tribe across the 19th and 20th centuries, and one that takes place in the years leading up to and immediately following the Revolution. The first thread paints a picture of the end of the Qajar Dynasty and the rise of the Pahlavi Dynasty with Reza Khan in 1921. It focuses on what these political changes meant for the Kurdish tribe in particular. For example, a significant episode in the novel takes place around Reza Shah's disarmament laws and land reforms because these were changes that concretely impacted the Kurdish tribes' lifestyle. This novel provides students a picture of Iranian history that extends earlier than Taraghi's. However, it also offers a non-hegemonic narrative, taking the rural Kurdish perspective rather than an urban, or governmental point of view. This perspective would open up the discussion to consider the various ethnic groups in Iran, and to consider the more abstract idea of how history is written from specific perspectives that often ignores the experiences of the marginalized.

The novel also covers later politics, particularly as the second half of the novel takes place from 1976 until 1980. Following Taraghi's novella, *Debout sur la terre* offers a more explicit look at the years immediately prior to the Revolution. The novel follows characters in different classes and social milieux, providing nuance to students' understanding of the conditions leading to the Revolution. For example, the narrative follows one character who goes from being a poor electrician to being pivotal in the Revolution, earning himself an important role in the new government. The Revolution comes through in the novel in large part through this character, as one of his roles is to copy and distribute tapes of Khomeini's speeches. Khomeini had been exiled to Paris, but he used tape cassettes to record speeches and garner further support for protests against the Shah. By the late 1970's, many leftists had begun protesting the Shah. They were joined by religious believers who took to the streets en masse, and eventually Mohammad Reza Shah fled the country on January 16, 1979. Khomeini returned to Iran weeks later. February of that year saw Khomeini take power and purge the government of Shah supporters. The following months involved clashes between the religious factions of the revolution and the leftist factions, each with their own vision of a new government. The Revolution was brought home to the US audience with the hostage crisis that began in November of the year and lasted 444 days. It helped radicalize the revolution and allowed Khomeini political cover to purge many leftists or secularists from government. The following year, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, beginning an eight-year war. *Debout sur la terre* ends just before the Iran-Iraq war, but it ends with several characters leaving Iran. In doing so, it not only offers a view of the political history in Iran, but it begins to depict the exile that many Iranians experienced following the Revolution, as well as the tensions between Iran and the US that continue to this day. It accompanies *khvab-e zemestani* by overlapping historically around the pivotal event of the Revolution, but by offering different perspectives of

that overlap. Furthermore, from a literary perspective, it offers a breadth of genre. Taraghi's novella is written in bleak prose that seem to be at once realistic and metaphorical. Tajadod's novel on the other hand is auto-fictive and incorporates large swaths of family history. Diasporic literature often takes the form of memoir or autobiography. *Debout sur la terre* allows students to think about how genre is shaped by historical and social context, as well as the politics of genre.

The third work I analyze in this dissertation furthers the discussion of the importance and effect of genre. It is Mana Neyestani's graphic novel entitled *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique* (2015). This work is semi-autobiographical and portrays in a darkly humorous way the experiences and difficulties of obtaining asylum in France. It belongs to a different historical context than the first two novels, taking place in the twenty-first century, in a political moment when immigration plays a central role. American students would be aware of the current political situation in the US, where anti-immigrant sentiment and policy has led to detention camps and forced family separation. Having read Tajadod's novel, they will understand why some Iranians left Iran, or the means of departure that some took. Neyestani's graphic novel offers a view into the daily grind of migrating. It does so with humor, but without shying away from emotionally raw or psychologically challenging topics. The work allows students to reflect on immigration in countries other than the US but could encourage discussion about the current political situation in the US. It also sets the stage for discussing the political history of Iran over the past two decades. Iran is framed for American audience as a place of oppression and human rights violations. Neyestani's graphic novel reveals some of these problems, while making it clear that they are not isolated to Iran. Students can develop more nuanced views of authority and power by comparing the experiences depicted in *Petit manuel*, which take places in France and Iran, with current events

in the US. Finally, this last work brings out the degree to which Iranians are writing and living in a global context.

Just as US students may have a narrow view of Iran, they are likely to think of “French literature” in monolithic terms. This dissertation thinks about what it would mean for American students to approach Iranian literature through France. Doing so forces students not only to re-evaluate what they know about Iran, but also how they think of “French literature.” It requires students to consider not only the political relationship of the US and Iran, but also that of France and Iran.

Francophonie and littérature-monde

France and Iran have a complex history, one that is neither truly postcolonial, nor completely devoid of postcolonial sentiment. Although France never directly colonized Iran from a political standpoint, there was a kind of cultural colonization that took place that exceeded an innocuous sharing of ideas and values. In some cases, the French presence in Iran was a welcome alternative to the more politically controlling, and traditionally colonial, British and Russian influence. In the early twentieth century, many Iranian intellectuals studied and worked from abroad, making Paris in particular one of many centers of Iranian cultural production. This changed mid-century as more Iranians started questioning their relationship to the west, the most famous instance of which is Jalal Al-e Ahmed’s criticism of adoration of the west in his work *Gharbzadegi*. Once in power, Khomeini attempted to cut off ties to the west, including France, by closing French schools around the country. It was the Revolution of 1979 and Khomeini’s rise that spurred an Iranian diaspora and encouraged many Iranians to settle in Paris. Because France was not a straightforward colonizer, it is not possible to consider the two nations in a postcolonial sense. However, that does not mean that there are not lingering power hierarchies; rather it means that those hierarchies are

not necessarily one-directional. Despite this particular history, French editors and publishing houses persist in lumping Iranian literature in French with all other French-language literature under the banner “*francophonie*.”

“Francophone” refers neither to a language nor a nation, yet it persists as a highly problematic term describing an entire body of literature. Authors who write in French, yet are not from metropolitan France produce *littérature francophone*, though the term itself is not as simple as that. It was historically established to delineate authors from former French colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia from their counterparts in mainland France. Now, although the meaning is broader, extending to *anyone* who writes in French but is not from France, it still carries connotations of difference and hierarchy. *Francophonie* is not “French literature”; it will always seem to designate the Other. This makes it difficult for writers, who write in French for a myriad of reasons, to break into a “mainstream” literary circle, where their works are read for what they are, rather than as representations of the Other.

In response to *francophonie*, and as part of a larger academic discussion on “world literature” French authors have proposed a notion of “*littérature-monde*.” In his 2003 book *What is World Literature*, David Damrosch outlined a new way of thinking about large bodies of literature. He urges scholars to think of literature less as a collection of texts, by one author, within one nation, or within one language, and more a network of texts that contribute to the circulation and sharing of ideas. In 2007, a group of almost 50 French-language authors proposed together a manifesto entitled “*Pour une littérature-monde en français*” (“Towards a World Literature in French”). This manifesto was published in the widely read daily *Le monde* and sparked enough dialogue among French authors to inspire an anthology of essays of the same title published by the prestigious press Gallimard later that year. It draws indirectly on Damrosch’s notion of World

Literature. For Damrosch, the main objectives of this theory are to propose a way of thinking about how literature moves and is not bound to a nation or a language. For the French authors, their notion of *littérature monde* was primarily about rejecting the notion of *francophonie*. While *francophonie* as a concept already does away with an emphasis on locating a text within a nation, it does not entirely achieve Damrosch's desire to "de-nationalize" texts because it still places France at the epicenter of all literature written in French. In other words, it creates a national binary of France, not-France. *Littérature-monde* attempts to undo this very binary.

Iranian writers are entwined with this debate between *littérature-monde* and *francophonie*. One relatively well known author, Chahdortt Djavann, was actively involved in the collection of essays that followed the manifesto, penning her own essay and signing the original letter in *Le monde*. Djavann arrived in France in 1993, without knowing any French. She taught herself the language, and eventually pursued a degree in sociology, where she studied the Islamization of the education system in Iran and published a pamphlet through Gallimard opposing the veil in Iran (*Bas les voiles!* (2003)). She is politically outspoken, giving frequent interviews opposing the Islam of Iran, which is a theme that runs through much of her writing. Her position as an advocate for *littérature-monde* speaks to the complicated historical and political relationship between France and Iran. Although she is a fierce critic of Iran, she is also skeptical of a literary movement that would position France as inherently superior. On the other side of the debate, Nahal Tajadod's works has frequently been classified in terms of *francophonie*, and she won the *Grande médaille de la francophonie* in 2007. She has never spoken out about where she herself stands on the *francophonie/littérature-monde* debate, but she also did not turn down her medal. The fact that two prominent Iranian writers are personally implicated with the debate between these two terms shows the degree to which the labeling practices around the works presented in this text is complex.

Though written by Iranian authors, it is not straightforward “Iranian literature.” Nor is it simply “French literature,” or some unquestioned form of *francophonie*.

Initially, I turned from *francophonie* and *littérature-monde* towards diaspora as a concept that will help categorize works by Iranians living in France. Diaspora is known for the liminality it engenders, for its reveling in the in-between. This sets it in opposition to *francophonie* which not only draws a clear France, not-France binary, a binary that cannot easily be crossed, but it establishes this distinction along hierarchical lines. *Francophonie* does not offer room for ambiguity, for occupying both the “France” and the “not-France” topos. Similarly, because *littérature-monde* aims to do away with national borders and the entire concept of *francophonie*, it doesn’t leave much room for occupying national boundaries and participating in national narratives. The hybridity of diaspora is about being a part of two nations at the same time and calling on national histories and narratives is an important form of establishing this trans and multi-nationalism. I therefore think that diaspora as a mode of productions offers not only more flexibility but a clearer picture of Iranian literature in France than either *francophonie* or *littérature-monde*.

Diaspora

When diaspora as a unifying theme first came to the fore, it seemed like the most meaningful way to connect the texts present in this dissertation. It made it clear that this project was one of curation, asking why and how to group works of literature in a meaningful way. It asked if it was enough that the authors were from the same country, or was that simply a way of reinforcing the exact nationalism that is problematic in *francophonie*? In what ways is “franco-Iranian literature” its own genre? Hamid Naficy’s book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* provided a model for thinking about literature written by Iranians in France. Taking

diaspora as the focal point, rather than audience reception, or publishing politics, I explored the effects of diaspora on the texts themselves, where authors were writing from positions of liminality. I posited that it offered a new way of portraying time. Rather than use diaspora as a way to define “franco-Iranian literature” as a genre, united around the shared experience of diaspora, this dissertation argued for a notion of “diaspora time” that was common to the works at hand.

However, this line of thinking began to pose some difficulties, as it failed to consider the significant differences amongst the works analyzed here and the authors who wrote them. Diaspora is typically understood as a global dispersion, generally precipitated by a momentous occurrence. In other words, diasporas occur when something causes many people to leave all at once. There is certainly an Iranian diaspora that took form over the course of the twentieth century. Approximately 18,000 people born in Iran currently live in France, most of whom live in Paris (Hakimzadeh). The Iranian diaspora is generally grouped into three waves. The first, occurring between WWII and the Islamic Revolution in 1979, saw educated or middle- and upper- class Iranians living abroad to study in European or American universities. Mottahedeh in his work *The Mantle of the Prophet* writes, “by the 1960’s Iran was sending abroad more students for a country of its size than practically any other in the world; and this high proportion was maintained through the seventies. In America alone in the academic year 1969-1970 there were over five thousand Iranian students; in 1974-75 there were over thirteen thousand; and by 1978-1979 there were over forty-five thousand” (65). The first wave also included religious or ethnic minorities who worried about the direction the Revolution might take. The second wave took place in the years immediately following the Revolution. It included political dissidents, who either opposed the Islamic government or were at risk of being arrested for their activism; young men fleeing service during the Iran-Iraq war; and women and families who did not want to live in an Islamic state.

Finally, the third wave is the more recent emigration of Iranians, occurring after 1995. This wave also contains a heterogeneous group although it is largely characterized by asylum seekers. Most of the Iranian diasporic population living in France belongs to those who came during the second wave of emigration.

The works studied in this dissertation fit in some ways into the designation of diasporic. Goli Taraghi obtained her bachelor's in the United States, before returning to Iran in the 1960's. She later moved to Paris with her two small children following the Revolution, in 1980, right at the start of the Iran-Iraq war. She didn't break ties with Iran completely, and continued to return and publish in Tehran. One of the most common features of diaspora is a connection with the home country, whether that connection is aspirational or through frequent communication with communities that remain (Safran 83-84). Another frequently identified feature is that people build diasporic communities in their new countries Nahal Tajadod offers an example of this. She left Iran in 1977, going to study Iranian influence in Chinese religions. She did not return to Iran after her studies were over, instead choosing to stay in Paris. In a personal interview in March 2016, she discussed how she sees herself as part of a community of Iranian writers in France. She had worked with Taraghi, as she translated one of the latter's short stories, *otobus-e Shemiran*, (*L'autobus de Shemiran*), into French. She also mentioned keeping other Iranian authors such as Sarai Kasmaï and Sara Yalda in mind in her work. Her community of Iranian artists extends beyond the world of literature: in 2012 she published a book entitled *Elle joue*. It offers a metafictional narrative about a young and successful Iranian actress, based on Golshifteh Farahani, who came of age after the revolution and her relationship with an older author who spends months living in her French home with the actress in order to write a novel about her. The text explores questions what it means to

have left Iran before the Revolution, what it means to have stayed in the Islamic state, and how the two characters navigate their artist careers in the political climates in which they work.

A third, significant feature of diaspora is the relation to home, travel, and hybridity it offers, especially in the works of art it produces. For example, Naficy writes about the ways films produced in diaspora or by members of diasporic communities often take places in liminal spaces—train stations, airports, or other locations of travel— or where geography and roots are emphasized. This is in response to the deterritorialization of exile and diaspora (Naficy 5). Such themes certainly emerge in Mana Neyestani’s *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique*, the focus of Chapter 3. In 2006, Neyestani produced a comic for a children’s magazine that depicted a cockroach saying an Azeri term. Many Azeris objected, arguing that the cartoon was equating them with cockroaches, and took to the streets to protest. Neyestani and the editor of the magazine were arrested and imprisoned for three months. During leave from prison, Neyestani fled the country, eventually going to France, where he applied for refugee status (Risley). His graphic novel *Petit manuel* portrays the way asylum seekers are placed in national ambiguity: they cannot leave the country in which they are seeking asylum, but they do not fully belong there, often having to wait long periods before they have any sense of their legal status in the new country. His work further depicts the emotional side of the rootlessness one feels at having left one place for another. In these ways, although Neyestani left Iran much later than Taraghi and Tajadod, his works still engage with themes common among diasporic literature.

There are a number of other terms these authors’ experiences could be called. They could be writing exilic, transnational, or migrant literature. Much work has been done to define these various terms. John Durham Peters, for example, distinguishes between “exile” and “diaspora” first by claiming that exile “implies a fact of trauma, an imminent danger, usually political, that

makes the home no longer safely habitable” (19). Diaspora on the other hand, is less explicitly about the trauma that caused someone to leave, but is instead about the community built amongst those who have left. He writes:

The key contrast with exile lies in diaspora's emphasis on lateral and decentered relationships among the dispersed. Exile suggests pining for home; diaspora suggests networks among compatriots. Exile may be solitary, but diaspora is always collective. Diaspora suggests real or imagined relationships among scattered fellows, whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact such as kinship, pilgrimage, trade, travel, and shared culture (language, ritual, scripture, or print and electronic media) (Peters 20).¹⁰

In other words, both exile and diaspora involve movement, displacement, and the creation of a new and an old, or “original” home. But diaspora is explicitly concerned with the relationships amongst those who have experienced the displacement, and those remain behind. Other scholars have considered the shift from thinking about “exilic literature” to “migrant literature.” For example, Carine Mardrossian claims that such a switch attempts to break free of a binary thinking of home and host country. It implies movement, without necessarily identifying a direction to that movement, and helps rethink the way colonial histories insert themselves into national hierarchies. She writes that “migrant art offers a transnational, cosmopolitan, multilingual, and hybrid map of the world that redraws boundaries by building bridges between Third and First worlds” (Mardrossian 17). Transnationalism, likewise, is a term that attempts to move away from an over emphasis on nation-states. It considers the way humans move and always have moved in ways that don’t necessarily align with current national boundaries. In a way, any of these terms could apply

to the literature presented in this dissertation. It certainly deals with movement, with rootlessness, and community.

I initially approached the work considering it diasporic because I was initially invested in the politics of publication, and how such politics create implicit communities of literature. As my research developed, I became more invested in grouping works in order to define a set of generic boundaries, using diaspora as the linking concept. However, the term itself is volatile, offering no one definition. James Clifford writes of attempts to nail down a definition of what diaspora is, “whatever the working list of diasporic features, no society can be expected to qualify on all counts, throughout its history. And the discourse of diaspora will necessarily be modified as it is translated and adopted” (307). In other words, the project of defining diaspora will continue to change, and so to ask whether or not a body of literature or a social group “fits,” will only apply to the moment of asking. Furthermore, I found that such a project flattens out both the term—diaspora—and the literature to which I was applying it. It reduced my analysis to a checklist. Although Taraghi wrote and published *khvab-e zemestani* in Iran, it was after her studies abroad. Could such a work “count” as diasporic? Does it have to be written from a place of exile? Many of Tajadod’s works *were* written while she lived abroad, but they do not deal with the themes of home, longing, looking back that supposedly marks diasporic writing? Should she be considered a “writer in diaspora,” who only sometimes writes “diasporic literature”? Neyestani is less clearly part of a wave of migrants who are leaving Iran all at the same time. Is his exile diasporic or is his literature part of a new trend of “globalization”? Such questions raise important issues in defining the terms, and hint at some of the difficulties of such a project. However, they also mandate a set of boundaries, ironically imposing a literary metaphor of borders. Instead, I shifted my focus to ask what is allowed to emerge by bringing together the three works presented here. When read alongside one

another, the works present a way of thinking about time in relation to bodies and the way political changes are embodied.

Time and Bodies

Time emerges in the three texts in this dissertation as central features. In each text, time begins to act like a character of its own. In Taraghi's *khvab-e zemestani*, time resists chronology, leaving the reader to piece together the various vignettes, and to make sense of when different events take place. Time alternatively slows and speeds up, skips ahead and dwells in the past. Tajadod's *Debout sur la terre* presents two narratives that run along strikingly different timelines. In one, the reader is offered a sweeping narrative covering over one hundred years of personal and political history. In another, the narrative inches forward, minute by minute in an episode of prolonged waiting. The juxtaposition allows the text to depict the intense social changes that took place in Iran over the twentieth century, while also reflecting on the ways that individual lives were and were not affected by those changes. Finally, Neyestani's *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique* depicts the way the asylum process dehumanizes by stripping applicants of their ability to control their own sense of time. By requiring long periods of waiting, both in an abstract sense and in a literal one—on lines, in waiting rooms—the applicant has no say over how to spend their time and is instead completely at the beck and call of the government.

Time has been theorized by a number of scholars and for a variety of purposes. Pre-industrial time, for example, marks the way primarily agrarian societies kept time before industrialization. Natural markers told people when to wake, when to work and for how long. Religion also played a key part in keeping time; Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren note the significance of church bells in 18th century Sweden as a way to orchestrate daily activities (19). In Iran, the daily calls to prayer would have played a similar role. Industrialization meant that many people no longer worked in

the field, and that machines replaced the cow and oxen as the producers of goods. These technological changes didn't change time itself so much as they changed the way people worked and the way work was understood. What people did at work was less important, since a lot of work was mechanized, what mattered was for how long people worked. Furthermore, while "peasant time" was linked to survival on a year to year basis, "industrial time" was linked to production and accumulation. This meant that the clock didn't reset, so to speak, at the beginning of each year, and that, "broadly speaking, time for the peasant was cyclical, while for [the modern man] it is linear" (Frykman and Löfgren 19). The shift from cyclical to linear is significant, not only because it marks a significant change in the way time was perceived but because it shows the intersection between social or political change and the lived experience of those changes.

Other theories of time have focused on a different aspect of the political. Julia Kristeva proposes "women's time" as a theory that interrogates the way gender affects temporality. She argues that women live in this in-between space of "monumental time" and "cyclical time." Cyclical time, like pre-industrial time, refers to natural, meaning pertaining to the body, experiences. Examples are the cyclical nature of menstruation, or birth, the experience of which is cyclical when it is repeated either from one woman to the next, or one child to the next. On the other hand, women also live "monumental time." This refers to experiences that are so huge, they take one outside of oneself, and are linked more to the *concept* behind the activity one is participating in. For example, gestation and birth speak to cyclicity in that they speak to a common experience of growth, but are monumental in how they speak to the idea of life, death, and the "Cycle of Life." In other words, birth as a concept brings up the other concepts of mortality, maternity, resurrection. Kristeva's theory offers an interesting look into the way time and bodies interact. She pulls her theory of time out of the physical experiences that she claims are unique to

women and central womanhood.¹ This dissertation also explores the intersection of bodies and time; however, it does so by exploring the ongoing interactions between bodies and time. In Chapter 1, I explore how anxiety about one's body allows the characters to perceive the passage of time. Rather than beginning with what the bodies at stake do and thinking of it in temporal terms, as Kristeva does, this chapter explores the way time marks on the body. Chapter 2 expands on the relationship between bodies and time by thinking about the way historical changes are born out on the body, and how those embodied changes are gendered. It presents a type of gendered time that is not focused solely on what women's bodies supposedly do, but is instead a marker of the passage of historical and political time that is enacted on bodies as they perform changing gender norms.

Chapter 3 draws on a different conceptualization of "women's time." This theory, outlined by Valerie Bryson in her book *Gender and the Politics of Time*, considers the very concrete ways women spend their time. Women spend more time per week on household and child care, preventing them from having free time. This theory of time is inherently political, hoping that it can help fix the wage gap, and that it can address the fact that "women's 'time poverty' continues to act as a constraint on their citizenship today. Inequalities in the ways that time is used and valued are therefore part of a vicious circle that leaves many women economically dependent and vulnerable" (2). Chapter 3 considers time in a similar way, thinking not about women as the focal

¹ This premise, that womanhood is centered around birth is a serious limitation to her theory. It presupposes an understanding of gender that is rigid, but in its assumed experiences and in the physical bodies she assigns to "woman," equating "woman" with "bodies that menstruate" or "bodies that give birth."

group, but about asylum seekers. It explores the way that the asylum process forces applicants to spend their time waiting and strips them of agency to change that.

The three chapters all show the ways that time acts as a reflection of political situations or changes, and that those reflections are experienced by and projected through the body. In this way it takes historical and political time and translates them to embodied experiences. Because twentieth century Iran saw many significant historical changes, the bodies that reflected those changes were significantly reflected.

Summary of Chapters

Each of the chapters that follows can function as a stand-alone essay. As individual pieces, they each ask how are bodies at stake? When read together, they begin to paint a picture of the role of time in each work of literature, and they draw out how time and bodies interact within a political context.

Chapter 1, entitled “Time in Suspension: In/Action and Disruption in Goli Taraghi’s *Winter Sleep*” explores the way time and the body intersect. I examine moments of temporal discontinuity or malaise and argue that these moments are felt through the body as helplessness or an inability to act. The chapter draws from Joseph Vogl’s theory of “tarrying” which explains episodes in texts when past, present, and future converge in a moment of pause, and the range of possible outcomes is laid bare. I argue that similar moments in *Winter Sleep* are instead a form of suspension, which is different first in its potential for being open-ended, or unending, and second in the way it jumbles past, present, and future entirely, refusing to distinguish temporal categories.

Chapter 2, “Hairless Bodies, Hairy Bodies: Gender Performativity and Belonging in Nahal Tajadod’s *Debout sur la terre*” looks at Nahal Tajadod’s novel *Debout sur la terre*. It explores the way hair constitutes a key site of gender performativity that grants or restricts access to homosocial

spaces. It draws on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is a series of repeated acts that are determined by an established social framework. I take discussions of hair and hair practices in the novel as a starting point to first understand how they represent gender performativity, and then to complicate the idea of performativity as based on a gender binary.

Finally, Chapter 3, "Resisting Bare Life: Humor and Absurdity in Mana Neyestani's *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique*" argues that humor as strategically deploying in the graphic novel format offer a resistance to a dehumanizing narrative of asylum seeking. I show how *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique* uses humor to first show and then subvert the mechanisms through which the asylum process dehumanizes those who go through it. I draw from Judith Butler's work *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, in which she analyzes the effects of indefinite detention on refugees, arguing that it reduces them to a state of "bare life." Chapter 3 examines the idea of "bare life" in the context of Neyestani's graphic novel and shows the ways he resists such a designation for his characters.

I began this introduction with a discussion about audience and pedagogy, thinking about how students in the US could approach Iran and Iranian literature via texts written in French. To do so could risk diluting the literature, allowing students to read about a non-Western place from the comfort of a European country. Alternatively, it could allow students to think about Iran and France as not such fixed, stable contexts. As I discussed above, diasporic literature (or migrant, or exile, or transnational literature) destabilize notions of fixed nation-states, and open up the space for communities of people and of art and knowledge that exist across and between borders. Students approaching this material in a French class will have to consider the concept of *francophonie* and think about the way it creates literary hierarchies. Furthermore, by thinking

about bodies and embodiment as a way that marks and reflects the passage of time, students will not only learn about this history and politics of Iran, but they will also be tasked with reflecting on the ways the political imprints on the body. Rather than focusing on the political from a partisan perspective, or as an abstract concept, students will be able to think about the ways the political is embodied. From a practical standpoint, these essays are not necessarily aimed at an undergraduate audience, but are instead aimed at French instructors who might consider incorporating works written by Iranian authors into their literature classes. The role of a teacher is a curatorial one, bringing together works to paint a picture of a broader topic. This dissertation participates in a similar curation, offering up three analyses of three texts by Iranian authors living in France and thinking about them both individually and as a collection that can offer a glimpse into contemporary Iranian literature.

Chapter 1
Time in Suspension:
In/Action and Disruption in Goli Taraghi's *Winter Sleep*

“What if we still have memories after we die? What if under all that earth we wake up and
remember everything?” (Azizi 34)

The fear of becoming nothing after we die has been at the basis of works of art, literature, and intense theological debate. Much engagement with this larger than life question stems from a desire for there to be *something*, which is to say that whatever it is that makes a person *that* person will not disappear completely. Azizi, a main character in Goli Taraghi's novella *Winter Sleep*, fears the opposite. For him, the thought of death not bringing a respite from memory is terrifying. This fear speaks to a theme that runs throughout the text, the fear of time and the lack of control the characters have in the face of it.

This chapter explores the relationship among time, action, and anxiety in *khvab-e zemestani*, (*Winter Sleep*, *Sommeil d'hiver*), a novel by Goli Taraghi. Taraghi is a well-known author and scholar who made a name for herself in Iran before she left for France in 1980. Her texts written during the time period before leaving Iran, and around the time of her emigration, including *Winter Sleep* (1973) often explore the effects of vast societal changes on the middle-class population. The novel was written in a moment of political frustration and burgeoning turmoil. The Iranian prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, who was widely popular, was overthrown in 1953 by a US and UK instigated coup. This coup increased the sense that the Iranian

people couldn't control their own politics, that their political world was influenced by foreign powers outside their realm of control. Following the removal of Mossadeq from Majles, the parliament, Mohammad Reza Shah, the king, consolidated power by appointing two new political parties who were sympathetic to him to rule in Majles. With help from the CIA and Israel's Mossad he increased the influence of a secret police force, SAVAK, that spied on citizens. In the early 1960's, the Shah proposed a number of reforms, called the White Revolution. Though the reforms were aimed at helping rural populations, they corresponded with an increase in mechanization, particularly mechanized farm work. Coupled with a huge increase in the population, the mechanization of many industries left large groups of people unemployed, and spurred mass migration to cities in search of work, where wealth became more and more unevenly distributed. The reforms weakened the power of the clergy, who had previously been influential in cultural and political decisions. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became a fierce opponent to the Shah, and an outspoken figure in Iran. He was exiled in 1964, though he continued to record speeches and call for the end of the Shah's rule. The 1960's and 70's also saw a complicated relationship to the West in Iran. Western products began to infiltrate the market, and the Shah enjoyed a close relationship with the US. Many educated Iranians rejected the "westoxification" of Iran, and called for a resistance to its capitalist, consumerist values. This historical context sets the stage for *Winter Sleep* as a metaphor for many Iranians of the time. They felt politically helpless, but imbued with a sense of malaise, a malaise that would eventually turn into a revolution in 1978 (Timothy-Mahak 22).

The novel tells the story of a group of friends in mid-twentieth century Iran. Though its translators in English and French refer to it as a novel, the book resists a simple genre category. No one plot makes up the novel; instead, connected vignettes feature characters from the group of

friends. The vignettes do not follow a chronological pattern, and not every friend from the friend group is the focus of a vignette. The narrative voice is also complex; the novel begins with an old man alone in his cold and rat-infested apartment who speaks in the first person. He is the only character who speaks in the first person, and the only character without a name, and I refer to him throughout as the narrator to show his place as an organizing character and plot device. However, his voice does not narrate every vignette. Those that focus on characters besides the narrator are instead recounted in a third-person omniscient voice. At times, the vignettes begin directly with third-person narration, though at other times they begin in a narrative present where the narrator is thinking about his friends; his thoughts then move to memories of their shared past, the narrator's voice and perspective disappear, and the narrative move into a third-person omniscient perspective. This structure suggests that vignettes originate in the narrator's memories, which provide a unifying thread throughout the novel.

The novel's structure presents a complex sense of temporality. The narrator speaks from a narrative present. In vignettes about the other characters, the narration switches to the past tense, with only one exception. The vignettes are not organized in any chronological order, and it is up to the reader to figure out when in relation to each other the events detailed in the vignettes occurs. Though there is a vague frame, where the narrator's memories prompt a new vignette to begin, the vignettes themselves are not the narrator's memories. Often, they include the memories of the vignette's protagonist, and recount events or effects that the narrator couldn't have access to. This movement from one character's present, to his memories, and then to another character's past and present engenders a sense of disjointedness. Not only does the narration jump around, but so does the chronology. Temporality becomes not just a structural component of the narrative, but a subject of the narrative: the disruptions in perspective mirror the disruptions the characters feel when they

are faced with experiences that highlight temporality and the change in time. These temporal disruptions interact with characters and drive plot. The sense of disruption is only remarkable because it disrupts, as I will demonstrate in the chapter, an otherwise seemingly atemporal sense suspension.

The title of the novel itself hints at this notion of suspension. In the Persian *khvab-e zemestani* can be translated either as *Winter Sleep*, or *Winter Dream*. Both the English and French translations (*Sommeil d'hiver*) focus on the “sleep” meaning of *khvab*. Both “to sleep” and “to dream” speak to a state of suspension, but with a different emphasis in terms of activity levels. Sleeping is a more passive state, while dreaming, especially the kind of lucid dreaming that *khvab* connotes, implies a state of activity, even if it contained within a space where action does not extend beyond the dreamer’s mind. The idea of dreaming as an activity one does unrelated to sleep further underlines the complex relationship between action and inaction—to dream is to hope for, to intend, maybe even to plan for. It is a state where a future plan comes into existence in one’s mind, though not in reality. A dream exists suspended between the present in which it is being dreamed, the future in which it would come to fruition, and an atemporality that hints at the impossibility of know whether or when the dream will come to be. The title plays with these implications of the word “*khvab*” and grounds the discussion of suspension as a temporal state that is itself related to action or activity that follows.

Other scholars have noticed the role of temporality as a literary device in *Winter Sleep*. In arguing that the novel reflects the anxieties of the 1960’s, Francine Timothy-Mahak asserts that the anxiety was in large part due to a shift in the temporal culture of the time. She states that “Iran of the ‘60s,... though imbued with a sense of time that was cyclical in its essence, had been launched into post-Hegelian ‘linear’ time” (76). This shift is reflected in the text, through the

thematic of temporal discontinuity, which came about “as the belief in the eternal [faded] and [was] replaced by the terror of a meaningless death, at the end of a limited, linear time. Temporal discontinuity... is a fundamental component of the modern malaise and it underlies the major themes of *Winter Sleep*” (75). Timothy-Mahak sees *Winter Sleep* as a reflection of this forced modernization, where people are unhappy because they are experiencing such a vast overhaul that it leaves them unsettled; they can no longer expect to experience life in the way that they are comfortable with or used to (30). She argues that this temporal switch led to a fear of death, but what Azizi reveals in the epigraph is less a fear of death as it is a fear of the eternal, a fear that death won’t make things *end*. Timothy-Mahak’s assertion that the temporal discontinuity and its relation to malaise that underlie *Winter Sleep* are due to a switch to a sense of linearity reveal her interest in understanding why the malaise is present in the novel. My analysis focuses instead on how temporal discontinuity and temporal malaise are manifested. It explores the way temporality is felt or experienced, particularly on or through the body. I argue that time emerges as a sense of a loss of control that is experienced through the body. It is in moments of anxiety about the body that temporality is made manifest. At times, the anxiety about the passage of time only appears when the body is dissociated from the self, and the characters are placed in a situation where they are made to think about their body and how it has changed over time and how it exists in the present. These moments of self-awareness disrupt a sense of suspension that permeates the characters’ sense of time, where past, present, and future don’t function the way the characters expect. The suspension leads to broad theme of inaction that defines the characters’ lives. They live in a state where they either can’t or don’t act, where acting seems like an impossibility that would surely not end in the desired result. When there are moments of action, those moments are coded as disruption, and correspond to a sense of ruptured temporality.

The Narrator Waits for Death

The novel begins with the narrator, an old man, alone in his cold and rat-infested apartment. He is restless because he has nothing to do, and no one to talk to. He is constantly plagued by how he has nothing left in this life. He passes his time by figuring out *how* to spend his time. Sometimes it involves making dinner, sometimes counting the rats in his apartment, sometimes going for a walk (although it's often too cold to do so in the winter), but mostly it involves waiting. The narrator claims he is waiting for summer, when things will somehow be better, although his friend, Azizi eventually reminds him that he hates the heat and that it is foolish to think things will really be different then (102). However, the narrator is also acutely aware that he is near death. Both the absence of his friends, who have almost all died, and the constant feeling that death is marching towards him leave him frequently reflecting on how the whole process of dying, or running out of time, works. He thinks to himself, "I've lost track of the days and the years.... When did old age begin? When did death confirm its presence?...What an awful night it is. What a cold, dark, long night. It's still only seven-thirty. If only time would stop for an instant, just give us a chance" (1-2).² Every time the plotline returns to the narrator's story, it references the exact time, which emphasizes both the slowness with which the narrator's current life is passing, and how that slowness is what makes him so unhappy. This is not a case of someone wishing he could slow down time. Although the emphasis on the slow passage of time seems to underline the narrative

² حساب روزها و سالها از دستم در رفته. ... پیری از کی شروع شد؟ از کی مرگ حضور خودش را تایید کرد؟...چه شب بدیست امشب، چه سرد و تاریک و طولانیست. ساعت هفت و نیم است. کاش زمان یک لحظه می ایستاد، یک لحظه فرصت می داد (۵-۶).

present, it also points out that for the narrator, there is most certainly a future. He doesn't know if that future will be better, but he is aware that time in the present doesn't stand still. His wish for time to stop for just an instant speaks to this. Though he is acutely unhappy in the present, it would still be better if the present were actually the past, if he had already lived through what he is currently experiencing. His references to the temperature relate his experience of the passage time to this felt state of coldness. Feeling cold is almost playful in this context, where dead bodies are said to be "cold"; he is both referencing the future, when eventually his body too will be cold with death, as well as making the present hyper real. The cold the narrator feels can't be shaken off; it is making him more aware of how slowly time is passing because he is uncomfortable.

Though the narrator is uncomfortable in his present, he is clearly not thrilled about his future rendezvous with death. His way of addressing this, "when did death confirm its presence," mixes the future and the present. Death is not yet—it is the narrator's future. Yet for him, it is already here, it is present. On the one hand, the narrator seems anxious about this, and about the passage of time at all. He begs time to stop for an instant. The narrator is clearly unsettled by the fact that death seems to be a part of his current life, and not some far off abstraction. On the other hand, if death is already present, already part of *the* present, what good would stopping time do? The narrator may feel anxiety about this present, but he is equally unhappy with how slowly time is moving forward. It is in this space, in the present itself, which is under death's shadow, and the movement towards the future, which is frustratingly slow, where the narrator wishes for a pause, for time to stand still for a moment. When, at the very end of the novel, the narrator, in a narrative present, runs into his ex-wife, he reflects on the state of things:

We had always been on the move always waiting for the next day; and now there was only the past. Time no longer unfolded; we had come to know it, and now its

existence was only a memory. We seemed to be caught up in a temporary pause, an empty pause in which nothing happened, and nothing would happen. We were only a step away from that eternal void (101).³

The narrator himself acknowledges this paused state of being. On the one side of it is the past, which now only take the form of memories. The pause, happening in the present, implies that no new memories will be made. If time does not move forward, new events or experiences cannot be turned into memory; they can only ever remain in the prolonged present. Furthermore, in a paused state, time's "existence [is] only a memory," where, without time to transition between the present and the past, the present will never become a past. However, even though *time* no longer unfolds, the narrator is not entirely without a future. His observation about being only a step away from the eternal void shows that he knows there is a future, even if that future is something about which he knows nothing. Because the future, however, is not so much a future in which things happen, but is instead, an official entry into a time and place where everything is nothing, is a void, the narrator feels like his life is in state of pause that is at once temporary and permanent.

The narrator's idea of the pause is a moment when the present stands still, though not indefinitely. The Persian term "مکث" translated here as "pause" ranges in meaning from the neutral "interval," to the positive "respite" or the potentially negative "hesitation," or "halt." The general idea communicates interruption: the opposite of "مکث" means "eternal." The many meanings of the word allow the concept of the pause to be more than just a break in time. Within the moment of the pause, of the "مکث", is the possibility for that interruption to be calming, to be a respite.

³ همیشه در راه بودیم. همیشه ب فکر روز بعد بودیم و حالا فقط حس گذشته بود. زمان دیگر خودش را باز نمی کرد. شناخه بودیم ش و حالا بودنش فقط یک خاطره بود. انگر در یک مکث موقت ایستاده بودیم, یک مکث خالی که در آن هیچ اتفاقی نمی افتاد و بعد از آنهم هیچ. تنها یک قدم تا آن تهی همیشگی فاصله داشتیم (۱۴۴).

There is equally the possibility that such a pause will feel like a hesitation, a sense of indecision or simply inaction.

The notion of the pause is similar to that of “tarrying,” when past, present, and future converge through a character’s actions or through a plot device (Vogl). Tarrying creates space that is “a-chronic, in which the past, the present, and the future are simultaneously present” (48). Because of the tarrying, the present is put on hold, the exact action is in delay. Tarrying creates space in a text for possible future actions, and the ramifications of such actions to come into focus. However, tarrying is also a “decisive inactivity” (35). It is a moment in which inaction is the action. Pausing, on the other hand, is less decisive. The narrator feels “caught up” in the paused moment, like he has no control over it, he is not choosing for time to be paused.

But what the novel and the narrator are describing as a pause, I argue is more a state of suspension. Pausing implies that eventually, things will be “unpaused,” play will resume, and the present will become the past as the future moves to take over the present. Pausing is an elongation of the present, that still functions within a structure where the past, present, and future exist. Suspension on the other hand doesn’t necessarily relate only to the present. Instead, it jumbles the tenses; it can make the past feel like the present, like the narrator feels when his present is only “memories,” or it can make the future feel like the past. Suspension is outside any one temporal period; just as a dream speaks to the present moment in which something is dreamed, the future in which the dream could come to fruition, and the realm in which the dream exists, suspension steps outside of clear temporal bounds, while disrupting any clear sense of past, present, or future.

Azizi and the Photograph

The idea of suspension time comes up among the other characters as well. As Azizi sits at his friend’s birthday party, he finds himself staring at his reflection in a mirror. When he sees what

he looks like, he is stunned. He can't quite believe how old he's gotten. He begins to reflect on his youth, on when he joined the military. He thinks back to the body he had as a youth, and how he was in such good shape once, and he thinks of the woman he loved before shipping out. When he returned from his military service, and the woman he loved, the thought of whom sustained him during his time as a soldier, had married someone else, he tried to convince himself that it wasn't so bad. At the moment of this discovery, he thought to himself, "It's been two bad years, but they passed. Now it's time for life!' Of course, the idea of living without that pale, plumpish girl didn't appeal to him much" (24).⁴ Azizi's reaction is at once completely banal—bodies change as they age—and indicative of how he understands both the passage of time and his own sense of his body. The changes of his body that happened over time were subtle or unremarkable enough that they didn't register so intensely until he saw his body in the mirror, which left him both surprised and nostalgic. He had existed in a state of suspension where the passage of time did not register in a physical way. Not only was he not aware of the passage of time, but he has no control over what effect its passage had. Azizi's suspension is not quite the same as that of the narrator, who feels like his life is on pause, but such an unending pause that it is as though he is suspended. Azizi feels like time passed, and he existed but without having a say over what that existence would look like.

Though he laments his current body and becomes nostalgic looking at it, he is not so much missing the body of his youth as he is missing the possibilities youth held for him. He is focused on the life he could have had with the woman he loved. He remembers how "he had planned his life [with her] in meticulous detail"⁵ and how he was "always waiting, waiting for life, waiting for

⁴ «دو سال بدی بود. ولی گذشت. حالا دیگه وقت زندگیه». البته زندگی بدون آن دختر سفید نیمه چاق زیاد به دلش نمی نشست (۳۹).

⁵ نقشه ی زندگیش را با تمام حسابهای دقیقش کشیده بود (۳۶).

the days to come, for something bigger and better than what he had” (23).⁶ The nostalgia for youthfulness is key because it’s not the physical state or activities of youth for which Azizi longs; rather it’s the future that had yet to come that he longs for. He misses his old body, certainly, but mostly he misses the life he had planned with a woman, not the life he actually lived. He is experiencing a type of nostalgia for a time when the future still had the chance for something to come. This is not a nostalgia for the past at large, but a nostalgia for the moment in the past when the future had yet to unfold. Azizi is not wishing to return to the past exactly, but is instead wishing that his future had more open possibilities, that he were back in a time when the future would have been different. His experience is not unlike the narrator’s, who has a desire to both put the present on pause, and not be in the present any longer, Azizi is also in a position where he is unhappy in the present, but doesn’t exactly want to return to the past. However, he is equally discontent about the prospect of the future, which only increases as the party he is attending shifts activities.

Every year, the friends all take a picture to commemorate another friend, Heydari’s, birthday. The photos end up in an album that Azizi and a friend are looking through when the friend asks:

‘Did you see this picture? It’s from June 1948. Dear old Heydari’s Birthday. We’re all there, arm in arm, just like always.’

Azizi thought back to that night and cringed. He thought of June of 1949 and June of 1950 and ‘51 and ‘52. He looked at Heydari and Anvari, at Hashemi and Asgari. He thought of June of 1978 and June of 1988 and June of 2008 and June of 2018. He pictured Heydari’s two-thousandth birthday and shuddered, muttering

⁶ ... و همیشه منتظور, منتظور زندگی, منتظور روزهای بعد و چیزی بزرگتر و بهتر از آنچه داشت (۳۶).

to himself, 'We're all there, faithful skeletons, arm in arm, just like tonight. All together, with an album three thousand pages long with one million snapshots... and then again the year after and the year after that, forever' (27).⁷

The photos in the album begin to take on a larger than life feeling. They become this marker of the passage of time, but an unending time. While Azizi's friend is excited to see an early photo, for Azizi, it is just a reminder that, though some things have changed, there is still this constant annual recording of his life. He doesn't miss the old days, when the friends took their first picture; instead, he's worried that they will never end, that he will always, for eternity, be stuck attending the same party and that his future will look exactly the same as his present. While the narrator in some ways hoped for time to stand still, for the future to be held off, for Azizi this idea makes him shudder. He recognizes a terror in a future that is the same as the present. Or rather, a future where everyone pretends everything is the same. He recognizes that eventually he and his friends will all die, but his fear is that even as skeletons they will be made to stand together, celebrating Heydari's birthday and pose for a picture.

As Azizi imagines this grotesque future, his mind jumps from the concrete images of the past, in yearly increments, to the boundless years ahead. He thinks to himself, "June of 2008 is there, waiting for me, looking at me. All the moments of my past and future are there, riveted,

⁷ گفت: «این عکسو دیدی؟ خرداد هزار و سیصد و بیست و هفته. تولد حیدری عزیزه. همه امون هستیم, دست در دست, مثل همیشه».

آقای عزیزی به آن شب فکر کرد و دلش فرو ریخت. به خرداد هزار و سیصد و بیست و هشت فکر کرد و خرداد هزار و سیصد و بیست و نه و سی و سی و یک. به آقای حیداری نگاه کرد و آقای انوری و هاشمی و عسگری. به خرداد هزار و سیصد و پنجاه و هفت فکر کرد و خرداد و شصت و هفت و خرداد هشتاد و هفت و خرداد هزار و سیصد و نود و هفت. به دو هزارمین سال تولد آقای حیداری فکر کرد و لرزید. با خودش گفت: «همه امون هستیم, اسکلتهای وفادار, دست در دست هم, درست مثل امشب. دور هم, با یه آلبوم قطور سه هزار صفحه ای و یه میلیون عکس یادگاری. با یه کیک گنده و دو هزار شمع و باز سال بعد و بعد و همیشه» (۴۳).

fixed; just one picture, one eternal picture” (28).⁸ He is at once stuck in a concrete temporal frame—June of a specific year--and aware of the endlessness of the years ahead of him. His future repeats the same scenario, but it’s really past oriented. It is focused on keeping things the same, or as they once were. His entire life becomes condensed into that photo, a picture he doesn’t even want to be in, or have any say over its subject matter.

The fact that Azizi’s anxiety centers around a photo album and the act of taking a picture is not insignificant. In theory, photographs capture a single moment in time and preserve it. They speak to the desire to pause time that the narrator describes, in that they pause the time during the seconds the photograph was taken. But they do not pause time in that they stop the future from unfolding, as Azizi is aware. Instead, they act as an externalized memory or a way of maintaining the present into the future. However, they are often posed or manufactured, so the specific present that is maintained is not a present without a context, or a history. The photographs act in a way like the kind of tarrying Vogl describes, where, in pausing the present, the past and the future converge. They serve as a pause that shows how the friends were in their youth, and they preserve a present that would otherwise immediately become past. For Vogl, tarrying happens in a moment when there are multiple future paths, often “impossible” ones, referring to future possibilities that cannot both happen—one possibility precludes the other (46). Azizi’s despair over the photo and the photo albums in part stems from a lack of possibilities. He is unhappy about the fact that his future is stuck in a cycle of repetition, where even a delay or a moment of tarrying cannot draw out any other possibility besides the one in which he sits, year after year, for a photo for all of

⁸ «خرداد هزار و سیصد و هشتاد و هفت او نجاست. منتظر مه. نگاهم میکنه. تمام لحظه های گذشته و آینده ام او نجاست, میخکوب, ساکن, فقط یه عکس, یه عکس ابدی» (۴۳-۴۴).

eternity. Even death is not a respite, because in his mind, skeletons can just as easily sit for a photo as living people.

So, while a photograph can act like an a-chronic moment, bringing together past, present, and future, for Azizi the sum of all the photographs in the album only highlights his feeling of perpetual waiting, the feeling he articulates to himself as he stares in the mirror that he is always, “waiting, waiting for life...for something bigger and better than what he had” (23).⁹ Captured in an annual photo and having those photos spread out in front of him, Azizi becomes acutely aware of the passage of time. His glance in the mirror reminds him of the effects time has had on his body, but the photos remind him of something even more sinister--how, while some things change and others stagnate, he doesn't have much control over either. He begins to reflect on how he is just swept along and made to do everything he does. So, when the friends begin to assemble to take this year's photo, Azizi considers resisting.

Azizi attempts to stop the photo from being taken at all by becoming essentially nonreactive. He becomes heavy in his seat and almost seems to lose control of his body, requiring his wife to prop his head up. She “bends over and puts her hands around his neck, saying ‘Hold your head up’” (28).¹⁰ He ends up pinned between two friends, his wife's hands on his neck the whole time. When the photographer directs the friends to “sit closer,” Azizi thinks to himself:

Nobody has the right to tell me not to go when I want to go. Nobody has the right to tell me to shut up when I want to talk....Nobody can pin me to a spot as if I were a dried-up insect. If anything is going to happen, it's going to happen outside this room. There's only shadows and darkness here, with the precise calculation of

⁹ ... و همیشه منتظور, منتظور زندگی... و چیزی بزرگتر و بهتر از آنچه داشت (۳۶).

¹⁰ خم شد و دستهایش را دور گردنش حلقه کرد. گفت: «سرتو بالا بگیر» (۴۳).

birthdays--the thirtieth, the fortieth, the sixtieth--people marking time with precision, counting things, panicking about nothingness....I can't sit and watch it anymore. I must get up, right now. All I have to do is get my arm out from behind Hashemi's back, take my wife's hand off my neck, lift Shirin-khanoum's head off my shoulder, remove the bowl of dried fruit and nuts from my lap, pull my legs out from under the table and go! (28).¹¹

Azizi knows that this photo will be taken, but he wants so little to do with it, he stops acting. He becomes passive, where his body may be pushed or prodded into the right position for the photo, but he is not actively sitting for the photo. On the one hand, his resistance to the photo is like an attempt to not be photographed--if he isn't looking at the camera or sitting closer, he can delay the moment when the photographer will snap the shot. In this way, he is tarrying as Vogl describes. By delaying the moment when the photo is taken, Azizi opens up a space where he is reminded of all the past photographs, and the events that led to them, and where the present moment, the moment of the photograph, is elongated. However, Vogl's tarrying relies both on an actual, a-chronic pause, and on a situation that emphasizes the myriad possibilities of the future (34). Azizi's resistance is not quite a-chronic; while he is in his own bubble, refusing to make his body cooperate with the photographer, time around him has not come to a stand-still. Everyone else is clearly still busy posing for the picture, and the photographer is still ready to take to the picture. Tarrying for

¹¹ «هیچ کس حق نداره به من که میخوام برم بگو نرو. هیچ کس حق نداره به من که میخوام حرف بزنم بگه خفه شو... هیچ کس نمی تونه منو مثل یه حشره ی خشکیده به یه نقطه سنجاق کنه. اگه قراره اتفاقی بیفته بیرون از این اتاقه. اینجا فقط سایه است و تاریکی و حساب دقیق تو ادها--سی سالگی, چهل سالگی, شصت سالگی--حساب دقیق زمان و شمارش چیزها و دلهره ی نیستی ... دیگه نمی تونم بشینم و نگاه کنم. باید پاشم, همین الان. فقط کافیه که دستمو از زیر تنه ی آقای هاشمی در آرم, دستای زانو از دور گردنم و از کنم سر شیرین خانمو از رو شونه ام بلند کنم, بشقاب آجیلو از روی زانوم و ردارم, پاهامو از لای پایه های میز بیرون بکشم و برم» (۴۴).

Vogl also brings up the many future possibilities that can still come to be, which is clearly not the case for Azizi. Though Azizi is resisting the taking of the photograph, thus elongating the present, it is clear to him that the photo is inevitable. There is only one possible future—a future in which he and his friends pose for a birthday photo—and whether or not Azizi resists, or delays that moment, it will still happen.

The inevitability of the photo makes him want even more to resist its taking place. His reaction that nobody has the right to tell him what to do or say speaks to the fact that his future is laid out for him, that he has no control over what will happen. The photo album becomes a convergence of past and future, where all the past moments captured speak more to the never-ending repetition of the future than they do of the past. Azizi describes the feeling that inside, maybe indoors, maybe at that particular party, maybe “in” the photograph, is filled with darkness and shadows, and that that darkness is accompanied by, or perhaps because of the precise calculation of time. For Azizi, who feels like he is perpetually waiting for things to begin, the fact that precise calculation is dark or counterproductive to things “happening,” implies a binary understanding of the passage of time. Either there is precision, which is marked by calculation or repetition but is empty and full of shadows, a space where nothing happens, or there is a space for things to happen, an “out there,” that is not marked by the precise passage of time, but for which one must still wait. Yet the waiting is a better place than that of precision, for it’s in “here” that people are “panicking about nothingness.” The very act of measuring time leads to a sense of the passage of time that recognizes that counting or measuring it cannot slow it down; a realization that engenders such panic. Not only can measuring not slow it down, but it also doesn’t afford the measurer any increased agency over the effects of time on his body. He cannot change his body, or revert it back to its previous state, no matter what he does. Measuring just heightens the lack of

control Azizi feels he has. For Azizi, he is aware that being “in here,” sitting for the photograph, is preventing him from experiencing the something that he has been waiting for. He is struck by an urgency that he must leave. If making his body heavy and passive won’t actually pause time, then he has to get out of there.

Leaving, and actively refusing to be in the photograph is not as easy as Azizi’s urgency makes it seem. Although he wants to stand and just leave, he is physically stuck. His body is surrounded on all sides by people or objects that make leaving more of a task than simply *leaving*. What he describes, his arm around a friend, another friend’s head on his shoulder, is all a perfectly common pose for a photograph. However, his focus is not on how people and things are arranged, but on what he must do to extract his body from the arrangement. This language makes it seem like everyone and everything else is frozen, an object unmoving, and he has to play a careful game of Jenga to remove his own body without unfreezing those around him. Of course, if he actually pulls his arm out from behind Hashemi or puts the fruit bowl on the table and gets up to leave, his friends will react, likely asking him where he is going, or telling him to stay. But in Azizi’s presentation of the situation, that wouldn’t happen because everyone else is frozen in the photograph. For Azizi, time is moving forward, or at least he imagines himself in a temporal space in which action is possible, while his friends are put on an unending pause.

As the party goes on, Azizi is again pushed to do something he doesn’t want to do as his wife and then friends encourage him to sing. Again, he feels the pull of everything happening around him without his consent or participation. Again, he tries to make his body resist being pushed into this activity, and this time his friends notice. One comments on how fat he’s gotten. Another asks if he were asleep. By making his body leaden, Azizi is attempting to physically push back against what is likely another inevitability. Time is tied to the body both in that resisting the

passage of time can only be achieved by preventing an event from occurring, and in that he ultimately knows time will win out over his attempts at resistance. On the one hand, he can only resist the inevitable future if he lets his body take over and forces others to literally prop his head up or push him out of the seat. On the other hand, his episode looking into the mirror brought up the anxiety from recognizing how the passage of time has left his body unrecognizable. After seeing what time has done to his body, again without his intentional or necessary participation, he now employs his body strategically, as a means of pausing time. He strategizes about how he might get out of singing, and thinks to himself:

No, this won't do. They're looking at me. I have to figure out a way to leave without anybody noticing. The best way is for me to go into the bathroom and lock the door. When they're busy with something else, I climb out of the bathroom window and jump into the empty courtyard. I go into the kitchen and out the back door into the greenhouse....I crawl among the flowerpots on my hands and knees. I climb onto the streetlamp post; I slide down. I'm in the street. I look around. No one's watching me. I start running; I take a right; keep running; I take a left. I run farther and farther away. What new strength I've found! What speed! My body has shed all its fleshy overweight and the earth has lost its gravity. I keep going, going; I soar! It's as if I've emerged from the earth's atmosphere; I'm floating” (29).¹²

^{11 12} «نه، اینطوری نمیشه. دارن نگام می کنن. باید یه جوری برم که کسی نفهمه. بهترین کار اینه که برم تو دستشوئی درو قفل کنم. وقتی دیدم سرشون گرمه از پنجره ی حموم می پریم تو حیاط خلوت. میرم تو آشپزخونه. از در عقب آشپزخونه میرم تو گلخونه. خودمو میرسونم به آلاچیق. میرم روش. می پریم روی دیوار. میرم رو تیر چراغ برق. آویزون می شم. سر می خورم. میام بیین. توی کوچه ام. نگاه میکنم. کسی مواظبم نیست. میدوم. می پیچم دست راست. بازم میدوم. می پیچم دست چپ. دور میشم، دور، بازم دورتر. چه نیرویی پیدا کرده ام. چه سرعتی. تنم سنگینی گوستیشو از دست داده و زمین قوه ی جاذبه اشو. میرم، میرم، اوج میگیرم انگر خارج از مدار زمین. شناورم» (۴۶-۴۵).

Azizi so badly wants to leave this situation that he concocts what begins like a very plausible escape route. This time, unlike while he was posed for the picture, Azizi's friends are not frozen around him. He has to be careful to slip out unnoticed. The specificity of his plan makes it seem like it really could work, he really could just sneak out the bathroom window and crawl away. He is able to imagine his body moving through space in such a specific and physically concrete way that it sits in stark opposition to the way he actually carries his body, at least the way he *has been* carrying his body. In practice, he is essentially motionless unless prodded into a position. This experience mimics the way time acts on his body—he just lives and every now and then glances in the mirror or is made to look at a photograph of himself and is shocked to see that his body is different. Time has pushed and prodded into a new shape and he had no conscious say over it. In his mind, though, his body is perfectly capable of moving in clear, specific, and careful ways.

However, his plan doesn't remain in the concrete. It begins to push the boundaries of possible, as he imagines becoming lighter and faster and floating away into space. As he creates more and more distance from the party, the place where his friends are and where a collection of photos of his entire past, present, and future lies, his body transforms. For him the space where time is measured precisely is also the space where his body is heavy, overweight, slow. But once he can distance himself from this space and from the precise measurement of time, his body is able to change. He is able to regain the body of youth, like he is going back in time. But what he ultimately aims for, floating around in space, is less about a reversal of time or actually trying to go backwards as it is about a suspension. Floating in space would mean giving up complete control of any actions. Even though he feels like he has no control over what happens or what he does, and is just pushed into one scenario after another, he is still expected to have control. His desire to

take off and end up floating through space seems at first ironic--wouldn't he want to end up somewhere where he *does* have control over what he does? But because he has been able to get far enough away from the place of temporal precision and measurement, he has broken free of temporality altogether, and the ravages that it can bring. He imagines himself suspended; while he might relinquish control over his actions, being suspended, both physically and temporally means that having control over his actions is no longer important. Thinking back to Vogl's notion of tarrying, and how the act of tarrying not only converges the past and present but also brings out the various future possibilities, what Azizi imagines precludes the very idea of a future. Away from a measurable temporality, in a place where he has no control at all over his actions or his body, his suspended state means that even if there is a future to come, it will be no different to him. It will not be marked by birthdays, photographs, changing bodies, or any of the other markers of time. He might die, the true inevitable measure of the arrival of the future, but his body would keep on floating through space. Azizi's dream is not to stop time, or to move back in time, but to suspend it, such that the passage of time is un-remarkable. Only in such an atemporal state of suspension can he fully give in to his inability to act and feel some peace. Such a suspension frees him from the pressure of acting; he would no longer need to behave the way others expect him to behave, nor would he need to act in order to resist such enforced behavior. He could just be, suspended in a state of peaceful inaction, a state that is not atemporal, but where time is not measured or counted or acted upon, such that it sidesteps temporality.

Anvari on the Train

Like Azizi, another one of the friends, Anvari, oscillates between states of inaction and action that produce no results or changes. Anvari is a timid character whose best friend, Mahdavi, left to marry a woman named Talat-khanoum. Anvari and Mahdavi were so close that they were

like “one person,” so when the latter left, it was a great blow to Anvari (33).¹³ His friends react differently, some suggesting that Anvari is better off without his friend Mahdavi, others pointing out that he can always just go visit. Anvari feels torn and unsure what to do, but he decides to leave to follow his friend. Unfortunately, “he hadn’t left. He didn’t leave two days later either, or a week later or a month later or a year later. What did it matter seven days or seven years?” (41).¹⁴ Anvari is repeating Azizi’s experience of inaction: he wants to leave, intends to even, but doesn’t, he is stuck. It’s not clear why exactly he doesn’t leave, but time passes, and he still hasn’t gone to visit his friend. In part, he is stuck doing something he doesn’t want to do, like Azizi and the being photographed. But, unlike Azizi, his state of being stuck comes with a different temporal experience. While Azizi felt both like he was stuck in the moment during which he was made to sit for a photograph, and that the rest of the year, time moved to the background, Anvari experiences no difference between a day and a year. Without his friend, and without taking any action to go visit his friend, time ceases to behave in meaningful measures.

When he finally does decide to go visit Mahdavi, he is both nervous and excited. He gets ready for the train ride amid more conflicting advice from his friends. The whole trip couldn’t go worse. As soon as he boards the train, there is an overwhelming sense that he is both in the wrong spot and stuck there. He is carrying a suitcase, flower pot, and a bird, a gift from Shirin-khanoum for Mahdavi. Though he tries to share his enthusiasm with the fellow passengers, no one wants to speak to him. Instead a woman chastises him for leaving the bird and flower pot on the seat, forcing him to hold both in his arms. The bird, nervous and constantly pecking at Anvari’s tie, eventually

¹³ با هم یکی شدین (۵۰).

¹⁴ ولی نرفته بود ... دو روز بعد هم نرفته بود. هفته و ماه و سال بعد هم نرفته بود. چه فرقی می کرد؟ هفت روز یا هفت سال؟ (۶۰).

soils his pants, leaving a terrible smell in the compartment. Across from him is a little girl blowing on a balloon until it pops, making both Anvari and the bird even more nervous. When another passenger drops her ball of yarn, and Anvari bends to fetch it for her, the other passengers grumble and Anvari thinks to himself, “they’re right, with so little room, one shouldn’t move around” (47).¹⁵ All of this before the train even leaves the station. The overarching sense is not only that Anvari doesn’t belong, but that he doesn’t *fit*. His body and the things accompanying his body are out of control. He is physically too big for the seats and annoys the other passengers, but he is also accompanied by a bird that is loud and smelly. He is anxious and just wants to help and be excited about the journey with the other passengers, but they don’t leave any space for that. He is both stuck literally, forcing himself to sit still and be contained, and stuck in the train, that in turn is stuck in the station.

On the one hand, this preponderance of “stuckness” could seem like a type of tarrying, where the present is elongated not by choice, or by some accident, but because it is stuck. As for Azizi, the future is both at stake and presents an inevitable consistency. Though the future will unfold, it will likely be an iteration or repetition of the present; for Azizi, this means an endless series of photographs. For Anvari, it is a matter of never being able to see his friend, either because he is stuck in inaction—not leaving to visit—or his action of leaving proves futile. As Anvari is stuck on the train, he experiences an increasing sense of anxiety and claustrophobia. Though he acted, and left for the journey, his experience in action, in movement is equally stagnant. He is just as stuck on the train as he was before he left. The difference is that before, he was stuck because time kept moving forward without him taking any action. On the train, he is physically stuck. He

¹⁵ «حق دارند. جا به این تنگی که همیشه انقدر ول زد» (۶۸).

is bound by the train, which stops and delays as it wants, something Anvari has no control of. Though his journey breaks him out of a temporal suspension where a day was a year, or time just passed without him recognizing its passage, the current present he finds himself in is a present that he cannot escape, that he can't change and that he doesn't understand.

As the train is sitting delayed in the station, a train inspector comes through and goes through everyone's luggage. The other passengers move out of the way and go along with it, but Anvari doesn't understand what is happening. The inspector finds a packet of letters that Mahdavi wrote to Anvari over the years and a photo album in his luggage and treats this discovery like it's something truly unusual and suspicious. The other passengers start whispering to each other and assume Anvari has done something wrong. The inspector says he has to take the letters with him, and Anvari tries to resist, reaching for the letters, "the ticket inspector turned around and looked at him. Anvari let his hand drop and put it in his pocket. He took it back out and sadly scratched his head. 'When will you give them back?' he asked. 'Later,' said the ticket inspector and left" (45).¹⁶ As this happens, the inspector and other passengers react with great suspicion. The other passengers discourage Anvari from arguing with the inspector and assume that if the inspector wants to take the letters, there is a good reason for him to do so. Anvari on the other hand is puzzled. To him, the letters are perfectly innocent. The ticket inspector needs Anvari to explain what each other object in his suitcase is, even though the objects—a toy accordion and a photo album—are fairly self-explanatory. This creates a sense of paranoia for Anvari. He is being treated like a criminal, but it is not clear at all to him why or what he's done. It also increases his feeling

¹⁶ مامور برگشت نگاهش کرد. آقای انوری دستش را پایین انداخت. توی جیبش کرد. در آورد و با غصه سرش را خاراند. پرسید «کی بهم پس میدین؟» مامور گفت «بعداً» و راه افتاد (۶۶).

of helplessness. He clearly doesn't want the inspector to take the letters, so his first instinct is to reach for them and try to grab them back, but he aborts this mission almost immediately, just by a look from the inspector. The way his hand is described here is almost like something that is separate from him: there is Anvari and there is his hand, and the two are not the same. His hand becomes one more thing that he has to take care of, to look after and to keep to himself. The fact of his being stuck in the train, in a situation where he has no agency, or doesn't even know what agency would look like, is emphasized by the way his body is not under control or contained.

This harkens back to Azizi's sense that he is both physically stuck on the couch, in the photo, while his body is at the same time changing, aging, decaying, without his control. The narrator too is aware that he is stuck living, that as much as he wishes to either be dead already or to be much younger, there is nothing he can do but wait for his body to do what it wants. There is a disconnect between how the characters want their bodies to behave or exist in the world around them, and how the bodies actually behave. Azizi is stuck recreating the same photograph every year, despite the fact that his body was changing. The narrator is stuck waiting for death, despite the fact that it won't come fast enough; he can't will his body to die. Anvari is stuck on the train with the inspector, waiting for the train to start and the "later" when the inspector will return the letters. He wants his hand to reach out and grab them back, but it won't. He wants his body to fit in the small space of the train car, but it won't; it is too big and smelly and isn't able to behave in the unoffending way he wants. This lack of control is reflected in the inspector's promise that he will get his letters back "later." "Later" gives no indication of time; its open-endedness leaves Anvari with no space to imagine when that time might be so he could begin to take action in retrieving his letters.

Though Anvari never ends up getting the letters back, by signaling that there is a “later,” the inspector breaks the stagnation of the present. The train starts moving, but for Anvari, it’s almost too late. His stomach hurts, his head hurts, he feels on edge. He tries whistling as a way to calm his nerves, but doesn’t actually know how to whistle, so he just blows air out of his lips (46). Again, his body is not quite doing what he wants it to do. He is trying actively to make himself calm, but his body won’t cooperate. His action, whistling, produces no results, and he is back to being helpless against both what his body is doing and what is happening around him. Only when he falls asleep is he able to let go of the sense of anxiety he was feeling. Sleep is a state of letting go, willingly becoming helpless, giving in to a lack of control. Anvari started in a state of free flow, where time was meaningless, unmeasurable, a day was a year, and what difference did any of it make since he was apart from his friend? Then, he made a plan, took action, got on a train and was suddenly stuck. Once he fell asleep, and let go of control again, lost his ability to act, did the train start moving. Unfortunately, the train stops again, this time for no clear reason, and without a sense of when it will start up again. In this moment of tarrying, the moment when the present becomes stuck, and Anvari stuck in it, he gives up.

In a state of even increased anxiety, he tries to figure out what is happening, why they are stopped. He discovers that another passenger is stuck in the bathroom and tries to help him open the door. It’s really jammed, and the person stuck inside is becoming increasingly agitated, making Anvari “stunned. He was upset. He wanted to leave but he couldn’t bring himself to. He said: ‘I’ll push from the outside, and you pull from the inside.’ It didn’t work. ‘Don’t get upset,’ he said” (48).¹⁷ He leaves to get assistance from fellow passengers who refuse to help, claiming it simply

^{16 17} آقای انوری جا خورد. ناراحت شد. خواست برگردد ولی دلش نیامد. گفت: «من از بیرون فشار میدم. شما از تو بکشین». فایده نداشت. آقای انوری گفت: «ناراحت نباشین» (۷۰)

isn't their problem. The inspector can't help either, so Anvari returns to the bathroom to free the man, who has now gotten angry at Anvari and is making threats that he will enact when he is finally freed. Anvari feels sick, and decides to give up, thinking to himself, "he might as well stay locked up in there. That's what he deserves" (49).¹⁸ Again, Anvari begins to exhibit a sense of paranoia. Though he is behaving in a kind and reasonable way—helping someone who is stuck—the other passengers' lack of action makes him second guess his actions. He can't understand why no one else will help the man trapped in the bathroom, or why that man is getting angry at him, Anvari. The trapped man behaves like an externalized demonstration of Anvari's experience. He is trapped on the train, trapped in his unwieldy body, and no one is helping, or even behaving in a predictable way. Anvari wants to leave; he doesn't want to stay in the uncomfortable position of helping an angry man. But once again, Anvari does not act in the way that he wants. Something stops him from just leaving the stuck man right away. Telling the (already very upset) man to not get upset is like Anvari "whistling" when he doesn't know how. Anvari handles being unhappy or upset by trying to willfully ignore it, by choosing to whistle instead of wallow in unhappiness. Anvari's "don't get upset" is as much to the man in the bathroom as it is to himself. Anvari is *already* upset. The man in the bathroom is *already* upset. If he feels upset, he can just tell himself, the self that is trapped, to not be upset, and it'll be fine.

Ultimately though, he can't help the trapped man. He makes a justification for not freeing the man by thinking that he deserves to be stuck. The way he thinks about the situation, that the man "might as well" stay trapped suggests that being stuck is a neutral state. Is being free really any better than being stuck? Once the man is freed from the bathroom, he's still stuck on the train,

¹⁸ «همون بهتره که حبس باشه. سزاش همینه» (۷۱).

so how is that really different? He might as well just stay in the bathroom, what difference does it really make? This fatalist, pessimistic attitude recalls the narrator's sense of helplessness in the face of time. He is aware that things aren't ideal, that he's aging, alone, and surrounded by literal rats. But he also knows there's nothing he can do to propel time, and he's not sure that's what he actually wants to do. Anvari knows it is not good to be trapped in the bathroom; his initial reaction was to help free the man. But he also settles into a state of acceptance when he sees that no one else will help and he can't do it alone.

This attitude speaks to a larger sense of temporality and the fine line Anvari walks between being stuck and behaving stuck. He could have gone and visited his friend much sooner. Nothing was actively stopping him, but he didn't. Waiting became his state of stuckness. He waited to visit Mahdavi until waiting became the status quo, because time no longer broke his life up into patterns or chunks. He wasn't technically stuck, but he waited long enough that what should feel like discernible chunks of time blended together, and he entered into a state of suspension, where the past, present, and future blended together and he lost awareness of the fact that he was stuck. His failure to act was the process through which inaction became the norm. Once inaction becomes the norm, and once time is no longer broken into measurable or meaningful moments, time ceases to be a force. Inaction on Monday is the same as inaction on Friday.

Suspension for Azizi was precluding the future, not necessarily remaining or focusing on the present, but rejecting the notion of a future. This was what he desired, as a way to get out of the present, which for him felt stuck. He was stuck on the couch at the party. He was stuck in a body that was changing without bringing him on board. Anvari was stuck through implicit choice: he was stuck when he waited so long that inaction became the norm, and he entered into a state of suspended time, where time just *was*, it didn't *mean* anything. But he broke through and got on the

train. Unfortunately, the train had other plans for him, and he was forced to contend with an outside force keeping him stuck. His body was acting separately, not cooperating with the environment, but he couldn't control that. He just had to wait it out, stuck on the train. So when he encountered another man, stuck in the bathroom, it seemed like a reasonable enough experience. In the end though, his lack of control in the train overwhelms him, and he makes the choice to abandon the journey and head home. When the train is stopped again for incomprehensible reasons, he decides he wants to return home. He has a moment of panic, where he thinks, "if something terrible happened to me, no one would know" (53).¹⁹ Anvari then is not quite in a state of future-less suspension. He imagines a future where he is, at the very least, still alive, such that something terrible happening would upend that future that he pictures. His thought—presumably about his friends—underscores the isolation he has felt all throughout the trip, starting from his fellow passengers' refusal to share his excitement about the impending journey, extending to his inability to fit in, and to suspicions about his behavior.

As he's deciding to leave, he picks up the bird that he has carried with him the whole trip, the bird that was too loud and smelly, that ruined his pants, that made him stand out to the fellow passengers. He is about to bring it with him, but reconsiders, and instead "throws it on the ground" and leaves (53).²⁰ The bird was both a remnant from home, a gift from Shirin, and something that he was meant to take to Mahdavi, a reminder of where he was going. Even though it caused him so much stress throughout the journey, he held on to it. But in the end, he decides to leave it behind.

¹⁹ «آگه به بالایی سرم بیاد هیچکس نمی فهمه» (۷۷).

²⁰ منصرف شد و انداختش زمین (۷۷).

There is clearly a decision process, an action that he is choosing to take, just as he is choosing to return home.

The manner in which Anvari leaves the bird is decidedly violent. A bird, in theory, can fly away. He could have just placed the bird somewhere and assumed it would fly off. Instead, he “threw it on the ground.” It seems that he wanted to expel it from himself, to actively get rid of it. The active language turns what could be seen as the passive act of leaving the bird behind and simply neglecting to bring it with him, into a clear decision. He is *choosing* to reject the bird. In this vignette, the bird seems to represent both the inability of Anvari’s body to conform, or to fit, as well as his tie with home. By getting rid of it, he makes his body more acceptable, but he also ties himself down to home and to staying in place. Without the bird, Anvari’s body would no longer stand out in the train; he wouldn’t seem loud or smelly, and would begin to fit in. But, because he is not going back on the train, his rejection of the bird is an acknowledgement of his choice to return home and to be stuck at home waiting rather than stuck on the train in forced inaction. The bird is only necessary as a tie to home if he is away from home; if he returns back home, he doesn’t need something to remind him of where he already is. Birds often symbolize mobility, travel, and freedom. Anvari began his trip by breaking free from the state of suspension, but breaking free didn’t work. He had to go home before the journey ended, and before he could be reunited with his friend. Before he could fully return though, he had to get rid of the symbol of freedom and mobility that had accompanied him on his brief foray into the world and out his state of perpetual suspension. Suspension here must mean both waiting indefinitely, with no sense of end in place, as well as giving up on acting, allowing oneself to be pushed and pulled, without resistance or a means of resistance. It results in an implicit or explicit consent to not being able to act, to step meaningful out of suspension.

Hashemi on the Shore

Suspending time and its effect on agency comes up later in the novel, when another one of the friends is on vacation at the beach with his wife. This vignette begins in a state of suspension, where Hashemi is half asleep, and only upon opening his eyes and becoming aware of his surroundings is he able to make sense of where he is. As he relaxes on the beach, he becomes aware that his wife, Shirin, has perhaps drifted too far off to sea. But that doesn't stop him from also taking in his surroundings and reflecting on what a wonderful beach day it is, and how good his life with Shirin is. He thinks to himself, "What a wonderful world! How wonderful that I am alive, that I exist. I wish everything could just stop and stay forever the way it is right now, with nothing coming, nothing going, nothing changing; I wish everything could be, just be" (90).²¹ While this is often a common sentiment when one is enjoying a pleasant vacation, Hashemi's desire to stop time goes further than just wishing for the beach day to not end. It is at once an exaltation of existing, of being alive, and a recognition that that will not always be the case. Here, time acts as a reminder that as time passes, things eventually cease to exist. Hashemi's sense of the passage of time and the fact that he will at some point no longer be alive does not make him want to go back in time, nor does it make him yearn for his youth. Just like Azizi, he is not so much interested in the past itself, but in disrupting a move to the future. His ideal, what he wants to happen, is to prevent time from moving forward and having its inevitable effect on Hashemi's existence.

²¹ «چه روز خوبی. چه دنیای خوبی. چه خوبه که زنده ام, که هستم. کاش همه چیز همین الان بی حرکت می ایستاد, برای همیشه. نه چیزی می اومد, نه چیزی میرفت, نه چیزی چیز دیگه ای میشد. همه چیز بود. فقط بود» (۱۲۹).

Hashemi's wish for the present to remain quickly turns into fear when he realizes that that is not possible. His sense of the future is tied up with "the day when Shirin-khanoum wouldn't be there anymore," and it causes a dark blemish on his nice beach day (90).²² He forces himself to think positive thoughts, and not let the inevitability of his own mortality overwhelm the nice outing, focusing instead on how Shirin is "here, now before [him]" (90).²³ The fact that he thinks of Shirin being "before him" as the motivation for not focusing too much on the passage of time is noteworthy because technically, Shirin is not "here," she is somewhere "out there," soon to float off to sea. The Persian text describes Shirin as "رودروی" which more literally means "face to face" or "across from." For Hashemi, his wife's presence is comforting and positive, but it is a bodiless presence. Shirin doesn't actually have to be physically in Hashemi's presence for him to be comforted; just the idea of her existence is enough. So when she floats off, farther and farther until she is out of view, it takes Hashemi a little while to realize that his anticipated future without Shirin might actually be "now, before him."

Hashemi oscillates between action and inaction. At first, he just sees the day as wonderful; everything from the sunshine to the sand is wonderful. But he eventually becomes anxious and calls for Shirin to swim back to shore. The sea becomes at first "restless," and Hashemi doesn't know what to do. His second attempt to bring Shirin back is to whisper at the sea for her to return. His whispering is a moment when he is both aware that the situation could be bad—Shirin could be drowning—but also not quite willing to *act* to remedy the situation. It is almost the opposite of the types of pauses that constitute "tarrying": instead of a moment where a character pauses in the

²¹ ²² به روزی که شیرین خانم نخواهد بود (۱۲۹).

²³ ولی حالا اینجاست. روبروی منه (۱۲۹).

midst of acting, a moment in which the multiple possible futures are drawn out because the character's next move is not yet made, Hashemi's whisper is an action that foretells future inaction. He knows that whispering to Shirin to come back is ineffective. But calling to her didn't accomplish anything, and a more proactive action would mean acknowledging that the future Hashemi fears is a real, and present, possibility. While "tarrying" allows possible futures to come into view, Hashemi's half-hearted action speaks instead to a refusal to acknowledge a future that is different from the present. He opts for a state of suspension, in which time itself is not necessarily on hold or paused, but in which he refuses to participate in his surroundings in a way that would acknowledge the passage of time and the various futures that passage could bring about.

Hashemi persists in manufacturing a sense of suspension throughout the chapter by moving back and forth between possible outcomes. He convinces himself that Shirin is fine and will return when she's ready, and then he panics. He thinks that this whole thing must just be a bad dream, so he tries to go to sleep, just so that he can wake up from the nightmare and find that everything is fine again. Sleep is a type of suspension, where the body is still, more or less immobile, but the mind is active. Hashemi is once again opting for a chance to do an action that is really like an inaction, just lying there, asleep, to escape what he suspects the future will be. This plan doesn't last, as he is never able to fall asleep, because he is aware that some truth is "lurking in the back of his mind" (96).²⁴ He next considers flagging down another beachgoer and asking for their help, but finds himself unable to call to this other person. He tries, but can't lift his arm to wave them down, or can't find his voice to call out. He ends up speaking to the sea, convinced that Shirin will

²⁴ تو سرش چرخ می خورد (۱۳۷).

come back, that that is really the only possibility. The chapter ends with Hashemi once more alone on the beach, repeating that it is a wonderful day.

Hashemi's final decision is to preserve the state of unknowing, where his wife is still suspended in the ocean. By settling on inaction, he can maintain a state of ignorance, and delay the moment when what he suspects to be true, that his wife has died, becomes reality. This moment highlights a key distinction between suspension and tarrying. While tarrying involves incidental moments when a character is mid-action, and is not necessarily aware of tarrying, suspension as Hashemi experiences it can be active. He has spent an entire afternoon generating actions that all work to maintain a state of being in which Shirin is still living. Though he is aware of the fact that Shirin may have drowned that she is no longer "before him," he also recognizes a comfort in not knowing definitively. Not knowing becomes a way of putting off or resisting the future. Hashemi acts to enter into a state of suspension that resists the future by insisting on maintaining ignorance.

Shirin in and out of Suspension

Shirin too spends this entire chapter in a state of perpetual suspension, as she presumably floats off to sea. However, Shirin doesn't interact with time in the same way as the friends. While they struggle with action and inaction, and feel like time is more of a trap, where the best they can hope for is delay and suspension, Shirin's character motivates time. Hashemi sees her as the thing that brought time into his life. Though he was aware of his existence prior to her arrival in his life, he was not quite sure who he was. He thinks about his past and realizes:

He was there, among the rest of the children, among the brothers and cousins.... Which one was he? He saw himself at the edge of the pool, in the alley, on the roof, in the schoolyard. And that was it. He had no childhood. He thought of his youth... of his twenties and thirties and the years before and after. He saw

himself here and there, but nowhere in particular. He knew that he had to have been twenty at some time, since now he was forty-two. But when? His past was like a colorless substance diffused in the air....It was only with Shirin-khanoum that he'd started to have his own memories, his own past, his own place....With Shirin-khanoum, everything had begun, the first day, the second day, the third day, and the days thereafter. Time had begun, time in terms of things, and time in terms of Hashemi. With Shirin-khanoum, certain things had come into existence: darkness and light, seasons, places, desires, fears, memories--and Hashemi himself. It was with Shirin-khanoum that he had come to look at himself, to see himself, to realize that he was, had been, and one day would no longer be (92).²⁵

This passage reveals how Hashemi relates the idea of himself to the concrete, physical being of himself. He is aware that he must have been, because he is, now, but that sense of having been, of who he was in his childhood is foggy because his memories have no sense of concreteness. Some of what he describes seems like a fairly typical kind of memory: a shadowy sense of a place, where it's not entirely clear where the memory takes place, but it sticks as a memory nonetheless. But the overarching sense is that Hashemi feels, or felt before Shirin came into his life, completely disconnected from any sense of himself. He can't even identify himself in an image of himself,

²⁵ آنجا بود میان باقی بچه ها. میان برادر ها و پسر عمو ها... کدام یکی بود؟ خودش را دید لب حوض. خودش را دید کنار دیوار. خودش را دید توی کوچه یا روی پشت بام یا توی حیاط مدرسه. همین. بچه گی نداشت. به جوانیش فکر کرد ... به بیست سالگی و سی سالگی و به سال های بعد یا قبل از آن. دید که آنجاست و اینجاست و هیچ جای خاص و معینی نیست. میدانست که باید روزی بیست ساله یا سی ساله می بوده چون چهل و دو سال داشت. ولی کی؟ گذاشته اش مثل ماده ای بی رنگ توی هوا پخش بود...تنها با شیرین خانم بود که صاحب خاطره شده بود. صاحب گذاشته, صاحب مکان. با شیرین خانم همه چیز شروع شده بود. روز اول و روز دوم و روز سوم و روزهای بعد. زمان شروع شده بود. زمان چیزها و زمان آقای هاشمی. از شیرین خانم چیزها به وجود آمده بود: تاریکی و روشنی, فصل ها, جا ها, خواستنها, ترس ها, خاطره ها - و آقای هاشمی. با شیرین خانم بود که بخودش نگاه کرده بود. خودش را دیده بود و فهمیده بود که هست, که بوده, که یک روز هم نخواهد بود (۱۳۱ - ۱۳۲).

and instead wonders “which one was he?” To not be able to recognize himself amongst a group of children speaks to a complete dissociation both between himself and his body and between himself in his current “now,” and the self of his past. He is able to mark time in a standard measurement of years, where he knows that a set number of years, his “twenties and thirties” have passed, but he is unable to make sense of them as something that he experienced. Much like Azizi felt dissociated from his body until he caught a glimpse of it in the mirror, Hashemi feels disconnected to his body until some outside force creates a link for him, and Shirin acts as that outside force.

He repeats that it was only with Shirin that “time had begun.” If Hashemi is claiming that his own existence is reliant on close proximity, physical or abstract, to Shirin, it is no wonder that he is anxious about her possible disappearance; it is not just that his beloved wife would die, but also that he himself would cease to be. The idea that it is “with Shirin,” and not through, because of, due to, or any number of phrases that communicate causality, highlights the physical nature of time that keeps coming up. Azizi is brought out of his state of suspension when he is forced to look at his body, when his body is forcibly dissociated for him, both in the mirror and in the photograph. Hashemi only has a sense of himself, which is tied in to his sense of time, by placing or keeping his body near Shirin’s. Feeling time, and being aware of time, is located not just in Hashemi’s memories, or sense of the future, but in his physical body, and where and how that body exists in space and in relation to Shirin.

Shirin’s effect is not just to bring “time in terms of things,” but also to enable Hashemi to “look at himself.” By being able to “look at himself, see himself,” Hashemi is able to get first a sense of self, and second a sense of self as something that changes. Just as Azizi needed the moment in front of the mirror and to see himself in the photograph to make sense of time, Hashemi also needs to visualize himself, to look at himself as an embodied being in order to understand

what it means to exist. By looking at himself, and gaining this sense of a physical self, he also understands that he will eventually cease to exist. This realization that he will not exist forever stands in opposition to Azizi's feeling that the annual birthday photograph will go on for all of eternity, even when it is just a group of skeletons posing for the camera. By bringing in a type of temporality, Shirin breaks the state of suspension Hashemi had existed in prior to her presence. Before time, he couldn't "see himself"; he could only see vague places or a "colorless substance." With Shirin, and with time, he was able to gain a perspective through which he could view himself, and understand that existence is not an endless, amorphous state of suspension, but something which eventually ceases. As Shirin floats off, Hashemi is once again returned to a possible state of suspension. Though he is aware that she is gone, he actively works to reject the future where that is the case. But in refusing to acknowledge this future, Hashemi is choosing to opt for a state of timeless suspension, where the present is elongated for so long that it eclipses the past and future. In other words, Shirin brought time with her, and ended Hashemi's state of disembodied suspension. But when she floated off, she took time with her, leaving Hashemi back to a place where time doesn't exist because time means that eventually Hashemi himself will not exist.

Shirin is presented as a God-like figure who brings "darkness and light, seasons, places, desires, fears, and memories" into existence. These concepts are linked to temporality. Darkness and light can be stand-ins for night and day, which, like the seasons, are ways of measuring time and indexing its passage. But they are also at the beginning of life; without light there can be no life. Light acts as the opposite to darkness, which is a stand-in for nothingness, or the void. This recalls the narrator's awareness that all that remains between his existence and the "eternal void" is a brief moment of the present. Hashemi is aware of this void, aware that without Shirin, he could go back to an existence that doesn't allow him to see or understand himself. But Shirin brings more

than simple markers of time; she brings out desire and fear, both concepts that are future oriented. Desire or fear speak to a change, something to come, whether that something is positive (desire), or negative (fear). Similarly, memories serve the past. By default, a memory cannot be of the future, and only exists in the present as a sense of awareness that the only way to hold on to the present is to remember it.

Hashemi includes “places” in his list of things Shirin brought into his life. Space here, as for the other characters, becomes the backdrop for the experience of time. Anvari felt this, as it was only when he changed settings and got on the train that he becomes aware of his own inability to act and of being stuck—both physically and temporally. Hashemi also understands that time is felt through physical location and proximity as he acknowledges that it is by being *with* Shirin that all of these temporal markers and experiences, himself included, can come into being.

It is as though Hashemi was not a full person before Shirin arrived; not only was he disembodied and without a sense of time, but he was also unable to process emotions or make sense of his surroundings. What was there before Shirin brought about both darkness and light? He is portrayed as barely existing, not just in a suspended state temporally speaking, but also his entire being appears as some type of thing that was not quite human, that just floated through space until Shirin came along and bestowed it with the ability to see itself, and therefore gain a body, the ability to desire or fear, and the ability to sense and experience the changing of the seasons, the state of light and darkness.

Shirin too is presented as a someone who exists as ambiguously human. Besides being portrayed by Hashemi as a God-like being, his friends call her “the monster who took away [their] friend” (95).²⁶ Hashemi prefers to compare her to insects, describing her small body as “knee-high

²⁶ دیوه اومد رفیق [شان] را برد (۱۳۶).

to a grasshopper” (89),²⁷ and “no bigger than an ant” (95).²⁸ His pet name for her is his “butterfly” (95).²⁹ Shirin herself associates with birds, always having her own nearby, and gifting them to the friends. She is able to whistle better than anyone and would “sit by the window and whistle, imitating birds--nightingales, canaries, swallows, and birds no one had heard, sounds no one had ever heard” (46).³⁰ Her whistling ability suggests that not only can she imitate birds, but she can embody them. It also sits in opposition to Anvari’s inability to whistle. Though he wants to whistle on the train, as it would be a way to calm down and force himself to feel happy, he simply can’t. Anvari is imbued with an inability to act such that, even when he tries to act by making the decision to whistle, he is unsuccessful. For Shirin, on the other hand, whistling is so natural to her that it is less like a choice on her part to sit and whistle, and more an embodiment of various birds. The physical ambiguity she exhibits speaks to the way Shirin herself came into Hashemi’s life.

Shirin came into Hashemi’s life in a state of perpetual or ongoing suspension. As Hashemi thinks about his wife, at the very start of his chapter, he reflects on the puzzling nature of her origin. When asked a friend asks where she had come from, no one knows:

Where *had* she come from? ... Shirin-khanoum had laughed. She’d pointed toward a place in the distance, to the sky, the trees, the neighbor’s house, the fountain pool, the roof, this direction and that direction, and had said, “From there, from behind

²⁷ سر تا پایش که یک وجب بیشتر نبود (۱۲۷).

²⁸ قد یه موره (۱۳۷).

²⁹ شاپرکم (۱۳۶).

³⁰ می نشست کنار پنجره و سوت می زد. صدای پرنده ها را در می آورد، صدای بلبل، صدای قناری، صدای چلچله، صدای پرنده های که کسی نمی شناخت (۶۷).

those trees, from in there, from way over that way, from those depths--what difference does it make? I'm here now" (89).³¹

Shirin's arrival in the friends' lives speaks to a spatial ambiguity. She has no origin place, no origin story, and is able to be from everywhere and nowhere at once. The places she is "from" are a mix of natural spaces, like the sky and the trees, and manmade spaces like a house or a fountain. They create a mystique around her as a person; if she is from the sky and the trees, is she human? How could she be if she is from all of these places at once? Her spatial ambiguity comes alongside a temporal ambiguity. To be from everyone suggests that she doesn't quite follow the same rules of time. An origin story is just as much about place as it is about time and having such an ambiguous one creates the sense that Shirin doesn't necessarily follow the same rules of aging, the same rules of chronology. Her emphasis is on the present; she is "here now," so what does it matter where she was before? Or, what does it matter where she'll be in the future? The focus on the present in a way resists the sense that time necessarily means the present fades into the past as the future arrives. Her present presence is a type of suspension, where she is both elongating a singular tense, the present, and resisting following the rules of past and future. Shirin's arrival insists that the present is the temporality that matters; it eclipses the past and serves as no guarantee of the future. If she arrived from everywhere and nowhere, there is no guarantee that she won't also disappear in the same ambiguous manner.

Shirin's arrival as a form of suspension which remains focused on the present also acts as a resistance to gendered norms. Hashemi's friends are skeptical of her, calling her a monster, as

³¹ از کجا آمده بود؟ ... شیرین خانم خندیده بود. به جای آن دور ، ته آسمان ، پشت درختها ، به حوض ، به پشت بام ، به اینور و آنور اشاره کرده بود و گفته بود «از اونجا ، از اون پشت ، از اون لا ، از اون ته -- چه فرقی میکنه؟ اومده ام دیگه» (۱۲۸).

they explain to Hashemi that “the family a woman comes from is important” (89).³² Shirin refuses to disclose her past, refuses to accept the adage that what is important about her is her family and past. She then leaves by floating off to sea. The logical explanation is that she drowns, but, given her mysterious arrival and her association with animals, it’s just as likely that she turned into a bird and flew off. By leaving or dying in this manner, she perpetuates this extended suspended life. She arrived without a trace, without a family, papers or a sense of a past that brought her into Hashemi’s life. She then parts at sea, before there is a chance for her, or for Hashemi, to really come face to face with the changes that aging might make on her body. She dies in a literal state of suspension—floating in water—but she also dies as a suspended being, as someone who resisted temporalities other than the present. She arrived from nowhere and everywhere, showing up one day and having no discernible past. She then disappears another day, when her body drifts off, leaving nothing physical of her being.

Talat-khanoum and Disruption

Shirin’s character at first appears to sit in stark opposition to that of the only other named female character in the text, Talat-khanoum. While Shirin is a tiny ant, or a bird that can fly off, Talat is big, tall, and masculine. She is described as an “uninvited guest” who is so tall, “her head reached the top of the doorway. She looked like the tree at Emamzadeh Qassem, frightful, imposing, ancient. The wind was blowing her hair this way and that. Her body gave off a kind of animal heat. Her skin smelled like sheep, like fresh milk and dung, like garden vegetable paths”

³² «خانواده ی زن مهمه» (۱۲۸).

(33).³³ Like Shirin, Talat is also not quite entirely human. She is a clearly a force to be reckoned with--huge, imposing, standing firm despite the wind whipping around her, while also coming in and upturning everyone's lives like the wind itself. Her non-human associations are not the cute, dainty ones Shirin is associated with; Talat is compared more to a farm, something challenging, dirty, but also life-sustaining. By depicting her as a tree that stands unwavering, Talat is temporally encapsulated: a tree has roots and can be a relic from ancient times, as is the one to which Talat is explicitly compared. Its rings are a way of measuring time, of making it known exactly how much time has passed. Just as Shirin brought about darkness, light, and the seasons, Talat brings her own way of measuring time through plant and animal life. She is compared to "sheep, fresh milk, dung, vegetable gardens," all of which bring up farm life, which work together on a cyclical schedule and in a state of cyclical reciprocity. Milk only comes after the birth of an animal and is its nourishment, while dung is the waste that in turn nourishes the plants. This cyclicity is its own temporality and speaks to endurance. While the friends are stuck in states of suspension where they cannot act, where they are suspended in a state outside of time, Talat embodies a timeliness that encompasses past, present, and future all in one.

Both women, Shirin and Talat, become beings that motivate time. They are both accused of being a "monster [who] came and took away [a] friend. And took him so easily!" (34 and 95).³⁴ The exact language is used to describe both women's entrance into the friend group. Although the respective men they each "took away" seem to be fine with having been taken, the women are cast

³³ سرش تا بالای در می رسید. شبیه درخت امامزاده قاسم بود، هولناک و عظیم و قدیمی. باد موهای قرمزش را اینور و آنور می کشاند. از تنش گرمایی حیوانی بیرون میزد. پوستش بوی گوسفند می داد، بوی شیر تازه و پشگل، بوی کوچه باغ های دهات (۵۰).

³⁴ دیوه اومد رفیق مارو برد. چه آسونم برد (۵۱؛ ۱۲۶).

as the monsters. The notion of time itself being a kind of monster comes up throughout the text as well, creating a parallel between the abstract concept of time, and the role Shirin and Talat play in the friend group. By entering the friend group, they make it impossible for the friends to carry on in their state of suspended inaction. The change is seen as a negative, as a disruption, by the friends, and at first, only Hashemi is glad of it. But if Talat and Shirin have the ability to motivate time and make it move forward through change, they also have the ability to slow it down, or stop it.

When Anvari gets sick, the friends don't know what to do. They offer a number of suggestions, but don't end up doing anything productive. When Talat appears on the scene, the friends are afraid, and Anvari is convinced she has arrived to kill him. Instead, she orders everyone out of his room, ignoring their protestations, and gets to work curing Anvari. The friends stand outside his room, debating whether they should call a doctor, or the police, but, unsurprisingly, they settle on inaction and do nothing. Talat, on the other hand, is able to act, to make decisions and see them through in a way the friends are incapable of. While this action initially causes them to hate her, because it breaks up their little friend group, it also makes them respect her because she ultimately saves their friend. Saving Anvari is an act that delays the inevitable: he will eventually die, but not yet, thanks to Talat. Delaying the inevitable is Azizi's goal when he resists being photographed. It's what the narrator imagines when he wishes for the present to be paused. Only Talat is able to actually accomplish the delay.

Both Talat and Shirin are also able to stand up to Heydari, the de facto leader of the friend group. It is at his company that several of the friends work, it is his birthday that is celebrated, what he says goes. He is opposed to Anvari's train trip, and it takes Shirin's nudging to get Anvari to go. She is not afraid of Heydari's questions about her past. Heydari has taken the friends' money for some investment plan that requires 100 years to see any returns, and it is Talat who demands

her husband's money back. When she arrives to retrieve the money, it is in place of her husband, Mahdavi, whom the friends had been expecting. She explains, "I came instead of him... he doesn't have what it takes to deal with you guys" (35).³⁵ Not only does she recognize that the friends, especially in this case her husband, are unable to act, but she sees that they are a group, united in their inaction. Her arrival in the place of Mahdavi implies that she does "have what it takes." The other friends are fine with going along with whatever Heydari says or wants, so Talat knows that in order to accomplish anything she herself must act. The two women's ability to stand up to Heydari not only speaks to their ability to act, but also to the way their presence in the group is disruptive.

Disruption is suspension's opposite. If suspension is a state without a chronology that potentially goes on forever, disruption offers a break from that state. By returning to a temporality where time passes, disruption brings the inaction that the characters exhibit into relief. This lens of suspension offers a reading of the temporality in *Winter Sleep* that looks at more than nostalgia. Other scholars have explored the way Taraghi's works emphasize the past through memories, arguing that they develop a temporality that is inherently nostalgic and often melancholic (Pourjafari, Daneshvar). Though suspension can dwell in the past, it is more about a temporality that belies a clear chronology. Suspension resists categorization in a clear past, present, or future, and instead is a state that engenders inaction. The characters are able to recognize their inability to act when their bodies are at stake, when they become aware of the physicality of their bodies. These are moments when the state of suspension is disrupted, which can happen through

³⁵ من به جاش اومدم. او نکه عرضه نداره با شماها در بیفته (۵۳).

dissociative episodes, as when Azizi sees himself in the photograph, or through the presence of characters who can act, Shirin and Talat.

The two female characters are seen by the friends as a disruption, because from their perspective they jolt the men out of their state of suspension. There is a freedom to giving in to inaction, to embracing a lack of control, as Azizi dreams about when he envisions floating off, or as Hashemi recognizes when wills himself to ignore that Shirin has floated off. Within the historical context of *Winter Sleep*, this embrace of inaction is both an acknowledgement of how people felt, and a warning; ignoring the fact that Shirin has floated off does not change the fact that she has not returned from sea. It is also no coincidence that the two characters who can act are women. Taraghi's text writes against the prevalent idea that women in Iran are passive, and unable to act (Varzan). Though framed as disruption, they are the only characters who can effect change.

With Shirin and Talat, their presence not only disrupts the friends' initial set-up, but it also continues to provide a source of disruption as it brings time into relief. As long as the friends could exist without marking time, what did it matter if they did not act? But once time became a measurable constant, once they were lifted out of their state of suspension, they understood the extent of their lack of control. Shirin and Talat, in motivating time, did the work of lifting that state of suspension and revealing that inaction is not an inevitability.

Chapter 2
Hairless Bodies, Hairy Bodies:
Gender Performativity and Belonging in Nahal Tajadod's *Debout sur la terre*

One might be taken aback to be referred to as “the unibrow,” perhaps finding such a nickname offensive or overly simplifying of one’s other traits. In Nahal Tajadod’s 2010 novel *Debout sur la terre*, the characters don’t seem to think twice about such a nickname. In fact, the novel spends a fair amount of time describing the various characters’ body and head hair, and changes to and choices they make about hair. At times hair is an important plot point, at others, it is simply a descriptor. Its frequent presence in the novel draws attention to it, and this chapter takes hair practices in the text as a starting point for an exploration of the ways gender is performed, and how performativity relates to gendered spaces.

Debout sur la terre incorporates semi-autobiographical content from Nahal Tajadod’s life. Nahal Tajadod was born in 1960, and left Iran for Paris at the age of 17, just before the Islamic Revolution. Her prolific writing spans the academic, the historical, and the fictive. She began her career researching Manichaeism and religious exchanges between China and pre-modern Iran. Her text *Mani le bouddha de lumière: Catéchisme manichéen* (1990), a translation from Chinese and scholarly analysis of three Manichean scrolls received a broad critical response. Her work was reviewed numerous times and was important for the field (Forte, Lieu, Martynov, Schmidt-Glintzer). Her later writing, which include historical fiction, novels, and autofiction, has not been the focus of scholarly attention, and it is the aim of this chapter to begin to remedy that fact.

Debout sur la terre is a complicated novel that shifts temporal and geographic setting as it narrativizes the lives of four central characters. The first half of the novel is broken into two parts—one specific day in 1976, and the telling of one of the main character’s long family history. The main character is Ensiyeh, a wealthy widow and one of the last leaders of an “ancienne tribu kurde” (54). Ensiyeh’s storyline begins as a recounting of her family’s history that she tells her lover, Fereydoun. It begins with the arrival of her great-great-grandmother, Parvani, from India and continues through the political changes of the 20th century. It covers the lives of her mother, Leyla, both as a young wife and as a much happier widow. And it details Ensiyeh’s childhood, being raised as a boy so that she could inherit the tribe from her father. Ensiyeh’s father dies when she is still young, meaning she takes over and, from a young age, finds herself having to navigate the laws that are Reza Shah’s attempts at modernization but that subsequently disempower her tribe. Her efforts to appeal to the government on behalf of her tribe lead her to Monsieur V., who is the government official with whom she has contact. The second half of the novel addresses her life during the time leading to and immediately following the Revolution. She ends up leaving Tehran for Paris, where she struggles to figure out what to do, since all of her assets are frozen in Iran. The novel ends on a note of ambiguity for Ensiyeh. Although she asks her lover Fereydoun to join her in Paris, he indicates that he likely won’t, and it is not clear what Ensiyeh plans to do until she is able to access her accounts.

The specific day in 1976 is interwoven with Ensiyeh’s narrative history. It involves two other characters, Monsieur V. and Fereydoun. Monsieur V. is the embodiment of modernity—he dresses as a European, speaks French (not to mention, Arabic, English, and German, as well), studies one of France’s iconic literary figures, and has travelled extensively on diplomatic exchanges, meeting various heads of state. He is worldly, intellectual, wealthy, and in a position

of power as a government official. Monsieur V. represents exactly the modern, areligious, euro-centric, or at least euro-adoring type of citizen that Reza Shah Pahlavi hoped would become the new norm.³⁶ Monsieur V. has written a new biography about Victor Hugo that is going to be made into a TV series, directed by the newly famous Fereydoun.

Fereydoun is a young womanizing tv producer who has just made a new series that somehow managed to be popular across all walks of Iranian society. In the space of one day, Fereydoun travels across town to Monsieur V.'s house, discovers that not only is Monsieur V. not there, but that other people, the gardener, an electrician, the cook, a young Swedish tennis player who lives on the property, also have not seen Monsieur V. Monsieur V.'s absence on this day is never explained in the text. But Fereydoun's visit introduces him to the fourth of the main characters, Massoud.

Massoud is an electrician whose work causes him to meet several upper-class Iranians in Tehran of the 1970's. His storyline traverses the first half of the novel, when he is stuck with Fereydoun at Monsieur V.'s house over the course of one day, and the second half of the novel, when he becomes a central figure for the Revolution. He is religious, and his storyline portrays his increasing piousness and his foray into politics. He becomes involved with a religious revolutionary group and works to bring Ayatollah Khomeini out of exile. After the revolution, he

³⁶ Starting in the early 1920's with his rise to power, Reza Shah implemented a series of laws that constructed and shaped an Iranian nationalism, that ushered in a period of industrialization, and that aimed to bring about social reform. The king's social reforms shaped education systems, attempted to strip the clergy of political power, and asserted how men and women could dress and behave. He envisioned a "modern" Iran, in line with Western Europe of the time. This vision of modern Iran plays out perfectly through Monsieur V.'s character. However, just as some people approved of this image of the modern Iranian, as did Monsieur V., others vehemently opposed it, calling it a type of "Westoxification." A counter-nationalism sprang up, leading to a type of cultural tension that eventually leads to the 1979 Revolution, that ousted Reza Shah's son and successor, Mohammad Reza Shah, and established the Islamic Republic.

ends up in a position of power in the new government, and with Fereydoun, is able to help Monsieur V. escape the country.

This chapter focuses on the way hair practices constitute a form of gender performativity. Judith Butler outlines the concept of gender performativity in her work *Gender Trouble*. She explains that to say gender is performative means “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 33). Gender identity is made through the repetition of acts, which themselves are not individually or consciously chosen, but are part of a pre-existing system that works to reinforce a gender binary for the sake of heterosexuality (Butler 135). The historical context at the outset of *Debout sur la terre* presents a world where social spaces are dictated by gender, where to perform a gender is to belong to a homosocial space of like-gendered individuals. Vicki Bell in the introduction to *Performativity and Belonging* has worked to bring these two concepts together, arguing that belonging itself is a form of performance. She writes, “the performativity of belonging 'cites' the norms that constitute or make present the 'community' or group as such. The repetition, sometimes ritualistic repetition, of these normalized codes makes material the belongings they purport to simply describe” (Bell 3). In other words, in order to “belong,” one must act and reenact a set of existing codes that both grant one membership to the group and constitute the codes necessary for belonging.

In this chapter, I explore the way hair acts as a site of gender performativity. I argue that the performances tied to hair not only form the characters’ gender identities, but in so doing, they grant or restrict access to homosocial spaces. Those spaces are sites of belonging that rely on the gendered performances to determine their very boundaries.

Background on Hair

Hair is an important feature of beauty in many cultures, including Iran, but how exactly to wear hair, or which hair to remove to fulfill those standards varies across region and time period. Afsaneh Najmabadi shows in her work, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* (2005) how standards of beauty and sexuality were manifest in facial hair as she explores the way beauty, gender, and sexuality change over the course of the 19th and 20th century in Iran, and how those changes were mapped onto facial hair practices. She explains that beauty standards were broken down not along gender lines but along age lines, “gender [was] irrelevant to beauty” (Najmabadi 16). Instead, young and adolescent boys set the standard of beauty as they were the typical object of male desire. These adolescents, called *amrads*, were considered most beautiful when they were just beginning to grow a mustache and had a thin shadow of hair on their upper lip, called a *khatt* (line). Women, too, were considered most beautiful with this thin line of hair. When the *amrad* grew and began to grow a beard, he was no longer the object of desire but became the one who desired. Shaving his beard would have been socially unacceptable because it would have indicated an interest on his part in remaining the object of desire, rather than becoming a desiring man. This system of beauty and desire existed until the interaction between Iran and European countries began to increase, and Iran became more invested in the project of modernization, which looked a lot like westernization. Suddenly same-sex love became unacceptable and the country underwent a process of heteronormalization where heteroeroticism became the norm, positioning women as the object of male desire.

The consolidation of a female-centered beauty standard led to an inversion of previous beauty ideals: beauty became feminized and the way *amrads* looked and presented themselves were seen as men imitating women’s beauty, rather than the other way around. This heteroerotic

framework meant that same sex acts were relegated to a space of denial and disavowal. However, a strong system of homosocial networks remained in place and because homosociality was marked as “empty of homosexuality, yet at the same time, by insisting on that exclusion, provided homosexuality a homosocially masqueraded home” (Najmabadi 61). In other words, homosociality was both able to persist even in a modernized, heteronormative Iran because it was distinct and devoid of homosexuality and provided a space where same-sex love could still occur. The course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw beauty become gender-specific and feminized, women become the object of desire, both of which meant that hair practices changed dramatically, but the importance of homosocial spaces remained.

This historical background is important because much research done on hair and hair practices comes from a Euro-American contemporary period. For example, studies in sociology have produced what Anthony Synnott calls “the theory of opposites,” in which, “opposite sexes have opposite hair, head hair and body hair are opposite, and opposite ideologies have opposite hair” (382). While this theory may work for Synnott’s subjects, it doesn’t take into account the complex history of gender in Iran. Other studies look at body hair removal, and how its practice creates gender normatively (Toerien et al). For instance, in a large study of UK participants, Toerien and her research team found that 99.7% of survey responders engaged in some body hair removal. They claimed that this number shows that “body hair removal is strongly normative across numerous cultural contexts today” (Toerien 399). On the one hand, their work presents the same problem as Synnott’s theory, which is that it is culturally located in the West, and temporally located in the present, making it difficult to apply to the narrative presented in *Debout sur la terre*. On the other hand, they conclude by noting that discrepancies in what body hair is removed reveal that the goal of body hair removal is not to remove all body hair from public display, but is instead

to participate in social norms about which parts of the body should be hairless (Toerien 403). Their findings and conclusion speak to the idea of performativity as something mundane and repeated, and which constitutes acts that adhere to a social norm, and in doing so, help create and reinforce that social norm.

Performativity and Belonging

One of the main threads of the novel traces the protagonist Ensiyeh's ancestors beginning with the arrival of her great-great grandmother in the 18th century. This was a historical moment of relative political stability under the Qajar Dynasty, but a time of intense social and cultural changes. Her grandmother, Parvani, was brought to Mazandaran, in North-West Iran from India, to marry the head of the Kurdish tribe, Abdal Khan. In preparation for Abdal Khan's wedding, his other wives and mother prepare a week-long festival. As his mother is polishing the samovar, she glances at her reflection and "y distingua clairement la triple bombe de son menton, parsemé de méchants poils. Ah, les poils! Aucun miroir ne les épargnait" (59); (...and clearly sees the triple bulge of her chin, covered in awful hairs. Ah, so much hair! No mirror spares her the sight of her hairs). She is dismayed at the presence of her chin hairs, and cleaning the samovar only made them appear that much more clearly to her. The description of her chin as a "triple bombe" underlines its size, but also offers a humorous counterpoint to her despair about her chin hair. The chin hairs are present, yes, but they are "parsemé"—sprinkled or scattered—over her chin. They are simply described as present, nothing more, yet they are thing that she focuses on, rather than her bulging chin, which is described with such vivid imagery.

The time period, the late 18th century, would see a sense of beauty standards similar to what Najmabadi has described. Women were trying to mimic the *amrad's* pubescent look, with only a shadow of a mustache apparent on an otherwise gender-neutral face. What the Khan's mother sees

in her reflection, however, is not the desirable *khatt*, the thin, downy line of a mustache. She sees chin-hairs, the sign of a potential beard. Having a beard would not have been desirable, as it would have marked her an older man, not the young man who set the standard of beauty. The hairs complicate a straightforward gender binary: she is not a young woman, mimicking an *amrad*, but she is not the man for whom a beard would be standard. Her frustration about the chin hairs reflects an inability to perform gender satisfactorily. Furthermore, her chin hairs are a reminder of her inability to tame her body as it ages. Aging carries with it the implicit knowledge of mortality, a moment when she will certainly no longer maintain her place in the social order. Though she is focused on her chin hairs, Parvani's arrival makes her acutely aware of the fact that she is nearer to dying, that the social order will change, and she may not be a part of it.

The anxiety the Khan's mother feels speaks to a fear of displacement. She has a privileged position in her household, and in this way sets the standards for acceptance into that space. Parvani's arrival and a loss of control over her body could disrupt her standing in the household. As she prepares for the celebration, she has the impression that "aucun miroir ne les épargnait" — no mirror would spare them. This sentence gives the sense that no matter where she looks, she is constantly reminded of her chin hairs and the potential displacement they represent. The structure of this sentence speaks to the lack of control the Khan's mother feels. She can't control what her face looks like, or where her body hairs grow. The only way to control how she feels about her face is to not look at it. So in this sentence, where the mirrors are the subject, she is stripped even of that bit of agency she had over her chin hairs. The mirrors have chosen not to spare her the sight of her chin hairs, and there is nothing she can do about it. A key feature of gender performativity is the fact that the acts that constitute the performance are concealed and made to seem natural (Butler 140). In other words, the repeated acts are made credible by their repetition and by the

sense that there are no alternatives. The Khan's mother is put in a position where she risks being ousted from her community, which in turn brings her gender into relief, but she is unable to do anything about it.

When Parvani arrives, she experiences the need to belong to a social group, and the way that control over her body can grant her that access. After the week-long celebration, Abdel Khan's young bride, Parvani arrives in her litter. Seated apart from the festivities, she is:

coupée de tout, [et] elle fut longtemps exposée aux regards acérés des femmes de la tribu. Certaines poussèrent la curiosité jusqu'à approcher une mèche de leurs cheveux des siens, pour décréter après examen que le noir des deux chevelures n'était pas le même. Dans le noir de l'étrangère se glissaient par instants des reflets bleus. La mère du khan elle-même inspecta ses paupières, son menton, ses aisselles, ses cuisses et ses mollets. Elle n'y détecta aucun poil (60).

(...cut off from everything. She was exposed for a long while to the sharp gaze of the tribeswomen. Some indulged their curiosity to the point of comparing a strand of their own hair against one of hers, in order to declare that the black of the two strands was not the same. In the stranger's black, there glistened blue reflections from time to time. The Khan's mother herself examined her eyelids, her chin, her armpits, her thighs and calves. She didn't find a single hair.)

Parvani's very arrival is marked by isolation. She does not have a social group, she is "coupée de tout." Even her means of travel in a litter underlines that isolation. Though she has come to marry the Khan, and supposedly join his social group, she herself is set apart physically and socially.

Parvani's isolation is a social anomaly, not just because she is not a part of the community, but because it puts her gender into question. Is she so similar that she will replace them, or is she

so different that she is a threat? Their method of comparison begins with the hair. The tribeswomen take a strand of their own hair and compare it to Parvani's, in order to declare that, though both appear to be black, the stranger's is in fact tinted with blue and is therefore different enough. The women's relief at identifying difference reiterates that Parvani is apart. She is physically separated, both from her home, and from the other women, as she arrives in her covered litter, and sits apart from them. Parvani arrives not only as someone who is not accepted in the tribe, but also as someone who is not quite the same kind of human as the tribeswomen. She is treated like a curiosity: something to be examined or inspected, like a creature at a zoo. The women can look at her, and they do, but her gaze is absent from this passage. Parvani's difference is located in her hair, both that on her head, and the lack of body hair on her body. The difference allows the women a breath of relief: if this newcomer is not really a woman, or not the same kind of woman, they don't need to worry so much about her disrupting the order and displacing them.

The Khan's mother's inspection of Parvani's body reinforces Parvani's being as something between human and object worthy of or requiring inspection. The Khan's mother already has a bone to pick with chin hairs, so it is no surprise that she looks over the chin in her inspection, but she goes further to examine Parvani's entire body, an activity that goes beyond simply glancing at the newcomer. Finding no body hairs furthers Parvani's status as something strange, someone different.

The mystery of Parvani's hairlessness is quickly resolved, when she teaches the women about depilation. She is still an outsider, yet, "sans avoir appris à parler le persan, le kurde, ou le saravi, Parvani réussit à s'intégrer dans une communauté de femmes, a priori hostiles, grâce à de simples procédés d'épilation" (61); (without ever having learned to speak Persian, Kurdish, or *Saravi*, Parvani was able to join in a community of women who were previously hostile, thanks to

the simple process of depilation). The ability to control, in this case to remove, unwanted body hairs, allows Parvani access to the other women in the tribe, and to the homosocial space they occupy. She is no longer a mystery, someone to be both suspicious and jealous of, but is simply someone with a skill set that she can share with her fellow tribeswomen. The ability to control body hair in this passage is able to connect people more than being able to speak together. Parvani's lack of body hair makes her initially distinct and therefore suspect. It later becomes her ticket into the social environment from which she was otherwise excluded. She is able to "integrate into a community of women," suggesting first that such a community exists, and second, that knowledge about hair supersedes other forms of communication within that community. The Khan, and any male gaze really, are absent from this community; it is explicitly a "community of women." The gendered dynamics of love and beauty that exist outside of this homosocial space are almost irrelevant. The women here are far more interested in removing their body hair, in exerting control over their bodies, than they are in fulfilling a beauty standard of the time, one that was based around an ideal of older man-younger man love. The standard of beauty that would make them objects of male desire would mean leaving some facial hair. While the text is not explicit about what hair exactly to remove, there is no mention of the Khan or other men in this passage. The emphasis is instead on controlling bodies and belonging.

Parvani's experience highlights the way hair acts as a marker of appearance around which gender norms are formed. Her knowledge of depilation allows the women to renegotiate what the norm of appearance is from one where women had body hair to one where they do not. Parvani does not undo the social order; she redefines what the norm is, essentially establishing a new set of acts that will be repeated in order to gain access to the community.

The importance of hair as a means of belonging to homosocial communities is apparent for men in the novel as well. Massoud is the pious electrician and fourth main character who also connects all three other characters' narratives. He is present at Monsieur V.'s house the morning of Fereydoun's appointment. He spends the entire day there looking for the fuse box, to no avail. He is later hired by Ensiyeh, but never ends up completing the job for which he is hired. When he is not working as an electrician, he is engaged in politics, and works hard to bring back Ayatollah Khomeini and to bring about the Islamic State. When he is first introduced, in April 1976:

Massoud a vingt-quatre ans. Il est de taille moyenne, plutôt maigre. Ses cheveux sont toujours coupés court. Quand on travaille dans la soudure, même si on porte un masque, il vaut mieux éviter les cheveux longs. Ses sourcils se rejoignent par une forte taroupe en v. Quand agha Massoud l'électricien ne porte pas de masque de soudure, ses sourcils attirent le regard. On les voit avant ses yeux (144).

(Massoud is twenty-four years old. He is average height, on the skinny side. His hair is always kept short. When one works in welding, even if one wears a mask, it's best to avoid long hair. His eyebrows join in a strong unibrow, forming a v. When *agha* Massoud the electrician is not wearing his welder's mask, his eyebrows draw the eye. One sees them before his eyes.)

Massoud's description is based largely on his hair. While his age and general size are given, his hair is the main focus of attention; it's the most significant or noticeable feature about him, even before any of his actual personality traits are put forward. It's not just the first thing one sees when they encounter Massoud, it's also the most noteworthy feature of his appearance. For Massoud, his hair choices speak as much to his appearance as they do to his profession. He can't have long hair because it's too dangerous in his line of work. What's interesting here is that "cheveux" in

this case refers more specifically to beard hair than it does to head hair. Though he can wear a mask, covering his mouth and face, and presumably any beard he would have, it is still not too safe to have a beard, and so he stays clean shaven. It's later revealed in the novel that he would in fact like to wear a beard, because he feels it would be a facial representation of his faith, when he "laisa pousser sa barbe et céda à l'achat d'un blouson noir" (379-380); (lets his beard grow and gives in to buying a black shirt). The language here complicates the idea of performativity as an *act*—Massoud is passively letting his hair grow, performing through inaction. Furthermore, his performance is not a neutral masculinity—he is performing a religious masculinity, indicating that there are multiple nodes of identity at play.

His new outfit marks him clearly as an Islamic revolutionary, and strengthens his friendship with Mostafa, another religious revolutionary. Though they had been developing a friendship, Massoud's changed appearance indicates a full commitment to his new cause, and gains him access not only to Mostafa's friendship, but also to the resources that Mostafa's network awards him. Massoud spends a great deal of time in the first part of the novel fretting about affording school supplies for his sister. Once he grows his beard and puts on his black shirt, joining Mostafa's network, the latter gives him an envelope filled with cash. Massoud resists initially, but Mostafa explains how the money is part of a "taxe islamique... et que cet argent appartenait en fait à tous les musulmans" (384); (Islamic tax... and that this money belonged to all Muslims). Massoud in this way is able to reap the very concrete material benefits of belonging to a community. As the Revolution goes on, Massoud is given more and responsibilities and power. After the Revolution, he is given an important role in the new government.

Having a beard alone is not enough to belong to the community Massoud joins. It is equally important that he engage in revolutionary acts and that he behave piously than that he simply grow

a beard. However, the beard is a way to signal belonging. It is a political act that is public and immediately visible. It allows Massoud to indicate to Mostafa, and others in his community that he belongs. In this way, it constitutes a series of repeated acts that reflect performativity—every time one of his friends witnesses him with the beard, his membership in the masculine homosocial space of his compatriots would be at stake.

Masoud's belonging to a community was a choice, but it can be imposed as well as chosen. For example, Monsieur V.'s son has to shave his head when he joins the army. This is painful for him because he had previously been a "hippy," and so had very long hair, but:

Quand il a voulu faire son service militaire, il a dû couper ses cheveux! Et Monsieur le ministre disait qu'il y avait de quoi en faire une perruque....Quand on lui a coupé ses cheveux, il les a ramassés et il les a rapportés à la maison. Puis il s'est fait photographier avec son crâne chauve. Après ça, il a collé ses cheveux sur la photo. Bien soigneusement. Il a encadré la photo et il l'a offerte à ses parents avant son départ pour le service militaire (196).

(When he wanted to do his military service, he had to cut his hair! Monsieur the Minister said there was enough to make a wig ... When his hair was cut, he gathered it up and brought it home. Then he had himself photographed with his bald head. After that, he glued his hair to the photo. Very carefully. He framed it and gave it to his parents before leaving for military service.)

Monsieur V.'s son was able to shift between two radically different social groups--hippies and the military--by cutting his hair. The action of this passage switches between the son being the subject and his hair being an object. At first, "il a voulu faire son service;" he wanted to do his military service, and the consequence of that desire was having to cut his hair, something he, as the subject,

had to do. Later, the son passes into the object of the sentence, and an unknown "on" is the actor. This switch speaks to the relationship between control over one's appearance and belonging to a group. Massoud wants a beard, but his profession, which he also wants to do, makes it difficult to have one. Monsieur V.'s son wants to do his military service, but he clearly doesn't want to have his hair cut.

His response to having his hair cut reflects an attachment to hair. I argue that the photo collage he makes reflects a sadness at having forgo membership in a community. Belonging to his community of hippies was contingent about appearing a certain way, and without his hair, he no longer is visibly a part of the community. The photo collage also hints at anger—either towards his parents or towards the army that's making him cut his hair. The fact that he prefers to hold on to the physical object and glue it to his pictured bald head, rather than photographing himself before his haircut, speaks to an importance of hair above other forms of appearance. Hair is visible, or if it's covered, the fact of it being covered is itself visible. This makes it a particularly contentious site of gender performativity.

Changing Norms

Ensiyeh's mother, Leyla, emerges as a character during a time of social change in Iran. Several of Reza Shah's reforms were directed at women, including family laws, laws about women's employment, and unveiling laws (Rostam-Kolayi 166). These changes began to construct a "new woman," who was styled after European women, and who was expected to occupy heterosocial spaces.

Leyla encounters these changes in social expectations and norms immediately following her husband's death. In this moment of freedom, she uses her hair as a means of asserting her identity and individuality. The Khan marries Leyla because he is desperate to have a son. She is

recommended to him because she is “soumise, silencieuse, obéissante, accommodante, serviable, sérieuse” (238); (submissive, silent, obedient, accommodating, obliging, serious). This description becomes the refrain to describe who, or rather how, Leyla is. Throughout the beginning of Ensiyeh’s narrative about her childhood, her mother is largely a background figure, only important insofar as she is able to become pregnant. Once Issa Khan dies, however, Leyla suddenly steps out of her shell:

Aucun deuil, aucune spoliation ne pourrait l’empêcher de se transformer, de sortir de sa chrysalide, de devenir papillon, de jeter aux orties le tchador, de se vêtir d’un tailleur droit (239).

(No mourning, no dispossession, could stop her from transforming, from emerging out of her chrysalis, from becoming a butterfly, from throwing her chador away and wearing a straight suit.)

This moment of coming out coincides with a new law forbidding the wearing of the veil or the chador in public. The other women in the novel have mixed reactions to this law. Leyla’s mother finds it unbearable, and vows to never leave her house without her chador, planning instead to use secret allies and networks to navigate the city and avoid getting arrested or being publicly de-veiled. Ensiyeh finds the law intriguing. Having grown up in Mazandaran, she is used to seeing girls without veils; the pupils at the local school never cover their hair. She is curious to see how the girls in Tehran, who frequently do veil, will react, but she herself does not feel particularly affected by the *kashfe hijab*, the mandatory unveiling. The reactions speak to the different ways gender can be performed. For Leyla’s mother, veiling is central to her identity as a woman. Ensiyeh on the other hand, does not perform gender in the same way, as I will discuss later on.

Leyla is very excited about the unveiling. Her first act as a “butterfly” is to cut her hair. While Ensiyeh is busy consulting with a lawyer about how to not lose all her lands in the north, Leyla is busy inspecting a magazine that describes the newest hairstyles in Paris. She decides to go to a “*couafour*” to get her hair cut “*a la garson*” (246). This new modern style is not just about choosing how to look and how to wear her hair, but it is a resistance to the gendered behaviors that have been imposed on her up until this point. The haircut “*a la garson*” gives masculinity a type of freedom that Leyla did not have access to until her husband died. She had been subsumed by her husband’s needs and by the terms defining her. Getting her hair cut is her first act as a person who is not “*soumise, silencieuse, obéissante, accommodante, serviable, sérieuse*” and it’s no coincidence that the style happens to be one that sort of masculinizes her. There is an irony that at the moment when beauty becomes feminized, and indicates a differentiation between two genders, the fashionable hairstyle is “*a la garson.*” This irony pushes back against a neat distinction between genders based solely on hairstyle. To be beautiful and modern is to look like a boy, just as to be beautiful before the Shah’s modernity meant to look like a boy. This moment of modernity also meant that beauty mimicked the European style. That being said, the exact location that elicits boyhood is head hair, rather than facial hair. When Leyla gets the courage to go to the hairdresser, she is met with surprise that the “*couafour*” is a man. The discomfort she feels speaks to the fact that she is suddenly being asked to enter a heterosocial space. Leyla, although she is cutting her hair “*a la garson,*” is not trying to present herself as a boy or a man. She is acutely aware that she is woman, interacting with a man. However, her discomfort will not stop her from going ahead with the haircut: “Leyla, enfoncée dans un fauteuil en cuir rouge, fixait le portrait de Reza shah dans le miroir.... Elle déchiffra les titres du journal Gharné bistom, “Vingtième siècle” (246) ; (Leyla, sunk down in a red leather chair, stared at the portrait of Reza Shah in the mirror.... She

deciphered titles on the magazine *Gharné bistom*, ‘Twentieth Century’). For Leyla this moment of cutting her hair and breaking free from being submissive, silent, and obedient is rendered even more significant by the fact that a man other than her husband will touch her. To deal with the anxiety that this gender mixing engenders, she focuses on her surroundings, all of which remind her of the push for modernity. Leyla is aware that the act of cutting her hair is not only a change towards a type of modernity, but is also a change in who she associates with. She thinks to herself:

C’en était fini des deux heures quotidiennes de démêlage de cheveux et de grimaces. C’en était fini, une fois par semaine, dans le hammam, des coups de peigne redoutables de Soghra dalak... C’en était fini des tresses en cheveux naturels accrochées à ses propres nattes, de la coiffure dite “queue de paon,” celle avec laquelle elle s’était montrée pour la première fois dans la maison d’Issa Khan, et du modèle “pattes de corbeau,” où il fallait se coller de petites boucles et rassembler le reste, derrière la tête, en huit nattes. C’en était fini, fini, des chansons de son enfance qui décrivaient sa chevelure comme un très long lasso, comme une coulée de jais d’un noir profond. Dans son sillage, elle n’entendrait plus gis borideh, l’insulte commune adressée aux femmes dévergondées, cette offense qui, à l’origine, visait les prostituées dont on avait, pas puniton, raccourci les cheveux (247).

(She was done with the daily two hours of untangling her hair and the grimaces it caused. She was done with the weekly trip to the hammam and the terrifying comb of Soghra *dalak*....She was done with the braids of natural hair stuck to her own plaits for the style called “peacock’s tail,” the one she was wearing when she was

first shown in Issa Khan's house. She was done with the style "raven's feet" where she had to form little loops and gather up the remaining hair into eight plaits at the back of her head. She was done, done, with the songs of her childhood that described her hair like a long lasso, like a river of jet black. In her chair, she no longer heard *gis borideh*, the insult hurled at depraved women, the insult that was originally aimed at prostitutes whose punishment was to have their hair cut short.)

Hair care clearly took up a large portion of Leyla's life. She had to spend significant time simply detangling it, and putting it in elaborate hairstyles, participating in exactly the kind of gender performativity that Butler describes. Cutting her hair frees her from this burden, giving her time to do other things. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that there are no hair-related acts that she will perform. As we saw with Massoud, the very visibility of her hair in a short haircut does some work of performing her gender as a "new woman."

The new hairstyle also means less time spent in the company of other women. She acknowledges that she will no longer make her weekly trips to the hammam, that the female company is not worth the annoyance and discomfort of managing her unruly hair. Her past relation to her hair also recalls Parvani's mother-in-law's frustration with her chin hairs. She was unable to control her body, both in its appearance and as it aged, and that lack of control was concentrated around her chin hairs. Leyla also was frustrated with her hair. She could control it, but to do so took a massive amount of time and energy. Her excitement about the *kashfe hijab* speaks to the fact that, when in public, her hair was mostly covered, meaning her elaborate hairstyles were seen by her female companions and her husband. For her, the unveiling is not just about taking off the fabric veil, but is also a chance to "take off" her actual hair that causes her so much grief.

The elaborate hairstyles themselves suggest a dissociation with the wearer. Named after animals, they made Leyla into something else. Her hair was an adornment that was both part of her body and separate from it. The language in the passage “elle s’était montrée pour la première fois dans la maison” positions her as both the subject and the object of the sentence. She associates wearing the “queue de paon” with the moment when she was first shown in her husband’s house. It is not that she was shown the house, where the house would clearly be the object, nor that she was shown to the Khan, which would solidify her position as object. Instead, she is shown in the house, not dissimilar to the way a peacock might be present on a lawn, both as a living animal, and as a type of lawn adornment. The “dans”; (in) makes it clear that her seeing the house, or the Khan, is not the end game. Neither is it a matter of her being shown *to* the Khan. It is almost incidental; she made herself up, like a peacock, arrived at the house and was therefore seen by those in the house. The “peacock’s tail” hairstyle recalls the gender mixing of Leyla’s later haircut. Male peacocks are the ones whose tails are large and beautiful; female peacocks’ tails are rather unremarkable. Presumably, Leyla’s elaborate “queue de paon” is representative of the male peacock’s large tail and is a reminder of the *amrad* as the standard for beauty at the time.

As Leyla sits with her newly short hair, she reflects back on the fact that short hair was once a punishment for prostitution. The fact that sex workers had their hair forcibly cut short complicates the question of belonging to homosocial spaces and hair as a visible marker to signal that belonging. Sex workers were likely required to be in heterosocial spaces for their work, and their short hair signaled belonging to the “wrong” space. However, because heterosocial spaces are becoming the norm, Leyla’s hair cut does not equate her with prostitution, but instead with a new set of norms. It blurs previously clear lines about gendered interactions and spaces. Leyla’s

experiences with her hair highlight a key feature of gender performativity: its malleability. The acts can change, but Leyla still performs them in order to gain access to a social group.

Gender Fluidity

Gender performativity is predicated on a binary, because it is at heart working to reinforce heterosexuality as the norm. This facet of performativity comes into question when we turn to Ensiyeh's experiences of gender fluidity.

Ensiyeh's storyline follows her ancestors up to the moment of her birth. Ensiyeh's father, Issa Khan wants a son more than anything. After his first wife has two daughters, and his second wife has no children, he is determined to have a son with his third wife. He needs someone to take over as leader of the tribe when he dies and to inherit all the land. When Ensiyeh is born and he is informed that he has a daughter, his first action is to thank God for having given him a son. He names the child a feminine first name, but "il le gratifia du titre, ô combien masculin, de khan" (83); (he gives it the, oh so masculine, title of khan). Ensiyeh is set up for a childhood of gender fluidity, where she is raised in both masculine and feminine terms. This fluidity affects her ability to participate in both male and female homosocial spaces, and to move between the two.

Though it is generally known that she is a girl, in official manners she is treated like a boy during her childhood. This creates an interesting tension with how her infant body is treated:

A peine lavé et emmailloté, le nourrisson fut accaparé par Kohan Banou.... Alors que toute la maison cherchait "le nouveau khan," Kohan Banou "le" démaillota, puis elle ouvrit posément la boîte de couture de l'ancêtre indienne et en retira un pot qui contenait une matière noire et gluante. Le bébé, silencieux, paraissait suivre du regard les gestes de cette femme avec qui il venait de passer la première heure de son existence. Celle-ci se mit à appliquer, avec une extrême minutie, la

substance noirâtre sur les aisselles, les bras et les jambes fraîchement venus au monde. Friction efficace : Ensiyeh ne connut jamais, de toute sa vie, à l'exception des poils pubiens, le moindre duvet sur son corps. Même à son adolescence, lorsque le visage de ses amies deviendra un terrain vague où s'affronteront boutons et poils, Ensiyeh cherchera vainement, munie d'une loupe, à la lumière du soleil, la plus légère trace d'une poussée pileuse aux abords de ses lèvres.... La pâte...[avaient] l'étrange pouvoir de rendre imberbes, pour toute la vie, les nourrisson (83- 84).

(Barely washed and swaddled, the newborn was monopolized by Kohan Banou. While the whole house was looking for the “new khan,” Kohan Banou unwrapped “him” and calmly opened the sewing box from the former Indian and took out a small pot containing a sticky black substance. The baby, silent, seemed to follow with its eyes the movements of this woman with whom it had just spent the first hour of its existence. The woman set about applying, with extreme attention to detail, the black substance to the armpits, arms, and legs, that had just come into the world. Effective rubbing: Ensiyeh never, in her whole life, had the least bit of fuzz on her body, with the exception of her pubic hairs. Even in adolescence, when her friends' faces became a fuzzy terrain covered in pimples and hairs, Ensiyeh, equipped with a magnifying glass and in the light of the sun, would search in vain for the slightest trace of a hair follicle around her lips.... The paste...had the strange ability to render newborns hairless for their whole life.)

Ensiyeh's first experience in the world is to be rendered hairless. Although there is no mention of any hair on her infant body, Kohan Banou, her caretaker, is planning for a future where that might

be the case. Ensiyeh is clearly too young to understand what is happening, or to consent to it, but she has no choice. Her lack of choice flips the narrative that Parvani and her community of women experienced. While hairlessness for Parvani was a choice, and a choice that gave her access to a community, Ensiyeh is not able to make an active choice. She is implicitly positioned within a community of women through the use of the same substance that Parvani used, but without herself having to perform any acts. Thus, from infancy, she has her gender foisted upon her.

Ensiyeh's hairlessness speaks in part to the changing standards of beauty. As she grows, she remains completely hairless, while her peers became "fuzzy terrain covered in pimples and hairs." The description of her friends makes clear that they are suffering effects of adolescence and that they do not fulfill an idealized beauty standard. Body hairs and pimples are equated, asserting that body hairs, even an emergent mustache that was once the standard of beauty, are not desirable. In one way, Ensiyeh represents the new, "modern" ideal of beauty based on a distinction of gender. She has a female body, and to mark it as different from a male body, her body is rendered hairless. However, this is complicated by the fact that she is raised as a boy. According to the beauty standards of the time, a boy would be most beautiful right at adolescence, as his mustache came in. He would then become seen as masculine when the growth of his beard would signal his exit from adolescence. Ensiyeh will never grow a mustache or a beard. She will never conform to the male standard of beauty or masculinity. The use of the adjective "imberbe" highlights this. Being called "imberbe" (beardless) emphasizes that not only is she different through her lack of any body hair, but she is different because of the gendered expectations of what body hair is normal. She does not have the undesired body hair of a feminine body, nor does she have the desired facial hair of the masculine body. Though "imberbe" can mean any type of hairlessness, it carries with it the root of beard, while "glabre" (glabrous) would have been a more generic type of

hairlessness, that does not reference the face or beard. Ensiyeh at once belongs to a community of women rooted in her ancestors' desire for hairlessness, while also marking her as different from both her female and male peers. Her inability to control her body hair speaks to the fact that she cannot completely belong to one homosocial group or another.

Her “beardlessness” means that even if Ensiyeh were completely raised as a boy, at a certain point, the jig would be up. Kohan Banu's hair removal guarantees that, even if her father refers to her as a boy, and treats her like one, she will eventually not be able to perform masculinity, because she will not be able to grow a beard. Although her family and neighbors know she is a girl, she is raised to behave like a boy of the time:

L'imberbe Ensiyeh Khan fut élevée comme un garçon. En lieu et place d'institutrice, un précepteur s'occupa de son éducation. Très tôt, à l'âge où des congénères jouaient à la poupée, elle dut apprendre à monter à cheval, à manipuler les armes à feu, à s'impliquer dans l'administration du domaine familial, à transformer son timbre de fillette en voix d'homme, plutôt rude et autoritaire. Les accès à la filature de chanvre, de laine et de coton, au dosage des confitures, à la confection des vêtements, à la neutralisation des amulettes, et aux chuchotements incantatoires lui furent définitivement fermés (84).

(The beardless Ensiyeh was raised as a boy. Instead of a governess, a private tutor took care of her education. Very early on, at the age when her peers were playing with dolls, she had to learn how to ride a horse, handle firearms, be involved with the family administration, transform her little girl's voice into a man's voice—rather formidable and authoritative. She was permanently cut off from access to

spinning hemp, cotton, or wool, making preserves, sewing clothes, neutralizing amulets, and incantatory whispers.)

This passage shows what it means for Ensiyeh to be raised as a boy. It's an active experience, where the things she learns, and the way she spends her time indicate her boyhood. Instead of having a female teacher, an "institutrice," she is given a male tutor, a "précepteur." This difference indicates that it is not only in what she learns during her lessons that marks the difference from being a boy or a girl, but who she learns it from. In other words, gender, at least of a child, is informed by homosocial settings. Being a boy means learning from a man, while being a girl means learning from a woman. Of course, Ensiyeh's courses also inform the fact that she is being raised as a boy. However, her education is not simply about being a boy; she is required to learn the skills to take over as leader of her tribe. So, while this position has always been held by a man, the exact content of her education is tailored just as much to being the tribe's leader as it is to being a boy. She is privately educated, neither in the presence of male nor female peers, so there is nothing that suggests her education is completely typical of a non-tribal leader boy's education. In this way, her boyhood is affected by her privileged position as it is affected by her sex.

The idea of homosocial space as essential for gender performance and formation comes in the fact that Ensiyeh isn't able to learn what her female peers learn. Just as she needs a male tutor to engage in her boy-oriented education, she is "definitively cut off from access" to the topics girls would learn about. The language here highlights the way sharing certain activities leads to a type of community. It is not just a matter of not learning these other topics, but of not having "access." She cannot participate in these activities not simply because she doesn't know how to, but because she is barred from them. The lack of access extends definitively and permanently. This means that, even as she grows and her body, her lack of a beard, prevents identification as a man, she will still

be cut off from these female activities. The activities themselves are interesting; beginning with rather quotidian, practical ones of spinning cloth, making preserves and clothes, they also include knowledge about magic. Ensiyeh's ancestors participated in a number of magical acts, especially surrounding fertility and birth. Her father's first wife used magic to render him impotent, thus preventing him from having a child with the second wife. Then, when Ensiyeh's mother was pregnant, Kohan Banou used magic to ensure the pregnancy would last and the baby would be a boy. Not having access to amulets and spells cuts Ensiyeh off from her ancestral community of women. So, while her ability to "pass" as a boy has a time limit—the point at which she will not have a beard—her inability to participate in girls' activities is indefinite.

The fact that she is "imberbe" and the degree of permanency with which she is cut off from female activities reference the physical component of her upbringing as a boy. The only adjective describing her, "imberbe" makes it clear that her body is different, both currently and in the future. One of the skills she must learn is to "transform her little girl's voice into a man's voice." On the one hand, this is a physical transformation. Though her body might not change, the way she projects her voice takes place within the body and extends outward. On the other hand, the specific transformation required of her—making her voice "formidable and authoritative" is in part a type of performance. However, it is a conscious one, and one that is not natural to her, drawing into question whether it is a form of performativity. Because voice is tangential to the body; it certainly originates in the lungs, vocal cords, and mouth, but once something is spoken, the way it is perceived is cultural. Ensiyeh is positioned to be able to perform masculinity without necessarily having to alter her physical body.

Looking back at the passage where Ensiyeh is rendered hairless, it is clear that Kohan Banou does not apply the paste to her pubic hair. In a way, the text highlights the distance between

the body and gender. Both men and women have pubic hairs, so the ones on Ensiyeh's body do not necessarily align her with any particular gender. She is treated like a boy in the actions she can do, and the education she receives, and the property rights she is awarded. Her body, on the other hand, is treated like a female body, but an anomalous one that is marked as different from her female peers because she is hairless. And once she is no longer treated as a boy, she doesn't lose the position of being tribal leader or her inheritance rights.

Like voice, Ensiyeh draws on other types of physically tangential modes of self-representation that determine her access to different social groups. When the Shah imposes an arms ban, and requires people give up their arms, Ensiyeh and her father go to Tehran to request an exemption. This visit is the first time she meets Monsieur V. She and her father make an effort to dress in western clothes and appeal to Monsieur V.'s obsession with the west. As they walk up the steps of the parliament, "le père et la fille savaient qu'ils n'allaient plus quitter cet accoutrement. Avec le retrait de la tenue militaire, aussi bien pour Issa Khan que pour le petit soldat Ensiyeh, une longue branche de leur vie s'arrachaient" (124-125); (the father and daughter knew that they would never again take off this outfit. With the removal of the military uniform, a long branch of their lives had been cut off for both Issa Khan and the little soldier Ensiyeh). The gendering of this passage is interesting; Ensiyeh is at once specified as a girl or daughter and called a grammatically masculine "little soldier." By changing clothes, her gender ambiguity comes into relief. She no longer appears as a boy, because she is not wearing her military uniform. In her skirt, she would in theory look like a typical Western girl, but her upbringing as a "petit soldat" hasn't left her. When the two of them meet Monsieur V., the first thing he does is to awkwardly caress her hair and suggest she marry his son (218), firmly identifying her as a girl who will one day marry a man. However, when her father can't make the tribe's case against disarmament because

he has a cough, Ensiyeh takes over speaking with a “voix sévère, victorieuse, et puissante” (221). This voice recalls the “man’s voice” she was compelled to learn in her lessons, when she was treated as a boy. Though the exact qualities are slightly different—her voice is “severe, victorious, and powerful” rather than “formidable and authoritative”— it generates a similar effect. This moment in the text is in some ways her transition from being raised as a boy to being treated like a girl. However, her voice, and the authority her voice awards her, is a carry-over. The voice was the one thing from her boy’s education that focused on the body, that was a quasi-physical change she had to learn. So in this scene, where she is seen by Monsieur V. as clearly and simply a girl, her voice acts as the embodied feature that indicates her ambiguously gendered upbringing.

Ensiyeh uses these physically tangential modes to perform masculinity and femininity at various times. Because she has this gender flexibility, she is able to belong to both male and female spaces. The fact that she can participate in both genders seems to contradict the fact that gender performativity is based on a binary. How can it be a binary, when Ensiyeh is an example of someone who occupies both spaces at once? While her character does present gender fluidity, being able to perform both genders, she still exists within a binary framework, where there are only two poles of performance.

Conclusion

In her essay, “Thinking Sex,” Gayle Rubin explains that sex is a charged topic in society because of the history of Christianity in the US. She states, “Outside the law, sex is also a marked category. Small differences in value or behavior are often experienced as cosmic threats. Although people can be intolerant, silly, or pushy about what constitutes proper diet, differences in menu rarely provoke the kinds of rage, anxiety, and sheer terror that routinely accompany differences in erotic taste. Sexual acts are burdened with an excess of significance” (149). I contend that hair in

Debout sur la terre is likewise burdened with an excess of significance. Although hair is not explicitly related to sex, because it is a marker of gender and because gender determines what spaces one has access too, it is implicitly tied up to issues of sexuality. The fact that the *amrad* was the object of desire for so long was because he was visible within a society where men associated with men. The hair that designated the *amrad* from a boy or a man was a sign of beauty, but it was critically tied to sexuality as well. Hair became a marker for appropriate or inappropriate types of desire. The significance of hair remained, even as social mores changed, and as heterosociability became the norm.

Because of its excess of significance, hair is a useful site in which to see the ways gender is performed as different hair practices play out in different contexts throughout the novel. It can function as a means of access to homosocial spaces, where its visibility makes others partake in the repetitive act of performance. Even as social expectations change, hair practices remain a site where those new norms are revealed. Though the norms change, the requirement to perform them persists. Finally, we saw that even in moments of gender ambiguity, which could potentially serve as a form of subversion to gender performativity, the binary of feminine/masculine persists. Though Ensiyeh's experiences complicate it, by revealing moments when a character can choose to switch between genders, she still lives within a binary framework.

Chapter 3
Resisting Bare Life:
Humor and Absurdity in Mana Neyestani's *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique*

Mana Neyestani's graphic novel *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique* (2014) offers a darkly humorous window into the Kafkaesque experience of obtaining a *carte de séjour* in contemporary France. *Petit manuel* behaves like a guide book, giving advice on the different aspects of obtaining refugee status and offering insights into French society. Although *Petit manuel* adds to a burgeoning canon of Iranian graphic novels, joining Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Parsua Bashi's *Nylon Road*, and Amir and Khalil's *Zahra's Paradise*, it stands apart in content and tone. Amir Khadem has argued how, although Neyestani draws from personal experience, his works do not offer a "straightforward counter-narrative to any distorted vision of Iran" that he hopes to correct through an alternative representation of his home country (Khadem 482). Instead, he plays with narrative technique to push back against a simplistic pro- or anti- government dichotomy. This chapter examines that playfulness, looking at the way Neyestani pushes generic boundaries and depicts an absurd humor in the face of serious political difficulties.

Neyestani began his career as a freelance artist and cartoonist, working for leftist economic and cultural magazines and newspapers. In 2006, one of his cartoons in a children's magazine depicted a cockroach saying a word in Turkish. This led to protests by Azari people, who are

ethnically Turkish, and who thought the cartoon equated them with a cockroach.³⁷ The protests escalated and the government arrested Neyestani, claiming he caused the protests. His requests for asylum in several European countries were rejected, and so, during a temporary relief from prison, he fled to Malaysia, aided by smugglers. From there, he began work on his first graphic novel, *An Iranian Metamorphosis*, which details the cockroach situation and his experience fleeing Iran. He later was invited to Paris, where he underwent the process to become a political refugee. From there, he worked on *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique*, the focus of this chapter.

Petit manuel features a main protagonist, who acts as both a nameless, generic asylum seeker and a character representation of Mana Neyestani. He shares features with the author—he is an illustrator whose cartoon got him imprisoned—but he also maintains a generic quality that allows him at times to be a stand-in for the “refugee experience.” This slippage serves to provide concrete examples that lend the manual an air of authenticity and that make it seem like a report of what the asylum process is actually like, while at the same time allowing for the novel to avoid engaging too deeply in political discussions of race, class, or nation of origin. The protagonist and his experiences are general enough that the text can convey its central message—that the asylum process is unnecessarily and impractically complicated, that it is a kafkaesque nightmare—through humor, rather than through a specific historically located narrative. The novel is funny in a dry way, often portraying sad events in a comically hyperbolic manner. Visually, the text plays with the graphic novel format to accentuate the difficulties depicted.

Petit manuel joins a growing group of graphic novels that portray the difficulties and hypocrisies of immigration in the twenty-first century. For example, *A Guard's Story* details an

³⁷ The Azaris were protesting other issues; the cartoon served as a catalyst that represented the way they were treated as second-class citizens.

investigative journalist's experience working as a guard for an Australian detention center. Like *Petit manuel*, it plays with the visual component of the graphic novel format to highlight the horrors of being held in indefinite detention. Golnar Nabizadeh looks at the way frames and framing specifically function in *A Guard's Story*, to show how the work resists frames, relying on white space and open-edged panels (Nabizadeh 342-343). Frames and the gutters they create are typically the way that a reader makes meaning in a graphic text (McCloud 63). When a graphic text subverts the panel-gutter set-up, it alters the reading experience, and the way that meaning is made, a technique that we will see *Petit Manuel* also employs. Nabizadeh argues that the lack of frames and the use of white space make the readers complicit in a politically charged meaning making process and function as an ironic metaphor for the freedom of movement and the lack thereof that the subjects in the text experience (Nabizadeh 345). Rebecca Scherr likewise picks up the topic of framing as she examines several of Joe Sacco's graphic texts about Palestine. Sacco is a reporter who has produced several graphic novels as his medium of journalism. Scherr explores the way frames in Sacco's works create literal and metaphoric frames for understanding whose stories and whose bodies "count" (114). Both scholars look at the way framing—visual and metaphoric—contributes to a way of talking about or working with refugees that leads to and results from a dehumanization of them. They draw on a recent publication of Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, that considers effects of indefinite detention on those detained. Butler analyzes the legal system that allows a space of indefinite detention to exist in the first place, and then argues that such spaces strip detainees of their subjecthood, reducing them to "bare life" (67).³⁸ They are not subjects in a political sense, and

³⁸ Butler draws on Agamben's theory of "bare life" here, which he develops in his work *Homer Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, in which he states "the fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as originally political element and as threshold of articulation

they are not dead, so they are in a liminal state of living, but living outside the bounds of political community. The fact that it is possible for anyone at any time to be reduced to a state of “bare life,” highlights the fragility of the interaction between government and subject.

Although *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique* is not set in a detention center, it shares some features with graphic novels that are, in particular in the way it portrays dehumanization. A frequent feature of *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique* is the way the protagonist is often injured, beheaded, or shown as not a human. Drawing on Nabizadeh and Scherr’s work of other graphic novels that depict detention centers or refugee experiences and drawing on Butler’s analysis of the effects of indefinite detention, I explore the ways *Petit manuel* plays with the generic forms of both guide book and graphic novel to highlight the absurdity of the asylum process. The text shows first the mechanisms through which the asylum process, similar to detention centers, dehumanizes, the way it strips asylum seekers of identity and subjecthood and reduce them to a state of “bare life.” However, the manual’s use of visual humor allows the text both to critique the asylum process itself, and to resist the narrative of dehumanization that the process engenders.

Waiting

Throughout *Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique*, the protagonist is repeatedly forced to wait, whether it’s waiting on line, waiting to receive something in the mail or waiting for a predetermined amount of time before he can move on to the next step. The endless waiting takes

between nature and culture” (181). “Bare life” is the space that is not quite *zoë*, the idea of life as a simple fact of living, and not quite *bios*, the way of being a living creature within a community. Bare life is made by exception from that community, shunting the being from *bios* to a space not quite inhabited by *zoë*. Butler’s innovation is applying the idea of bare life to the experience of indefinite detention.

up his time, preventing him from doing anything else—finding work and housing or building a network. Certain periods of waiting leave him helpless; he can't move on to the next step in the application process until he receives a critical document. The text uses visual cues and humor to communicate the frustration and helplessness the applicant feels during moments of waiting.

Neyestani frequently uses hourglasses to indicate that waiting and slowness are the narrative action. For example, the protagonist explains that in order to get refugee status, you need to have an interview with a team at the Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA). Getting this interview naturally requires waiting for months on end to receive a letter stating the time and date of the meeting. In the meantime, the applicant must wait (Figure 1: 56-57).

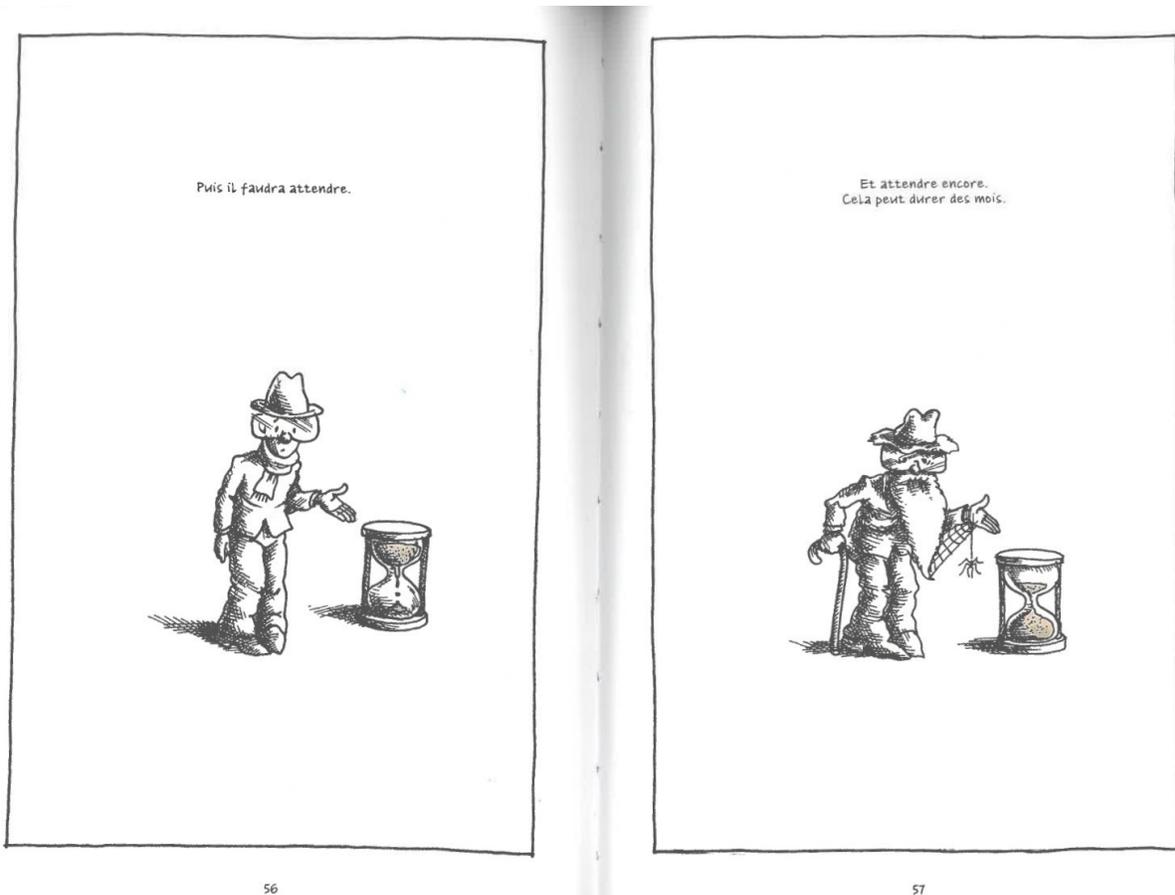


Figure 1: “Puis il faudra attendre.” (Neyestani 56-57)

At first glance, this seems to be an obvious depiction of waiting: the young protagonist ages, becoming a stooped man with a long beard. He has been in the same position for so long that spiders have built webs on him, implying that not only has he been waiting for a while, but he has been completely immobile during that time. It is as though he has become a piece of furniture and is no longer a person. If the protagonist's metamorphosis has not been indicative enough of the passage of time, the hourglass next to him is a clear reminder that these panels are about waiting. This excessive referentiality generates humor; the text isn't just communicating "waiting." It's communicating that "waiting" is all-encompassing. That, in the span of the several months it takes to hear from the OFPRA, a person can spend so much energy waiting that he has aged years. The double reference of both the hourglass, which shouts "passage of time!" and the old man covered with cobwebs shows that waiting becomes the protagonist's day-to-day activity. The panels are set up to imply that, though much time has passed, the protagonist hasn't done anything but wait, in the exact same position.

The way the protagonist(s) are positioned and the transformation from one panel to the next both highlight the sentiment of helplessness, while also offering humor as a solution. The fact that the old man protagonist is covered in cobwebs suggests that he hasn't moved between the two panels. The cobwebs make him out to be more like an object than a human, like a forgotten piece of furniture. Waiting here contributes to a sense of dehumanization, where the protagonist has nothing else to do or that he can do until he receives the information from OFPRA. His complete lack of power in the situation turns him into something less than human. However, this difficult message is mitigated through the humor conveyed in the text. Panel one reads, "Then, you have to wait", and panel two says, "And wait some more. This can last for months." The main idea communicated here is not exactly how long the protagonist has to wait, but how long it feels like

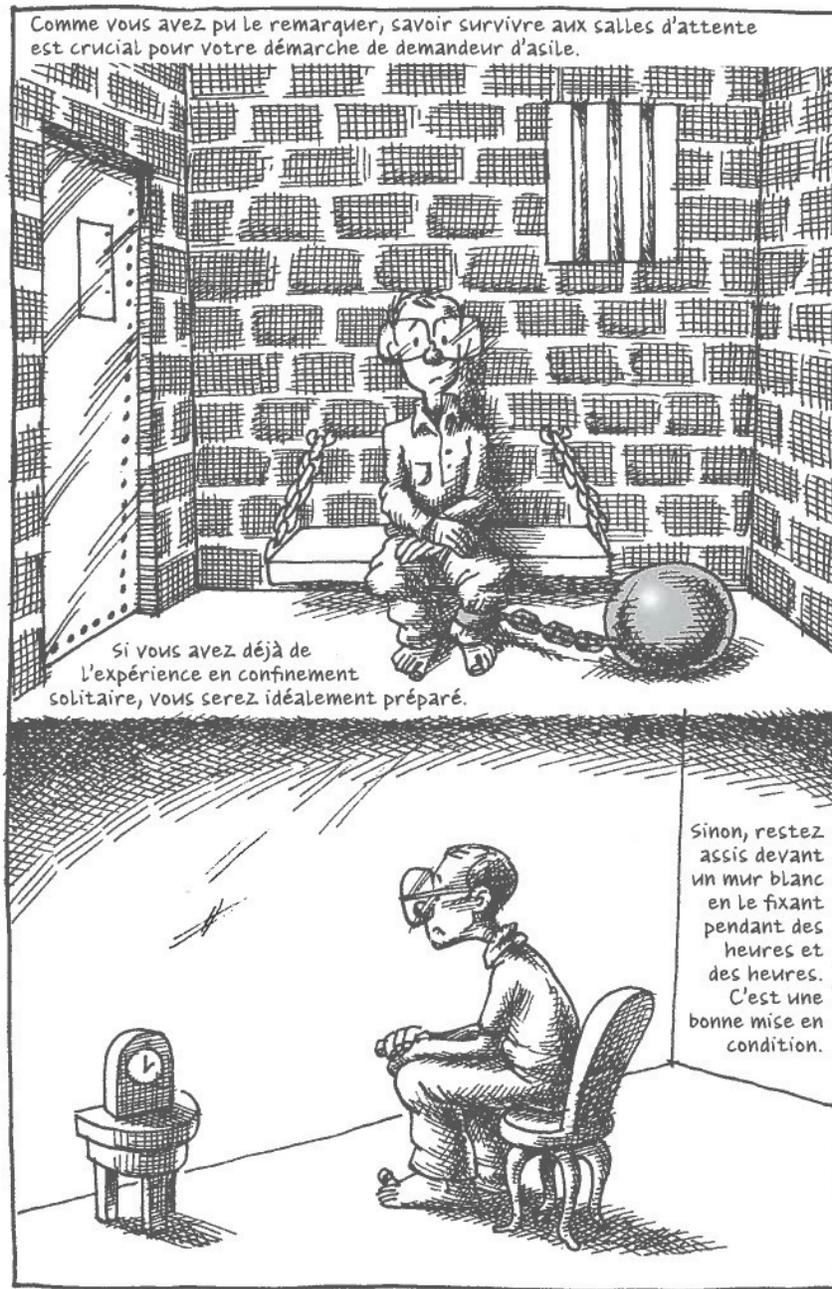
he has to wait, and what that wait does to his sense of self. In the span of months, the protagonist would obviously not have aged as drastically as portrayed, and the discordance between the text and image produces the humor of the panel. However, it is a humor that does not negate the sentiment of waiting as an activity that produces anxiety about time running out, and a sense of helplessness during the moments of waiting. The protagonist's outward gaze asks for sympathy as he is stuck, both hoping the hour glass won't run out, and hoping for the end of his need for it entirely.

The use of two full-page panels play with the way the passage of time is visually communicated. In her analysis of comics as literature, Hilary Chute asserts that “the form of comics always hinges on the way temporality can be traced in complex, often nonlinear paths, across the space of the page....A comics page offers a rich temporal map configured as much by what isn't drawn as by what is: it is highly conscious by the artificiality of its selective borders which diagram the page into an arrangement of encapsulated moments” (Chute 444-445). In comics, time is presented spatially, meaning the way the reader understands that time has passed is through the portrayal of visual cues and through the use of panels and frames. The image in each panel can change slightly, or the scene can transition to a new location, but the reader understands that from one panel to the next, the gap does the work of transitioning. There are exceptions; a graphic novel might use a narrative box to label “meanwhile...” or a panel to panel transition might focus on setting the scene by showing different details of the same scene (McCloud 68-72, 96-99). In other words, the passage of time happens between panels, and is understood by the reading through the process of closure. In the case of Figure 1, the passage of time happens between the panels as you might expect; it is between panel one and panel two that the protagonist transforms into an old man. However, the use of two, same-sized panels does not emphasize the transition.

The message is not about time passing. It's about time having passed. Waiting can be framed as a passive or an active experience—it can be something you do, or something you have done to you. When waiting is a passive experience, it is because the person waiting has no control over what happens or over when the waiting ends. The fact that these panels emphasize the passage of time as something that has happened, not that is in the process of happening, indicates the passivity of the protagonist. He is not actively waiting. Rather, the waiting is forced upon him, so much so that the experience of waiting is only portrayed as the eclipse of time. Not only does the protagonist find himself frequently having to wait in order to comply with the government, but the process of waiting emphasizes his powerlessness in the situation.

There is an irony at play with the closure the reader must complete in order for the passage of time to have occurred. Though the panels are meant to display a long amount of time, the fact that there are only two means that the reader can quickly gaze from one to the other and make that passage of time occur quickly, in the space of a few seconds. There are few words to linger over, and the image is minimalistic, with no details to attract the eye. This irony speaks to the freedom the reader has as she can choose to slow down and stay with the protagonist, or to move on and see what happens next. The protagonist of course, does not have the freedom to choose whether or not to wait. His powerlessness is heightened when the reader is ready to turn the page, only seconds after comprehending the length of time he must have waited between panels.

In addition to communicating to the protagonist that he is powerless, the long waits become a reminder of his time in prison. Figure 2 (65), for example, shows the other type of waiting situations the protagonist frequently finds himself in: waiting in line, waiting in waiting rooms. The top panel shows the protagonist in a prison cell, indicated by bars on the window, and a ball and chain around his ankle.



65

Figure 2: "Comme vous avez pu remarquer" (Neyestani 65)

The narration says: "As you have already noticed, knowing how to survive in waiting rooms is crucial for your process of obtaining asylum. If you already have experience in solitary

confinement, you will be well prepared. If not, sit and stare at a white wall for hours and hours. That's how to get in shape." Again, the use of frames here speaks to the transition, or rather lack thereof, between the two panels. The top scene, in prison, is separated from the bottom panel only by crosshatching, not by a distinct frame line, and not by a gutter, indicating that the transition between these two scenes is not one of movement or time; rather, the two scenes are parallel, where one does not transition into another. The parallelism suggests a simultaneity between the experiences—one does not lead into the other; rather it evokes it. The loss of control, loss of identity, and the isolation experienced in prison evoke similar feelings to what the protagonist experiences as he spends hours waiting on line and in waiting rooms. His suggestion--that if you do not have solitary confinement experience to prepare you, you should spend hours staring at a blank wall--highlights the isolation that he feels as he waits. The scenes that depict lines and waiting rooms are full of people; he is not waiting by himself. Yet Figure 2 explicitly speaks to the fact that solitary confinement and sitting alone in a blank room are the best preparation for the constant waiting. This emphasizes that, although there are plenty of other people also seeking refugee status, the predominant feeling is isolation or solitude. Not only is he forced to wait for hours and hours at a time, but he is made to feel alone, like he is not a part of any community. Furthermore, the parallel images of the protagonist waiting in prison and practicing waiting alone in his room emphasize that such a state of solitude reduces him to a body. Without the opportunity to move or to engage with other people or things, his body and his body's needs become his primary concern. This speaks back to the theory of "bare life" that Butler argues emerges in indefinite detention centers. Though the protagonist is clearly still alive, he is isolated in a way that prevents him from participating in a community, even in a community of fellow waiters.

The humor in this panel comes from the narration and the way it plays with the guide book genre. Speaking in the second person does the work both of following a generic convention, as its purpose is to offer advice, and of providing a cynical assessment of how to best prepare for the experience of becoming a refugee. It flips the expected narrative of how to deal with trauma; instead of suggesting ways to move past the traumatic experience of solitary confinement, it suggests using it to one's benefit as a training method for applying to become a refugee. The passage takes trauma and renders it useful and humorous. Neyestani acknowledges that of course the experience of being in prison is not actually the same as waiting on lines for hours and hours, but his equation of the two highlights the lack of agency both experiences engender.³⁹

The experience of isolation in the crowded space of a line or waiting room speaks to a sense of spatial as well as temporal disorientation. In Figure 3, we see the way the protagonist perceives the experience of constantly waiting on line. While waiting in an abstract sense renders him powerless and recalls the lack of agency and isolation he felt in solitary confinement, the physical act of waiting in line disorients his sense of space and his physical relation to the governing bodies who determine the lines. In Figure 3, he is squashed in amongst a crowd of people, who, although they are touching, are not interacting with him. The line of people is like a line of cattle, who are being herded along. The two faces at the top and bottom give the sense that the government is all encompassing. The panel does not quite offer the sense of a faceless bureaucrat—the speakers are *only* faces— but it does make the bureaucrat seem less like an actual human and more like a force dictating the lives of the protagonist and his fellow line-mates. The

³⁹ In an interview with Alex Dauben, when asked which felt more Kafka-esque, the Iranian prison system or the UNCHR, Neyestani answered, “the cartoon consequences, the prison, and the trial in Iran of course were more Kafka-esque, but we cannot deny that the UNCHR and the abroad part were good supplementary materials!”

positioning of the faces puts pressure on the vertical space in the panel that compresses against the horizontal space of the line. The line shows its own type of compression, moving from both sides as the people depicted are pressed into each other's backs, or crushed between each other. This sense of compression is anxiety producing and highlights the way the physical experience of waiting on line bears not just on the protagonist's sense of agency, but on his body as well.



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Figure 3: "Avancez" (Neyestani 38)

Rule of Law

The disorienting sense of space produced by frequent waiting speaks to the relationship between the government, or bureaucratic practices, and the refugee experience. In her essay “Indefinite Detention,” Butler attempts to understand the causes and effects of a government that engages in indefinite detention. She analyzes the situation in the US that brought about the Guantanamo Bay prison, arguing that governmentality, meaning the system of controlling populations and goods, and sovereignty both engage in extra-legal actions that result in a suspension of the rule of law. Drawing from Carl Schmitt's theories of sovereignty, Butler asserts that the suspension of the rule of law “produces sovereignty in its action and as its effect,” which is to say that a leader who ignores or makes exceptions to the law, as is the case with indefinite detention, asserts himself as sovereign in the act of suspending the law, and the effect of the suspension of rule of law is that the leader is now above the law and therefore sovereign (66). The result of this suspension is that some humans are stripped of their humanity and reduced to “bare life” where a person “enters a suspended zone, neither living in the sense that a political animal lives, in community and bound by law, nor dead and, therefore, outside the constituting condition of the rule of law. These socially conditioned states of suspended life and suspended death exemplify the distinction that Agamben offers between ‘bare life’ and the life of the political being (bios politikon), where this second sense of ‘being’ is established only in the context of political community. If bare life, life conceived as biological minimum, becomes a condition to which we are all reducible, we might find a certain universality in this condition” (67). Butler’s main interest is in understanding the legal and extra-legal processes specific to the US that allow for the suspension of a rule of law. While *Petit manuel* is different in significant ways—it is not set in the US, it is not a story of indefinite detention, although, as we have seen, the experience of prolonged

waiting can generate a sense of isolation and dehumanization similar to the effects of indefinite detention—it does offer a depiction of the relationship between government as an abstract body and the effects that body has on the asylum process. Neyestani’s text, however, shows not how the rule of law is suspended, rather how it is embodied, and how that embodied can lead to a similar effect of “bare life.”

Petit manuel portrays a type of sovereignty that does not rely on the suspension of rule of law, as Butler claims is the case in the US, but on an embodiment of the rule of law. Figure 4 shows the protagonist interacting with various bureaucrats. He begins by offering the reader some key advice saying in the top panel, “Before beginning the process, know... that you must respect The Law. What does The Law say?” Right away the text conveys a sense of gravity about the topic through the capitalization of “The Law.” The image depicts “The Law” as a book, held by a woman sitting at the desk, suggesting that the law is something specific, written, concrete, immutable. This is of course the theory behind “the rule of law” as a mode of government ruled not by the whims of a monarch or dictator but by a standard set of recorded laws that are applied universally, fairly, and consistently. The following offers an alternative perspective as the narration explains: “The Law is a person seated behind a desk who holds your future in their hands.” The woman, who we now are meant to understand is herself an iteration of “the Law,” tosses the book aside, allowing it to break the frame that otherwise binds the entire page. The book not only breaks the frame, but bleeds onto the edge of the page, highlighting the message that the idea of “law” as something consistent and uniform is really not true. The narration goes on to explain in the bottom panel what he means, saying across the top in three open panels, “The Law can be irritable or persnickety, and she can push back your dossier for several months; The Law can be sweet and considerate; But it’s very unpredictable. The considerate people can have their bad days.”

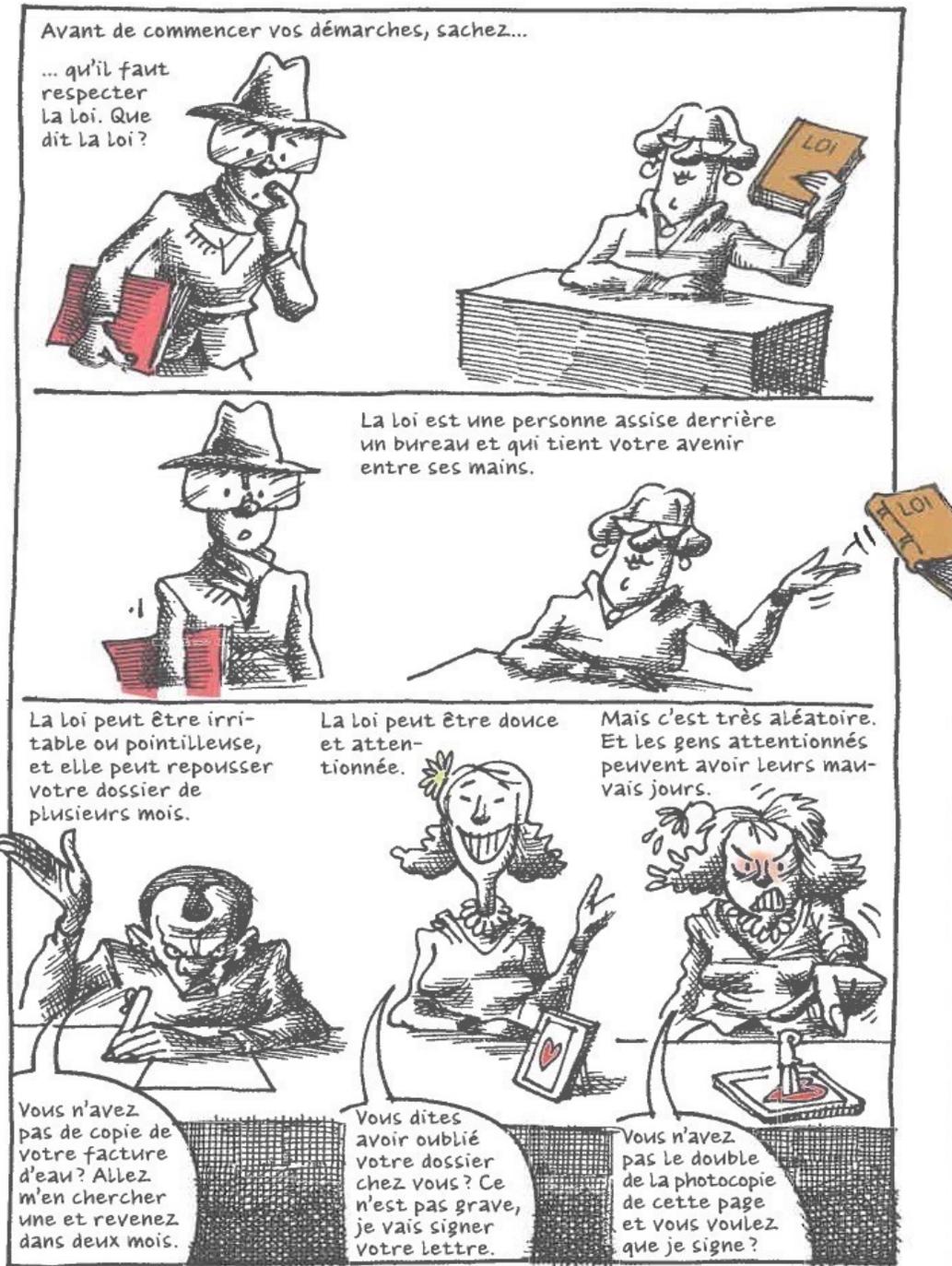


Figure 4: "Il faut respecter La Loi" (Neyestani 91)

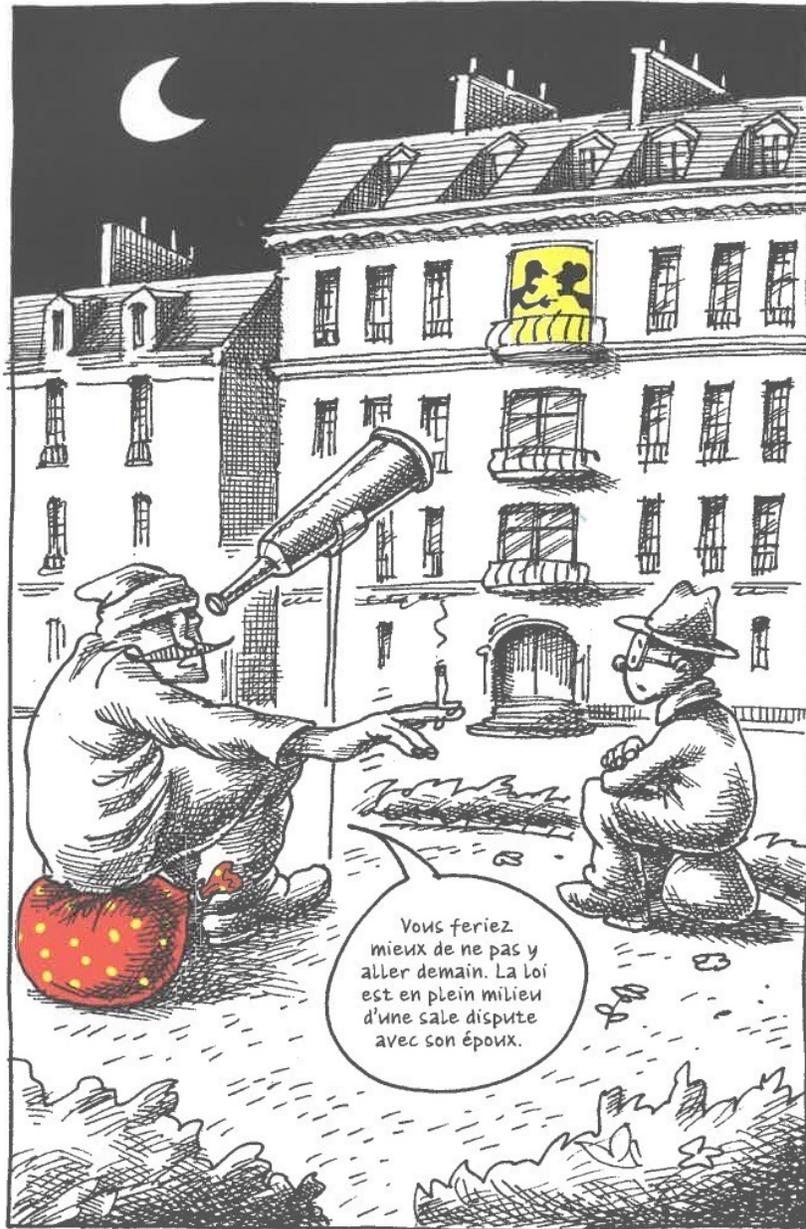
The language in this passage emphasizes the way the law is embodied and not absolute. In the bottom panels that describe the various personalities the law can have, “La Loi” is the subject. This is particularly noticeable when the image depicts a man, but because “La Loi” is the actual subject, the adjective, “pointilleuse” is feminine and “elle” is the subject pronoun. The law is not a matter of an abstract law or set of laws being enforced or represented by someone who is irritable or kind; rather, the law itself is those things. This animates the law, giving it the ability to feel, act, and change. If the law has this sense of life that allows it to feel and change, it no longer is an abstract concept of governmentality that is bound by the law itself. The fact that the law is embodied and subject to such intense and rapid changes as portrayed by the woman in the bottom panel highlights how fickle the legal system can be. There is a great deal of luck and randomness to the process, depending on which version of the law is seated behind the desk on any given day. Luck and randomness contribute to the powerlessness the protagonist feels, compounding his sense of helplessness in the face of all the waiting he must do to even find himself face to face with the law in the first place.

The panels use color to indicate the personal and emotional aspect of the law as an embodied experience. Throughout the text, color is used sparingly, with certain objects consistently in color or consistently drawn in black and white. The protagonist’s dossier is always red and is at times a way to distinguish his dossier from others’ or to place a visual emphasis on the dossier. In the panels of Figure 4, we see the red dossier tucked under the protagonist’s arm in the top two panels, as well as the red heart in a frame in the bottom panel. The use of red in the bottom panel offers a visual mirror that communicates both the personal attachment between the protagonist and his dossier, which contains his whole life story, and the emotional trauma he feels

when encountering a particularly unpleasant iteration of “The Law.” “The Law” is thus not simply embodied in the person who acts it out, but in the recipient of The Law’s whims as well.

The powerlessness that the protagonist feels in face of the explicit depiction of the rule of law as nothing other than the caprices of the embodiment of law could engender a hopelessness that renders his attempts to gain refugee status pointless. This hopelessness, however, would not make sense for the genre of guide book. Figure 5 shows how *Petit manuel* uses humor in keeping with the guide book genre to push back against the idea that the refugee really is completely powerless in the face of this intense bureaucratic system. The figure shows us the protagonist sitting with his friend and advisor, a nameless migrant who at times offers advice on how to maneuver in the asylum process and at times offers cynical commentary about the process’s failings. The figure, like the protagonist and his red dossier, is always accompanied by his red polka dot sack, which I argue serves as both an indicator that this man was also a migrant, and a reminder that, even though he seems to have all the answers, and know how to work within the French system, he is still homeless and still in a state of migration. His advice on this panel, as he and the protagonist sit together looking in to a window where two figures can be seen is, “you’d do better to not go in tomorrow. The Law is in the middle of a dirty fight with their spouse.” The humor here is obvious: because the law is a person, he or she will likely be in a bad mood the next day and will make things difficult for the protagonist. However, this humor also hands back a sort of power that was previously denied the protagonist. If the law is a person, subject to that person’s specific whims, the protagonist cannot rely on a sense of legal objectivity. But if he can figure out what those whims will be in advance, or at least what mood the law will be in, he can make conscientious decisions about when or how to interact with the law. Of course, this is not actual, doable advice for real refugees going through the process. (This “*petit manuel*” would generally

not be the most useful document in that case.) However, the power of this panel is in communicating that although the cards may be stacked against him, or the law may be more about luck than anything else, the protagonist can still use what resources he has to his benefit.

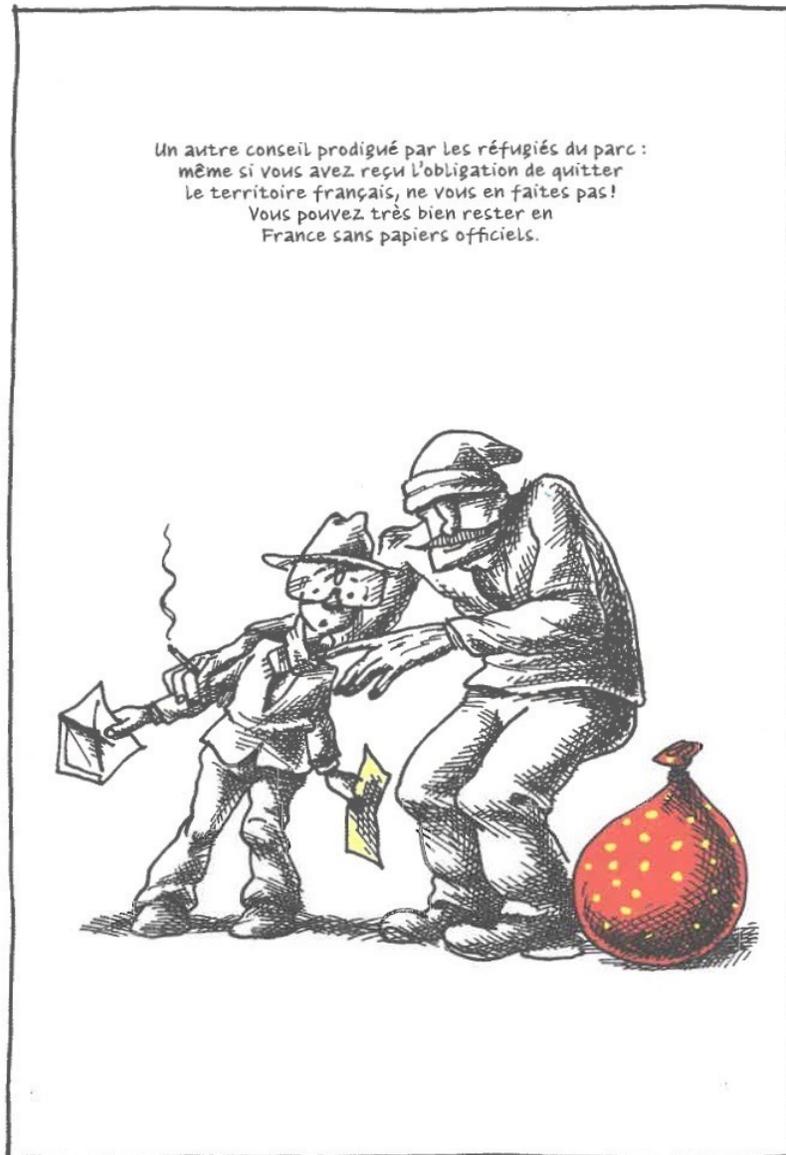


92

Figure 5: “Vous feriez mieux de ne pas y aller demain” (Neyestani 92)

This panel communicates that the most powerful resource the protagonist has is his fellow migrant helper, the man with the red sack. In Figures 2 and 3, he was shown as isolated, either alone in solitary confinement, or alone in an emotional sense, despite being among other people. The stripping of a community, particularly a political community, is key to the idea of “bare life.” Figure 5 offers an alternative to the isolation. It doesn’t negate it, but it shows that there is the potential for political community even in the face of a system that makes explicit the lack of an abstract rule of law. The advising figure offers the protagonist and reader alike important suggestions, presumably because he has gone through the system before. But he also functions as someone who isn’t a bureaucrat for the protagonist to converse with. From a practical standpoint, this allows for a mix of narration and information sharing, where the text can communicate ideas through dialogue as well as straight narration. It also offers a foil to the protagonist’s optimism. A large part of the humor in the text comes from the way the protagonist offers a positive spin on clearly negative situations. The advising figure can then communicate the stark negative reality which furthers the cynical humor of the text as a whole. For example, the protagonist explains that after the whole process, if you are rejected, you will receive a letter telling you to leave France within thirty days. Figure 6 shows the advising figure in a conspiratorial pose with the protagonist, who holds the letter telling him that he’s been rejected. The text reads, “another bit of advice spread amongst the refugees in the park: even if you’ve received a mandate to leave the French territory, don’t do it! You can easily remain in France without official papers.” The panel offers insight into the community of refugees, whom the advising figure seems to represent. Figure 7 shows how this community, even though it is made up of people who are outside the French legal system, is still actively political. The top narration reads, “You can even participate in protests for undocumented immigrants” and shows a protest asking for equal rights and worker’s rights. Not only is there a

sense of community, but the community is strong enough to have political voice. The situation here is very different from the "bare life" Butler assigns to detainees at Guantanamo. Though there is a sense of powerlessness, especially manipulated through the destabilizing and isolating periods of waiting, there is still a community that shares knowledge.



82

Figure 6: "Un autre conseil" (Neyestani 82)



84

Figure 7: “Vous pouvez même participer à des manifestations” (Neyestani 84)

Figure 7 demonstrates the way *Petit manuel* can both maintain a humorous and light guide book format and at the same time offer a deeply political critique of the current state of affairs. The top panel shows a political situation, without necessarily attempting to make light of it. The

middle panel, which reads, "... and be thanked by the police" displays a type of humor that is found throughout the text, where the image shows the opposite of what the words are saying. It shows a type of irony about the reality of the community of undocumented immigrants: while they can form a community and protest, if they get arrested, they will be deported. The previous page includes the concrete advice, "Veillez juste à ne pas faire remarquer par la police," "Just be sure to not be noticed by the police" (83). So to show the group protesting, actively drawing attention to themselves seems at first hopeful: though they lack papers, they can still protest and have a political voice. However, the quick middle reframes the top panel as not entirely genuine. Read from a straight-forward perspective, where the group is actually able to protest, the panel portrays the intense risk the protesters would undertake by drawing attention to themselves. The reframing of the panel as sarcastic, with the police "thanking them" makes it clear that protest is not really a viable option and relies on humor to convey the message.

The page gets darker however, where the bottom panel depicts the advising figure with a wife and child being offered a hand by a man in a hat labeled "Daesh." The narration reads, "In return for all these difficulties, your child's future will be guaranteed in France." The nature of the humor is the same—a text that sits in stark opposition to what the image depicts. However, the image itself indicates a much darker point than the panel directly above. The composition sweeps from left to right, moving from the outstretched hand and aided by the slanted shading over the seated couple. This composition allows the eye to take in the image before encountering the text, which sits within a darkly shaded corner. The text is not entirely necessary to understand the point of the panel—children who grow up in the inequality and poverty caused by having undocumented parents are a key demographic for terrorist groups. The text then serves not to explain, but to point

out an irony that keeps with the tone of the *Petit manuel*. It offers a joke—not a funny one, but one that allows the text to make political commentary within the bounds of the guide book genre.

This section has shown some of the ways *Petit manuel* manipulates the guide book and graphic novel genres to explore the relationships between the rule of law, governmentality, and the experience of going through the asylum process. Thinking with Butler’s assertion that indefinite detention leads to a sense of “bare life,” where detainees are stripped of a sense of community and political identity and potential, I argued that, although the waiting identified in the first section leads to a sense of isolation and powerlessness, and the fact that the rule of law is embodied and not absolute furthers this feeling of powerlessness, the text portrays the protagonist within a community that offers a response to the powerlessness. The text makes use of a secondary character to act as the foil to the protagonist; both characters are experts, but the protagonist sticks to a guide book persona, while the advising figure is able to both offer advice and portray a cynicism and harsh reality that is not necessarily in keeping with the advice genre. In the next section, I explore the protagonist’s character in moments when his humanity is at stake.

Dehumanization

One of the key assertions of Butler’s is that indefinite detention leads to a derealization of the humanity of detainees (68). In other words, “bare life” is not just a matter of being alive but without a meaningful community or political identity. It also creates a sense of dehumanization where certain “imprisoned lives are viewed and judged such that they are deemed less than human, or as having departed from the recognizable human community” (57). *Petit manuel* often shows moments of dehumanization that complicate the idea of the asylum process as one that leads the “bare life.”

The idea of dehumanization as something that marks a human as “less than human” and not necessarily “non-human” is a recurrent visual depiction in *Petit manuel*. For example, Figure 8 equates the protagonist with a cat. The panel depicts two older women talking and explains, “Often, it happens that good Samaritans will financially support refugees or will even protect them and take them in under their roof.” The tone of this text—whether it’s read as genuine respect for those “good Samaritans” or whether that term is used in sarcasm— depends on the image, where one of the women (the good Samaritan) says to the other, “Mine is Persian!” The humor comes from the play on the word “persan,” which refers both to Persian people who make up the largest ethnic group in Iran, and to Persian cats. The message becomes that these good Samaritans are participating in a system that results in the dehumanization of the protagonist, and by extension other refugees. The protagonist is dependent on an individual good Samaritan, because the government does not adequately offer aid. This dependency makes the protagonist feel like a pet, and the good Samaritan acts accordingly. However, the image depicts the protagonist as human, though a human who behaves like a cat. This creates a liminal space of humanity: he is both still a human, and at the same time less than a human. It offers insight into the mechanism of dehumanization, showing how it is a matter of perception and behavior.



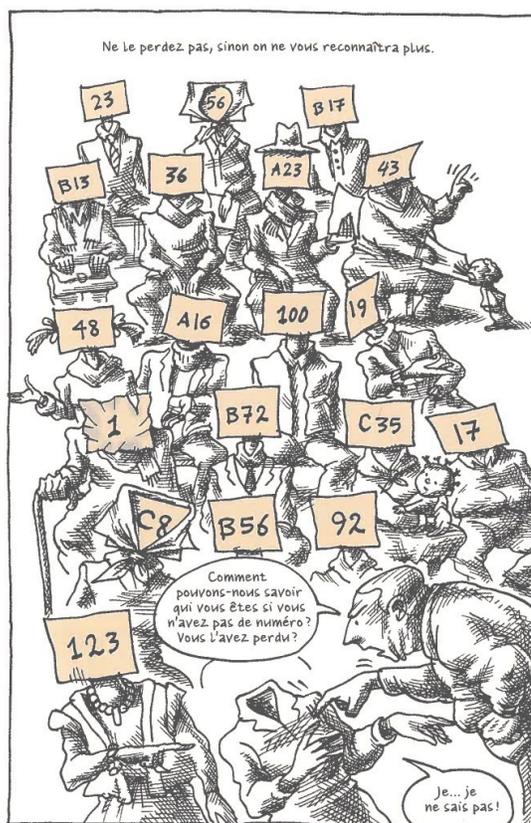
26

Figure 8: "Le mien est persan" (Neyestani 26)

This mechanism of dehumanization comes up throughout *Petit manuel* as it shows how the actual asylum process dehumanizes. Figure 9 shows how the asylum seekers are given numbers to identify themselves and their cases. The text at the bottom of page 40 explicitly states, “For as long as you are at the prefecture, this number will be your identity.” This is a common dehumanization process, calling people by numbers rather than by their name. In the full page panel, Neyestani has drawn each applicant waiting with a number in the place of their head, as if to underline the idea that you are physically, not just metaphorically, your number. The narration at the top of the panel explains, “Don’t lose it, or you won’t be recognizable.” The “on” in the French sentence “on vous donnera un formulaire à remplir...ainsi qu’un numéro” is interesting—on the one hand, it can mean the most neutral “one,” meaning any single individual. However, the bureaucrats or officials, those who issued the numbers and presumably use them, are not specified. It is not “ils” (they) who won’t be able to recognize; the protagonist positions himself among those who may potentially not be able to recognize. The “on” is often used in place of “nous,” “we” and leaves open here whether the protagonist is including himself in the group of people who cannot recognize or not. Either way, the language indicates that it is not just a state-down loss of identity, but a lateral one as well. Even though other people wouldn’t actually use their given numbers in day to day life, the process relies so intensely on the numbers that the applicants begin to lose their sense of self as individuals that exist outside the process.



40

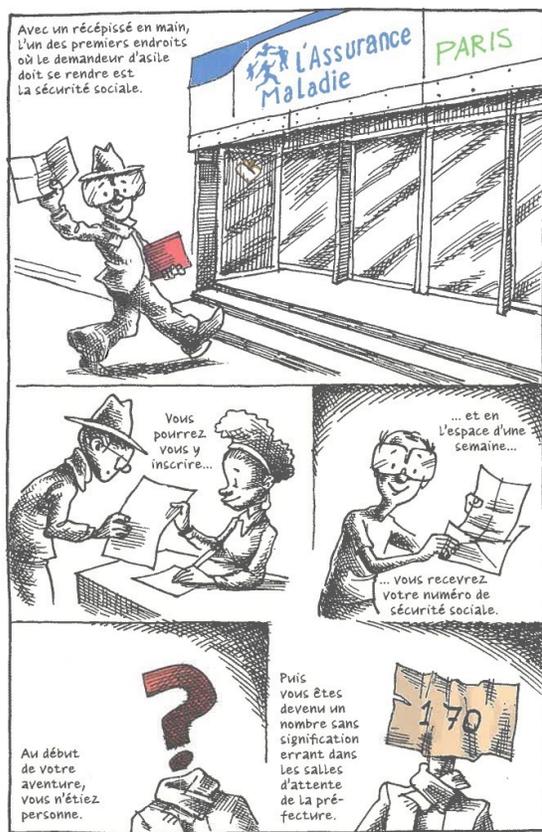


41

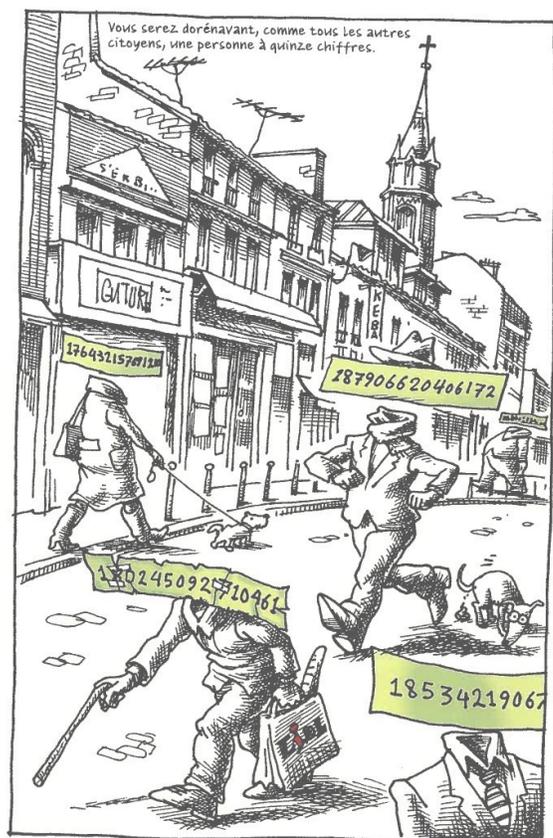
Figure 9: “On vous donnera un formulaire” (Neyestani 40-41)

Although the protagonist’s and his fellow refugees’ identities are replaced by numbers, they maintain a sense of individuality. The full page panel picks up where the bottom panel on page 40 left off, almost without missing a beat. The protagonist can be found seated between a man and a woman with a child. The child appears to be biting the woman’s dossier in both images, and the protagonist himself has not even lowered the documents in his hand. This suggests first that the process of having one’s identity replaced by a number can be abrupt or immediate. It also indicates that, although the characters’ heads are missing, their head is not the only key part of them that constitutes their identity, at least from the reader’s perspective. The person at the bottom of the page, whose head has not been replaced by a number and is therefore likely the bureaucrat,

is angrily asking a figure, “how can we know who you are if you don’t have a number? Did you lose it?” The bureaucrat’s speech bubble hovers over the figure as if replacing her missing head. She presents a type of dehumanization that leaves her in a similarly liminal state to the refugee as a cat: though she has a body, and is completely alive, she doesn’t have a head so she is not *whole*; she is not wholly human, nor something nonhuman. She is “less than human” as Butler says, in a literal sense. Her response to the bureaucrat, “I...I don’t know!” is equally ambiguous: either she doesn’t know if she lost her number, or she doesn’t know how the bureaucrat will be able to tell who she is. This ambiguity opens the door for humor, but the panel as a whole offers a terrifying consequence of losing one’s number. She stands at the front of the room, almost subsumed by the other refugees and by the bureaucrat who hovers over her. It’s unclear what will happen to her, whether she’ll be given a new number, or have to remain in her headless, nonhuman state.



98



99

Figure 10: “Avec un récépissé en main” (Neyestani 98- 99)

The number that the protagonist receives is not permanent; it is a place holder, further highlighting the precariousness of the process. He depicts his number, shown as his head, becoming tattered at various points, but eventually, when he receives his social security number, it also replaces his head. Figure 10 shows the process by which his head/identity change form. The bottom panel on the left, showing a question mark in the place of the protagonist’s head, reads, “At the beginning of your journey, you were no one.” The next panel swaps the question mark for a small, beige, and tattered number, saying, “Then, you became a number without meaning, wandering in the waiting rooms of the prefecture.” These two panels reiterate the process shown in Figure 9, but modify the experience slightly. Instead of simply replacing the protagonist’s

identity with another type of identity, the initial number granted the protagonist an identity, but one that was meaningless. The panel on page 99, however, shows a street where everyone's head is replaced by a fifteen digit number. The text at the top reads, "From now on, you will be like all the other citizens, a person of fifteen numbers." This panel suggests that participating in any type of nationality, whether as a refugee or as a citizen results in a bureaucratic replacement of identity.

Conclusion

The protagonist's receipt of a fifteen digit number speaks to the way his identity has become mutable throughout the asylum process. Even though there is an increased sense of citizenship, a fifteen digit number is still as liminal as a two or three digit number--it still undoes and replaces the characters' own identities, and leaves open the possibility that the number could be lost or replaced. The end of *Petit manuel* breaks from the earlier format of maintaining a sense of distance between the protagonist and Mana Neyestani, and turns more concretely towards the autobiographical in the way that it addresses identity. After the protagonist has checked off all the things on his asylum-seeker list--getting the fifteen-digit number, getting health insurance, an apartment, a job--he reflects on how the system can remind an asylum-seeker of the countries they have just left. He is seen interacting with the cartoonists from Charlie Hebdo who were murdered in 2015 (Figure 11). The cartoonists are ghosts, and float above the ground, holding pens and bearing bright red, bleeding bullet wounds. This reference is significant because it is one of the only indications in the graphic novel of the year, and the exact political and historical context in which the protagonist is seeking asylum. It is also meaningful in the way that it presents a key part of the protagonist's identity as unrelated to nationality or citizenship. Rather, he is a cartoonist, and so identifies with the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists.

And yet, the protagonist still brings in a discussion of nationality identity right at the end of the text. A series of panels reflect his confusion about his identity, one showing him without his standard hat and folder, and instead wearing a beret and carrying a baguette, and the other showing him filling out a form that asks for his nationality. He is seen first marking a box indicating that he is "Iranian," before crossing that off and marking that he is "French," before erasing that, and pausing to think. This page is set up in a classic panel format, emphasizing the temporal transitions. This emphasis serves as a reminder that what might be a quick question for others, for the protagonist, and for other refugees, takes a fair amount of reflection.

This turn to the autobiographical, and the emphasis on identity in the final pages of the text also offer a note of sobriety. The final pages are not marked with humor or underscored by irony; they are genuine. This shift, away from humor and towards a serious autofiction serves as one final reminder to the reader of the intense ways the asylum process affects those who go through it. Although the novel maintains a wry and humorous tone throughout, and in so doing is able to critique the asylum process, and resist a simplistic reading of that process, it ends with a personal exposé of how the protagonist as an individual, and as an avatar for Neyestani, experienced the process.



127

Figure 11: "Ça n'a pas marché pour nous" (Neyestani 127)

Coda

Petit manuel du parfait réfugié politique uses humor to complicate the various experiences of becoming a refugee in France. In his work on *An Iranian Metamorphosis*, Neyestani's first graphic novel about his cockroach cartoon, arrest, and exile, Amir Khadem argues that Neyestani works with his western audience by "disappointing the readers' familiar anticipation while highlighting such a disappointment as an integral element for maintaining empathy" (485). This strategy works because it both acknowledges the expected narrative, and points out how this expectation is often exaggerated, or the stuff of fantasy. However, it doesn't just disappoint the reader by constantly correcting the assumed narrative. Instead it plays with that expectation and then corrects it, noting that the reality is less exciting. In Chapter 3, I argue that a similar type of narrative strategy is at play in *Petit manuel*, where the text plays with the assumed narrative the reader might have about the refugee process by relying on humor to correct or nuance it. For example, I discussed how *Petit manuel* depicts the dehumanization that occurs, while also resisting any singular or simple narrative of dehumanization. The text acknowledges that it happens, and then shows the way humans are still humans, that even in a system that can lend itself to dehumanization, there can be resistance. The text allows the reader to recognize that having a number as an identifier is a common dehumanizing strategy, but then goes on to portray individuality and to joke about the inability of the bureaucrat to identify a numberless person.

Khadem's theory relies on the importance of making the reader empathize with the main character's experiences, in order to not give up after repeated instances of disappointment. However, because *Petit manuel* lives between the personal and the generic, the need for empathy is different. It is not important for the reader to empathize with the main character, so much as it is important for her to empathize with the actual person that the character represents—the refugee. Because of this different expected reaction, I contend that Neyestani flips the narrative strategy employed in *An Iranian Metamorphosis*: instead of disappointing the readers with a narrative that is more banal, less exciting or exotic than the expectation, he takes what should be a very usual and not at all exotic experience—waiting on line, going to a prefecture—and dramatizes it. He doesn't disappoint, he exaggerates. He takes the banal and depicts the absurdity of the situation, the way something so simple can be maddening, or worse, dehumanizing, and finds in that absurdity the kernel of humor that will allow the reader to be drawn in. Although it critiques France, it does without necessarily alienating or disappointing its French readers.

The idea of disappointing the audience recalls the introduction, where I discussed the idea of educating the audience. In the introduction, Tajadod and Satrapi both are quoting explaining why they write in French, implying that if the audience can read the text at all, they can't help but be educated when they read the text. Khadem nuances that a little, discussing the importance of empathy, both empathy for the readers who may be challenged with new ideas, and empathy from the reader for the characters and situations unfamiliar to them.

Empathy has become a popular topic in pedagogical research. On the one hand, there is plenty of research highlighting the importance of empathy in the classroom, particularly as a way to address multicultural topics or in diverse settings. Empathy has become a cornerstone for training teachers (Cruz and Patterson) as well as a means for addressing racial or class divides

between teachers and students (Warren). It is being taught in classes as a path towards social justice; Elizabeth Segal defines “social empathy” as “ability to understand people by perceiving or understanding their situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities” (266-267). However, empathy as a magic potion for opening communication and ending inequality has its rightful critiques. Amy Shuman, for example, identifies some of the limits of relying on empathy as the goal for storytelling, arguing that, because empathy is the “attempt to experience the suffering of others,” it puts in place the potential for appropriation, and more critically, misappropriation of that suffering (8, 120). In other words, empathizing with another person’s story can run the risk that the listener will empathize so strongly that they will feel a sense of ownership or entitlement to the story itself.

In the three chapters of this dissertation, I focus less on empathy as an educational imperative, as I do on experience. As I set out to do my own type of translation, the goal was not to approach texts in such a way that would aid read in empathizing with the content. Instead, I thought first about how to draw readers in and about beginning from a shared space—bodies, questions of embodiment—and allowing the experiences of the characters to portray difference. In other words, I began not with empathy, but with its cousin, sameness, and used experience to particularize.

Chapter 1 takes the anxiety around changing bodies as its starting point. It explores this theme as it is related to aging, but it grounds it in the historical context of mid-twentieth-century Iran, where the inability to act is present in relation to both questions of aging and to issues of political and social change. The characters feel helpless, in the world and in their bodies, and it is a helplessness that is both familiar to readers who see their own aging or changing bodies reflected in the narrative, and alien to a US readership who has not lived during the 1960’s and

70's in Iran. I do not attempt to identify moments in the text when readers with empathize with the characters' plights; I attempt to analyze the experiences portrayed without such a goal, instead leaving it up to the reader what to make of the text. Likewise, Chapter 2 focuses on hair practices, something that crosses cultures but that is culturally and historically specific. Thinking through the various hair practices in *Debout sur la terre* involves both reflecting on one's own hair practices and opening up to the social and historical contexts the novel reflects. And, as I mention above, Chapter 3 shows not how *Petit manuel* evokes empathy by sympathizing with readers, but how it requires readers to reconsider every day experiences in the context of asylum seeking. In the foregrounding of experience, I hope to open up space for future considerations of the role of experience in addition or in place of empathy in a literature classroom.

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