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In Search of Identity: Hushang Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* and Other Works of Fiction

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This dissertation examines representations of identity in the fiction works of Iranian author Hushang Golshiri. An extensive, theoretically grounded examination of Golshiri's attention to five different aspects of identity in his novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is the focal point of the research presented herein. This examination is supported by an exploration of these same aspects of identity in his other long works of fiction and in numerous short stories from several collections he produced. A brief biography of Golshiri's life which is focused on his literary activities at different points in his life is included. An annotated bibliography of Golshiri's major publications is also provided, as is a plot summary of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*.

Table of Contents

مهمترین مسئله در حقیقت این است که من، این انسان ایرانی شرقی،

چه‌کاره‌ام؟ که هستم؟ و کجای این تاریخ بشری ایستاده‌ام؟ و چه سهمی دارم؟

ـ هوشنگ گلشیری

For me, as an Iranian and Eastern human being, the most important questions indeed are:

What am I? Who am I? Where do I stand in human history? And what is my part?

– Hushang Golshiri

Chapter One:

Introduction

Hushang Golshiri was a creative writer of fiction and literary critic who experimented with Western literary techniques combined with elements from classical and medieval Persian literature in developing his writing style. Though Golshiri's focus was often on the craft of writing itself, there is an obvious socially and politically aware subtext to many of his stories. The protagonists in many of his works are intellectuals who are painfully aware of the problems within their country and society, and they either want to change their world somehow or are struggling to survive within a world they find gloomy and disconsolate. In some of his longer works such as *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* [Mirrors with Doors],[1] the main character/narrator is struggling with self-knowledge and his own identity as an Iranian writer as he is trying to decide how to live and what to do with the rest of his life. *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, in particular, accentuates such identity concerns by placing the examination within expatriate communities whose members face conflicting linguistic and social cues regarding their identities.

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[1] There are other translations of the title *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*. For example, Khorrami in his article in *Encyclopedia Iranica* translated the title as *Mirrors with Cover Doors* while Moayyad in the introduction of *Black Parrot, Green Crow* (2003) translated it as *Mirrors in Doors*. I, however, have translated the title of the novel as *Mirrors with Doors*, which is the closest to a literal translation and also comes closest to describing the actual items from which the title is taken. A picture of a mirror with doors [ayeneh-ye dardar] from the cover of the novel is provided as an appendix at the end of this dissertation.

This dissertation presents an exploratory analysis of representations of identity in Golshiri's work, particularly his novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, leveraging the extant research on Golshiri's writing and life, including Golshiri's own assessments of his work. Golshiri's entire body of work – including his novels and collections of short stories, stories published in journals such as *Jong-e Esfahan*, and interviews conducted with Golshiri – was examined as a part of the research for this manuscript. An initial translation of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* has also been completed and a summary of the novel is presented here. The full translation will be polished and refined for future publication.

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows. The rest of Chapter One presents a short biography of Golshiri including the works he produced/published during different periods of his life. A review of literature focused on identity issues in modern Persian literature and on Golshiri's literary works is also presented. Chapter Two illustrates Golshiri's concerns with different aspects of identity with examples from many of his short stories and novels. Chapter Three presents a detailed summary of the novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* and follows that with a detailed examination of Golshiri's treatment of identity in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*. This chapter leverages supporting theory and critical opinion regarding identity in general, and diasporic/immigrant/exhilic identity in particular, and examines the five different elements of identity distinguished in this dissertation, presenting specific examples from *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* for illustration.

Chapter Four concludes the dissertation with a summary of the arguments presented and the contributions of this research.

GOLSHIRI'S LIFE AND WORKS

This section reviews Golshiri's life from his birth in 1938 until his death in 2000. The primary focus is on his adult years and the literary artifacts he produced during his life. The short biographical sketch is supplemented by an annotated bibliography of Golshiri's literary production at the end of the chapter. No attempt has been made to organize the works thematically. In both sections, events and major works are presented in chronological order.[2] A review of literature examining explorations of Persian identity and a review of literature analyzing Golshiri's works are also included.

[2] For more detailed examination of Golshiri's life and how it impacted the subjects of his writing, see the collection of interviews in *Hushang Golshiri* by Maryam Taheri-Majd (2004), and also the article "Golshiri, Hushang" by Hasan Mir'abedini in *Encyclopædia Iranica*. A brief but very interesting interview/autobiographical sketch of Golshiri's life appears as a preface to Minoo Buffington's translation of *Shazdeh Ehtejab*, in Hillmann, Michael C., Ed. *Major Voices in Contemporary Persian Literature.* Austin, Texas: Literature East & West, 1976: 245-250. See also the introduction and "Goftoguha" in *Bagh dar Bagh*, Vol. II, 2001 and also "Dar Ahval-e In Nimeh-ye Roshan" [About This Bright Side], the preface in *Dark Side of the Moon* (2001), written by Golshiri in 1991. See also "Negahi be Hayat-e Khod" [A Glance at My Own Life] by Golshiri in *Hamkhani-ye Kateban* [Harmony of Writers], 2001.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL/BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GOLSHIRI

Hushang Golshiri was born in March 1938[3] in the city of Isfahan in central Iran. His father was employed as a blue-collar worker when he could find work. Though the family was poor, Golshiri was one of several children. He spent his early childhood in Isfahan until work drew his father to move to Abadan, an oil rich city in western Iran near the Iraq border. The rest of the family followed in 1941 or 1942.[4] Golshiri spent his early teenage years in Abadan before moving back to Isfahan in 1955 where he graduated from high school in 1957. He began teaching elementary school in 1958. While teaching, Golshiri also studied Persian literature at the University of Isfahan, focusing on Isfahan's folk literature and local games (Kelk, 2000).

Golshiri began writing fiction in the late 1950s and published his first poem, "Shahr-e Kowlia" [The City of Gypsies], in early 1961 in the magazine *Payam-e Novin* [The New Message].[5] His first short story, "Chenar" [Plane Tree], also appeared in *Payam-e Novin* in 1961. In 1962, Golshiri was arrested and accused of being a member of the Tudeh party.[6] He was only 24 at that time, and he had not yet written *Shazdeh Ehtejab* [Prince Ehtejab]. He subsequently spent several months in prison.[7] He claimed

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3 Golshiri was born in 1316 during the month of Esfand on the Persian calendar, probably the 25th [which would be 16 March 1938 in the Western calendar] (Sanapur, 2001, p. 43).

4 Golshiri himself claims he lived in Abadan from 1942 – 1955 (Golshiri Foundation website). Several other sources list 1941, and Taheri-Majd lists both years (Taheri-Majd, 2004) as reported here.

5 There is some evidence that he published another poem sometime earlier under a pseudonym. However, the first publication known under his own name was this poem.

6 Iranian communist party and pro Soviet Union

7 Reported in an interview given by Farzaneh Taheri, Golshiri's wife (Taheri-Majd, 2004, p. 25).

that this time in prison influenced the content of several of his later, politically themed stories such as “Aksi Baraye Qab-e Aks-e Khali-ye Man” [A Picture for My Empty Picture Frame], “Har Do Ruye Sekkeh” [Both Sides of a Coin], “Yek Dastan-e Khub-e Ejtema’i” [A Good Social Story], and “Jobbeh-khaneh” [The Antique Chamber].[8]

Golshiri was released from prison on 21 September 1962. He celebrated his graduation from university upon his release and returned to teaching in the towns and villages around his native Isfahan. In the summer of 1965, Golshiri, along with several colleagues, established the journal *Jong-e Esfahan* [Isfahan Anthology] (also referred to simply as *Jong* [Anthology] as the title appears on the cover of the journal). He published his short story “Dehliz” [Corridor/Labyrinth] in the first issue of *Jong-e Esfahan*. In the following few years he published several stories, eventually collecting many of them into his collection and first book length publication, *Mesl-e Hamisheh* [As Always], in 1968. Around this same time, Golshiri and others signed a statement opposing formation of the Shah’s Kongereh-ye Nevisandegan va Sha’eran [Congress of Writers and Poets], which they viewed as a puppet organization without legitimacy (Abedini, 1989; Taheri-Majd, 2004), and established the Kanun-e Nevisandegan-e Iran [Association of Iranian Writers] as a free and open alternative to government sponsored gatherings for authors (Karimi-Hakkak, 1985; Kelk, 2000; Sepanlu, 2002).[9]

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8 *Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah* [Dark Side of the Moon], 2003, p.12

9 For an extensive discussion of the history and importance of the Association see Mohammad Ali Sepanlu’s *Sargozasht-e Kanun-e Nevisandehgan-e Iran* [The History of the Association of Iranian

The following year, in 1969, Golshiri published *Prince Ehtejab*, the book that would first bring him fame. *Prince Ehtejab* details the last hours in the life of a minor descendant of the Qajar dynasty. The book has been interpreted as a commentary on the inappropriateness of monarchy as a form of government, and on the Iranian monarchy in particular.[10] His autobiographical novel *Keristin va Kid* [Christine and Kid], which is set in Isfahan, was published in 1971. In 1974 a movie based on *Prince Ehtejab* was filmed. Golshiri was arrested for a second time on 24 February 1974. He was held in prison for almost half a year, until 12 July 1974. His wife reported that he was never certain of the reason for this second imprisonment, though Golshiri himself guessed that it was for the story "My China Doll." He later heard that it was done as a favor for a group of princes in Isfahan who were seeking to retaliate for his publication of *Prince Ehtejab* (Taheri-Majd, 2004). For five years after that, his freedom was severely restricted, including a prohibition from teaching (Taheri-Majd, 2004).

After his release from prison, and in part because of the severe restrictions on his activities, Golshiri moved to Tehran in 1974. In Tehran, he began a series of weekly meetings with colleagues from *Jong-e Esfahan* and others. This period produced two further volumes, *Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man* [My Little Prayer Room], a collection of short stories published in 1975, and *Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i* [The Lost Lamb of

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Writers]. Spanga, Sweden: Entesharat-e Baran, 2002. See also Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak's "Protest and Perish: A History of the Writer's Association of Iran." *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2/4, Sociology of the Iranian Writer, Spring-Autumn 1985: 189-229.

10 For example see the discussion in Taheri, Farzaneh and Abdol'ali Azimi. *Hamrah ba Shazdeh Ehtejab* [Along with Prince Ehtejab]. Tehran: Nashr-e Digar, 2001.

Ra'i], a novel published in 1977. In 1977 he began teaching in the college of Fine Arts. In October of the same year he delivered his speech titled "Javanmargi dar Nasr-e Mo'aser" [The Premature Death of Modern Persian Prose] at the Goethe Institute in Tehran as part of a gathering arranged by Association of Iranian Writers.[11] That night Golshiri's wife saw him for the first time (Taheri-Majd, 2004). In 1978, Golshiri traveled to the United States on the invitation of the International Writing Program and spent several months in Iowa City while also giving speeches about literature and politics elsewhere around the country.

After his trip to the United States he returned to Iran, and in 1979 again became a high school teacher in Isfahan since the restrictions on his actions had terminated. He married Farzaneh Taheri in 1979, and she became his lifelong literary partner, editing his works and participating in his other literary activities. In the winter of 1980, he requested and was granted a transfer to the University of Tehran by the Education Department. That same winter he published the short novel *Ma'sum-e Panjom ya Hadis-e Mordeh bar Dar Kardan-e An Savar ke Khahad Amad* [The Fifth Innocent or the Tale of the Hanging of the Corpse of the Knight Rider Who Shall Come]. After teaching in the College of Fine Arts in Tehran for about one year, Golshiri received a termination notice, likely related to the Cultural Revolution following the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 during which the universities were closed.

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[11] See *Bagh dar Bagh* [Gardens within Gardens] pp.290-306, and also *Dah Shab* [Ten Nights], 1978.

On 30 March 1981 Golshiri and Farzaneh's daughter, Ghazal, was born (Taheri-Majd, 2004). Their son, Barbad, was born on 8 September 1982. Also in 1982, Golshiri initiated a new journal called *Naqd-e Agah* [Informed Criticism], which continued until 1984. Furthermore, he hosted weekly story reading and discussion sessions, which became famous as the Thursday Meetings. Some of the new generation of fiction writers, including Shahryar Mandanipur and Moniru Ravanipur, attended these meetings, which continued until 1988. In 1983, Golshiri published the collection *Jobbeh-khaneh* [The Antique Chamber]. The following year, he published a short novel titled *Hadis-e Mahigir va Div* [The Tale of the Fisherman and the Demon]. Over the following years, he continued his literary involvement, including working with a number of journals and giving talks.

Golshiri traveled to Europe in 1989, his first trip abroad after the Revolution. His trip included visits to Holland, England, and Sweden, where he published *Panj Ganj* [Five Treasures]. He also visited West Berlin in the spring of 1990 to attend a series of literary meetings, "Khaneh-ye Farhangha-ye Jahan" [The House of the Cultures of the World], also visiting other cities in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and France. This trip may have influenced his writing in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* [Mirrors with Doors], which chronicles an author's trip through Europe. The novella *Shah-e Siyah-pushan* [King of the Benighted] was published in English under the pseudonym Manuchehr Irani in 1990.

The short satirical novel *Dar Velayat-e Hava: Tafannoni dar Tanz* [In the Land of Daydreams: An Attempt at Satirical Writing] was published in Sweden in 1991.

In 1992, Golshiri traveled to the United States for the second time, including a visit to Austin, Texas, where he presented his lecture on "Dastanha-ye Mo'aser va Ma Iranian" [Modern Fiction and We Iranians], later published in *Adineh* (1992). *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* was published in 1992 in both Iran and the United States. In 1995, *Dast-e Tarik, Dast-e Roshan* [Dark Hand, Light Hand], a collection of five short stories, was published. The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance opposed publication of the story "Enfejar-e Bozorg" [Big Bang] in this collection and suggested changes to the story. As a result, Golshiri removed that story and replaced it with "Naqsh-bandan" [Sketching]. A later edition of the collection included the story "Big Bang". That same year, Golshiri published two long essays about poetry in a book of criticism called *Dar Setayesh-e She'r-e Sokut* [In Praise of the Poetry of Silence].

In 1997, Golshiri traveled to Germany again, this time under the auspices of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. On this trip he was accompanied by his family (Taheri-Majd, 2004). The Heinrich Böll Foundation had been founded that same year to promote democracy, human rights, self-determination, and justice. Golshiri was invited to spend nine months in the Heinrich Böll Haus, and he lectured and gave readings throughout Europe. He was awarded a Hellman/Hammett Grant from Human Rights Watch in the

spring of 1997. During that time, he completed his work on *Jen-Nameh* [The Book of Jinn], his last novel, which was published in 1998 in Sweden.

Golshiri returned to Iran at the end of 1997 and continued his work with the Association of Iranian Writers. He became the editor of *Karnameh*, a monthly literary journal, in 1998. In addition, he organized gatherings for literary discussion in the offices of *Karnameh*. A collection of Golshiri's essays of criticism were collected in the two volumes of *Bagh dar Bagh* [Gardens within Gardens] in 1999. That fall, Golshiri traveled to France and Germany, where he was awarded the Erich-Maria Remarque Peace Prize for his activities promoting democratic reforms and human rights in his homeland. At the beginning of the following year, he fell ill. After a protracted illness, Golshiri died in the hospital in Tehran on 5 June 2000. He was 63 years old.

After his death, the collection *Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah* [Dark Side of the Moon], a collection Golshiri had hoped to publish during his lifetime, was published (Golshiri, *Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2001). This volume includes 36 of his short stories arranged chronologically. The Golshiri Foundation has also been established and, among other activities has initiated a literature prize in Golshiri's name.

Persian Identity and Persian Literature

The pre-Islamic components of Iranian culture that underlie a unique Iranian identity and Iranianness have been emphasized by Iranian writers and scholars.

Historians such as Shahrokh Meskoob in *Iranian Nationality and the Persian Language*[12] have described the Arab invasion as a degradation of Iranian culture, a situation that induced an identity crisis. "When Iran emerged from beneath the rubble, it suddenly saw itself in an unfamiliar, alien land, finally managing after much hardship and risk to free itself" (Meskoob, 1992, p.27). The Arab conquest and subsequent imposition of Islam were often seen as difficulties or hindrances to overcome by authors of the early twentieth century such as Sadeq Hedayat (Katouzian, 2002).[13] Such authors considered the Arab invasions and particularly the imposition of Islam as primary causes of Iran's failure to keep up with Western advances and economic/technical dominance.

Iranian literati of the early twentieth century often turned to the *Shahnameh* [Book of Kings] of Ferdowsi as a touchstone for their pre-Islamic identity.[14] The *Shahnameh* is one of the great literary products to arise from this desire for a distinctly Iranian culture. It is the national epic of Iran, and portrays the myths, legends, and history of Iran and its people from the creation of the world to the invasion of Arabs and the associated introduction of Islam to Iran (Davis, 2006). Mansur Rastegar-Fasa'i, in his *Ferdowsi va Hoviyat-shenasi-ye Irani* [Ferdowsi and Iranian Identity] explores questions about Iranian identity based on the *Shahnameh*. Questions such as: Who is Iranian? How does s/he think and behave? What are the bases of Iranian identity? (Rastegar-Fasa'i, 2002, pp.

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12 This book is the English translation of Meskoob's *Melliyat va Zaban*, Paris, 1982.

13 Sadeq Hedayat (1903–1951) was a modern Persian author.

14 "The *Shahnameh* is the national epic of Iran" (Davis, 2006, p. xi). It was composed by Ferdowsi (940-1020) in 1010 of the Western calendar. More detail regarding the *Shahnameh* is provided later in this chapter.

12-13). He argues that Ferdowsi gives the reader details about non-Iranian peoples such as: Chinese, Indians, Turks, Arabs, and other nations, in the *Shahnameh*, in order for Iranian readers to discover Iranian identity by comparing themselves with others and recognizing differences and also similarities.

Much of research that has been done on this prominent book, including Rastegar-Fasa'i's has focused on nationalistic views and patriotism. The author, Ferdowsi, finished composing the *Shahnameh* four hundred years after the establishment of Islam. However, it is clear that he set about composing an intimately Iranian epic that derives from Iranian history rather than from the traditions of Islam and the Arab conquerors. The majority of critical examinations of the *Shahnameh*, especially those written prior to the Islamic revolution of 1979, convey a sense of Iranian nationalism and patriotism and venerate Ferdowsi's vision of unsullied Persian language and culture.[15] The attention the *Shahnameh* received after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, however, was much different. As Dick Davis (2006) puts it:

> Just as the politics of Ferdowsi's own time seem to have affected the reception of his work so too modern politics have played a part in defining the poet's and his poem's reputation. The Pahlavi kings who ruled Iran from 1925 until 1979 were particularly interested in

[15] For evidence to the contrary see Moinfar, Mohammad Jafar. *Le vocabulaire arabe dans le Livre des rois de Firdausi: etude philologique et de statistique linguistique*. Beitrage zur Iranistik Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970.

> emphasizing Iran's pre-Islamic past as the ultimate source of Persian civilization, and to this end they assiduously promoted the study of Ferdowsi's poem, as it takes exactly this past as its subject matter. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran the Islamic component of Persian culture has received emphatic state support, and the pre-Islamic period has been downplayed as a factor within the culture. In each case scholarship, both Western and Iranian, has tended to follow the current political fashion. Scholars writing on Iran before the revolution tended to emphasize a continuity of culture across the Islamic watershed: some recent writing tends to suggest that little of significance survived the conquest, that Iran became a wholly new cultural entity after its incorporation into the Islamic world. (p. xxxiii)

Such imposition of politics into literary criticism is not unique to Iran and Iranian literature, but the sharp political bifurcation between pre-Revolution and post-Revolution politics in Iran often makes political influences both more pronounced and more salient in discussions of modern Iranian identity. Indeed, Ahmad Ashraf (2006), in his discussion of 19th and 20th century Iranian Identity in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, structures much of his discussion of the topic around political distinctions.

Maryam Sani-Ejlal (2005) tackles the question of Iranian identity in *Daramadi bar Farhang va Hoviyyat-e Irani* [An Introduction to Iranian Culture and Identity]. She explains that in each era of Iranian history, the sanctioned, officially endorsed interpretation of Iranian identity shifted, sometimes dramatically, as each new regime was established. In Sani-Ejlal's analysis, each political turn, from the pre-Islamic era to the establishment of Islam, from the Shi'ite Safavids (1501-1722) when the official religion of the country was changed to Shi'ism to the Constitutional era (1905-1911) when the emphasis of Iranian identity was on the "nation of Iran", gives rise to a different interpretation of what it means to be Iranian. For example, she argues that during the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), the government expended a great deal of effort to revive the ancient roots of Iranian identity while ignoring or downplaying Islamic elements (p. 12).

Many consider the *Shahnameh* as a solid example to search for Iranian cultural identity whether "pure" Persian identity, Islamic identity, or both. However, with the rise of modern literature, particularly the advent of the Iranian novel, the literary examination of Iranian identity changed markedly. While the authors who adopted this new format consistently revered the *Shahnameh* as a touchstone of Iranian culture and identity, they approached the question of identity in very different fashions, often with greater emphasis on psychological or social elements than is present in any of the poetic traditions that dominated Iranian literature before the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Prominent authors of prose literature during the twentieth century such as Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh (1892-1997), Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951), Sadeq Chubak (1916-1998), and Hushang Golshiri (1938-2000) have been greatly concerned with questions of identity, particularly Iranian identity. The writings of Jamalzadeh, Hedayat, and Chubak routinely ridicule the corrupt, bankrupt pretenses of religion practiced by many putatively devout clergy. They also deride and ridicule the ignorance and superstition of the populace, often illustrating the tie between artificial, showy practice of religion and the perpetuation of ignorance and superstition. Though all of these authors point out negative effects of religion as practiced in Iran, Hedayat in particular interprets the arrival of Islam as *the* root cause of many of Iran's ills at the beginning of the twentieth century (Katouzian, 2002). Indeed, Hillmann has pointed out that Al-e Ahmad's stories, including those in *Did o Bazdid* [An Exchange of Visits], have been characterized as indicating his opinion that Shi'ite customs and superstitions contributed to the ignorance and backwardness of the Iranian nation, though his perspectives in his travel diary *Khasi dar Miqat* [Lost in the Crowd] present a more nuanced view of the nature of Shi'ite Islam's influences (1985, 1990).

Given this negative view of the influence of Islam and, by extension, of the Arab invasion, it is not surprising that many of these authors either explicitly or implicitly treasured the concept of a distinctly Iranian identity, purged of "corrupting" foreign influences. Such a common desire for a distinctly Iranian identity does not necessarily

imply that there was widespread agreement on what constituted such identity. However, in general the cultural identity of Iran, for them, is connected to the glorious past of Iran as described in the *Shahnameh.* The influence of Islam is, thus, at least implicitly to be regarded as having caused deterioration, corrosion, or diminishment of the glory of ancient Iran. The Iran before to the seventh century Arab invasion, and prior to the arrival of Islam, is a font of strength and cultural pride. The apparent degeneration of Iran when compared to the West is, therefore, a product of non-Iranian elements that should not be part of the great Iranian identity going forward. Golshiri, following these other major influences on Iranian literature, implicitly reacts to their scorn for Islam and attempts to relegate it to the scrapheap. Although he has little use for religion or its influence over the people of Iran, he accepts it as a major influence on Iranian culture and identity, and one that cannot be so easily removed. He views Iranian identity as akin to a stream running from the past, the pre-Islamic past in this case, to the present. In other words, "the idea of cultural identity implies a continuity between the past and the present" (Hanaway, 1993).

The first major work of Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh was *Yeki Bud Yeki Nabud* [Once upon a Time], published in 1921. It is a collection of six short stories that deals with the social and political conditions in Iran at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Until Jamalzadeh, such interest in contemporary social and political issues had been largely outside the purview of literary writing. Iranian cultural

identity is one of the issues that Jamalzadeh emphasizes in this collection. Jamalzadeh also mixes in a significant dose of anti-religious sentiment and often employs open mockery of religious fanaticism. In his works Jamalzadeh clearly intends to preserve the Persian language, particularly the informal, colloquial language of ordinary people (Jamalzadeh, 1954; Parsinejad, 2002). He emphasizes the duties of Iranian writers, especially the younger writers, as the protectors of the Persian language because the language will be the only thing that will remain for Iranians. Jamalzadeh strongly believed in the Persian language as the foundation of Iranian identity (Jamalzadeh, "Dibacheh", the introduction to *Once Upon a Time*, 1954). The first story of *Once Upon a Time* collection, "Farsi Shekar Ast" [Persian Is Sugar], is a satiric story in which, as the title makes apparent, the Persian language is the focus. Jamalzadeh makes mockery of three people who are observed by the narrator, an Iranian who just returned to Iran after living abroad – one who is wearing western style clothing, another who is a cleric and is dressed in a long cloak in a religious style, and the third one who is a young villager who works in a teahouse. The story circles around the young man and his conversations with the others. Although all of them are Iranian and speak Persian, the man in western style clothing uses a lot of French words and the cleric uses a lot of Arabic words. Their manner of speaking renders them incomprehensible to the young man, and he does not comprehend what they say, thinking that they must be foreigners. The point that Jamalzadeh makes here is that the Persian language is and will remain an intimate part of

Iranian identity if a distinct Iranian identity is to remain at all. The importance of language for identity coherence is apparent in many Iranian communities outside Iran where the Persian language forms a primary, perhaps the most significant and immediately salient, bond connecting these transplanted, diasporic people to each other.

Jamalzadeh considered Islam to be a largely negative element, serving to detract from rather than add to a uniquely valuable Iranian identity. In addition to his efforts to preserve the language, Jamalzadeh makes fun of superficial and superstitiously religious people. In *Sahra-ye Mahshar* [Armageddon], published in 1947, he openly makes fun of Islam and the religious authority of his time (Mehrin, 1963). Jamalzadeh lived most of his life outside Iran, and for this he has been criticized by some literary critics such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1961) who disapproved of him for choosing not to return to Iran where he could have been more fruitful (Dastgheyb, 1977).[16]

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16 Jamal Mirsadeqi notes that of Jamalzadeh's prose characteristics, one that stands out is his use of simple language. He gives examples from *Persian is Sugar*. He explains that the text is written in a very simple language and the writer tried to write the way people speak. However the language of Jamalzadeh in *Once Upon a Time* had not yet reached maturity and was still significantly influenced by previous writers' styles. Also, another characteristic is usage of vocabulary and idioms and sayings which ordinary folk use as part of their daily language. However, too much usage of idioms and sayings may cause ambiguity and misunderstanding of the text for those who are not familiar with such vocabulary (*Daftar-e Honar*, year 1 #1). Other critics such as Abdol'ali Dastgheyb have more negative critiques than positive. For example, in his *Naqd-e Asar-e Jamalzadeh* (1977), Dastgheyb starts with a letter by Al-e Ahmad to Jamalzadeh. This letter is full of negative comments and anger towards Jamalzadeh as a person and for his writings (pp. 5-13). These critics often focus on Jamalzadeh's works which were written abroad. Most such critics note the fact that Jamalzadeh rarely visited his home country though he continued to write about it, pointing out that Jamalzadeh's depictions of Iran remained stuck at the turn of the century. Other critics like Mohammad Ali Sepanlu are more positive. Sepanlu in *Nevisandehgan-e Pishro-ye Iran* (1986), in addition to emphasizing the status of *Once Upon a Time* as the first innovative work in modern Persian prose, says that he believes that this book belongs in between two literary periods: the Constitutional writing from the early 20th century and the modern writing that ultimately followed.

Another prominent Iranian author, Sadeq Hedayat, is famous for his biting and morbid satire. His stories cross a wide range of styles and convey a broad spectrum of messages, from the political to the social to the psychological (Katouzian, 2002). Katouzian argues that Hedayat's language is based on Jamalzedeh's prose, but contains less Arabic derived vocabulary than even Jamalzadeh (unless required for depicting a character accurately). Nationalism was a prominent characteristic of much literature during Hedayat's early years, and many authors, including Hedayat, wrote works satirizing the backwardness and stupidity of traditional religious doctrine and rejected "foreign influences". Foreign often meant "Arab" for these nationalistic authors, though Western dominance was also an issue. In his most famous book, *The Blind Owl* [The Blind Owl], first published in 1937, he openly criticizes the religious, which means Islamic, manners and rituals that he perceives as dominating Iranian society. Hedayat desired a uniquely Iranian nation and Iranian identity that he believed such foreign influences only served to attenuate or suppress. This element of anti-Arab, anti-religious sentiment in *The Blind Owl* has been widely noted by scholars. For example:

> The language of the text speaks against Arabic language and portrays the protagonist as an antireligious intellectual who is made to suffer by traditional and Islamic culture.... H[e]dayat scrutinizes the superstitious aspects of the traditional and religious beliefs that the protagonist encounters everywhere he turns.... By slandering the

> religious beliefs, rituals, and leaders that are often referred to in Arabic, H[e]dayat reinforces a Persianist dichotomy between pious culture and Persian culture. (Talattof, 2000, pp. 59-60)

Hedayat also pursued serious research on the folklore of Iran and studied ancient Iranian languages, helping to underscore the importance of folk language and folk imagery for future writers (Dastgheyb, 1978). Scholars have pointed out the influence that Hedayat's research and writing on folk tales and language have had with respect to the preservation of unique elements of Iranian culture. Hedayat, himself, seems to have believed in the importance of preserving folk language and imagery as a way of sustaining the foundations of a living, flourishing Iranian cultural system. All of these efforts triangulate on his desire to define and promote and Iranian identity tied to the glory of pre-Islamic Iranian society rather than to the cultural detritus of foreign powers.

As with Jamalzadeh, Hedayat also focused on cultural and religious aspects of identity and their impact on his vision of Iranian identity. In *Al-Be'that al-Islamiyya Ella al-Belad al-Afranjiyya* [An Islamic Mission in the European Lands], Hedayat overtly ridicules some of the practices of Islam and religious authority. This story tells the tale of representatives from Islamic nations who are invited to Samera in Arabia to discuss sending an ambassadorial mission to spread Islam to the world. As Talattof explains in *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, Hedayat's mocking, ridiculing uses of Arabic words

(derived from Persian words) in this story, and his use of deliberately "Arabized" forms of words produces "a sense of convolution and a comical sound to a Persian ear" (p. 61). In Hedayat's view, Iran could be as progressive and prosperous as Western countries if there had been no Arab invasion and if Islam had not been introduced to Iran.[17, 18] Although there are significant religious elements in *The Blind Owl*, the narrator is seeking his identity more broadly. The religious component is a piece of the puzzle, but identity confusion is the focus. "No matter how the story is read, however, it is clear that Hedayat portrays a man and a society that have both lost their identities" (Talattof, 2000, p. 59).

Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* has had particularly significant influence on Persian literature. This book is written in a surrealistic style and deals with fundamental questions of human existence and identity, but from a distinctly early 20th century Iranian perspective. *The Blind Owl* is often characterized as social criticism, though Hedayat's critical realistic works are more appropriate to this typology. Hedayat's story, which some scholars think is autobiographical,[19] has a very strong Iranian cultural identity

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17 Though many of Hedayat's works are considered realistic, he tended toward romantic attitudes, drawn to death and fascinated by past glories. He was also drawn to social and ethical concerns and wrote many short stories examining the themes of justice, trust, change, and determinism.

18 This lack of development could be applied to literature, as well. The *Encyclopædia Iranica* article on fiction by de Bruijn argues that "in the literatures of the Muslims in general, a tendency may be noticed to disapprove of fiction if it could not be linked to what was considered to be historical fact, which of course included sacred traditions like the stories told in the Koran, the lives of prophets and Sufi saints, and legendary accounts of ancient history. In classical Arabic literature this led to the virtual exclusion of the narrative, although the Arabs did produce a rich novelistic literature of a semi-popular kind. In Persia, on the other hand, narration has always been fully accepted as a form of polite literature."

19 See for example Michael Hillmann "Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*: an autobiographical nightmare" in *Iranshenasi*, vol. 1, no.1, 1989; and Hasan Kamshad, "Hysterical Self-Analysis" in *Modern Persian*

theme. However, Hedayat's focus on psychological elements of identity and use of somewhat existential themes make the work accessible beyond an exclusively Iranian context. "[The Blind Owl] is an authentic reflection of Hedayat's own innermost thoughts and psychology; [and it is] universal, because it addresses issues which are by no means exclusively Iranian in nature" (Katouzian, 2002, p. 158)." The narrator often talks about his own existence and views others in comparison to his own being.

> My one fear is that tomorrow I may die without having come to know myself. In the course of my life I have discovered that a fearful abyss lies between me and other people and have realized that my best course is to remain silent and keep my thoughts to my self for as long as I can. (Costello, 1957, p.2)

He is in search of his own identity by being in dialogue with himself. "[The Blind Owl] is a conversation with the inner self. It is introspection. It is a deep search in recollection" (Al-e Ahmad, 1978). Hedayat's work, in general, had a profound impact on Persian literature, particularly on Sadeq Chubak another major Iranian author.

Sadeq Chubak (1916-1998) is another Iranian writer who holds a prominent position in the pantheon of modern Iranian literature. His stories often deal with characters from different socio-economic classes. He followed Hedayat's lead in

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Prose Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1996, and M. Hillmann (ed.), *Hedayat "The Blind Owl", Forty Years After*, 1978.

focusing on the position of people in society and made extensive use of colloquial language and slang in his writings. As Ghanoonparvar in *Reading Chubak* (2005) puts it:

> Sadeq Chubak, made his literary debut with a collection of short stories, *Kheymehshabbazi* [Puppet Show] (1945), which focuses mainly on various aspects of the lives of individuals from the lowest classes of society. With his choice of characters and his use of colloquial speech, he was recognized as an artist following in the traditions of Jamalzadeh and Hedayat. However, most critics did not fail to recognize in Chubak an original artist and a careful craftsman, specifically noting his carefully drawn sketches of Iranian life and his success at transliterating the colloquial language of his characters. (Ghanoonparvar, 2005, p. 10)

Chubak's attention to linguistic detail shows the importance of language usage and specific linguistic elements on the identities of these characters. Though Chubak was focused on the craft of writing and literary expression, his stories provide details that indicate a linguistic root of identity and class identification, even among members of the same society who ostensibly speak the "same" language.

Chubak's style allowed him to present his social realism stories with such skill that he was able "to 'show' rather than to 'tell' a story" (Ghanoonparvar, 2005, p. 119).

Chubak was bothered by social injustice, and many of his works reflect this concern. The social injustice was caused by the political and religious authorities. His works depict the poverty and injustice that he felt were caused by religious pressures. He also showed strong interest in power relationships, paying special attention to the circumstances of those members of society whom he felt were oppressed by the dominant social/political order. This selection of subjects is intimately bound up with what some have called "Chubak's grim worldview" (Ghanoonparvar, 2005, p. 16). Chubak's interest in identity is prominent in all of his stories, whether political (anti-colonial) novels such as *Tangsir* in 1963 or 1966's *Sang-e Sabur* [The Patient Stone], a novel through which he represents the identities of the characters by showing their places in a society that lacks religion, or at least genuine religion. In his famous novel *The Patient Stone*, he selects his characters from the lowest classes and constructs detailed psychological studies of them. Each character is in search of his identity. The reader becomes familiar with each character and discovers the roles that the characters play in relation to each other and to the society as whole.

A particularly salient section of *The Patient Stone* deals with the story of the school teacher Ahmad Aqa, who has an "imaginary journey" through the history of mankind to discover the meaning of creation (Ghanoonparvar, 1984). It seems he goes through almost all of the periods of the history of mankind by way of Iranian history, but what Chubak wants to convey is not only Iranian but also universal – that the character,

who is in search of his own being and existence, is not merely Iranian, but rather a representative of all human beings who are in search of their identity. Chubak includes selections from the *Shahnameh* in *The Patient Stone*. Scholars (e.g., Reza Baraheni in *Qesseh Nevisi*, 3rd edition, 1983, p. 708) have argued that the inclusion of these selections shows that Chubak, in addition to searching for something universal, was seeking to discover an identity that is uniquely Iranian or to present his own view of Iranianness.

Hushang Golshiri analyzes Chubak's *The Patient Stone* in his collection of literary criticism *Gardens within Gardens* (1999, pp. 238-252). He argues that the novel has both strengths and weaknesses such that some critics may call it a masterpiece and others say the opposite. He wrote that Chubak has tried to create a novel based on Freudian thought: the Oedipus complex and the three parts of the human psyche, ego, super ego, and id (Golshiri, 1999, p. 248). Whether the critics think the novel has many weaknesses or strengths, the characters are all searching for their identity and the meaning of their being and existence.

Another novel that analyzes Iranian identity, with particular emphasis on expatriate identity, is Esmail Fassih's *Sorayya dar Eqma* [Sorayya in a Coma].[20] This story, published in 1984, is presented over the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war, the United States hostage crisis, and other significant events. The current action of the story takes

[20] The translation of this book appears in the bibliography as *Sorraya in a Coma* since it was published with that spelling. The Persian, however, includes a double y (*tashdid* over the "y"). *Encyclopædia Iranica* lists the book as *Sorayya in a Coma*.

place in Paris where a group of Iranian intellectuals drink and otherwise drug themselves into oblivion while pretending to engage in serious artistic endeavors as the titular Sorayya, the narrator's niece, drifts ever deeper into a coma caused by a road accident. Sorayya seems to be a representation of Iran, and all of the characters are concerned about her, yet none has any influence or ability to help her. As in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, the narrator relates more distant past events through flashbacks, reflecting on his time in Abadan during the Iraqi attacks on the city. In the present of the story he observes the antics of the satirically represented intelligentsia expatriates in Paris.

Another prominent author of the 1950s and 1960s in Iran, Gholamhoseyn Sa'edi, wrote several stories about the villages of his homeland in northwestern Iran. His attention to the issues confronting the peoples of Azerbaijan cast him as a representative of those intelligentsia identified by Ashraf who saw Iranian identity through a multi-national and multi-cultural lens (Ashraf, 2006). His works, though they were often set in pastoral locales, depicted poverty, superstition, insanity, horror, and death (Mir'abedini, 1989). Many Iranian intellectuals during Sa'edi's time were suspicious of Western political and cultural influence though they wished to appropriate Western intellectual practices (Hillmann, 1982). Alavi (1982) argues that the three strangers who appear in Sa'edi's "Gav" [The Cow], and who are suspected of stealing, represent foreign exploitation of Iran and its citizens. The story tells of a villager who goes insane after the loss of his beloved cow, which was also his primary source of livelihood and prestige in

the village. He believes that he has literally become his cow and behaves as a cow until his death. Perhaps, following Alavi's reading of the story, the villager represents Iranians, who have themselves become resources for the exploitation of Western imperialists.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON GOLSHIRI

There is a small but growing body of literature examining Golshiri's literary production. Authors have investigated different aspects of Golshiri's craft, from his attention to social and political circumstances and his attention to the impact of Islam on Iranian society, to his passion for the craft of writing itself. Although identity concerns are present within and depend upon many of these domains of examination, few prior studies have examined Golshiri's treatment of identity in explicit detail.

Investigations of political influences on Golshiri's work often separate his works into those written under Pahlavi rule and those written under the post-Revolutionary Islamic Republic after 1979. Golshiri's writings prior to the Revolution are the subject of Rita Offer's dissertation (1983). This examination focuses significant attention on the issue of ideology and censorship and Golshiri's reactions to such issues in his literary endeavors, whether through fiction writing or through the organization of groups or publications that shared his literary interest. Ghanoonparvar examined the relationship between Golshiri's writing and post-revolutionary Iran in his article "Hushang Golshiri

and Post-Pahlavi Concerns of the Iranian Writer of Fiction" (Ghanoonparvar, 1985). In this article, Ghanoonparvar notes that Golshiri's topics are often social or political in character, and also notes that the authorities of both the Shah's regime prior to 1979 and of the Islamic Republic after the Revolution considered Golshiri to be politically activist as indicated by their harassment and occasional imprisonment of him. Farrokh (2008) agrees, arguing that Golshiri was a sharp critic of political and social circumstances in Iran, whether under Pahlavi rule or in the Islamic Republic.

Ghanoonparvar also points out the political implications of Golshiri's "Fathnameh-ye Moghan" [The Victory Chronicle of the Magi] in his translator's note (Golshiri and Ghanoonparvar, 1997). Movahed (2000) argues that Golshiri's association with political groups was only in service of his interest in freedom of expression, and that he distanced himself from groups whenever they diverged from the broader positions he espoused. However, some examinations of Golshiri's writings point out a sense of pessimism regarding political activism. As Nasrin Rahimieh writes of one of Golshiri's narrators that "He sees no point in writing about death, denouncing regimes, and spurring others to political action" (in Abbas Milani's translation of *King of the Benighted*, 1990, pp. 8-9). Khorrami treats the political aspects of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* in some detail, even taking an identity stance as he argues the importance of a "God-Satan dualism" in identity determination in the novel (Khorrami, 2003). This is a slightly different take on

dualism of identity than the dualism that is often attributed to exiles, though Khorrami also ties in exilic sentiments by tying them to the satanic or oppositional influence.

Despite Golshiri's strong interest in social and political oppression and the recurring role such themes play in his writing, he was not a stereotypical political activist. He was not a member of any political party, nor was he a revolutionary writer seeking the overthrow of the government. He was, rather, a staunch proponent of human rights in all circumstances and situations and a steadfast opponent of censorship and restrictions of freedom of thought and expression (Farrokh, 2008).

Islam has also been examined as an important element of Golshiri's writing. Rita Offer in her dissertation examines Golshiri's particular interest in the impact of Islam on Iranian society. For example, her reading of the "Innocent" stories (especially "Ma'sum-e Avval" [The Innocent I], "Ma'sum-e Dovvom" [The Innocent II], and "Ma'sum-e Sevvom" [The Innocent III]) reflects on the Islamic traditions that these stories draw upon and interprets the import of the stories through the lens of Islamic religious thought and belief. Ghanoonparvar (1985) points out that Iranian writers have long struggled with the twin "demons" of political repression and religious repression. Milani, perhaps deliberately, echoes this assessment indirectly through his quote from Kafka:

> "He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants

> to push him forward, and in the same way, the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment – and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet – will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other. Kafka
>
> (Milani, 2003, p. 91)

Although Milani does not explicitly identify the "two antagonists" that this quote might refer to in Golshiri's writing, the entities proposed by Ghanoonparvar are likely contenders and certainly the phenomena surrounding their conflict fit the quote exceptionally well. Milani specifically refers to Islam as one of the causes of an Iranian identity crisis in Golshiri's eyes, referencing the religious elements in Golshiri's novels *Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i* [The Lost Lamb of Ra'i] and *Ma'sum-e Panjom* [The Fifth Innocent] (2004, p. 127). The distinction between these two "demons" became much less stark and much more problematic for writers playing one off against the other with the

Iranian Revolution and the advent of the Islamic Republic combining religious and political authority into a single entity.

Golshiri's fundamental concern with the craft of writing is also a significant focus of prior scholarship on his literary works. As one of the first Iranian writers to experiment with Western literary techniques in conjunction with elements from Iranian literary history in the establishment of his own unique style (cf. Milani, 1990), Golshiri holds an important place in Iranian literary history. Scholars have recognized the importance of literary technique in Golshiri's works and for Golshiri himself. For example, though Khorrami devotes considerable attention to his conception of the essentially political dualism in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, he also recognizes the importance of Golshiri's literary technique. He argues that "the form and the overall structure of the novel is such that it complicates and problemizes [sic] the fixed identities and realities" (Khorrami, 2003, p. 96). Asghari (2000) points out that Golshiri makes extensive use of internal monologue as a technique for conveying the thoughts and ideas of characters. This technique often makes reading a more difficult challenge since thoughts do not often follow the linear, focused channels that written arguments often follow. Hoseyni and Rafu'i contend that in Golshiri's work "the style of writing has a direct connection with the content and meaning of the story" (2001, p. 37). Thus, Golshiri used his craft in order to most effectively convey the stories he wished to convey. Indeed, Mir'abedini (2001) contends that *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is largely autobiographical, and that Golshiri uses his

literary craft as a mechanism for revealing elements of his private life through the story. Ameri (2003) argues that Golshiri deals with identity in many of his stories, and he contends that *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is primarily focused on identity. He makes a case that the writer/narrator in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is seeking to understand his own identity, his "inner world", by examining the "outer world" in which he is traveling. Ameri points out the importance of Golshiri's technique in putting together a composite picture composed of myriad smaller pieces in order to convey the complexities of identity for his narrator, an Iranian traveling through Europe meeting with many friends and former colleagues among other Iranian expatriates.

Ghanoonparvar (1985) makes the point forcefully regarding the primacy of literary concerns for Golshiri. He maintains that Golshiri's published comments indicate a strong opinion that writers should be concerned with literary processes first and foremost. Although he also acknowledges the significant import of Islamic thought and belief in Iranian literature, particularly literature produced since the founding of the Islamic Republic, Ghanoonparvar contends that Golshiri's primary focus was always on the craft of writing itself. Dabashi agrees, saying that "Golshiri has been particularly meticulous about the aesthetics of his language" (1985, p. 148) while also arguing that Golshiri was among those producing literature "deeply rooted in the tumultuous soil of its social and cultural reality" (p. 172). Milani echoes this argument in his chapter "Houshang Golshiri: The Janus Face of Tradition," arguing that Golshiri "was more than

anything else a writer" (2004, p. 126). Milani points to Golshiri's talk at the "Ten Nights of Poetry" on the eve of the Iranian Revolution as an example of this primacy of things literary for Golshiri. In that talk Golshiri did not give a rousing politically themed speech as other speakers did, but rather spoke of the sad state of fiction in Iran, where all too many authors die before their time.

Movahed (2000) makes a similar point, maintaining that literature was the critical focus on Golshiri's writing, rather than politics. Politics was a tool he used in creating literature rather than literature being a tool for politics. Although some readers took *Shazdeh Ehtejab* as political statement, Taheri and Azimi report that Golshiri reported in one of his lectures that rather than writing to show how tyrannical the Qajars were (or governments in general often are), "I write in order to say how I think, meaning writing is a tool for discovery, not a tool for testimonial on what exists" (2001, p. 19). The importance of language for Golshiri is also discussed by Diana Darab in her dissertation research, which argues that Golshiri, like Faulkner, mistrusted language and focused on the development of new linguistic systems with which to represent experience (Darab, 1994). Pari Shirazi (2001) also notes the importance of literary references in Golshiri's work in her analysis of his film script *Davazdah Rokh* [Twelve Champions],[21] particularly his use of references to the *Shahnameh*.

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[21] Shirazi (2001) translates "rokh" as "warriors" but here Davis's (2006) translation "champions" has been used.

Given the impact of social and political circumstances on the broader human condition, it is not surprising to find that such issues are reflected in Golshiri's writing. However, despite the harassment indicating that the government considered Golshiri to be an activist writer, and despite the fact that many of Golshiri's stories present commentaries on social and political circumstances, Ghanoonparvar (1985) points out that Golshiri's most powerful stories impart a broad perspective on people and on human life. Golshiri's primary focus was on the use of words as a tool for the discovery of "self" or of identity according to Mir'abedini (2001). For example, he points to Golshiri's story "Shab-e Shak" [Night of Suspicion] (1967) in which several characters give their different perspectives on Mr. Salavati (Mir'abedini, 1989, 2001). Mir'abedini argues that these characters find their own identities through their examinations of Mr. Salavati, finding similarities with him rather than the differences they focused on initially.

Golshiri's writing is often noted for its convoluted and complex construction. Mandanipur (2001) contends that Golshiri's writing is difficult primarily for those unfamiliar with the literary techniques he uses, particularly internal monologue and stream of consciousness. Golshiri's characters are not direct channels of information to the reader, and the writer is not directly present in many of his stories. Rather, the reader must reconstruct events by piecing together what is important enough to emerge from the thoughts of the various characters. Given Golshiri's position as one of the first Iranian

authors to experiment with Western literary techniques, it is not surprising that his audience was initially unfamiliar with such literary devices and found reading works that utilized them to be complex and difficult to read. Sanapur (2001) points out that Golshiri's works are essentially literary mosaics in which myriad small details are presented as fragments of a broader story.[22] It is up to the reader to combine these into a coherent picture. Thus, such mechanisms enhance the reader's perception of reality as fragmentary and subject to/demanding of (re)construction by the observer.

While Golshiri's use of literary technique makes his works harder for many readers to approach, such focus on technique allows Golshiri to delve beyond surface retelling of events salient to a specific place and time. Thus, Golshiri's stories are not limited to holding a mirror up to present social or political situations, but maintain a much broader appeal. This appeal crosses times and even cultures, but as Golshiri himself stated, his stories were not written for everyone, but rather for a specific audience – for those willing to invest the time and effort to unraveling his complex and often convoluted tales.

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[22] For Golshiri's own perspective on the mosaic-like character of much of his writing and also the concept of a story within a story, see Golshiri's discussion "Ru dar Ru-ye *Ayenahha-ye Dardar*" [Face to Face with *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*] in *Bagh dar Bagh (Majmu'eh-ye Maqalat)*, Vol. II, Tehran: Entesharat-e Nilufar, Summer 2001: 801-852.

AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF GOLSHIRI'S WORK

Novels and stand-alone publications

Golshiri published nine novels of varying length. His longest novel, *Jen-Nameh*, was published in 1998 toward the end of his life. Three of his works, *Hadis-e Mahigir va Div*, *Ma'sum-e Panjom ya Hadis-e Mordeh bar Dar Kardan-e An Savar ke Khahad Amad*, and *Shah-e Siyah-pushan*, are quite short at fewer than 100 pages each, but they were published as stand-alone stories rather than as portions of short-story collections, therefore they are included here with Golshiri's novel-length stand-alone works.

Shazdeh Ehtejab [Prince Ehtejab]

Prince Ehtejab, published in 1969, was Golshiri's first novel and brought him significant fame. Prince Ehtejab, the central character of the story, is the last surviving descendant of an aristocratic Qajar family.[23] He is largely impotent, has no heirs, and has sold off many of his possessions including furniture. He is sitting in a chair suffering from tuberculosis, which he refers to as the hereditary fever of his family, and thinking about the past four generations of the family history. The entire story takes place during his final night of life, prior to his death at the dawning of the following morning. Piece by piece and apparently at random, he remembers events from his family's past. Some of

[23] The Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from 1794 to 1925.

these events happened to him personally and some a gleaned from books and photo albums. The prince is searching for his identity throughout the story through different characters, especially his wife, Fakhronnesa. The primary technique Golshiri uses in this story is internal monologue from the perspective of the Prince, following his stream of consciousness. Many of the characters who appear in the story are long dead and many of the events in the story take place in the memories of the Prince. A film was made based on *Prince Ehtejab*. The scenes in the film made the storyline more comprehensible to many readers who had difficulty following the story when reading the book. As a result of the increased comprehensibility of the storyline, more people became interested in (re-)reading the book after watching the film (Buffington, 1976).

***Keristin va Kid* [Christine and Kid]**

Christine and Kid consists of seven integrated short stories: "Little Doll," "A Game of Chess," "A Woman with My Eyes," "Christine and Kid," "In the Center of a Ball of Faceted Mirrors," "Honeymoon for the Kid," and "The Seventh." It tells the story of a love affaire between a single young man from Isfahan and a married woman from England. Although there are cultural differences and a substantial, though incomplete language barrier between the two, these obstacles do not prevent a significant attraction from developing. However, the woman is married and has children, effectively preventing any continuing relationship. Eventually, the woman returns to England and

the couple separate. The story is written from the perspective of the young man after the woman has returned to England.

In an interview Golshiri said of the time when he was writing *Christine and Kid*:

> But… in *Christine and Kid* I was writing to see what I was doing? And through this writing I discovered that I was in love. … I was writing to find out what I should do and what I was doing? In fact, then, writing in this period for me was in order to know myself. (Akreh'i, 1993)

This interview comment indicates that the book is largely autobiographical, as does the dedication to Barbara, who was an English woman with whom Golshiri spent three years in a relationship according to Golshiri's wife (Taheri-Majd, 2004, p. 21).

***Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i* [The Lost Lamb of Ra'i]**

The protagonist of the story, Mr. Ra'i, is a high school teacher. He is a middle-aged single man and is also a writer, one of the many Golshiri protagonists with literary ambitions. Golshiri's interest in the impact of language on human activities is evident in this story. One of the stylistic choices made by Golshiri in this work is that the type of language used to tell the story changes when Mr. Ra'i thinks or talks about different things. For example, when Mr. Ra'i talks about classical or medieval literature, the language he uses shifts to mimic medieval or classical Persian phrasing and vocabulary.

His thoughts seem to be shaped by the language in which the materials he teaches were written. This use of two distinct writing styles, one using archaic style with extensive Arabic loan words and the other using more modern, spare, "realistic" language, implies a tension between old, tradition bound society and a "modern," much more liberal (Western) approach to life. Despite this tension, both styles coexist, and Golshiri moves between them fluidly.

Another interesting aspect of this story is Golshiri's treatment of the wife of one of Mr. Ra'i's colleagues. The colleague, an art teacher at the same school, was unable to draw his wife as a whole; he could only sketch her piece by piece. This piecemeal representation of the woman in art resembles the literary treatment of the narrator's former sweetheart in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, which is discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation. In addition, each of the three significant male characters in the story is presented as perceiving the absent woman from different angles, each seeing different aspects of her and none seeing the whole.

The title page of the novel lists it as the "first volume", but Golshiri never produced a second volume.

Ma'sum-e Panjom ya Hadis-e Mordeh bar Dar Kardan-e An Savar ke Khahad Amad **[The Fifth Innocent or the Tale of the Hanging of the Corpse of the Knight Rider Who Shall Come]**

This book tells the story of people in a city waiting for someone who will come to save them (a messiah). Every morning the people take a horse to the city gates so that the messiah may ride when he comes, and in the evening when he doesn't appear they return the horse to the stables. Each year they stone the horse to death and distribute its meat as charity. At the same time, the government of the city have a wanted poster seeking anyone who looks like the messiah figure, and when any such person is caught, they have him beheaded along with anyone caught admiring the picture on the poster. The heads of all of these executed people are placed on the walls of the city. Eventually, the authorities hang a dead rider who was mounted on a live horse. Finally, the sultan of the area captures a horse that escapes its stoning. He determines to play the messiah and rides the horse into the crowd where he and the horse are both stoned to death.

In this story, Golshiri uses prose based on classical Persian literature, such as that used in Sa'di's *Golestan*, Rumi's *Masnavi*, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Nezami's *Haft Peykar*, Beyhaqi's *Tarikh-e Beyhaqi*, or Attar's *Tazkerat al-Oliya*.[24] Adopting characters from such works, Golshiri gives this story a style that suits the telling of a story of a messiah-like character who shall come and save the world. Although the writing style is

[24] Persian classical literary figures: Sa'di (c.1215-c.1290), Rumi (1207-1273), Ferdowsi (c.940-c.1020), Nezami (1141-1209), Beyhaqi (995-1077), Attar (c.1145-1221). See also *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

similar to the medieval prose, and is based on legendary or mythical beliefs, the story suggests a response to events contemporaneous with its publication in 1980. The book was written during the time of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the tale evokes the zeitgeist of the period leading up to the Revolution, when the country was in turmoil. Despite the archaic language, the story does not have a definite timeframe, instead alluding to a timeless message that the past remains visible in modern world.

Hadis-e Mahigir va Div [The Tale of the Fisherman and the Demon]

This story is modeled after an old tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*. The story is usually interpreted as socio-political allegory. Golshiri opens the story with the original tale, and his story employs a very similar style, thereby matching the prose style with the content of the story. Golshiri's story differs from the original after the fisherman retrieves the jar in which the jinni is imprisoned. Unlike the fisherman in the original tale, Golshiri's fisherman declines the jinni's offers. For example, he refuses the offer of unlimited fish because that would cause his neighbors to starve. He throws the jar back into the sea saying that he is a simple man with simple needs and is happy with just a single fish each day.

Dar Velayat-e Hava: Tafannoni dar Tanz **[In the Land of Daydreams: An Attempt at Satirical Writing]**

An old man, Mirza Yadollah summons a jinni, Ja'far, to grant his wishes. The summoning takes 40 days and 40 nights of extensive preparation and sacrifice. The jinni is invisible to everyone except for Yadollah and children who can see his wide-brimmed hat, big belly, hooves, tail, round glasses, and goatee. Ja'far also has a speech impediment, so he ends up calling himself Za'far. Unlike most old jinni tales, this story involves extensive conversation between Mirza Yadollah and Ja'far, and Ja'far even brings his family to introduce them to Yadollah. In fact, the jinni goes to work with Yadollah and they play backgammon together, and Ja'far does not do the things or grant the wishes or give the gifts that jinn are wont to do in stories.

Ayenehha-ye Dardar **[Mirrors with Doors]**

Ebrahim, the protagonist/narrator who is telling the story in third person, is a writer. He is writing the story of his travels to several different cities throughout Europe. While seeking a handle on his identity and his responsibilities as a writer, he remembers the past from his childhood until the present. In his trip to Europe he meets with his childhood sweetheart, Sanam. Sanam married another man, and now, after a divorce, she lives alone in Paris. After Ebrahim and Sanam meet in Paris, the story continues with a long conversation or series of interconnected conversations between them about cultural, historical, linguistic, and interpersonal issues. Sanam tries to convince Ebrahim to stay in

Europe, while Ebrahim is debating what he should do given his identity as a writer. This story is analyzed in detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Jen-Nameh [The Book of Jinn]

The story starts with the narrator, Hoseyn, the second son of the family, explaining the family's situation when they lived in Abadan. His father, a blue collar worker, was laid off from the oil company. The family was poor, and they eventually moved back to their home town of Isfahan. In this novel, Hoseyn claims that he writes in significant detail in order to preserve history. Golshiri seems to be doing much the same thing, presenting details about myriad facets of life from the architecture of the cities to the practices of old professions such as the process of fabric dyeing. The story involves the two cities of Abadan and Isfahan, though the majority of the action occurs in Isfahan. These cities represent a stark contrast. Abadan is modern, rectilinear, and Western in character, whereas Isfahan is ancient, serpentine, and thoroughly Middle Eastern. This contrast between old and new, Western and Iranian, modern and traditional is a recurring theme in the novel.

In Writing *Jen-Nameh*, Golshiri was influenced by his mother's stories and memoirs. His mother was one of the most influential people in his life. According to his mother, when Golshiri was writing on Isfahan's local games and folk songs he would take notes about whatever his mother would say about these local folk customs. He used to sit next to his mother and ask her to talk about anything she liked, and he would take

notes. One element of his writing style, that of the story within a story, may come in part from the way his mother told of her memories (Taheri-Majd, 2004).

Shah-e Siyah-pushan [King of the Benighted]

The protagonist of this story, a poet, is arrested and taken to jail. While in jail, he meets several other political prisoners including a young man named Sarmad. Sarmad claims that he is in prison because he killed several Revolutionary Guards. Now he is forced to clean up after executions at the prison, including administering coup-de-grace to other prisoners in order to avoid his own execution. The majority of the story is in the form of conversations between the poet and Sarmad.

Shah-e Siyah-pushan has been translated into English as *King of the Benighted*, which was published in 1990 before the publication of the Persian version, published postmortem in 2001. The English translation begins with a prologue titled "The Black Dome," which is one of the sections of a longer poem by the Persian poet Nezami.[25] The poem tells the stories of the visits of Bahram, the King of Iran, to the seven princesses from seven different regions of the world. The seven beauties "represent the climes into which the habitable world is divided and are lodged in separate symbolically colored palaces, beginning with the black and ending with the white" (Milani, 1990, p.11). Milani includes the Black Dome as a prologue in order to set the stage for the non-Iranian

[25] For more information on Nezami's *Haft Peykar* see the *Encyclopedia Iranica* article "Haft Peykar" by François de Blois (2002).

reader who may not be familiar with the poem, which is referred to repeatedly throughout Golshiri's story. The prologue tells the story of the King's first night. The Persian version does not have a prologue, instead opening directly with Golshiri's story *Shah-e Siyah-pushan*.

Collection of Short Stories

Mesl-e Hamisheh [As Always]

This volume, Golshiri's first collection of short stories, was initially published in 1968 and includes seven short stories written between 1967 and 1968. The stories in the collection are: "Shab-e Shak", "Mesl-e Hamisheh", "Dakhmeh-i baraye Samur-e Abi", "Ayadat", "Posht-e Saqehha-ye Nazok-e Tejir", "Yek Dastan-e Khub-e Ejtema'i", and "Mardi ba Keravat-e Sorkh". Golshiri's interest in social and political themes is already evident in many of these stories, as is his experimentation with literary techniques and language, including the use of multiple viewpoints within stories and different linguistic modes.

The short story from which the title of this collection is taken, "Mesl-e Hamisheh" [As Always], first published in 1967, is about life and death. The story examines how an old man, a neighbor of the writer who is the primary protagonist of the story, deals with the death of his son. The old man is trying to hide the death of their son from his wife, telling her that their son is living in another city and even forging letters. The woman

notices that something is wrong, for example asking why her son never sends recent pictures. Two stories from this collection, "Yek Dastan-e Khub-e Ejtema'i" [A Good Social Story] and "Mardi ba Keravat-e Sorkh" [A Man with a Red Tie] are analyzed in detail in Chapter Two.

Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man [My Little Prayer Room]

This collection was published first in 1975 and contains nine short stories. The title story "Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man" appears along with "Aksi baraye Qab-e Aks-e Khali-ye Man", "Har Do Ruye Yek Sekkeh", "Gorg", "Arusak-e Chini-ye Man". Golshiri's "Innocent" stories – "The Innocent I", "The Innocent II", "The Innocent III", and "The Innocent IV" – also appear in this collection. The title story is about a man who has a vestigial sixth toe. Since his childhood he has obsessed about it and kept it hidden from almost everyone at the urging of his mother. He is very sensitive to what others say about this "abnormal/extra" part of his foot, particularly given the reaction of one schoolmate to whom he showed it as a child. The obsession is so strong that this extra toe-like becomes something more important than other parts of his body. He washes it every night with warm water and soap and massages it. This nightly ritual suggests religious or perhaps sexual fetishism, and he feels obligated to do it. Examples from each of the stories in this collection are treated in Chapter Two.

Jobbeh-khaneh [The Antique Chamber]

This collection was first published in 1983 with four stories. "Jobbeh-khaneh" (1981) is a lengthy short story in this collection. It is followed by three short stories: "Be Khoda Man Fahesheh Nistam" (1976), "Bakhtak" (1976), and "Sabz Mesl-e Tuti, Siyah Mesl-e Kalagh" (1979). Golshiri, in the introduction to the collection, says that the final story has nothing to do with the others in the collection and that it should have been published elsewhere, with stories of the same kind. Nevertheless, he eventually decided it worked as part of this collection in part because of its misfit character (Golshiri, *Jobbeh-khaneh*, 1983, p. 9).

In an introductory note to the collection, Golshiri explains the meaning of the word *jobbeh-khaneh* (Golshiri, *Jobbeh-khaneh*, 1983, p. 7). He writes that in the Qajar period this term referred to a house of weaponry, a place that was used to store arms and armor as well as anything else related to armaments. However, in more modern times in Isfahan, it refers to a place that is full of antique items, including antique clothes. Golshiri also makes it clear that the story was written in 1974, and that it was intended to form the basis of a film. However, no film was ever produced. Golshiri revised the story in 1981, and it was subsequently published as part of this collection in 1983. The story centers on a love affair between a wealthy woman and a young student in Isfahan. Selections from "Sabz Mesl-e Tuti, Siyah Mesl-e Kalagh" appear in Chapter Two as examples of Golshiri's treatment of identity issues.

***Panj Ganj* [Five Treasures]**

Published in 1989, this collection consists of five short stories: “Fathnameh-ye Moghan”, “Bar Ma Cheh Rafteh Ast Barbad?”, “Mir-e Noruzi-ye Ma”, “Nirvanay-e Man”, and “Khabgard”. *Five Treasures* was published abroad in Sweden due to censorship/official disapproval. Selections from “Bar Ma Cheh Rafteh Ast Barbad?” and “Nirvanay-e Man” are examined in Chapter Two.

***Dast-e Tarik Dast-e Roshan* [Dark Hand, Light Hand]**

This collection was first published in 1995 with five short stories: “Dast-e Tarik, Dast-e Roshan”, “Khaneh-roshanan”, “Naqqash-e Baghani”, “Naqsh-bandan”, and “Harif-e Shabha-ye Tar”. In 1999, the sixth short story, “Enfejar-e Bozorg,” was added to the second edition. “Naqsh-bandan” tells the story of a painter who wants to paint a woman on a bicycle riding against the wind. He paints pieces of her, but is unable to paint the whole. “Naqqash-e Baghani” relates the story of a writer who takes a trip with his family to a village called Baghan during the Iran-Iraq war. The trip takes place at the time of air attacks on the city of Tehran and many people took such trips in order to escape the city, at least for a while. In the village, the writer meets a painter, and the interaction between these people gives the story a tint of mystery.

Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah [Dark Side of the Moon]

A collection of short stories from across Golshiri's career, *Dark Side of the Moon* was published posthumously. Golshiri had planned more collections of his works, but did not live to complete these projects. This collection was completed by his wife, who added eight more stories to his original plan of 28. All of the stories in this collection appeared in print elsewhere earlier.

Film Scripts

Davazdah Rokh [Twelve Champions]

Twelve Champions is a film script written in 1990. The story follows an elderly man's thoughts about his own death in modern day Tehran. The man's wife passed away some years before the story, and his children do not want to take care of him in his dotage as tradition would call for. The story follows the old man's relationships with his children and his quest to find at least one living member of his old acting troop, which had performed "The Battle of Gudarz and Piran," a story from the *Shahnameh*. Pari Shirazi's dissertation includes a detailed examination of Golshiri's film script *Twelve Champions* (Shirazi, 2001).

Other Scripts

Some of Golshiri's works have not been published. For example, he wrote a script for a play, *Salaman va Absal*, in 1975. In collaboration with director Bahman Farmanara, he also wrote a film script entitled *Sayehha-ye Boland-e Bad* [Tall Shadows of the Wind] based on his short story "The Innocent I", expanding the four-page story to about 90 pages from 1976 to 1977. The film was completed in 1978 but was banned by the Shah's government. It was briefly released in 1979 before being pulled from circulation again under the Islamic Republic regime. Neither script was published in print form.

Non Fiction (Literary Criticism)

***Jedal-e Naqsh ba Naqqash dar Asar-e Simin Daneshvar: Az Savushun ta Atash-e Khamush* [The Encounter of the Artist with the Art in the Works of Simin Daneshvar: From Savushun to Atash-e Khamush]**

This volume contains Golshiri's literary criticism examining three books written by Simin Daneshvar (b. 1921). Before her novel *Savushun*, Daneshvar was primarily known as the wife of Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Although she had translated several significant foreign books into Persian and written two books of her own, she struggled to emerge from her husband's shadow. Golshiri discusses two of her early works that were written as she struggled to be accepted/acknowledged for her own work. He also examines her

novel *Savushun*, the book that finally brought her fame in her own right. *Savushun* was the first major novel written by an Iranian woman, and it has been translated into English by M. R. Ghanoonparvar.

Bagh dar Bagh **[Gardens within Gardens] Vol. I and Vol. II**

These two volumes gather together a large number of Golshiri's articles and literary criticism on a variety of topics from throughout Golshiri's writing career. Golshiri analyzes classical Persian literature, modern prose and poetry, modern cinema, etc. The volumes also include several interviews with Golshiri and lectures presented to university and general audiences.

Golestan-e Sa'di, Ba Tozihat va Moqadameh-ye Hushang Golshiri **[The Golestan of Sa'di, with Commentary and Introduction by Hushang Golshiri]**

This volume of Sa'di's poem *Golestan* includes an introduction and extensive commentary by Golshiri. It was not published until 2005, several years after Golshiri's death.

Dar Setayesh-e She'r-e Sokut **[In Praise of the Poetry of Silence]**

This book contains an introduction to modern/contemporary Persian poetry criticism, and also a critique on the poetry of Mansur Oji (b. 1937/8). Golshiri begins with a chapter on the concept of "poetry of silence," explaining what Golshiri means by that term and examining the use of language in and the structure of silent poetry. He

draws examples from different poets, but the emphasis is placed on the poems themselves, rather than the styles of the different poets. The second chapter specifically treats Mansur Oji's poetry, selections of which Golshiri also collected in the volume *Hava-ye Bagh Nakardim* (see next entry, below).

***Hava-ye Bagh Nakardim: Bargozideh-ye Ash'ar-e Mansur Oji be Entekhab-e Hushang Golshiri* [We Did Not Long for the Garden: Hushang Golshiri's Selection of the Poems of Mansur Oji]**

This volume brings together several poems by Mansur Oji, a modern Iranian poet from Shiraz, as selected by Golshiri.

Golshiri published under several pseudonyms, as well, including Siyavash Agah, Qodratollah Neyzari, and Manuchehr Irani. The last of those names was used as the author of *King of the Benighted* when it was first published in English translation. Golshiri is now credited as the author of *Shah-e Siyah-pushan*, the Persian original from which *King of the Benighted* was translated. In 1961 and 1962, he published the essays "The Regional Games of Isfahan I and II" in the journal *Payam-e Novin* under the pseudonym Siyavash Agah. In 1974 he wrote an analysis essay on Sadeq Hedayat's "Seh Qatreh Khun" for *Peyk-e Javanan* magazine which was not given publishing permission by the authorities.

Translations of Golshiri's Work

Quite a few of Golshiri's works have been translated into other languages. As noted above, the novel *Shah-e Siyah-pushan* was first published in 1990 as *King of the Benighted*, translated by Abbas Milani. Milani's translation opens with an introduction by Nasrin Rahimieh and includes a translation of Nezami's poem "The Black Dome" which plays a role in Golshiri's story. Even though the translation was credited to Manuchehr Irani, Golshiri is now widely credited with writing *Shah-e Siyah-pushan*.

Golshiri's first novel, *Shazdeh Ehtejab*, has been translated into several languages. Minoo R. Buffington translated it into English in the 1970s. Her translation was published in 1976 in the volume *Major Voices in Contemporary Persian Literature: Literature East and West*, Vol. 20, edited by Michael Hillmann. Another English translation was done by Rita Offer called *Blood and Aristocrats*, published in 1991. In 2005 a new translation was published by James Buchan called *The Prince*.

A collection of selected short stories, edited by Heshmat Moayyad, *Black Parrot, Green Crow* was published in 2003. This collection includes a brief introduction that provides some overview of the topics of the stories collected within. The introduction quickly spins through very brief analyses of the stories in the collection, primarily from political and social activism perspectives. The emphasis of this introduction is to set the stage for readers approaching Golshiri's stories for the first time, rather than to examine his works in any detail.

Stories from Iran: A Chicago Anthology, 1921-1991, edited by Heshmat Moayyad and published in 1992, includes two Golshiri stories: "The Wolf", translated by Paul Losensky, and "Portrait of an Innocent" (which appears in *Black Parrot, Green Crow* as "Portrait of an Innocent: III" and is translated in this dissertation as "The Innocent III") by Frank Lewis.

"The Innocent I" was translated as "Innocence" by Barbara Nestor and published in *Stand* (Literary Quarterly), Vol. 14, No. 3, 1973.

"My China Doll" was translated by Julie S. Meisami and published in *New Writing from the Middle East*, edited by L. Hamalian and J. D. Yohannan, New York: New American Library, Mentor, 1978.

"Behind the Thin Branches of the Screen" was translated by Mohammad R. Ghanoonparvar. It appeared in the literary magazine *Artful Dodge*, Vol. 12, No. 13, Fall 1985, pp. 115-117.

"Naqsh-bandan" has been translated as "Sketching" by Abbas Milani. It appeared in *The Literary Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1: Iranian Diaspora Literature Since 1989, 1996, pp. 75-82.

An English version of "The Victory Chronicle of the Magi," also translated by M.R.Ghanoonparvar, was published as "Alienation from the Self-Made Revolution: 'Fathnameh-ye Moghan' (The Victory Chronicle of the Magi) by Hushang Golshiri" in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3/4 , Selection from the Literature of Iran 1977-1997

(Summer – Autumn, 1997), pp. 225-242. It also appeared in *Strange Times, My Dear: The Pen Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Literature*, edited by Nahid Mozaffari and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, New York: Arcade Publishing, 2005.

Chapter Two:

Identity Representations in Golshiri's Works Other than *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*

Many, if not most, of Golshiri's works treat the subject of identity in one fashion or another. Given the frequent focus of his writing on politically motivated oppression and tyranny, political identity is often a central element of such identity concerns. However, the reflections on political identity undertaken by Golshiri and his predecessors and peers often invoke the deep and rich cultural heritage of the Persians. This cultural aspect of identity is to a great degree foundational for the political elements of identity that often seem central to Golshiri's writing. More fundamental still are the linguistic roots of such cultural identity. Language and culture are intimately intertwined, and theoretical arguments related to such interconnections and associations will be introduced in the discussions following this chapter. As Golshiri is an author and is intensely interested in objects literary, it is little surprise that we may find substantial treatment of linguistic and literary components of identity in his works. Of course, all of these facets of identity – political, cultural, and linguistic/literary – are ultimately rooted upon the existence of a subject whose identity can be brought into question. Such existential concerns also arise in Golshiri's writing and often form a backdrop for more involved discussions of the other aspects of identity treated in this dissertation.

This chapter presents examples of different identity elements from across numerous works of Hushang Golshiri. Since the focus of this dissertation is on Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, the treatment of these examples will not be organized in terms of Golshiri's works. Rather, it will be organized in terms of the loose classification of identity elements noted above, with specific examples from Golshiri's works serving as illustrative instances of the author's attention to identity concerns. The representations of identity revealed through analysis of Golshiri's works are assumed to be reflective of underlying elements or aspects of identity, which have been given the labels above.

This taxonomy of existential, linguistic, literary, cultural, and political identity is far from strict in terms of mutual exclusivity, and it does not necessarily imply phases or temporal precedence. Nonetheless, in many respects the aspects of identity treated earlier in this dissertation are foundational for those raised subsequently. Thus, it will prove convenient in the pages that follow to deal with them in order. In both this chapter and the chapter that follows, this dissertation will treat existential concerns regarding existential identity first, followed in order by aspects of identity that I have labeled linguistic and literary, cultural, and political. Since these categories are not mutually exclusive there will be some degree of overlap, but the separation of the discussion into categories will allow greater focus and more effective discussion of examples across Golshiri's short stories and novels. Setting the stage for such categories will also

facilitate greater elucidation of identity concerns in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, the focal work of this dissertation, in the following chapter.

EXISTENCE AND IDENTITY

Despite Golshiri's focus on social and political phenomena and their impact on people caught up within them, some of his stories touch more directly on the existential question. Such concerns are, of course, connected to other identity themes, but a recognition of the impact of the phenomenon of existence often shines through. Perhaps the most elemental manifestation of such recognition of the importance of existence as foundational appears in "Enfejar-e Bozorg" [Big Bang]. The narrator of that story is bedridden and likes to observe events outside his window as much as possible. He complains that people are not active as they used to be:

> God knows my heart was heavy. There was no one to be seen behind all these windows. Were they all dead? Then I stretched my hand out and with a lot of difficulty managed to open the window and pulled myself up, with support of my elbows, to be able to see the bench in front of the building, and I saw that it was empty. The one in front of the entrance to number three was also empty. Where are the young folk, why don't a couple of them come to sit on the bench under our window? The girl at one end, the boy at the other, and then the boy

> starts to pick at the wood with his fingernails and asks, "So, how's it going?" And the girl answers, "I'm okay." (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, pp. 498-499)

The focus of the story is on the old man's experience. However, he clearly perceives the dependence of such events upon brute existence and thus upon billions of years of history as described by science:

> You see, just yesterday I read in the newspaper that fifteen billion years have passed since the origin of heaven and earth. They had even taken a picture of the beginning of creation. Apart from that – are you listening to me? – it would take billions and billions of years for each atom to break down and the atmosphere to cool off. (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 498)

He later continues in that vein, making the connection with the events outside his window:

> Look around you woman! Pay attention to what's going on. From the last fifteen billion years from the Big Bang until now, stones and rocks have been whirling around and crashing into each other until they have become us, they have become two young people sitting at opposite

> ends of a bench and one would ask, "How's it going?" and the other one would answer, "I'm fine," and they slowly scooch toward each other, … (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 500)

Thus, while the old man's focus is on the differences, he perceives between the events outside his window at present (or perhaps the lack of events) and the events of his youth, Golshiri also depicts him as aware of the existential framework described by science that led up to both his youth and to the present of the story. The dominance of current occurrences in his experience is also made clear, as when he says of his daughter "When I can't see her, what does her 'hello' do for me?" (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 503).

An existential element of identity may also be observed in the identification of characters by their fathers, by their family, or by their name. For example, in "Har Do Ruye Sekkeh" [Both Sides of the Coin][26] the narrator says to his interlocutor "you are his son, after all" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 86). This comment is in relation to the narrator's response to the son's first visit and self-introduction, but the son's identity is, at least for the narrator and for the story, founded almost entirely upon his father's identity. He was born with a given identity that he cannot change.

The titular Shazdeh, in the novel *Prince Ehtejab*, faces a similar identity issue as he remembers or hallucinates his way through the last day of his life. He is consumed by

[26] The publication referenced in this dissertation uses the title "Har Do Ruye Sekkeh" whereas later publications use the title "Har Do Ruye Yek Sekkeh" which might be translated as [Both Sides of the Same Coin].

his familial history and his identity as the last member of that line at the same time that he recognizes his inability to live up to (or unwillingness to live down to) the example set by his father and, especially, his grandfather. He remembers his wife, Fakhronessa, assailing him with this unwanted or undeserved family identity. She picks up memoirs of her and Shazdeh's ancestor (they are cousins) and begins to read it. She tells him "… if we want to know ourselves, we must start from here, from our ancestors" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab,* 2005, p. 45). Later she points out his inadequacies in relation to his ancestors after referring to all of the killing their ancestors took part in, of people and animals when people weren't handy, and all of the women their ancestors bedded:

> "How about you? Where do you stand in this competition?"
>
> "What competition?"
>
> Fakhronessa laughed. She laughed loudly. The two lines around her mouth extended to her chin and her mole was lost in her laugh lines.
>
> "You are so lost. Between this great ancestor and all of those other noble ancestors there is a strange competition, competition for multiple wives and colorful decapitations. Each of them wanted to have the most variegated harem and …" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab,* 2005, p. 47)

Shazdeh is compared, constantly and by everyone (in this case including himself since his wife has already died when this recollection assaults him), to his "great" ancestors. Even when their actions were deplorable to modern sensibilities, he sees himself as not measuring up. As the last descendant of this once great house, he should have been "great" himself. His family identity, the identity he was born with, is inescapable, even on this last day of his life.

A more intimate, personal example can be found in "Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man" [My Little Prayer Room]. In this story, the narrator repeatedly identifies himself on the basis of a small physical deformity. He writes:

> Now it is different. Now, for me, it is a private thing, something that only I know.
>
> …
>
> I am the only one who knows it is there, it is something that makes me different from others. (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, pp. 9-10)

The narrator identifies himself on the basis of a physical trait. He has "a nailless piece of red flesh – smaller than all other little toes in the world" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 8). Despite the fact that he admits that at one point he thought of removing his deformity, "To tell the truth, if Mother had not showed up I would definitely have cut

it off" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 9), he eventually comes to accept it. This small red piece of flesh, this vestigial sixth toe becomes a distinguishing trait in the narrator's own eyes. He comes to view it as something that sets him apart, that makes him unique or an individual, that grants him a distinct identity. He closes by confessing that he is now happy, but that it is also sad that only one person has seen him "truly naked" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 16), and thus that only one person knows of his distinction from the rest of humanity.

The little girl narrator of "Arusak-e Chini-ye Man" [My China Doll] associates physical appearance and identity, and she is taken aback when she fails to recognize her father because of the changes prison has wrought: "Daddy was over there, on the other side. I didn't recognize him" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 66) and later "Daddy didn't look like Daddy at all. Just like the dwarf [one of her toys], who also doesn't look like Daddy" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 67). Eventually, however, despite the differences in appearance, she notices a physical trait that confirms her father's identity for her: "It wasn't Daddy; he looked strange. But from his smile I recognized that Daddy was Daddy" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 67). The narrator in "Both Sides of the Coin" also references this physicality of identity - this tie to the body. Early in the story he argues that "becoming a hero depends on one's physical stamina for example, and on one's muscles and physique" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 88). This is a rather fatalistic position, placing the responsibility for his position, and

for his (in) ability to be a hero outside of his control. He also mentions the effects of his physical suffering at the hands of his torturers. "The skin on my chest had healed a week ago. Only a brown spot remained. My wrists were still aching." (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 88). This implies that he has already faced his opportunity to be "a hero" and has failed, and the fact that it is presented as something past, done, and almost retreated to invisibility makes it quite fatalistic. It is in the past, unchangeable, and is now joining the realm of the hidden or imperceptible. Yet, he goes further still when he says "people see my body, not my spirit" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 100). His physical existence defines the totality of his identity, at least for others, or at least in his assessment of what others think of him. Tellingly, his tale falters shortly after this statement, as if that is all that needs to be said.

However, in other places, identity is placed on a deeper or at least different level than physical appearance. In "Sabz Mesl-e Tuti, Siyah Mesl-e Kalagh" [Green as a Parrot, Black as a Crow], the narrator tells us that "Being a parrot is not just a matter of its wings or its beak" (*Jobbeh-khaneh*, 2005, p. 160). In other words, there is something to identity beyond a few prominent physical characteristics. Perhaps, at least in this story, that something is captured in the actions of the individual. A real parrot for the purposes of Hassan Aqa, the character who keeps buying "parrots" (which we are led to believe are actually disguised crows), the action of speaking is the critical element. For individuals, then, actions may also be more important than mere physical existence. A

parrot that doesn't do the expected thing (saying Hassan Aqa's name) isn't an acceptable parrot. But one that does the required thing is acceptable, even if it falls short in most every other dimension. As the narrator puts it, a parrot that can talk to you and knows morning, noon, and night, and can recognize people is fine. "Even if the parrot is not the best parrot in the world, which is OK" (*Jobbeh-khaneh*, 2005, p. 163). The old man in "Both Sides of the Coin" is also, to some degree, identified by his actions. The narrator never gives us his name, but he does report, "I heard that, the day that the artillery fired on the Parliament, your father was one of the riflemen in the Sepahsalar Mosque, or maybe one of the Azerbaijan Committee" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 86).[27] The old man's name is not necessary, but his role in past events, the actions he has taken in his life, are a central part of his identity.

Sometimes the phenomenological component of identity is placed within a person's own mind, as a manifestation of the subconscious. The subconscious may be a reflection of other elements of identity, particularly linguistic or cultural influences, but it reveals itself as a fact of existence for that character. In "Bar Ma Che Rafteh Ast Barbad?" [What Has Happened to Us, Barbad?] the narrator takes her son to a doctor when he stops speaking after visiting his father in prison. The doctor tells her that "The subconscious of a person is very strong. Our conscious, our reasoning, is only a single

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[27] The Sepahsalar Mosque and the Parliament building were attacked by Russian soldiers on order of the Qajar Shah in 1908, as a reaction against Constitutional reforms. The Azerbaijan Committee was a militia organized to defend the Parliament at that time.

thin layer to cover it, tame it" (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 55). This implies that the fact of the subconscious is dominant, and that a person's attempt to create an identity is at the mercy of thinly, imperfectly controlled subconsciousness.

The existential element of identity is also illuminated through its lack or absence. In "Naql-e Naqqal" [A Storyteller's Story], the narrator's narrator (the narrator of the story within the story) relates a poem:[28]

> I am nothing
>
> I am nothing and even less
>
> We are not from this world that you see…
>
> (*Bagh dar Bagh*, Vol. II, 2001, p. 578).

However, the title of this poem "Ma, Man, Ma" [We, I, We] hints at a social, as well as an existential, element of identity. Also, in "My China Doll" the narrator, a little girl, is playing with her toys and dolls, acting out what she hears and sees and knows of her father. He is being held in a prison and she appears to be convinced that he will not return. At one point she says "Then a woman came. She was pretty, like my own china doll. No, it is Daddy, because it's not here, it's Daddy" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 70). The original Persian is even more compelling on the subject of existence and identity because it does not require a subject specifying what is not here.

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[28] This poem "Ma, Man, Ma" is by Persian poet, Mehdi Akhavan Sales (1928-1990), whom the story is about, though it is likely largely fictional.

Golshiri simply writes “nistesh” or “it’s not”, leaving open the question of which “is not”, Daddy or the china doll, or in this interpretation, both of them.

There is a discernible fatalistic facet to many of Golshiri’s stories that evokes existentialist sentiments. “Both Sides of the Coin” presents many references to lack of control or lack of ability to change things. For example, the narrator argues that “whoever else was in my place would have done the same” (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 89) and that “we, all of us, become victims of the way we look at things” (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 95). He also makes wider fatalistic arguments such as when he is debating with the old man about the old man’s optimism. He says that “we have been like this, always, like it or not” (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 96). In this instance, he is arguing for the sake of winning the argument, but he nonetheless stresses the point that individuals and even societies, or at least his society, have no choice of action. Earlier in the story he similarly implies a lack of importance in the lives of those outside the prison, saying that the old man “had seen that life goes on beyond the barbed wire, with its usual sluggishness and monotony” (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 89). He is making a deterministic argument that things never have, never will, and apparently never can change. The woman in “Nirvana-ye Man” [My Nirvana] says similarly, “Everything is always the way it is” (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 83) repeating the fatalistic thread. The narrator of that story also says, “And it always happens the same” (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 84).

Although his comments are with respect to more localized events, he is nonetheless expressing a fatalistic sentiment that nothing changes.

A similar trope appears in "Yek Dastan-e Khub-e Ejtema'i" [A Good Social Story]. Although "the Writer had decided to write a social story" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 93), he also anticipates the futility of such a decision. "The Writer knows where all of this will lead. Again, people will say 'The end of your story is so hopeless.' Others will say again, 'you always…'" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, pp. 93-94). Even as the Writer "decides" and take a position of agency in which he exercises his will to take control of his own actions, he senses that his choices will lead to a predictable outcome, and it is an outcome he does not seem to relish. The narrator of "Both Sides of the Coin" ascribes similar futility to the arguments of the old man. "Of course, his reasons were useless. He knew it, himself, as well. He knew, but he kept trying anyway." (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, pp. 99-100). The old man, much like the Writer in "A Good Social Story," recognizes the futility of his actions, yet he persists, perhaps because in that, as well, he has no real choice. Both characters seem to consider their actions too much a part of their identity to do otherwise, regardless of the outcome.

As noted above, these elements of identity often interact or interconnect in Golshiri's stories. For example, the social and the existential interconnect, as in "Mardi ba Keravat-e Sorkh" [A Man with a Red Tie]. In this story, Golshiri reveals the testimony of a surveillance officer who observes a suspect for an extended period of time.

The story details the growing connection between the officer and his subject, leading up to a night of drinking and drug use during which the officer shows the subject his ID card. He tells the judge that "it was just as if a person shows his ID card to himself, or sees himself in the mirror and very simply combs his hair or doesn't" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, 1968, Vol. 7, p. 126).

Another prominent example of such interconnection occurs in "What Has Happened to Us, Barbad?" When the narrator berates her husband for maintaining his collection of books despite the danger from the authorities and despite the fact that many others are disposing of their books, he replies "It's me and these books. If these do not exist, I do not exist either. I do not want to exist." (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 53). The narrator's husband conflates his existence with the existence of the literature he loves. Without literature, existence is not possible, or at least no longer desirable. Indeed, despite the importance of existence for identity, Golshiri remains an author of fiction. Existence in reality is not nearly as important as the description of existence in the story. As the narrator of "A Storyteller's Story" puts it:

> Despite all this, it is not clear to me whether the text or the event is real or not. It is not important, because the story itself is what is important. I am the storyteller, and I leave the haggling to others, the hypocrites. (*Bagh dar Bagh*, 2001, Vol. II, p. 573)

Thus, for this narrator, and perhaps for Golshiri himself, real existence is, after a fashion, secondary to the fictional existence within the storyteller's story.

Existence also arises as a concern in Golshiri's novels. For example, in *Shazdeh Ehtejab* [Prince Ehtejab] the existence of the titular prince's father is cast in interesting and quite telling imagery. "Father was behind that military uniform, and behind the smoke rings he blew out from his mouth, and behind the black, kohled [mascaraed] eyes of the women, or behind the trees" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 29). This description is given just after Shazdeh's father has attempted to explain his orders during a massacre of demonstrators to his father (Shazdeh's grandfather). When thousands of demonstrators appeared, a few of them armed with clubs, Shazdeh's father had ordered his troops to "Open fire with the machine guns!" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 29). The implication of the following description, however, is that his existence was separate from the uniform. The uniform occluded a full view of him, just like the smoke that curled from his mouth obscured his face. In this case, even the women of Shazdeh's grandfather's harem are presented as primary, as being in the foreground and establishing the field behind which Shazdeh's father was fated to exist. Even the trees that lined the road, the trees that ordinarily formed a backdrop for human activity rather than the other way around, are presented as more central and more clearly present than Shazdeh's father. This lends greater weight to Shazdeh's own alienation and sense of insignificance; or perhaps it is more appropriate to characterize this as lending less weight to Shazdeh's substance or his

consequence in the world. While Grandfather was a central figure in his own story and in the history of the country, Shazdeh's father was in the background of even his own life, and Shazdeh himself is yet further removed, generationally and existentially, from importance in the world.

Existence and identity are even more problematic for Shazdeh's maid, Fakhri. After the death of his wife, Fakhronessa, Shazdeh has taken to forcing Fakhri to play the role of maid and the role of Fakhronessa, as well. Upon the death of Fakhronessa, while her corpse is still lying on the bed, Shazdeh undresses Fakhri and lays her down on the bed. He says to her, "Laugh, Fakhronessa. Laugh!" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 84). When she doesn't laugh quickly, "The Prince slapped me on the face, and screamed: 'Dear Fakhronessa, you were never like this.' I said: 'I am not Fakhronessa.'" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 84). Although Fakhri protests that she exists as a separate entity from Fakhronessa – the Fakhronessa of Shazdeh's memories and imagination – and though Fakhri claims a different identity, Shazdeh does not recognize her as Fakhri unless he needs something from Fakhri. Even though she lives in more "modern" times than the women of Grandfather's harem, her position is effectively much the same as theirs was. She exists, but her existence has been subjugated to the needs and desires of the master. Her multiplicitous roles are a reflection of Shazdeh's reduced status in the world. However, these multiple roles may also serve, on a social level, as a reflection on the multiple, often conflicting roles that "modern" women were expected to fulfill.

The Lost Lamb of Ra'i very starkly illustrates this existential component of identity. Ra'i lectures his students at one point, after reading them a story that he wrote, "And now here we are, something between two infinities. If you want you are a god, otherwise you would be mineral, vegetable, or animal, or nothing, zero." (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i,* 1977, p. 70). Although many kinds of existence are possible, all are contingent upon the brute fact of existence. Otherwise, there is nothing, zero. The essential character of existence for identity is also alluded to when Ra'i is speaking with his mother about his girlfriend who had left him recently. He experiences an existential moment, thinking, "… you don't think that you exist, that's the reason why everyone talks about the past, that they existed, or one day, sometime they have become…" (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i*, 1977, p. 108). Existence is necessary for identity, but Ra'i implies that existence may also be mutable for those experiencing it, and that only with the benefit of hindsight can people figure out what they *were*, with what they *are* always presenting in a state of flux – always becoming, as the existentialists might put it. This concept is dealt with in more detail in the section on the indeterminate nature of identity later in this chapter.

LINGUISTIC/LITERARY IDENTITY

Since Golshiri was a writer of fiction and literary critic, it is not surprising that linguistic and literary elements recur in his examinations of identity. Many of his

characters reflect his life experiences in many respects, often being writers of one sort or another or being intensely interested in Persian language or literary history.[29] Broader literary references also occur frequently, and these may be a nod to or reflection of Golshiri's own fascination with and leveraging of Western literary techniques and styles. Of course, literature is a cultural product and represents part of the broader socio-cultural milieu within which Golshiri operated and within which his stories are set. Yet language may also be considered a separable element of the identity equation, serving as it does as the primary mechanism for learning or absorbing the social and cultural system and communicating with others within that system.

Sometimes the importance of language, of the words themselves, is made explicit. For example, in "Both Sides of the Coin" the narrator says, "My words have not been that superficial" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 89). He recognizes that words can be and are often superficial, but that they can also be substantial. In either case, they are a representation of and an identifier of the person behind them. The narrator also makes reference to the power of writing, saying that "it happened exactly like everyone says, and actually, the way it was written in the newspapers, too" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 86). Here the narrator is confirming that the newspapers printed a true account, and strongly implies that they do not always do so. However, there is also an implication that the way it is written will become the new reality for those who have access to only

[29] Golshiri's wife discusses many elements of Golshiri's writing in her interview reproduced in Taheri-Majd, 2004, pp. 12-90.

the written accounts. Current readers may be skeptical of the truth of the account, but in the absence of any alternative account, that written account will be all that can be considered.

The characters in "Banuyi va Anne va Man" [Banuyi, Anne, and I] are also shown to be quite aware of the importance of language. The German painter, Anne, does not speak English fluently and struggles to find the right words. Banuyi and the narrator are aware of language, as well, and are reminded of differences when Anne comments on their use of Persian saying, "This is a beautiful language" (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 543) and again later, "This is a beautiful language" (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 546). Golshiri's repetition of this phrase draws the reader's attention to the linguistic difference between the characters. Anne's attempt to find precise language is the most closely related to her conception of her own identity. Her first attempt to find a precise word is related to her experience of the dawn and her painting as she casts about for the word "velvet" to describe the softness of the dawn (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 542). However, her second exploration for verbal precision is with respect to describing her own character as she explains that she is not courageous, but rather "timid" (*Nimeh-ye Tarik-e Mah*, 2003, p. 543).

The little girl narrator of "My China Doll" ascribes still more power to words. She watches her mother and uncle talking about her father and plays out the scene with her toys:

> You say. No, don't say. Mommy said a bad thing. Mommy is very bad, sometimes she's bad, when she says something to spite Uncle Naser, she talks about Daddy.
>
> …
>
> Then they didn't say anything. If they had said anything, talked about Daddy in front of me, then Daddy would have come for sure.
>
> (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 75)

As the little girl tries to make sense of events, her toys and dolls take on the identities of those she is concerned about. She is convinced words have the power to capture these identities, and also that words have the power to alter the phenomenological world beyond her play, that her words and the words of her mother and uncle can bring her father home from prison. Some of the sentiment that there is magic in words may have accrued through her relationship with her father, who seems to have been infatuated with books and literature. As she reports, "Then he sat at his desk and read. How ever many times I said 'Daddy!' he didn't hear" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 71). Her father's ardent relationship with books and literature lead the little girl to ascribe power to those books, as well. She reasons that "If I touch his books, if I tear just one of them, he would appear" (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 70).

Furthermore, Golshiri raises the issue of language when dealing with religious practice. In the practice of Islam, only Arabic language is sanctioned for "legitimate" religious practice, much as Latin was the only accepted liturgical language of the Catholic Church for many centuries. Golshiri's novel *Jen-Nameh* [The Book of Jinn] has a particularly direct example of such language issues. Given the official status of Arabic as the only acceptable language for reciting the Koran, including the prayers that originate in the Koran, it is somewhat shocking when one of the central characters, Hasan, the brother of the narrator, begins to say his prayers in Persian. Golshiri introduces Hasan's change in practice thus, "he prayed regularly, although now he was praying in Persian. He had memorized the translation of the prayer that we had in our religious textbook [the original is in Arabic] and would recite it" (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, p. 19).

Although Hasan is praying in Persian, Golshiri makes it clear that he is not doing so as a result of lack of piety. Indeed, Hasan is presented as being more pious than his father, who does not exhibit the same degree of focus in his prayer routine, though he recites his prayers in the approved Arabic. "Hasan was praying in Persian. Unlike father, whose praying was a teeter-totter and he scratched himself while he was standing up and while he was bowing, Hasan held both of his arms straight at the sides of his body and

would not take his eyes off his *mohr*"[30] (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, p. 28). Hasan's and the narrator's father is presented as going through the motions of prayer. He goes through the prayer routine so quickly that he looks like a child playing on a teeter-totter, popping up and down rapidly and scratching himself instead of focusing on his prayers. In contrast, Hasan maintains a respectful focus on his body alignment and his *mohr* while he is praying. His only deviation from accepted practice is his use of his mother tongue as he recites the prayers, and this is due to his strong identification with (and understanding of) his language rather than to any impiety with respect to Islam.

In addition to such examples of the importance of language, itself, the prevalence of writers or literary people in general as narrators/protagonists is noticeable upon reading even a few of Golshiri's stories. Ghanoonparvar notes Golshiri's interest in literary protagonists:

> Golshiri has created a number of significant characters in his fiction who are writers by occupation, a phenomenon which in itself indicates Golshiri's preoccupation with the social identity and activity of fiction writers. (Ghanoonparvar, 1985, p. 352)

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[30] A *mohr* is a small clay tablet or "prayer stone" that is made from the clay of the holy city of Karbala in Iraq where Imam Hoseyn's tomb is located. In Shi'ite Muslim prayer ritual, the supplicant touches his forehead to this "prayer stone" during prayers. Imam Hoseyn was the third Imam of Shi'a Islam and is an important historical figure.

Poets, writers, and teachers abound in Golshiri's stories, and many characters who are not directly identified as writers are depicted as having extensive libraries. In some cases the libraries are presented as representations of the characters or vice versa. For example, in "What Has Happened to Us, Barbad?" the narrator's husband once kept a large library. His books have been disposed of in order to forestall accusations of anti-regime activities, and the bookcases in the house are empty. When his associates begin to be arrested, he shaves his moustache in order to avoid recognition and likely arrest, prompting his wife to think "His upper lip had become like the empty bookcases" (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, pp 39-40). The character and his library are intimately linked in his wife's mind such that she identifies him with the bookcase, or more precisely she identifies changes in his appearance through changes in the appearance of the bookcases.

Even narrators who aren't literary are given connections to writing. For example, while the subject of the investigation in "A Man with a Red Tie" is somewhat literary, or at least has a library in which the narrator (the investigator) is interested, the narrator is not literary. However, the story is presented as his written report to a judge or cleric, as is made clear several times in the story, particularly at the end when he refers to his missive's intended recipient as "your Exalted Honor" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, 1968, Vol. 7, p. 127).

The character of Sarmad in *King of the Benighted* occupies a somewhat similar position. He is not literary himself, but the narrator is a poet who recites poetry for the

other inmates, including Sarmad, poems which Sarmad takes to heart, though he often misinterprets them. Characters such as the sculptor in "Ma'sum-e Sevvom" [The Innocent III] are also similar, listening to the recitations of a literary narrator and taking his words (in this case all too much) to heart. Whereas Sarmad is influenced by the narrator's recitations and may have changed somewhat, acquiring a slightly altered identity, the sculptor loses himself entirely in the story and assumes an entirely different identity.

More tangential references to things literary also abound. These references often serve to provide the reader with a measure of understanding regarding the identity of the narrator or the character with which they are associated. For example, in "A Good Social Story" the main character has a picture of Dostoevsky, indicating his literary interests, specifically Russian literary interests, which fits with the political tone of the story and the mention of a book titled *What Is To Be Done?*, which was the title of a Nikolai Chernishevsky book. "A Man with a Red Tie" makes mention of Rumi[31] and Dostoevsky volumes as the possessions of Mr. S. M. For example, "He had put his book on the counter. It was Rumi's *Masnavi*, the second volume of the Broukhim edition. The tip of a bookmark appeared between the pages of the book" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, 1968, Vol. 7, p. 116). Or, later in the story the narrator reports, "He was nervous. He took the book from under his arm, showed it to me, and said, 'It is not new. It is Dostoevski's. You

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31 Jalal al-Din Mohammad Balki, also known as Jalal al-Din Mohammad Rumi (1207-1273) was a 13th century Persian poet and mystic. His most famous book is *Masnavi*.

know him, right. It is *Crime and Punishment*'" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, 1968, Vol. 7, p. 118). In fact, the interactions between the narrator and Mr. S. M. routinely involve discussions of book and literature:

> I said: "You are definitely going… the rest of the book…"
>
> He answered: "Who knows which one of them one should continue reading."
>
> I said: "I very much would like to see your library."
>
> He said: "Library? It's not a library, only a few books scattered around."
> (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 7, 1968, p. 120)

The narrator also takes pains to note shortly after that report that "He does not loan books" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 7, 1968, p. 120). Although this statement has strong political overtones given the situation dealt with in the story, an informant reporting on the activities of a person of interest to the autocratic authorities, it reflects on the importance of literature and of books in general to the identity of Mr. S. M., as well. The old man in "Both Sides of the Coin" uses extensive literary and cultural allusions in his

debate with the narrator, identifying with "Islam and Sufism and even the poets" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 102). The narrator tells us:

> One day he recited for me all of Bahar's poem, "The Early Morning Bird." He also recited "Damavandieh," with enormous pride. He had a good voice. He recited the poems of Farrokhi, as well. I even remember he used one of the *Golestan* stories as an example, or as an authority, for proving his ideas.[32] (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 102)

References to libraries occur in Golshiri's stories even in situations where they may seem dramatically out of place. For example, in "Aks-i Baraye Qab-e Aks-e Khali-ye Man" [A Picture for My Empty Picture Frame] the narrator mentions that his guard while in prison, Saghar, has read most of the books in the library. He even notes that Saghar has read Maxim Gorky, whose books are not available in the prison library. The discussion of literature and its impact on this story are intimately related to the political identities of the characters, which are discussed in more detail in the Political Identity section later in this chapter.

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[32] Bahar (1884-1951) was a Persian poet and scholar who adhered to traditionalist style of poetry. "The Early Morning Bird" is titled "Morq-e Shabahang" in Persian. "Damavandieh" is a poem about Mount Damavand, the highest mountain in Iran, north of Tehran. Farrokhi (1887-1939), a Persian poet, was famous for his criticism of Shah Reza Pahlavi. *Golestan* is by the Persian poet Sa'di (1213-1291).

Many of Golshiri's stories suggest a strong connection between the existential and the literary. In many instances, narrators describe the compulsion they feel to play a role. Two of Golshiri's The Innocent stories, "Ma'sum-e Dovvom" [The Innocent II] and "Ma'sum-e Sevvom" [The Innocent III], depict characters who are consumed by literature, by the stories they have heard or read. In "The Innocent II" the narrator has been inveigled into playing the role of Shemr[33] in an all too realistic presentation of a passion play of Imam Hoseyn's martyrdom (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 8, 1970, pp. 119-130). For the people of the village where he was living he becomes Shemr, or at least a manifestation of Shemr, after he carries out the beheading of the *Seyyed* who had come to inaugurate the village's new shrine. His taint, the taint thrust upon him by his role in a retelling of a principal Shi'a religious/literary story, has changed his identity with the other villagers. He has transformed from Mostafa into Mostafa Shemr, or sometimes (eventually) just Shemr. In "The Innocent III" the sculptor becomes Farhad from Nezami's poem.[34] When offered a drink, the sculptor says "Farhad doesn't drink. I know that Farhad doesn't drink." (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 111). The sculptor seems to have known of the story of Farhad and Shirin, but perhaps been somewhat ignorant of the details. As he learns more of it through the narrator's book and

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33 Shemr was the general of Yazid, the second Umayyad Caliph, who captured and beheaded the third Imam, Hoseyn, in addition to massacring his entire family, in Karbala, Iraq. Hoseyn's martyrdom informs central beliefs and practices in Shi'a Islamic ritual.

34 Nezami (1141-1209) was a Persian poet. Farhad is a character in "Khosrow o Shirin" [Khosrow and Shirin], one of Nezami's *Khamseh* poems. The portion relevant here involves the stone mason Farhad's love for Shirin and his death as a result of his devotion to her.

the narrator's own reading and explication, he becomes more and more imprisoned within his adoptive identity. He is captured by the tale and even tells his apprentices what he knows he will do and warns his wife not to let him out of the house on the last night. Yet, as in the story, his actions are apparently driven by fate, and there is no escaping them. His wife opens the door for him and he goes off to the mountain to his death.

The story "Both Sides of the Coin" also presents instances of role playing, though these are more linguistic, a tool of the old man's arguments, than literary references. The narrator argues that "he forced me to play the role of a hopeless man" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 89) and later explains that "not all of the dimensions of the role that was forced on me were clear" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 92). Though these are less literary, they are no less culturally bound. The adoption of such roles, indeed the very ability to recognize them at all, represents a link to cultural identity, as well, thus providing yet another interconnection between these elements of identity.

King of the Benighted presents one very striking invocation of literary identity. When the poet is being interrogated in prison, his captors present him with a written question. "Q. What is your religion?" (*Shah-e Siyah-pushan*, 2001, p. 42). After a brief intervening paragraph in which the poet contends that such questions should not be asked and receives the response that anything is acceptable if it serves to protect Islam, he writes his response. "A. I am a poet" (*Shah-e Siyah-pushan*, 2001, p. 43). The narrator,

as with many of Golshiri's narrators, identifies himself first and foremost with his literary character. He gives this response despite his knowledge that the expectation of his captors is that his religion should be primary.

The literary references in *Prince Ehtejab* are generally tangential. The wife of Shazdeh, Fakhronessa, is portrayed as bookish. For example, in the scene noted earlier, immediately after Fakhronessa's death when Shazdeh was forcing Fakhri to play the role of Fakhronessa, Fakhri noticed that "Her books were all over the shelves and on the niche and on the table" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 84). Even her introduction in the story as a picture portrays her literary interests:

> His paternal cousin, Fakhronessa, was still sitting in her picture frame. The carnation was in the corner of her mouth and the big, leather-covered book on her lap. Her white and slender fingers had remained on the binding. She was holding her prescription glasses in her right hand. (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 34)

Later a similar image is presented from his memory from the picture frames that surround him in his library:

> Fakhronessa was still sitting with her back to Shazdeh. Shazdeh moved closer. Past the line of her thin neck and the pleats on her right

> shoulder, he saw the thick leather-covered book and the white, slender fingers. Fakhronessa put a finger between the pages of the book and closed it (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 43)

Fakhronessa also torments Shazdeh with the book containing the history of their family. She used to say to him "You must do something that is really something, something that will at least blacken one page of the history books" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 99). This sums up one of Shazdeh's central conflicts rather well. He is an insignificant figure unlikely to be remembered by history, yet he is consumed by and bound up within his own history. He does not so much have his own identity as he has a collage of identities imposed upon him by his ancestry and the cumulative weight of their history. "But he wanted to know, if only for his own sake and Fakhronessa, wanted to understand behind that skin, behind that light and dark of the photographs or between the lines of all of those books…" (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 2005, p. 16).

In Golshiri's semi-autobiographical novel, *Keristin va Kid* [Christine and Kid], the foreign female character, Christine, is represented as speaking in English. The story contains myriad instances of English language text throughout (e.g., *Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 9, p. 10, p. 11, p. 13). Christine's identity is thoroughly foreign, thoroughly English, and the representations of her speaking reinforce this identity. Rather than presenting her utterances in translated form, her speech is presented in English text using

Roman letters – a striking departure from the Persian script used for the vast majority of the novel. This markedly foreign linguistic identity also creates a tension in the identity of the narrator and of the man with whom Christine is having an affair. Both of these characters interact with her in broken English, though she does make some attempts at communication in broken Persian. Regardless of the direction of linguistic accommodation, the linguistic component of identity is front and center throughout the story.

Ra'i, in *The Lost Lamb of Ra'i*, also experiences a form of linguistic identity. His linguistic patterns change when reciting a particular story to his students:

> Then he would explain the story of the creation of Adam, just as he had read in the books.
>
> …
>
> and his language naturally would get the color and smell of old, archaic prose. (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i*, 1977, p. 50)

Ra'i cannot help changing his linguistic patterns when recounting certain things to his students. A similar change occurs in his written language when he writes a verse from the Koran on the blackboard. "He would get up and erase the board, from top to bottom

and from right to left, and then he would write in *Sols* script[35]: 'I will create a *khalifa* on Earth'" (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i*, 1977, pp. 49-50). In this instance, Ra'i's writing style changes to match that which he has seen for Koranic verses. In both of these cases, Ra'i transforms into a conduit for the wisdom of the past. He assumes a different identity, becoming the medium for exposing the children to the wisdom contained in the books rather than acting on his own, as an agent with free will. This change is both initiated by the language he uses and manifested in the expression or enunciation of that language.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

A prominent theme in the works of Persian authors is the importance of the cultural heritage from which they come. Golshiri's works exhibit similar themes regarding the culture of Iran, and this culture is often presented as an element of the identities of characters within his stories. The short story "Both Sides of the Coin" has several significant examples of such links between culture and identity. For example, the narrator in the story tells us that the old man "believed that they [foreign powers] are afraid of an ancient nation, especially one with a magnificent culture" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 96). He continues:

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35 Sols, meaning 1/3 in Arabic, is the Persian name of the Arabic Thuluth script, which is often used for architectural inscriptions and titles, including chapters of the Koran.

> His reason was that, leaving aside the pillages or, for example, the dismembering of this land, but one cannot deny their taking our poets and writers for their own. How about the plundering of the ancient artifacts? He would say, "They are afraid, my dear, believe me, from such a land if… (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 96)

The old man uses the "magnificent culture" and ancient history of their nation as a rallying cry during his attempts to encourage the narrator to persevere through his imprisonment. Eventually, the narrator comes to associate the old man with that ancient culture, telling the old man's son that it was "as if all the past… were crystallized in your father's being" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 97). The old man becomes, by dint of his emphasis on their link to a glorious past and at least for the period of their debate, an embodiment of the culture and history of Iran. However, in the mind of the narrator, this is not entirely positive. "I saw the old man with his back propped up against this history… with that rotten heritage" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 97). The narrator, in part because he is attempting to defeat the old man in what he has come to consider a debate, determines that the ancient history of Iran is something negative rather than something to lean upon or revel in. Indeed, he considers the old man to be somewhat masochistic in his repeated references to Iran's history.

Social connections with others are also a mechanism for establishing and maintaining identity. The narrator of "The Innocent II" is something of an outsider in his village. His lack of strong ties with the other villagers makes it all too easy for him to become stuck with the Shemr identity after his role in the all-too-real passion play for the opening of the Imamzadeh's shrine.[36] Given his role in the play, it is far from certain that he could have avoided his fate after performing it, but it is likely that his outsider status played a part in his selection for the role. The narrator of "Ma'sum-e Chaharom" [The Innocent IV] recognizes the importance of such culturally prescribed social connections to identity formation. Speaking of his colleague, Mr. Zein al-Abedini, he relates the following:

> He says: "people in the world are in two groups. The people in one of them are connected to a community, a party, a club, or even an organization, a company. These have peace of mind, whether they are leftist or rightist, red or black, each of them is everyone, is a crowd. Even when they are in their rooms, alone, they know that there are others who think as they do, or at least act like that."
>
> …
>
> I think he wanted to say that I am part of those loners, that's why I'm

[36] Imamzadeh literally means "son of the Imam" and is a term for the shrine/tomb of descendants of Shi'i Imams.

> like this. Maybe. He was saying: "Go, young man, before it gets too late stick yourself to one of these groups, crowds, and have peace of mind." (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 119-120)

Of course, for many characters in Golshiri's stories, social connections become an integral component of identity, at least for the powers that be. Many of Golshiri's characters have been sent to prison, in large part because of the people they associate with. While the narrator of "My Little Prayer Room" identifies himself based on the fact that he is unlike everyone else (because of his vestigial sixth toe), the narrator's husband in "What Has Happened to Us, Barbad?" is identified with and eventually sent to prison because of the group he consorted with.

Roles within a culture may also shape identity within the social sphere and beyond. In many societies, servants are identified by their roles as much as or even more so than by their given names. For example, Banu, the servant in "My Nirvana," is identified as a servant by another character, the engineer, himself identified by a role. The engineer expects certain traits that he identifies with the "servant" identity, and he is surprised at Banu's behavior, saying "A maid, and so discreet!" (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 79). In "Gorg" [The Wolf] the doctor is a central character, but he is introduced as simply "the doctor." His position tells the interlocutors (and the reader) what is important about him more so than would his name. Indeed, his wife is identified only through her relationship

to "the doctor" and is called "the doctor's wife" throughout the story. Similarly, the husband in "What Has Happened to Us, Barbad?" is known only by his marriage to the narrator, whereas his children and friends are given names. The sculptor in "The Innocent III" is simply identified as "the sculptor" throughout the story. However, the role he assumes from Nezami's *Khamseh*[37] is given a name because the name is culturally/literarily important. Knowing that he took on the identity of Farhad matters, whereas his original identity is primarily that of sculptor. In "A Good Social Story" the protagonist is simply identified as "the Writer," combining the importance of literature for Golshiri and the primacy of the protagonist's role as a (would be) producer of literature.

Golshiri's writing also makes use of characteristics of individuals in his stories to give a perspective on the characteristics of the Iranian people, reflecting on what it means or at least what it may mean for some people, to be Iranian. For example, the story "Both Sides of the Coin" makes extensive references to the political discussion between the old man and the narrator. At one point the old man tells the narrator, "For the wife your beliefs are a fraction of your whole. However stranger, fresher, or I don't know, more complicated it may be it is not all of you" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 99). The old man is telling the narrator that his beliefs, the same beliefs that may identify him with his

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[37] *Khamseh* or "Panj Ganj" is a collection of five epic poems composed by Nezami (1141-1209). One of these poems is "Haft Peykar," which plays an important role in Golshiri's *King of the Benighted*. For more information see Parrello, Domenico. "Khamsa of Nezami." *Encyclopædia Iranica*. 10 November 2010. Web.

friends, his coworkers, or his comrades, are a part of him for her as well, but only a part. However, his following statement is a reflection not only on the narrator's situation, but also on the narrator as representative of a broader group. "Abstraction and absolutism are especially for men, or at least Iranian men are like this" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 99). Here the old man is relating the narrator to men in general, or more specifically to Iranian men.

It eventually becomes clear that the old man is pushing the narrator to work through conflicted sentiments and attitudes regarding what his wife's efforts to save him from his imprisonment – or perhaps from the more extreme and permanent punishment, execution. Though the narrator does not explicitly tell the reader what transpired between his wife and whomever she was trying to convince to commute his sentence, the intimations are very strongly suggestive that it was sexual:

> Actually, it was not really important that my wife for example had done this and that, or for example, had slept with this one or that one. It was important that all of my actions were obliterated by one night of sex. One cannot continue with humiliation. You understand, right? Not that I did not love my wife. But I was ready to remain in that one-

> and-a-half by two-and-a-half room[38] forever if that would not happen. (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 99)

It seems that the old man is trying to get the narrator to accept what the unpleasant situation of his arrest has led to. However, despite his knowledge that his wife did whatever she did for his sake, the narrator is playing the role of the aggrieved husband, even though he knows that he has little justification for doing so. He is back to playing "the role that was forced on me" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 92):

> I knew she had done it for me. But there was nothing left of me anymore. I don't remember what else I said. And I still don't know how your father could keep his equanimity and dignity. Of course, his reasons were useless. He knew it, himself, as well. He knew, but he kept trying anyway. For example, what did it benefit me that your father would talk about the pleasure of forgiving; or for example, about the value of the sacrifices of my wife; or even explain in detail how it is possible that a woman sleeps with someone but she doesn't give in? He meant not give in in spirit. (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, pp. 99-100).

[38] Referencing the size of a prison cell.

The old man here is comparing the narrator's own efforts to preserve himself while in prison with his wife's efforts to preserve him, to save him from prolonged imprisonment or perhaps execution. Eventually, the narrator admits that the old man is correct, but he is only able to do so much later, after he has left the prison:

> Now I can concede to some degree that he was right. But in those days, no… how should I say it? Not even now. I wanted to say that in our time, at least, spirit was not considered. Because they could pull out the spirit from the pores of the skin with tweezers. I told these things to your father, as well. I said that people see my body, not my spirit. (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 100).

The narrator realizes that his identity is not tied to any single act, incident, or occurrence. He accepts that a person's "spirit" is separate or at least separable from specific instances or circumstances. However, he is unable to count this "spirit" more highly than he does specific actions, or at any rate the specific actions of his wife, the sexual actions she appears to have taken in order to save him:

> I said that's why… truthfully, I don't remember. And these things that I remember because later I told them to that woman, also. I mean,

> truthfully, she knew it already, that everything was over. She asked for a divorce. (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 100)

Ultimately, the narrator is unable to even refer to his wife as his wife, calling her "that woman" and distancing himself from her. Although he knows that for her even his beliefs are not the entirety of himself, he is unable to consider her identity separate from her sexual act with someone else in order to save him. The closing line of that paragraph in the story is particularly poignant, "I heard that now she has a child, from her second husband" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 100). While this seems just another comment in passing to close the anecdote he had started telling, it also serves as an indicator of his own lack of significance or importance in any grand scheme, implying once again that, regardless of what happens to him, one solitary man, "… life goes on beyond the barbed wire, with its usual sluggishness and monotony" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 89).

Whereas the immediate implication from the text is that men, or at least Iranian men, are prone to thinking in abstractions, the narrator of that story repeatedly hints at determinism of a sort. For example, earlier in the story he argues that "now I think whoever else was in my place would have done the same" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 89). He seems to consider himself culturally determined, by his gender, by his nationality, and by his times. All of these components of his identity are culturally fixed, and for him and according to him, they are effectively unchangeable. While he claims

that the old man "forced [him] to play the role of a hopeless man" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 90), it appears that he knows of no other role to play.

"Dehliz" [Corridor/Labyrinth], which was among the first stories Golshiri wrote, explores the connection between culture, roles, and identity. This story deals with two central elements of the central character's life, his work and his family, which together form his identity. The story is told in reverse chronology, with later events being related first, and his recollections of earlier events portrayed later. The temporality displayed in this story is a remarkable element in its own right and helps to highlight the social and cultural basis of much of human identity.

The central character, Yadollah, is a laborer in a textile mill who is married with three young children. The story opens with his wife finding their children drowned in the patio pool at home. This tragedy leads to Yadollah's estrangement from his family and that aspect of his identity. He realizes this estrangement when he looks at his wife and sees how "the lines of her face had become obsolete and unfamiliar" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 1, 1965, p. 50). He also fails to feel any sense of identification with his family and neighbors in their gathering to mourn children's deaths, and he goes to his room alone and closes the door. He even avoids his own children's funeral, instead going to work.

Eventually, Yadollah recollects his earlier feelings of estrangement. He first felt the structure of his identity threatened when he was imprisoned over a strike at the mill. He was imprisoned with a colleague, Hasan, who provided evidence in exchange for his

own freedom. This left Yadollah isolated in prison and deprives him of the unity of workplace and political solidarity that had formed the other half of his identity. As Yadollah puts his experience of those events:

> "A man can bear everything, a whip that cuts the skin, handcuffs and burning cigarettes, and a thousand other things, but he can't stand seeing someone who has been a life-long drinking buddy come and say everything right to his face with no shame. Then he spent a lifetime in that hellhole for nothing, for what?" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 1, 1965, p. 50)

Later there is another strike. However, the second time, because of his estrangement from his coworkers, Yadollah knows nothing about the strike. Even when he asks a coworker who is leaving, he is not told what is going on. Although he knew nothing of the strike, he is arrested with everyone else. Despite his inability to identify with his colleagues, who apparently think he was an informer, he is identified with them by the authorities.

Essentially, Yadollah has sublimated his entire existence, first to his coworkers and his sense of collegiality at work and later to his family. After workplace and political identity fail him through the betrayal of Hasan, he flees to family. Yadollah remembers his conversation with Hasan years earlier after Hasan's betrayal. In that conversation he

said that being alone is hard and requires courage and recommend marriage and children as a solution. At the present, as told at the opening of the story, family has failed Yadollah through the deaths of his children and his estrangement from his wife, leaving him with nothing but himself to hang his identity on. Yet at the end of the story, Yadollah is still yearning for a sense of connection to provide identity, even wishing for a reconnection with Hasan despite his betrayal. He realizes the truth that solitude is hard and that identity, at least for him, is bound up in the social realm.

In addition to such examinations of the relationship between the roles prescribed by the culture and the identity of his characters, Golshiri also constructed elaborate descriptions of the culture in which he grew up. As the narrator of *The Book of Jinn*, Hoseyn, puts it, "Write about these things that have gone in order to find out what we should write or what we should do" (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, p. 215). He continues later, "If I write them down, then they will be forever" (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, p. 227), and still later, "I write in order for them to exist" (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, p. 235).

Thus, much of the detail regarding specific locations and cultural practices presented in *The Book of Jinn* represents an attempt by Golshiri to preserve, at least in written form, some of the rich cultural heritage he remembers from his childhood and youth (Ghanoonparvar, 2008). For example, the novel opens with a detailed description of his childhood home in Abadan. Golshiri spends several pages on this description of the house and their daily lives within it. In a somewhat closer parallel to the relationship

between cultural roles and identity, in *The Book of Jinn* Golshiri also describes in extensive detail the practices of old professions that were disappearing as Iran modernized. However, these details about "things that have gone" are not solely for the purpose of preserving the past, though that is among the reasons for presenting them. In addition, such details are intended, at least by the narrator, as a guide to, or as elements that should shape modern Iranian identity. Knowledge of these "things" is not a luxury; it is necessary "in order to find out what we should write or what we should do."

Cultural identity also appears in *Christine and Kid*. In some cases the text focuses particular attention on perceived differences in cultural expectations between the Iranian characters and the English woman, Christine. For example, at one point Christine asks, "What do you think Iranian men think of me?" (*Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 12). She follows this later with the comment that "for some Iranian men, a woman, especially a foreign woman, is only an object" (*Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 12). She keys in on the cultural phenomenon of objectification of women. Although this phenomenon is not isolated to Iranian men, the narrator has told her that the cultural distance between Iranian men and foreign women almost uniformly leads to female objectification. It is also likely that stereotypes about Middle Eastern men inform her sensitivity to such statements, though in this instance she is specifically asking about Sa'id, her lover, which adds additional, interpersonal elements to her observation.

Christine and Kid additionally portrays significant elements of shared identity across cultural distances, or of shared elements of human culture. One prominent instance of such shared cultural characteristics involves the discussion of rings:

> It was in her hand. It was a little box wrapped in colorful paper. With a red ribbon on the lid of the box shaped into a bow. She had made it, I am sure. I asked, "What is it?"
>
> She answered, "You don't know? Seriously, you don't know?"
>
> I knew and she knew that I knew.
>
> …
>
> I took the box and put it in my pocket, and I said, "I will see you." (*Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 115)

The narrator turns to leave the room, but Christine follows him and asks if he wants to open the box. He notices that she is not wearing her old wedding ring. He realizes that she had chosen this new ring for herself. Despite the apparent cultural gulf separating

these two characters, they immediately understand the culturally weighted significance of these rings, the new ring or the missing old ring.

Later in the same conversation, Christine asks the narrator, "When do you want to put it on my finger" (*Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 116). The narrator recognizes the implications of his bond with Christine. He tries to make things into a joke when he speaks to her because he does not want to accept responsibility, which is another shared cultural expectation related to the purchase of the ring. He thinks to himself, "I couldn't be serious. Maybe I wanted to make a joke out of it; to show that I didn't want to be responsible at all. I said, "Here, if it's just the ring, here is the ring." And I put the ring on her finger" (*Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 117). The cultural similarities are contrasted with linguistic differences. One particular example involves the narrator explicitly recognizing their linguistic separation. "I didn't say anything only because I couldn't say it in English. For example, for me to say 'I love you' is as if I said 'This is a ring' or 'Is a gold ring in the red box?' I won't write these. She knows" (*Keristin va Kid*, 1971, p. 115). Despite the linguistic separation they face, the narrator and Christine share a common understanding based on cultural similarities. They have different linguistic identities, which are the cause of some difficulties and friction, but they share much in the way of cultural identity. In particular, the giving and receiving of the ring carries the same weight in both cultures. Both of these characters share similar expectations about the cultural meaning of this act. The narrator makes clear to the reader that he does not

want the implied responsibility that he realizes both of their cultures will lead Christine to expect.

POLITICAL IDENTITY

Political circumstances and their impact on individuals form an important theme in Golshiri's works. For example, many of his stories feature characters who are in prison, apparently for political offences or for politically unacceptable cultural or literary aspirations or associations. Given the importance of political conditions as a significant determinant of broader social circumstances, it is reasonable to consider the links between cultural identity and political identity to be diverse and complex. Golshiri's writings often suggest the strength of this connection, leveraging descriptions of cultural or literary elements in conjunction with politically laden scenes or discussions. For example, the old man in "Both Sides of the Coin" takes a political stance vis-à-vis international relations when he argues regarding foreign powers that "they are afraid of an ancient nation, especially one with a magnificent culture" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 96). The narrator lets us know that the old man considered Iran's culture to be a significant element in the country's international political situation.

Several of Golshiri's stories examine the relationship between social and political phenomena. For instance, in "A Good Social Story" the main character of the Writer's story (the Writer is a character writing a story within the short story) argues that political

matters are more important than social. The main character, Mr. Monazzah observes that "Love is ridiculous. As long as our society is in misery we must give up paying attention to sensuality" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 95). Mr. Monazzah is arguing that Iranian society is not well and that remedying that underlying illness is more important than personal pleasure or satisfaction, including love. Mr. Monazzah relates the political needs of the country as he sees them to the concerns of individuals, and echoes the interpersonal divergence of the narrator and his wife in "Both Sides of the Coin," albeit with an argument that reflects a different perspective on the matter of sexuality and politics. Mr. Monazzah argues that "sleeping with a woman is a piece of cake. But we are responsible too. We must get busy with fundamental matters" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 95-96). Yadollah, in the short story "Corridor/Labyrinth", also experiences the interconnection between the social and the political when his identity as colleague and coworker is ripped away following his imprisonment. Although he did not inform on his colleagues while in prison, his comrade Hasan did, and the resulting fallout leaves Yadollah alienated from his accustomed position in the social order.

In addition to the significant focus of many of Golshiri's works on politically associated aspects of Iranian society, his stories also often invoke political references from other cultures. Such references are used to set up the identity of characters within stories. For example, Mr. Monazzah in "A Good Social Story" explains that his cousin is in love with him. In describing their relationship, the story explains that "They have even

read Chernishevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* page by page together" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 96). The title "What Is To Be Done?" was a title common to a number of politically motivated Russian books and indicates Mr. Monazzah's interests in politically inspired literature, perhaps hinting at an interest in leftist or communist politics. However, the story also reflects on the social aspects of Mr. Monazzah's fixation on activism, continuing with the scene as follows:

> Now the poor girl [Mr. Monazzah's cousin] has put *What Is To Be Done?* under her pillow and moans and she does not know what she is to do. When they were reading the book, the girl was against the idea of a husband and wife living separately in two rooms. But Mr. Monazzah gave her reasons and he even read a few pages of the book until he could convince Miss Monireh. But all of a sudden Miss Monireh said, "But we do not have two rooms, we have only this one. Besides, the roof of your room is leaking and has become damp." (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 96-97)

Mr. Monazzah is focused on political idealism and ideology. In an attempt to sway him from one of his arguments, his cousin points out the physical reality of their social and economic situation. However, rather than admit that his argument does not hold in the circumstances they are in, he argues instead that political ideology trumps

social desires or expectations. "Mr. Monazzah said, "We must pay attention to realities. As long as a person has no security he must not give in to marriage and such things… If tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow I…" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 97). While Miss Monireh hoped to show her cousin that his arguments about appropriate behavior from a political perspective were impossible given their circumstances from social and economic perspective, Mr. Monazzah turns the argument around. He argues that the political ideas with which he identifies are more important than social conventions regarding family or marriage.

Although this is the interpretation that Mr. Monazzah would likely approve, an alternative explanation for his lack of interest in marrying Miss Monireh is that she is not the type of woman who would make a proper wife by the standards of the society against which he purports to fight:

> Miss Monireh is not pretty. But she is decent. She is not a domestic kind of girl. Her mother washes the dishes and also cleans the house. Instead, Miss Monireh has read all of the books in Mr. Monazzah's room. Several times, she even has asked Mr. Monazzah to find her a picture of Maxim Gorky to put above the shelf on the wall. She is interested in discussion. She believes a woman must have economic independence. She goes to evening adult education classes. She even took the eleventh grade exams this year. She only has to retake

> religion and composition. She says, "One must not be superficial. A woman is not a doll." (*Mesl-e Hamisheh*, 1968, p. 99)

Thus, she is, or at the very least is attempting to be, a thoroughly modern woman. Mr. Monazzah espouses a political position that should value such a modern woman, yet when presented with the opportunity to tie himself to such a woman he revolts against his own espoused values. He hides behind them and argues that precisely because he values such change he cannot allow himself to marry her. Instead he proposes to rely on that oldest of all professions for his desires. As he puts it, "The only thing that remains is a prostitute. The best way is having relations with a prostitute… a prostitute" (*Mesl-e Hamisheh,* 1968, p. 96). Mr. Monazzah may have bound himself so tightly into his "revolutionary" identity to accept any encumbrances from traditional male-female relations, even if his response throws him into the clutches of the most traditional of all male-female relations – prostitution, the oldest profession in the world – and even if this reliance on prostitution undermines much of the leftist ideology that underlies his political identity.

The story "What Has Happened to Us, Barbad?" joins the literary and cultural with the political in telling us about the family situation behind the titular Barbad's persistent silence. Hamed, the narrator's absent, perhaps imprisoned or perhaps

executed, husband once told the story of Khosrow, a king from the *Shahnameh*, and his horse Shabdiz:

> Hamed said, "When Khosrow's horse Shabdiz died, no one had the courage to tell him, for Khosrow had said, 'whoever brings me the news of Shabdiz's death, I will kill him.' Barbad went and sat and sang so sadly and so mournfully that Khosrow said, 'Did Shabdiz die?' He himself said that Shabdiz had died." (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 56-57)

The Barbad of Golshiri's story, the son of the narrator and her husband, Hamed, is depicted as having a similar dread of conveying terrible news. The boy has gone to the prison where his father was at one point being held in order to visit him. After that visit, he ceased to speak, leaving his mother to wonder what is going on. She wonders if her husband is alive or dead, or if he is whole or maimed, imagining several different tortures he might have been subjected to. Her son, like Khosrow's minstrel Barbad in the *Shahnameh*, will not convey his news directly. Rather, he draws disturbing pictures that his mother struggles to decipher. In this story, the tyrannical behavior of a literary king from the Iranian epic the *Shahnameh* is used to convey a sense of the anxiety and terror provoked by the government that is holding the narrator's husband. The political message is made more complex and affecting by the following sentence, in which the narrator tells us that "My father said, 'Barbad? A singer? You named my grandson after

a minstrel? Shame on you!'" (*Panj Ganj*, 1989, p. 57). By that point at the end of the story we know that the narrator's father has expressed his support for the government. This statement at the end makes it clear that in this case family bonds have proven insufficient in the face of the grandfather's disdain for literature and his related political persuasion.

The short story "A Picture for My Empty Picture Frame" combines identity and political repression. After describing the treatment of prisoners while they were held in prison, the story relates the subsequent treatment of those prisoners who were released:

> Mohammad had heard, I don't know from whom, that "M" had changed his identity document and now he has become Baqeri. Mohsen Baqerinezhad. And he was unemployed. After that I didn't see him anymore. I didn't see "D" either. They couldn't put down roots. For the whole two years. How much can one bear? They had to, they had forced them to, in order to get revenge on them, in order to force them to experience the taste of vengeance. (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 31)

This segment combines references to the effects of repression with an identity card reference similar to that in "Mardi ba Keravat-e Sorkh" [A Man with a Red Tie]. There are pointed references to the relationship between the effects of these punishments in the

service of political oppression and the very identities of those suffering the punishment. The story also ties political and literary elements together, as when the narrator discusses the confiscations of his books:

> I said that I had burned them. But they had taken *Buf-e Kur* and *Haji Aqa* and even Nima's books. Then I found out that they had become interested in modern poetry. Because, there, Saghar forced me to read and explain "Arash-e Kamangir."[39] (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 20)

An element of irony is introduced into the story through the relationship between the narrator and his prison guard, Saghar. There is an aspect of shared identity that arises through their mutual interest in literature. However, their approaches to literature are quite different. Although Saghar reads with an eye toward political implications, he is one of the torturers in the prison, as well. He occupies a position of complicity with the authority that is subjecting the narrator and his friends to oppressive and brutal treatment. Both Saghar and the narrator struggle with this identity conflict, with their shared literary interests forming a bond that their opposing political identities renders insupportable.

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[39] *Buf-e Kur* and *Haji Aqa* are famous works by Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951), who is one of the most prominent early modern Persian writers of prose. Nima (1896-1960) is famous as the father of modern Persian poetry. *Arash-e Kamangir* is a famous poem by Siavash Kasra'i (1927-1996).

Such conflicting identity elements are dealt with in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

In *Prince Ehtejab* there are myriad references to political elements from the past. However, most of these elements revolve around others in the story. For example, one of the strikingly violent incidents from Shazdeh's great-grandfather's days is related in the novel through Morad, Shazdeh's former driver and now a cripple begging money from Shazdeh. The incident is presented as banal and almost routine, and involves Shazdeh's great-grandfather ("The Great Prince," one of the sons of the Qajar shah) casually murdering an illegitimate relative by sitting on a pillow over the man's face to suffocate him and then ordering the man's wife and children thrown into a well along with his body (*Shazdeh Ehtejab,* 2005, p. 39-41). This establishes Grandfather as a brutal, but also ruthlessly powerful political force. Shazdeh's father is presented as a much less powerful force in the incident involving the machine gunning of demonstrators. Rather than presenting the incident as a casual execution of trouble-makers, Golshiri presents us with Shazdeh's father suffering regret and perhaps fear or remorse. It is not entirely clear whether he fears imprisonment or regrets taking innocent lives. However, he is certainly not the brutally efficient authoritarian force that his own father (referred to as "Grandfather" by Shazdeh) was.

The Book of Jinn also includes extensive political references. For instance, Hasan, the older brother of the protagonist, argues that Iran remains feudal even as it

modernizes (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, p. 270). In the past, the lord owned the land and took what the peasants grew. In the modern incarnation of feudalism, the "lord" owns the factory, but he still takes what the people make. He is essentially making a rather fatalistic point about the state of political freedoms in Iran. This lack of political or economic freedom is a component of what Hasan sees as the Iranian identity, and it has not changed much over the centuries. Hasan finds this state of affairs intolerable given his underlying desire for change. His brother, Hoseyn, the narrator, on the other hand, prefers the permanency of a constant, fixed, unchanging present. These different preferences regarding change are, in fact, the primary traits of the two brothers' identities in the story.

Hoseyn's preference for fixity or permanency is a central identifying trait. When he heard about Yuri Gagarin's orbital spaceflight, his immediate reaction was one of extreme fear (*Jen-Nameh*, 1998, e.g., p. 226, p. 267, p. 294). He was so frightened of the change this flight implied that he wished to commit suicide. He even takes issue with Galileo, or more precisely with what Galileo represents – the perpetual advance of science. Hoseyn desires a fixed Earth that does not move, that does not change. He says that he writes in order to preserve things, but this preservation is done not for the sake of memory in a changing world, but rather in hopes of preventing the change. He is not comfortable with an indeterminate identity that he must continue to invent or reinvent or even reinforce for himself.

This last point regarding attitudes toward change impacts questions of identity. As circumstances change, so too do the people who create and interact with those circumstances. Perhaps this mutability of identity is part of what terrifies Hoseyn and leads him to seek permanence and stability, which leads to the next identity aspect dealt with in this analysis of Golshiri's works.

INDETERMINATE NATURE OF IDENTITY

The fact that so many of Golshiri's short stories involve characters playing roles indicates Golshiri's perception of the changeable, unstable nature of identity. The identification of characters with specific roles is common in Golshiri's stories, as is the recognition that such identification, and therefore such identity, is indeterminate, uncertain, and subject to alteration. For example, in "Both Sides of the Coin" the narrator reports on his initial attempt to ascribe an identity to the old man: "At first I thought he was a detective, or someone. But that early in the morning? Well, then who was he?" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 87). Although a person's identity may appear to be fixed and firm, it is often largely an amalgamation of different roles that people play in society, and identity is thus subject to change if circumstances lead to a change in a person's relationship to the broader society. The narrator eventually accused the old man of playing a role, if only or at least primarily for himself. "I said, 'You have become

addicted to being. To hopefulness, also. When you get up in the morning, you wear your hopefulness just like a hat and a shirt and tiepin'" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 98).

The narrator had earlier reported that "we, all of us, become victims of the way we look at things" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 95). Although the characters are "victims of their way of looking at things," how they look at things changes from day to day, hour to hour, and perhaps even minute to minute. The identity point being made in all of these selections is that identity is related to how one interacts with others, and thus may change as associations and situations change. In cases where identity seems to remain more fixed, characters are perceived as "wearing" an identity, rather than living it and letting it progress organically.

In *The Lost Lamb of Ra'i*, shortly after Ra'i's observation regarding the brute fact of physical existence noted earlier, Ra'i's colleague, Mr. Salahi, discusses his (Salahi's) pretense of religion in the presence of his wife. Salahi's wife was religious and Salahi feigned worship and adherence to religious precepts when around her. However, once she dies he determined that there was no need to go on being that person. In particular, he decided that he could drink whenever he liked. Salahi wore one identity for his wife while he lived a different identity around his friends (and perhaps yet another when by himself).

The characters in the "The Innocent" stories, particularly "The Innocent II" and "The Innocent III," also serve as striking examples of this kind of role playing subsuming

prior “stable” identities. “The Innocent IV” implies the possibility of deliberately changing identity by changing the “role” one plays in society by changing one’s name. First, the narrator relates his feeling of being trapped by his father’s name and thus by identification with or through his father:

> This is not in our hands anymore. Maybe because his name is in our identity documents or because if someone hears our last name he immediately remembers our father: “What is your relation to ‘so and so’?” They also said it there. One of them was saying: “Assuming that you are telling the truth, how about your father?” (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 123)

The narrator’s identity is first and foremost an offshoot of his father’s identity, at least for the people he meets. However, he envisions a separate and distinctly different future identity that he hopes to change into: “By the way, I have decided to change my last name” (*Namazkhaneh-ye Kuchak-e Man*, 1985, p. 123). This take on identity is quite similar to that noted in “A Picture for My Empty Picture Frame” above. Much the same identity reasoning is presented in *King of the Benighted*, as well. The protagonist is speaking with his wife on the phone when he reports the following:

> Then he heard the voice of his Mahbanoo. She was preparing for her high school finals, or maybe the university entrance exam. Yet he knew they would not let her into the university. How could the Selection Center42 at the Headquarters for the Cultural Revolution ignore her family name?[40] (Irani[41], *King of the Benighted*, 1990, p. 71)

It is clear that for the authorities her identity is based, more than any other factor, upon her family association. Her name, rather than her own political affiliations and ideology, determines how she will be treated by the political powers that be. However, in the references in "The Innocent IV" and "A Picture for My Empty Picture Frame", the characters discuss the ability to change "identity" by changing a name or an identity card. The political implications of this attempt to change "identity" in a police state are significant, and it is likely that the political powers did not favor such practices. Nonetheless, the possibility of changing ones identity in the broader social sphere through a simple change of name exists, at least when one moves away from familiar locales and people.

In addition, Golshiri's works contain more direct references to the indeterminate nature of identity. The narrator of "Both Sides of the Coin" makes it clear that he sees the events of a person's life as fragmentary and underdetermined at the moment they are

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40 Selections from *King of the Benighted* are from Abbas Milani's 1990 translation.

41 Manuchehr Irani is listed as the author of *King of the Benighted* [Shah-e Sia Pushan]. The story is attributed to Golshiri, with the name Manuchehr Irani argued to be a pseudonym.

happening. "It means when a person is involved in something, he sees things in bits and pieces and is incapable of putting together or organizing them" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 98). He had earlier said of the old man that "I left connecting the pieces to him" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 98) and follows up later with the argument that "The duration of a particular event is apparent only when a person has become distant from that event" (*Jong-e Esfahan* Vol. 9, 1972, p. 98). The implication that the seemingly connected flow of events after the fashion of a coherent story is a pastiche, a framework placed on it from a distance, at a later time, is clear.

Golshiri's characters recognize that the visible components of a person's identity, the elements that can be used to construct this pastiche, may not convey an accurate picture of the identity behind those visible actions. It is possible that the visible serves to hide, rather than to reveal the underlying 'reality' they seek. For example, the observer in "A Man with a Red Tie" has compiled an extensive dossier on Mr. S. M. Nonetheless, he feels compelled to write in his report. "What if all of these characteristics are only misleading, masks to cover what is going on inside a dangerous person? Just like those glasses and beard, and perhaps the red tie…?" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 7, 1968, p. 120). Although he has observed all of the subject's behavior, the same elements that are sufficient to identify a parrot in "Green as a Parrot, Black as a Crow" even when beak and wings are not, he is uncertain if those elements of behavior paint an accurate picture of the subject of his surveillance. The difference is related to free will and agency. The

subject of the investigation is his own agent, choosing his own actions, and capable of altering those behaviors at will. So for a human, because of the capacity to act strategically, to hide reality behind a mask, knowing someone's behaviors does not necessarily provide sufficient information to determine deeper identity. Identity, thus, remains forever indeterminate, however strong a hypothesis one may develop through long observation and interaction.

Golshiri's *Prince Ehtejab* confronts such uncertain, indeterminate identity, as well. The character of Shazdeh, himself, embodies this modern, existential conception of identity. While Grandfather is a self-assured, traditional individual and Father is uncertain, divided but active, Shazdeh is vague, undefined, debilitated, and thus he is thoroughly modern. In this fashion, Shazdeh Ehtejab represents the country of Iran. Iran, a country with a distinguished, celebrated history, has languished and moldered in modern times. Both the country of Iran and the character of Shazdeh Ehtejab are indeterminate, uncertain, and debilitated in comparison to their expectations and to the standard set by their historical roots. As James Buchan puts it, "The impression conveyed by The Prince in both its narrative and its style is not that Iran has no future. More to the point, it has no present" (*The Prince*, 2005, p. 16). Shazdeh is presented as existing in a state of limbo, much as the country of Iran could be characterized as existing in a state of limbo. Both Iran the country and Shazdeh the character are caught between

the solidity and weight of the historical and the hesitancy and uncertainty of the emerging modern.

The characters in *The Lost Lamb of Ra'i* experience the indeterminacy of identity, as well. When Ra'i (literally Shepherd, though it is also his name) is speaking with his mother about his girlfriend who had left him recently, he experiences an existential moment. He thinks, "… you don't think that you exist, that's the reason why everyone talks about the past, that they existed, or one day, sometime they have become…" (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i*, 1977, p. 108).

Ra'i experiences loneliness after his girlfriend leaves him. He is no longer sure who he is, or even if he is without that omnipresent social reinforcement that he received through his relationship with her. His only solid touchstone is the past, when he was sure he existed, or in more existential terms, when he was aware that he was becoming. The existentialist concept of "becoming" emphasizes the choice inherent in human existence and human identity creation, although it is not entirely clear that Ra'i recognizes his own agency in this fashion. Rather, Ra'i clings to the past and envisions everyone else doing the same.

The quote from Ra'i presented earlier regarding "infinities", in addition to insinuating the primacy of existence, reflects the multiplicitous nature of existence. "And now here we are something between two infinities. If you want you are a god, otherwise you would be mineral, vegetable, or animal, or nothing, zero" (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye*

Ra'i, 1977, p. 70). Once existence versus non-existence is settled, Ra'i argues, the possibilities are literally endless.

Moreover, as noted above, Ra'i's colleague, Salahi, recognizes the change in his identity when he is around his wife. Or perhaps more precisely, he recognizes that the requirement that he change identities or maintain multiple, conflicting identities has terminated with the death of his wife, for whom he was playing a different role. The extended quote regarding Ra'i's existential crisis also indicates his own recognition of the indeterminacy of his identity:

> No, he couldn't tell, it wasn't possible, because it's always late, you never understand that now it's the time, or when you think too much of sitting on the chair, or under that pine tree watching the rain, you don't think that you exist, that's why everyone talks of the past, that they existed, or one day, sometime they have become, and its signs were that very kiss, the trembling of hand, or the expectation of the door bell – when you know that she is not there; she has gone. (*Barreh-ye Gomshodeh-ye Ra'i*, 1977, pp. 107-108)

His own sense of identity thrown into turmoil by his girlfriend's departure, Ra'i feels lost and alone. He is uncertain who he is. In addition to questioning *if* he is – his very existence, he is questioning who he is and whether it is even possible for him to know

who he is at any given time. He recognizes the reexamination of identity that takes place from a future vantage where the outcomes of present decisions are more fully realized and recognized. This recognition evokes the conception from "Both Sides of the Coin" that the determination of the duration of events can only take place from some future vantage: "The duration of a particular event is apparent only when a person has become distant from that event" (*Jong-e Esfahan*, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 98).

The examples presented here illustrate Golshiri's recognition of modern conceptions of identity as mutable, turbulent, and often conflicting. All of the different aspects of identity noted above coexist, shift into and out of prominence, diverge, clash, and coalesce repeatedly. Golshiri dealt with all of these at one point or another, but, as Ghanoonparvar points out, Golshiri held the opinion that:

> the writer should be primarily concerned with the literary work, artistic imagination, and the process of literary creation, rather than merely using literature as a vehicle for extraliterary socio-political and other purposes. (Ghanoonparvar, 1985, p. 354)

Golshiri utilized attention to all of these aspects of identity, at times placing more emphasis on one, other times another, but he used them in service of his literary aims. These conflicting elements of identity form part of a broader commentary on the human

condition and human existence rather than representing a verisimilitudinous examination of social or political phenomena primarily of interest to a single time and place.

Such attention to broader human experience is central to Golshiri's approach to literature. Though he leverages the events and circumstances of particular places and times, he pays close attention to the craft of writing, to the techniques and structures he utilizes, and to the import of his work on a more expansive view of life and of human experiences. Although the following chapter examines Golshiri's treatment of identity in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, the reader should keep in mind that Golshiri examined such identity issues within the structure provided by his attention to literary craft and technique.

Chapter Three:

Identity Representations in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*

This chapter examines treatments of the five different aspects of identity introduced in the previous chapter within Golshiri's novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*. The chapter opens with a plot summary of the novel, followed by the exploratory identity examination that forms the core of the analysis presented here. As in the previous chapter, the five aspects of identity employed in this investigation, Existence and Identity, Linguistic/Literary Identity, Cultural Identity, Political Identity, and the Indeterminate Nature of Identity, are dealt with in this order and the examinations are conducted separately, though some significant overlaps and interactions between them are identified. The subsections include theoretical grounding for identifying and examining these categories of identity.

PLOT SUMMARY OF *AYENEHHA-YE DARDAR*

Ayenehha-ye Dardar tells the story of a writer, the protagonist/narrator,[42] who travels to several European countries, including Germany, Denmark, and France in 1990.

[42] It becomes clear over the course of the story that the narrator is, in fact, the protagonist from whose point of view the third-person narrative is related. He is recounting the story as he recalls it from his past. Khorrami (2003) argues that there are three layers of time in the story, the distant past of the stories the narrator relates to his audiences, the near past of his trip about which he is writing, and the

In these countries, he reads and discuses his works to audiences composed largely of Iranian expatriates. The story opens in the airport in London. Two airport security officers approach the narrator, who is sleeping in the airport waiting for his flight, and ask him to show his passport and answer some routine questions. Shortly after that, he remembers that he had answered similar questions asked by the inspection officer in the airport in Tehran when departing for his trip to Europe. Much of the story deals with his recollections of events from the recent and from the more distant past.

At this early point in the novel, it becomes apparent that the narrator is thinking about his own identity. He asks himself who he really is and where he is from. These questions recur throughout the story. He recalls that he had asked the same questions when he saw the East Germans and the Poles standing in long lines in front of stores in West Berlin. He reflects that these people come to West Berlin to buy goods to use or to sell at a higher price in their home countries. He thinks of himself a vagabond, just as these people seem to him to be vagabonds. Explicit questions such as these make the theme of the story regarding questions of identity clear to the reader of the novel at the very beginning.

The bulk of the story follows the travels of the narrator, Ebrahim, whose name the reader eventually learns towards the end of the novel, as he reads his stories to Iranian expatriate audiences in cities across Germany including West Berlin, Cologne, Hanover,

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present in which he is writing the story for the reader. Each of these layers is presented from the perspective of the narrator.

Frankfurt, and Hamburg. He sees the First of May celebration in West Berlin. He remembers he has seen May Day demonstrations in Iran, with tear gas and smoke in the air and people shooting. He remembers that the men who were shooting let him pass because he looked like them, having a similar coat and a full beard (suggesting that these men were supporters of the Islamist government suppressing a leftist demonstration on May Day). While the narrator is reading his stories in Berlin, he receives an anonymous note among questions from the audience. It is the first of many such notes. He thinks that he recognizes the handwriting. The note says "Don't read. It's private." It says it is from an old acquaintance, and a phone number is written on it as well. He calls the number the next morning, but the person who answers does not speak to him so he thinks it is a joke.

At a reading in Cologne he receives a second note in the same handwriting asking about the most intimate moments in one of his stories. At that reading, he gives a summary of a short story called "Arusi" [Wedding] about a young girl's wedding and her childhood sweetheart, whom she does not marry. He then reads a selection from it. Later, in Hanover, Ebrahim reads part of a novel about a middle-aged woman who is separated from her husband and lives with her parents. After a break during his reading in Hanover, he receives yet another note on a scented piece of paper requesting that he read a story called "Maryam" from one of his short story collections. He recalls a section of the requested story in his mind. It is about a young man whose friends take him to the

red light district. Although his friends go with prostitutes in the district, he does not. Suddenly, as they are leaving, he says "I will go with this one." He thinks of Maryam, a woman he apparently loved who had a real mole unlike this woman, whose mole was painted on. He cries and can't do it. Outside he vomits and tells his friend that the mole was fake, and that she was not really named Maryam, either.

The next day, at a party in Hanover, Ebrahim sees Marziyeh, an acquaintance he knew in Iran. She is wearing black, as if in mourning. She tells him that she usually does not go to this kind of gathering, but that she made an exception for his reading. She explains to him how she spends her days, walking and walking until she gets somewhere she does not even recognize. She spends some time window shopping and sitting on benches in parks as if she is waiting for someone, and then she starts walking again. Eventually she says to him, "Well, that's the way it is," expressing her sense of fatalism regarding her expatriate life in Europe.

The following day Ebrahim does some sightseeing with his nephew, Hamid, who tells him about the secluded areas being dangerous for foreigners. He recounts that at five in the morning one day the Fascists beat up an Iranian in the Metro because they think foreigners are taking the jobs away from Germans. Hamid says that these Fascists mostly harass Turks, so Turks usually walk together in groups. However, he says that "we [Iranians] cannot," leading the narrator to comment that "it was obvious that no group remained anymore."

That evening at a barbeque party the narrator visits with a group of former leftist activists.[43] They have political discussions about human civilization, "the fatalist path of human history," Western democracy, socialism, and capitalism. Their discussion also ranges into cultural differences. For example, the differences between the behavior and expectations of women in Iran and in the West as well as differences regarding family and children, divorce and marriage, and casual relationships out of marriage, all come up as topics in their conversation. The narrator's description of the people involved in the discussion indicates that idea of casual sexual relationships apparently still makes some of them nervous or shy.

The next day he visits a garden/park with some acquaintances, including Petal, the American-European friend of one of the Iranians whom he met at the party the day before. She points to a willow tree across the lake and tells him the willow story:

> They say that two lovers go to a river for a swim. One of them drowns and the other one stands on the edge of the river until her feet root and her hair and hands bud, leaf, and grow until they reach the surface of the water in case if the lover brings his head out of the water or

[43] Golshiri does not explicitly state the ideologies of these people, but the context and content of their discussions seems to indicate that they were socialist or communist sympathizers. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that the group includes a mix of somewhat incompatible ideologies that share a common lack of acceptability for Iranian governments, both Monarchic and Islamic, leading to their status as exiles, whether self-imposed out of fear or state imposed on pain of imprisonment or death.

stretches his arm to grab her disheveled hair or her long arms to come out of the water[44] (p. 25).

That night, Ebrahim speaks on the phone with his wife, Mina, who has remained in Iran with their children. He tells her about his schedule and asks about the children. He wants to speak with them, but she tells him that they are sleeping. She reminds him to write, or at least takes notes so that he will not to forget the details.

At his next reading, in Frankfurt, he reads an unpublished satirical story. During the break he receives another note, again with the phone number, from the anonymous person who asks him to call if he visits Paris. In Hamburg, he reads a story about a woman who was infatuated with a wolf that used to come under her window and howl at the moon. He does not get any notes from the anonymous person in Hamburg. After that, he goes to Copenhagen for five days, where he visits with an old writer friend from Iran. This friend now lives in a complex for the elderly and alcoholics. He has been living there for six months while waiting for the government to give him a separate place to live. They talk about his friend's old sweetheart. His friend says that she may now be in Aachen with someone, and that she may be living in separate house for the purpose of getting double the monthly asylum stipend.

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[44] Because in Persian language there is no gender for third person pronouns, I have had to make assumptions in order to render this passage into unstilted English. Given the reference to grabbing hair to come out of the water, I have assumed that the lover who is standing on the edge of the river is a female (with long hair), and that the one who has drowned was male.

Ebrahim then goes to Paris and stays with another friend. He visits people in the city for several days before he finally decides to call the number written on the anonymous note. He guesses that the anonymous person might be his old sweetheart, Sanam (also called Samanu or Sanam Banu). They speak on the phone and decide to meet. The major part of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* revolves around the conversations between Sanam and Ebrahim, about their lives when they were young, about what is going on in the present, and about what may happen or what may be possible for their respective futures.

When they meet, they see older people going about their lives. They are now in their forties, but reminisce about when they were young and used to walk to school together, do their homework, and talk about their parents. Since they were cousins, they had more to remember about their families and childhood homes than many former sweethearts might have. Sanam talks about her children, telling Ebrahim that they are all grown up and independent now. During this conversation Sanam tells Ebrahim that he gave pieces of her to different female characters in his stories. Ebrahim thinks of his stories and acknowledges to himself that he has done so. For example, he had written about Sanam's mole in "Maryam" and other stories, and about her marriage to a man other than him in "Wedding." Eventually Sanam tells Ebrahim about her house and her work place, a library in her neighborhood.

Ebrahim spends several more days sightseeing and also visiting friends and talking with them about the people they both knew in the past. He asks what those common acquaintances and friends are doing now in Europe. Bahman, one of Ebrahim's old friends, talks about Imani, Sanam's former husband. He says that Imani is now in Dubai and doing well. He explains that he and Imani were imprisoned in 1959, and after they were released they went back to their previous jobs in the oil company. Later on, in 1964, Imani was arrested and imprisoned for two months, and again in 1971 or 1972 for six months. After his release he was not allowed to go back to his former job. Imani started another job, and later in 1977 he left for Paris. Several years later, in 1982 when Bahman arrived in Paris, he stayed with Imani for a while. It was then that Imani revealed a booklet with a list of 8,000 names of agents working for the Iranian secret police (SAVAK).[45] Imani's name was also included in that list. Bahman tells Ebrahim that he knew about the list in early 1979 or 1980. During this conversation, Ebrahim often says that he knew this or that fact. The conversation between Ebrahim and Bahman exposes that Imani secretly collaborated with the SAVAK while pretending to be an activist, and that Imani confessed to Bahman about his role in identifying political groups for the government.

In Paris, Ebrahim reads an unfinished story for one of the Iranian gatherings. The story was dedicated to his wife, Mina, and this is the first time he has read it in public.

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[45] SAVAK, the Iranian secret police under the Shah, was established in 1957. See Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran*, p. 126.

He tells the audience that for several years he had been hoping to polish it, but he doesn't really want to change it because sometimes he thinks it is not bad just at it is. Sanam and other people whom Ebrahim knows are in the audience. The story is about a writer who also teaches at the university, and is in the middle of writing a story. It seems the life of Ebrahim and the writer of this story overlap significantly, and sometimes it is difficult or impossible to draw any distinction between the writer character and the author Ebrahim. It seems as if Ebrahim wants the readers/listeners to know the events of his life story through these characters.

The main character in the story, the writer, is a political activist. He is divorced, and he meets his second wife almost the same way that Ebrahim met his wife Mina. Other characters in the story are also former political activists. For example, one character shares the name of Mina's former husband, Taher. Both Mina's Taher and the Taher in the story were activists and were executed by the SAVAK. Even the names of the characters in the story mirror those of Mina's daughters. Ebrahim does not give a name for this story. It seems it may be an autobiography, a chapter of his life at the time he met Mina.

Two days later he meets with Sanam Banu around the Sacre-Coeur cathedral. Sanam, who is now working on her doctoral degree in literature, is very interested in talking about literary figures, language, and philosophy. Ebrahim and Sanam have discussions about Iranian writers who have lived abroad and about the subjects of their

writings. Sanam argues that the writers who left Iran still write about the same things, the same old streets and the same political issues, as they did in Iran. She thinks that the writers in Paris, for example, should take advantage of being in different location with different culture and see the Iran they know through different lenses, not feeling sorry for the past, a past that changes so frequently whether by regime change or by war or simply by business development or new construction. Ebrahim, on the other hand, thinks that for that same reason, because things are changing so fast, he must write in Iran. He must write for the next generation to know where they are coming from, and he does not think he can capture that sense of Iran from a distance, in Paris.

Later that day, Sanam invites Ebrahim to her place for dinner. They have long conversations about many things – Sanam's life after she got married, her life in Paris, the importance of language, her library at home (which they refer to as her "language house"), Ebrahim's works in relation to their often shared childhood memories. Sanam argues that Ebrahim should be able to compose the same quality works there, in Paris, perhaps even more effectively than he can back in Iran. Ebrahim, in contrast, thinks that he has to return to Iran to be able to write what he wants to write. Ultimately, Sanam's efforts to convince Ebrahim to stay in Paris fail. At the end of the novel Ebrahim talks of his roots, particularly his wife and children. He says that they are good and also that he is old and that he doesn't "want to be cured", and he decides to go back to Iran. They sleep together in one bed, but they simply say "good night" to each other and the story ends.

EXISTENCE AND IDENTITY

The protagonist/narrator in Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* introduces his identity concerns at the outset of the story. On the second page of the story he writes "Indeed, who was he?" (p. 6).[46] However, even prior to this, he references existence:

> Then, he sat at a table: "Now I am." He knew he had played a trick on someone, not on those who were sitting here and there at a table and their faces and hair and even their clothes seemed normal to the airport policemen, but on himself. (p. 6)[47]

It is as if the narrator is implicitly accepting the precedence of some phenomenological question of being that occurs behind or prior to questions of consciousness and identity. Such questions of existence or being have been a focal concern of philosophers at least since the time of Plato. Attempts to determine the essential elements of existence have been a prominent area of focus across many metaphysical systems. The narrator of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is not really interested in such philosophical examinations of existence, but he is concerned with questions of identity. He also seems to have some concern for the existential questions that underlie questions of identity.

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46 Hushang Golshiri, *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* [Mirrors with Doors], Tehran: Entesharat-e Nilufar, 1992.

47 All of the quotes from *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* are translated from the Persian by the author of this dissertation.

This concern with existence is, however, subordinate to a concern with identity. As a writer, Golshiri's narrator is sensitive to questions of identity. Since the narrator may actually be an autobiographical character, serving as a manifestation of Golshiri himself in fictional form, it is unsurprising that he is primarily focused on literary identity or identity from the perspective of his characters. This concern implies relegating questions of existence to a subordinate issue that is motivated and informed by the identities of interest. However, at the same time the brute facts of existence also serve to inform and provide a foundation for these same identities.

Such an approach to the interaction between existence and identity is akin to the approach taken by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger turned the question of existence or being on its head. Heidegger argues that the question of what existence is cannot be answered in general terms. In order to approach the question in any meaningful way, one must first determine what being (who) is asking the question. The experience of existence, both of things and of people, including the self, is contingent upon the mind of the observer. The narrator of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* explicitly recognizes this contingency, though he aspires to reach beyond it. For example, he tells Sanam that he wants to write, but to move beyond the subjectivity of the narrator:

> I, of course, want to write. Because we have not written at all, because we have not thought about the style of writing, for example, how we can write this, this darkness, or that swan of yours, so far all of it has

> been generalization. Sometimes, it is the imagination (subjectivity) of the narrator, as if we cover the swan with the glaze of mind, in a way as if it was not the real swan. I want to write this way, the way that there is nothing beyond the swan. (p. 127)[48]

This episode shows the narrator's realization that he approaches things through his imagination, through his individual subjectivity, rather than perceiving them as they "really" are. Yet he continues to desire to see the entirety of the thing, in this case the swan, so that he isn't projecting himself over the swan, but is instead conveys only the swan, and "nothing beyond the swan."

On the other hand, Sanam, who was the narrator's sweetheart when they were teenagers and lived in Iran, seems to recognize the impossibility of approaching a thing from all perspectives at once. "She said: 'You see, it is always this way. 'Either nothing or everything' is nonsense, it is impossible to both sing and expect that the swan stays'." (p. 127)

The existence with which Golshiri deals is not uniformly the existence of an external reality. Not surprisingly, given that the novel is written about an author who in many ways mirrors Golshiri, the existence of a character as a character in a story is a

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[48] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this chapter are translated by the author from Golshiri's novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* [Mirrors with Doors]. Tehran: Entesharat-e Nilufar, 1992.

repeated motif. For example, Sanam refers to her own mediated existence in the narrator's stories:

> Look, I want you to know that I am happy now that I am somewhere in the world, even if it is on the paper and in Persian language. Well, except the few pictures I have, it is not bad either that something remains from the buried past, even though it has been altered. (p. 40)

She accepts an element of identity that is not her own, or at least not representative of the Sanam who is examining that existence. The narrator, himself, seems to see his own existence as subsumed within writing:

> He pulled out one or two folders and turned the pages. He had guessed right. She had collected everything about everyone. Each shelf was specifically for someone. He found his own shelf. She had arranged them chronologically, and on the folders she only had put a number. (p. 109)

In Sanam's library, Ebrahim/narrator is reduced not only to a set of folders, but to a numerical reference. His folders do not even get a name. For her part, though Sanam recognizes and says that she values "her" existence in his stories, she also argues that she, at least as the Sanam that exists in present day Paris, is not the Sanam that the narrator

has written into his stories. "It has been the same way that it is now, just like me who never has been what you have written" (p. 128). At another point she confronts Ebrahim more forcefully with this differentiation between what he has written in his stories and what he faces with her in the present: "The Samanu[49] or the Sanam is only in my and your memories, I am now forty three years old, and I exist" (p. 136).

The narrator recognizes that external reality, though it may not be directly accessible as Kantian noumena, does impinge on reality as experienced. His wife, Mina, comments on (reminds him of) the impact of external reality, as well. "Now I am on earth, I put up with these virtues and vices" (p. 123). Saussure invokes a similar distinction between the ideational thing, the signified, and the assumed "actual object" that underlies the ideational thing. The notion of the referent invokes a reality that is external to the mind, providing the stimuli that are experienced and translated into mental images. Golshiri's narrator takes this mental image, ideational element to the extremes that authors often do, creating his own imagined world. He confesses that his imagined Sanam or Samanu is more powerful, more real for him than the one standing in front of him:

> He said: "I loved you very much, Samanu."
>
> "I know."

[49] Samanu, Sanam Banu, Sanam are all names by which Sanam in the story is known.

> She had given him a soda drink too, she said: "What about Sanam, what about Sanam Banu?"
>
> "Well, of course you are Samanu, as well as Sanam and Sanam Banu, but frankly, I can't see that one, the one whom I have always seen, here and now present." (p. 151)

The fact that the imagined, remembered Sanam/Samanu is more real to the narrator than present "reality" is a deliberate stance taken by the narrator. Again, this may be due to the fatalistic interpretation he and his circle have accepted regarding their apparent impotence with respect to their former political, ideological aspirations. The narrator may unconsciously be looking to escape into his own imagination to avoid his inability to affect the external world as he desires. Sanam seems to imply such an attitude when she accuses him of simple-mindedness for ever thinking that he and his small group could give rise to a social/political revolution (p. 143).

Such an interpretation is, however, a bit facile. Though there may be an element of shame in the narrator's interactions with his former comrades and their inability to live up to their ideals, he takes a conscious and deliberate position in that his writing, his very style of writing, is driven by memory. This is, he claims, at least in part a result of his

cultural and literary heritage. "Playing in the mind/imagining [khiyal bazi][50] with the figure of the one who has beautiful hair and slender waist, was his heritage and tradition." (p. 138). This mind-play for him is the legacy of his cultural heritage. He makes a much more direct statement shortly after this when Sanam asks him if he has to only write about a woman who comes in his imagination and is good for nothing but mind-play:

> "...But my job, now I understand, is more recollection, pointing out someone or something, and that would be by setting the moments or pieces of that person or that thing next to each other."
>
> To which Sanam replies:
>
> "This is just like Plato's example that his way of knowledge was recollection." (p. 142)

Though the narrator exercises control over the characters in his stories, at least in so far as he writes what he remembers or wants to remember, he cannot control the world beyond his stories with the same facility. This recognition likely colors the fatalism regarding the unfulfilled political, ideological aspirations the narrator faces when he

[50] Khiyal bazi, refers to the Persian poetic tradition when poets used to sit in a room and imagine their subjects in their mind and inspired by to write their poems. It also could refer to shadow puppet show.

speaks with his former colleagues in Germany. He and his friends repeatedly remark that "that is the way it is" (e.g., p. 16) or speak directly of fatalism (e.g., p. 23), implying that they can do nothing to change things, though they all thought differently as leftist activists back in Iran.

LINGUISTIC/LITERARY IDENTITY

The ontological primacy of existence as a (theoretically) necessary precursor to questions of identity is turned somewhat on its head by existential approaches to identity. The existential philosophies developed by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre imply radical freedom for the individual, Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return notwithstanding. All three of these thinkers, however, recognize the difficulty of moving beyond culturally bound expectations and preconceptions.

Psychoanalytic approaches to identity such as those developed by Sigmund Freud and extended and refined by Jacques Lacan couch such culturally determined systems in linguistic terms (Ecrits, 2006). According to Lacan, an individual acting in the world does so through a symbolic order that is fundamentally linguistic in nature. The symbolic order serves to structure the individual's imaginary order, where recognition of its own individuation comes together with its Ego. Lacan argues that the reflected image of the individual, what he calls the mirror stage, leads to profound alienation since the internal experience of identity is indeterminate and fluid whereas the reflected image is solid and

static. The symbolic order and the imaginary order, or the social realm of rules and the individual realm of desires and imagery, come together in confrontation with what Lacan calls the real. The real is the brute fact of experience intruding upon the mental landscape, but it is not accessible in itself. Here again we face something akin to Heidegger's argument that being can only be assessed from an assumed or given perspective, never in general. Though this interaction is often fraught, and though the individual's psyche may suffer from misalignments between the elements of this triangle, such as when the individual misapprehends the rules inherent in the symbolic order and runs into conflict with social expectations, or the other, in most cases the members of a society are able to interact with relatively minimal friction and disruption.

In the case of diasporas there is significant tension between different, conflicting symbolic orders. Given the emigration of large numbers of people, substantial communities of expatriates are likely to coalesce in cultural ghettos. In such circumstances, the symbolic order that predominated in the old socio-political, linguistic system will continue to exert substantial influence and to exhibit greater persistence than would likely be the case for individuals transplanted abroad as immigrants. At the same time, the symbolic order that predominates in the new cultural setting will also exert significant influence. Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk (2005) call this situation a hyphenated identity:

> The potential for erasing ethnic and national ties is inherent within the notion of diaspora but in practice what often occurs is both syncretic cultural formation and re-enforced ethnic and nationalist ties within the same diasporic space. The formation of hyphenated identities ... can reinforce the sense of belonging to the nation-states on both sides of the divide, but this can also result in the creation of new identities which have no affiliation to the nation-state form. (2005, p. 33)

Thus, while it is possible that some transplants will find greater attachment to existing cultural spaces and identities, it is equally possible that entirely new, and somewhat rootless, homeless identities may be created.

In *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, Golshiri's characters face just such a situation. The narrator refers to this early in the novel when he thinks to himself "Indeed, who was he?" and then says aloud "Where am I from?" (p. 6). The expatriates to whom he speaks in his travels and with whom he attends parties have formed a loose community of Iranian expatriates in multiple locations across Europe. Those who settled close to each other continue to have close associations, thereby reinforcing the expectations and requirements for behavior inherited from the symbolic order of their homeland. For example, after a conversation that includes discussion of the fraught relationships of the

Iranian expatriates attending a barbeque in Hanover, West Germany, one female character, Petal speaks to the narrator:

> "... They are often together, and every night there is this kind of discussion, either about women or politics or I don't know what."
>
> "Why about women?"
>
> "You can see yourself, all of them have come alone, except Sa'id, but I assure you each of them has a girlfriend whom they hide from the rest." (p. 22)
>
> Later she says:
>
> "You see they started again? They are still hiding things, even their love. I say if you like someone, then you should say it aloud." (p. 24).

It is telling that this comment comes from Petal, who is "American-European" rather than Iranian. Indeed, she is a foreigner in both her country of residence and among the hosts of the barbeque, though she does come from a Western country. The Iranian men in attendance are reluctant to express their feelings, particularly for women to whom

they are not engaged or married. However, many of them are separated or divorced from their Iranian wives and are dating European women. These Iranian men are living in a culture that allows much greater freedom, particularly for women, but, in part as a consequence of this freedom for women, for men as well. At the same time, in their native culture it is not customary to date casually, much less have intimate relationships. At least one member of the group has assimilated to a greater degree to the symbolic order of their new home since he has brought his girlfriend (who speaks only German).

Another cultural difference that emerges and is commented upon by the characters in the story involves the relationships between husbands and wives. Many of the women in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* are separated from their husbands. "Aziz had recently separated from his wife and was living with Zamyad. Hadi was also separated, but his wife was not willing to keep the kids" (p. 23). They had already discussed the differences between women back in Iran and women in Europe/the West. Sa'id's German girlfriend began that part of the conversation with Manuchehr translating for her:

> Manuchehr said: "But she says it does not matter Iranian or German, men are the same everywhere."
>
> Manuchehr was laughing, he said: "And I told her, women are not that different either."

> Hadi said: "Of course they are not different, except when they get here, to Europe, too."
>
> Hasan said: "That's obvious, so you say that they have to remain the same as they were?" (p. 22)

The characters recognize that Iranian women in Europe are not the same as Iranian women in Iran. Hadi essentially claims that once in Europe, Iranian women are indistinguishable (culturally/socially) from their European counterparts. Though overstated, his point, according to Hasan, is that Iranian women are *very* different when in Iran. The culture, customs, and expectations in Iran, Iran's dominant symbolic order, hold that women should be much more obedient toward and subservient to men than is common in Europe. This is particularly true of post-revolutionary Iran, though the changes wrought by the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s were largely a superficial "revolution" rather than a more substantive, grass-roots cultural transformation.[51]

The discussion points out the apparent presence of unfulfilled desires or expectations among Iranian women. Given the dominant position that the symbolic order plays in structuring the imaginary, one might argue that Iranian women were not and perhaps could not be consciously aware of such desires while under the sway of an

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[51] In 1963, the Shah of Iran started a series of reforms which he called The White Revolution. See also Ervand Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 123-154.

Iranian symbolic order. Of course, for those in the middle classes, who were most likely to be counted among the social activists and were much more likely to emigrate, may have had substantial exposure to Western media and to have at least to some degree begun exploring more "liberal" Western thoughts and cultural expectations regarding the role of women. Indeed, the Shah's White Revolution, itself, at least presented the opportunity for many women (and men, as well) to be exposed to such thinking.

Once in Europe these Iranian women are presented with the opportunity, perhaps even the demand, that they explore the broader options afforded to European women. The narrator discusses the reasons for the differences in marital relationships as he travels on the train from Copenhagen to his next destination. His companion comments on the status of family in Europe:

> He stayed in Copenhagen for only five days. He traveled by train and he was accompanied by someone who was from there, he was saying, "The foundation of family here has no meaning anymore. Two people live together for a while, then if they don't like it, they say goodbye."
>
> The children were not an issue that much. One of them [husband or wife] probably would assume responsibility to raise them. Then the only issue would be themselves. He was saying, "I have told Azita, we are both free, if one of us wants, well, you know."

> He trusted Azita; but he himself, well, you know, he had someone's address in Hamburg, he could not find her. He was saying, "Here we often hide it, we are still bound by traditions we had back home, we are even hypocritical, and when the cat is out of the bag we get mad." (p. 29).

The last comment here is very similar to Petal's comments at the barbeque; the expatriate Iranians may take advantage of the greater latitude of possibilities regarding romantic or sexual relationships they have in their host culture, but they continue to feel the pressures of their home culture. The narrator's conversation partner realizes that while he is unwilling to give up the Ego (and Id) satisfactions that his host culture makes possible, he is also not able to entirely suppress or overthrow the Superego that he carries from his home culture. In Lacanian terms, his imaginary, newly informed by a more permissive symbolic order, is in conflict with the symbolic order of his homeland that he still carries in some corner of his psyche.

As the passage quoted above makes evident, another element of cultural heritage that recurs throughout the story is a focus on family and on familial differences, particularly the status of children. Along this dimension of family, the expectations of the Iranian exiles are very different from those expectations they perceive their host country nationals as holding. The fact that "one of them probably would assume

responsibility to raise them" (p. 29) is particularly telling. It is indicative of the degree of assimilation or of adoption or acceptance of the cultural expectations of Europe that he leaves the question of who would raise the children should he and Azita separate. Of course, he notes that he met Azita in Europe, so their entire relationship has developed outside of the immediate reinforcement of the social norms of Iran.

The earlier statement that "Hadi was also separated, but his wife was not willing to keep the kids" (p. 23) is somewhat surprising, as well. The fact that a woman would not be willing to keep the kids is somewhat alien to Western sensibilities, but it is interesting to contrast this statement with the fact that, under Iranian law, the father is almost always granted custody (though the children are often raised by his female relatives – mother, sister, or the like). The narrator writes something to this effect in one of the stories he reads to an audience during his travels: "She was a laboratory technician. She had two children whom she was allowed to see only on Fridays" (p. 55). The same story relates the shocking situation of another woman. "Mrs. Sarlati had a husband and three children but still her head was turned by other men" (p. 56). This state of affairs might not cause significant shock to a European audience talking about a European woman, but in Iran such a person would be well outside the bounds of acceptable behavior.

There are, of course, similarities between the attitudes in the West and Iran with respect to children. Sanam invokes many common themes regarding marriage and

children when she discusses the deterioration of her marriage to Imani. Imani begins cheating on her in Iran:

> "Children, I understand, they are often good for genetic continuation. Sa'id now talks about them all the time, the same in those days. In 1976, in the month of Mehr, I found out that he was with someone. Sometimes for no reason he would sit and think to himself, or in the middle of the night he would wake up and go to the sitting room. One night he called me 'Khaji dear'. I ignored it of course. It was over. When he sent the children abroad, I realized that he couldn't hide it anymore, I couldn't either, until 1977 when I found out, I mean one night he himself told me, he cried and told me what he was doing." (p. 122)

Sanam's experience is presumably little different than that of many other women wronged in such fashion. As Sa'id's (not Sanam's husband, but the Sa'id living in Germany) girlfriend says "it does not matter Iranian or German, men are the same everywhere" (p. 22). However, despite his domineering behavior and infidelities she remains with him:

> She said: “For me that was the only opportunity that I had then, later when I found out, as you said it is possible to be somewhere else too, I stayed for the sake of the children. People, now I understand, see things that they want to see, change, relocation needs a lot of courage. When I was pregnant with my first child, I figured out that for Imani I was only Zohreh’s mother...” (p. 123)

Though Sanam knows that her relationship with Imani is not what she had hoped for or wanted, she remains because she believes it is the best thing for the children. When she explains her marriage to Ebrahim, it is clear that she did not relish the life of a cloistered Iranian housewife. She began studying and writing even in that less than conducive cultural and familial environment. She said: “I cannot explain things very well. You must imagine how it was. After the children slept, then my life would start. My desk was in the bedroom” (p. 129). Regarding staying in her marriage to Imani, she continues that “Father was still alive and it was not possible” (p. 123). The Iranian tradition, reinforced by her father, views separation/divorce as unacceptable. Eventually, however, once she is in Europe, she makes use of the cultural norms of her adoptive country to break free from an unsatisfying marriage; at least once the children are grown and gone.

There are many examples throughout the novel of the impact of conflicting symbolic orders, or at times of the dominance of one symbolic order over another. According to Lacan, these symbolic systems that exert such control over the lives, both internal and external, of human beings are fundamentally linguistic in nature. When Sanam speaks of the freedom she gained by learning French, she is on the surface speaking about the elimination of one more mechanism of control that Imani had over her. However, she also gains a measure of freedom from the constraints of her home country's cultural and social demands. She begins, however fitfully or even perhaps timorously, to explore a new language system and all of the cultural baggage that comes along with it. Though initially those learning a foreign language may retain the thought structures of their mother tongue, translating phrase by phrase to create utterances in the new language, eventually the signifying chains native to the new language begin to take root. Once the new language begins to serve as a language of thought, fundamentally new psychic possibilities may open, and new identities may become possible. Elliott and du Gay (2009) speak to the impact of language upon identity in a postmodern context:

> Identity in social theory had, arguably, always been about representations and signs; but with postmodernism, even the interior life of the subject became coterminous with the supremacy of the signifier (2009, p. xiii - xiv).

The importance of language is not lost on the characters in Golshiri's story. Sanam discusses the importance with the narrator when they are walking through Paris to her house. The narrator frowns as Sanam is talking to the caretaker of the house and begins the following exchange with her:

> "When I don't understand, I get nervous."
>
> "Well, at first everyone is like that."
>
> "Afterward?"
>
> "It is obvious. You must learn their language, even think in this language, otherwise, you will always be out of the loop, as a stranger or intruder." (p. 102)

The narrator is nervous because he does not understand the language, but the nervousness of the exile goes deeper than this. The exile is unfamiliar with the entirety of the symbolic order of the host country. While the narrator is focused on his lack of understanding of the language, he might also be suffering from his lack of comfort with

the rules of behavior.[52] Such behavior might not be problematic for someone thoroughly steeped in the symbolic order of the liberal, modern West. However, for someone just off the plane from Iran, who may have spent his entire life in Iran, it must be at least somewhat intimidating and upsetting.

The narrator speaks to the troubling nature of this visit to his childhood sweetheart's apartment. Sanam tells him that neither of them can do anything in "that village"[53] where they grew up and to which he wants to return, at least metaphorically, in his memories. She also seems to be disparaging Iran by implicitly comparing it to Paris, which "is still the center of art and world literature" (p. 103). He said: "But that village, to tell the truth, has a language …" (p. 103). But then he thinks again about what had transpired:

> No, this was not the time when he talked about language. He had thought about it earlier. This was the only thing he had and it was his roots, and it would connect him with anyone who speaks or thinks in this language, even with Imani. (p. 103)

Imani, the husband from whom Sanam is separated, was an agent of the SAVAK, the Iranian secret police under the Shah. The SAVAK often persecuted, among others,

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52 He is witnessed by the caretaker going into the apartment of a woman who is not his wife, but who was his childhood sweetheart and also his cousin.

53 She is referring to Iran.

writers who wrote works that state did not approve. The narrator hates him, both because of Imani's almost diametric political opposition to his own and because of Imani's relationship with his childhood sweetheart and because Imani forced him to stop seeing Sanam or even watching her from distance. To recognize any kinship with Imani, however slight, is a dramatic concession for him to make.

The narrator's obsession with the literary past arises again when he tries to recall what he was doing just before they entered the apartment. Due to the writing style the narrator (or Golshiri, or both) adopts, we cannot be certain what transpired because the narrator himself is uncertain. However, when trying to remember why he was standing at the far end of the hallway without walking down it with Sanam toward her door, he thinks:

> It was a long hallway with a few doors on the right side, and another hallway, bright with lights, crossing this one, and Sanam Banu was standing at the end of it in front of a door. So he had been standing, maybe to take a breath or to think about Rudaki[54] and then about Farrokhi[55] and about "The violet of my locks that cypress height silver body" and he had continued until he had reached: "In my prayers the

54 Rudaki was an Iranian poet (c.859-c.941).
55 Farrokhi was an Iranian poet (d.1037).

arch of your eyebrows came with the wind", and finally when he reached near Sanam Banu, he murmured:

Her long hair – like seaweed on the water –
Turned around my head
Threw me
In weakness and in struggle. (p. 103)

When he is uncertain what he was doing standing there, his immediate assumption is that he must have been contemplating Persian poetry. He is thoroughly bound up in the Persian language and in the social order that it reinforces, but he is also thoroughly and willingly captured by the sweep of Persian literature.

Such fixation on cultural and literary heritage pervades much of his thinking about writing, though he does apparently make use of modern techniques akin to those of stream of consciousness. When considering his own writing he thinks, "Playing in the mind/imagining [khiyal bazi] with the figure of the one who has beautiful hair and slender waist, was his heritage and tradition." (p. 138). This motif is a common one from the deep roots of the Iranian poetic tradition. He also recognizes the impact of literary traditions:

> We still read Hafez[56] when we are depressed. In our arguments and debates we get support from the *Masnavi*,[57] meaning the past still exists, still can win, it gives form, it shapes our views about here, about this drunken woman, or that swan, it fixes our point of view towards everything before hand. Well, it is hard to depart from it. (p.130)

He identifies literary culture and literary history as fundamental building blocks of Iranian thought, and thus Iranian identity. These foundations do not disappear just because of a move to a foreign land.

Thus, the literary traditions of his homeland bind the narrator more firmly to that social/cultural system, to that symbolic order. Though he is traveling in Europe and interacting with Iranians who live in Europe, his touchstone for such interactions remains linguistically and literarily Persian. This linguistic and literary anchor makes complete assimilation difficult, if not impossible. Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk (2005) state that "the problem of cultural difference is, then, that which cannot be translated" (2005, p. 43). The narrator is bound in a web of cultural ties that resist attempts at transformation into a European context. He continually returns, in his thinking and imagery, to scenes and

56 Hafez was an Iranian poet (1315-1390).

57 The *Masnavi* is a collection of poems by Persian poet Rumi.

writings from his homeland. Homi Bhabha calls this the liminality of migrant experience (2004, p. 321).

While the narrator recognizes that he is captured within the web of his past and his culture's past, Sanam attempts to deny the clutches of culture and language. "I learned ...[the language] in six months, that was enough to be able to take care of my own needs by myself, and be deprived of the blessings of the presence of respected and exalted interpreter, Mr. Imani" (p. 103). Sanam is being sarcastic with respect to her husband, who seems to have used her need of a translator to maintain control over her. Once she learned enough of the language to be at least minimally functional, she was granted a degree of freedom that, like so many other Iranian women transplanted to Europe, enabled her to separate from her husband.

One interesting linguistic motif that recurs several times in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is that of the "language house". When the narrator speaks of the "language house", he is speaking both of a personal space of language and concurrently of a cultural space of language. There is a telling parallel between these two spaces; they seem almost exactly the kind of interaction that we would expect between the Lacanian concepts of the imaginary order of the individual and the symbolic order of the collective:

> When they reached the street he had talked about language. No. The language house ... that it is the only root he has. He said: "I have only this, after all those invasions and attacks this is the only thing has left

> for us. Every time someone has come and has plowed through that land, with this language bond and link we could gather and unite, they made us whole. We have said what they have done, for example, the Ghuzes[58] or the Mongols,[59] and we have remained, but to tell the truth, we have not written, we only have said that they came, they killed, they burned and they left. There is nothing about their appearance or whether they had their shoes on or not when they sat around the fire with their backs towards that minaret of human skull." (p. 128)

The narrator invokes a number of iconic Iranian cultural elements in this paragraph. As the crossroads of the ancient world, Iran was subjected to numerous invasions by foreign powers. Time and again the region was conquered by different groups that, at least nominally, ruled over the land, often for centuries at a time. Despite these myriad conquests by foreign powers, the Iranian language and Iranian culture continued and often came to dominate the cultures that the invaders brought with them.

Even the Arab invasion[60] of Iran in the early first century of Islam and the almost complete elimination of the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism did not diminish the prominence of Persian culture. In fact, Persian culture came to play a dominant role in

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58 The Ghuzes were a Turkic tribe who invaded Iran in the 12th century from the north-east.
59 The Mongols invaded Iran in the early 13th century.
60 The Arabs invaded Iran in the 7th century.

the Arab Empires of the time. Thus, the Arab invasions served to transport elements of Persian culture throughout the western Middle East and into Anatolia and northern Africa. Many centuries later, the Turkish (or Turko-Mongol) Mughals spread Persian culture throughout the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent. Though they were descended from the Turkic groups of central Asia that were conquered by the Mongols, their culture was almost entirely Persianate. The official language of the Mughal Empire was Persian and many of the artisans, scholars, and artists were Persian. For one prominent example, Ustad Ahmad Lahouri, the designer of Shah Jahan's memorial mausoleum, the Taj Mahal, was Persian.[61]

The latter part of the narrator's thought here is focused on minutiae of the lives of those invaders that remained unrecorded. His point here is that they left limited marks on the culture of Persia. While it is certainly true that some of these historical periods led to an influx of people, knowledge, skills, and ideas, at the same time there was a much larger outflow of the same that came to color the conquering empires themselves. Thus, the language house is representative of the vast and inexorable sweep of Persian history and culture.

However, the language house is also a personal space. When the narrator visits Sanam's house, he asks to see her library. "He had said: 'Where were your books that I

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61 Ustad Ahmad Lahouri is known to have been an architect in the court of Shah Jahan. See, for example, Asher, C. *The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992. p. 368.

could not see?'" (p. 131). Sanam replies, "I told you, they are in the other room. My language house is there" (p. 131).

When the narrator climbs upstairs to Sanam's language house (p. 132 – 133) he describes the scene in an intensely personal fashion. He imagines stories involving himself and her husband and murder scenes. He remembers stories that he has written that contained similar elements. He finds deficiencies in her library that can be corrected, gaps that can be filled, missing books that can be added. He discovers many books he cannot find or has not read, "enough for several lives' intoxication" (p. 133). At the end of his description of Sanam's language house, her library, he writes that "they had gathered the pieces of his body here" (p. 134). For the narrator these books and periodicals from his past are intensely personalized, almost fetishized symbols of himself, or of his literary self which in his mind is the same thing.

In the face of this overwhelming array of literature the narrator suddenly thinks of his wife's chipped tooth. "Why did he think of Mina's chipped tooth? Whenever she laughed, it would appear. Had this very imperfection bound him? But this perfection, [the library], made him dizzy" (p. 134). When Sanam comes up to the room and asks him if he wants coffee, his first response is to say "It is too perfect" (p. 134). It isn't the fact that there is too much in the library for him ever possibly to read that bothers him. It is the degree of orderliness. He clarifies this reaction later:

Suddenly I remembered that the magazines, I used to get to read from your father, often were incomplete. He would give me several, then I would realize I could not find the rest of the story. Your father used to say: "I don't buy them in order. Sometimes I buy to see what is going on." Well, I always have read like this, and I am not used to using libraries. What is the point of going there? One should own books.

"Well, what is the problem with this good orderliness now?"

"You don't have those magazines, or the continuation of Attila, or I don't know the hundred and third issue of '*White and Black*'."

"What are the uses of these to you now?"

"No. I don't want them anymore; because I have filled that gap myself. I write this way as well. When everything comes to mind in chronological order, there is no need to write them anymore." (p. 134)

The narrator ties imperfection of memory, incompleteness of knowledge, lack of order, gaps, and holes to his own writing process. He is attracted to those things that are

missing, that are imperfect in themselves, precisely because he can then fill the gaps and create the “perfection”, the completeness, to his own liking.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Culture, including elements of religious belief and mores, is also an important element in the identity equation. As Shahrokh Meskoob puts it, “The tree of Iranianness grew on the earth of the Persian language and in the climate of Islam” (2002, p. 44). Historical continuity and linguistic distinctions are widely used delineators of culture among Iranians, in addition to religious, national civil society, and multi-national and multi-cultural collectivist notions of country (Ashraf, 2006). Exiles, however, as noted above, face the influences of a new and different symbolic order. Though there is a great deal of examination of the changes in the lives of women who move to Europe, the characters themselves recognize that they all have changed because of the new social and cultural environment in which they find themselves. Manuchehr says as much in a continuation of one of the discussions quoted above:

Hasan said: “That’s obvious, so you say that they have to remain the same as they were?”

> “I am not talking about everyone, I am talking about these who were so pretentious there in Iran, they wanted to change the world, but as

soon as their feet got here to the West and they saw they actually have the equal rights, they forgot everything and started to …"

Manuchehr said: "Like all of us." (p. 22-23)

Manuchehr, at least, recognizes that to some degree they all "forgot everything and started to ...". In the case of the activists, the forgetting was primarily with respect to their aspirations to change the world, to spark the revolution that would make things better. Their youthful revolutionary zeal has dissipated and been replaced by a fatalistic attitude toward the world and their lives.

This fatalism in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* may also be examined as a good example of a cultural element of identity. The focus of more recent Persian prose on social conditions is noted in scholarship on Persian literature. Scholars such as Kamshad (1996) and Talattof (2000) note that the development of Persian literature has been directly linked with the social and political changes in Iran.

However, this focus on social conditions does not necessarily imply that socially focused Persian literature is similar in all respects to comparable English literature. Davaran (1996) observes that, while novels in the English tradition often engage elements of character development and differentiation, Iranian novels very rarely made use of such practices. While this claim is somewhat hyperbolisitic, Davaran's point is

that these techniques were less common in Iranian novels than in their English counterparts. In part, he argues, this was due to the relative lack of development of the novel as a literary form in Persian. Persian literature was dominated historically by poetry. In these poetic works, characters were often represented as examples of types rather than as distinct individuals. The lack of development of the Persian novel may have sprung from the relatively belated development of a middle class capable of appreciating and supporting a native novelistic industry. However, as the middle class in Iran has grown, so has the volume of prose literature, particularly novels.

The repressive social and economic situation that prevailed in Iran under the totalitarian monarchy to a large degree continued, though with different focus and different prohibitions, under the theocratic state. As a result, many middle class Iranians have succumbed to disillusionment with the idea of social change, at least for the better. The routine expression of such attitudes in Golshiri's novel represents one intrusion of the Iranian cultural heritage on the lives of these characters living abroad in a very different cultural milieu. The openly discussed disillusionment of these characters with the idea of social change seems to have atrophied their capacity for personal change, or at least for taking charge of their transformation. For example, Sanam, when discussing with the narrator the idea of remaining in Europe, says, "You are deceiving yourself. Clearly and simply say: 'I am attached to Iran, I like my childhood the way I see it through the window of those years and I don't want, by staying here, to wake up from

sleep'" (p. 136). She sees that the narrator is unwilling to even attempt to change, to develop into someone new. He has not only given up his thirst for social change, but also his capacity for personal change and growth.

It is not only the author who is caught by this web of culture and history. After a night of discussion about people they knew in the past, the narrator speaks with one of his former colleagues:

> The next morning he told Ali: "You all live in the same village that you have brought with you from Iran."
>
> [Ali] was taking a picture of a black woman. He said: "So much the better, instead whenever we get lost we can go to that village." (p. 42).

The characters, at least some of them, recognize the need for change in order to succeed in a changed and changing world. One of the characters who has recently arrived from Berlin, comments:

> These are all the requirements for entering the twenty-first century. If we can't adjust ourselves we would break, or we have to return to the past which is the same thing. On the basis of one or two books that we had read there, it is not possible to answer these things that are happening here and there. (p. 18)

Given the prior leftist activism of these former comrades in Iran, his meaning likely has significant political overtones. However, the implication is clearly that what is culturally and socially appropriate in one place and time may have little to tell us about how to live in another place and time. This statement follows very shortly after Marziyeh talks about getting lost walking through the city:

> She said: "Everyday when I take Sina [her son] to school, I start to walk. I walk and walk then I realize I am somewhere that I don't recognize, I am standing in front of a store that I haven't seen before, I look at the window display, at the things that are displayed there. So, it's not my business that they have a sale, or how many marks that camera is, but I still stand there and look at them. Even sometimes I go to a store and ask the price of something. In the parks I sit on a bench, just like I am waiting for someone. I start to walk again, sometimes I eat the sandwich I have in my purse and again start to walk. Well, that's the way it is." (p. 17)

On the surface she is talking about feeling lost in a city that remains, after how long we are not sure, significantly and tellingly unfamiliar. Though she may attempt to act in some normal fashion, as if she is just waiting for someone, she is fundamentally adrift in unknown seas. Her first statement upon arriving at Ebrahim's book reading,

however, sets up a context in which this feeling of being lost is as much cultural as it is physical. "Marziyeh was there too, in black. She said: 'I came because of you; I don't usually attend this kind of cultural gathering'" (p. 17). Marziyeh's concern is with cultural disorientation and confusion. She may, indeed, be physically lost, as well, but it is her status as a foreigner, "lost" in a sea of cultural alienness and alienation, that causes her distress. Nonetheless, she too has a fatalistic attitude toward this aspect of her identity as an immigrant, perhaps an exile.[62]

Identity is a fundamentally social construct. It surfaces as an issue of concern primarily when something does not seem to fit or to work properly, when conflict of some sort arises. As Bauman puts it:

> One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioral styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. (1996, p. 19)

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[62] The distinction here is between a voluntary move to a foreign land (immigrant) and an involuntary move (exile). Most exiles would find it difficult or impossible to return to the home country without exposure to substantial risk of persecution or prosecution by the authorities. However, some exiles may be self-imposed as political statements or desire to avoid the social situations prevailing at home (e.g., James Joyce's self-imposed exile in continental Europe). In Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* it appears that the exiled characters fear political persecution, imprisonment, or execution should they return to Iran.

Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk speak similarly of this concern with belonging, but situate it with respect to the members of a diaspora. "The diasporic condition is one that is claimed to question all notions of belonging" (2005, p. 30). Thus, identity becomes salient for the individual when these rules of interpersonal or social behavior become visible due to strains or breaks. Thus, it is differences of any kind that invoke questions of identity. "Above all ... identities are constructed through, not outside, difference" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). In the case of expatriates who are members of a national/cultural diaspora, such strains and breaks often happen as a result of differing cultural expectations. In such cases, using Lacanian terms, identity arises as a point of concern when there is a clash of Symbolic Orders, or as Stuart Hall puts it:

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. (Hall, 1996, p. 4)

POLITICAL IDENTITY

The relationship between politics, as well as social concerns more broadly, and identity is a significant concern in many of Golshiri's works. This concern is, in some ways, the converse of identity politics. The characters in Golshiri's works, particularly in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, may obtain some of their identity from their social, cultural, and

ethnic heritage. However, their identity is also intimately colored by their history as leftist activists. Their identities in the story have been molded and shaped by their experiences as leftists in a world in which leftist states are collapsing. To some degree, perhaps, their identities *are* (or at least were) their political affiliation.

Political elements of identity are brought to the fore very early in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, as part of the narrator's opening monologue about his own identity confusion. When the narrator thinks about his identity while he is waiting for his flight to Berlin in the opening pages of the novel, he recalls the questions asked of him by airport security. He also recalls troubles that he encountered when crossing the border between East and West Berlin:

> "Where am I from?"
>
> He had said this when he saw the long lines of East Germans and Poles in front of West Berlin's shops. These people have also been vagabonds. Once they passed the Wall, they dropped by the first bank where they were given fifty Marks help money and then walked around a little. They saw so many packages of food products; they went to the third floor and with fear and hesitation, they touched the surface of the vacuum cleaners, television sets, big and small sized tape recorders, and they returned to East Germany or Hungary, so that

> the next day or the day after that others would come get a fifty Marks help money and would do some shopping, and sell the items at a higher price there in their own country, or they would put their radio on a shelf. No, on a table so that they could hear the free voice of radio fifty Marks donators better, so that again tomorrow they would come earlier and stand in lines, behind the still closed doors, bags in hands. (p. 6-7)

Though his past as a leftist activist has not yet been revealed this early in the story, already the economic failure of Soviet Bloc Communism is shown as being prominent in his experience of Germany. The juxtaposition of the formerly divided and still largely distinct Germanys is an immediate, visceral reminder of the collapse of the ideologically communist East and the seeming triumph of Western capitalism. At the time of the story the Berlin Wall still exists, though it is in the process of demolition:

> And again, the proletariats of the world unite. When the Wall of the fortress of the proletariat had crumbled and now still here and there, there were some people sitting with chisels and hammers in hands to take a piece of the concrete wall between the two Berlins, so that they might show it to their grandchildren later or even sell it in a Sunday market where the Easterners were selling everything, ... (p. 7-8)

As mentioned earlier, at the time of the story the Wall was still clearly visible though in a state of demolition. The collapse of a central touchstone of leftist activism was underway in an immediate and inescapable display for anyone in Berlin to see. Even the destruction of the Wall, that massive symbol of the separated, communist East Germany, had been turned into an opportunity for economic profit. The conquest of the capitalist system seems total. Even the unification of the two Berlins seems something out of the minds of those in the West. Svetlana Boym recounts the following regarding differences in the prominence of the Wall between East and West:

> The wall is hard to find on a city map in West Berlin. Only a dotted band, delicate pink, divides the city. On a city map in East Berlin, the world ends at the Wall. Beyond the black-bordered, finger-thick dividing line identified in the key as the state border, untenanted geography sets in. (Boym 2001, p. 178. Quoted from Peter Schneider, *The Walljumper*, New York 1984)

It is interesting to compare this particular time of obvious change and the political dominance of one economic system over the other, as presented through this depiction of the deconstruction of the Berlin Wall, with a more recent account of the landscape of Berlin, where the Wall has been almost entirely obliterated:

> After the wall came down, the former border zone between East and West became the city center. In most places there is virtually no indication as to where the wall used to be, only an occasional red mark on the asphalt that runs across the Brandenburg Gate. If you didn't know what it was, you could easily confuse it with a bicycle lane or some other traffic regulation. (Boym 2001, p. 178)

Eventually, after a presentation to an audience of some of his works, the narrator explicitly relates the situation in which his former activist comrades often seem to find themselves and its impact on their political sensibilities and expectations:

> Well, often this kind of talk caused a stir. They were bitter. They wanted to change the world, but the world had become what it was, and now they were living in this city and that city in one-room, or at most in two-room houses, sometimes even with wives and children, on monthly government assistance provided by the capitalist system. (p. 14-15)

For former leftist activists, those who had spent the entirety of their youths fighting against the perceived or real evils of an economic system they viewed as fundamentally exploitative and downright evil, relying on a capitalistic state for monthly

assistance must have been particularly galling. However, this did not stop many of these immigrants from trying to game the system. His writer friend, Ahmad, reminds him of this. "'Here, you know yourself, in order to get two separate monthly asylum allowances; couples often live in separate houses'" (p. 31).

The leftist cause that so many of these exiles had given their lives to, had sacrificed their freedom and witnessed their friends sacrificing even their lives for, had obviously and spectacularly come crashing down, almost literally on their heads for those living in Berlin. These activists had been driven into exile for pursuing a cause that now seemed little more than a fanciful illusion at best, and was perhaps a glaring personal failure or delusion. Given this state of affairs it is unsurprising that many of these former activists would develop fatalistic views regarding politics and the state of the world. The phrase "that is the way it is" recurs several times in the story, indicating the pervasiveness of this kind of fatalistic attitude. For example, in response to a question at one of his public presentations the narrator says:

> "Yes, we are sad, or I am sad. I know, but that is the way it is. Maybe the next generation could talk about happy things, talk about grass, about grass itself that would not be a metaphor for anything else, about a stream, about a lake, which without any breeze just by itself on a sunny day, tiny waves would cover its blue calm surface into the far distance." (p. 16)

The narrator, at least, seems to be longing for a non-political world for the next generation. He is tired of the stresses and strains of activism and has seen little to no benefit from his efforts. He has seen his childhood sweetheart married off to a former comrade who then joined the SAVAK and became the mortal enemy of those he once worked alongside. He has lost friends and relatives in the struggle to bring about change and then seen that change fail to live up to any of his expectations. Yet he still harbors some degree of hope, or at least retains some sense of responsibility toward the world or the future, even if he has not found a way to fulfill this perceived obligation. "He said: 'I'm very tired, because I see so many people and talk so much. But I have to. I must see what is going on in the world; maybe later I do something about it'" (p. 14). Hadi's comments from above speak to this, as well:

> "I am not talking about everyone, I am talking about these people who were so pretentious there in Iran, they wanted to change the world, but as soon as their feet touched the ground here in the West and they saw they actually have equal rights, they forgot everything and started to …"
>
> Manuchehr said: "Like all of us."

> Aziz said, “This crisis is for everyone, if we stay here we will be caught up in it for one or even two generations.”
>
> “Yes, fatalist history.”
>
> It was Hadi. (p. 22-23)

As many of the characters in the novel, most of the characters in this discussion were leftist activists back in Iran. They all aspired, to one degree or another, to change the world. Most of them are living in Europe in what amounts to political exile. Many of them would be subject to arrest, perhaps torture, imprisonment, and possible execution should they return to their homeland. The narrator reflects on his own experiences with imprisonment and torture as he reads a selection from a story he wrote about it:

> There was no beating or abuse anymore. The officer talked to Hakim and him only about the danger of North. If he had written this, Hakim would have definitely remembered it now. He looked at it. How long ago were those days! He read:
>
> He woke up with the smell of dampness and feeling of coldness on his spine. They had only ten minutes and they were thirty two of them.

> The bathroom had only three showers. Esteki said: hurry up, move, what are you waiting for?
>
> Head to toe naked he ran to get in line. He saw the marks of the wire cable or the handcuffs in there. Now no one could hide it. On the fat and pale back of Parviz the black lines with brown edges were more visible. (p. 59)

For these activists, imprisonment and torture had always been a very real possibility. They were, in those days, willing to face such dangers and to struggle constantly for social and political change. Yet in this new environment, where they have at least the appearance of many of the freedoms for which they struggled so mightily, they have lost their revolutionary energy. Some of this change may be due to their advancing age, but the characters themselves do not often characterize it that way. They seem, rather, to perceive it as a capitulation to the culture in which they find themselves:

> "As soon as their feet touched the ground here in the West and they saw they actually have equal rights, they forgot everything and started to …"
>
> Manuchehr said: "Like all of us." (pp. 22-23)

There is also a significant element of disenchantment with the revolution for which they had all struggled. They did not achieve the leftist uprising they had sought, but even had they succeeded, that in itself might have represented a failure. The fate of the communist East Germany and of the entire Soviet Bloc attested to the failure of their rhetoric, of the primary model in the world of the revolution they had sought. They have begun to question the entirety of their activism, not just their failure to achieve the right revolution. The narrator speaks to this through a female character in one of the book selections he reads at one of the book events he attends:

> "I know, and the problem is that you did not know all the details, you have guessed it all. For example, these friends of Taher who had come to see me and convince me to wear black again, one of them, the one whose lips were twitching, he did not even raise his head up to look at me, all the time while we were talking. Well, I was sitting there in front of her in the clothes I usually wear at work, but I was not wearing my lab uniform and he was, on and on, talking about, I don't know, the world Proletariat, but he would not raise his head up to see how this model that they want to set up looks like. I don't see any difference between these and those investigators who with their

> impudence wanted to force me to tell them everything in detail. I was an object in both places, in one case, an object for breaking, or for being felt up and here a decorative object." (pp. 80-81)

This woman does not see any difference between the SAVAK agents, who tortured and killed her husband and abused and threatened her, and the leftists who wanted to use her in a different way, as the poor, black-clad widow in mourning for a martyr to the cause. In both cases she is nothing more than an object.

There are some indications that the characters believe in some sort of teleology. Their leftist past may explain such a tendency since much of the communist and socialist rhetoric presupposes an inevitability of development toward a (somewhat) predetermined end. Marx theorized that capitalism would inevitably sew the seeds of its own destruction, leading inexorably through socialism to a classless, stateless society. Engels referred to the theoretical system as "scientific socialism" since it was supposed to be based on empirical observation, as opposed to utopian socialism. Even the adjustments made under Leninism and the emergence of the totalitarian Stalinist state in Russia did not eliminate this teleological rhetoric from many leftist movements.

Hasan, for one, seems to cling to this idea of a teleology that to some degree cannot be deviated from. "Hasan was saying: 'It is always like this. You can't take a

shortcut. That's why in Eastern Europe now everyone has to go back to the starting point'" (pp. 19-20). Others in the group, however, are not so quick to accept this point of view, perhaps preferring to maintain their affiliation with leftist social aims at the expense of teleological beliefs as to their status as a necessary and unavoidable end:

> Hadi said: "So you say the civilization is a one-way road that is stretched from here to eternity and it is the job of social scientists and economists and even politicians to make sure that no one deviate from this path?" (p. 20)

It appears that some of these former activists have internalized one aspect of the ideology they all espoused earlier in life more than another, while others have internalized the other aspect. Hasan seems to accept the idea that each stage or relatively stable social/political circumstance must be and must be arrived at via a given chain of intermediary steps.

Later in the story one member of the group makes a more definite Marxist/Leninist reference regarding necessary preconditions within Marxist teleology. This is, perhaps, a mantra of sorts, a stock phrase that these former revolutionary comrades are used to saying and to hearing, and it is followed by a joke from Hasan. "Someone was saying, 'The precondition for any society to reach Socialism is the

existence of Capitalism'" (p. 23). "Hasan said, 'How about we fight for the establishment of Capitalism'" (p. 23).

Hasan seems to have maintained his belief in teleology, at least of some sort, but to have abandoned his faith in the inevitability of a classless, stateless society of pure communism. Hasan seems to have switched allegiance to the cause of democracy, perhaps assimilating to his new environment, at least politically. Hadi, on the other hand, does not buy this line of argument and takes it upon himself to report the shortcomings of the supposed democratic West:

> Hadi now had his hat on his head and was standing behind his chair. Both of his hands were on the back of the chair, he said: "Yes I know, I have read the newspapers here, I also watch the television here every night, you know it, of course I don't watch all sixteen channels, to tell the truth I don't have time to watch, but at least I watch the news and commentary on three channels. It is all about democracy, your dear democracy; it is as if in the world right now no one is dying from starvation, or right here the four governments' arsenals are not filled with all those bombs. No my dear, I don't think at all the main issue is democracy, or …," (p. 20)

Turaj seems to split the difference. He says: “These are all the requirements for entering the twenty-first century, if we can’t adjust ourselves we would break, or we have to return to the past which is the same thing (p. 18)” implying that there are necessary requirements for entering into any social or political arrangement that must be met. However, he also states that: “By one or two books that we had read there, it is not possible to answer these things that are happening here and there (p. 18)” showing his abandonment of the simple truism of his former revolutionary mindset.

This confusion of political identity is not surprising given the time and place in which these characters live, Germany during the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of totalitarian leftist states in Eastern Europe. Their background as leftist activists would make them more prone to soul searching even than many native Germans who may have had less of a political activist bent. Most of these Persian expatriates had spent much of the early lives fighting to bring about a system modeled upon those they had just witnessed collapse in an immediate and quite striking way. All of them appear to have changed their minds regarding the existence of grand teleology or the necessity of those outcomes they once sought to hasten. Regardless of the direction of their change, it is of little surprise that many of them succumb to fatalism. Either the ends they thought must come have been cast down into the dustbin of history or there are no necessary ends at all and their efforts have failed regardless.

It is not surprising, then, that some of the characters may fall under the sway of notions that have plagued some inhabitants of "the 'pre-modern' world" as Kevin Robins once referred to it (in Hall and du Gay 1996, p. 62). The attitudes provoked by the encounters of technologically less developed culture when confronted by western technologies can be compared to those faced by these proponents of an ideology that immediate evidence and much public oratory claim to be an abject failure. Keeping in mind that Bhabha's comments are made regarding the experiences of members of "pre-modern" cultures, his comments can still be applied with minimal alteration (e.g., adding "Western" in front of "Europe") to the experiences of these activists as well as to the inhabitant of the former Soviet Bloc:

> Europe was closed to their realities, but they must be open to its. It was not possible to shut out this new cultural dynamism coming from modern Europe. Indeed, the western achievement provoked admiration, if also trepidation. Was not this the new 'universal' culture, the cultural future and even destiny of all the world's peoples? (Robins, Kevin. in Hall and du Gay 1996, p. 62)

In many ways the characters may have been something of the "pilgrims" that Bauman invokes in his essay "From Pilgrim to Tourist – a Short History of Identity" (in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall & du Gay, 1996). Their activism and attempts to

initiate social change at home having failed, they may have been in large part forced into exile. However, some Persian exiles chose to live in the Communist East Europe. These exiles were the "true believers" in leftist ideology and political activism. When their efforts at home failed to come to fruition as they had hoped, they appear to have gone in search of, as Bauman puts it, a truth that is elsewhere (Bauman 1996). Once they arrived in their exilic home, they discovered that they were unable to maintain the revolutionary zeal that had consumed them in youth, leading them toward a fatalistic existence in which they feel impotent and, according to the narrator, sad.

These characters may have attempted to throw off their religious and to some degree their national identities, but they are still bound to something outside of themselves. This binding of identity to a larger collective is similar to Newton's translation of Kristina (substituting "comrades" or "party" or "group" for "national and religious roots"). "I don't know who I am or even if I am, but I belong with my national and religious roots, therefore I follow them [or 'I am them,' since the French reads 'donc je les suis']" (Newton, 2005. p. 112).

The sentiment regarding belonging is similar to that from Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk noted earlier. In this case, there may be a desire for belonging that is fundamentally challenged by the diasporic condition. "The diasporic condition is one that is claimed to question all notions of belonging" (2005, p. 30). If the "national and religious roots" of identity have been ripped up by politics and ideology, then perhaps for

these characters such politics and ideology became their primary locus for belonging. But then, as Sanam Banu puts it, “The stomach of the West is very gigantic and powerful, it can digest anything, now it is swallowing Eastern Europe and after that it will color the Soviets the same color as itself” (p. 136). When politics and ideology also failed them, they appear to have responded by modifying their sense of belonging to fit the situation. Different characters appear to have undertaken different modifications of their sense of belonging, but most of them seem to have become, to a large degree, fatalistic.

The narrator notices that his comrades have begun modifying their affiliations, their identities, in very different ways. Bahman notes the changes people make in their ideological or political stances in their practical choices of activities. “He said: ‘Many ex-political activists, you probably know, in these years, increased in number, after the turning of the page with a bribe they became the defenders and fighters for the working class’” (p. 44).

The narrator recognizes the effects of these changing ideas and affiliations early in the story. Following a discussion about the Fascists beating up an Iranian in the Metro, in Germany, Hamid comments that: “Turks usually walk together, in a group. We cannot” (p. 19). The narrator’s thought immediately follows: “It was obvious that no group remained anymore” (p. 19). Although they were close comrades in arms in their leftist motivated political and social struggles back in Iran, they have, in exile, in their individual search for belonging, ceased to be a group. They are now little more than a

collection of individuals loosely associated by history and the culture of their inaccessible homeland, of childhood, of the past.

The narrator is straightforward in his assessment of the outcome of his former group's efforts. He and his comrades may have set out to change the world, but in the end they realize that their endeavors have accomplished little or nothing. As a result of their exile and their different, individualized adjustments and assimilations, they are no longer even a coherent group. "He looked at Sanam Banu: 'You know, we wanted to change the world, now I realize that only we are changed'" (p. 106). Toward the end of the story, prompted by Sanam Banu's own assessment, he reassesses his youthful zeal to be a leftist activist, a revolutionary:

> He had asked: "What do you mean by simple-heartedness?" She had said: "It is when one would think that your little engine can turn on the engine of revolution, and afterwards it would be possible to give everyone equal opportunity." She was saying: "People don't need guardians to give them equal opportunity or not." How about himself? It seemed a bit simple-minded that he had thought that this had been caused by the collapse of the association. (p. 143)

But it is Sanam Banu, and not the narrator, who closes this line of reasoning. "Sa'id or my father, even you, wanted to change the world in one day, they by action or

hope of action and you by writing; but the world could only change bit by bit" (p. 148). She characterizes this as a discrepancy between realism and idealism. Apparently in this case "realism" is equated with what the former activists are experiencing as fatalism: "that's the way it is."

Toward the end of the novel, the language changes and the characters begin using blunt won-lost terminology. This rhetoric first appears on page 121 when Sanam Banu asks Ebrahim "So have we both lost?" This discussion continues on page 124 where Sanam again asks the narrator:

> "So have you lost, too?"
>
> "What?"
>
> "That's what I said, you yourself have written it, either nothing or everything."
>
> ...
>
> "..., I have lost too, but to tell the truth, I think it is not too late yet. ..." (p. 124)

Even the swan that they watch swimming by itself in the lake is not excluded from this won-lost dichotomy. Ebrahim says "So this one [the swan] has lost, too" (p. 126). In this case the swan is a symbolic reference to Sanam, herself, perhaps recognizing in an external symbol her own "defeat" at the hands of harsh reality (or the Real, in Lacanian terms). The conversation continues with Sanam's response: "Maybe, I don't know" (p. 126). Ebrahim follows with a thoroughly fatalistic musing, "But we know and still continue" (p. 127).

Sanam continues the won-lost dialogue when she talks about her now deceased father, a leftist activist who had pushed her to marry Sa'id Imani, a young activist. Imani, as noted above, eventually joined the SAVAK and helped to persecute his former comrades. "Sanam said: 'He lost, too. Of course if he had remained till now he would have lost even more, or if he was alive and found out what his Sa'id did'" (p. 147). Although there is certainly a significant political undertone to much of this, the questions are achingly personal, as well. These characters are assessing their own lives in as complete a way as they can manage and finding that something is lacking. The narrator thinks the same thoughts repeatedly regarding himself. "Had he lost?" (p. 139) and again "Had he lost?" (p. 140). In the earlier instance, the narrator assesses his own aging body and the implications that fact has for mortality this way: "He looked at his chest and saw the white hair; he took out his dental bridge, washed it and put it in its place. The front of

his head was balding. Had he lost?" (p. 139). However, the narrator does not seem to have completely given up hope. Speaking about the literary past yet again, he says:

> "When I think about the inspirations of The Poets who composed the Suspended Odes[63], I feel sorry for them. There would have been a black tent and a few camels and a stagnant water or a salty water well and a lover who had gone with a caravan. In those days they talked (wrote) about these kinds of things. Our Manuchehri[64] for example, riding a camel crossing through a desert and his tools had been nothing but the sun, the moon, and the rain. If he discharged his duty (as a poet) honorably, used the tools as much as he could in a positive way, served justice, in this case poetry, I think he would not have lost." (pp. 125-126)

If Manuchehri can not lose (there seems to be no consideration of the possibility that he "won"), perhaps the narrator, himself an author, working with similar (though he seems to think more extensive) literary tools and discharging a similar literary duty, can avoid losing, as well. However, he had earlier considered the issue and determined that

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63 The pre-Islamic poets who composed their poems and hung them on the outside or inside walls of the Ka'ba,, a building in Mecca, where today is a place the Hajj pilgrimage is performed.

64 Manuchehri (d.1040) was a poet in the 11th century in Iran.

"Everyone had lost" yet he continues with the thought "But is there a winner?" (p. 131). His final answer, at the very end of the book, appears to be "no":

> Sanam said: "So have both of us lost?"
>
> "Yes, but ..."
>
> "But what?"
>
> "If we had taken another path there was no winning either, only maybe there was a cure, another loss." (p.158)

INDETERMINATE NATURE OF IDENTITY

One (or perhaps this should be multiple) aspect of identity that continually emerge in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is the multiplicitous, multi-faceted, indeterminate, emergent, negotiated nature of identity. This conception of identity is similar to Hadi's assessment of the issue in politics and political change. When asked what the main issue is, he responds:

> "I don't know. Besides, the problem is that often and simultaneously hundreds of issues have to be solved and each has its own solution. ...

> in each period, you should not stick to one plan and think that if we solve this the rest will be solved by itself." (p. 21)

The same can be said of identity. Lacan argues in "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" that the viewing of the reflected self as a unitary entity in the mirror creates a psychological urge to create a corresponding unitary psychological self, a singular identity. This urge arises despite the intimate experience of the self as fragmentary:

> For the total form of his body... is given to him only as a gestalt... it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it... in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it. (Lacan, Ecrits, p. 76 (pp. 94-95))

Lacan held that a dual relation existed between the body and the Ego, and also between the Imaginary and the Real. Whereas the experience of the "self" demonstrates a disjointed and fluid Real, the image in the mirror leads to the construction of a contiguous, singular Imaginary.

Indeterminate identity can be characterized in at least two distinct ways. One way to characterize such indeterminate identity is to consider the possibility (or certainty) of identity change over time. In this conception, identity may be considered solid and

delimited at any given point in time, but diachronic processes involving experience and changing circumstances lead to identity changes. The narrator implies awareness of such issues numerous times in the story. At the outset, on page 6, he comments on his own existence across time: "He existed, and even now he existed when he was sitting and typing these with his typewriter. Indeed, who was he?" (p. 6). The phrasing implies a solid "self" that exists across time, both in the past in the airport in London and in the present at the time of writing down the story in Iran. That both of these existed, he accepts. He may even accept that both exist simultaneously, the one as a memory trace in the mind of the other. However, this multiplicitous existence of the self leads him to his fundamental question throughout *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* – Who am I?

Another, more radical way to conceive of indeterminate identity is to consider the "fractured, fluid, mobile and liquid dimensions of identity" (Elliott and du Gay, p. xiii) as underlying a negotiated presentation in the world. This implies an inconstant, changeable "identity" that underlies any seeming constancy. Khorrami points out that the Golshiri's writing style "creates a structural lack of absolutism about questions such as *who am I* or *where am I from*" (Khorrami, p. 90). Thus, in Golshiri's work the prose itself indicates the difficulty and potentially the futility of attempting to arrive at a singular answer for questions of identity. This interpretation is more akin to Lacan's conception. The narrator expresses an appreciation of this aspect of identity, as well, although he does so through his perception of his writing rather than through his perception of himself:

> Or simpler, wouldn't the writer see people as objects (things)? To tell the truth often this is the case, because he has to keep distance from them to be able to make them whole and absolute child, or whole lover; but at the same time, since he also wants to see them from inside, then they become the child who is unique, the lover who is matchless, etc. This going and returning from whole to partial that would show him contradictions and paradoxes. He would be a kind father and also a harsh one; he would be a loyal lover and also a forgetful one. (p. 15)

The narrator grasps the contradictions that coexist. He, however, couches these contradictions in binary oppositions. He also invokes one singular reality against which these contradictions are to be judged:

> "And this is the last question. They are asking: 'Why aren't you truthful?' I would ask with whom? You would probably say with ourselves. Well that's fine… But where is the standard of truthfulness? The testimony of the writer should not require justification, and what would remain is the testimony of the readers that will be contradictory. Here they apparently rely only on the writer's words. But in my opinion, it is not his intention but his action

> that is trustworthy. His work ... one cannot measure this work on the basis of truth, because each sentence would not be the same as what has been in reality." (p. 15)

Sanam Banu, on the other hand, seems to grasp the notion of a world of shifting possibilities:

> "No, but at least we must understand that in the world there have been other possibilities, or there are. Here, for example, those small sorrows, worries, have become laughable for me. I understand that I did not have to tolerate them all these times, other people the same. From here [Paris] you can see your alley between the orchards, or that bridge's multi-arched shape, that in the sunset became orange, and more visible because you know that it was one of the millions of alternatives that you thought possible." (p. 88)

Such a world of possibilities implies, at least indirectly, an individual of shifting possibilities. She is an instinctive perspectivist. Drawing on her own experience as an exile with a hybrid, hyphenated identity she points out that the world fundamentally looks different from different vantage points. It is not that the world as noumena changes; she, too, accepts a singular reality at the brute physical level. It is that the experience of that

reality changes, and so too does the reality that is in the mind, the phenomenal world, because of the effects of experience and perspective.

The notion of hybrid identity plays into this indeterminate, emergent notion of identity. For these expatriate Iranians, not only is their identity a product of a negotiation process between multiple, potentially conflicting elements of their psyches, it is also a product of negotiations and conflicts between two separate, distinct, often conflicting sets of assumptions about what kinds of behaviors, what identities, are appropriate. In Lacanian terms these characters exist simultaneously in two symbolic orders as well as in a new space that is both in-between and beyond both of them. These conflicting assumptions are at the root of the "hyphenated identities" noted above that Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk (2005) talk about.

Literature plays an important role both in creating and reinforcing the symbolic orders that underlie much of cultural identity. Similarly, exilic literature, the literature of those who exist in this doubly uncertain space between/beyond two individual cultural spaces, plays a role in forming the new, hybrid culture of the exile. And the importance of this literary interaction/fusion is reinforced, from a Lacanian perspective, by the primacy of language:

> The technique of reading cultural products as texts open to (re)interpretation is one of the reasons why literary theory has become so important in the study of diasporic culture formations. Central to

> any intercultural interaction is the tension that arises when two languages clash. Here, language does not refer only to spoken formal language, but to the metaphorical basis of communication. (Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk, 2005, p. 43).

As Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk note, the primacy of language is a critical element of Homi Bhabha's treatment of diaspora. Repeating a quote used above, in which Bhabha invokes the theories of Walter Benjamin, and continuing the passage with a final quote from Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*:

> This liminality of migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one; there is no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the 'survival' of migrant life. Living in the interstices of Lucretius and Ovid, caught in-between a 'nativist', even nationalist, atavism and a post colonial metropolitan assimilation, the subject of cultural difference becomes a problem than Walter Benjamin has described as the irresolution, or liminality, of 'translation', the ***element of resistance*** in the process of transformation, 'that element in a translation which dos not lend itself to translation'. This space of the translation of cultural difference ***at the interstices*** is infused with that Benjaminian temporality of the

present which makes graphic a moment of transition, not merely the continuum of history; it is a strange stillness that defines the present in which the very *writing* of historical transformation becomes uncannily visible. The migrant culture of the 'in-between', the minority position, dramatizes the activity of cultures and translatability; and in so doing, it moves the question of culture's appropriation beyond the assimilationist's dream, or the racist's nightmare, of a 'full transmissal of subject-matter'; and towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference. The God of migrants, in *The Satanic Verses*, speaks unequivocally on this point, while of course, fully equivocal between purity and danger:

> Whether we be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridisation of such opposites as Oopar and Neechay, or whether we be pure, stark, extreme, will not be resolved here. (2004, pp. 321-322).

Bhabha follows this passage with a direct reference to "the indeterminacy of diasporic identity" (2004, p. 322). Bhabha argues that the heresy of Rushdie's book is precisely its hybridity, not any religious misinterpretation. Although this interpretation

seems to ignore the Islamic cultural/religious prohibition on demeaning the prophet, whether directly or by implication (as here with the "misuse" of names), Bhabha's primary point is that the use of cultural artifacts from one cultural perspective within another is often considered inappropriate and unacceptable precisely because the new context will not assume the same rules as the original. A Lacanian would say that these perspectives do not have the same "name of the father", the same Law that directs and regulates behavior such that culturally unacceptable uses are well-defined and obvious.

Ebrahim, the narrator, seems to recognize the fragmentary nature of his mentally constructed reality, of his Lacanian imaginary. Speaking to Sanam Banu at the foot of the Balzac statue, he says:

> "When I *looked* at it, I realized it was not looking at us who were standing right in front of its feet, rather looking at far distance, at its own Paris, at Rastignac, or his Madame Vauquer, at that boarding-house that he has explained in detail, or merely he was listening to the swish of the daughters of Father Goriot. Well, he had a place to gather all of his characters in one location, but we don't have, at least I haven't been in one place, never been in a fixed place. (p. 89)

According to the narrator, while Balzac had a relatively steady, fixed perspective from which he wrote, he, himself, has written from a much less stable perspective.

Although the narrator continues this conversation by talking about all of the places he has lived in his life, he closes his comment with a remark that makes his focus on the issue of perspective and fragmentary memory/identity and the importance, at least for those like him, of the notion of hybridity stand out. "So, that's why always I remember things in pieces. Perhaps that's the reason I write, to gather them in the world of imagination, somewhere next to each other, just like two old neighbors" (p. 89). He recognizes the fundamental hybridity of his imaginary and accepts it as a necessary part of his writing, of his attempts to express his own experience of subjectivity in a doubly inconstant world that is changing itself even as he changes perspectives within it.

A variety of accounts of cultural identity have been posited by theorists in the past. One model holds that there is something essential in any identity that serves to define it.[65] This is the "essentialist" view of cultural identity. According to another model of cultural identity:

> Cultural experience is always experience of the others: the others, the real others, are the indispensable transformational objects in historical change. History is created out of cultures in relation and interaction: interrupting identities. (Hall and du Gay, 1996, p. 82).

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65 For a definition of essentialism, see e.g., the entry in Childs, Peter and Roger Fowler, Eds. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London; New York: Routledge, 2006: 73.

Or stated a bit differently: “Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative” (Hall 1991, p. 21) [from Hall and du Gay, 1996, p. 89]. This view defines cultural identity by showing what it is not. This approach often seems to take on a hegemonic bent. One cultural perspective is seen as primary, as central, while all others are distinguished from it in an exclusionary, demeaning fashion. This tendency to demean one cultural perspective at the expense of another is characteristic of many of the imperial powers of the nineteenth century. For example, Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay once remarked:

> “I have never found one among them [the Orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.” (Macaulay, 1835, pp. 230-231)

Hall and du Gay continue the argument by focusing on the interaction of multiple pieces rather than dichotomous distinctions: “The emphasis here is on the multiplicity of identities and differences rather than on a singular identity and on the connections or articulations between the fragments and differences” (Hall and du Gay, 1996, p. 89).

The narrator seems to find this multiplicity of fragments, of differences or perspectives, depressing but also necessary. As they are leaving Sanam's apartment to get cigarettes and for Ebrahim to catch the train to his friend's apartment, Ebrahim comments on what he sees as the need to select one path, perhaps one single identity:

> He said: "You see Sanam, people are always somehow cheated."
>
> She opened the door: "Why on earth cheated?"
>
> "People, out of necessity, are somewhere and cannot be in another place or in a thousand other places." (p. 123).

On the other hand, the narrator also sees this fragmentary nature of identity and of experienced "reality" as fundamentally necessary for his art. Speaking about the issues of serialized magazines that Sanam has in the "language house", but that he had never been able to find he says: "No. I don't want them anymore; because I have filled that gap myself. I write this way as well. When all things come to mind chronologically there is no need to write them" (p. 134). The narrator considers it his task to recount the fragmentary real, not the imagined sequential, ordered fiction that ex-post human subjective experience turns it into. His fiction is, thus, more true than the "truth" as seen

from but a single perspective. The narrator speaks to this with respect to writing several times. For example, at one point, speaking of Joseph from the Koran, he says:

> Each time they wanted to structure him according to a different observer. For instance, imagine if each time we point at different part of this cup that would not be the exact segment, inevitably it awakens the cup itself, or, more correctly, the being, of the cup. As a result of all these different, or even similar, views, something awakens in our mind which is existence, or it is something that neither depends on the observer nor is dependent on its time and place. (p. 135)

Or later, he says that: "Peace with the world is to awaken fragments of the world by the way of something which is part of the world and also at the same time is not" (p. 137). The narrator is more interested in the fragmentary than in the whole. He has given up the fictional whole in exchange for the reality of the fragment. He takes as his task the collection of the fragments, but rather than assembling them by some external logic he senses that he must connect them via their own, internal, perhaps inconsistent or contradictory logic.

The narrator is more concerned with the fragments that he senses as being real or true. He is seeking a truth. He speaks to this point early in the novel, on page 41, as quoted above. He recognizes that this truth is contingent upon his subjective position.

He can tell a fragment of truth, he can perhaps tell multiple perspectives on truth, but he does not pretend to have access to the Truth that will satisfy everyone. He actually seems to avoid presenting unitary, sequential, well-ordered stories. At least one element of his reasoning for his preference for the fragmentary comes from an assessment of the unifying tendencies he perceives as fundamentally Western. In expressing this, he refers to a graphic image invoked by Sanam earlier. "Here, Sanam was right; they had collected the broken pieces of all of the centuries in their museums and had left them to the fluid of this gigantic stomach which behind these windowless walls …" (p. 137). Ebrahim, therefore, eschews any attempt to recreate any whole via the collection of all of the broken pieces. Any such attempt is doomed to failure, or at least to misrepresentation. For Ebrahim, the pieces are already complete – at least as complete as they need to be. Sanam finally grasps this about him:

> "Honestly, I wanted to compromise with you so that maybe, according to yourself, you become whole, but you did not want to, because you thought it cannot be real."
>
> She turned away and left, step by step she was descending, like a statue by Phidias and on a revolving column. She was complete. Wasn't he whole? (p. 137)

The narrator once again questions his own identity, his own existence, but this time he has an answer ready – perhaps the only answer he can construct for the question. "He would write so that it would not vanish" (p. 137).

Sanam also recognizes a difference between temporality in Iran and in France. She comments on the state of affairs in Iran that Iranians like the narrator are "never willing to go and live in damp old houses, which day and night termites are eating up even their painting frames. Then you regret the past, the past that every ten years, is ripped out by the root" (p. 93). She seems to be arguing that Iranians like the narrator cling to their cultural past and are unwilling to abandon it because their physical past is in such a constant state of flux, due to war or construction or whatever. The French, on the other hand, are less obsessed with the cultural past and are more willing to move on to the new, the exciting, the creative, perhaps because they perceive a greater solidity to the foundations of their "place" in its physical instantiation. She comments, "Here, you definitely have noticed, people's past still exists, they don't even change the names" (p. 93). Later, also, she refers to this physical, geographic constancy:

> "Well, here, probably you have noticed, nothing ever changes, or every new thing was put next to the old things with such obsession that you don't notice it is new. For example, this alley, during the past five years that I have lived here it seems it has not changed at all. A couple

> of houses have been built, but the façades have not been changed." (p. 101)

The narrator responds:

> "For this reason maybe we must write, or before it is too late, I should talk about the house that now we, [my family and I], live in, so that tomorrow, when Sohrab has grown up, he will know where he has come from." (p. 93)

To which Sanam says:

> "Well, piece by piece yes, but what about yourself, from which point of view do you want to look at these?" (p. 93)

It is interesting that Ebrahim's response to this is a quote:

> One window is sufficient for me
>
> One window opens on the moment of awareness and glimpses and silence. (p. 93)

He seems to be saying that his Iranian point of view, the perspective he has from his "village" back home, is enough for him, and that it will last him for the brief span of this life. In the process he resorts, once again, to his literary past in search of something stable, constant, and comforting, however fragmentary it might be.

The narrator's conversation toward the end of the novel becomes increasingly focused on his art and the reasons for his writing style. Just before the following exchange, Ebrahim has been telling Sanam his memories of their shared past, and she said:

> "I wish you would write these things."
>
> "It is not possible."
>
> "Why not? Do you have to talk about a woman who only comes in the imagination, or is she only good for imagining?"
>
> "Sometimes. But my job, now I understand, is more recollection, pointing out someone or something, and that would be by laying the moments or pieces of that person or that thing next to each other." (p. 142)

Ebrahim prefers the fragmentary. He is used to working with the fragmentary. Perhaps it allows him greater freedom of expression, or perhaps it offers less since it is closer to the real. Perhaps each fragment is also a whole. When Sanam suggests that his writing is like a mosaic, he responds that it is not since a mosaic has a singular overarching pattern within which each piece must fit. "'Well it is tile work, mosaic work'" (p. 143). "'In mosaic each piece is only part of a whole; for me each section is another narrative of all of what has to be'" (p. 143).

Ebrahim's style is driven by his obsession with memory, with the past. He does not write stories; he recollects them. This theme is mentioned repeatedly toward the end of the story. For example regarding memory:

> So, it is memory's fault too that of that night, only a hand remains in the memory, and the glitter of a ring, and of that scene of the drawing of "Sorrow"[66], a woman with her head on both knees. (p. 145)

and regarding the cultural past:

> Then he said: "I want to write these kinds of things, I want to defend these values, even though old, because I know being cut in two pieces, to be here and there, or this suspension between sky and earth, is the same thing that we have had, it is our roots." (p. 151)

[66] Referring to Vincent Van Gogh's drawing.

and regarding his past and Sanam's past:

> "No, for me you always are, as I told you, the same Samanu who was sleeping behind that mosquito net with those two braids and her chest moving up and down with each breath. Your dress was white with tiny blue flowers. You had closed up the front of your dress, and I was leaning against the tree trunk and moving my head up and down with each breath you took." (p. 157)

At this point Sanam had already told him that "The Samanu or the Sanam is only in my and your memories, I am now forty three years old, and I exist" (p. 136). Yet, he is not concerned with her. The narrator may recognize a fragmentary nature of experience and he may be willing to face up to that knowledge, in both his life and in his writings. However, his obsession with memory, with the past, is all consuming. Perhaps this is his desire for stability and solidity asserting itself. And here the symbolism of the mirror is very significant.

The mirror first appears very early in the story where the narrator's wife, Mina, has given it to him to take with him on his trip. He has also received a note from someone that he thinks is Sanam, or Samanu, his sweetheart from childhood. "He crumpled the paper, but he did not throw it away. He smoothed it out and put it in the small pocket of

his briefcase, next to Mina's mirror with doors. She had said: 'I am behind these doors'" (p. 8).

The narrator appears obsessed with giving the mirror to Sanam. It is not clear what the connection between her and the mirror is within the context of the story, but the narrator attaches different meanings to it as the story progresses. On page 73, from within one of his stories, he explains the significance of the mirror. "Mina bought a mirror with doors, she said: 'When you close both doors, you are happy that your image remains fixed behind these doors'" (p. 73).

Thus the mirror fixes the image. Referring back to Lacan's mirror stage, this is exactly what Lacan argues occurs psychologically in the infant. In *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, the mirror become fetishized. The mirror fetish becomes the symbolic representation of an absence, a substitute for something missing. In a world such as the one the narrator sees where all is fragmentary and passing; perhaps the possession of a fetish of fixity becomes a comforting solidity, a foundation rather than an anchor as in Lacan's mirror stage. Thus, rather than forcing fixity upon a subject that experiences self or identity as fluid and turbulent, the mirror with doors provides respite from the turbulence as of a storm.

The narrator's focus on fragmentary reality also echoes his fear of losing, of being defeated. This fear, in addition to being the fear of a man who has as much, if not more life behind him as in front of him, may be a fear of losing a needed unitary of identity, at

least in some fashion. His adjustments have been so numerous, his positions in life so many, and his perspectives in memory so varied, he seems to run substantial risk of flying apart into an ever expanding, diffusing mass of completely disjointed experiences. He recounts just such a fear:

> They are sitting: A fourteen year old boy with a long neck and short hair, and an infected pimple on the corner of his nose; and his other face, on the fifth floor of a building in a ritzy neighborhood of "Enghien-les-Bains" staring at a finger without a ring, and he is here. Only the fear of losing unites them, a mirror with doors that keeps these three behind its doors. (p. 144)

The mirror with doors, (the ayenehha-ye dardar), in this case serves a vital function of preserving an individual identity of some sort. However, it also serves at the same time the function of preserving and protecting his past. Two of the faces mentioned above are historical; they are memory traces. They represent another kind of absence, the lack of a preserved, real historical self. Only memory remains, so the narrator has also fetishized this lack within the mirror. The mirror serves to bind himself into a single entity that contains, preserves, and can write about its past. Since this is his task, his job, and perhaps the only critical aspect of his conception of his own identity, it is the most important thing he possesses. And in a way he is, perhaps, trying to give her back her

own past, which she seems to have lost or given up in order to assimilate to her new circumstances. If the latter, it is not surprising that she is not happy upon receiving it since she has taken hold of the present and the possibilities it presents. However, she also feels the lack quite keenly:

> Sanam Banu said: "I thought Sa'id killed me, now I see you have killed me, you have cut me into pieces and gave each piece to someone [in your stories]."
>
> He also pulled the sheet over his chest and then on his neck under his chin, and said: "This also is somehow turning into a willow."
>
> "For you maybe, because you have your roots, but I, here ..." (p. 158)

Petal's story of the willow returns here through Ebrahim's reference:

> She showed the willow tree on the other side of the stagnant water (the lake) and said, "They say that two lovers went to a river for a swim. One of them drowned and the other one stood on the edge of the river until her/his[67] feet took root and her/his hair and hands budded, leafed,

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67 Persian language uses a third person pronoun that is not gender specific. This pronoun allows selections such as this one to remain ambiguous regarding which member of a couple is taking which

> and grew until they reached the surface of the water, in case if the drowned lover brought her/his head out of the water or if stretched her/his arm, he/she grab his/her disheveled hair or his/her long arms and could come out of the water. (p.25)

Though Sanam Banu suffers the same sadness as all of the other lost souls, she lacks the roots to anchor her in place, to give her any hope of "winning". The narrator occasionally says of himself that it may not be too late to avoid losing. He mentions his roots. "He had turned the light off. He saw a remote light through the window pane, and said: 'These roots: 'wife, children,' they are good, they make the passing of days bearable...'" (p. 158).

Sanam Banu, rootless and drifting, grasped for the branches of his willow, but he withdrew them. She hints at this earlier when she talks of a Persian man with whom she began living after separating from her husband:

> She was rubbing her hands together and still was pacing back and forth, she said: "I, myself, here, when I was separated, for a while I had to behave with everyone, even with foreign friends, in a way that they wouldn't think … you understand, right? Then I became friends with someone. I knew him from Iran; he sometimes gave me some

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action. The translation presented here maintains this ambiguity at the expense of including his/her, which is not a common construction in English.

> books. He knew Sa'id as well, he composed poems too, if I say his name you would know him. Then I realized he wanted to get over his homesickness by being with me. (pp. 149-150)

Sanam may similarly be seeking to get over her loneliness by being with Ebrahim, by convincing him to stay, or perhaps she considers him lost, instead. Yet, she is unable to establish any roots in order to try to save him, from himself or fate or culture or anything else. In either case, her fate is to be cursed by freedom, rootless and free and sad and lonely. Perhaps the narrator's mirror with doors only serves to make her lack more immediate and unavoidable.

As the above analysis shows, identity concerns form a prominent theme within Golshiri's novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*. By separating the investigation of such identity concerns into five largely distinct categories, the analysis presented here is able to provide greater clarity and detail regarding Golshiri's treatment of identity concerns. Expatriate/immigrant/exilic concerns form a significant backdrop for Golshiri's exploration of identity in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*. These concerns come to light in each of the different aspects of identity covered in this chapter, highlighting different components

of or perspectives on the human experience of living as an expatriate or immigrant or exile.[68]

Throughout the novel, Golshiri's concerns with linguistic and literary matters, cultural context, and social and political activism are evident. However, as is usual in Golshiri's writing, his craft and his focus on technique keeps such concerns from overwhelming the story (cf., Ghanoonparvar, 1985). While the focus in this dissertation is on Golshiri's identity concerns, which are present throughout the story, *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is a broad examination of the human condition in which identity concerns are but a single part of a complex, intricate, and often convoluted whole. Though Golshiri's prose is often difficult to parse, and though his technique may often rise to the foreground, these aspects of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* form a central component of the impact of the novel. The prominence of the technical aspects of the writing serve to emphasize the shifts between different perspectives and to highlight the multiplicitous positions that different subjects and indeed the same subject may take in various circumstances and on different issues. In *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, identity is among the central concerns to which Golshiri turns his craft, and the very difficulty of parsing the language is an aspect of his

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[68] As Houra Yavari points out in her *Encyclopædia Iranica* article "Fiction, ii(e). Post-Revolutionary Fiction Abroad" – "It is interesting to note that concern with the themes of immigration and exile is not confined to those authors who have actually undergone such experiences." She specifically references Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* among such books written by non-exile, non-immigrants who tackle such subjects. Even the narrator of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is such a non-exile, non-immigrant writer tackling immigrant and exilic topics.

examination of fraught and complex identity issues for these expatriates, immigrants, and exiles.

Chapter Four:

Conclusion

The foregoing examination of representations of identity concerns in Golshiri's works shows Golshiri's persistent and pervasive concern with identity issues throughout his literary life. Representations of identity in his novel *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* are particularly notable as examples of his interest in identity with respect to expatriates, including emigrants and exiles. The background information on Golshiri, a brief overview of treatments of Iranian identity in Persian literature, a review of existing research examining Golshiri's works, and an annotated bibliography of Golshiri's publications presented in Chapter One provided a broad sense of Golshiri's literary interests and activities and the context within which he lived and wrote. Chapter Two provided evidence of Golshiri's interest in issues of identity, presenting an extensive, though far from exhaustive assortment of treatments of identity within Golshiri's works. These selections from Golshiri's writings were organized using the same five categories of identity utilized in the discussion of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, the central discussion of this dissertation, in order to provide an extensive foundation for the analysis of *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* that appears in Chapter Three. This assortment of examples from Golshiri's works provides direct evidence of Golshiri's enduring interest in issues regarding identity, particularly, though certainly not exclusively, Iranian identity.

Prior research has remarked on identity themes in Golshiri's work, including in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, providing subsequent investigators with interesting avenues to pursue. Although Golshiri's interest in and literary examinations of identity have been noted previously, most prior analyses have not attempted a theoretically grounded examination of such issues. The analysis of representations of identity in *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* presented above is exploratory, leveraging several theoretical approaches to the question of identity and applying them to Golshiri's novel. The theoretical approaches to the discussion of identity presented in this study are not intended as a coherent, unified view of identity. Rather, they are intended as an exploratory effort at applying different theoretical lenses to Golshiri's treatments of identity in an effort to open a theoretically grounded discussion of identity in Golshiri's works. This preliminary application of multiple theories to the analysis of Golshiri's work provides some initial groundwork for more theoretically rigorous future analyses.

The categories of identity representations presented in this dissertation are distilled from prior research through the filter of Golshiri's writings. While these categories will ideally provide the basis for future, more focused examinations of Golshiri's work, they are not, as noted in the preceding chapters, intended to be nor are they viewed as mutually exclusive. For example, linguistic and literary aspects of identity are intimately related to cultural identity. Much of what is commonly called culture is both drawn from and reflected in uses of language and depictions in literature.

Similarly, while there are many identifiable cross-cultural similarities, political aspects of identity are often closely related to specific cultural factors that differ from one society to another.

Identity is a complex phenomenon and in most cases will subsume many if not all of these categories in some fashion. Future research will likely find it productive to focus on a few compatible theoretical lenses or even a single theoretical lens in order to facilitate a tightly focused, internally consistent view of identity in Golshiri's works. The exploratory analysis undertaken in this study suggests that a Lacanian approach to identity representation within *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, and indeed to identity concerns across Golshiri's works, may be the most fruitful. A Lacanian lens could allow the integration of the multiple categories of identity and may provide a more compelling overarching explanation of the mechanisms through which these different aspects of identity manifest and interact.

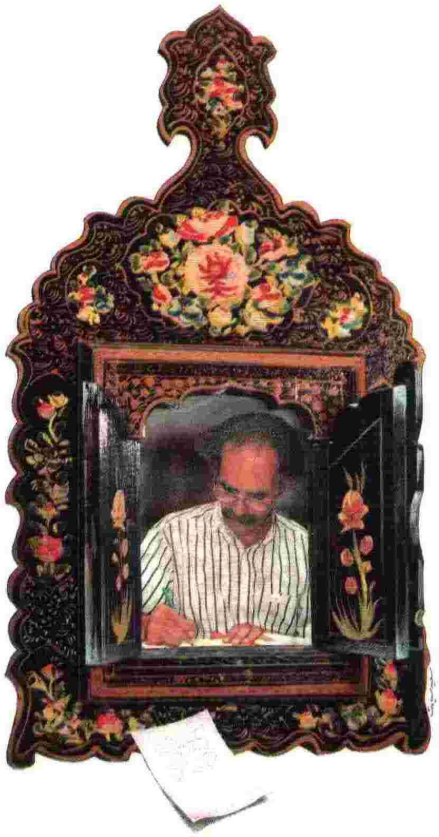
As an exploratory investigation of identity, this dissertation is limited with respect to its ability to offer dramatic advancements in the application of specific theories to the analysis of Golshiri's works. However, as an initial step in theoretically driven analysis of Golshiri's investigations of identity, it may serve as a starting point for future studies. Thus, this dissertation offers one additional step in the application of theoretical approaches to literary analysis to Golshiri's representations of Iranian expatriate identity. While the surface content of Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* is distinctly Persian in

character and draws much from Golshiri's roots as an Iranian writer, the story delves into deeper investigations of identity. This observation is not an attempt to apply a structuralist view of narrative onto the story, but rather an appreciation of Golshiri's skill in delving into decidedly human concerns rather than solely into specifically Iranian phenomena.

Ultimately, a Lacanian lens may be most useful in assessing the myriad identity concerns raised by *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*'s narrator. However, the concept of hybridity and hyphenated identity in the work of Homi Bhabha may also be valuable in a more rigorous assessment of identity in Golshiri's work. Eventually it may prove most interesting and constructive to attempt to reconcile such somewhat incompatible approaches, either by arguing for one in favor of the other or by finding a functional synthesis of different elements. In any case, this dissertation presents an introductory application and assessment of theoretical frameworks vis-à-vis identity concerns in Golshiri's *Ayenehha-ye Dardar*, potentially opening a discussion that will include more rigorous application of these frameworks in the future.

Appendix – *Ayenehha-ye Dardar* cover, a mirror with doors

هوشنگ گلشیری



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