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Men in Transition: A Study of Hegemonic Masculinity in Amy Waldman's *The Submission* and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*

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Abstract

This study traces James W. Messerschmidt's concept of hegemonic masculinity in two post-9/11 novels, *The Submission* (2011) by Amy Waldman and *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2008) by Porochista Khakpour. Messerschmidt's Structured Action Theory considers hegemonic masculinities as surreptitiously omnipresent or social constructs whose main purpose is rendering unequal gender relations possible. We believe that this theory can help us better understand the transformations the masculinities of these novels undergo after the 9/11 attacks. In analyzing the novels, we argue that characters who manifest pre-9/11 ideals of American hegemonic masculinity and who are symbolically disempowered by the attacks endeavor to regain their hegemonic status by establishing the hyphenated Middle Eastern and South Asian masculinities as their racial Other and subordinating them in the post-9/11 landscape. In other words, we will focus on the former group's symbolic emasculation and their subsequent remasculinization in light of the 9/11 attacks and the impact of this transformation on immigrant men in the United States. Moreover, by applying the Structured Action Theory to the aforementioned novels, we aim to show how American hegemonic masculinities, previously defined as strong, untouchable, and invincible, are reconstructed, after the 9/11 attacks, around the ideals of revenge; besides, we explore the responses of the Middle Eastern and South Asian men to their unequal position. Ultimately, we analyze the varying intersections of gender, religion, nationality, race, class, and age which are at work to reconstruct such identities.

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1. Introduction

The post-9/11 new world order redefined a myriad of fundamental Western concepts such as freedom, war, independence, trauma, masculinity, and femininity, prompting worldwide scrutiny, particularly in the United States. As a result, critics across disciplines endeavored to make sense of this new order by investigating the long-lasting impacts of such a paradigm-shifting event on their respective fields of study. One field of study that has focused on the impact of this event on people was Gender Studies in academia. Feminists, such as Susannah Radstone (2002) and Judith Butler (2020), for instance, analyzed the influence of the post-9/11 discourses of masculine invulnerability on the victimization of the feminine subject.

New forms of confrontation also emerged after the attacks. The binary opposition of man against man, for instance, was among the conspicuous ramifications of the 9/11 attacks, which outweighed the traditional binary opposition of man against woman. As Thomas Ærvold Bjerre maintains, "[in] the immediate aftermath of the attacks, much of the mainstream media constructed a triumphant narrative to tell the story of 9⁄11" (241). The American culture, it seems, was also shifting, and as Myc Wiatrowski says, "this shift in cultural rhetoric was centered on the shared construction of individual, and by association national, masculine identity" (2) mostly because this was, according to Zillah Eisenstein, a "manly moment" for America (161). Having realized that the attackers were Middle-Eastern men, American men shifted the 'other' against which they defined themselves from women to Middle-Eastern men.

Therefore, in this paper, we endeavor to study how the pre-9/11 symbolic representations of American men as untouchable, invincible, and safe are replaced by the image of a resilient and vengeful figure seeking justice against a racial other. Moreover, we will analyze the reactions of Middle Eastern (and by extension South Asian) men to their redefined position. Applying James Messerschmidt's theory of Hegemonic Masculinity to Amy Waldman's *The Submission: A Novel* and Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects,* we will examine the representations of these two groups in the post-9/11 world and explore how this theory helps interpret these post-9/11 novels by authors from opposing backgrounds and literary traditions.

By analyzing the representations of the masculinities in *The Submission*, we investigate how Waldman portrays the consciousness of American men regarding their re-masculinization and their confrontations with Middle Eastern/South Asian men. Furthermore, we trace the reactions of the Iranian-American men, as the subordinate group, in *Sons and Other Flammable*

Objects. By applying the theory of Structured Action, we study the realities of the masculinities and their transformations by focusing on their embodied actions and their impact on social connections in these men's respective communities.

2. Literature review

Numerous studies have individually analyzed these novels. For instance, Cyrus Amiri and Mahdiyeh Govah's "Hedayat's Rebellious Child: Multicultural Rewriting of *The Blind Owl* in Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*" (2023) focuses on the question of identity in Hedayat's novel but does not go beyond national identity. It is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing discourse of nationalism and multicultural national identity, suggesting that both novels seek a return to pre-Islamic cultural purity and linguistic unity as a solution to Iran's challenges. They also assert that while Hedayat's concept advocates revitalizing the nation through Aryan purity, Khakpour's narrative promotes redemption through tolerance, inclusivity, and acknowledging contemporary cultural diversity.

Also relevant is Arash Rahmani and Amir Ali Nojoumian's "Cultural Trauma in Post-9/11 Fiction: Representing the Marginalization of Iranians in Diasporic Novels" (2023), which explores the marginalization of Iranian characters in Khakpour's novel using Jeffrey C. Alexander's concept of cultural trauma. The study, however, only focuses on the nationality of the characters and ignores gender, particularly masculinity, as a game changer in the power dynamics after 9/11.

In a more relevant study, *Falling Men in 9/11 American Fiction* (2015), Justin D. Shaw examines the concepts of sub- and supra-hegemonic masculinities in post-9/11 novels, including *The Submission*. Shaw's dissertation challenges the common assumption that post-9/11 novels primarily reinforce sub-hegemonic masculinities, arguing that supra-hegemonic masculinities prevail in the novel. Furthermore, Nathaniel Cloyd's dissertation, "Terrorists, Zombies, and Robots: the Political Unconscious Thematics, and Affectual Structures of the Post-9/11 American Fear Narrative," explores how fear is portrayed in the post-9/11 American narratives employing Fredric Jameson's three horizons of interpretation. It investigates the impact of genre, historical context, and media on the representation of fear in post-9/11 novels.

The significance of our study lies, on the one hand, in its novel framework, Hegemonic Masculinities, particularly James Messerschmidt's Structured Action Theory, which we use to analyze the novels. Messerschmidt's theory offers a reformulated and more comprehensive perspective on Masculinities,

emphasizing the significance of the setting for the intersections of various inequalities like race, class, religion, ethnicity, nationality, etc. On the other hand, this study sheds light on the transformations and reactions of the two distinct groups of American and Middle Eastern/South Asian men in the aftermath of the attacks. Using very different techniques, these novelists, one American and the other Iranian-American, portray the experiences of each group and the actions and reactions of the other group.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Masculinity studies is a burgeoning interdisciplinary field that delves into the intricate aspects of male gender identities. It employs various theoretical frameworks, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies to investigate how masculinity is constructed, performed, and embodied in different social and cultural contexts.

As Messerschmidt notes, "The concept of hegemonic masculinity, formulated by Raewyn Connell more than three decades ago, has been the driving force behind the expanding field of masculinities studies" (ix). This concept, with an undeniable influence on gender studies and interdisciplinary recognition of gender, was introduced by R. W. Connell in the 1980s to examine variations in masculine norms and definitions of manhood in societies and over time. Connel's concept of hegemonic masculinity primarily scrutinizes the ways through which unequal relationships are legitimized between men and women, masculinities and femininities, and among different masculinities (ix).

The concept of hegemonic masculinities was further developed in 2018, when James W. Messerschmidt presented Structured Action Theory. This theory is a more inclusive approach to gender inequality, acknowledging both marginalized group's and hegemonic group's power on global, regional, and local scales. This theory embraces an intersectional view of masculinities, accounting for factors like class, race, sexuality, nationality, and age in their construction. Moreover, Messerschmidt discusses the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity practices and the challenges of their enactment. Eventually, this reformulated concept stands out for its urge to study hegemonic masculinities across all three local, regional, and global levels, arguing that a unidimensional societal level fails to capture the ubiquity and slyness of hegemonic masculinities.

Messerschmidt's concept of hegemonic masculinity emphasizes the fluidity of identity, gender, and sexuality as social constructs influenced by contextual factors. These interconnected constructs evolve through embodied actions and societal interactions, rejecting fixed definitions (114-115). Negotiating and

adapting to gender involves demonstrating "accountability" by self-assessing and considering others' evaluations in specific situations within the context of "structured gender and sexual relations" (116). Additionally, "reflexivity" plays a crucial role in an individual's response to social incidents and experiences, helping them address unique challenges, like the September 11 attacks, through socially structured practices to counteract or reconstruct gender norms and resist unequal gender relations (117). Messerschmidt emphasizes that sex, gender, and sexuality construction results from a dynamic interplay of accountable and reflexive practices within specific social settings, influenced by structural constraints and opportunities. These social structures shape gender hegemony, but individuals may engage in reflexive deviations in certain situations, leading to fluid manifestations of sexed, gendered, and sexual social actions (117-118). Therefore, in *The Submission* and *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, we investigate reflexive actions and possible deviations from the hegemonic relational and discursive social structures after the 9/11 attacks. We examine the recreation of the hegemonic masculinities on local, regional, and global levels in that setting and the counterhegemonic actions by the subordinated hyphenated Middle Eastern/South Asian masculinities to challenge or dismantle the unequal relation settled by their American counterparts; through this lens, we will find out how their reflexive embodied practices fashion their new identities in line with their situation.

Structured Action Theory also highlights intersectionality in shaping hegemonic masculinities, with sexuality, race, class, and nationality as key constructs linked to social practices. These intersections constantly reconstruct hegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt 124). Analyzing inequalities fashioning the post-9/11 identities of American hegemonic and hyphenated subordinate masculinities reveals their strategic use of hegemonic masculinity for empowerment and the counterhegemonic practices of non-American and Middle Eastern/South Asian men. This framework illuminates how masculinities in *The Submission* and *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* reclaim power and navigate post-9/11 identities.

4. Discussion
The September 11 attacks prompted global discursive responses, such as the hegemonic discourse of "war on terror" by President Bush, aimed at reconstructing American hegemony. This discourse exacerbated the "expressions of hostility to Muslim/Arabs," resulting in violent acts against them (Alsultany & Shohat 6). In this regard, Aisha Peña notes that since 9/11, "American Muslims have been dealing with issues brought about by rising xenophobia" (202), which has manifested itself in different forms. In the wake

of the attacks, almost all Muslim communities faced harassment in America, as they were accused of extremism and were collectively held responsible for the actions of a few (Hilal xiii).

The attacks and ensuing xenophobia led to efforts to reconstruct the fallen image of America and Americans. That global reconstruction of American masculinity, which affected the regional and local levels as well, prompted men to restore their disrupted hegemonic status by targeting Muslim Middle Eastern and South Asian men through various violent and nonviolent social practices. In the following paragraphs, we will delve deeper into these issues, applying the Structured Action Theory as a critical tool to explore the complexity of identity formation in Waldman's novel.

5. Hegemonic Masculinity in The Submission

Amy Waldman's *The Submission* explores the impact of post-9/11 identity shifts on American and Muslim minority masculinities, challenging American ideals as the society redefines its status, particularly in the portrayal of Muslim men as the new 'other.' The narrative begins by examining 9/11 memorial proposals from a diverse group, showcasing power dynamics and hegemonic concerns. Waldman's focus on Paul, an American, and Mohammad, a Muslim American, Illustrates the competition for hegemonic status in post-9/11 American society. The jury convened to choose the competition's winner includes figures like Paul Joseph Rubin, the chairman, along with radical art professionals and critics such as Bob Wilner. Clair Burwell, a representative of the families who lost loved ones, is notable for her husband's opulence, suggesting that jury selection is impacted by power dynamics, making Clair the sole non-official, non-critic member chosen for her financial influence.

Unaware of the designers' identity, the jury primarily focuses their discussions on the two finalists, *The Garden* and *The Void*; they emphasize *The Garden's* potential to heal the wounds left by the 9/11 attacks. Their conversation delves into the memorial's significance for Americans, highlighting their feelings of vulnerability, uncertainty, and loss. Paul Joseph Rubin, the chairman of the jury and the prototype of the American ideologies and patriarchy throughout the novel, claims that the memorial's raison d'être is to fill out the "blank space" reminiscent of their "surrender, something for ***them***, whoever they were, to mock…. America's diminished greatness and its new vulnerability to [the] attack by a fanatic band" (Waldman 8). The attacks also accelerated societal transformations and led to Paul's retirement due to changing financial politics. By leading the jury and building the memorial, Paul is trying to improve his profile to become the chairman of the public library for which he'd yearned for a long while. Paul's character as the quintessence of

the dominating hegemonic masculinity in the novel gradually unfolds when staged against other male and female characters. His initial reactions to the attacks reveal his self-interest in the market consequences (Waldman 13). Notably, Paul's immediate deliberate action after the attacks is replacing Sami, his moderate Pakistani driver, with a safe Russian driver, driven by his feelings of discomfort in the presence of Muslims. Watching the attacks on TV, he feels the trauma of the attacks for the first time; he ponders how the media recreates American identities as "a traumatized victim? A charged-up avenger? A queasy voyeur?" (Waldman 13). These are exactly the personas that he himself adopts throughout the novel, however, simultaneously, he considers himself a social actor who has to take action, to redirect and "tame" people towards the real values of the American society within those chaotic times.

When The Garden wins and the designer's name, Mohammad Khan, a Muslim name, is revealed, the whole scenario sparks harsh criticism and prejudice against both the designer and all Muslim men. This is the reflection of America's global discourse on the "war on terror" at the local level during the jury session that shifts the focus from the design's merit to the designer's background, which is tainted with negative assumptions related to Islamist terrorism. This point underscores how American ideologies and stereotypes about Muslims come to the fore in the novel, highlighting religion as a defining factor in one's identity during a critical period in American history.

Although the blind submission is supposed to be impartial with contestants' backgrounds thoroughly vetted, Paul's immediate concern upon hearing Mohammad Khan's name is to ask about his nationality. This highlights the perception that Muslims are not considered true Americans and are not trusted as loyal citizens (Khushi and Rashid 98). The stereotyping of Muslim men as "criminal" or "terrorist" is the initial discursive practice of Paul and other American men, reflecting the global discourse of "war on terror" in their subordination of their racial Other, i.e., Muslim men, on a local level (Waldman 19). Khushi and Rashid also state that Muslim men are targets of American men's "otherization," "racialization," and "secularization," particularly after the 9/11 attacks (103). This dehumanizing and othering process, championed by Paul, persists to the end of the novel. The Jury even decides to nullify the whole process because, according to Bob Wilner, the designer's religion makes him "unsuitable by definition" (Waldman 20).

Waldman depicts Paul's patriarchal identity and hegemonic masculinity through his unequal relationship with his wife, Edith, who represents prevailing American societal ideologies. When the possibility of a Muslim designer for a memorial is discussed, Edith expresses skepticism about Muslim countries' acceptance of a Jewish designer. In response, contrary to his true

intentions, Paul defends the decision, claiming superiority over Muslim countries. In the eyes of Edith and the household, Paul remains a distant, aggressive patriarch and primary financial provider. At home, Paul maintains gender dominance by controlling economic resources, exemplifying hegemonic masculinity. His relationship with his sons, Jacob and Samuel, is fundamentally financial and lacks emotional connection. Samuel, Paul's younger son, runs a gay rights organization and resents his father for undermining his sexuality. Paul reinforces unequal gender dynamics in his home by manipulating his financial resources (class), age, and sexuality. He embodies an old-fashioned, patriarchal masculinity while pretending to hold liberal views on gender and homophobia. His actions consistently uphold his hegemonic masculinity in various contexts.

As previously discussed, the 9/11 attacks brought a seismic shift in American male identity and discourse, pushing men to adopt a vengeful image in response. In the novel, Paul's interactions with Mohammad Khan, whom he dubs a "problem to be solved," are of great significance and exhibit his controlling, autocratic nature and his desire for gender dominance (Waldman 55). Paul's discriminatory attitudes towards Mohammad's participation highlight Americans' prejudices against Muslims, and his attempts to suppress Mohammad reveal his efforts to solidify his own hegemonic masculinity. The first question that Paul poses to Mohammad, inquiring about the reasons for his participation in the contest, highlights the prevalent perception of Americans: Muslims are unsuitable for such a competition. Subsequently, Paul asks questions about Mohammad's faith in Islam to see if is a practicing Muslim, and, finally, he requests Mohammad to change the name of the designer and obviate any reference to his own name.

Mohammad, in response, emphasizes that as an American, he **could** take part in that competition and wants to heal the wounds of America. Throughout this conversation, which also includes interrogations of Mohammad Khan's religious tendencies and his stance on Islamic radicalism, Paul consistently denies Mohammad the right to design the memorial for Americans and even accuses Mohammad of being complicit in the tragedy and sufferings of the victims' families because of his background. This type of reasoning, intended to suppress Mohammad Khan and insinuate his inferior position, showcases Paul's reflexive discursive and material practice to reconstruct himself as a hegemonic masculinity. In this dichotomy, the character of Mohammad Khan plays a significant role. Through Paul's investigations, we learn that Mohammad Khan, the son of successful, educated Indian immigrants, was born and raised in the United States. Although Mohammad has worked in various firms and has no history of convictions, Paul is astonished when he

realizes that Mohammad has become a successful architect who resides in Chinatown, highlighting his rigid American perspective. The initial meeting between Mohammad Khan and Paul resembles a police interrogation, evoking memories of Mohammad's past experience at Los Angeles airport in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

It is worth pointing out that Mo, despite coming from a Muslim family, hardly ever practices Islamic teachings and has limited knowledge of them. Therefore, he seems unable to comprehend why he faces frequent questioning. Gradually, he realizes that he is automatically being linked to the attacks because of his family and what we earlier called the "collective responsibility" of all Muslims (Hilal xiii). Frustrated by such accusations, he decides to confront those who question his Americanness and responds assertively, even though he has limited knowledge of Islam. In one part of the novel, Paul accuses Khan of treating the situation like "a game," to which Khan replies "It is a game. One for which you made the rules. And now you're trying to change them." (Waldman 65). This conversation, not only characterizes their rhetorical duel as a "game" but also insinuates that the memorial contest is a game of power and hegemony for them. Khan sees Paul as the regulator of the multi-layered "game," i.e., the competition, as Rubin is the representative of the traditional hegemonic business masculinity that strives to preserve America's economic system "designed by and for men like himself, who have the hegemonic power to manipulate the rules to their advantage" (Shaw 129).

Mohammad's victory in the competition was initially based on merit, as the judges were unaware of his identity. But, as post-9/11 America witnessed an escalation of race and ethnicity discrimination, the core ideals of American democracy reflected in the blind competition began to destabilize, underscoring the American society's privileges for the pure American non-Muslim white men. Accordingly, as the prototype of post-9/11 America's hegemonic masculine culture, Paul Rubin bluntly asks Mohammad Khan first to eliminate his name as the designer and submit it as his firm (the ROI)'s creation, then change the design based on American values, and, ultimately, withdraw. These demands unsettle Mohammad, who has always considered and introduced himself as an inseparable member of American society. Mohammad, preferring to be called Mo for its secular connotations, and his family have always assimilated themselves to the American culture and have maintained the illusion of being American. However, after 9/11, they finally get to witness a darker side of the country they called home.

In the face of this conflicting social situation, Mo's parents implore him to withdraw; his father reveals to him the bitter truth that he and his ilk are considered "less American" (Waldman 175). This is, as Fakhrulddin et al. assert,

an obvious indication of American imperialism's oppression, as it propagates misconceptions by any means at its disposal (372). Mohammad's mother even wants him to change his appearance, i.e., cut his long hair and trim his beard, as a symbolic act of compliance. Thus, in addition to the American society's demands, Mo is challenged by his parents who are afraid that his confrontation with the committee will probably not end well for their son; this fear is amplified by the tragic fate of another character in the novel, Asma Anwar. Asma, the widow of an illegal alien victim of 9/11, falls victim to the harsh realities of post-9/11 America, where discrimination and prejudice prevail even in the face of tragedy.

Facing events like the violent murder of Asma Anwar and an ever-widening schism between himself and American society, Mo, eventually, reflexively breaks America's highly hegemonic masculine culture through a nonviolent response to both its discursive and material practices of subordination. He distances himself away from America by his act of withdrawal without acknowledging the opposing party's hegemonic masculine power. In his final stages of reflection before his ultimate decision to withdraw, Mo mulls over the position the American society has situated him in, particularly by murdering Asma Anwar, vehement opposition to his design, and his total rejection. Such reflections, coupled with his parents' advice, eventually steer him away from further confrontation and enable him to resolve the contradiction by practicing an alternative response, to withdraw and leave America for India, his *fatherland*. His withdrawal and swift departure represent a more compelling form of challenge to American democracy, its gender hegemony, and the hegemonic masculinity of characters like Paul and Bob Wilner, who reinforce that hegemony. Edith Rubin admits this when, after Paul's death, she concedes that Mohammad Khan's withdrawal crumbled Paul's whole fame as a successful banker, particularly in light of the failure of the memorial project; Paul's obituary is indicative of this fact: "Despite a distinguished career in finance, he will be remembered mostly for his failed stewardship of the memorial process, which some argued set back America's convalescence" (Waldman 289). Moreover, most of the jury members confessed that "they felt betrayed by Mo's abdication," a sentiment Mohammad himself understood (292).

Under pressure from the committee, Mohammad is urged to attend a public hearing and announce his voluntary withdrawal of the proposal in respect of American values. Feeling taunted from all sides, Mohammad decides to leave his birth country and fight back in India, the nation he truly identifies with, without publicly retracting his proposal. In the novel, according to Badar Sheikh, liberal white Americans face obstacles from various opposing

forces, including the American values of merit and equality, as they strive to maintain their vision of a fair society, which necessitates the acquiescence, submission, and voluntary withdrawal of the specter from the public space they aim to exclude him from (176). Therefore, Mo reflexively decides not to dignify the committee's request for a public withdrawal and instead leaves abruptly "like a fugitive," an action that, he concludes, will be a challenge to the hegemony of American culture which still pretends to be democratic. This is the best way for him to handle the situation to reflect more on an appropriate procedure to fight back. The counterhegemonic act of non-public withdrawal and departure from the country leads Mo to become a nonviolent challenge to the hegemonic masculinity of the American men, who wanted him to either change his design according to their volition or publicly announce his withdrawal in the hearing. Mo's withdrawal cuts the relational practice of hegemonic masculinities, like Paul, and their discursive practices of labeling and othering to substantiate their unequal relationship and power.

Waldman also emphasizes the role of the internet in perpetuating America's gender hegemony by spreading globally fabricated information about Mo as a representative of Middle Eastern Muslim men. Instead, Mo dismantles his nonhegemonic status in two ways. First, he leaves the country without announcing his withdrawal publicly; then, he decides to build the memorial in another place. However, he chooses a provocative approach by removing the victims' names and substituting them with Quranic verses to challenge American hegemony and its xenophobia. The personalized practice of constructing the design that Americans feared, with highlighted symbols of Quranic verses in the third social setting, is Mo's alternative hegemonic masculine response that is embraced by this new setting. He constructs hegemonic gender relations with American men in the Middle East and South Asia, and he actualizes these relations by engaging in a different form of social action that composed his hegemonic masculinity. From the standpoint of the Structured Action Theory, Mo draws upon relational and discursive social structures in different locals – the Jury and MACC (Muslim American Coordinating Council), America, and India – to engage in a masculine social action, and, in return, he reproduces and challenges specific social structures through distinct practices. This adaptability points to his fluid masculine identity across various settings. Throughout the sessions with the jury and MACC as well as the hearing, Mo is consistently labeled as a masculine deviant, a terrorist, a jihadi, and [a racial] Other. The continuous labelling takes a toll on him, eventually reaching an unbearable point; the culmination of hate speech against him after Asma Anwar's death prompts him to reflexively decide to sever the relational practice of the American hegemonic masculinity and fight

back in a situationally appropriate hegemonic way. Mo resolves to exhibit a non-violent masculine persona by his withdrawal and a tough hegemonic masculine persona by constructing the *Garden* with highlighted Islamic symbols and inviting William to film the monument.

On another aspect, a year after the 9/11 attacks, upon his return from Afghanistan, Mo decides to involve his body in his material practices to suggest a new course of action he started to embrace. He grows his hair and a beard and thus uses his body as the object of masculine social action. Growing a beard is a timely deliberate action whereby he introduces himself as the Other of the American masculinities, i.e., Muslim men that challenged the hegemonic masculinity of America within its own borders and throughout the globe. As Peter Ferry argues, "following the terrorist attacks of September 11, the beard returned to the American consciousness when hegemonic white American masculinity once again defined itself in terms of opposition, them and us, Westerners and Muslims, the beardless and the bearded" (5). The symbolic significance of the beard is revealed when Mo deliberately grows a beard after his travel to Afghanistan, a year after the attacks when Muslims faced heightened official scrutiny and suspicion, and shaves it for the hearing. He admits that he grew a beard in order to violate Americans' expectations of Muslims as terrorists, the ones who disrupted their hegemony and power dynamics, "to assert his right to wear a beard, to play with the assumptions about his religiosity it might create" (Waldman 114). Then, he shaves his beard to distance himself from the MACC, which stopped supporting him, and align himself more with the Americans whom he believed would support him in the hearing; as he notes, "to do this was smart," making his "image more sedate and foreign" (Waldman 213).

However, paradoxically, Mo's trajectory is influenced by multiple factors. His parents, the MACC (as the complicit of the Americans to gain support from them), and American society propel him towards a new way of challenging American men's gender hegemony, i.e., withdrawal from the competition and leaving America. Electing to withdraw privately, conveyed through a note to the jury, instead of altering his design, assuming a different identity, or publicly announcing his withdrawal in the hearing were attempts aimed at validation by embodying a specific type of masculinity for his opponents and for himself. It is an endeavor to resist the subordinating actions and feelings of being reproduced by the jury, the MACC, and the American men via their material and discursive social practices. Yet, it simultaneously constructs a new nonviolent masculinity. However, after constructing the design, in the Middle East and flaunting its symbolic Islamic elements in William Burwell's movie, Mo establishes himself as another hegemonic masculinity. He finally orchestrates

the embodiment of a powerful hegemonic masculinity in the eyes of his Other (American hegemonic masculinities) and secures a strong response to their subordination. His new hegemonic masculinity is fully supported and acknowledged in his new setting; he practices the re-embodiment of new gender relations by the counterhegemonic practice of constructing the *Garden* and nullifying the American hegemonic masculinity by withdrawing and leaving the U.S. Through such practices, Mo opposes the hegemonic masculine relations, specifically by emphasizing the aspects that were threatening for his Other, i.e., the inscribed Quranic verses on the arches. Therefore, Mo's final act is a deliberately reflexive counterhegemonic practice that serves as a response to the oppressive gender relations and power dynamics of the American hegemonic masculinities who pushed even non-practicing Muslims towards extremism. In the upcoming section, we will analyze Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, using Structured Action Theory to examine the actions of its male characters in the post-9/11 era and compare them to Waldman's characters.

6. Hegemonic Masculinity in Sons and Other Flammable Objects

Porochista Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* is mainly about the household of the Adams in the middle-class vicinity of Pasadena in Los Angeles and their struggles for assimilation and conformation to American norms. Their apartment, ironically called "Eden Gardens," reveals its stark contrast to its denomination, serving as a symbolic reflection of the turmoil that ensnares members of the Adam family, particularly Darius and Xerxes Adam, in the post-9/11 era. As Rahmani and Nojoumian maintain, Khakpour's "novel focuses on the relationship between an immigrant father, Darius, with nostalgic ties to his homeland, and the teenage angst of his son, Xerxes, who tries to know himself better as a second-generation Iranian-American" (141); the strife between the father and the son is, therefore, reminiscent of what Hasan Kaplan describes as "the crisis of maintaining already formed and inherited traditional (ethnic and religious) identity experienced and voiced by the parent generation" and "the crisis of forming a new identity between two seemingly conflicting (family tradition and Western/ American way) cultures, experienced by the second generation" (3). Although the novel lacks prominent American characters, it effectively portrays America as a central character, showcasing the same identity and attitude transformation that, in turn, significantly impacts the Iranian characters' self-perception.

Our initial introduction to Darius Adam, the head and patriarch of the Adam family, occurs when he eccentrically outfits the apartments' cats with bell collars in an effort to protect the blue jays. This symbolic act's underlying

significance, which Darius later explains to Xerxes, leaves a haunting impact on Xerxes' psyche. From the outset until the eruption of the September 11 attacks, Darius relentlessly strives to prove his hegemony over both his son, Xerxes, and his wife, Lala. His display of hegemonic masculinity within his home is characterized by an overabundance of toxic masculine traits, including aggression and authoritarian control of every facet of his family's life.

Darius never fully assimilates into American culture, which marginalizes the Iranian masculine ethos. His acute consciousness of the stereotypes attached to Iranians is shown when Xerxes receives a Christmas card at school from his friend, Adam. This card, which deeply embarrasses Xerxes as a Middle Eastern, contains a camel that Adam drew in response to a recent argument, a gesture that the Adams perceive as reinforcing harmful stereotypes about Arabs and Middle Easterners as primitive camel riders with a history of bloodshed and savagery. Darius becomes agitated upon recognizing the card's significance, exclaiming, "What? Shotore? It's a shotore [sic]. A camel" (Khakpour 74). He admonishes Xerxes to avoid connecting camels and their cultural connotations to their race and to distance himself from Adam. The haunting memory of the card lingers with Darius throughout his life; Khakpour shows this when, at Xerxes's apartment in New York, Darius spots an empty pocket of **Camel** cigarettes as a poignant reminder of that card. He takes the pocket with him, always viewing it as a symbol of "parental failure" (Khakpour 77).

The Adam household exemplifies the relational and discursive practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations and reinforce gender hegemony. Within this context, both Xerxes and Lala find themselves victims of the hierarchical system of their home and the toxic hegemonic masculinity of Darius, who is the sole provider of their economic needs. Lala's additional dependence on both men is, however, due to her limited proficiency in English. Darius, in an attempt to shape Xerxes' understanding of Iran, narrates the country's history, a narrative that Xerxes dismisses as a skewed "his-story." This historical account, which primarily centers around the stories of Darius (the father) and Xerxes (the son) of the Achaemenid dynasty, positions one as superior and the other as inferior. Darius Adam's discursive practices consistently highlight Darius' victories while highlighting Xerxes' failures in Iran's turbulent history, underscoring his son's inferior status within the household. When Xerxes inquires about the reasons for such denomination, Darius responds "because after Darius, Xerxes comes next, no stopping to it, son-enough! (Khakpour 68).

To preserve gender hegemony within their patriarchal Iranian household, Darius emulates his father's accomplishments; he learns from his father the power of the word "enough" to halt any dispute. As Khakpour mentions,

"When he cut someone's sentence off with an abrupt 'Enough,' it was about merciful truncation, the 'Enough' that said,… let's just snip that sentiment off right there at its best, nicest, happiest point, before it goes bad" (Khakpour 52). Additional insights uncover that Darius's father, an alcoholic, had lost ties with reality and harbored a bitter form of optimism that prohibited discussions of life's somber truths. Throughout his childhood, Darius was unable to engage in meaningful conversations with his father. He vividly recalls an attempt to confide his fear of death, only to be abruptly silenced by his father's curt retort, "Enough." The narrator then reveals that Darius bequeathed the brutality of the older generation "through some cruel genetic osmosis" (Khakpour 55). Consequently, Darius not only adopts his father's repressive discourse but also struggles to communicate with his own son. Similarly, Xerxes, following futile attempts to discuss his issues with his father, reflexively severs contact with him.

Another attempt on the part of Darius to familiarize Xerxes with the cruel masculine culture of his birth country is recounting the disturbing habit of bird burning as a game, which had such a haunting brutality that, upon learning of it, Xerxes avoids his father. This narrative serves as a reminder of the hegemonic masculine culture they came from, marked by an excess of toxic masculine characteristics like aggression, bloodshed, and the demeaning of women and children, aiming to assert the superiority of men. Originating from such a culture, Darius struggles to adapt himself in a country where he faces inferiority due to his background, nationality, and race. In this regard, Rahmani states that Darius's "efforts are thwarted every now and again" since he does not "find the best way to approach this assimilation" (156). The clash between American and the failing Iranian hegemonic masculine cultures, evident even before the 9/11 attacks, is portrayed in the conflict between Darius and his neighbors at Eden Garden. Driven by the guilt stemming from his childhood bird-burning game, Darius clads cats with collar bells to protect neighborhood birds (Saremi 201). However, this action incites the neighbors' anger, leading a woman to confront Darius at the Adams' door, challenging his motives and even his identity with a stern "what's your … name even?" She warns him of potential jail time if it happens again (Khakpour 18). This episode leaves Darius grappling with the devastating pain of losing status in his family's eyes and serves as a stark reminder of his subordinate position within American society.

Nevertheless, Darius experiences his main crisis of masculinity and cultural trauma after the September 11 attacks, which trigger bouts of depression, weaken his mental and physical strength and cause insomnia and nightmares of his homeland. His condition deteriorates to the point where he cancels classes, becomes homebound, and ceases any contact with the outside world.

Lala expresses her concerns about Darius' mental state to Xerxes, noting his sleeplessness, incoherent speech, and physical distress. Paradoxically, as Darius retreats, Lala begins working outside and becomes more social, which exacerbates Darius' disempowerment. As the house and society undergo transformations, Darius increasingly feels emasculated and eventually confesses his disempowerment to Lala, "Yes, wife, something is wrong with me. I know. Yes, now more than ever I know. I'm sorry" (Khakpour 175).

After years in America, Darius remains connected to his Iranian culture but never seriously considers returning due to the risks. However, feeling mentally and physically shattered, he ultimately seeks refuge in Iran as a "remedy to fill all the many holes in his life" (Khakpour 263). Darius no longer embodies the dominating hegemonic masculinity he once did; he feels oppressed in the society he now calls home and laments that he and his fellow Middle Eastern men are now lunatics who decisively choose the worst options and are only retrograding (Khakpour 265). Despite the jeopardies, much like Mo, Darius intentionally chooses to return to his homeland in a bid to regain his lost power.

We already mentioned the destructive influence of Darius on Xerxes' attitude about Iran and Middle-Eastern men as harshly hegemonic masculinities. While Darius faced disempowerment and unequal gender relations due to his nationality and race in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in America, Xerxes experienced similar challenges throughout his life. The conflicts between Darius's and Lala's lives at home, along with Darius' memories of Iran and its history, constitute the most distressing moments in Xerxes' life, leading to his decision to cut all family ties. The hegemonic, subordinating dynamic between Darius, Lala, and Xerxes persists until Xerxes leaves home. Xerxes endures subordination at home, at school, and within American society but never takes corresponding social action. Although he understands that emulating Darius' gender project of embodying toxic hegemonic masculinity is doomed to failure in that context, Xerxes, unlike Mo, lacks the power to fight back and challenge the injustice imposed upon him due to his experiences of subordination in various settings.

At home, Xerxes experiences subordination through the unequal relationship with his father characterized by Darius's aggression, toughness, hubris, and relentless bragging about his family and homeland's masculine culture. Furthermore, in the social setting of school, he faces severe inequality by his classmates and even teachers' verbal bullying primarily due to his name, followed by discriminations based on his background, nationality, and race. The narrator vividly describes Xerxes' distress as he was derided by Americans for his name; even his teachers struggled to pronounce his name correctly,

which resulted in "a clunky absurd Exer-excess" (Khakpour 42). In California, according to Khakpour, names starting with X are "subversive, somehow off, subject to all sorts of avoidance, fun-making, and ill-founded investigation" (71). While Darius also faces the same problem, his first name is less problematic; however, both Xerxes and Darius suffer from the mispronunciations of their surname as Americans call them "Odd-Damn," "Aa-dumb" or use the offensive Americanized version "Adams," signifying chewing gum in Farsi (Khakpour 46). As previously mentioned, Xerxes' devastating childhood memory of the Christmas card with derogatory references to his Middle Eastern, camel-riding, primitive heritage exemplifies his early experience of discriminatory gender hegemony that was rooted in race and nationality. Due to such experiences, Xerxes develops the sense of being an eternal outsider in American society from his early childhood.

Xerxes, thus, finds himself at odds with a combined relational and discursive social structure at both school and home. Ultimately, he opts to avoid his peers at school and severs ties with his father, and leaves both their home and Los Angeles in a bid to escape such situations. His reluctance to fight back reveals the institutionalization of hegemonic masculinities' structured relations in both settings to which his only reflexive response is walking away. In other words, Xerxes is unwillingly positioned as a subordinate masculinity that results in a distressing lack of self-esteem in his masculine identity across school, home, and in the society. His distress stems from the discomfort and anxiety he endures, caused by verbal bullying and subordinating comments regarding his background, race, and nationality.

After reflexive rumination about his status at home and school, Xerxes deliberately avoids social interactions, transforming into a recluse, who confines himself to his New York apartment. In that agonizing state, Suzanne's birthday gift, tickets to Iran, is an incentive for him to regain the masculine power of his race by partaking in the hegemonic masculine culture of Iran. The American society's intensified subordinating discourse and practices against the Middle Eastern men after the 9/11 attacks, represented by figures like Dr. Arnold, Eleonore, and even the gay African American Marvin in the novel, leaves Xerxes feeling emptied, disempowered, and disillusioned. In response, he daringly decides to become the version that America both fears and inadvertently encourages its hyphenated citizens. Ultimately, as Rahmani and Nojoumian suggest, both Darius and Xerxes "realize that they should try to reconcile the two sides of the identity they have been struggling with. This is the quest to build his and his son's identity around an event that has forever changed the world order" (143).

In *The Submission*, the American characters focus solely on Mo's religion (Islam) while defining his identity; however, in the case of Darius and Xerxes Adam, the intersections of nationality (Iranian), race (Persian/Middle Eastern), gender (male), class (middle class) are the aspects by whose dint the post-9/11 American society constructs their identities as subordinate masculinities. On the other hand, like what happens to Mohammad Khan, several events debunk Xerxes' illusion of being an American, but, unlike Mo, who achieves success as an architect in both America and India, Xerxes cannot reconstruct a powerful hegemonic masculinity due to his severe subordination at home, school, and in society. Finally, these novels shed light on the conditions of American and hyphenated-American masculinities the post-9/11 American, showcasing how American masculinities reassert their lost power and gender hegemony by subordinating Middle Eastern/South Asian masculinities, and, as a result, propel them towards radical versions of hegemonic masculinities that resist this domination.

7. Conclusion

The 9/11 transformations of gender relations, economy, and politics culminated in American men's most intensified reassertion of their lost power through the subordination of Middle Eastern and South Asian men, leading to changes in their masculine practices and conformations vis-à-vis American hegemonic masculinities. This process of remasculinization, experienced globally, regionally, and locally as a direct result of the discourse of "war on terror," compelled Middle Eastern and South Asian hyphenated masculinities to seek new ways to confront such oppression and fight back properly. James Messerschmidt's theory, thus, helped us analyze how the masculine identities of such characters underwent profound transformations as a direct consequence of the 9/11 attacks, which served as a paradigm-shifting event. The dynamics is vividly portrayed in Waldman's *The Submission*, exemplified by the character of Mo, and in Khakpour's *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, especially through the character of Xerxes. Both novels underscore the significance of the intersections of gender, race, nationality, class, and religion in the redefinition of masculinity in post-9/11 America, as the individuals strived to regain power and gender hegemony. Driven by the American society to construct radical versions of hegemonic masculinities in response to the suppressions they endured, these subordinated individuals decided to redefine their identity. Ultimately, Waldman and Khakpour depicted how under such compulsions, flying back to homelands is a deliberate practice that hyphenated characters see as a remedy to their subordinated status.

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مردان در گذار: بررسی مردانگی هژمونیک در رمان تسلیم ایمی والدمن، و پسران و دیگر اجسام سوختنی پروچیستا خاکپور

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چکیده

اثر ایمی والدمن و پسران و دیگر اجسام سوختنی پروچیستا خاکپور (۲۰۰۸) نوشتهٔ پروچیستا خاکپور بررسی میکند. در نظریهٔ «کنش ساختاریافتهٔ» مسرشمیت، مردانگیهای هژمونیک به عنوان ساختهای اجتماعیِ نهانِ همواره حاضر در نظر گرفته میشوند که هدف اصلی آنها ایجاد روابط نابرابر جنسیتی است. پژوهش حاضر تلاش میکند نشان دهد که نظریهٔ فوق میتوانـد درک بهتـری از دگرگونیهـای مردانگـی را، پـس از حملات یـازده سپتامبر، در رمانهای حاضر ارائه کند. در تحلیل رمانها، استدلال نویسندگان این است که شخصیتهایی کـه آرمانهـای مردانگی هژمونیک آمریکایی پیش از یازده سپتامبر را نشان میدهند، و بهطور نمادین در اثر حملات سـلب قدرت میشوند، در تلاشند تا با یافتن یک «دیگری» نژادی در میان مردانی که هویت دوگانهٔ خاورمیانـهای (یـا آسیای جنوبی)–آمریکایی دارند، آنها را مطیع خود ساخته و موقعیت هژمونیک خود را پـس از حملات یـازده سپتامبر به دست آورند. به عبارت دیگر، این مقاله بر سلب قـدرت نمـادین مـردان آمریکـایی و بازیـابی مجـدد مردانگی آنها در پرتو حملات یازده سپتامبر و تأثیر این دگرسازی بر مـردان مهاجر در ایـالات متحـده تمرکـز خواهد کرد. علاوه بر این، با بهکارگیری نظریهی کنش ساختاریافته در رمان های فوق الذکر، نشان میدهد کـه چگونه مردانگی هژمونیک آمریکایی، که پیشتر با صفاتی همچـون پرقـدرت، غیرقابـل نفـوذ و شکسـت ناپـذیر تعریف شده بود، پس از حملات یازده سپتامبر، حول آرمان انتقام بازسازی می شـود. همچنـین، ایـن پـژوهش واکنش مردان خاورمیانهای را نسبت به موقعیت نابرابرشـان بررسـی میکنـد و در نهایـت، تلاقیهـای متفـاوت جنسیت، مذهب، ملیت، نژاد، طبقه اجتماعی و سن، که در بازسازی چنین هویتهایی تعیین کننده هسـتند، را تحلیل خواهد کرد.

واژگان کلیدی: مردانگی هژمونیک، نظریهٔ کنش ساختاریافته، ادبیـات داسـتانی پسایازدهسـپتامبری، مردانگـی هژمونیک آمریکایی، مردانگی دوگانه

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