

Hegemonic Islamic masculinities: Contextualising a new form of hegemonic masculinities in the Iranian diaspora in the UK

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Abstract

Masculinities research has started to explore the possibility of alternative manhood among migrant men. This paper aims to contribute to this emerging work by touching upon a less-explored subject in relation to hegemonic masculinity and migration and the perceptions towards sexual violence in the UK. Thirty participants were interviewed, and the data were analysed using framework analysis. The discourses such as ‘*ghairat*’ and ‘real man’ and ‘complete Iranian man’ showed that Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful, but does not provide an adequate theoretical framework for analysing other forms of masculinities in the migration studies. Hence a new concept, ‘hegemonic Islamic masculinities’, is introduced as the subsection of hegemonic masculinity to contextualise the lived experience of Iranian men to sexual violence in the UK.

Keywords

Masculinities, hegemonic masculinities, migration, Muslim men, sexual violence against women

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Introduction

Despite academic exploration of men's hegemonic masculinities and migration, there is a dearth of attempts to specify possible forms of hegemonic masculinities, particularly in relation to migrant men's perceptions towards violence against women in the diaspora. The ongoing exploration of the link between masculinities – specifically, hegemonic masculinity – and the perpetuation of various forms of violence against women in the diaspora undoubtedly brings us closer to understanding patriarchal domination, power and control, which potentially create new forms of masculinities in response to the gendered and diasporic challenges that migrant men face.

A growing number of studies have attempted to explore the link between the negotiation of masculinities, specifically, hegemonic masculinity and migration (Donaldson and Howson 2009; Gallo and Scrinzi, 2019; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020; Suerbaum, 2018; Wojnicka and Nowicka, 2022). Scholars have critically used Raewyn Connell's classic (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity to shed light on the transformations, reconstruction and diversity of emerging masculinities in relation to familial gender relations in the host society. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as '...a configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, guaranteeing (or being perceived to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Connell, 1995: 77). It is evident that migration challenges men's hegemonic ideal of manhood and distribution of power not only between masculinities and femininities but also through hierarchical relations between men (Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020). In other words, the new home is the new social context where migrant men bring their beliefs and practices about their manliness (Donaldson and Howson, 2009). Literature suggests resettlement undermines established notions of gender and threatens migrant men's idealised notions of masculinities (Fathi, 2022; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020; Scrinzi, 2010; Walsh, 2011) which eventually have great impacts on familial gender relations and renegotiation of gender roles. For some men, migration alters and contests the meaning and experience of hegemonic masculine practices and creates new forms of them which in turn impact the way individuals perceive their own identities and understand those of others (Torbaty, 2019). Hence, it is important to address how male migrants reproduce various forms of masculinities from their homeland to their destination and to what extent gender relations are rebuilt and negotiated in migration.

What is mainly unexplored in migration studies is the extent to which Muslim men challenge and rebuild their pre-existing hegemonic masculine practices and beliefs about violence against women, particularly sexual violence, after they arrive at the host society. In other words, there is limited evidence on what happens to Muslim men's sense of hegemonic masculinities through the process of migration, whether it is reinforced and shattered or new forms are generated when probing their views towards women's victimisation of sexual violence. These explorations are important since they indicate whether men sanction gender inequality and violence against their female kin in the diaspora or they favour women's equal rights and agencies (Torbaty, 2019).

This paper tentatively introduces the concept of hegemonic Islamic masculinities as a subcategory of hegemonic masculinity to the existing conceptualisation of different

forms of manhood that challenge male domination over women in a diasporic context. Connell's theory of gender has set the stage for most studies of men and masculinities. It is based on a distinction between masculinities that are hegemonic, complicit, subordinated and marginalised (Connell, 1995). In her view, men who adhere to complicit masculinities take advantage from what she calls 'the patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 1995), while other masculinities are subordinated and marginalised in the way that they do not have access to the same privileges of manhood, whether material or symbolic. The strength of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool lies in recognition of both men's patriarchal ascendancy over women and the layers of multiple masculinities at the structural level along with men's relations to one another, to recognise the fluidity of gender identities and power (Hearn, 2004).

Connell (1995) clarifies that there are particular gender relations of supremacy and subordination between groups of men. Oppression locates subordinated masculinities at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men; therefore, we need to focus on how various subordinated groups of men may facilitate the improvement of hegemonic masculinity and how such inequality may be reasonably negotiated and disputed (Connell, 1995). In theorising multiple masculinities, however, one must be wary to avoid oversimplification of the term masculinity. To avoid simplifying and associating all groups of men into stereotypes based on their behaviours, Connell (1995) suggests that we need to include a more comprehensive understanding of gender hierarchy and acknowledge the dynamics and impact of the intersection of gender with other structures such as class and race as an important constituting factor of masculinities that create further oppression as opposed to the dominant group. Although Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity has been extremely significant in understanding the hierarchical power embedded in masculinities, the concept has been criticised for being fixed and inflexible. This is an important consideration in relation to this paper which confirms the need to develop a term that explicitly points to an alternative form of hegemonic masculinity. As the title of this work suggests, I attempt to demonstrate masculinities through the lens of multiple masculinities (Kimmel, 2010) to avoid essentialising certain attributes masculinities and allow experiences of other forms of hegemonic masculinities. Using hegemonic masculinity as the main theoretical framework, this paper discusses how pre-migration understandings of manhood, influenced by cultural and religious principles, sustain and reinforce hegemonic masculine ideals. Additionally, it explores how these ideals create new forms in relation to subordinated femininities and white dominant masculinities in the diaspora. To achieve this, the article is structured as follows. First, the background and review of the literature that explores the negotiation of gender relations in the Muslim diaspora, with a focus on Iranian men, are discussed. In the second part of the article, research methods and ethical issues are outlined. The analysis then proceeds to examine some of the salient themes emergent from the responses to explore the aims of the paper.

Negotiation of gender relations in Muslim diaspora

The focus on masculinities, life trajectories and social change in migration studies is relatively recent (Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020; Sinatti, 2014; Vlase, 2018). By centering on

hegemonic masculinity as the core concept, literature has primarily addressed the impacts of resettlement on gender, class and employment dynamics (Donaldson and Howson, 2009; Gallo and Scrinzi, 2019; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020; Kleist, 2010; Mungai and Pease, 2009; Suerbaum, 2018). In this context, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) highlight the influence of social processes in shaping the idealised definition of masculinity and the role of geographical scale in forming and differentiating patterns of hegemonic masculinity across local, regional and global scales.

Literature sheds light on the masculinity crisis in the diaspora which Muslim men are likely to experience when they lose their position as providers for the family (Donaldson and Howson, 2009; Gallo and Scrinzi, 2019; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2020; Kleist, 2010; Mungai and Pease, 2009; Suerbaum, 2018). This particularly intensifies when women take over the economic responsibilities. Loss of a job or being impacted by economic insecurity tends to result in breaching the traditional ascribed roles (Bell and Pustulka, 2017). For example, in the study of Muslim African masculinities in Australia, Mungai and Pease (2009) indicate how African men connect responsibility with their Islamic doctrine in order to control the family, female kin and younger members to attain a higher legitimated position in the family. The authors argue that this practice becomes problematic in the new Australian gender order, as African men lose control and responsibility while confronting gendered challenges, such as their female kin's engagement in the labour market and their increased social freedom and mobility. The ambiguities of living in a new environment not only contest the old values and practices for men and women but also negotiate and transform the hegemonic masculine ideals and femininities in the diaspora (Mungai and Pease, 2009).

In the same fashion, Kleist (2010) argues how forced migration with loss of employment and social position creates a particular context for the formation of gender ideals where men become marginalised in the diaspora. The notion of 'respectable masculinity' is offered by Kleist (2010) to show how Somalian men try to re-establish their hegemonic masculine ideals after forced migration in order to be recognised and respected by others, in particular by their female kin. Donaldson and Howson (2009) question the impact of migration and resettlement on men's sense of hegemonic masculinity and problematises the lack of evidence in understanding these shifts and changes. In their study with Muslim migrant men in Australia, they argue that after migration, fundamental elements of gendered behaviour and beliefs that form men's hegemonic masculinities remain unchanged and may even be reinforced. In their view, some of the features of hegemonic masculine ideals, such as being a guardian of the family, protectors and breadwinners, remain outstanding for migrant men. Suerbaum (2018) and Huizinga and van Hoven (2020) have raised growing concerns regarding the restoration and reformation of hegemonic masculinities in diasporic contexts. One of the strategies used by Muslim Syrian men, in order to cope with the lost status of manhood as Suerbaum (2018) argues, is to restore former idealised patriarchal notions of masculinities in relation to femininities. Practices such as limiting female kin's social mobility, control and micro-regulations of women by men are common themes within both studies. These results are evident in Huizinga and van Hoven's (2020) study which shows how Syrian hegemonic masculinities are reformed in relation to the particular economic and welfare opportunities and

confrontations of the host society. Reflecting on respondents' personal life trajectories, the authors suggest that in order to maintain the hegemonic masculine norms, many of the male respondents re-established the traditional structure of gender roles in relation to women's social mobility in labour market.

The common theme among the above studies is that Muslim migrant masculinities are mobile, contextualised and disputed. Although the above studies have attempted to explore various gendered, classed and racialised challenges Muslim men face as the result of migration, the challenges to Muslim men's religious and cultural identities in the diaspora have received minimal attention. This is particularly significant since the impact of these identifications on Muslim men's perspectives in relation to violence against women in the diaspora shows whether they reinforce patriarchy or dominance practiced in homeland on their female kin or sanction gender equality. It also shows the extent to which men perceive the gender ideology that they have been brought up with in contestation with the dominant gender ideology in the host society.

Iranian masculinities in Muslim diaspora

The advancement of men and masculinities studies has not seen widespread attention among Iranian social researchers in the diaspora, even though there have been notable contributions, such as Khosravi's (2009) study, 'Displaced Masculinity: Gender and Ethnicity among Iranian Men in Sweden', published in *Iranian Studies*. Research on diaspora migrant men in the UK, in particular, remains scarce. There is little evidence to show how Iranian men's sense of hegemonic masculinity is affected by migration and relocation – whether it is weakened or reinforced through these experiences. Few studies on Iranian men in the diaspora indicate that migration tends to diminish Iranian men's authority and superiority over women, creating opportunities for women to achieve greater freedom and equality (Farahani, 2012; Khosravi, 2009; Moghissi et al. 2009). Farahani (2012) argues that while both men and women undergo migration, the experience of their challenged positionality is different within the same family. These changes are seen as initiators of familial violence, especially between husbands and wives, which transforms the family into a consolation zone or a territory of conflict (Moghissi et al., 2009). The experience of migration for many of these men is not only about their trajectories but is also in relation to maintaining and regaining power over their wives, partners or daughters. Migrant men might feel that their masculinity is being compromised and negotiated with the new gender roles and values could potentially result in tension and violence in the families.

Studies suggest that those Iranian men who hold orthodox Islamic views tend to be more vulnerable to these changes since their positionality within the family is destabilised due to loss of control and domination over the family (Farahani, 2012; Khosravi, 2009; Moghissi et al. 2009). Within this context, men attempt to show their hypermasculine behaviour and maintain their dominant position in the gender hierarchy (Farahani, 2012). At the same time, they continuously compete with other men to stabilise their position through practices that are considered masculine which are often through the marginalisation and subordination of women. This has been evidenced in a study conducted by

Khosravi in 2009 in Sweden, where migration and movement have challenged Iranian men's perceptions towards the construction of '*mard e Irani*' (Iranian man). In this context, Iranian manliness is continuously challenged and negotiated with Iranian womanliness in the host society (Khosravi, 2009). Farahani (2012) suggests that Iranian men's authority and patriarchy decreased as their social and economic status reduced. The diasporic study on Iranian, Pakistani and Afghan immigrants in Canada revealed that sometimes men utilise their cultural and religious values to impede changes in traditional gender roles (Moghissi et al. 2009).

Other studies have echoed the same results and suggested that some Iranian men tend to justify violence against their female kin by emphasising their cultural and religious demands in order to isolate them emotionally, sexually and financially (Di Bartolomeo et al. 2015; Lewin, 2001). Besides the intersection between religion, culture and gender roles, ethnicity and sexuality are found to be negotiated by men in a diasporic context. For example, Khosravi (2009) argues that Iranian masculinity is contested in the diaspora by a sense of losing their partners to 'ethnic others'. In his view, 'Female sexuality is associated with ethnic national identity. In the diaspora, the man's patriarchal attention to protect the female virtue of his family might be turned into a nationalist concern ... losing women causes fear of losing ethnic identity among Iranian men. Loss of identity and acculturation usually center on the issue of women and daughters' sexual behaviour' (Khosravi, 2009: 595). Exploring the cultural politics of self and community in Sweden, Bauer (2000) argues that those middle-class men with egalitarian views before displacement live with a sense of fear of losing their partners to 'other' men and believe that '*zan e Irani*' (Iranian women) must not follow the freedom and choice offered by the host society. Through a review of the literature on Iranian masculinities and migration, it is evident that migration is a gendered process that fosters new understandings of self and others. Migration tends to decrease Iranian men's authority and superiority over women, thereby creating opportunities for women to achieve greater liberty and equality. However, it is difficult to make out to what degree Iranian men still practice and experience hegemonic masculinities and whether they create new forms of it which in turn impact the way they perceive their own identities and understand others. In the following section, I detail the methodological and theoretical frameworks that were used to analyse the data.

Methodology

The research upon which this paper is based is a PhD study that aimed to explore the perspectives of diaspora Iranian men on sexual violence in the UK and to their own perceptions of the causes of why sexual violence against women occurs. A purposive snowball sampling technique was used to recruit 30 highly skilled heterosexual Iranian migrant men aged between 18 and 40 years who have migrated to the UK over the past 20 years. This method was used since there is no way of identifying a research population and potential respondents in the absence of census data or other lists of Iranian descent. The task of finding Iranian men willing to participate in research on a sensitive topic proved to be highly challenging. As a result, I reached out to several London-based

universities including King's College London, University College London, London School of Economics and Political Science, City University of London, University of East London and Queen Mary University. I actively participated in numerous events, celebrations and gatherings hosted by these institutions. London universities were considered conducive for recruiting potential participants due to their diverse student population, large demographic and accessibility. Although using the snowballing technique resulted in similarities in socio-economic status of participants (they could afford the cost of further education and living in the UK), this homogeneity provided a better and greater insight into the impact of the identity categories on their perceptions towards sexual violence. The majority of the participants were medical doctors, engineers and dentists, and a few were PhD students. Religion was practiced differently among the respondents. Most participants identified themselves as strict Muslims practising the Islamic faith, while some described themselves as spiritual but not strictly adhering to Islam. Pseudonyms are used in this paper for confidentiality and anonymity.

	Religious	Spiritual	Married	Single	Average age	Average length of UK residency	Total number of participants
Student	7	3	6	2	25	9	8
Professional	18	2	20	2	38	15	22
Total	25	5	26	4	63	24	30

During fieldwork, my insider and outsider positionality placed me in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, my Iranian nationality with shared cultural knowledge, my ability to speak Farsi, my class affiliation as being middle class and my capacity to understand the participants' use of English expressions gave me insider knowledge to effectively communicate with the potential participants. On the other hand, my gender affiliation as the opposite sex made me an outsider at the same time. This shows that the insider/outsider boundary is not only unfixed and fluid (Mullings, 1999), but it also challenges the positionality of the researcher since no one can consistently remain insider and outsider at the same time. Furthermore, the power dynamics between the participants and myself posed another challenge, underscoring the significance of gender dynamics in cross-gender research (where the researcher and participants belong to different genders). During some interviews, I faced interruptions from male participants who questioned the reasons for asking basic questions, answered with one-word responses or belittled women's rights activists. However, this is not to say that I remained silent and passive while struggling with the gendered power dynamics of the research. During the interview instances, I realised that I needed to assert my power as a researcher and remain firm to maintain command over the interview direction and male participants who wanted to take control of it. Hence, I established clear expectations at the onset of the interview that my role was solely to listen to their perspectives and ask questions, emphasising that they should refrain from seeking validation through questioning me. This practice has

been noted by other female researchers such as Grenz (2005) and Gailey and Prohaska (2011), who have had similar experiences during their fieldwork.

Semi-structured interviewing was used to examine the differences in understanding of sexual violence among Iranian men and to analyse the reasons behind the sexual violence incidents. The participants were asked to provide their understanding of violence against women, sexual violence and their different forms particularly in marital relationships and the reasons behind sexual violence incidents. They were also asked to define their sense of manhood and gender roles before and after migration. It is important to note that the participants' responses are their own viewpoints and do not represent all Iranian migrants in the UK diaspora. For safety reasons, the interviews took place in the hired rooms at different university campuses in London. All interviewees spoke in Farsi. The choice of language came naturally to the participants and the researcher since the interview space was an opportunity for them to express their attitudes and understanding of sexual violence in their mother tongue (Torbaty, 2019). Therefore, all interviews were transcribed into Farsi to retain the context-specific meanings and subsequently translated into English.

Framework analysis was used to analyse the transcript interviews since 'it provides clear steps to follow and produce a highly structured outcome of summarised data' (Gale et al., 2013: 2). The aim of framework analysis is to find, define and interpret key patterns inside and across themes and within the subject of interest. Framework analysis is similar to thematic analysis with the difference that it is essentially a comparative form of thematic analysis which uses a prearranged structure of inductively and deductively derived themes (i.e. frameworks) (Goldsmith, 2021). This was a point that fitted well the aims of this study since I had certain predefined areas I wished to explore but also wanted to remain open to discovering the unexpected. The five stages in framework analysis, i.e. familiarisation, identifying the thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation, provided me with clear steps to follow the patterns of masculinities driven from responses and produce a highly structured outcome of summarised data. This has assisted me immensely in uncovering the new concept of 'hegemonic Islamic masculinities' as a subsection of hegemonic masculinity which is explained below. Hegemonic masculinity was used as a main theoretical framework for data analysis. During the analysis of findings, it became clear that hegemonic masculinity is helpful but not an entirely adequate theoretical framework in the context of this research. Hence, a new concept was conceptualised to achieve the research aims.

Towards a conceptualisation of alternative manhood

This article tentatively proposes the concept of hegemonic Islamic masculinities as a sub-category of hegemonic masculinity within the framework of diverse conceptualisations of manhood that contest male dominance over women in diasporic contexts. As previously discussed, while Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity has been highly influential in elucidating the hierarchical power dynamics within masculinities, the concept has faced criticism for being fixed and inflexible. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity within a patriarchal culture in the West; she does not problematise it to explain gender relations

and specific forms of masculinities in an Islamic context, especially in the Muslim diaspora. This is not to undermine hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, the analysis of data from the current study shows that not only hegemonic masculinity is useful in identifying new and other forms of masculinities, but it also assisted me in placing these new forms, i.e. hegemonic Islamic masculinities, within the context of diaspora. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue, hegemonic masculinity needs development and reconceptualisation in response to its limitations. They also assert that the construction of masculinities and hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical framework is still in 'progress' and must be seen as an aspect of 'large-scale social structure and processes' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 39).

The concept of hegemonic Islamic masculinities is built upon Connell's theoretical framework and adds a subcategory to the existing model in order to conceptualise various forms of manhood and validate male domination over women. Hegemonic Islamic masculinities refer to male domination over women not only through the cultural exaltation of men but also through discriminatory religious doctrines that shape men's identity and reinforce male domination over women. The reinforcement is through the function of the family, schools, media and Islamic centres such as mosques in a patriarchal society. Although other alternative masculinities in relation to Muslim migrants' identities are discussed by Huizinga and van Hoven (2020) as discussed above, here I argue how discriminatory religious legal codes and cultural practices that exist in a patriarchal society, such as Iran, play an important role in shaping hegemonic Islamic masculinities of the participants and bestow them hierarchical status in homeland and host society.

The new concept is helpful particularly in studies on men and masculinities in the Islamic context where gender roles are religiously and culturally constructed and socially consolidated through enacting certain laws that define and perpetuate the supremacy and control of women by men. In conceptualising hegemonic Islamic masculinities, I look at Islam not as a religion but as a religious culture (Norris and Inglehart, 2011) that has been fluid and practiced differently throughout history. The term religious culture means the distinguishing influence that religious beliefs and perceptions have had on cultural practices that construct social norms and gendered values (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). These cultural and religious practices are influential in forming individuals' gender identity from childbirth into socially improved patterns of masculinities and femininities (Jackson, 1991). Hence, I chose 'Islamic' while acknowledging the role of 'culture' on the formation of the new concept. Hegemonic Islamic masculinities do not represent a certain type of man but rather represent a way that men position themselves through patriarchal cultural and religious practices. The next sections elaborate on how I arrived at the concept of hegemonic Islamic masculinities and how this concept was used to analyse the participant's narratives.

Hegemonic Islamic masculinity in Iranian diaspora

The data suggest the respondents' constructions of masculinities are strongly tied to their religious and cultural doctrines and teachings which they were raised within Iran.

Understanding and re-establishing their hegemonic Islamic masculinities seem to have impacted their perceptions towards sexual violence. Suerbaum (2018) similarly argues men in displacement revitalise pre-migration norms, principles and customs they are brought up with and use them to reform and represent their masculine identities in The Netherlands. Likewise, most participants in this study were proud of the religious and cultural ideals of their masculinities which are rooted and based in gender ideologies from Iran. They employ these ideals to assert dominance over their female relatives, which reinforces traditional gender roles and hierarchies. At the same time, they draw on their religious and cultural masculine ideals to differentiate themselves from their white English counterparts, highlighting their cultural and ethnic identity. This dual assertion of superiority underscores the complex interplay between gender, race and ethnicity in the male participants' efforts to navigate their identities in the diaspora.

It is also evident that the hegemonic Islamic masculinities are influential in the way they perceive sexual violence. The participants defined a range of behaviour and act such as sexual looks, touching and groping and slurring as a form of sexual violence. All participants defined forced sexual intercourse without consent as rape. However, a discrepancy was found in the participants' views towards marital rape which is discussed in the last section of this paper. Participants' responses over the attribution of blame in sexual violence cases offered a mixed view. Some view the lack of men's protection and control over their female kin and others blame women for the lack of wearing conservative clothes and having heavy makeup as the reasons why sexual violence takes place. Few participants blame the actual perpetrators of sexual violence and hold them responsible. It was evident that those who did offer such perspectives uphold egalitarian views towards women and sanction gender equality. Groes-Green (2012) categorises this particular type of masculinities as equitable masculinities or philogynous masculinities which favour women's rights to agency and respect them in gender-equitable ways.

In order to navigate these issues, this section discusses two themes, '*gheirat*' and 'real man and complete Iranian man' which are the key components of hegemonic Islamic masculinities. These themes appeared when participants responded to why sexual violence takes place. In fact, the emergence of some of these discourses made it clear that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is helpful but not entirely adequate in the context of this research. I discuss how certain practices sustain and reinforce hegemonic Islamic masculinities which perpetuate violence against women and construct unequal gender relations in the diaspora.

Gheirat

Gheirat is a complex emotion and refers to various contextual meanings, including jealousy, chivalry, courage and protecting one's *nâmus* – female family members (Bakhtiar, 2015). The root '*gheir*' means 'the other' and is a religious concept that demands Muslims to protect their honour and female kin from threats caused by others (Bakhtiar, 2015). This means that women are under the suspicion of their men in order to maintain a socially acceptable image and sometimes are the innocent victims of men's *gheirat*. Although most literature connects *gheirat* to cultural ascendancy of what it means to be

a man (Abedinifard, 2019; Bakhtiar, 2015; Razavi et al. 2023), for most participants, *gheirat* seemed to have originated from their Islamic doctrine which legitimises male supremacy and dominance over women. When participants were asked to explain why sexual violence takes place, most of them referred to *gheirat* that potentially protects women from being victims of sexual violence. For the participants, *gheirat* is equivalent to caring, protecting and guardianship demanded by Islam and essential components of masculine identity in Iranian culture that protect women from perpetrators in public. Some of the participants reflected to their Islamic doctrine and embodied women as a 'box of jewellery' who must be shielded by men's *gheirat* in order to be protected from the sexual gaze of other men. In their views according to the *hadith* (a collection of sayings of the prophet Muhammad, which constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran), women's sexuality needs to be controlled in order to have a safer and moral society. For instance as many other participants, Meysam states:

A Man's main duty is to use his *gheirat* and protect his family, especially their female kin otherwise he is less of a man. This is a demand from God and every Muslim man must follow it. *Gheirat* would reduce the risk of being exposed to perpetrators of sexual abuse because a *gheirati* man does not allow his wife to wear revealing cloths and heavy makeup. These are very important especially when you move to a new society, I believe men must be more protective after migration. (Meysam, 35, an engineer living in London for 15 years)

The above narrative illustrates *gheirat* as an important component of Islamic teachings that sustain hegemonic Islamic masculinities to form subordinated femininities. The main function of *gheirat* was perceived as controlling women's sexuality and their bodily performance in order to protect them from sexual violence, particularly after resettlement. In relation to men's *gheirat*, women are obliged to observe chastity and modesty in society. In this context, *gheirat* is deemed as a religious and moral virtue and a practice that culturally and religiously exalt men to gain a hierarchical position in relation to women. In Islamic texts, *gheirat* is referred to as a necessary virtue of the pious Muslim (Mazaheri, 2016; Tabatabaie, 2015). A devout Muslim man is described as someone who is prone to *gheirat* and reacts accordingly in response to norm violations involving their female kin (Akbari and Tetreault, 2014). It is evident from the responses that the function of *gheirat* becomes more crucial when men face gendered challenges after migration. Hence, they tend to reinforce and maintain the pre-migration hegemonic Islamic ideals to control women in the diaspora. The same principle was also prevalent in the accounts of others. For example, Ashkan states:

If you are an Iranian man you must have *gheirat* to protect your wife, daughter or sister otherwise you have committed a big sin and Allah does not forget you, this is a very important issue when you are in a new society so you must be cautious of other men. (Ashkan 27, doctoral student living in London for 9 years)

Some excerpts show that if an Iranian man does not follow his *gheirat*, he tends to be stigmatised as honourless and less of a man (as stated by the above participant and

others). A man who is not *gheirati* is referred to as *bigheirat* (without *gheirat*) or dayouth (both derogatory terms) and is often depicted as unworthy, incapable of distinguishing right from wrong and having a weak moral character (Bakhtiar, 2015). It seems that *bigheirat* serves as an example of subordinated masculinities, shaking the very foundation on which these men have built their masculinities and challenging the gender ideology that they have internalised since childhood. Similarly, Khosravi's study (2009) shows that if the Iranian man does not defend his woman from a stranger's looks, he will be denounced as honourless. This ascribed form of hegemonic masculinities, which I name it as hegemonic Islamic masculinities, is highly influenced by the Islamic doctrines of participants and is embedded in their Islamic teachings. *Gheirat* expects men to live up to the normative conception of hegemonic Islamic masculinities ideals and religiously legitimises men to construct their superiority through displaying hegemonic behaviours.

A real man and complete Iranian man

Other concepts that are rooted in participants' Islamic doctrine and practices and support hegemonic Islamic masculinities are a 'real man' and 'complete Iranian man'. During the interviews, most participants associated the 'Iranian man' with characteristics, such as being powerful, decisive and the pillar of the family, who must protect their female kin from sexual violence. For them, these traits were interwoven with their religious doctrines which construct hegemonic Islamic masculinities. Many Iranian men made frequent references to '*Mard e vagheie*' (real man) and '*Mard e kamel e Irani*' (a complete Iranian man) to define their Iranian manhood. They used these attributes not only to distinguish and symbolise themselves as rational and assertive in comparison with women but also to demarcate themselves from the English men as being superior to their English counterparts. Mehrdad states:

An Iranian man must be a '*Mard e vagheie*' (a real man). In Quran, God demands that men must be guardian and trustworthy. A real man must manage the family members and they need to rely on him specially after migration. For example if men feel that their wives or daughters are not wearing appropriately specially here (in the UK) that everyone is free what to wear, men should not allow them to go out with deceiving appearance. This would expose women to dangers such as sexual violence. These are the characteristic that distinguish them from English men. (37, a dentist, living in London for 17 years)

When you move to a different country, it is very important that you must handle the family because you are the decision maker and support the family, this is a real man, a demand from God upon men, so everyone must listen to you otherwise they will be in lots of danger and sexual violence is one of them. (Sadra, 40, IT man, living in London for 12 years)

The above statements reiterate the association of 'real man' with being supportive, trustworthy and assertive. This suggests that the religious and cultural commitments of being an Iranian man are restored and normalised through hegemonic Islamic masculinities in order to conform to a masculine ideal. It seems that what Stark (2007) calls 3Rs is

prevalent among the perceptions of the participants. In Stark's view, masculinity is perceived as equal to humanity and the model of 3Rs stands for rational, reasonable and right for universal masculinity, as opposed to irrational, emotional and immoral for femininity. Within this context, hegemonic Islamic masculinities neutralises men's position as rational and women's position as weak and in need of protection. Based on Mehrdad's view which was widespread among other participants', this would protect women from becoming victims of sexual violence. Additionally, participants reference to maintaining pre-migration hegemonic Islamic ideals in the diaspora is linked to what Kandiyoti (2013) calls 'masculine restoration'. When the traditional gender ideology is not available to reinforce the domination in a host society, other forms of controlling behaviours manifest to maintain the hegemonic ideals of a real man.

Depicting men as the head of the family in accordance with the religious teachings works towards the construction of 'a complete Iranian man', and it is another feature of hegemonic Islamic masculinities. Ali states:

To me being an Iranian man is equal to being a '*mard e kamel e Irani*' (a complete Iranian man). First, Islamic teachings order us that complete Iranian man is like being the pillar of the family. A complete man must be able to take any situation under his control specially after migration and be able to make decisions independently.

This is why Iranian men have advantages over English men. (Ali, 40 an engineer living in London for 20 years)

Mard e kamel e Irani (a complete Iranian man) was a common expression used by some participants, which distinguishes and symbolises Iranian men as dominant human beings who are rational and assertive in comparison to women. In Iranian culture and religion, manliness is a symbol of assertiveness, generosity, honour and humanity and the act of manliness means to be understanding, assist people in need and forgive (Khosravi, 2009). These are seen as forms of religious and cultural commitments that pressurise men to conform to a masculine ideal, particularly after migration to maintain control. It is interesting to note that in Khosravi's study, the male participants perceived *mard-e irani* (Iranian man) as an insult since it signifies masculine domination and control over his female kin which is not acceptable in a modern society such as Sweden. However, in this study, not only the male participants did not consider their masculinities as being marginalised but they associated *mard-e irani* (Iranian man) with a positive meaning and perceived it as a man's privilege in the diaspora. In other words, the participants steer the racial, cultural and religious structures of hegemonic men through the concepts of 'pillars of the family' and 'decisive and reliable men'. They have created a hierarchical power, where Iranian masculinity is situated as (morally) superior, not only in relation to English men but also in relation to their female kin as a way of maintaining and/or regaining power. This might be since 'whiteness' as a form of dominant masculinity challenges and contests Iranian masculinity. However, for Iranian masculinity to regain legitimacy and symbolic power, it defines itself in relation to the dominant white masculinity. This shows the extent to which participants are simultaneously positioned and position themselves through different axes of power,

i.e. race, gender and religion, in order to demonstrate their superior masculinities over their English counterparts.

Participants' comparisons between Iranian and English masculinities offer valuable insight into how English masculinities are situated within the broader ideological landscape of masculinities in Britain. Scholars have argued that traditional images of men as 'guardians' and 'breadwinners' no longer hold the same cultural significance in the UK as they once did (Davis, 2013; Francis, 2002). Over the past 20 years, research has highlighted the emergence of two new dominant representations of masculine identity in the British context (Benwell 2003; Beynon 2002; Gough 2001). Baker and Levon (2016) argue that the rise of the 'New Man' and the 'New Lad' over the past two decades has introduced distinct stereotypes into the British popular imagination. Despite their different connotations – 'New Lads' generally refer to younger, working-class individuals embodying so-called 'working-class values' and 'New Men' typically signify older men from different social classes – both archetypes shape contemporary notions of English masculinities (Baker and Levon, 2016). These archetypes are referenced by 'real men' in the diverse and everyday construction of their masculinity in the UK (Wetherell and Edley 1999).

Baker and Levon (2016) show that 'real man' English masculinity is associated with a number of traits such as action, duty and courage. Action, including violence, is portrayed as a duty; courage in the event of danger is elevated to heroism; and obedience is framed as serving the common good (Baker and Levon 2016). In their view, masculinity is not solely about possessing these traits; it also involves knowing when to apply them and ensuring they are used for sufficiently 'honourable' reasons, such as seeking justice (Baker and Levon 2016). However, unlike Iranian masculinity, which is closely intertwined with religious adherence as mentioned above, English masculinity appears to be less directly influenced by religion. As Delap and Morgan (2013) argue in recent decades, there has been a noticeable decline in religious affiliation and observance among the general population in the UK, including men. Many English men identify themselves as non-religious or secular, distancing themselves from traditional religious practices and beliefs (Lee, 2015).

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that there is no singular way to define manhood. The comparison illustrates that being a man involves actively positioning one's self in relation to culturally dominant images of masculinity. Masculinities are fluid and men understand manhood and navigate the social and cultural practices that shape their gender identities in their everyday experiences. This process entails not only conforming to or challenging prevailing norms but also navigating complex intersections of identity shaped by cultural, social and historical contexts. As individuals engage with these ideals, they negotiate their sense of self and their place within broader societal frameworks of gender and power.

As discussed before, the enforcement of discriminatory religious legal codes in society sustains hegemonic Islamic masculinities. The next section discusses how the existence of legal codes, such as Islamic marriage and *tamkin khaas*, not only reinforces and strengthens hegemonic Islamic masculinities in the family and society but also leaves women in a vulnerable position and makes them subordinated and dependent on their husbands.

Sustaining hegemonic Islamic masculinities in Iranian context

Hearn and Morrell (2012) argue that 'hegemonic legitimacy can be through formal law', established 'custom' or through, media, ideology and social influence. Throughout the research, it was found that the existence of some legal codes, such as Islamic marriage, not only had an impact on participants' understanding of sexual violence but also reinforces and strengthens their hegemonic Islamic masculinities in the family, homeland and host society. This potentially leaves women in a vulnerable position and makes them subordinated and dependent on their husbands.

The feminist understanding of Islamic marriage, as Afshar (1998) points out, is a commercial transaction in which women are considered as sexual bodies who transact their bodies and sexual services to their husbands. In Islamic marriage, female sexuality is seen as a commodity, which she sells to her husband in return for receiving *nafagheh* (maintenance). The age of marriage for women is 13, while polygamy and temporary marriage are legalised for men. Feminist scholars such as Mir-Hosseini (2000) critically define Islamic marriage as a contract between two parties: the woman and the man. In her view, the concept of 'exchange' is a central tenet in the construction of Islamic marriage, which is the exchange of sexual service for financial security in the terms of the economic of *mehrieh* (a mandatory payment, in the form of money or possessions, payable by the groom or his family to the bride at the time of marriage that legally becomes her property), *nafagheh* and *ojratolmesle* (the compensation a wife can claim for the work she has done during the marriage) (Tizro, 2012: 33). When a woman says 'yes' to the marriage sermon, she is located under her husband's supremacy, dominance and security and he becomes solely responsible for providing maintenance. Mir-Hosseini (2000) argues, 'providing maintenance is an absolute right that cannot be waived by agreement nor delegated' (Mir-Hosseini, 2000: 46). Maintenance is an inexorable duty of the husband if he is to receive sexual submission. In order to receive these rights, the woman must be submissive; otherwise, she will lose her rights to maintenance.

One of the key components of Islamic marriage is *tamkin khaas* (full sexual submission). According to Islamic law, full submission of a woman is in two forms: (a) *tamkin khaas*: being available for sexual activity when the husband wishes and receives maintenance in return and (b) *tamkin aam*: not leaving the household without permission. Therefore, the husband must support his wife financially if he has access to her sexuality. Ayatollah Ali Motahari, who was a Shi'a cleric and an influential scholar in incorporating Islamic marriage into Iranian family law, elaborates that the maintenance is obligatory upon the husband if the permanent wife does not leave the house without her husband's permission and submits to her husband's pleasure (Motahari, 1979). As discussed previously, when the participants were asked about what sexual violence is, all participants defined forced sexual intercourse without consent as rape. However, a discrepancy was found in the participants' views towards marital rape. Some participants not only perceived *tamkin khaas* as a constructive code of law but also did not view it as a form of marital rape. Morteza states:

Women must submit to their husbands' sexual desire to maintain a balance in the marital relationship no matter where they live. Pillars of a good marriage are based on the

balance between give and take. In a good marriage the man has responsibilities, the same as the woman. They must adhere to their roles that *Sharia* law has allocated them, otherwise their relationship will lose its balance and there is a penalty for it. If a man's duty is to be the main breadwinner of the family, then a good woman has a duty to submit to a sexual relationship without any objection. (Morteza, 29, doctoral student living in London for 7 years)

Such a definition of a 'good marriage' resonated with other participants. It is linked with the principles of Islamic marriage, which Mir-Hosseini (2000) defines as a legal institution, based on a contract between men and women with rights and duties for each side. Tizro (2012) also critically discussed the principle of Islamic marriage as a legal institution, which is a contract between two parties with defined rights and obligations. As soon as the woman gives consent to marriage, she will be placed under her husband's power and authority. Other feminist scholars such as Aghtaie (2011) argue that marriage is seen as a contract that defines sexual relations between two genders, since women's sexuality only exists within the framework of marriage.

Within the above context, the orthodoxy of Islamic marriage strengthens hegemonic Islamic masculinities that is culturally and religiously sanctioned and attribute men, greater authority over women's sexuality. The above excerpt shows how a misogynist law such as *tamkin khaas* not only contributes to the legitimisation of sexual violence in the diaspora but also regenerates hegemonic norms to transform women's right to sexual fulfilment to a mere tool that is regulated by men for their sexual satisfaction. The concepts of pleasure, love and closeness are absent from the above excerpt, and instead, the participant perceives providing sexual pleasure as a woman's duty. In a society where men are perceived to be inherently wiser than women, the existence of laws such as *tamkin khaas* is designed to reinforce male guardianship over women's sexuality. Similar to other participants, Reza believes:

Rape is a very strong word to use in the marital relationship. It does not make sense in the existing legal framework in Iran. If a woman does not want to have a sexual relationship, then she is not entitled to receive *nafagheh* (maintenance). This is a principle of marriage in Islam. We cannot contest *tamkin khaas* because it has been defined and is very clear. (Reza, 35, dentist living in London for 13 years)

In this view, marriage is constructed around the pillars of what Mir-Hosseini calls 'sexual access and compensation', which manifests in the concept of *tamkin khaas* (Mir-Hosseini, 2000: 7). According to Mir-Hosseini, in *tamkin khaas*, sexual access is unlimited; it can neither be rejected nor contested by agreement (Mir-Hosseini, 2000). In order to achieve her rights, a woman must be obedient; otherwise, she will lose her *nafagheh*. Within this context, *tamkin khaas* as a code of *Sharia* law perpetuates sexual violence through the reconfiguration of gender relations, which sustain a form of hegemonic Islamic masculinities and maintain subordinated femininity to men's sexual desires. The issue of consent raises questions about the way participants, such as the above, view *tamkin khaas* as not a form of rape within marriage. According to

those participants who perpetuate similar views, it seems that the religious sanctity of *tamkin khaas* as a code of Sharia law must not be disputed nor compromised regarding the issue of women's consent since it is obtained once the marriage contract is signed. The existence of misogynist laws not only reinforces and strengthens hegemonic Islamic masculinities in the family and society but also leaves women in a vulnerable position and makes them subordinated and dependent on their husbands. In the above context, hegemonic Islamic masculinities have asserted and established themselves through male-controlled cultural practices and religious laws such as *tamkin khaas* in Islamic marriage and have become normalised and integrated into the fabric of society.

However, not all the participants perpetuate the above views. Few perceive the objectification of a woman's body and the disownership of it through a legal code such as *tamkin khaas* in Iran, as a form of sexual violence. Others refer to *tamkin khaas* as an uncivilised law that sanctions discrimination by gender and allows men to have unlimited non-consensual access to women's bodies which must be questioned. For example, Shayan states:

I think *tamkin khaas* is violating a woman's body. If you had asked me this question five years ago, I would have said that women must submit to their husbands' sexual desire according to *tamkin khaas*. But now my view has changed. In a marital relationship both partners must enjoy having sexual intercourse and women must choose if they wish to have sex with their husbands. (Shayan, 29, an IT man, living in London for 6 years)

For these participants, having had the opportunity to live in a more gender-equal society, where religious codes no longer play such a key role in maintaining individuals' marital relationships, has changed their views. However, for others, the clash of homeland values with the new principles of the host country not only has changed their hegemonic masculine ideals and attitudes but also has reinforced and sustained them. The results of this study show that throughout the process of migration and within the context of diaspora, the meaning, experience and power relations of masculinities are different, contested and challenged for men. In other words, migration provides profound and different understandings of gendered dynamics where individuals experience shifts and switches in their positionalities. Hence, it is important to explore these experiences, particularly in relation to violence against women in the diaspora since they can sanction gender-based violence or promote gender equality.

Conclusion

The constructions of masculinities discussed in this paper are specific to the respondents in this study. Following Connell's approach, Coles (2009) argues that masculinity must be separated from its structural form and must be defined as shared and collective human projects that are individually lived out. This means that masculinity does not have the same meaning to all men. It is diverse in terms of how it is perceived, experienced and lived out daily. The introduction of the concept of hegemonic Islamic masculinities is part of an attempt to open a theoretical dialog in order to contain contextual variation

of men's own representations and notions of gender, power and control across religious and cultural settings. The new concept can be considered an important contribution to the knowledge of 'masculinities' since it facilitates the analysis of hegemonic masculinities within the patriarchal religious and cultural practices learned at homeland and exported to diaspora. The concept can also be applied in masculinities studies to embrace the evolving dynamics of masculinities and reconsider hegemonic masculinities within a globalising migrant context. This concept can be further developed by illustrating how cultural and religious practices intersect with other dynamics of identity, such as those not explored in my research, that influence Muslim men's perceptions of gender equality and violence against women. Hegemonic Islamic masculinities is not an independent notion, but an additional theoretical concept and a subcategory of hegemonic masculinity that is used to contextualise the practice within the Islamic setting of diasporic gendered identities.

In fact, recognition of the concept of hegemonic Islamic masculinities and its position in relation to Iranian femininities and other forms of masculinities in this study has been useful in outlining the various nuances of power, i.e. domination and subordination, which exist within the hierarchical framework in diaspora itself. However, one must be cautious to avoid reducing groups of diasporic men into stereotypes based on their behaviour, for instance, viewing Iranian or Muslim men as overly violent or sexually aggressive. This is in line with Connell's argument where she emphasises on paying attention to the gender relations among men, keeping the evaluation dynamic and avoiding stereotyping or homogenising multiple forms of masculinities into one form.

Hegemonic Islamic masculinities are mobile and fluid. This is evident from participants' responses when they tried to make a relationship between their gender ideology that they carry from their country of origin (Iran) and the gender ideologies within their country of migration (UK). This allows room for the exploration of various forms of masculinities in this category. In sum, masculinities are extremely complex formations and since male dominance may take many forms. Further research on hegemonic Islamic masculinities among other Muslim diasporic communities may pave the way for advancement of the concept where the gender-discriminatory views can be challenged and confronted.

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