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Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan

Lala Mahmudova

Loyola University Chicago, lmahmudova@luc.edu

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

AZERI MASCULINITIES AND MAKING MEN IN AZERBAIJAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER STUDIES

BY
LALA MAHMUDOVA

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Azerbaijan Democratic Republic	ADR
Council of Europe	CoE
Domestic Violence	DV
International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association	ILGA Europe
Internally Displaced People	IDP
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer	LGBTQ
Non-Government Organization	NGO
The Commonwealth of Independent States	CIS
United Nations	UN
United Nations Development Program	UNDP
Women`s Studies and Gender Studies	WSGS

ABSTRACT

This thesis research is about Azeri Masculinities. I searched for answers to the questions - What are the main rituals and life events in a man`s life which make him a "real" man in Azerbaijan? What kind of paths are enforced to maintain this place in the society as a man?

Through this research, I examined male identities in Azerbaijan - men in political, social and cultural background of the Azeri society. Then, I delve into the lifecycle of the development of manhood. I review the effects of the Islamic religion in the process of making men and reflection Islamic religious masculinities. However, different types of masculinities (which do not fit the traditional notions) such as Azeri gay masculinities are one of the important focus points of my research.

I used self – reflexive interpretive methodology for my research, which enabled me to reflect on my memory and my situational experiences and subsequently interpret them. The main theme emerging from this study is that three major life events are crucial for the man making process.

First step is the event of circumcision, which has more cultural value for the local people than religious. The second event I discuss in men's lives is military service. Military duty is essential for Azeri men and protecting the land means the same thing as protecting their mother and their family, so the land is also feminized. The third event is marriage, which is inevitable, indeed the biggest life event for the adult man.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Until now, there have been exhaustive volume of studies about women's issues and studies in Azerbaijan. These studies include historical background on Azerbaijani feminist movements, and the exploration of cultural, religious, social and political aspects of being a woman in Azerbaijan. Beside scientific knowledge creation about women's issues, many international organizations have also worked on generating statistics and reports about the issues of domestic violence, gender inequality, women's empowerment, and women's reproductive health in Azerbaijan. When it comes to gender inequality and issues around women's rights, studying men and their participation in this process is missing. While conducting research on women's issues, studying men and their accountability for the oppression were not explored in countries like Azerbaijan. Azeri masculinities, like in most parts of the world, are hegemonic and the main source of oppression for women and family members today.

Michael S. Kimmel in his book, *Changing Men* says, historically and traditionally men have been the default gender in society, and studies around men have always been within specific identities such as scientists, government officials, soldiers and others, but we need to study men as men. In a globalized world where Western and European ideals of masculinity are exported, these kinds of specific studies leave out the everyday family dynamics, social

behaviors, and gender expectations that make up a broader understanding of ‘masculinities’ in other parts of the. Traditional male sex roles and the notion of manhood is not as rigid as it was in previous centuries or even at the beginning of the 20th century, but that does not mean "natural masculinity is now being recovered" (R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 1999). Studying men and unexplored notion of ‘masculinities’ in Azerbaijan is very important to understand gender relationships and behaviors. Instead of expecting the same patterns and archetypes from Azeri men which seen in idealized western male sex roles, manhood, and masculinity, it is important to observe what is happening in Azeri notions of manhood. What kinds of paths do they follow to become "real" men in Azerbaijan? Not a lot of literature materials specifically emphasizes men and masculinities in Azerbaijan. However, it does not mean that there are not any masculinity ideals. Having the advantage of personal reflexivity as an Azeri woman, I have been exposed to the cultural notions of masculinity all my life. That is why I can approach the idea of ‘what makes a man in Azerbaijan’ more closely. Previous studies have concentrated on women’s struggles to overcome patriarchal structures. Studying men in these areas is pivotal as many of these same struggles can apply to the male population of the country as well.

Situated in the South Caucasus Mountains, Azerbaijan has often been generalized with Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Post-Soviet countries. An ethnic and cultural framing of the country has many similarities with these geographical and ethnic neighborhood regions. That is why, studies have been performed with these populations can be applied to Azeri society as well. At the same time, one must also look at the country's own distinction and characteristics. Searching the notions of manhood and masculinity in Azeri society would give us a fresh insight into gender relations. In my thesis, I will deconstruct existing masculinities in

Azerbaijan, analyzing different cultural, religious and traditional ways of thinking that have an impact on the process of constructing masculinities. I will also explore mindsets in society that give privilege to heterosexual male over the gay male. Especially, in today's independent era of Azerbaijani society, the importance of the identity politics become more visible. Nayereh Tohidi pointed to this reexamination of national identity, saying "people are seeking to reassess, reimagine, and redefine their ethnocultural and national, as well as individual, identities" (Nayereh Tohidi, 120). I propose to examine masculinities by analyzing Azerbaijani history, religion, traditions and the redefining of manhood and masculinities within these complex social changes.

Ultimately, as a feminist from Azeri society, my research will contribute to finding new knowledge. Feminists "understand how race, class, gender, and sexuality are used within society to construct one another" (Nagy S, Hesse-Biber & Yaiser L. M, 117). That is why it is essential and significant to study masculinity in different societies in parallel with femininity, womanhood, intersectionality, race and class, to find the complex aspects of the construction of gender. My studies in WSGS enabled me to learn and see masculinity as a subject of feminist research. While feminism mostly talks about gender, and different social constructions of it in many diverse cultures and recognizes that there is not only one feminism but also many others, which embrace many different realities. Through my research about Azeri masculinities, I will attempt to make visible something which has not been researched much.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Feminist researchers have always been deviant and rule breakers when it comes to research methods. Often what makes feminist methods unique is their exploration of new techniques, applying different positionality and insight to study in equity. Many feminists have rejected all the notions and rules of the positivistic methodologies, which demand that researchers should not engage personally with the research subject. Unlike positivist methods, feminist research methods have been shaped by the interest and positionality of the researchers.

For this research, I proposed to apply reflexive interpretive methods, which were suitable for this study. The reflexive method enables researchers to examine social constructions and cognitive processes and practices in society and bring them in front of viewer's eyes, allowing viewer's to become familiar with them. There are some pre-conditions in undertaking this research. Multiple truths and different values and ways of thinking that are different from the "default society," should not be ignored and should not be exaggerated while conducting research using reflexive methods. (Nagy S, Hesse-Biber & Yaiser L. M, 2004)

The key components of reflexive methods are

- Allowing the researcher to be aware of her social locations
- Being aware that her "situated knowledge" can affect the data and research itself.
- Reflexivity takes place through the research process

- Researcher examines and explains the cultural and creative artifacts, which are her way of explaining and reflecting on them.

The key artifact I am analyzing and reflecting on is the cultural and traditional background of the Azeri nation, which I experienced since birth. My self-reflexivity takes place through my cultural memory, family relationship and social roles. Of course, my memory and thinking emerged from my social place/positioning in the Azeri society, which influenced by class, social, historical and political relations. I have been raised in the rural area of Azerbaijan, in the family, which was trying to find ways to survive in newly established independent country in Post-Soviet period. Soon after the collapsing of the Soviet system like many men in Azeri society my father was also left jobless, and it took longer for him to be able to find a job that he can work in the new capitalist system. My mother was a director for a small state run kindergarten, which suffered from insufficient government support and workers' benefits. In this hardship, I was raised with my two brothers that are a little younger than me. Because of my educated mother, and the father who considered education necessary; growing up, education was our primary preoccupation, but it was accompanied with its own hardship and shortcomings. Sometimes we could not buy even our subject books to prepare for our homework. In a household where a girl and a boy were not approached differently for their gender in their young ages, but the peer pressure, societal expectations from the family members and cultural and traditional values and beliefs changed these relations in later years during the 'growing-up' process. Growing in such a family with two brothers was unique in a way that I could see all the transformational processes of manliness. That is why being a woman and writing about males

and the notions of manhood in Azerbaijan is very clear and apparent to me for the fact that I could observe all the manliness transformations with my own eyes.

Through my research, I am examining the historical roots of the cultural and traditional structures. These historical roots are traceable from religious, traditional and folkloric materials, which can be considered as my national memory too.

Through this research, I have found links between modern and old cultural artifacts, and gender and its representation. As a country that lived through many political currents and changes, Azerbaijan owns all the cultural and historical background that influenced with these changes. Nowadays Azerbaijan is living its independent period after the Soviet collapse. Before Soviet Union (1920 - 1991), there was Modern Azerbaijan for short period, which is directly connected to the emergence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) (1918-1920). In two years, the Republic made so many democratic and contemporary reforms in the country. Before ADR, Azerbaijan was under Tsar Russia`s ruling for a century after the extreme fragmentation of the Empires era. As one can see from here, there is a history that was shaped by the diverse regimes and political systems. Now Azerbaijan has political relationships with European Union countries, which allows the country to reintegrate with the European system of values. But might it even be happening in the Azeri society? This is the fact that many different politicians from Azerbaijan expressed traditional and conservative thoughts on human rights in the political conferences of the Union countries and other congregations. They emphasize the idea of Azerbaijan is a country with its own cultural values that does not need European ones.

If there are different societies around the world, multiple truths and different approaches understanding gender will be a reality. My research is about gender and its expression, and how

the notions around it are socially constructed. Through this research, I am deconstructing the masculinities and its influences in Azerbaijan. To do this, I am creating and exploring a cycle of manhood and the process of becoming a "real" man. Three main life events in men`s life becomes clear with my research: 1) the experience of social and public celebration of circumcision, 2) mandatory military service when they turn 18 years old, and 3) marriage. In understanding the lifecycle as well as traditional practices, I am using self-reflexive interpretation. Some scholars inform their research subjects of their positionality before they begin. This helps in getting real answers to their questions as they conduct their research. For example, Kath Weston (1998) revealed her identity as a lesbian person while collecting data for her fieldwork in lesbian and gay communities. She notes in her writing that her research "wouldn't have been the same study" if she would not identify as a lesbian herself. (Weston, 202). She also notes that being a woman influenced her research with the lesbian community with which she was communicating. In my research, my subject was my own standpoint theory approach. Growing up I had observed and experienced similar cultural and traditional masculinity with my two brothers. My brothers also were subjected to the same exact cycle of becoming men. I experienced how they were separate from me to practice rituals specific to the male population, such as the celebration event of the circumcision in our house and backyard, and the effect of military life on my older brother after his return home. That is why my representation of the Azeri social reality and understanding of cultural, traditional celebrations and relations would not be the same if I had not lived and been exposed to these life moments.

The reflexive methods that I am using opens possibilities to uncover new questions for future research. With this research, my goal is not to provide solutions for the possible

inequalities and oppression in the society. However, this method helps me to find them, analyze and present them: "Reflexivity provides a tool through which researchers can critically examine the benefits they provide, hope to provide and fail to provide. Textual representations of reflexivity create opportunities for sharing this kind of critical analysis, which can help to create realistic expectations for potential collaborative work (Hope Alkon, 134)". To construct my research paper, I used literature materials related to the topic, related topic areas, and expanded geographical population and societies. I examined other authors writings about manhood and masculinity studies in topics of various gender and social justice issues. My position as a feminist scholar has also affected the way I think and understand various social issues as a gender concern and use my women`s and gender studies training and lens as a basis for my academic thought and reflection. My outline begins with an investigation of the social background of the Azeri society, and it`s cultural, traditional values. Next comes development lifecycle of manhood in a man`s life. After finding and distinguishing the development steps in men`s lives, I indicate the relationship of manhood with different gender and nontraditional norms of masculinity.

CHAPTER THREE

COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Geo-political Profile

Azerbaijan is situated in the South Caucasus Mountains, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia; its capital city of Baku lies along the Caspian Sea. Historically, the geographical location of Azerbaijan made the region crucial for trade routes. The ancient caravan route The Great Silk Road, which lasted for many centuries, connecting Eastern and Western civilization passed through Azeri lands. The Great Silk Road traveled through China to Europe, and the reason behind this was that the most valuable commodity, silk. It was imported through this route into Europe. "Through ancient and medieval periods, Azerbaijan was at the crossroads of three civilizations – the old Christian Mediterranean, Zoroastrian Iranian and Muslim Turkic" (Elmira Muradaliyeva, 2014). This road gave many benefits to Azerbaijan. Along this road, travelers and merchants exchanged goods, culture, education and etc. "The British used to lay their routes to India via Azerbaijan, Indian merchants traded in spices and cashmere fabrics with Baku and Shamakhi. For this reason, one of the medieval caravanserais in Baku has the name of the Indian origin, "Multani" ("Azerbaijan, Silk Road").

The country is situated in the South Caucasus region that was formerly in Transcaucasia Region. The Russian Empire created the political name Transcaucasia for the area. The term of

South Caucasus region is not theoretically contested. For some scholars, the term itself is a result of the post-colonial legacy, the legacy of the Soviet Union. It is a fact that the South Caucasus term was defined in relation to the North Caucasus part of the region. These two regions are separated by the Great Caucasus Mountains range, which separates Europe from Asia. (Thomas De Wall). This clear political boundary was established by the Soviet Union, of which Azerbaijan was one of the sub countries: “I would argue, the experience of the Soviet Union, the Cold War and closed borders have given those boundaries a real historical solidity” (Thomas de Wall). That is why, at the beginning of the Post-Soviet term, Azerbaijan had and nowadays has more in common with Post-Soviet Armenia and Post-Soviet Georgia, with its secularized way of life, than with Turkey and Iran (the part where the majority of Azeri people live).

In an independent era, Azerbaijan is one of the major oil exporting countries in the world. Opening the borders after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and transitioning to a free market economy, gave new chances and opportunities for Azerbaijani people for economical and cultural exchanges. This is mostly visible in Baku, the capital city and also the center of the oil industry, where mostly foreign people work and do major oil business. The economy of Azerbaijan is now at the end of the oil boom, and the government has started to think about the development of non-oil sector.

Socially Superior Status of Men

When it comes to social life and gender relations within the country, there is a large degree of segregation between men’s and women’s activities. This separation can be smaller in city centers and the capital city of Baku itself, but as one goes into the periphery of the country it

is more noticeable. The role of the men in the family is the major breadwinner. So, if a woman works and earns money, it will never consider as the main income. Men are traditionally considered superior to women and children. Families are run by men. Even when there are no older men present like a father or grandfather, young son in the household will be the head of the family, even if there is a mother before him. The conservative mentality and patriarchal notions restrict women`s freedom to go off to study, live outside of the family by herself, travel, go off to vacation or live abroad. All decisions have to be made by the “head of the family,” and most of the time the decision leads to women`s immobility. Male members of the family are usually free to decide what they want to do: travel, study or when to have a family. But young male members of the family are not free to do whatever they want. They too have to get the permission of the older generation. Male children of the family are praised and welcomed. Both, mother and father in the families think that they raise a soldier and the family`s future support (*arkha, dayaq*) by having sons instead of daughters. Having many sons is a source of pride, while having many daughters is a heavy load.

The most important life event of the family in Azerbaijan is marriage. The marriage of the child is more important than her/his study, work and success. If the girl is not married, or if in early years of the marriage if she has not had a child, she is considered incomplete. When girls get married family should prepare all the needs for their daughters future family as a form of the trousseau. "Ceremonies associated with it comprise the happiest, yet the most costly and demanding requirements, of the life cycle. In addition to an engagement party, two lavish wedding ceremonies (*qiz toyi* for the bride and *oghlán toyi* for the groom) take place. In many regions of the country, traditional customs like bashlig (the groom's payment to parents for

nurturing the bride), mahr (an agreed sum to be paid to women in case of divorce), and jahaz (the dowry of household appliances and furniture provided by the bride's parents) are strictly observed. (Tohidi, 85)" The trousseau is very important in Azeri culture; it has to be done by the girl's parents. That is why raising many girls is costly than many boys for families. A folklore in Azerbaijan as a new bride moving to her husband`s house marks this:

"Mother, sister, girl bride.

The veracious bride.

I would like seven sons,

Only one girl, bride"

The family is the main concept in Azeri society, and it is considered the nucleus of it. Family structure also sets limits, attitudes, ways of behaving in social situations and controls individuals' sexual bodies. The family is a touchstone and establishes the basic system of values. A person carries specific self-verification for her/his family in the society. Especially, men would not agree to undermine the prosperity and the value of it.

Demographic profile

Azerbaijani people live in a nuclear family where parents and their children are present. In rural and remote town areas, there are extended families where more than one generation live together. During Soviet time birth rate, have reached to six (Mazur, 25). However, nowadays the family size has also decreased, and female fertility indicator dropped from 5 (that was in Soviet time) to 2 in 2006. Due to the transition period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic challenges and war situation at the borders and migration led the fertility rate to drop in Azerbaijan (Billingsley, 213). In Azerbaijani families, elders, especially grandparents, fathers

and then female elders are approached with a certain amount of respect. However, certain indications come from the “responsibility” and “debt” mindset. The main caregivers are mothers, older daughters. But elderly female members of the family also have the responsibility to take care of others. However, the male members of the family as in sons are considered to have more responsibility to take care of the family and senior parents financially and materially. This responsibility can be considered as in the form of “debt.” Another reason why they choose girls over boys in the selective abortion is the notion that boys are for support for the family in the future. Indeed, they are sources of the family's generational lineage. In opposition to that, girls are the property of the family, owned by their fathers before marriage. It is believed that girls are somewhat like a migrant population, who will go away when she will get marry and belong to another family.

Selective abortions are prevalent in Azerbaijan. For the high rate of the selective abortions Azerbaijan comes first on the list of former Soviet countries along with other South Caucasian countries Armenia and Georgia. After collapsing of the Soviet Union in these three countries war situation influenced fertility level and it dropped to low. Sex-selective abortion increased in Azerbaijan because new sex-determination techniques arrived in this area and people used them increasingly. The government was tolerant to this process, giving permissions to Western European manufacturing companies to do active marketing around these services. (Garenne, Hohmann and Lefevre, 892). Also before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was illegal to import western and cheap ultrasound machines. After collapse of the Union in 1991, access to those machines made these abortions possible. (Michael et al. 98) Besides that, sex-selective abortion is very cheap in Azerbaijan, even free in most public clinics. Even though

modern forms of contraceptives introduced, sex-selective abortion rate remained high in Azerbaijan. This reveals the fact of cultural reasons in this process. (Garenne, Hohmann, & Lefevre, 892). The prior collapse of the Soviet Union to import cheap ultrasound machines was illegal that is why sex-selective abortion was not high before. (Michael et. Al. 98). Through this industrialization, the masculinization of the birth happens. There are so many reasons to that including, the cost benefit of having a boy rather a girl, prestige around the boy child Another reason that sex-selective abortions increased is a migration factor. Due to economic difficulties where Azeri men would travel far Russian cities to work and earn money, and in that situation having a boy is more promising for family`s future economy.

There are currently many discussions around sex-selective abortion in the media. Many international organizations expressed their concerns about high rate sex-selective abortions. However, in Azerbaijan these kinds of discussion should be carried out carefully; otherwise, it can lead banning all abortions in the country (Garenne, Hohmann, & Lefevre, 894).

Employment

The notion of the working woman is accepted in Azerbaijan, but if the woman is very successful and if she is the primary provider for the family, it makes her husband feel impotent, especially in the Post-Soviet, independent era of the country. During the Soviet time, women were forced to work by the government, and in this situation, husbands had less say over women`s economic freedom and mobility. Because “...it was counteracted by state ideology. In the independent era, however, those advocating male superiority and authority are free to voice such ideas in the public arena” (Hayat, 402).

In Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, young women started to work in town centers, the big cities as possible, but their earnings were also considered as a help to the main family budget. During this new political and economic system, new skills needed to be able to enter the job market such as knowing English as a foreign language, computer skills and so on. These qualifications made it hard for middle age and older generation to find proper job and work. Instead, young members of the family gained those skills for their age (they were still in schools, learning English and other skills after school), and started to work in foreign-led companies and organizations. But again, their earnings did not make them entirely independent: “It is not uncommon to find young people who live at home and handing over their relatively high wages to their parents for the upkeep of the whole family, including siblings and grandparents, and simply receiving pocket money” (Farideh 401).

Cultural

Azerbaijani culture is a collectivist and predominantly patriarchal culture. More than 94 percent of the country is Muslim, and the influence of the Islamic religion can be seen in lifestyle, national honor, and gender structures. There is a close gender parity in education and literacy but specific inequalities regarding women`s empowerment and gender roles are popular, even among young people. The content of the early education is very gendered, traditional and stereotypical in Azerbaijan. That is why young people do not get to learn much about gender roles, discrimination against women and other social issues. Social work and the institutionalization of it is almost absent. Lobbying for the rights of the minority groups is not in an organized form but can happen with an individual effort.

Bending the rules of having different gender roles for women and men can lead to the emasculation of the men in the family. That is why many household chores are on women even if women work. Many women even agree with this stereotypical belief, which shows internalized gender roles. For example, a mother who is at work would not ask her son to pick up the laundry from the washing machine. For her, it is something not for men, she thinks he simply cannot do that. Chores like dusting, washing the dishes, vacuum the house, cooking and cleaning remain and men are not willing to help and take over themselves all those household duties. Many times, they even do not find, wash, and iron their own clothes if there is a woman present at home. Indications for the Azeri domestic ideals observed with certain hierarchies of age and gender. It is more visible on the display of the hospitality. If the guest is a male and is not from the family and relatives women and children in the family, will not get into the conversation with him, but women will cook and serve the meal and drink while often remaining out of sight with her children.

Women`s social relations with men observed with the dualities. It is because women face many different obstacles and problems than men, when they face with desperate situations. They have to show the duality of being strong and decision maker outside of the house, but be easygoing and submissive to cope with the patriarchy and hegemony in her household. In her interview with Nayereh Tohidi, Pusta Azizbekova, "a prominent academician in her seventies and director of the Azerbaijan Museum of History" this duality can be seen sharply when she explains that she enjoys the sheltering from a man when she is going outside. However, when Tohidi comments that protection creates dependence she answers:

" Oh, it just appears that way. Only men think that we depend on them and by thinking, so they feel satisfied and powerful. Let them take care of us under this illusion. We know very well who in reality is the power here and who depends on whom. ...God forbid a household without a man. A man to a household is like a gem to a ring, we Azeris say. But the gem stands on top, is nothing without the ring." (Tohidi, 88-89).

Men decide the family budget, house repair works, children`s education and their health care, but only cooking and chores are left to women and allowed to decide on her own. I would stress more on the lack of the emotional connection between fathers and their children. There are formal relationships between father and their children, the "... hierarchy creates clear boundaries in the relationship between the father and children, jeopardizes closeness and emotional exchange, and results in a relationship defined by respect and fear" (Boratav, et al., 302). Fatherhood is determined by keeping an emotional distance from children, maintaining discipline, and not making themselves available for emotional sharing. Nevertheless, in recent years, with the economic and social changes in the country, the emotional connections between fathers and children have increased. It can be seen in smaller percentage of the families of young generation in Azerbaijan. Personally, I think it is mostly because of the fathers becoming active users of the mobile connection such as messaging applications like WhatsApp, and others, which are the way of switching on interpersonal relationships through messaging, heart emoticons and etc. Communicating through writing made its big leap through the paper form to mobile messaging applications. Emailing between family members is something that almost does not exist. First, that is because social media is more present than the emailing system. Second, there is not a culture like emailing outside of the work and office environment. It has own economic

reasons such as family members can own mobile phones more than personal computers and laptops. I was personally amazed when my stern father sent me a heartwarming and long WhatsApp message the very first time when I was abroad, in the U.S., saying that he misses for me so much and that for him I am the person that comes first, with heart emoticons (which in physical space and connection is not happening).

When it comes to the community and public presence of men, they are visible in many public places. You can see men outside in the teahouses (*çayxana*), communal gathering places like neighborhood corners and in front of small kiosk and shops. In rural areas, women and girls cannot go out to the parks for recreation reason or to public restaurants without the permission and guidance of the male guardian. Teahouses in Azerbaijan are the primary indicator of unemployed men. Even though, stigma around male unemployment is prevalent, in the current economic crisis, where the unemployment rate is high, there is a justification for those men who are not retired to gather in these houses and spend their time socializing there. The main rituals in those teahouses are to sit and drink a glass of tea with a bit of sugar and play domino or backgammon (*nərd*) over community conversations that occur between men mostly. These men decide on important community issues, and how to deal with them, spontaneously. Certainly, these kinds of public gatherings affect their behavior in their household. Men can behave at their houses differently depending on what kind of conversation they were part of in those social groups, which most of the time can create additional control strategies especially for female members of the family in their public presence. But from afar, for a foreign observer, it can seem that those men sitting, chatting, sipping their teas, and playing their board games in this homosocial environment is just for leisure (which is a part of the situation where the

unemployment rate is high for the middle age men in the country). Just like for this foreign observer puts in her blog post: “Men sit in suits all afternoon at the tea house, sipping glass after glass, playing backgammon, and talking about the latest cell phone. The pace of life is slower here, so there is always time for sitting and talking, time for tea to cool.” (Chickens And Tea In Azerbaijan - Page 2")

Legal

Gender equality law in the country identified with gaps, and inactivity in the legal system is present, even though “Law on Guarantees of Gender Equality was passed in 2006, Azerbaijan has not yet enacted comprehensive legislation on discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, language, religion, citizenship, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender identity.” (ECRI, 216). Azerbaijan is a member of the UN, the Council of Europe (CoE), which is why the government has undergone numerous social, gender rights enhancements, including the decriminalization of homosexuality in Azerbaijan during the membership process. (Forced Out, 2007). Unlike these facts, Azerbaijan still lacks for gender egalitarianism. It is hard to implement new ideas and projects around contemporary issues of gender and sexuality. One of the important issues in the civil society are restrictive regulations adopted on NGO law in 2014 and 2015, which makes it almost impossible for them to get international fund and implement many different projects.

CHAPTER FOUR

MALE IDENTITY IN AZERBAIJAN – PATHS TO MANHOOD

In this research, I am giving three main life events and practices that are part of the development of men in Azerbaijan. These three main terms are very important for a man to fit into the traditional Azeri men frame. What are those three major life events that create this frame in Azerbaijan? I am giving the explanation as the research paper proceeds to explain those major phases in men`s lives. They are the socio-religious circumcision experience, militarism, and marriage. These three principal components create the whole package of the manhood in Azerbaijan, which is described below. As in many parts of the world, men are made and “men do not follow a predetermined biological trajectory encoded in their physical organization; they do not inevitably grow from infants through boyhood to manhood. Rather, men are made.” (Hale, 703)

Social Background for Male Identity in Azerbaijan

Azeri Masculinities in Folklore and Tradition

There are many examples of male development and societal expectations in folklore and traditional practices. In public seasonal, holiday celebrations male performers are mostly healthy and powerful men, who can lift heavy weight, can ride a horse or other rigidly masculine behaviors. In these ceremonies, national dance scenes are inevitable. Men and women are

dancing together, where men have different dance moves than females. I want particularly to focus on the dance culture and talk more about it. Even though traditionally dance is a tradition, to engage with dancing professionally is not popular or welcomed. Dancing is happening in every wedding and men and women are dancing without any hesitation and overthinking. However, parents would not put their sons in dancing schools. Even if they are enrolled in a school's dance circles, it is approached as a temporary hobby or interest. It would not elevate to a professional desire. For example, a popular Azerbaijani male dancer Namus Zokhrabov's parents were not tolerant with his desire of being a dancer. Even though so many state-supported companies were paying relatively high pay, than for teachers, factory workers, and engineers when he was dancing in the late Soviet period. In his words, his parents said "Shame on you!" when he started his dance career in the 1970s: "...there were not Azerbaijani boys in ballet classes, they were mostly Russians" (349). During Soviet time, there were so many natives living in Baku who had a keen interest in dance, but "Azerbaijanis despised dance and regarded it as a form of low behavior" (Fisher & Shay, 349). Namus started to dance and stayed with his dancing classes, even though boys were laughing at him, and his family was not happy with his choice. Namus also says: "they thought that I must be from a different planet. But I loved my classes and worked hard. In two years, when I was 13 to 14, I shot up to my current height of six feet two inches. Studying in Kareografski Institute was hard work" (350). He became a reputed dancer in the former Soviet Union that he could travel to many countries and represent Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union. Despite challenges, when he received the award of the Merited Artist of the Republic of Azerbaijan, his parents were so proud of him. He states that being active in dancing and promoting it in Azerbaijan; he made it easy for boys to go after their desire to be a dancer.

Another artifact related to dance is the dancing dress. The *cherkes* (the ethnic group in Azerbaijan and the garment most associated with it) is both the national dress and a male dancer garment in Azerbaijan. It is a black coat, that reaches out until the knees, and bullet cartridges are worn over this coat across the chest from both sides. The important part of the dress is a dagger, and it is worn around the belt area. The dress itself with its bullet cartridges and a dagger, defines warrior and soldier characteristics - key masculine signs. These characteristics are amply illustrated in Azeri folklore and tradition.

Religious Masculinities

Most of the time research and studies about masculinities are limited to homosexuality and homoeroticism in Islamic culture. These studies are conducted on literature and Islamic lifestyle in Arabic countries. Islamic masculinity stems from the patriarchal mindset i.e.; “social constructionist perspective and is premised on the belief that men are not born; they are made. “(Ouzgane, 2). Contemporary researcher in Azerbaijan Alov Inanna also argues that; after Christianity, Islam came to the physical world and made patriarchy more influential. In Islamic teaching, that the God is not a word, but the word itself is a way of making patriarchy. For Islamic teaching, God can create whatever he wants, if he will just say “Become” (Ol), and it will become. That is why the power of creation took away matriarchy and customized it for patriarchal notions.

As a Muslim society, Azeri men carry out Islamic masculinity in their lifestyle too. Islam takes a great part in important men`s life events like marriage, a birth of a child, circumcision of an infant or a young boy and death ceremonies. Religion is separate from the government, but it plays a vital role in people`s lives. According to Azerbaijani Constitution, Azerbaijan is a secular

country, which means the religious life is separate from the state. There are several religions practiced by different ethnic groups, but the main religion that is exercised in the country is Shia Islam. 99 percent of the country's population is Muslim. 85 percent of the population identified as Shia Muslim, where 15 percent of the Muslim population is Sunni Muslim. However, after the domination of the Soviet Union, the religious beliefs and practices of the population were abandoned by the pressure of the atheist agenda of the Union. "Azerbaijanis believed they suffered greater repression" by the Soviet secularization movement "than their South Caucasian neighbors, Armenia and Georgia, because of their identification with the world of Islam" (Swietochowski, 72). This kind of Soviet secularization led to other social changes. For example, before the Soviet time, polygamy was an open practice; in fact, mullahs could provide temporary wedlock, and several women could easily be wives for one man. During the Soviet time the privatization of the religious ritual took place. This means that they could practice their religious beliefs only in private, in their houses, where nobody outside of the family should know. That is why this privatization made it impossible to have more than one wife. Polygamy completely disappeared, veiling rejected, women modernized, and their seclusion ended.

However, the arranged marriages did not change and continued. Men hardly ever married outside of the close-tied kin, where women were never allowed to marry someone outside of the community. The levels of the religiosity differ by the regions of the country also. In the Southern parts of the country, close to Iran, there is a high level of religiosity and practice of religious rituals. But in the Northern parts of the country, where it is close to Russia and Georgia, people's religiosity level is lower, and the population here is predominantly Sunni Muslims. This for the

influence of the bordering countries of course. Iran in the South has a religious influence on people than in the northern parts of the country where it is bordered by Russia and Georgia.

For more Azerbaijanis, Islam is their national identity because Islamic traditions and rituals are integrated into the everyday life. That is why, often this notion of the religion covers not just religious rituals, but also lifestyle and everyday life. In most rural areas, mullahs (religious leaders) traditionally were community leaders - important people for religious registering the marriage (*kəbin*) for the couple, or for a temporary wedlock (Azeri- *siğə*, Arabic- *mut`ah*, lit. translation-pleasure marriage) and main spiritual facilitators for the mourning ceremonies (*yas*). When the Soviet Union collapsed, these few remaining mullahs could gain political power in the absence of the state formation in early the Post-Soviet period. But they did not go so far as to rule the country. The neighboring strictly Islamic country “Iran, despite the common Shi`ite background, could not serve as a model for a national state combining ethnonationalism with Islam” (Motika, 114). For Motika, The Iranian Revolution of 1979-1980 was an example for Azerbaijani religious activists for mobilization against the secular regime, but it never happened. Because the structure of the society is different in Iran and Azerbaijan and Iran has such a bad reputation in Azerbaijani society. In addition, Iran plays main oppressor role for the ethnic Azeri people living across the Aras River in Iran and has good relationships with Armenia - invader of the Azerbaijani lands causing ongoing Nagorno - Karabakh conflict. That is why the Iran model was never a successful model for Azeri Islamic activists.

Nowadays, state leadership showcases the state as Muslim in its identity, and this is “demonstrated by President Aliyev's widely celebrated hajj, Koran recitations during political Festivities and the incorporation of religious holidays into the official calendar” (Motika, 115).

There are so many complexities in religiosity and spiritual beliefs and practice in Azerbaijan, which conflicts the leading Islamic theory. The majority part of the population believes shrines, and often they refer to them as physical representations of Islam, and the "working definitions, shrines are portals to other worlds, themselves sites of passage to or windows onto other realms"(Grant, 655). Many times, these shrines are the grave of a holy person (*övliya*). Many mullahs and religious leaders in Azerbaijan are opposed to shrines, and for the Islamic teaching, such behaviors (belief in shrines) are against Islam and God`s will. For them, nobody besides God is allowed to be worshiped (118).

During the continuous Post-Soviet period in Azerbaijan more veiled women are visible, mainly in Baku the capital city of Azerbaijan. The new rise of the Islamic ideology in the independent era "involved in new veiling for Azeri women" (Farideh, 361) Even though on the foundation of the veiling stands some pressured action, but new veiling is somewhat voluntary action. It can be accepted as self-assertion, a form of a dressing and creating her own unique identity. For Farideh Hayat, new vailing in Azerbaijan in the independent era can have many different aspects. One of the aspects is that they rebel against their parents who raised and lived in an atheist country. It is also a form of modernization and perceiving new global Islamic movements, going against western consumerism. "They are attracted by the messages of sincerity and honesty embedded in the religious worldview..." which makes them be proud and reject the lives of their parent's generation. However, it plays empowering role for women who are living in a more religious family with a more jealous husband. Women in those families "found being veiled helpful in gaining permission from jealous husbands and possessive parents

to move more freely outside the home.” (366). Often, you can come across the conversation among group of women that, their husband would let them drive a car if they were veiled.

Traditionally women`s public presence was policed by men and even women in Azeri society. Because of that, male population has those fragile fears that if their wives would be out and about their manhood and maleness and the chastity of their wife would be under a question mark. People would blame him not being able to control their wives. However, if their wife is veiled public idea toward their wife and to them immediately will be more respectful. It "is the main identification for these men`s honor (namus). Women wearing hijab, or headscarves believed to have ‘higher’ moral behaviors signaling “respectability (through an image of modesty and chastity) while leading an active public role” (366). In that case, woman`s permission for driving a car or being freely mobile outside of the house is provided only if she is veiled, which is directly connected to men`s controlling behavior. Here, veil plays a saving role for a woman to get permission from a jealous husband, and a tool for being somewhat free.

Development Lifecycle of Manhood

Circumcision in Early Ages

Creation of maleness in Azerbaijan has its own rituals and tradition. Inevitably, it starts with the birth of a child, and then in the very early ages of the children every Muslim boy gets circumcised. Circumcision is carried out by medical specialists, in modern Azerbaijan. However, traditionally it was done by a person called a barber (dəllal, tabbar). “When the moment has come, the uncle or grandfather takes the child in his arms, and a barber performs the operation which lasts only a second or two, with a razor or sharp scissors. Then the wound would seal with a little wood ash, spider`s web, alum or other hemostatic” (Ghaşşüb, 22) This is the traditional

way of the holding of this practice since early Islamic history, but we can see the same exact process in poor and rural areas of Azerbaijan nowadays too. Traditionally circumcisions should be done by the age of 10-12. Even 10-12 years is very old for this operation and has a psychological effect on the child. Experts suggest doing the circumcision before the age of two and after the age of six. If it is done by the age of two, the psychological effects of the operation will not create a memory. Because 3-5 are the crucial years of the child age, it is recommended not to have this operation at these ages. It also depends on the financial status of the family. Arranging the medical surgery and preparation for the celebration event is costly for poor families. This process is carried out with the special celebration like any other Muslim countries. The circumcision itself is an event of admission for the boy to the community of men, and the celebration revolves around when the boy suffers from the injury done to his body part. For the traditional celebration “Just at the moment of the operation, a large red or black cockerel must be killed, and the *tabbar* takes it away as a payment. Just as the cut is being made, new pitchers must be broken by throwing them violently on the ground.” (22) Around that time the children outside of the house in the yard, or in another word, the child’s friends should have to make a lot of noise with bagpipes and fanfare to let the people know that something important is happening to someone important.

On the day of celebration, there are a lot of people, and a lot of food and dancing. In addition, there are a lot of “jugs smashing on the floor, the cry of the cockerel, struggling and losing its blood” during the young child’s acceptance in to the Muslim community, which for the mutilated child, “he could do nothing but cry out in pain and weep in shock at the violence done to his body.” (22) This shock and violence and the courageous consent that the boy gave for the

circumcision, the celebrations outside, happy faces and happy family, all these define the first path to manhood. Getting rid of the small tissue that was keeping him away from the "real" manliness, now removed from him with the violence itself, through this psychological nature the boy understand one of the first "notions" of manhood in this society and this is the community's victory through violence. In another saying, sexing the boy's body takes place in two ways, one is actually getting rid of the tissue that was something feminized, and the other is taking risk to define manhood through pain and violence. (Thomson, p.34)

When it comes to the act of circumcision being a religiously important thing, it should be noted that in Islam it is recommended to have a boy circumcised, but according to the *fiqh* - Islamic law is in no way compulsory. It has a more social aspect than a religious one - "Circumcision like excision indeed, is more a practice of Muslim than a practice of Islam." (26) That means the social and traditional aspects of the circumcision is more important than the religious significance of it. Circumcision defines a man who is in the group of "accepted" men that in the future will not be any question about them when they expect to get married. This act of acceptance is a passage to the world "carried out in blood and pain" and that is why it marks an important day or an event for a male's life and celebration for his bodily difference. The outcomes of pain need to be addressed here. Going through pain defines masculinity for many stereotypical societies. Men socialize and measure their ability and strength for the endurance of pain starting from younger ages. Boys mostly take after their family and close knit groups men in his environment and learn that this is one of the markers of being a boy. Many studies show men's socialization often identifies with aggression and endurance to pain. (Reidy et al. 422-429). The pain is one of the main thing that identifies circumcision, and a young boy

experiencing this pain through this social practice is also training for endurance to pain and therefore “manning up.” Male members of the family can relate to the event, and that is why they are the main “support system” for a young boy. When it comes to the mother, for a boy seeing her mother satisfied or agreeable with the pain that caused on his body can encourage him to be open to violence and accept it as a norm. Further research needs to be done on this phenomenon. In fact, in many African societies mother is the person that prepares her son to be circumcised, through massaging and making the skin numb to ease the pain.

Circumcision is a social practice that exists in the same way hamams exist in Azerbaijani culture. The circumcision practice definitely marks as a first and very important nuance of being a man in this Islamic country. Often in Azerbaijan the circumcision event is called “The Little Wedding,” there is even a traditional song, an additional artifact, (often they tell it in the form of the poem too) they sing:

“I was a fugitive for some years,
 Finally, I got caught yesterday.
 “What's going on?” I asked,
 “It is your circumcision,” they said (The Little Wedding).
 “You can’t make me agree,” I said,
 “Don't be afraid, it will not hurt,” they said.
 Circumstances should be lived through,
 Excess things should be cut through.
 They made me believe, and I agreed,
 I too became a man today.”

In fact, you could find this poem on the invitation cards to the circumcision event (in Azerbaijan, “wedding”) which is the main separator of the invitation card to the real wedding. There is a sexual significance in the practice of circumcision. There is no doubt that the circumcision event and the celebration of it is tied to the boy’s future virility. Peter Hansen points out the male sexual organ’s exposure and ties it boy’s future virility in Somali culture, which is similar to the Azeri notion of it too: "The important aspect of male circumcision is that it exposes the male reproductive organ and as such is a phallic exposure representing male privilege to venture into (‘colonize’) the outside non-domestic world. Female circumcision is not about exposure but closure and preservation or covering of the female reproductive organ." (Hansen, 1113).

In Azerbaijan, the circumcision event is named “The Little Wedding” (*Kiçik toy*). When people announce the event date itself, they invite people to their son’s “Little Wedding”. Often you can even see a same aged girl in a wedding-style gown accompanies the boy who will get circumcised, or already the operation itself is done before, and the wound is healed, and the event itself is carried out in a more modern fashion in a wedding or celebration hall just for the social announcement for the circumcised boy. This significance of the sexuality starts with circumcision as a “The Little Wedding” and ends with a real marriage “The Big Wedding” (*Böyük toy*) which from here we can see a direct link between the two.

Militarism

The second life event in men's lives is the military in Azerbaijan. Every man who is 18 should serve in the army for 18 months. It is mandatory, but if they enter to the university and start their bachelor degree right after high school the service can be postponed to a later time

when the man will graduate from the college or the university. Military service is often called a school of manliness. Military institutions share similar features in many different countries, but their impact and meaning are not the same in every part of the world today, especially in Azerbaijan while the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is ongoing between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and serving in the army is a national honor and somewhat moral priority. "...Nagorno-Karabakh region emerged in the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakh War left over 30,000 dead and created over a million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP); over 800,000 of the refugees and IDPs were Azerbaijanis. Nagorno-Karabakh is a region that is legally part of Azerbaijan but on the eve of the Soviet breakup was populated by an ethnic Armenian majority" (134).

The current ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the main issue justifying the morality of avenging, fighting, and militarization psychology in the country. Public and semi-private TV channels promote patriotism through patriotic programs from military service areas, and air special military patriotic news programs and films every remembrance day for martyrs and commemorating losing strategic regions in the fight with Armenia. Because women are free from military service, in all these programs soldier men get interviewed, and their manly opinions about caring for the nation, saving the mothers, sisters and the country as their duty is the core elements in these programs. All this militarism and preparation has one reason, to get ready to fight the enemy and avenge the blood of the martyrs.

Having no service history can prevent these men not being able to find a proper job to work. People who had medical or other excuses not to attend military service still have difficulty finding a job and having a right to marry sometimes. Emma Sinclair-Webb explains this in the

case of Turkish military which applies to Azerbaijan too: "... many families - and women themselves - would not favor marriage until the prospective husband has completed his service. In these two senses military service becomes a rite of passage to manhood: most of the time a man is not accepted as a permanent employee, and therefore unlikely to find a means of becoming economically independent of his family, and in addition may not be regarded as fit to be a marriage partner unless he has passed through military service" (Sinclair-Webb, 74). In some families, the first question asked will be if he served in the military and if he does not have a threat that after getting married military forces may call him to complete his service. It certainly is still dangerous to serve in the military; there are so many fire attacks and mass killings even during ceasefires too. Interestingly enough, for parents of the current soldiers the military remembered is as a somewhat important part of their life, a first chance to leave their birthplace and become mobile, which will lead to moving to another city or to get to know the world after the military service itself. Military service is characterized as being masculine and the place to do manly activities and indeed the fulfillment of a debt or a duty to the nation that is the most honorable thing for men. They are always reminded, and in particular are told that by serving they are protecting their own mother and sisters. Protecting country is protecting the women in your family.

Due to the military hardship, some soldiers emerge with psychological problems. They can not cope with the military service, and they choose suicide. In recent years, there have been a lot of suicides in the news from soldiers who can not cope with the military system and its hierarchy. For this reason, a newspaper published an interview with a psychologist in Azerbaijan expressing her opinion and explaining how it is hard for a young boy to be separated from their

comfortable house and family and serve in the military. She also notes that there is a big difference between the person who served in the military versus a person that did not serve in the military: "When someone has not served in the military, it will affect his life negatively in the future. They are weak and irresponsible people, and their self-esteem is so low. When a man serves in the military he becomes tough and decisive with a high self-esteem, but the person who did not serve in the army will face the emotional hardship when he faces with a hard situation." (Memmedova, 2017). The majority of the population thinks like that about the military and men's military service. Because the military is a "manhood school" it is important for men to "be" in this school, if not they are emasculated for the rest of their life in the workplace and the community as well.

Marriage

After the military people change, men change. Now they only have left one obligation for the tribal rituals, getting married. I named this one the third manliness metamorphosis which starts from circumcision. As in many countries in the world, marriage is the main entry into a maturity and real manliness. With this entry, a man has matured with specific morality and masculine social roles. The wedding is a very important life event that is significant for many different reasons. For an Azeri man it is a social obligation, and by getting married one validates himself as a man. In Azerbaijan marriage, reproduction, and importance of fertility are a major sign for a man like in many Middle Eastern Countries. (Inhorn, 3). In fact, in the Middle East virility and fertility are the main indicators of manhood in the marriage and significant for family's patrilineage. For a man and his parents getting marry is securing their patrilineage, and therefore fertility is the main focus of a newlywed man. This also is a way for a man to

accomplish patriarchal power through creating his own family and being a head of the family, ruling it and dominating over wife and children: men who do not become family “patriarchs” through physical and social reproduction may be deemed “weak” and ineffective”(Inhorn, 4). In the marriage, it is important to have sons for the continuation of the patrilineage, and that is why the birth of the sons in the family is well-received. In the family where men can not be a father due to their health and fertility problems that man considers himself timid and his patriarchy and dominance over his wife and household becomes more violent. Many times, men do not accept that they are not capable of having children and blames the women, in many cases avoiding the responsibility of medical check-ups. Sometimes they even see the solution in having different wives to check the probability of having a child. Because a family without children creates a question in the society, men tend to use this option for restoration of his own "reputation."

Family pressure is even bigger on young people to get married, it is somewhat easy to face this pressure for heterosexual children, but for homosexual children, it is a desperate situation where there is not same-sex marriage in the country. Getting married is that important that often gay people choose to marry with an opposite sex gay person, a gay man with a lesbian woman for example, just for formal proof. These gay people gather in LGBT social media platforms and in groups to find an opposite sex gay person to marry and to be free of this burden by their family: " There are proposals from lesbians and homosexuals to have a formal marriage on paper, just to get rid of the pressure of the family they are forced to take this step" (Safarova, 2016). It is even better for lesbian people where there is so much family pressure on girls to get married so early in their twenties.

Because marriage is pressured on the young generation, family members become main providers for these young married couples in their early marriage. Especially in the economic hardship of Azerbaijan after the Soviet Union, people choose to marry to a person in close kin. So that their parents could provide financial and social help for these young families: "Young adults in the South Caucasus are constrained by their elders' control of the housing stock, but 'remaining close' makes sense when parenting young children is extremely difficult without the support of a local extended family" (Roberts et al. 166). On the other hand, the husband is thought to be the main provider for the family. A man has a certain respect level in his close relatives, and community if he is mostly concerned about the well-being of his family: "the ability to support a family is perceived as an attribute of mature masculinity." (Hohmann, 121). To achieve this level of respect and the recognition of his masculine power by the society he should be the provider and take care of the family lineage as a fulfillment of the traditional expectation from a man.

CHAPTER FIVE

AZERI MASCULINITIES IN RELATIONSHIP WITH WOMEN

Women's Roles Perceiving Maleness – Female Reactions

In Azeri culture tough, not emotionally available, muscular and macho men are problematically idealized. Men with a feminine trait are not acceptable and can be a target for bullying by his close family members and people in the society. It is not a secret that men with long hair always face with that kind of bullying even from their own fathers, ordered to cut it down if he is too young to oppose to his father. Most of the women would not feel comfortable with a man who has long hair too. You can see on the streets long haired guys, but most of them are from a different country, Azeri guys embracing these styles are less common. So many times, I have seen a Turkish guy who had long hair and earrings before marrying Azeri girl, but after the marriage, those long hair and earrings are removed.

Besides that, mothers in Azerbaijan desire to make their sons be angry-men. When they are angry, tough and not easy going people mothers feel pride. Often you can see such kind of conversation between mothers saying that they have an angry boy, it is a kind of prideful excuse for things that his son is doing and how he is acting. Maybe it comes from the notion of the power and authority, where women want their sons to have that character as a leader in the

group, as a warrior and as a defense mechanism. Sons who are spoiled and don't have their actions questioned by their mothers are more childish, getting angry at stupid things, and they are more prone to violence not only toward women, but also other people in the community too. Because these characters are never criticized, and are indeed welcomed by the family, especially their mothers, they do not feel and see any problem in that, which is why self-criticizing in this matter does not exist.

These kinds of men always intervene to the small things and are keen to make war from small mistakes or wrongdoings (wrongdoings from their understanding). Most domestic violence or intimate violence issues take place in families or any relationships for this reason. Everybody, especially female members of the family should obey these men (sisters, mothers, wives, and daughters) They must check in about their daily life, their activity, where are they going, what they are doing and so on by these men. There is constant policing of morality, freedom, and daily activity. If men are at home and women are coming from somewhere, most of the time women will get asked where they are coming from, what they have been doing outside, who accompanied them, who is the person calling them on the phone, what kind of dress, pants, shirt they are wearing, why they are late coming home and so many other such kind of policing issues. Surely, some women find them oppressing and intruding, and they react to these policing issues that are redefining their freedom and their main human rights ignoring all the small concerns and being muted most of the time to avoid violence. But for the childishly angry men, ignoring small talk or showing that you are offended is too much and not conforming to the man and husband's rules. This understanding by men is valid to society because it is accepted that domestic violence or "misunderstanding" between partners is a private issue and they, especially women should try

to solve this problem in private too. If a woman strongly objects to her husband, (or even father, and brother) he will feel emasculated in these situations, and for him his masculinity is under threat or in crisis, that his wife (daughter, sister) is not showing any respect. To rejoice often they choose violence, not a mutual understanding and respect. “Thus, situations where women have relatively strong external breakdown positions can provoke the worst kind of internal violence. To the extent that modernity produces crises in masculinity, and economic restructuring towards more female employment, increasing domestic violence may occur simultaneously with increasing economic opportunities for women.” (Jackson, 7). Abuse toward property and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse is inevitable and “regardless of type, the function of the violent or abusive behavior is the same: to gain control over another's actions, thoughts, and feelings.” (Mary Ann & Waltz, 15). The women that I talked about earlier who support their son to be angrier, answered to me in the same way during a training I was facilitating in the rural places of Azerbaijan in the frame of the “Awareness Campaign about Domestic Violence” project. In these trainings, we were explaining about the types of violence and how to recognize them in the family and in the intimate partner relationship. An older woman who was a participant in one of these trainings, interrupted the training when I was talking about how to act in the process of violence and how to proceed when the violence had already been committed. For her concern, it is the family issue, and the unity of the family comes first, and the husband can beat his wife and can “love” too. It is something between the partners, and giving that much freedom to the daughter in law is not necessary (the person talking was a mother-in-law herself). It is obvious that in the case of violence committed toward the daughter in law, mother in laws

takes their son`s side and make the daughter in laws accountable for creating such an environment to cause the violence in the family.

Notions of Honor and Domestic Violence

Notions of honor (*namus*) in Azerbaijan have different aspects comparing to westerns notions. Honor is very gendered and often violent honor killings happen throughout the country. Notions of honor are something important and the main law for familial life. “Muslim culture such as that of Azerbaijan in which guarding the chastity of women is a matter of sexual honor for men, their *namus* in the community. Not obeying familial and social sexual norms ends with violent violence and murder in these families which is often justified by media and society. “An Azerbaijani schoolgirl, Aytac Babayeva, was similarly murdered in brutal, public fashion in Baku in April 2015. The 17-year-old was stabbed to death in what local media called a ‘crime of passion.’ (Sinead Walsh, 2015). Media uses the same style of soft approach to hate crimes toward LGBT population too, sometimes even using awful headlines that ridicule these people, especially trans women.

In many Muslim Societies and Middle East countries, as well as in Azerbaijan “the social pressure to conform to norms of chastity and virginity is strong, and many families police the behavior of unmarried daughters and sisters to ensure compliance with these social dictates” (Bond, 2).

Women considered as men`s property, and when a girl marries her parents remind her that she should not divorce and come back to the father's house to shame him. She becomes somebody that belongs to other people after getting married: “Notions of honor nest within core property principles. Honor operates in many of the same ways that more traditional forms of

property operate to regulate behavior and incentives.” (Bond, 3) Virginity, chastity of a woman, is valued the most by men and equally by women in Azerbaijan like all the South Caucasus countries. It is a social norm that discussion around it should not be carried out. This is some kind of mentality and value issue for the nation. Having sex before marriage is unacceptable and taboo for the girls. That is why women are choosing abstinence or non-traditional sex before marriage to save their virginity, which means a harder situation to have sexual affairs before marriage for men in the country. But it does not mean that men do not support virginity. Indeed, they choose a virgin girl to marry to validate their “power” in the society. For them, there is an honor and reputation to marry a virgin girl. In opposition to that, until marriage men can have sexual activity and this is unquestioned, not criticized.

The pressure is only on girls. Some girls choose hymenoplasty operation to regain their virginity just for the sake of the day of marriage. The reason for this is the possible violence if the husband or his family would find out that she had a sexual affair before the marriage. Even if the new husband and his family would not cause any physical violence, they can cause stress, blame, shame on the girl. His family would make bride`s parents and brothers angry and violent toward the girl, meaning physical violence, in this case, would be inevitable too. Girls get to know about it while they grow up, facing obstacles, rebukes by her parents and close relatives for a possible sexual relationship and inappropriate social activity if they mistakenly did. Where even “violent efforts to enforce virginity or honor are a form of gender-based violence designed to regulate women's sexual behavior and enforce rigid social codes.” (Bond, 2)

Drawing attention to these violence issues, women`s sexuality problems, and virginity, an Azerbaijani photographer-artist created a video installation in Yarat Contemporary Art Space in

Baku. The name of the installation was The Night of Marriage, the virginity test. Outside of Baku, the virginity issue is a big and scandalous thing that if a woman lost her virginity, she is having hymenoplasty surgery before the marriage. The author of the installation was the object of her artwork in this installation. In this video installation, a girl (the author) is in a wedding gown, and periodically makes sit-ups as the married women do on their first night for the test of their virginity. If women did the hymenoplasty surgery, these sit-ups would end up bleeding, and everything will become obvious. In her words, on that day in that art center, she put four different installations for the four different social problems. But this video artwork made a lot of resonance on social media and was criticized a lot. She received bullying messages addressing her and her family members.

The hymenoplasty is well-known among South Caucasus countries, Kosovo, Turkey, and many other countries too. Women from Azerbaijan even can travel far to have this surgery done abroad. Hymenoplasty is done in the country too, and it is in the semi-lawful situation. The law does not prohibit it, or there is not a law that prohibits this experience. Instead, the test of the virginity is strictly forbidden in the clinics. Many clinics are not taking these kinds of patients for the surgery operation, but some do. Another big fear for doctors is the fear from husband of the woman who will get married. If on the first night, they will get aware that a girl had this surgery they can ask where she did the surgery itself and call the police to hold the surgeon accountable for this act.

Domestic Violence is a great concern in Azerbaijan today. Often in media, there are news articles about women who are faced with brutal violence from their intimate partner, brothers, and relatives. According to a UNFPA survey from 2008, emotional abuse is the most common

form of intimate partner violence in Azerbaijan. Insults (22%), degradation (13%), and intimidation (11%) were the most frequently reported.” (Oxfam, Policy & Practice")

It is very hard to estimate the real numbers of DV incidents because most of these outbreaks of violence take place within the family where women do not feel safe to report. The law in Azerbaijan does not fully criminalize domestic violence, even though it allows for criminal prosecution holding the perpetrators accountable. There are problems with women`s reporting issues and also in the approach of the police to this problem. First and foremost, it is taboo for women to report about their lifetime partners and the person who is the father of their kids. Many times, its considered as a family issue that can happen in every family and it needs to be resolved between the partners. The second problem in the reporting is that women do not feel safe to report. If they do, the police don`t show enough will to solve the problem or provide options for women to be away from the perpetrator. After reporting to the police battered women should go back home where the violence happened and live with the man who committed the violence. Because there are not many shelters (just one in the capital city Baku) for Domestic Violence victims, it is hard for them to find a place to go after reporting. That is why the fear of continuous violence keeps them from reporting to the police.

Another big issue is that the law in Azerbaijan is not fully supporting these women who are faced with domestic violence. The lack of law enforcement services for women who are victims of domestic violence, the low number of female law enforcement officials, their lack of gender sensitivity, and lack of the gender sensitivity in the criminal justice sector makes it less accessible for women to report. Sometimes even stigma, shame around the reporting is created

by the authorities and they promote the family unity over the life of the domestic violence woman victim.

Domestic violence issue and the attention to women`s fundamental rights also have a gendered character in Azerbaijan like in many countries. Domestic Violence is always considered as a women`s issues, and that is why women`s rights organization who are working on this problem do not get much attention in solving this problem. One main reason for domestic violence issues not getting a big spotlight on men is because this problem has always been talked about in passive voice which has "a political effect" and "It`s a bad thing that happens to women, but when you look at that term ‘violence against women,’ nobody is doing it to them. It just happens to them...Men aren’t even a part of it!" (Keren). Using this language and constructing sentences around Domestic Violence, not talking about men, or naming them in this perpetration, is not keeping them accountable for the violence that they committed.

Azeri Gay Masculinities

Azerbaijan is a country where LGBT rights are not recognized even though decriminalization of the homosexuality was implemented in 2000 in the country under former Azerbaijani ruler Heydar Aliyev. Homosexuality was illegal in the country until 2001, when Azerbaijan was forced to decriminalize the statute or not be accepted into the Council of Europe. This changes in the law happened abruptly, and there was no public discussion about it too: "there were no significant discussions or debates in the parliament when decriminalization was discussed: The President “just ordered” the parliament to approve decriminalization since that was a precondition for membership of the Council of Europe. It should be noted that

consensual same-sex acts between women are not and have never been penalized.” (Forced Out, 2007, p 24). Clearly, the decriminalization law was approved by the demand of the Council of Europe. Also in 2000, the new Criminal Code was adopted as in many other post-Soviet countries. The new Criminal Code was prepared by the CIS Model Criminal Code where criminalization of homosexuality was not intended.

Before the decriminalization law, only men who were involved in same-sex activity were punished, women`s same-sex relationships were not recognized, and the notions about it were absent. During Soviet time in Azerbaijan women were protected from the same crime as it was in the whole Soviet Union. (Healer D. 357). The main reason to this duality was that women`s sexual relationship`s had no public presence, it did not happen in public places like men having sex with men. Women`s same-sex desire was approached as a mental illness and they tried to cure it in Soviet areas: " women were increasingly caught up in the psychiatric system, and women who desired other women were diagnosed with a form of schizophrenia—the same diagnosis the authorities would use for political dissidents." (Quince & Philips).

Azerbaijan stands in the last place for the rights of the LGBT population according to the ILGA-Europe compared to the rest of the Europe. For this report in 2017 Azerbaijan comes at the end of the scale even after Russia as the worst country for LGBT people in Europe. The European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) - is an international NGO organization which is bringing 490 LGBT organizations under one umbrella from 45 European countries and working for advancing the rights of LGBTQIA+ population. Every year this organization publishes an annual review of the LGBT situation in each country in Europe. Because Azerbaijan was selected as the worst country in Europe for the

LGBT rights and situation, to improve the legal and policy situation on LGBTI people in Azerbaijan ILGA-Europe recommend:

- “1) Giving LGBTI people protection under the constitution, by expressly referring to sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics.
- 2) Introducing hate crime laws that explicitly cover all bias-motivated crimes based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics.
- 3) Introducing hate speech laws that explicitly include sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics as protected grounds.”

This document created public debate about LGBT people and their rights in Azerbaijan. Especially, LGBT rights defenders, the LGBT community, and a small number (one or two) or local and international media organization refer to this document to carry a discussion about LGBT rights in Azerbaijan. But no legal and social changes have happened since the publication of this series of reports put Azerbaijan in the last place in recent years. The political image of homosexuality is very stereotypic in Azerbaijan. The leadership of Azerbaijan likes to use stereotypes around sexual minorities in the country to discredit opposition leaders and their critics against the government. A government supported youth organization stated that Ali Karimli who is one of the prominent opposition Front party leader, is gay. But because of the stigma and misunderstanding in the society, or maybe because of his personal bias toward LGBT people, even he did not try to bring this problem in front of people to discuss while he was addressing the campaigns that the government launched to damage his reputation as a party leader. The opposition political parties and youth organization always concentrate their efforts on

the economic difficulties in the country, political prisoners` right and “the unequal distribution of the power in the country” (Stöber, 2013).

As a Muslim society homosexuality is not openly discussed in Azerbaijan, and same-sex relationships that mostly revolve about men, are not considered homosexuality. Men`s virility played an important role in this thought and men who had sex with another man never imagined himself being homosexual man. It was connected to the power dimension where class and autonomy played the main role, that those hegemonic men who were above in the class level could do whatever they would want, even have sex with a man. But there are so many historical facts that talk about the same-sex sexual relationship when hamams - bathhouses are the conversation. Traditionally, these kinds of bathhouses existed in the country and were an important social and cultural gathering place for men. Hamams were separated as hamams for men and hamams for women. In those men hamams, often young boys were working to help their clients to wash their body and also enabling the possibility of having sexual relations too. Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, an Azerbaijani satirist, and writer who is considered one of the first feminists having had a big role in the founding of the first women`s journal at the beginning of the 20th century wrote a satirical story covering the men`s homo socialization in hamams in Azerbaijan. I am providing translations of this satiric work here:

“Where are you going, Mashhadi Mammadnajat?”

- To the hamam (public bathhouse)

- Who is this child that is accompanying you?

- He is the son of the late uncle, Hasan. May God save him; he is a very apprehensive child. I am taking him to the hamam so he can wash up.

- Where is your master, Kulamali?

-He went to the hamam.

-Why didn't he take you with him?

- Kurban is on duty today

- Karbalayi Novruzali! If you want to see my goods, let`s go, or I will sell them, there is a client.

- I am going to hamam, can't look at them now.

- But, didn`t you went to hamam yesterday?

- Ahmad`s body is dirty. I have to take him to hamam to wash up.

-Mashallah (God willed it), Masha Allah, qardashoglu (polite address to a young man), You have become a wonderful boy! Come, be my apprentice. I will buy a red jacket for you. Will buy nuts and dry fruits to fill your pockets to eat.

- If my mother would not let me?

- Go, tell your mother if she would not let you, I can pay you.

- Let me go and tell my mom.

- Be quick, let me know soon. I would take you to hamam every other day to be clean.

-Let me go and tell my mom.

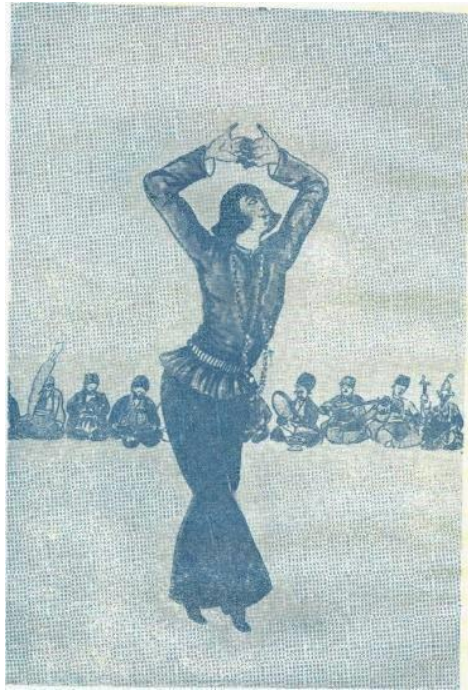
- Go and bring me news soon.

- Why today, so many shops are closed? Karbalayi Oruj went to the hamam, Mashhadi Iskandar went to the hamam, master Ali, master Sadiq, master Hasan all went to the hamam.

Nowadays hamams are not that popular and the main place for the homosocial environment as it was at the beginning of the 19th century. Industrialization and personal bathhouses took away the significance of going to hamam for washing and cleaning reasons.

That is why the hamam practice that is talked about above is not that relevant in modern Azerbaijan as it was before, even though there are hamams and people using those for recreational and decorative reasons. But the cultural memory about hamams and their "usage" is still remembered.

When the Soviet Union was established, and its power took over Azerbaijan, all the regulations in its law system applied to Azerbaijan too. In 1923 sodomy was outlawed in Azerbaijan, and in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (which are culturally similar countries to Azerbaijan) keeping of bachi is prohibited. (Healey, 357) A bachi was a teenage dancing boy who was used in weddings and other parties, or worked as a prostitute. This kind of male dancers were called *mutribs* in Azerbaijan until early XIX century. This is a male dance performer who were always in the wedding or other social gatherings or parties where men and women sections were always different. In these man's social environment they were enjoying the dance of these mutribs who "was appreciated for his for his androgynous beauty and was available as a sex worker." (18). These dancers often trained in their childhood and they performed in these parties until they hit the puberty and their beard is visible. Today we can see the same scene in some clubs in the capital city Baku, as the appearance of transvestites (it is not a derogatory term in Azerbaijan) and it has more local roots than that western imitations.



Mutrib`s portrait by Azeri painter Azim Azimzadeh, year unknown.

Mutrib - the definition of this word is entertaining and pleasuring. In the Arabic language, it means “instrumental music player, singer while dancing, a boy who dances in a woman dress in weddings” This word is also correlated with the person who was dancing in shrines and religious places in a nude and half-nude form.

Azerbaijani writer Huseynqulu Sarabski wrote in his piece “Old Baku” about mutribs in 19th-century weddings in Baku:

“Mutrib would perform a female dance Khalabaji (*lit. translation: auntsiter*) wearing a long woman`s skirt, putting a bell on his thumb finger and index finger and a headscarf on his head. Young men were bringing an apple, orange, muskmelon, candy, pistachio, and almond to the wedding palace. While mutrib was dancing, they were calling him, giving those apples,

oranges, candies to him, and sending him to the other end of the wedding palace ordering: “Tell Abbas good evening, and say that Mirzebala sent this to him.”

Others were shouting from another side:

“Hey, come on this side too! Dance in front of us too! Our money is not a false money?!” While dancing, mutrib was going to another end too. This time that person would clink the metal coins in his pocket, taking out the small ones to stick to mutrib`s forehead and cheeks. Sometimes unblushing brash youth would give a sit a mutrib on their knees, would wipe sweat of the mutrib`s face with their own pocket handkerchief and would put that handkerchief back to the pocket. Later they would be proud of themselves among other young men saying “I have wiped the sweat from the forehead of the “hobby” with this handkerchief.” Sometimes they were calling mutrib from many different directions. Teasing would start. The old man who would sit on the doorstep would see this frolicsome and would stop the mutrib`s dance.” ...” Sometimes there would be a big fight for the mutrib, people would get wounds and die.

Now we can see these kinds of historical shreds of evidence in the literature materials from that time. The dance of the mutrib moved to some gay bars but is not performed publicly and openly. Because of the fear and ignorance by police, there are not special and publicly known gay bars for gay people in Azerbaijan. Recently they found some ways such as facilitating these kinds of gay events and shows in different bars, each time negotiating with the owners of those bars who are more clients oriented and LGBT friendly.

In medieval Muslim societies, the sexual act of domination and reception of the penis happened between an older male and a younger boy, where the boys “could be penetrated without losing their potential manliness” (17). But sexuality between adult males was considered

problematic. Having a sexual relationship with the young boy was making (nowadays too) the older man who is penetrating more manly and masculine. His sexual activity was a sign of his class difference in the society outside of the hamam space. That is why if a person is wealthy, having so many sexual relationships outside of the marriage and with men, is considered as “expected”. Being a penetrator in the sexual relationship was a sign of a double manliness for him as a show off that he can penetrate everybody, women, and men, and this is the main power. David Halperin explains this notion clearly, bringing examples on ancient Greek love in the book of “One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, which can apply to this same exact hegemonic sexual relationships happening in men's society”: “an adult, male citizen of Athens can only have legitimate sexual relations with statutory minors (his inferiors not in age but in social and political status): the proper targets of his sexual desire include, specifically, women, boys, foreigners, and slaves-all of them persons who do not enjoy the same legal and political rights and privileges that he does.” (Halperin, 39). Social status, class, special physical and social privileges play specific role in this domination nowadays too, which is the same as it happened in ancient Greek society as Halperin explains.

Living at the beginning of the IX century and spending her childhood in Baku, a French writer of Azeri origin Um-el-Banin wrote about these sexual relationships, which were happening between men in Azerbaijan. She wrote some pages about these sexual relationships on her book which was mostly about emerging Azeri nationalist intelligentsia during that time: “Pederasty of two kinds – active and passive – was flourishing in Baku among men predestined for the company of the representatives of their sex. The first form, usually respected, was something that all men did; at least before marriage and was considered as some form of social

necessity. The second one, on the contrary, was not practiced by anybody except for the womanly boys in their aim to earn some money and was deeply despised. This person was called “*getveryan*” (offering his back) and people offended him in this way. Nobody found objections to this fact that a most respected sir could belong to the “fellowship of *ushagbaz*”. (17) This text shows the main dichotomy in sexual relations between two men: active and passive, where in Azerbaijan now being gay is divided into two categories, active gays, and passive gays.

Following Foucault's teaching Halperin reinterpreted the active and passive relationship in ancient Athenian society explaining that “the partner whose pleasure is promoted is "active," while the partner who puts his body at the service of another's pleasure is deemed "passive"- read "penetrated," in the culture's unselfconscious ideological shorthand. Sexual "activity," in other words, is thematized as domination: the relation between the "active" and the "passive" sexual partner is thought of as the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior, master and servant” (Halperin, 39). As it can be seen, the notions of homosexuality nowadays are something the product of XIX century ideals which gay people should follow in Azerbaijan nowadays. Which causes alienation and exclusion by the Azeri society. Main cause in this is the western terms and slangs, and western style of self-defense and justification by gay people seems artificial in a way that local culture and lifestyle objects to, seeing those people as aliens, rule breakers and so on. For Halperin, sexual behaviors and attitudes need to be de-centered from the interpretations of old and inappropriate. Deconstructing western ideals on human sexuality that were placed and enforced upon today's society might be a good start to redefine it and make it more local, familiar and indigenous, which throughout the history it had in many different notions:

“Just because we are so concerned to trace the history of sexuality does not mean that everyone has always considered sexuality a basic and irreducible element in, or a central feature of, human life” (Halperin, 40). For example, all of the pronoun anxiety is not relevant to Azerbaijan as it is for western countries. There are not specific she or her pronouns for each gender, just one word for both traditional genders – o (she or he). The second thing is when one is carrying out LGBT activism using the western LGBT historical facts, events, and terms for it, it is not well received by the LGBT society itself. For them, it becomes more alienating, and for others in the society it becomes more western and the notions that homosexuality is something western production becomes valid.

To help end this thought in Azeri society late LGBT activist Isa Shahmarli who was also a first openly gay and the founder of Azad LGBT Organization initiated a film production, which himself was a director of that short film. In this film, he sought to explain that homosexuality and the notions behind it are not western, it was actually taking place in Azerbaijan since historical times. To visualize this in the film, he created two hugging gay personages in traditional Azeri garment in the forest which one of them was himself. After the film was public, it gained interest by the Azeri people and well-received by local and international gay community. My active involvement with the LGBTQ community in Azerbaijan started with Isa Shahmarli. We started to work together in 2013 and created many LGBT-related projects together. Our first meeting took place in a media organization where I was working. He approached me and our other team members there and proposed the desire of giving an interview about him being openly gay and working for the gay rights in Azerbaijan. After that time my active involvement with his AZAD LGBT organization and helping with the awareness projects around LGBT activism started. But

the continuous homophobic attitude by society and family ignorance played its bad role in 20 years of gay man`s life, and after all the pressure he committed suicide in 2014 leaving the heartbreaking note behind: ““I am going away: this world and this country are not for me. I am going away to be happy. Tell Mom that I love her. This world is not colorful enough to accept my color too. So long,”” (Lomsadze, 2014).

CONCLUSION

I was committed to exploring and presenting the notions of Azeri manhood and masculinities, and the constructing masculinities in Azeri society through this research. With my lived experience as an Azeri woman in an Azeri society I could easily find a relationship between cultural, religious and traditional elements in the development of maleness. Exploring literature, examining cultural, religious events and rituals and their role in the man-making process, I found that like in other Muslim societies, Azeri society also follows specific and focused practices to build a man's expectations of himself and others, different from the women.

The research process was challenging due to limited literature materials that are available about Azerbaijan. To address this, I examined other literature from similar Muslim societies that had many similar issues. I underscored the that Azerbaijan Society combines many different identities like Muslim, post-Soviet, Turkic, and secular; hence, it was important to combine these literature materials that I have found about many different societies with the Azeri society. Reviewing this literature, often I found that t men are the missing point in discussion of gender issues in the society.

Even though I started my journey in WSGS to learn more about women's studies, the gender issue played a big role. After taking the Masculinities course with Dr. Hector Garcia, I realized that gender issues should be also directed to men, and the scope of men's studies should

be enlarged. Understanding women's fundamental rights and feminist notions of gender and sexuality made me rethink Azeri manhood in Azeri society. I thought about studying problematically idealized masculinities and their construction and the complex gender relationships in the country.

Conducting this research helped me identify problem areas, and I started thinking about possible policy recommendations that would address gender inequalities and toxic notions of manhood and masculinities in Azerbaijan.

People learn about gender and its construction from the family and society that they are raised in. Even though some families would not be familiar with the methods of teaching young children about gender and sexuality, educational institutions could take on that role. Changing the stereotypical instruction about what it is like to be a "good girl" and "good boy", and what are the female and male gender roles could make a significant difference, if at the same time gender-sensitive teachers, school staff, and psychologists would be available. Sexual education is absent in the education system, and the emphasis on learning about sexual organs is not favored in middle schools. Problematically, sexual organs education chapters are named as reproductive organs instead. Setting the foundation for basic sexual education in schools should be the problem that Minister of Education and curriculum specialists should be more concerned about.

When it comes to LGBT activism, using the local examples when possible, and interpreting LGBT-related terms into a local language is essential. It would help lessen alienation between LGBT and heterosexual people. Changing the negative opinions toward gay people and not talking about how the "gay lifestyle" is not right for Azeri society and mentality would make

a big difference in society too. Also, new LGBT laws should be adopted in the country. After the decriminalization of homosexuality, there is not a single law that could work for the LGBT individuals. Especially hate crime and hate speech laws should be adopted in the country so LGBT slurs and homophobic statements would diminish in the country in media and public life.

Statistics about hate crime and hate speech should be carried out and depending on the results certain implementations should be carried out. Changing the ways, the media portrays gay people is very important, as changing the attitudes toward negative context in media is very important and special regulations can be added through Azerbaijan Press Council and the National Television and Radio Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, people who head these councils are not LGBT friendly and have expressed negative statements toward this community.

Portraying traditional manhood and manliness in Azerbaijan, it is also presented stereotypically through mass media and pop culture, and it still continues. Instead, approaching with acceptance and tolerance to alternative notions of manhood and changing the traditional framing of this would be more effective. Most of the time content creators for the media outlets have a limited understanding of social justice and gender relations. Training and providing some public education and awareness materials would change the ideas of traditional manhood and masculinity. Or creating a gender sensitive review board at these kind of media institutions would help.

Strengthening laws on women's right, and domestic violence issues is important. Today it is a fact that protective (restraining) orders are not in use in Azerbaijan. Domestic Violence law

and protective order were accepted in 2010. But during these past years, the implementation of this order by the court system and local municipalities is not in effect. Giving the Domestic.

Violence issue to police to deal with in its early stage rather than local executive power authorities may affect the implementation. Also, training the judges and increasing the number of female police authorities is important. Another problem is the absence of shelters for domestic violence victims. Every town and remote area should have its own shelter. But instead there is just one shelter, and this is only in capital city Baku. Government and funding to build the shelters should be on the radar with the increasing numbers of Domestic Violence incidents nowadays.

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VITA

Lala Mahmudova was born and raised in Azerbaijan. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Loyola University Chicago during 2015 -2017. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she was advocating for women`s and LGBTQ rights in Azerbaijan. She worked on a project "Awareness Campaign About Domestic Violence" in a women's organization in Azerbaijan.

Later, she started actively support the rights of LGBTQ community and organized many LGBTQ-related art and educational projects. These projects focused on educating Azeri society about LGBTQ people and help to end homophobia toward this community. She is the head of the AZAD lgbt organization in Azerbaijan which`s work focused on raising awareness about LGBTQ issues, creating positive publications about it, and monitoring homophobic media content.

For her Post-Academic Training in the U.S., she is starting to work in Apna Ghar (Our Home), which provides holistic services and conducts advocacy across immigrant communities in the Chicago area to end gender violence.