Notions of beauty were largely undifferentiated by gender in early Qajar Iran (1785–1925); that is, beautiful men and women were depicted with very similar facial and bodily features. Sometimes only the style of headgear distinguishes male from female in visual representations. Other times it remains very difficult to tell, as in figure (right)"Amorous Couple."

Adjectives that today are more likely to evoke feminine beauty, in the nineteenth century were equally applicable to men and women.

MEN, AMRADS, AND WOMEN

Savabegh-ol-managheb, Abdulwahab Hamadani, 1540 AD

In pre-modern and early modern Persian male homoerotic culture, an amrad was more often a young male, in contemporary usage an adolescent, although he could be even in his early twenties, so long as he did not have a fully visible beard. In fact, an adolescent with the first trace of a mustache (nawkhatt) and before the full growth of facial hair (a process that could take a number of years) was considered the most beautiful.

-Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity, 2005

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

To consider gender as an analytical category (Scott 1988) poses questions different from those relevant for retrieving women's history (Scott 2001). My questions became, What work did gender do in the making of Iranian modernity, and how did it perform this cultural labor? If central concepts of Iranian modernity were gendered, how were they gendered, and what effects did their genderedness produce for constitution of Iranian men and women of modernity (Felski 1995)?

From the late eighteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth century, Iranian modernity was shaped in the rearticulation of concepts like nation (millat), politics (siasat), homeland (vatan), and knowledge ('ilm).
These reconceptualizations depended on notions of gender. Until the first decade of the twentieth century, when women began to claim their place as sisters-in-the-nation, nation was largely conceived and visualized as a brotherhood, and homeland as female, a beloved, and a mother. Closely linked to the maleness of nation and the femaleness of homeland was the concept of namus (honor).

-Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity, 2005

FEMALE SEXUALITY IN CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM SOCIETIES

Fatima Mernissi in "Beyond the Veil" (1975) offered a bold proposition about the structural work of the veil in Islamic societies. Mernissi argued that Christianity and other Western philosophical traditions, including Freudian psychoanalysis, presumed a passive female sexuality. Islamic doctrine, on the other hand, was based on the assumption of an active female sexuality. If it is not contained and controlled, this powerful force would cause social chaos (fitna) and threaten men's civic and religious lives. The veil and the closely related institutions of gender segregation are the mechanisms through which Muslim societies contain and control female sexuality.

This proposition is predicated on the heterosexual presumption that active female sexuality is eternally searching for a phallus.

Image left: A wimple as shown in Portrait of a Woman, circa 1430-1435, by Robert Campin (1375/1379–1444), National Gallery, London.
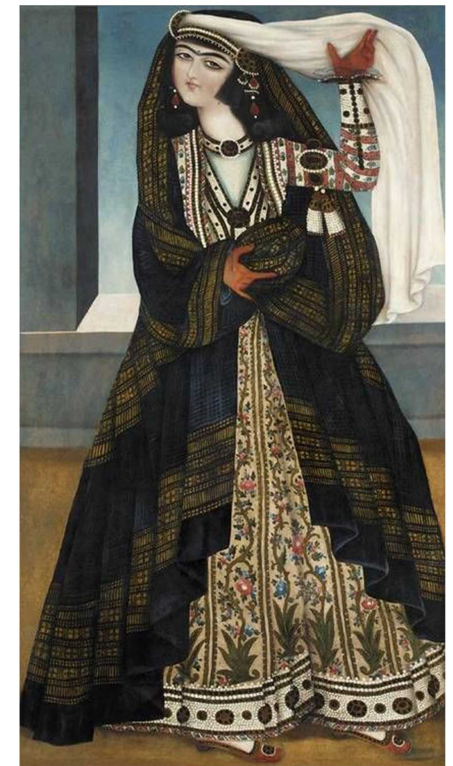
Image right: A young woman with white veil, Muhammad, Qajar, Iran, CIRCA 1845

COULD IT BE HOW LACAN MISREAD THE SAME-SEX DESIRE?

The manliness of the beard was not so much a sign distinguishing man from woman, as implied by the modern interpretation of beardless men as effeminate. In Persian texts of ethics and manners, woman and *mukhannas* (an adult man who made himself look like a young beardless man, displaying a wish to remain the object of desire of adult men) are often linked. To the extent that woman and mukhannas both defined nonmanhood, they are certainly affiliated categories. Yet the reduction of that neighborly affiliation to one of similitude is largely a modern phenomenon. The ubiquitous designation of the beardless amrad or mukhannas as effeminate in our time reveals the depth of heteronormalization and the reduction of all gender and sexual categories to two: male and female, man and woman. Indeed, amrad and other words used for adolescent beardless men do not derive from words that connote femaleness. This is congruent with a concept of desire that did not consider same-sex desire as derivative from other-sex desire. Calling amrads effeminate traps authors, despite their intentions, into transcribing homoeroticism as frustrated heterosexual desire.

Mihr 'Ali (Iranian, active ca. 1800-1830). Portrait of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, 1815. Brooklyn Museum

-Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 2005

THERE IS NO "HE" OR "SHE" PRONOUN IN PERSIAN LANGUAGE

Male love and desire, intimately linked with notions of beauty in the Persianate medieval discourse, could be generated at least as easily by a beautiful male face as by a female one. Premodern Islamic literature considered gender irrelevant to love and beauty. Alternatively, male beauty and male homoeroticism were considered the superior sentiments. As we have seen, in literature the same adjectives were used to describe beautiful male and female bodies, and in paintings the details of beauty were identical in male and female figures. Within Persian poetic tradition, ghazal became the most celebrated, though not exclusive, genre for the expression of male homoeroticism.

-Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity, 2005

EUROPEAN (MIS)CULTURAL TRANSLATION & MUSLIM SOCIETIES

* Stephen Murray, for example, concludes a chapter on patterns of male homosexuality in Muslim societies as follows: "With females segregated and tightly controlled, young and/or effeminate males available for sexual penetration are tacitly accepted—and very carefully ignored in Muslim societies, past and pre- sent" (Murray and Roscoe 1997, 42). Earlier in the same chapter he refers to young men who wish to be desired by older men as "seek[ing] to preserve an androgynous appeal" or as "emulat[ing] female appearance"

*In the case of Iran and much of the Islamic world, sexual practices were generally not considered fixed into lifelong patterns of sexual orientation. In particular, men, about whose sexual practices we know a great deal more than those among women, engaged in a variety of sexual acts. Vaginal intercourse with wives was aimed to fulfill procreative obligations, while other acts were linked to the pleasures of power, gender, age, class, and rank. It was (is) also the case that if men performed their procreative obligations, the larger community was generally not much concerned with the rest of their sex life—what Murray has aptly called "the will not to know" (Murray and Roscoe 1997, 14).

-Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards,
Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity, 2005

Mistranslations and travelogues

Tancoigne, who had traveled to Iran in 1807–8, reported with delight Fath'ali Shah's love for women, adding in a footnote: "As I may here be accused of contradicting myself, after what I said in the nineteenth letter, on the little regard the Persians have for the fair sex, I am very happy in having this opportunity of declaring that Feth Ali Chah is free from the general accusation against that nation.Unlike Tancoigne, however, Fath'ali Shah's court poet, Fath'ali Khan Saba, praised him for liking both young men and young women, and 'Azud al-Dawlah recorded not only his many wives but also his extended engagements with nazarbazi, gazing at beautiful young men (Saba 1962, 156; 'Azud al- Dawlah 1949, 70–72). My point here is not that Tancoigne got Fath'ali Shah's sexual preferences wrong but that Tancoigne and Saba had different sensibilities on this issue. Because Fath'ali Shah had many wives and children, Tancoigne concluded that he was heterosexual and homophobic.

Fath Ali Shah, Standing, by Mihr Ali, 1813

MISTRANSLATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

CUT THE LONG STORY SHORT, HOMOSEXUALITY WAS PART OF THE SOCIAL NORMS IN IRAN FOR INSTANCE, THEN CHRISTIAN EUROPEANS STARTED TO TRAVEL THERE AND FELT OFFENDED BY THOSE LOOSE BOUNDRIES OF GENDER IDENTITY, SO THEY CRITICIZED SEXUAL BEHAVIORS OF IRANIANS, SO NOW IRANIANS ARE AS HOMOPHOBE AS EUROPEANS IN 17TH CENTURY, AND DENIED THEIR OWN CULTURE AND HISTORY

Mama Divine, WTF is wrong exactly with the Middle East?

Where is this modern homophobia coming from in a culture with such an old queer history?

Foucault haunts studies of the sexualities of "other places and other times

His bold proposal that the homosexual as a type did not exist before it was invented in nineteenth-century Europe was critical to the ensuing rich work on the history of sexualities. What sense, if any, however, would it make to speak of homosexuality for other times and places? Most writers are happy to speak of and accept homoeroticism for pre-modern Islamic cultures. Crossing from eros to sex seems to make everyone screech to a halt. Most would agree that we could talk about same-sex acts but not about homosexuality as a concept that defined particular notions of erotic desire, which we now associate with the Foucauldian "homosexual as a human type."
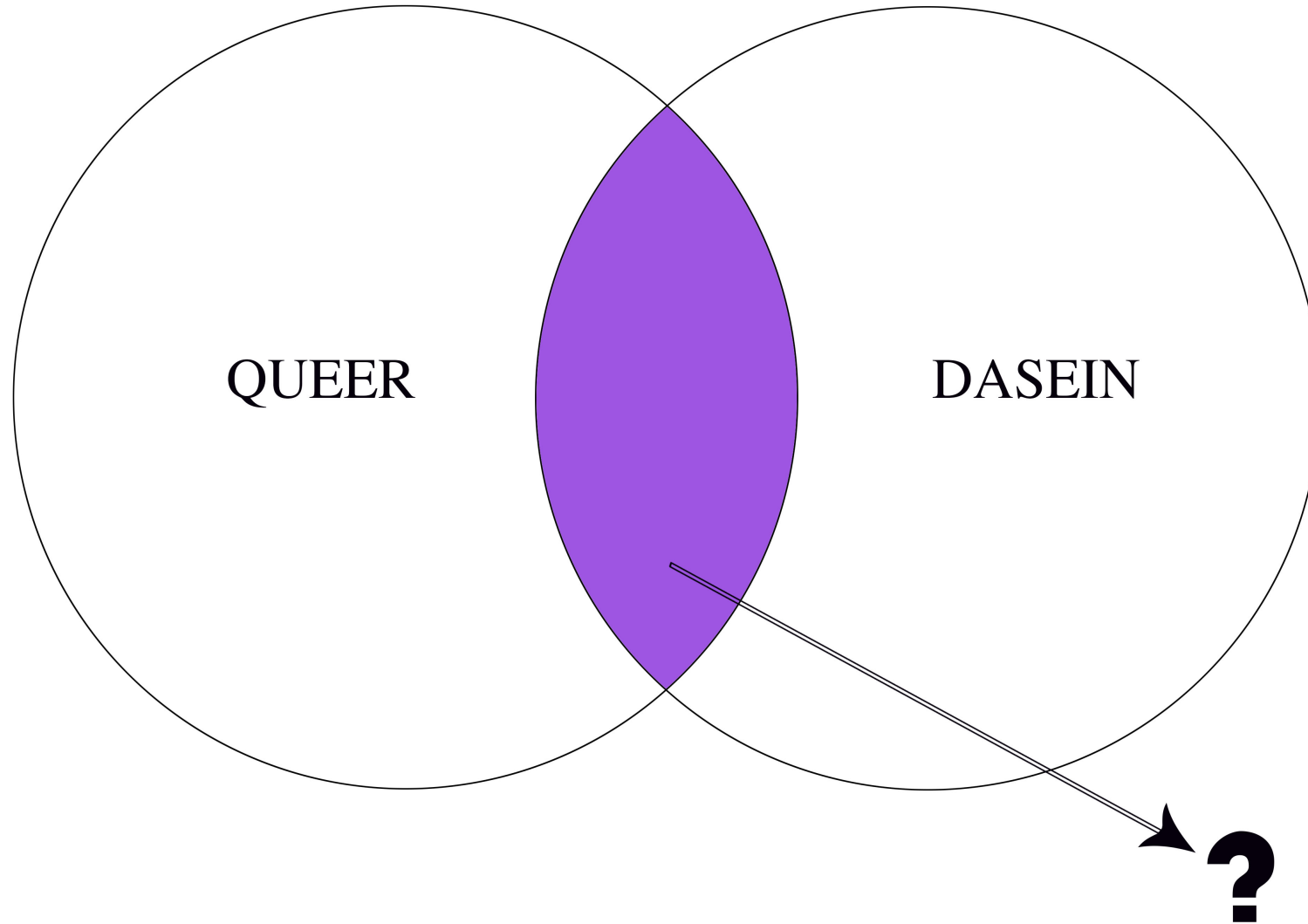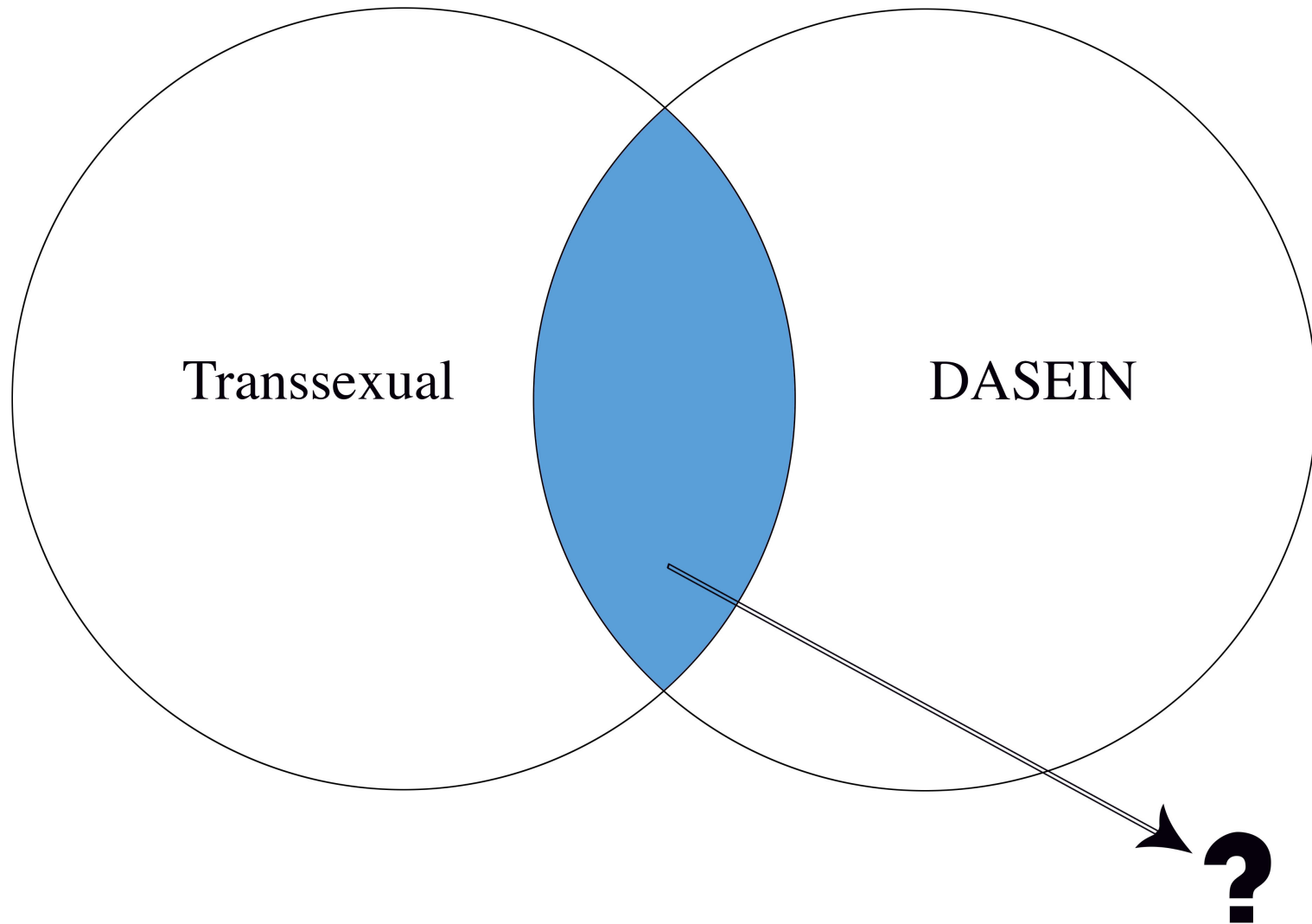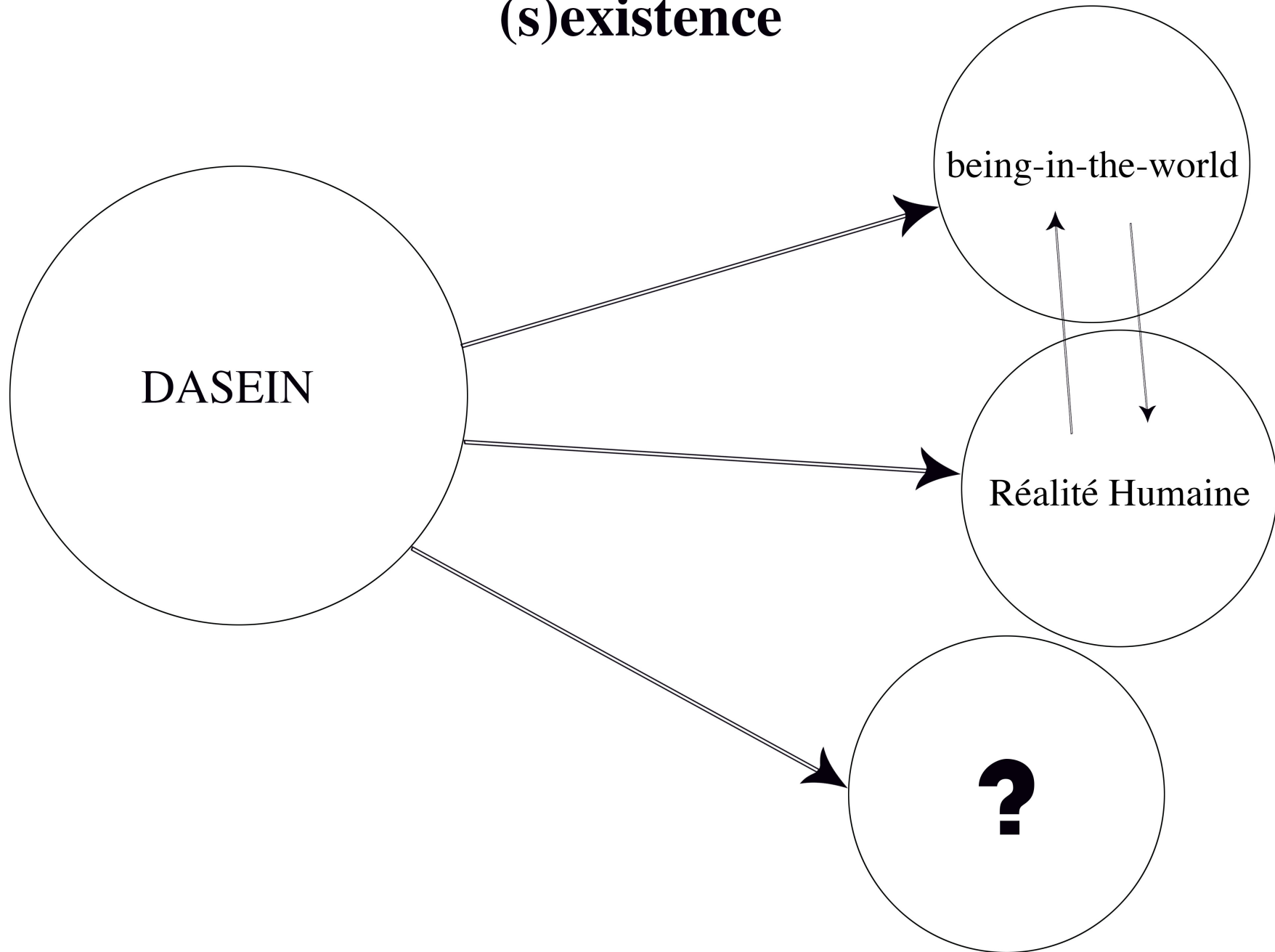
(s)existence

(s)existence

Transgender   DASEIN

?

# (s)existence

Transsexual   DASEIN

?
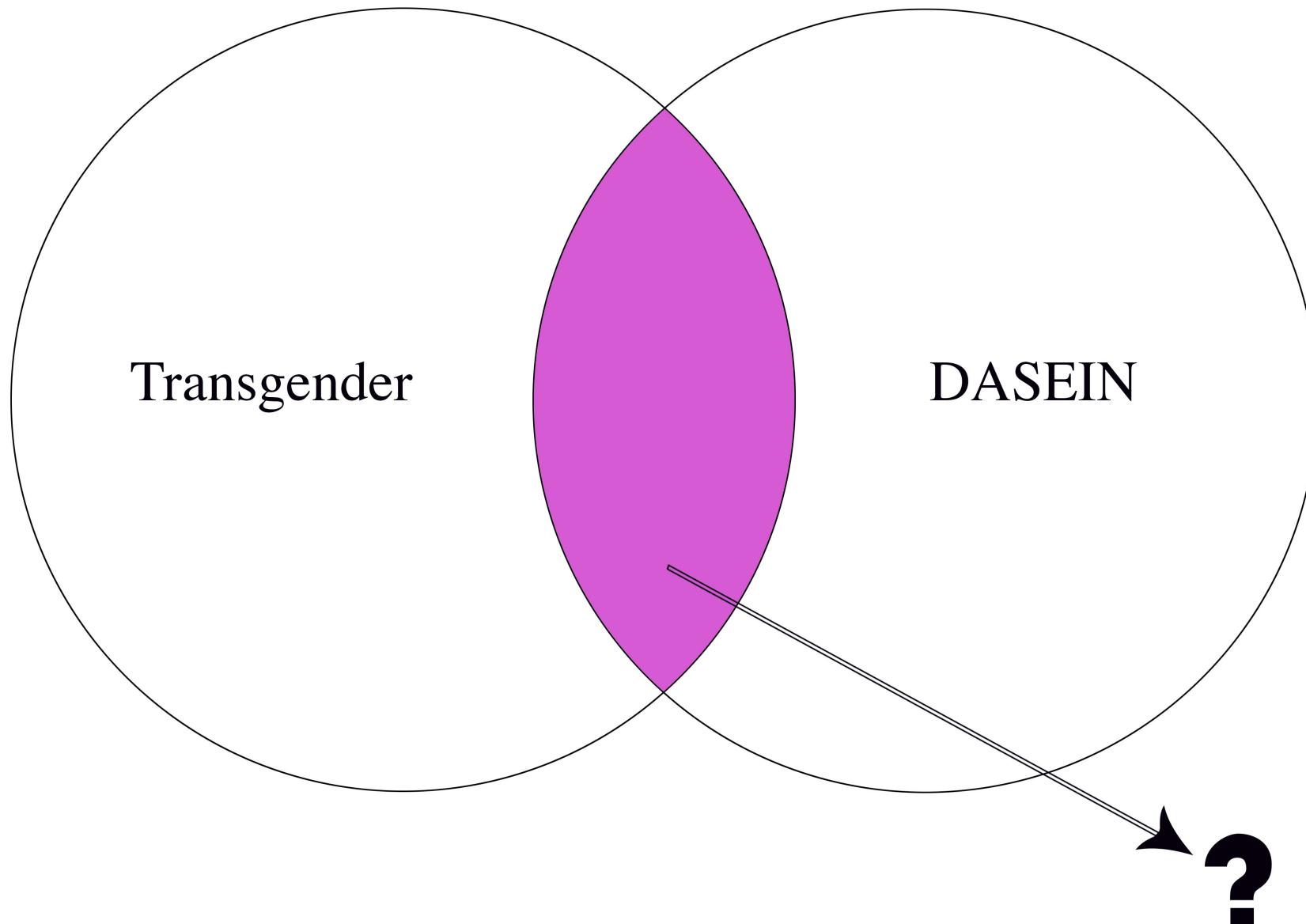
(s)existence

GENDER

In Farsi both words sex and gender are written under one signifier (jensiat). In Farsi the prefix of *far* for example in words like Farzand (meaning children) or Farhang (meaning culture) represents agency and change. What Mohtasham subtly came up with as a solution to translate the word gender (jensiat) is to add the prefix of far next to the gender which reads as "farjensiat". Not only does it point out the dynamic nature of gender but also the fluidity of it regarding to performativity of gender argued by Judith Butler in Gender Trouble (Butler: 1990-1999). Some of 'us' (and by 'us' I mean bilingual artists, gender theorists, art critics and so on) including an art magazine in Iran are currently using this phrase in order to normalize it.
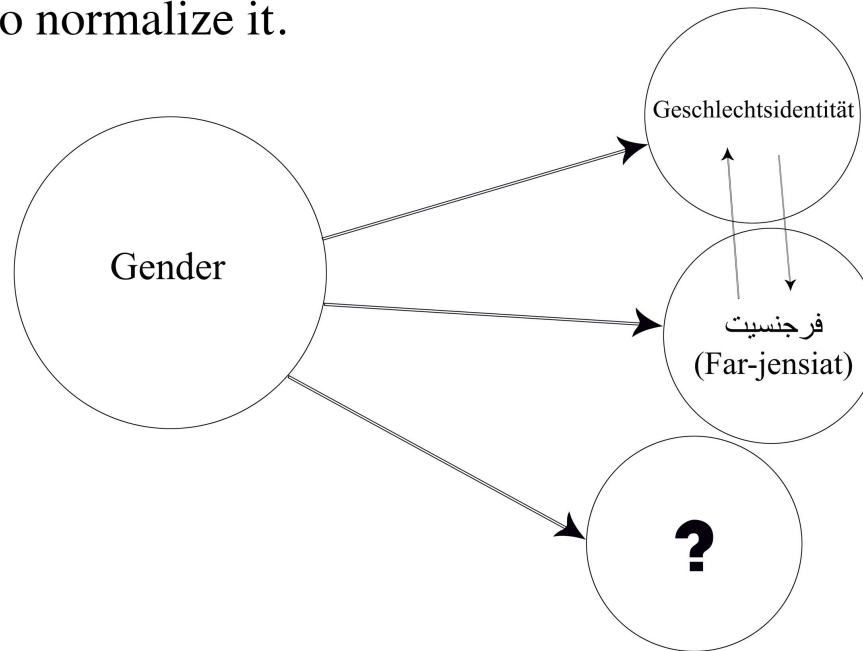
PROFESSING SELF : SELF TRANSLATION

THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION IN IRAN: "The moment in which the transition process works around a notion of "filtering" to determine whether an applicant is "really trans," "really homosexual," intersex, or perhaps suffers from a series of other classified psychological disorders. The complex nexus that filtering represents constitutes and authorizes a category of non-normativity as a legitimate, acceptable category, a process of subject-formation/subjection that is based partly on trans persons' own actions and narratives, and therefore also on self-cognition and self-production" (Afsaneh Najmabadi:2014)
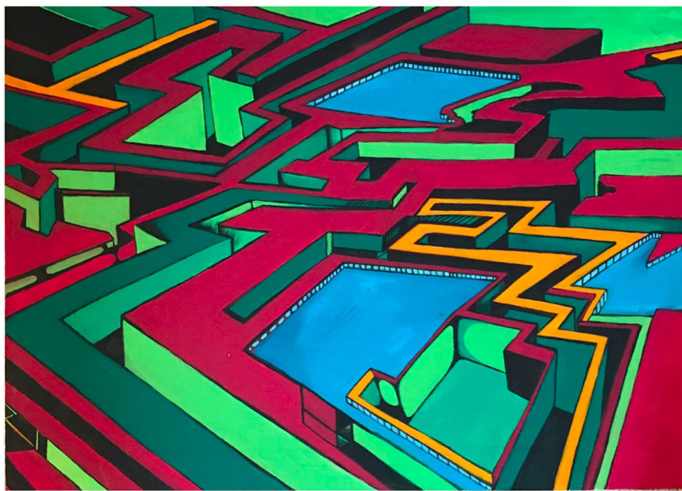
Sex: جنسيت

Gender: جنسيت

Ferdinand de Saussure

The process of articulation: Division of sound-image(signifier) and concept(signified)

Left image: Found online meme (source: unknown)

THANK YOU

Kamran Behrouz
June, 2019

References

- Professing selves: Transsexuality and same sex desire in contemporary Iran, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Duke university press, Durham, 2014

- Apter, Emily, Against world literature: on the politics of untranslatability, Verso, London, 2013

- Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity, Routledge, London, 2008 (first published in 1990- second volume in 1999)

- "Judith Butler, "Gender" entry, commissioned for the English edition of the Vocabulaire, forthcoming, Princeton University Press."

- Brad Epps, unpublished discussant's comments on draft of chapter 4 of Professing selves: Transsexuality and same sex desire in contemporary Iran (by Afsaneh Najmabadi, Duke university press, Durham, 2014), presented at the Harvard Humanities Center, Gender and Sexuality Seminar, September 30, 2009. See also Mieke Bal, Traveling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

- Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity, university of California Press, Berkley, 2005

- Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, (1916) ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, with the collaboration of A. Riedlinger, Lausanne and Paris: Payot; trans. W. Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics*, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977

- Foucault, Michel., History of sexuality, 3 vols., Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, New York, 1988-1990